

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]

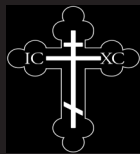
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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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ON THE CHURCH

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On entering into the uncreated Church we come to Christ; we enter into the realm of the uncreated ... the mystery of faith is great!

† † †

The Church is without beginning, without end and eternal, just as the Triune God, her founder, is without beginning, without end and eternal. She is uncreated just as God is uncreated. She existed before the ages, before the angels, before the creation of the world—before the foundation of the world as the Apostle Paul says. (Eph 1:4). She is a divine institution and in her dwells the whole fullness of divinity. (Col 2:9). She is an expression of the richly varied wisdom of God. She is the mystery of mysteries. She was concealed and was revealed in the last of times. (1 Pet 1:20). The Church remains unshaken because she is rooted in the love and wise providence of God.

The three persons of the Holy Trinity constitute the eternal Church. The angels and human beings existed in the thought and love of the Triune God from the beginning. We human beings were not born now, we existed before the ages in God's omniscience.

The love of God created us in His image and likeness. He embraced us

within the Church in spite of the fact that He knew of our apostasy. He gave us everything to make us gods too through the free gift of grace. For all that, we made poor use of our freedom and lost our original beauty, our original righteousness and cut ourselves off from the Church. Outside the Church, far from the Holy Trinity, we lost Paradise, we lost everything. But outside the Church there is no salvation, there is no life. And so the compassionate heart of God the Father did not leave us exiled from His love. He opened again for us the gates of Paradise in the last of times and appeared in flesh.

With the divine incarnation of the only-begotten Son of God, God's pre-eternal plan for the salvation of mankind was revealed again to men. In his epistle to Timothy the Apostle Paul says: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.* (1 Tim 3:16). The words of the holy Apostle Paul are dense in meaning: divine, heavenly words!

God in His infinite love united us again with His Church in the person of Christ. On entering into the uncreated Church, we come to Christ, we enter into the realm of the uncreated. We the faithful are called to become uncreated by grace, to become participants in the divine energies of God, to enter into the mystery of divinity, to surpass our worldly frame of mind,

The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2020. We completed our sixteenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2020 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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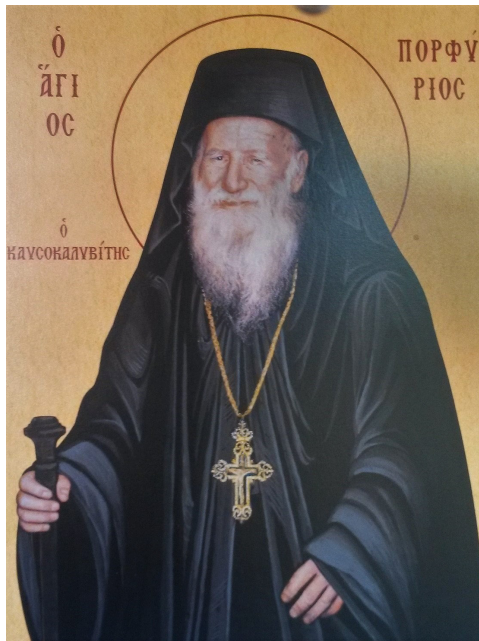
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to die to the “old man” and to become immersed in God. (cf. Col 3:9. Rom 6:6, Eph 4:22). When we live in the Church we live in Christ. This is a very fine-drawn matter; we cannot understand it. Only the Holy Spirit can teach it to us.

**In the Church We Are All One,
and Christ is the Head**

The head of the Church is Christ and we humans, we Christians, are the body. The Apostle Paul says: *He is the head of the body, of the Church.* (Col 1:18). The Church and Christ are one. The body cannot exist without its head. The body of the Church is nourished, sanctified and lives with Christ. He is the Lord, omnipotent, omniscient, everywhere present and filling all things, our staff, our friend, our brother: the pillar and sure foundation of the Church. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the basis—He is everything. Without Christ the Church does not exist. Christ is the Bridegroom; each individual soul is the Bride.

Christ united the body of the Church with heaven and with earth: with angels, men and all created things, with all of God’s creation—with the animals and birds, with each tiny wild flower and each microscopic insect. The Church thus became *the fullness of Him who fills all in all* (Eph 1:23), that is, of Christ. Everything is in Christ and with Christ. This is the mystery of the Church.



Christ is revealed in that unity between His love and ourselves: the Church. On my own I am not the Church, but together with you. All together we are the Church. All are incorporated in the Church. We are all one and Christ is the head One body, one body of Christ: *You are the body of Christ and individually members of it.* (1 Cor 12:27). We are all one because God is our Father and is everywhere. When we experience this we are in the Church. This is our Lord’s wish for all the members of the Church, as expressed in His great high-priestly prayer: *that they may be one.* (Jn 17:11, 22). But that is something you can only understand through grace. We experience the Joy of unity, of love, and we become one with everyone. There is nothing more magnificent!

The important thing is for us to enter into the Church—to unite ourselves with our fellow men, with the joys and sorrows of each and everyone, to feel that they are our own, to pray for everyone, to have care for their salvation, to forget about ourselves, to do everything for them just as Christ did for us. In the Church we become one with each unfortunate, suffering and sinful soul.

No one should wish to be saved alone without all others being saved. It is a mistake for someone to pray for himself, that he himself may be saved. We must love others and pray that no soul be lost, that all may enter into the Church. That

is what counts. And it is with this desire one should leave the world to retire to a monastery or to the desert.

When we set ourselves apart from others, we are not Christians. We are true Christians when we have a profound sense that we are members of the mystical body of Christ, of the Church, in an unbroken relationship of love—when we live united in Christ, that is, when we experience unity in His Church with a sense of oneness. This is why Christ prays to His Father saying, *that they may be one.* (Jn 17:11, 22). He repeats the prayer again and again and the apostles emphasize it everywhere. This is the most profound aspect, the most exalted meaning, of the Church. This is where the secret is to be found: for all to be united as one person in God. There is no other religion like this; no other religion says anything of this sort. They have something to say, but not this mystery, this exquisite point of the mystery which Christ demands and tells us that this is how we must become, that he wants us to be His.

We are one even with those who are not close to the Church. They are distant on account of ignorance. We must pray that God will enlighten them and change them so that they too may come to Christ. We see things in a human light, we move on a different plane and imagine that we love Christ. But Christ, who *sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous* (Mt 5:45), tells us: *Love your enemies.* (Mt 5:44). We need to pray that we may all be united, united in God. Then, if we live out this prayer, we will achieve the corresponding results; we will all be united in love.

For the people of God there is no such thing as distance, even if they be thousands of miles apart. However far away our fellow human beings may be, we must stand by them. Some people regularly telephone me from a town on the edge of the Indian Ocean—Durban is what it is called, if I am pronouncing it correctly. It is in South Africa, two hours drive from Johannesburg. Indeed, a few days ago they came here. They were taking a sick person to England and they came here first to ask me to read a prayer over him. I was very moved.

When Christ unites us, distances do not exist. When I leave this life it will be better. I will be closer to you.

In the Church We Progress towards Immortality

The Church is the new life in Christ. In the Church there is no death and no hell. Saint John the Evangelist says:

Whoever keeps my word will never taste death. (Jn 8:52). Christ does away with death. Whoever enters into the Church is saved; he becomes eternal. Life is one, an unbroken continuity: there is no end, no death. Whoever follows Christ's commandments never dies. He dies according to the flesh, according to the passions, and, starting from this present life, is accorded to live in Paradise, in our Church, and thereafter in eternity. With Christ, death becomes the bridge which we will cross in an instant in order to continue to live in the unsetting light.

From the moment I became a monk I believed that death does not exist. That is how I felt and how I always feel—that I am eternal and immortal. How magnificent!

In the Church which possesses the saving sacraments there is no despair. We may be deeply sinful. But we make confession, the priest reads the prayer, we are forgiven and we progress towards immortality, without any anxiety and without any fear.



When we love Christ, we live the life of Christ. If, by the grace of God, we succeed in doing this, we find ourselves in a different state, we live in another, enviable state. For us there is no fear: neither of death nor of the devil nor of hell. All these things exist for people who are far from Christ, for non-Christians. For us Christians who do His will,

as the Gospel says, these things do not exist. That is, they exist, but when one kills the old self *along with the passions and the desires* (Gal 5:24), one gives no importance to the devil or to evil. It does not concern us. What concerns us is love, service to Christ and to our fellow man. If we reach the point of feeling joy, love, worship of God without any fear, we reach the point of saying, *It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). No one can prevent us from entering into this mystery.

The Church is Paradise on Earth

With the worship of God you live in Paradise. If you know and love Christ, you live in Paradise. Christ is Paradise. Paradise begins here. The Church is Paradise on earth, exactly the same as Paradise in heaven. The same Paradise as is in heaven is here on earth. There all souls are one, just as the Holy Trinity is three persons, but they are united and constitute one.

Our chief concern is to devote ourselves to Christ, to unite ourselves to the Church. If we enter into the love of God, we enter into the Church. If we do not enter into the Church, if we do not become one with the earthly Church here and

now, we are in danger of losing the heavenly Church as well. And when we say “heavenly” do not imagine that in the other life we will find gardens with flowers, mountains, streams and birds. The earthly beauties do not exist there; there is something else, something very exalted. But in order for us to go on to this something else, we must first pass through these earthly images and beauties.

Whoever experiences Christ becomes one with Him, with His Church. He experiences a mad delight. This life is different from the life of other people. It is joy, it is light, it is exultation, yes indeed: it is exaltation. This is the life of the Church, the life of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God: *The Kingdom of God is within us.* (cf Lk 17:21). Christ comes within us and we are within Him. This occurs just in the way a piece of iron placed in the fire becomes fire and light; once it is removed from the fire it becomes iron again, black and dark.

In the Church a divine intercourse occurs, we become infused with God. When we are with Christ we are in the light; and when we live in the light there is no darkness. The light, however, is not constant; it depends on us. It is just like the iron which becomes dark when removed from the fire. Darkness and light are incompatible. We can never have darkness and light at the same time. Either light or darkness. When you switch on the light, darkness vanishes.



Listen to me, people of all nations, men, women, and children, all of you who bear the Christian name:

If any one preach to you something contrary to what the [Orthodox] Catholic Church has received from the holy Apostles, Fathers and Councils, and has kept down to the present day, do not heed him. Do not receive the serpent’s counsel, as Eve did, to whom it was death. If an angel or emperor teaches you anything contrary to what you received, shut your ears. I have refrained so far from saying, as the holy Apostle said, *Let him be anathema* (Gal. 1:8), in the hope of amendment.

St. John Damascene

[Apologia Against Those Who Decry Holy Images, II]



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

PATERNAL COUNSELS ON CONDEMNATION

Source: “Counsels from the Holy Mountain: Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim,” St. Anthony’s Monastery, Florence, AZ (1999), pp. 207-210.

Slander is a great evil. Just as the little rudder steers the whole ship wherever it wants, likewise the tongue leads a person either to good or to evil. The holy fathers greatly censure judging other people’s sins, faults, or evil habits.

1. When we judge our brother, we condemn ourselves to a great sin. But when we cover our brother, God will also protect us from great sins. When we expose our brother, we drive the grace of God away from us and He permits us to fall into the same sins so that we learn that we are all weak and that the grace of God supports us. Whoever guards his tongue guards his soul from great sins and grievous falls.

The chief cause of criticism and slander is pride and egotism, because one considers oneself better than the others. For this reason it is very beneficial for a person to think of himself as below everyone, so that he considers his brother better than him in order that, with the help of God, he may be delivered from this evil.

2. If something pushes you to criticism in any matter regarding a brother or the monastery, try to pray about the matter instead, without passing it under the judgment of your reason. If you turn within yourself through prayer, humility, and mourning, you will find a spiritual treasure—just keep pride and criticism far from you.

3. Be attentive, my child, that you not judge any soul. For God permits the one who judges his neighbor to fall, so he learns to have sympathy for his weak brother. The mercy of God supports all of us, but if we become proud, God will remove His grace and we shall become worse than the others.

It is one thing to condemn someone and another to be fought by thoughts of condemnation. To condemn is a terrible passion, but to be fought by such thoughts and to fight back—this is an occasion for crowns.

4. Each person must bear the weaknesses of others. Who is perfect? Who can boast that he has kept his heart undefiled? Hence, we are all sick, and whoever condemns his brother does not perceive that he himself is sick, because a sick person does not condemn another sick person.

Love, endure, overlook, do not get angry, do not flare up, forgive one another, so that you resemble our Christ and are counted worthy to be near Him in His kingdom. My children, avoid condemnation—it is a very great sin. God is greatly saddened when we condemn and loathe people. Let us concern ourselves only with our own faults—for these we should feel pain. Let us condemn ourselves and then we shall find mercy and grace from God.

5. Love one another, and do not be embittered out of egotism. Humility is a sure guide; it does not let the one who possesses it hit the reefs of carelessness and be shipwrecked, but as a luminous guide it leads him faultlessly on sure ground.

Egotism is the most evil of evils; it causes all our lapses through unsubmitive thoughts. Fear this and strive to get rid of it, for the more it remains within us, the more it will wound us with the proportionate pain.

I beg that you not criticize one another, for this is downright egotism. Excuse your brother's fault; this is evidence of humility and love. The brother who acts thus will find much grace from God, but he who judges and scandalizes his neighbor should know that not only will he not find grace, but even if he has something he will lose it, so that he may learn the lesson of humility through suffering.

Be particularly afraid of inner criticism, that is, thoughts of criticism, because it does not come to light through the spoken word, in which case it is likely to be corrected by someone who hears it. Be careful, I say, about criticism from within, which imperceptibly makes us fatally guilty and deprives us of the life of divine grace and offers as a most bitter drink the death of the soul. I pray that love and freedom from criticism will reign in every expression among you, so that the Holy Spirit may rest in your souls.

6. Experience has shown that it is wrong to accuse and condemn someone without letting him defend himself. As also the sacred Gospel says: *Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?* (Jn 7:51).

If we are not attentive, many sins of condemning others heap up within us, and then repentance is needed. How often a person repents because he spoke! Let us bear in mind the words of Abba Arsenios: *I have often repented for speaking, but I have never repented for keeping silent.*

If we are often deceived by the sense of touch, how much more so we are by people's words. Therefore, much attention is needed, for the devil prowls around roaring

to devour us. (cf 1 Pet 5:8). A Christian ought to be like the many-eyed Cherubim, for evil has multiplied greatly, especially the sin of condemnation, which is as common as "bread and cheese." May God cleanse us and sanctify us for His glory.

Do not let the sun go down on the wrath of your brother. (Eph 4:26). That is, let no one be angry and enraged against his brother past the setting of the sun.

Have you heard about that brother who was negligent and lazy, who did not go to the all-night vigils and did not do his duties, whom the brethren knew to be a negligent monk? When he fell ill and the hour of his death drew near, the brethren gathered to hear something beneficial, or to comfort him, or in case he wanted to say something to them, but they saw him joyful, cheerful. One brother was scandalized and said, "What is this we see in you, brother? We see that you are joyful even though you are approaching death. But we have the thought that you were not a violent ^[1] monk, so how do you have such courage and a cheerful face? How do you justify yourself?"

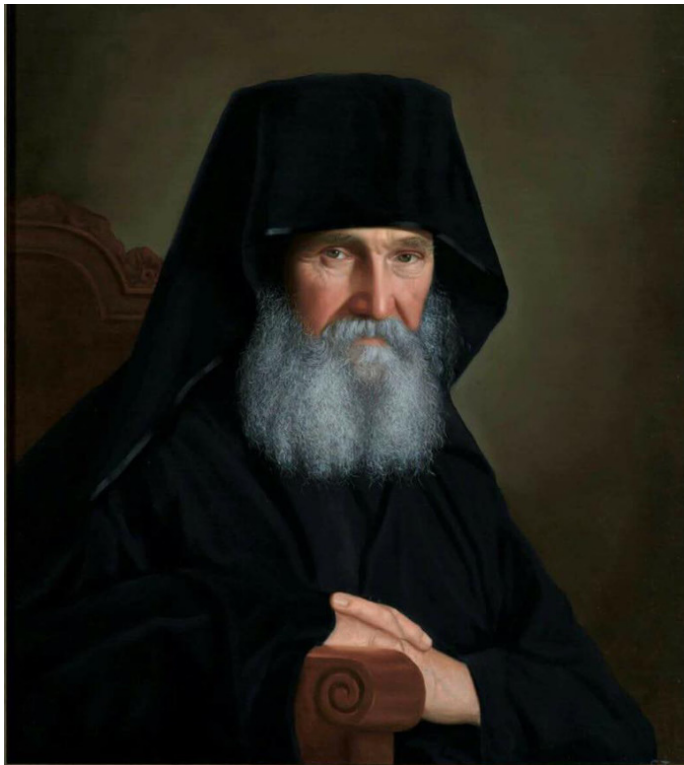
"Yes, brethren," he said, "indeed I was a negligent person and I did not fulfill my duties. But I achieved one good thing, by the grace of God: not to condemn any brother and not to scandalize anyone; and never did I let my heart have something against any brother of the monastery when the sun set. And inasmuch as I did not judge any brother, I believe that God will not judge me either, for He said, *Judge not, that you be not judged* (Mt 7:1), and since I did not judge, I will not be judged."

The brethren marveled and said, "Brother, you found the way of salvation very easily." And the brother died with much joy.

Do you see how the Fathers struggled and how they found the way of salvation?

† † †

[1] A "violent" or "forceful" monk or person is one who strives vigorously to *do violence to his nature constantly* (Ladder 1:4), for "*the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*" (Mt 11:12).



**Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona,
The Enlightener of America (+2019)**

NO WEDDING VOWS?

By the V. Rev. Stephen Freeman, Pastor Emeritus of the St. Anne Orthodox Church OCA parish, Knoxville / Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Few things differ more clearly between Eastern and Western Christianity than the service of Holy Matrimony. There are things found in Western Christian Marriage ceremonies that cannot be found in the East just as there are things in the East that cannot be found in the West. In many languages of the Eastern Churches, the service for a marriage is referred to as the *Crowning*—named for the central act within the ceremony—the crowning of the bride and groom. However nothing separates the marriage ceremonies of East and West like the place of marriage vows: **there are no wedding vows in an Orthodox wedding.**

Those unfamiliar with Orthodox weddings are often taken aback by this fact—how can there be a wedding without vows? How can a couple actually be married if they make no promises? I have heard it observed wryly that in Orthodoxy, we do not require the bride and groom to perjure themselves on their wedding day! But the absence of vows points to more than ceremonial differences—the theology of marriage differs greatly—and it is a difference worth pondering.

In the Orthodox wedding the couple is first *betrothed* with the exchange of rings. Led into the center of the Church, the priest offers prayers. In the course of those prayers, in something of an *epiclesis* (the calling down of the Holy Spirit to accomplish a particular purpose—present in all the sacraments of the Church), the priest asks God to be present; to bless the marriage; to preserve their bed unassailed; to give them the dew of heaven; to fill their houses with every good thing; to send down heavenly grace to bless, preserve and remember the bride and groom; and just prior to the crowning:

Stretch out now also Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling place, and unite this Thy servant, N. and this Thy handmaiden, A.; for by Thee is the husband joined unto the wife. Unite them in one mind; wed them into one flesh, granting to them the fruit of the body and the procreation of fair children.

And then the priest crowns the couple (three times), saying each time: *Crown them with glory and honor!* (Pss 8:5)

In contrast, the marriage in the West finds its focus within the exchange of vows. “Do you...take this woman...to have and to hold, to love and to cherish...etc. as long as you both

shall live?” I was taught, when I was an Anglican, that the “ministers” of the sacrament of marriage are the couple themselves. The priest witnesses, and prays for God’s blessing.

This centerpiece of marriage in the West has been a subject of great creativity in the last number of decades. “Writing your own vows,” has been an essential undertaking for many couples (and probably the source of more than a little angst). I have seen examples of beauty and examples of triteness beyond description.

The role of vows in Western marriage is also bearing some very strange fruit.

Our culture, following the logic of vows, views marriage as a *contract* between two people. Specific promises concerning performance (and non-performance) are offered. These details of the contract are “witnessed” (for that is the language of the license itself). A Church offers a blessing, but the essential nature of a civil ceremony and a religious ceremony are found only in music and the trappings, not in the ceremony itself. I have often wondered whether the state would declare Orthodox marriages to be null and void if it were to learn that there are no promises made or accepted.

This contract view of marriage has become problematic in the current civil discussions of same-sex marriages. If marriage is a contract, how can anything be an essential problem to any two people entering such a contract? If they are both willing to acknowledge the requests and requirements expected of them, how can anyone say they have no right to have such an arrangement? Marriage as contract is wide-open.

However, there is **no contract** in an Orthodox marriage. A couple present themselves to God within the Church and it is there that the sacrament occurs. The power of God comes upon the lives of a man and a woman and *unites* them in one mind and *weds* them in one flesh. **The sacrament is a union, not a contract.**

Not all people can be united. St. Paul warns of false or corrupted unions:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who



commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor 6:15-20).

Paul moves seamlessly in this short exhortation between sexual union with a harlot and spiritual union with Christ. Clearly, for St. Paul, union is *union*. **But in neither case is union a contract.**

It would seem obvious that if marriage is a contract, then almost any contract is theoretically possible (perhaps much less than advisable, but not impossible). However, in the Orthodox understanding, the union of a marriage is fulfilled most commonly in procreation. It is fulfilled mystically in the “one flesh” (of which procreation is but one example). Not every marriage union is blessed with children, but such a fulfillment is considered normative. Couples beyond the age of conception have certainly conceived children within Orthodox tradition (Abraham and Sarah, Joachim and Anna, etc.). But attempts to create a union out of what *cannot* be a union, nor bears even the most remote *possibility* of union, are outside the bounds of matrimony. There is no denying that relationships and even contracts might be created, but a union is something entirely different. St. Paul does not use the argument of union to oppose same sex relationships—**for union there is not possible**. His objections (and those of the Church) rest on other grounds.

In some ways, it would make sense for Orthodoxy to object to *all* marriage in the Western model because of its contractual basis. However, such objections have never been made. As civil societies continue to experiment with new definitions, however, such objections might be worth considering. The objection would not be an effort to declare marriage as a contract to be null and void, but simply woefully misunderstood.

The obligations of marriage are not enjoined by the terms of a contract—they are rather the obligations enjoined by our own “flesh and bones.” I do not need a contract with the atmosphere in order to breathe—I need to breathe in order to live. The analogy is not perfect, but is not inapt.

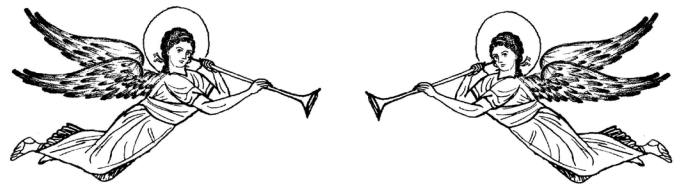
Pondering all of this, I once wondered if we should stop using the word “sex” to describe what a man and woman have with one another. Instead, I wondered how it would be if we called that activity “marriage”? “Have you had marriage with that girl?” Perhaps such a shift in language would better help people understand the nature of sexual activity.

Words and ceremonies matter, particularly when their nature and the context changes. The language and concept of contract served the West for many centuries. I believe that it created an overly legal understanding of a relationship that

would have been better described in organic terms. Today, contract has triumphed over organic objections and the language (and ceremony) seem to be coming up short.

The language of the understanding of marriage within the Eastern model might suggest possible ways for other Christians to think as well. It certainly behooves Orthodox Christians to ponder deeply the substance of the Tradition that is theirs. It would make good sense if Orthodox Christians were to rid themselves of the confusion of contractual imagery that might have been inadvertently absorbed.

Crown them, O Lord, with glory and honor!



Marriage, as we commonly understand it in our fallen condition, is a God-given concession to man's weakness. It is a divine indulgence to man in his fallen condition, and thus had no relevance in Paradise. Therefore, St. John [Chrysostom] is careful neither to exalt it unduly (since it is for fallen man) nor to denigrate it (since it has a divine origin). However, just as there exists a paradisaical virginity, so there exists a paradisaical union of man and woman; and just as the substance of paradisaical virginity differs greatly from that which exists outside of Paradise, the same may be said of the union of man and woman.

St. John Chrysostom uses the word “marriage” with reference to “earthly marriage,” and does not employ the word when he is describing the union of man and woman in Christ in Paradise, and in the coming Kingdom. The paradisaical condition of Adam and Eve is a mysterious union of the first man with his unique and co-equal helpmate, divinely provided to him for conversation, consolation, and to “share the same being.” Eve was formed from the rib of “her man.” Their union did not involve the many aspects of earthly marriage commonly associated with that state in the fallen age.

When God had completed creating the entire cosmos, He fashioned man, for whom He had made everything. When man lived in Paradise “there was no need for marriage.” Chrysostom is clear that in Paradise mankind lived “as in heaven” and was without marriage. In fact, all of the classical by-products of marriage extolled through the ages in all great civilizations, such as large populations, developed cities, crafts, homes, etc., did not exist in Paradise, and yet this in no way diminished the happiness of that original state. These extolled realities are superfluous and ought not to be greatly valued by man as in any way belonging to the essence of true happiness.

Marriage and Virginity according to St. John Chrysostom,
by Archpriest Josiah B. Trenham

ON ATHEISM: THE GREAT BOAST OF OUR AGE

By the ever-memorable Photios Kontoglou.



Atheism! Great title and boast of the contemporary man. Whoever receives it (to receive it you only need to be “tonsured a monk of the faithless”) he appears to others as wise, even if he is illiterate; serious, even if he is ridiculous; official, even if he is insignificant; important, even if he is unimportant; scientist even if he is incompetent.

I do not refer to the person who truly wishes to believe but cannot, even if the deep rooted reason of unbelief is always pride, this viper that hides so cunningly in man, that he cannot understand. Whatever it may be, the people who struggle and fight against their faithless self, they have our sympathy. For them we, who believe, beg God to help them believe as He did to the father with his sick child, by begging Christ to heal him. And He replied *If you believe, everything is possible to the believer*. And the father cried loudly and with tears replied, *I believe Lord. Help me in my little faith*.

The unbelievers we refer to here are not so. They not only never cried before to open with pain and contrition the closed door, the door of repentance, as that tormented father did, as written in the Bible but were not even moved neither felt any bitterness from their unbelief, nor assumed any responsibility or blame. All the blame is God’s who does not appear to them to tell them, “Come, poke me, touch me, talk to me as you talk between yourselves, analyze me with your chemistry, dissect me with your anatomy blades, weigh me, measure me, satisfy your faithless feelings, and satiate your insatiable logic.”

These self-appointed unbelievers, when they show off their smartness, pumped up by airs of pride and the cunning agility of their brains, are not in a position to understand how silly and narrow minded they appear to those who believe. Because to believe, they demand certain proofs that make the believer pity them for their limited view they have on the spirit and spiritual matters.

The believer is well aware how far the pondering of the unbeliever can get, for he too as a person has the same logic, the logic of the flesh, the worldly logic. While the unbeliever is unaware of what is within the believer, and what is beyond practical knowledge, namely the mysteries that are hidden from the eyes and because of this he believes they do not

exist. With his foolishness he feels smug, and talks with disdain for those that are in a position to feel the deeper meaning of the world, while the unfortunate one is blind and deaf and believes he can hear everything.

The believer has spiritual sight and spiritual hearing as well as some type of “super feeling.” The unbeliever, how could he comprehend that mystical world with the coarse means at his disposal, namely the bodily feelings? How could he touch the fine and odd messages of the world, when the poor one does not have the aerials that are needed to receive them?

Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, in his way known only to himself, writes about what it is possible for a believer to sense and what can an unbeliever sense. We preach, he says, the wisdom of God that is embedded in mystery and is hidden; the wisdom that God destined before time, for our glory and none of the rulers of this world came to know (namely, the wise men of worldly wisdom). And He uncovers it, that which according to the scriptures no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has ascended to the heart of any man, the things that God prepared, for those that love Him. For us, God revealed them through His Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit probes everything, even the depth of God.

What man knows the means of man but only the spirit of man that is within him? Likewise the mysteries of God no one knows but only the Spirit of God. We did not receive the spirit of the world (namely the philosophy and worldly knowledge) but the Spirit of God to understand all the things that He gave us. And these (the gifts) are not expressed with words that human wisdom uses but words that the Holy Spirit teaches, speaking spiritually with spiritual people. Unfortunately, a man of worldly knowledge (rational) does not accept what is spoken by the Spirit of God, because he believes it to be nonsense and is thus not in a position to understand how to examine it spiritually. The spiritual man examines every person while he cannot be examined by anyone.

The unbelief existed always. However today with the atrocious vanity that consumes us, we display it as if it accords us great value. Whoever believes in God and the revealed truth is ignored as narrow minded and foolish, and is the brunt of all jokes. He is looked at as “defective” by most people, especially the people that know how to achieve in this life, they are “successful,” make money and have a good time, giving not a cent to anyone, according to the saying, “Let’s eat and drink for tomorrow we die.” For this, he who believes in God needs to be courageous and ignore the worldly honours and material interests.

For the one that boasts that he believes in nothing: (1) The world has him in high regard and respect, even so the more of a non-believer he claims to be, that much more regard

and respect is shown to him by the clever and serious world. Such a man frowns upon others, is of few and heavy words, is short tempered and gruff, and is seen as a “positive man,” a “strong man.” (2) Everything happens to him conveniently and is neither bothered nor is he worried for anything. He has no responsibilities or is pestered by anything. He says to himself and all that listen to him: “Down here is both hell and paradise. Life is to be enjoyed, for us clever ones. Those sleeping or drugged, well, let them die...”

So you see, there is indeed no easier thing than to be an unbeliever! Just press one switch and everything comes conveniently. Did the devil not tell Christ, “kneel and worship me and the stones will become bread”?

Thus, the smart atheist proudly proclaims: “For man to sit with four hundred brains, waste time with stupidity like the old women, with gods, with hell and paradise, with candles, censings, with chalices, priests and nuns! And at what age? In our age where science sends men to planets! Listen my friend can you believe how stupid is the world?” That is what they say about the believers, the smart ones and the honourable of this world, who are applauded by many, who regard them as sensible in everything because they do not chase shadows but are strong minded and succeed in everything they try.

Yes, they succeed in short, for unbelief is “a wide gate, and a broad road” which the unbelievers do not believe “it leads to perdition” as Christ said, but “to worldly prosperity.” Where belief is “a narrow gate and a grief-stricken road” which the unbelievers do not believe “it leads to life” but “to worldly unhappiness and disdain.” The words of our Lord proclaim clearly: *Many are they that enter through the wide gate* according to our Lord, and *few are those who find the narrow gate.*

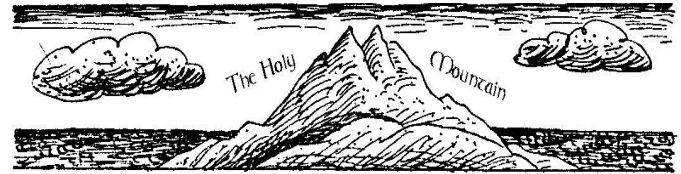
All the unbelievers say that if they witness a miracle they would believe. However, belief does not happen by force but with the involvement of the soul. For this, to all who ask for a miracle to believe it is not granted, according to our Lord’s address to the Pharisees: “This evil and adulterous generation, demands for a sign to be given it.” However, even if an unbeliever witnesses a miracle, his pride would not allow him to believe for he fears that he may be seen as gullible and become disdained.

Some time ago I wrote five or six brief articles on the miracles that were happening in a village on the island of Mytelene, with the title “Amazing Mysteries.” Many readers were moved a lot, especially the humble and illiterate people, “the babes of the world and the weak ones.” The clever ones however paid no attention to it and a few of them mocked me and wrote me that I write nonsense. But “God is not mocked.” From then to now the miracles have not ceased and progressively became more numerous and terrifying. People that see them, write me about them in detail and I

compile them in a book that will be like a hot iron for the unbelieving mouths.

During this age, discoveries are made of ancient churches with relics of those who appear living to simple people, in their sleep or while they are awake or in icons and other heirlooms. Everything could have been found and could have quickly and completely uncovered this terrible crater, that would have swept the unbelievers with its sacred lava, if there were greater means at the disposal of the poor ones who dig with fire like faith.

However, whatever it may be, with God’s grace “the healer of the sick and the replenisher of those lacking,” it will come to a good end, this blessed task and will triumph our indestructible faith, and will be heard to the ends of the world with a thundering voice saying: *Who is God as great as our God? You are the God who alone does marvels.*



We must pay close attention to our tongue (to know when we must speak and what we should say), because we are not spiritual people and we continually err. *To slip upon a pavement (i.e., from a height) is better than to slip with the tongue.* (Sir 20:18). A person is better off falling from a great height and breaking his head and his legs, which are body parts that can be healed, than falling from the tongue, which commits grave mistakes and which is capable—with a single word—to lead another person even to suicide. When we criticize and ridicule someone, we can push him to despair. Additionally, with a single word from us, he can take the path leading to sin. We often argue: “That’s all I said...” Yet, look at what resulted from this one word.

A possessed man once visited the Monastery of Simonopetra (on Mount Athos). After the vigil, the fathers stepped out for a short break onto the deck, and he was there as well. In order to lay blame on a virtuous ascetic from Katounakia, the devil succeeded in doing the following. The possessed person approached the monk and said: “My thoughts are telling me to jump off the balcony.” The monk took this as a joke and responded: “Why don’t you go ahead and jump then?” That’s all it took! The possessed person leaped off the balcony and killed himself! The monk assumed that he was joking, when—in fact—he was speaking seriously. Thereafter, the monk’s conscience bothered him for years on end. The devil would have killed him one way or another, but he tricked the monk in order to torment him for the rest of his life. See how a single word alone caused him such anguish!”

Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona
The Enlightener of America
 From “The Art of Salvation”

WHAT YOGA REALLY IS

By Johannes Aagaard, Professor of Religious Studies at Aarhus University of Denmark. This short article provides an excellent exposé of this very popular “meditation” technique, that is unfortunately being adopted by Orthodox faithful who become its regular practitioners for all of the wrong reasons.

The philosophy of yoga can be expressed as follows: “Ashes are fire, ashes are water, ashes are earthy, everything is ashes, mind, sight, and the other senses are ashes.” (Atharva Siras)

All things in life are transitory, and pain, suffering, and death lurk behind everything. All of life with its omnipresent suffering and death goes on and on in an eternal cycle (*samsara* or the reincarnation cycle) from which no one escapes. Life is an endless wandering through relentless and insurmountable suffering. The future holds only further rebirths, and whether one is inching towards a better life or sinking into worse life makes little difference.

For All Life Is Ashes

Hinduism in all its various forms is first of all an attempt to escape from this relentless cycle of rebirth. It is not a death wish because the aim is to escape death as well as life. Hindus wish to escape from life with good reason—for life on the Indian subcontinent is hard. Sickness of every kind, famine due to drought or flood, war and oppression make life an unbearable succession of suffering and defeat. The religious faith of the Hindus which grows out of their painful experience of life finds its foremost expression in the god *Shiva* and his consort *Kali*.

Fear of Death

The various Hindu techniques for liberation are attempts to be free of both life and death. Even those who fail to reach the ultimate goal can at least reduce their involvement with life. This is the aim of yoga. By practicing yoga one can reduce suffering and defer death by reducing or completely halting the normal life

An Important Text of Hatha Yoga Expresses It This Way

[92] As long as *prana* is held in the body, so long consciousness (*cittam*) (is) free from disease. What cause is there for fear of death so long as the sight (resins fixed) between the eyebrows

[93] Therefore, from the fear of death, *Brahma* (is) intent on *pranayama*, as are also Yogis and sages. Therefore, one should restrain the *prana*. (Gozaksa Sataka).

As expressed in this text the source of yoga is the fear of death, and the way to avert death is to hold back breathing. The same *hatha* yoga techniques will hold back and immobilize other life functions.

Hatha Yoga Techniques

Hatha yoga breathing exercises (*pranayama*) are not intended to lead to better breathing, but to the reduction or complete cessation of breathing! In the same way *hatha* yoga body postures (*asanas*) are intended to immobilize the whole body. Practicing them will enable the body to become completely motionless and hardened in fixed positions. Meditation words (*mantras*) serve to immobilize the consciousness. Mantras are usually the names of gods used for worship. Symbolic body movements (*mudras* and *bandhas*) in yoga are designed to close all “nine doors of the body,” so that no sense perception from the outside penetrates into the mind. When all outer sensation is shut off, the body itself will create as compensation sense perceptions of an inner kind, an inner light, an inner sound, an inner smell, an inner pleasure.

So the objective of yoga is not to affirm people’s lives, but to create another inner life as a substitute for the life one wants to escape. A whole inner new universe, an internal new dimension awaits those who meditate, those who are willing to become a disciple and follow the path of a guru. That is



the ultimate aim of the techniques taught in all yoga schools and yoga classes throughout the world.

In yoga there are no neutral techniques. The entire discipline from beginning to end is intended to lead toward an escape from life and death and to serve the so-called higher aims of yoga.

Tantra Yoga

This higher yoga has many names. Distinctions can be made between the yoga of the emotions (*bhakti*), the yoga of action (*karma*), and the yoga of knowledge (*jnana*). However more important than all of these is the greater or higher yoga called *Tantra* yoga. *Tantra* yoga itself can be called *kriya* yoga, *laya* yoga, *kundalini* yoga, and *raja* yoga. The three classic yogic disciplines of *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jnana* demand many reincarnations for training in order to break free from the cycle of life and death. In contrast, *tantra* yoga is the direct but also the most dangerous path. Most yoga schools teach that mankind is in a state of decay (*kali yuga*) and our desperate situation requires a desperate remedy. *Tantra* yoga is the desperate remedy, and most yoga schools and gurus are *tantric* in one way or another.

While the classic yogic systems either reject or play down sexuality, *Tantra* does completely the opposite. Along with the classic systems *Tantra* desires to escape from the *samsaric* cycle and perceives life as a poison, but *Tantra* intends to drive out evil with evil, poison with poison. This is where sexuality enters into *tantra* yoga. This is not immediately apparent to a newcomer, because like many other oriental religions, yoga functions at two levels, showing one face outwardly and a completely different face inwardly. This is why yoga is couched in what Hindus call “twilight language” which hides as much as it reveals, and is deliberately ambiguous. Thus the key concepts in yoga, such as *bindu* (semen) and *prana* (life force) have both a physical and a symbolic meaning.

Semen Mysticism

It is a basic tenet of *Tantra* yoga that normal sexual activity uses up the life force and exposes the individual to sickness and death. Consequently it is not only *prana* in the sense of breathing that must be held back, but first and foremost *bindu* (semen) which must be conserved. The holding back of breath and all other techniques in *Tantra* yoga serve the ultimate aim of retention of semen. Retention of semen can lead to immortality or at least rejuvenate man in a way which holds off death. For this to happen semen must be transformed in to nectar, ambrosia, soma, the elixir of life, the drink of immortality. This is the deepest core, the very center of all that yoga is concerned with.

The Kundalini Serpent

The full details cannot be explained in a short presentation, but the culmination of yogic practice is ritual sexual intercourse (*maithuna*) using the various techniques of *hatha* yoga. Yoga uses the orgasm as the determining experience for both liberation from the *samsaric* cycle of life and death and confusion with the divine. In reality what takes place is the “divinization” of the human.

This takes place through meditation on the *kundalini* serpent. *Prana* or life force is identical with sexuality and is portrayed by the *kundalini* or coiled serpent which resides behind the human genitals. She (the life force/serpent is seen as feminine) must be awakened and forced from her spot at the bottom of the spinal column into a canal within the spinal column and then up through this canal. On the way up she will pass through a number of points called *chakras*. At each *chakra* she receives more and more energy and becomes more and more divine.

This process of divinization should manifest itself in supernatural powers for the person meditating. For example, the meditator could levitate, or walk through walls, or be in two places at one time. The acquisition of supernatural power is called *siddha* yoga and is found all over the world. *Siddha* yoga is represented by TM which promises its meditators the power to levitate, but of course only upon the payment of a large fee...

The Great Death—Immortality

After all the difficult *hatha* yoga techniques and exercise are put into practice, the serpent is forced to the top of the brain and a cosmic culmination takes place with a super-orgasm. What occurs in reality is an orgasmic experience which when coupled with strongly hallucinogenic feelings, has an extremely violent character. Symbolically, the experience is explained as sexual intercourse between the god *Shiva*, who reigns supreme in the human brain, and his consort *Kali*, who is his potency and identical with the *Kundalini*.

This orgasmic experience is understood as the Great Death by which one escapes the manifold world, and by which one experiences the great freedom. From this experience only the “chosen” come back, as gurus who devote themselves to the liberation of others. Ordinary people according to yogic doctrine should die within three weeks of this experience of full liberation. This death—and no other—leads away from all life and all death, to total freedom.

Escape from Death to Death

It is ironic that a religiosity so driven by fear of death should culminate in the Great Death. This is because yoga is founded not only on the fear of death, but on the fear of life as well. Yoga therefore seeks to go beyond life and death to what can be called eternal Death, free from sickness, suffering, and all that is transitory.

A thorough reading of the central texts of yoga reveals that the root of yoga resides in the problem of old age. Yoga was developed as an old man’s attempt to stop the decay of the body, to put off death and at the same time to prepare the individual for death by a gradual withdrawal from life. This withdrawal is social, as an elderly man would leave his own environment to live in isolation in the forest or mountain. But the withdrawal is also mental and physical, as the individual draws back from ordinary life functions. The latter can even be accomplished while one remains in the same social environment. The truth of the matter is that yoga was first of all developed for elderly men. This sexist aspect of yoga is also seen in the centrality of semen mysticism.

Yoga for Health

Many people who practice yoga will object that they are not interested in such theoretical rubbish, for from their own experience they know that yoga does them good. They have become healthier with it. This attitude should be respected, but also correctly understood.

A comparison can make this clear. It is a fact that it has done many young men good to have been soldiers. They have been taught discipline and self-control and have become stronger and more healthy. This fact does not alter another fact, that the army itself has a completely different aim, namely to teach people to kill. In the same way it can be said that the aim of yoga is not identical with its side effects and it is a fact that many meditating people, after a period with positive

results, experience extremely alarming “harmful” results. We call these results “harmful” but they are in fact the desired effect. What happens is that one gradually loses the ability to lead an active, open extroverted life centering on loving interdependent relationships with others. The meditator gradually withdraws into himself and is less able to relate with other people. Slowly the meditator accepts this as valid – for as time goes on the practice of yoga leads to an acceptance of the theory of yoga.

One Is Taken Where One Does not Want To Go

If a person practices yoga with the intention of becoming a Hindu this is of course their choice; our culture is founded upon the necessity for freedom of religion, and people (usually) practice their religion according to their convictions. However the vast majority of people who practice yoga are taken where really they had no intention of going. They are transformed into people with new values, they become Hinduized, and this was not at all their intention. They began to practice yoga because it was presented as an art of life, when in reality it is an art of death developed to help first of all elderly men cope with the end of their lives.

If a person intends to escape from a normal life of social interaction and intends to “establish oneself as a god,” then yoga is the way. If one wants to abandon one’s Christian faith and its love for others and for life itself, then yoga is the best way. But most people are unsuspectingly drawn into yoga. **Even some Christians defend yoga because they are ignorant of its factual reality.** It is, therefore, necessary to expose the facts concerning yoga, not in order to deprive yoga teachers of their livelihood or gurus of their disciples, but to provide guidance for those who cannot comprehend the real situation when they approach yoga.

For those who have a need to meditate, there are many methods of Christian prayer. Christian prayer (and especially the Jesus prayer, *Ed.*) is diametrically opposed to yoga. It will not free us from life and death, but will bring us to God who through his resurrection saved us from the dilemma of which yoga is itself an expression.



HOW THE JESUS PRAYER DIFFERS FROM THE HINDU MANTRA

By Dionysios Farasiotis, an excerpt from “*The Gurus, The Young Man, and Elder Paisios.*”

One of the greatest spiritual gifts that Elder Paisios gave me was his guidance along the mystical path of the Jesus Prayer. This started at the beginning of our acquaintance and continued until his repose twelve years later. The Jesus Prayer

consists of the repetition of the phrase *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* The Jesus Prayer is not recited as a Mantra, but as a prayer to the Person of Christ.

Prayer, as I learned, is a relationship between God and man, who move towards each other. Thus, the swiftness or slowness with which a person advances in prayer depends on both the human and divine wills. Neither the freedom of God in His sovereignty nor the freedom of man in his free choice are ever violated. For his part, man offers his good intention, his labors, and his desire to draw near to God. God, in turn, offers His grace...

When yogis claim that the Jesus Prayer resembles their own mantras, they are in fact trying to fit the Jesus Prayer into their own Procrustean bed. Of course, there are similarities, but there are also enormous differences—both a table and a horse have four legs, but to conclude that they are consequently the same would be an error of the crudest sort. But this is just the kind of error the yogis make when they claim that the Jesus Prayer is a kind of mantra. A brief examination of the essential differences between the Jesus Prayer and a mantra should provide those with an open mind the wherewithal to draw the proper conclusions.

First, consider how the Orthodox tradition understands the meaning of the Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.* The word *Lord* is the name for God most frequently encountered in the Old Testament in the oft-repeated formula *Thus saith the Lord ...* or in the commandments: *I am the Lord thy God.* When Orthodox Christians call Jesus Christ, *Lord*, they are confessing that He is the God of the Old Testament Who spoke to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Word is the Person who gave the law to Moses. In other words, the One who spoke to the prophets was none other than the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who later took flesh and was united with human nature in the Person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, when we say *Lord Jesus Christ*—with faith, with all our heart’s strength—we come under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul says: *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor 12:3).

Having recognized the existence of the true personal God outside and beyond his own self, from this God a Christian asks *mercy.* The elder once told me: “*Mercy contains all things. Love, forgiveness, healing, restoration, and repentance all fit within the word “mercy.”* It is the mercy of God that brings about repentance, *purification* from the passions, the *illumination* of the *nous*, and, in the end, *theosis.* From my journey I have learned that salvation comes from the mercy of Christ, the unique Savior of mankind, rather than from my intelligence, my prideful endeavors, or the techniques of yoga. Salvation and *theosis* are so very precious that it is impossible for anyone to make any effort or do any ascetic labor that would be equivalent to even the smallest fraction of their value.

Indeed, from my conversations with other fathers who were laborers in the Jesus Prayer and from my own experience, I know full well that prayer is a gift from God. Nothing is accomplished by human labor alone, for Christ said: *Without Me ye can do nothing* (Jn 15:5), and as the Apostle James bears witness: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* (Jas 1:17). Even as God granted us existence, in the same way He gradually grants us to know Him and be united with Him through prayer, leading us ultimately to life eternal.

Now, consider how the yogis view a mantra. First of all, there are many mantras, and each refers to one of the many gods of the Hindu pantheon such as Krishna, Rama, Vishnu, or the goddess Kali. There is not one standard explanation given by yogis for the mantras; rather, their explanations are tailored to the receptivity of each listener. For beginners who are not disposed to worship idols, yogis give a pseudo-scientific, mechanistic explanation: they claim that the benefit accrued by repeating the mantra is due to certain frequencies produced by its pronunciation, which cause spiritual vibrations that activate spiritual centers within man. (However, the existence of such centers in man can only be taken on faith—if someone willingly chooses to believe such a claim.)

For those who are inclined towards psychological interpretations, the yogis present the repetition of a mantra as a type of auto-suggestion that enables the practitioner to program his inner world according to positive models. When addressing those who have become more involved with Hinduism and now believe in many gods, the yogis claim that the worshipper receives the blessing of whatever god is being invoked.

What constitutes the infinite distance separating the Christian Jesus Prayer from the Hindu mantra, however, is that which lurks behind the name of the god being invoked in a mantra and invited into the soul. Through the mouth of the Holy Prophet David, God declares, *All the gods of the nations are demons* (1 Pss 95:5)—In other words, behind the names Krishna, Rama, or Shiva are demons lying in wait. Once they are invoked by the use of the mantra, the door is open for the devil to begin his theatrical productions, using sounds, images, dreams, and the imagination in general in order to drag the practitioner deeper into deception.

Another significant difference between the Christian Jesus Prayer and the Hindu mantra is the diametrically opposed viewpoints of the two faiths regarding techniques and the human subject. I recall a conversation I had with Niranjana after he had given me permission to begin to practice some supposedly powerful yoga techniques. I said to him: “It’s fine practicing the techniques, but what happens to the human passions of greed, lust for power, vainglory, and selfishness? Aren’t we concerned about them?” “They disappear,” he replied, “through the practice of the techniques.”

“Do they just disappear like that, on their own?” I asked. “Yes, they disappear automatically, while you are practicing the techniques.”

What an astonishing assertion: physical exercises can wipe out the inclinations that a person’s soul acquired in life through conscious choices. But, in reality, man, as a self-determining and free moral agent, can change the conscious aspect of his personality and his moral sense only by the use of his own free will to make conscious decisions in real-life situations. Any external means to automatically induce such a change in a person’s consciousness without his consent circumvent man’s free will, obliterate his volition, and destroy his freedom, reducing man to a spineless puppet manipulated by a marionettist’s strings. Hinduism’s relentless insistence on properly performed techniques with automatic results degrades man by depriving him of his most precious quality: the self-governing free will. It restricts the boundless human spirit within a framework of mechanical methods and reflexes.

Orthodox Christian Faith, on the contrary, recognizes and honors the gift of human freedom as a divine trait. This recognition and approach help man to be actualized as a free being. Precisely on account of the human freedom to choose, man’s often unpredictable responses can’t be limited to the mechanical reflexes of a closed system, but can innovatively turn in any spiritual direction that he, as a free subject, wills. This is why Orthodoxy is not adamant about techniques and methods. In freedom and with respect, Orthodoxy seeks the human heart, encouraging the individual to do what is good for the sake of the good, and pointing out the appropriate moral stance of the soul before God, which an individual can then freely choose to embrace.

Genuine spiritual development entails a deepening familiarity with God and with one’s own self, acquired through moral choices that a person freely makes in the depths of his heart. Spiritual progress is a product of man’s way of relating to himself, to his fellow man, and to God by the good use of his innate moral freedom. This is why Christ calls out: *If any man wills to come after Me, let him freely deny himself* (Mt 16:24)—that is, without being deceived, without being psychologically compelled, and without being forced, all of which are inappropriate to the spiritual nobility of Christian life.

Saint Porphyrios had a small parrot that he taught to pray in order to illustrate the absurdity of some Christians’ empty repetition of the words of prayer, as well as the ridiculousness of the opinion commonly presented in Eastern religions that someone can make moral advances by physical exercises or breathing techniques. Every so often, the parrot would mechanically say, “Lord, have mercy.” The elder would respond, “Look, the parrot can say the prayer, but does that mean that it is praying? Can prayer exist without the conscious and free participation of the person who prays?”

Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σὲ Πολυχρονίζει!

Ἀπὸ Μία Ἀνατολίτικη Ἱστορία: Παρακαλῶ τὸ Θεὸ νὰ σὲ πολυχρονίζει γιατί αὐτὸς ποὺ θὰ ἔρθει ὕστερα ἀπὸ σένα θὰ εἶναι ἀκόμα χειρότερος...

Γράφει ὁ Σάββας Ἡλιάδης, δάσκαλος - Κιλκίς.

Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, στὸ βιβλίο «Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο» καὶ στὸ κείμενο μὲ τίτλο: «Τυποποιημένη Ζωή», πάντοτε ἐπίκαιρος, γράφει, «ἄκων προφητεύων», πρὶν ἀπὸ πολλὲς δεκαετίες, γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ σκλαβιά, ποὺ εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ ἀπλώνεται μὲ δόλιο τρόπο στὴν Πατρίδα μας καὶ ποὺ σήμερα ἔγινε ἡ ὄντως πραγματικότητα καὶ κατατρῶει τὰ σωθικὰ τῆς ὑπαρξῆς τοῦ Γένους μας. Τὸ πήραμε πολὺ νωρὶς τὸ «νεκροδάνειο» ἀπὸ τὴν Δύση καὶ τὸ «συγκεφαλαιώσαμε» στὸ «Κεφάλαιο» Ρωμιοσύνη, ἀλλοιώνοντας μὲ τὸν χρόνον τὸ περιεχόμενό της καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα της. Ἀποτέλεσμα: Ἐκδυτικισμὸς καὶ ἐκκοσμίκευση.

Γράφει ὁ Κόντογλου: «Τί μεγαλειώδης λεωφόρος προόδου ποὺ διανοίγεται εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα! Χαῖρε, ἄνθρωπε, χαῖρε κι ἐσὺ πιδ πολὺ, Ἑλληνα, τυποκῆρυκα καὶ τυποποιημένε!... Ὅλα μας σιγὰ σιγὰ γίνονται τυποποιημένα, κουρντισμένα, τὸ περπάτημά μας, ἡ κουβέντα μας, οἱ ιδέες μας, οἱ συνναστροφές μας, ἡ χαρὰ μας, ἡ λύπη μας. Χάνεται πιά κάθε πρωτοτυπία ποὺ ἔχει ὁ δροσερὸς κι ἀπροσπάθητος ρυθμὸς τῆς ζωῆς. Ὅλα εἶναι ὀρισμένα ἀπὸ πρὶν. Ἀπὸ πρὶν ξέρεις τί θὰ ἀκούσεις ἀπὸ κάθε στόμα, τί θὰ δεῖς στὰ μάτια τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου καὶ στὰ κινήματά του».

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ κύρια χαρακτηριστικὰ αὐτῆς τῆς ὑποτέλειας στὴν ἀρχόμενη τότε καὶ ἐπιβληθεῖσα ἤδη ἐν πολλοῖς παγκοσμιοποίησι ἦταν, γιὰ τὸν Κόντογλου, ἡ τυποποίηση τῆς ζωῆς. Ὁ ἔλεγχος τῶν κινήσεων, ὁ περιορισμὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας, ἡ ἀπαξίωση καὶ ἰσοπέδωση τῆς ἰδιομορφίας τῶν λαῶν, ἡ ταπείνωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ προσπάθεια κονσερβοποίησης σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τρόπους ἔκφρασης τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ κυρίως σ' αὐτοὺς τῆς τέχνης, ποὺ εἶναι, γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνα, οἱ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ἀντιπροσωπευτικοὶ πυλώνες στήριξης τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης, ὥστε αὐτὴ νὰ μεταβιβάζεται ἀνόθευτη ἀπὸ γενιὰ σὲ γενιὰ. Μὴν ξεχνάμε πὺς ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κόντογλου, ὡς πολυτάλαντος καλλιτέχνης, γράφει ἐξ ἰδίας πείρας, καθὼς, ὅπως ὁμολογεῖ ὁ ἴδιος, δεχόταν ἄμεσα, προκλητικὰ καὶ μὲ ποικίλους τρόπους τὶς προσβολὲς τοῦ πειρασμοῦ, γιὰ συμπόρευση μὲ τὴν κοσμικὴ ζωὴ.

Γράφει χαρακτηριστικὰ: «Ὅλα τὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα θὰ γίνουνε φωνόγραφα, κουρντισμένα μὲ κάποιο ἐλατήριο, ποὺ ἔρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ: «Τὰ-τὰ-τά, τὰ-τὰ-τά!» Ἐνας κατακτητὴς τῆς Εὐρώπης, πρὶν

ἀπὸ 150 χρόνια, ἤθελε, σὰν θὰ ἔλεγε αὐτὸς «Α.», ὅλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ λέει «Α.» Ἄν ζοῦσε τώρα, θὰ ἔβλεπε πὺς κοντεύουμε νὰ φτάξουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ὠραῖο ρομποτισμὸ καὶ θὰ χαιρότανε».

Μήπως αὐτὴν τὴν χαρὰ δὲν τὴν ἀπολαμβάνει σήμερα ὁ κατακτητὴς, ποὺ λέγεται ἄθεη Δύση, μὲ τὴν συνδρομὴ τῶν ἐντὸς τῶν τειχῶν «κουρντισμένων φωνογράφων τῆς»;

Καὶ συνεχίζει: «Τὸ τί θ' ἀκούσω γι' αὐτὰ ποὺ γράφω ἀπὸ ἕνα σωρὸ ὑμνητῶν τῆς τυποποιημένης ἑλληνικῆς ζωῆς, τὸ ξέρω. Θὰ μὲ ποῦνε σκουριασμένη ἄγκουρα, φουνταρισμένη καὶ γαντζωμένη ἀπάνω στὴν ξέρα τῆς Παράδοσης, ἀλλὰ «οὐ φροντίζ, Ἰπποκλειδῆ» (Παρομιώδης φράση ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα, ποὺ σημαίνει: δὲν τὸν νοιάζει τὸν Ἰπποκλειδῆ).

Ἡ τυποποίηση στὴν Ἑλλάδα, μ' ὅλα ποὺ εἶπα, εἶναι ἀκόμα στὴν ἀρχή. Ὑπάρχει κάμποση ἀτυποποίητη ζωὴ καὶ μ' αὐτὴν παρηγοριόμαστε λίγο ἐμεῖς οἱ «καθυστερημένοι» κι οἱ «ἀσυγχρόνιστοι». Μὰ σὰν συλλογισθῶ τί θὰ γίνεῖ ὕστερα ἀπὸ τριάντα - σαράντα χρόνια, λέγω: «Πάλι καλὰ, μπροστὰ σὲ ἄλλες χώρες. Βαστὰ ἀκόμα ἡ βλογημένη φύτρα».

Πέρασαν τὰ χρόνια καὶ σαράντα καὶ ἐξήντα καὶ ἑκατό. Τίποτε δὲν σταματᾷ τὸν κατήφορο ποὺ πήραμε. Ὁ προφητικὸς Φώτιος ἐπαληθεύεται. Ἡ λίγη παρηγοριὰ ποὺ ἔπαιρνε στὰ χρόνια του χάθηκε σήμερα ὁλότελα.

Παρεμπιπτόντως, ὀφείλουμε νὰ δεχθοῦμε πὺς τὰ διαλαμβανόμενα ἔργα πάσης μορφῆς καὶ ἐπιπέδου σήμερα, εἶναι αὐτονόητο ἐπακόλουθο ἐντὸς αὐτῆς τῆς πραγματικότητας καὶ μάλιστα δίχως νὰ εἶναι προβλεπόμενο τὸ μέγεθος τῆς καταστροφῆς τους καὶ ὁ χρόνος λήξης τους. Τὸ βλέπουμε νὰ γίνεταί ὁρατὸ μὲ τὶς ἀλλεπάλληλες ἀποφάσεις τῶν κυβερνήσεων, ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὶς πολιτικὲς καὶ ἰδεολογικὲς τους ἀποκλίσεις, ἀφοῦ εὐθυγραμμίζονται ἀπόλυτα πάνω σ' αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα, ὡς νὰ τοὺς κατευθύνει κάποια κοινὴ ἀόρατη δύναμη. Ἀλλὰ, **ἀνεπιφύλακτα μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε πὺς τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ τὴν διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὁποία, ἀδυνατώντας νὰ ὀρθώσει φωνὴ ἀληθείας, ἐμπλέκεται σὲ ἀλυσιδωτὲς οἰκουμενιστικὲς συμπαιγνίες, ἐξυπηρετώντας τὰ καπρίτσια τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ τῶν ἀθέων κέντρων τῆς Δύσης.**

Πάντοτε ἀπλὸς καὶ γλαφυρὸς στὶς περιγραφὰς του ὁ Κόντογλου, ἀποτυπώνει στὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ ἀναγνώστη μὲ περίτεχνο καὶ εὐγενικὸ τρόπο τὸ περίσσειμα τῆς δικῆς του καρδιάς. Κλείνει τὴν ἐνότητα αὐτῆ μὲ μία ὠραία ἀνατολίτικη ἱστορία, ἡ ὁποία ἐπιβεβαιώνει μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ διάβα τοῦ χρόνου τοὺς φόβους καὶ τὶς προβλέψεις του:

«Μία φορὰ ἦτανε ἕνας σουλτάνος αἰμοβόρος καὶ τὸν καταριότανε ὅλος ὁ κόσμος. Τὴν νύχτα γινότανε

“τεπτίλι,” δηλαδή, έβαζε ξένα ρούχα και γύριζε μέσα στα σοκάκια και στα μαγαζιά, για να δει τί έλεγε ο κόσμος γι’ αυτόν. Από παντού άκουγε κατάρες και βλαστήμιες. Μά δεν απελπιζότανε. Δύο τρία χρόνια έβγαينه στη βόλτα, μά δεν άκουσε μήτε έναν άνθρωπο να πει καλόν λόγο για τόν σουλτάνο. Άπάνω στα τρία χρόνια, εκει πού περπατούσε ένα βράδυ σ’ έναν δρόμο, μία γριά, πολν γριά, τόν γνωρίσε και είπε:

—Πολυχρονεμένη μου σουλτάνε, μέρες να κόβει ο Άλλαχ από μένα, χρόνια να σοϋ τίς δίνει.

Ο σουλτάνος παραξενεύτηκε, πώς βρέθηκε ένας άνθρωπος να τόν ευχηθεί και ρώτησε την γριά τί καλό είχε δει από αυτόν και τόν ευχιότανε. Κι ή γριά του είπε:

—Έγώ θα σοϋ πώ την αλήθεια και δεν με μέλει αν με σκοτώσεις, γιατί είμαι γριά. Έγώ έφταξα τρεις σουλτάνους, τόν παππού σου, τόν πατέρα σου κι εμένα.

—Λοιπόν, τής λέγει ο σουλτάνος, τί άνθρωπος ήτανε ο παπούς μου;

—Ο παπούς σου, λέγει ή γριά, ήτανε κακός άνθρωπος. Κρέμαζε, παλούκωνε, έσφαζε.

—Κι ο πατέρας μου; τή ρωτά ο σουλτάνος.

—Ο πατέρας σου ήτανε χειρότερος από τόν παππού σου, λέγει ή γριά.

—Κι εγώ, τή ρωτά ο σουλτάνος, τί άνθρωπος είμαι;

—Έσοϋ είσαι πιδ παλιάνθρωπος από τόν πατέρα σου.

—Και τότε γιατί με πολυχρονίζεις; τή ρωτά πάλι ο σουλτάνος.

—Σε πολυχρονίζω, επειδι ή ο πατέρας σου ήτανε χειρότερος από τόν παππού σου κι εσοϋ χειρότερος από τόν πατέρα σου, παρακαλώ τόν Θεο να σε πολυχρονίζει, γιατί αυτός πού θα έρθει ύστερα από σένα, θα είναι ακόμα χειρότερος!»

Κλείνουμε με την εισαγωγική φράση του κειμένου όπου, ποτισμένος μέχρι τα βάθη τής ύπαρξης του από τα βιώματα τής εν Χριστώ ελευθερίας, ως γνήσιος Ρωμιός, ο κυρ-Φώτης Κόντογλου διαχωρίζει με απόλυτο τρόπο την θέση του απ’ αυτήν την κολαστική ματαιότητα και ζητά να παραμείνει ελεύθερος, έξω και μακριά από μία τέτοια ζωή: «Αυτά τα γράφει ένας άνθρωπος, πού δεν μπορεί και δεν θέλει να γίνει τυποποιημένος, δηλαδή, ένας άνθρωπος ξένος από τη σημερινή ζωή και τους πόθους της!»



Αυτοί οι τρεις κανόνες ζωής είναι χρήσιμοι, τδ να αφοβάσαι τόν Θεόν, τδ να προσεύχεσαι αδιάλειπτα και τδ να κάνης τδ καλόν στδν πλησίον σου.

Άββας Ποιμην ο Μέγας

Οι Ημέρες Είναι Πονηρές

Του Μακαριστου Επισκόπου Φλωρίνης Αυγουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010). Δημοσιεύθηκε στο περιοδικό «Σταυρός» με τίτλο «Εξαγοραζόμενοι τόν Καιρόν»(τ. 59/1966, σσ. 1-4) και περιελήφθη στο βιβλίο «Ο Χρόνος και αι Τέσσαρες Εποχαι» με τδ νέο τίτλο «Αι ήμέραι Πονηραι» (Αθήναι 1966, σσ. 138-147), 20-11-2019.

«Εξαγοραζόμενοι τόν καιρόν, οτι αι ήμέραι πονηραι εισιν».

(Έφ. 5:16)

Οι άνθρωποι, αγαπητοί μου, εκτιμούν την αξία του χρήματος. Άλλα την αξία του χρόνου πόσοι την εκτιμούν όπως πρέπει; Και όμως ο χρόνος, πού τρέχει ασταμάτητα, σαν τδ ρεύμα του ποταμού, και μάς φέρνει γρήγορα από τη νηπιακή στην παιδική ηλικία, κι από την παιδική στην έφηβική κι από την έφηβική στην άνδρική κι από την άνδρική στη γεροντική και τέλος μάς αρπάξει και μάς ρίχνει στην αιωνιότητα, είναι πολύτιμος. Είναι χρήμα ανεκτίμητο. Αξίζει ασυγκρίτως περισσότερο από βουνά χρυσού. Και αν τώρα δεν τόν εκτιμούν οι άνθρωποι, άλλα τόν αφήνουν και διαορθεί ασκοπα, μην αμφιβάλλετε, οτι θα’οθη καιροδ πού θα κλάψουν πικρά για τδ χαμένο χρόνο, και θ’ αναζητήσουν λίγο χρόνο, λίγες μέρες, λίγες ώρες—τί λέω—, λίγα λεπτά, μά δεν θα τα έχουν.

Ο χρόνος φεύγει ανεπιστρεπτεί, σαν τδ ρεύμα του ποταμού πού δεν γυρίζει πίσω. Και όμως πόσο απερισκεπτα τόν μεταχειρίζονται οι άνθρωποι!

Μία παραφροσύνη. Κάποτε, λένε, άνοιξε τδ παράθυρο ένδς άρχοντικού, βγήκε κάποιος πού κρατούσε ένα σάκκο γεμάτο χρυσά νομίσματα κι άρχισε ένα - ένα να τα πετάη έξω, μέχρι πού τα έρριξε όλα κι ο σάκκος άδειασε. Έτρεξε κόσμος και μάζεψε τα νομίσματα... Τί είχε συμβη; Ο άνθρωπος αυτός είχε τρελλαθη και δεν ήξερε τί κάνει.

Σπάνιο, πολν σπάνιο, θα πήτε, να συμβη κάτι τέτοιο. Άλλα τδ σπάνιο, άνθρωπος πού παραφρονει και πετάει τα χρήματά του και γελάει και διασκεδάζει, αυτή ή άπίθανη περίπτωσι, είναι παράδειγμα - εικόνα μιās πραγματικότητας στην οποία ζη τδ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τής ανθρωπότητας. Δεν είναι βέβαια όλοι αυτοί παράφρονες, είναι λογικοί. Και όμως αυτοί οι λογικοί, πού δεν αποκλείεται να’νε και επιστήμονες και διεθνούς φήμης, διαπράττουν μιā άφροσύνη χειρότερη από του παράφρονος πού είπαμε. Γιατί σās έρωτώ· τί είμαστε όλοι εδω στη γη; Ίδιοκτητες; Αιώνιοι κάτοικοι; Όχι, άλλα «πάροικοι και παρεπίδημοι». (Α΄ Πέτρο. 2:11).

Λίγο θα μείνουμε. Η Γη είναι ένα μεγάλο ξενοδοχείο, ένα άρχοντικό, πού μένουμε προσωρινά. Δόθηκε στδν καθένα μας ώρισμένος χρόνος. Αυτός ο χρόνος

είναι ὅπως ὁ σάκκος μὲ τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα τοῦ παράφρονος. Χρυσᾶ νομίσματα εἶναι οἱ ὄρες τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς. Ἄνθρωπε θνητέ, μὲ μία καὶ μόνο ὥρα, ἂν τὴν χρησιμοποιήσης σωστά, ἀγοράξεις τὸν Οὐρανό! Πρόσεξε λοιπὸν πῶς θὰ χρησιμοποιήσης τὶς ὄρες τῆς ζωῆς σου. Ἀλλὰ τί βλέπουμε; Οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἀντὶ νὰ κάνουν καλὴ χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου τους, τὸν σπαταλοῦν ἀπερίσκεπτα. Ἀνοίγουν κι αὐτοὶ τὸν σάκκο τῶν χρυσῶν νομισμάτων, καὶ πετοῦν πρὸς τὰ ἔξω ἀσκόπως ὄλο τὸν πλοῦτο τους.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ σπαταλάει ἄσκοπα καὶ μάταια τὸ χρῆμα, λέγεται ἄσωτος. Ὅλοι τὸν κακίζουν. Ἄκοῦς ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄθλιο! Λένε, νὰ κληρονομήση ἀπ' τὸν πατέρα του τόσες λίρες καὶ νὰ τὶς σπαταλήσῃ! Αὐτὸς θέλει κρέμασμα... Ἀλλὰ μεγαλύτερος ἄσωτος καὶ ἄξιος μεγάλης τιμωρίας εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ σπαταλάει μάταια ὄχι χρῆμα ἀλλὰ τὸ χρόνο. Διότι χρῆμα ποὺ ἔχασες μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ ξαναποκτήσης, ἀλλὰ χρόνο ποὺ ἔφυγε σὲ ματαιότητες καὶ τρέλλες, εἶναι ἀδύνατον. Ἄνθρωποι, μὴν κλαῖτε τὰ χρήματα ποὺ χάσατε· κλάψτε πικρὰ τὸ χρόνο ποὺ σπαταλήσατε. Σεῖς, οἱ σπάταλοι τοῦ χρόνου, εἴστε οἱ μεγαλύτεροι ἄσωτοι.

Ὅχι ἄλλο ἀνεμοδείκτες καὶ χαμαιλέοντες. Τὴν ἀξία τοῦ πολυτίμου χρόνου ὑπογραμμίζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος μὲ τὰ λόγια «Ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν, ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσι». (Ἐφ. 5:16). Τί σημαίνει τὸ «ἐξαγοραζόμενοι»; Ὅχι, ὅπως τὸ ἐρμηνεύουν οἱ ἰδιοτελεῖς καὶ καιροσκόποι, νὰ κάνουμε δηλαδή ἀβαρίες στὴ συνείδησί μας, συμβιβασμοὺς μὲ τὴν ἀδικία καὶ τὴν παρανομία, νὰ προσποιούμεθα καὶ νὰ ὑποκρινώμαστε, νὰ γινώμαστε ἀνεμοδείκτες σὲ κάθε πνοῇ ἀνέμου γιὰ νὰ τὰ βολεύουμε καὶ νὰ περνᾶμε καλὰ τὴ ζωὴ μας, ἀπολαμβάνοντας τὰ ἀγαθὰ μὲ ἄνεσι καὶ εἰρήνη γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια μὲ εὐτυχία. Ὅχι. Δὲν μᾶς θέλει ὁ Θεὸς νὰ εἴμαστε «ποικίλοι καὶ παντοδαποί», ὅπως ὁ χαμαιλέον, τὰ γνωστὸ ἐρπετὸ ποὺ ἀλλάζει χρῶμα ἀνάλογα μὲ τὸ ἔδαφος ποὺ βρῖσκεται. «Ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν» σημαίνει, νὰ μὴν κοιμώμαστε, νὰ εἴμαστε πάντα σὲ πνευματικὴ ἐγρήγορσι, νὰ μένουμε ἄγρυπνοι φύλακες τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς, καὶ πνευματικὰ πάνοπλοι

νὰ κατοπεύουμε τὸν περίγυρό μας, νὰ βλέπουμε «τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν» (Ματθ. 16:3), νὰ κάνουμε φρόνιμη καὶ συνετὴ χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου.

Ἄς ἐξηγήσουμε λίγο πιὸ ἀναλυτικά, ποιές εἶναι οἱ «πονηρὲς ἡμέρες».

Καθὼς ὁ χρόνος κυλάει, φέρνει εὐκαιρίες γιὰ πνευματικὴ πρόοδο, γιὰ ἐκτέλεσι καλῶν ἔργων. Γίνεται π.χ. στὴν πόλι μας κήρυγμα; Περνάει ἀπ' τὸ χωριὸ μας ἱεροκήρυκας ἢ πνευματικὸς ποὺ μᾶς καλεῖ σὲ μετάνοια καὶ ἐξομολόγησι; Βρῖσκονται περιπτώσεις ἀσθενῶν καὶ φτωχῶν ἀδελφῶν μας ποὺ χρειάζονται ὕλικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ βοήθεια; Ἡ ὑπάρχει κάποια ἐργασία ποὺ πρέπει νὰ τὴν κάνουμε πάση θυσία; Αὐτὰ εἶναι εὐκαιρίες· προσοχὴ μὴ μᾶς ξεφύγουν. Ὅπως ὁ κυνηγὸς προσέχει καλὰ τὶς ἐποχὲς ποὺ περνᾶνε ἀπὸ τὰ νησιὰ καὶ τ' ἀκρωτήρια τὰ πουλιὰ καὶ τρέχει ἐγκαίρως στὰ περάσματα αὐτά, ἔτσι κι ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ κυνηγᾷ τὶς εὐκαιρίες καὶ ἄγρυπνος νὰ ἐκμεταλλεύεται ὅλα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ συντελοῦν στὴν πνευματικὴ του πρόοδο καὶ στὸ καλὸ τοῦ πλησίον· νὰ γίνῃ κυνηγὸς ἄγρυπνος ποὺ θὰ περιμένῃ τὸ θεῖκὸ κυνήγι, καὶ ὄχι κυνηγὸς ἀμελῆς ποὺ κοιμᾶται κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ σκιά τοῦ δέντρου τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἀπὸ πάνω τοῦ περνοῦν ὀλόκληρα κοπάδια πουλιῶν.

Ἀλλὰ ὁ χρόνος δὲν φέρνει μόνο εὐκαιρίες γιὰ τὸ καλὸ· παρουσιάζει καὶ σκάνδαλα καὶ δυστυχίες καὶ τραγικότητες. Ὅχι ὅτι φταίει ὁ χρόνος γιὰ τὰ σκάνδαλα, τὶς δυστυχίες καὶ τραγικότητες τῆς ζωῆς ὄχι.

Τὸ κακὸ δὲν τὸ φέρνει ὁ χρόνος, δὲν ὑπάρχουν «ἀποφράδες» ἡμέρες καὶ ὄρες ποὺ πρέπει κανεὶς ν' ἀποφεύγῃ. Δημιουργὸς τῶν κακῶν δὲν εἶναι ὁ χρόνος, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Αὐτὸς μὲ τὶς καλὲς ἢ τὶς κακὲς πράξεις του κάνει καλὲς ἢ κακὲς τὶς ἡμέρες. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ καὶ τὴν πιὸ λαμπρὴ ἡμέρα τοῦ χρόνου, τὴν ἑορτὴ τοῦ Πάσχα, νὰ τὴ μεταβάλλῃ μὲ τὰ κακουργήματά του σὲ ἡμέρα συμφορᾶς καὶ δυστυχίας. Αὐτὸς δίνει περιεχόμενο στὸ χρόνο καὶ τὸν γεμίζει ἢ μὲ ἀρετὴ ἢ μὲ τὴν κακία του.

Καὶ ἂν σὲ μία περίδο οἱ κακοί, οἱ ἀσεβεῖς καὶ παραβάτες τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχουν ἀύξηθῃ κι ἀποτελοῦν τὴν πλειονότητα τῆς κοινωνίας καὶ



Μητροπολίτης Φλωρίνης Ἀγυουστίνο
Καντιώτης
(20 Ἀπρ. 1907 - 28 Αὐγ 2010)

κυριαρχούν σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τομεῖς, καὶ κατατρέχουν κάθε εὐσεβῆ καὶ ἐνάρετο, τότε ἡ ἐποχή, οἱ ἡμέρες ποὺ τὸ κακὸ θριαμβεύει στὸν κόσμο, λέγονται «*ἡμέραι πονηραί*». Τότε τὸ πεδίο δράσεως τοῦ καλοῦ περιορίζεται: τὸ καλὸ, ἡ πίστι καὶ ἡ ἀρετὴ, καταδιώκεται, ἔχουμε διωγμοὺς εὐσεβῶν καὶ αἵματα μαρτύρων καὶ σταυροὺς καὶ κρεμάλες δικαίων.

Νὰ φυλάξουμε τὴν πίστι. Σὲ περίοδο τέτοιων πονηρῶν ἡμερῶν ἄς προσέξουν οἱ πιστοὶ γιὰ νὰ «ἐξαγοράζουν τὸν καιρὸ». Πῶς; Κάνοντας φρόνιμη (=μυαλωμένη) καὶ συνετὴ (=σοφὴ) χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου: «*Γίνεσθε φρόνιμοι ὡς οἱ ὄφεις καὶ ἀκέραιοι ὡς αἱ περιστεραί.*» (Ματθ. 10:16). Ἡ φρόνησις τοῦ φιδιοῦ ὅταν τὸ χτυπήσουν εἶναι νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ κεφάλι του, καὶ ἡ φρόνησις τοῦ πιστοῦ σὲ καιρὸ διωγμοῦ εἶναι νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀπ' ὅλα, αὐτὸ ποὺ ἂν τὸ χάσῃ ἔχασε τὸ πᾶν καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ πίστις του. Τὴν πίστι του δὲν θὰ τὴν προδώσῃ ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ· θὰ τὴν φυλάξῃ μὲ κάθε θυσία.

Καὶ ὅπως ὅταν πιάσῃ φωτιὰ σ' ἓνα σπίτι καὶ καίγωνται τὰ πάντα, ὁ ἰδιοκτήτης θὰ προσπαθήσῃ νὰ σώσῃ ὅ,τι εἶναι τὸ πολυτιμότερο ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὰ ἄλλα, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ πιστὸς. Ὅταν ὁ διάβολος βάλῃ φωτιὰ καὶ καίει τὰ πάντα, ὁ πιστὸς θὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν πίστι του καὶ θὰ διαφύγῃ μέσ' ἀπ' τὴν φλόγες τοῦ κόσμου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἀπιστίας ποὺ καίγεται. Καὶ ὅπως ὅταν κάποιος ληστής μπῆ μέσα σ' ἓνα σπίτι καὶ ἀπειλήσῃ μὲ θάνατο τὸ νοικοκύρη, αὐτὸς γιὰ νὰ σώσῃ τὴ ζωὴ του τοῦ παραδίδει ὅλα τὰ χρήματα, ἔτσι καὶ ὅταν ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὅλων μας κακοποιοὶ καὶ ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἄπιστοι κυριαρχοῦν καὶ ἐξουσιάζουν, τότε ὅλα μποροῦμε νὰ τοὺς τὰ δώσουμε, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν πίστι καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ.

Αὐτὸ συμβουλευεὶ ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός: «*Τοῦτο σᾶς λέγω καὶ σᾶς παραγγέλλω κἂν ὁ οὐρανὸς νὰ κατέβῃ κάτω, κἂν ἡ γῆ νὰ ἀνέβῃ ἐπάνω, κἂν ὁλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ χαλάσῃ, καθὼς μέλλεινὰ χαλάσῃ, σήμερον - αὔριον, μὴ σᾶς μέλη τί ἔχει νὰ κάμῃ ὁ Θεός. Τὸ κορμί σας ἄς τὸ καύσουν, ἄς τὸ τηγανίσουν τὰ πράγματά σας ἄς τὰ πάρουν μὴ σᾶς μέλει. Δώσατέ τ'αὐτὰ δὲν εἶναι ἰδικά σας. **Ψυχὴ καὶ Χριστὸς σᾶς χρειάζονται.** Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο, ὁλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ πέσῃ ἐπάνω σας, δὲν ἔμπορεῖ νὰ σᾶς τὰ πάρῃ, ἐκτὸς καὶ τὰ δώσετε μὲ τὸ θέλημά σας. Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο νὰ φυλάγετε, νὰ μὴ τὰ χάσετε... Τώρα χρειάζεται ἡ πίστις. Διὰ τοῦτο, ἀδελφοί μου, καλότυχοι καὶ τρισμακάριοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ὅπου πιστεύουν τώρα, καὶ ἀλλοίμονον εἰς τοὺς ἀπίστους. Καλύτερα ἂν μὴ εἶχον γεννηθῆ εἰς τὸν κόσμον».* (Βλ. ἡμέτ. βιβλ. Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός, Διδ. Δ', ἔκδ. «Σταυρός», Ἀθῆναι 2013, σσ. 180-181).

Ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μας. Κανεῖς, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθῆ ὅτι ζοῦμε σὲ ἡμέρες πονηρῆς. Τὸ κακὸ ἔχει ὑψώσει τὸ κεφάλι μὲ θράσος. Μεγάλα πολιτικὰ καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ σκάνδαλα συνταράσσουν τὸν τόπο. Ἡ πατρίδα σείεται ἐκ θεμελίων. Καὶ μόνο ἡ Ἑλλάδα; Ὁλόκληρη ἡ οἰκουμένη συνταράσσεται. Οἱ πιστοὶ ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἀποτελοῦν μία ἐλάχιστη μειονότητα. Ἄς προσέχουν λοιπὸν πολὺ. Ἄς προσέχουμε νὰ μὴν ἀφομοιωθοῦμε μὲ τὸν κόσμο, ἀλλά, διατηρώντας ἀφθορη τὴ συνειδήσί μας μὴ παύσουμε νὰ ἀγωνιζώμαστε. Κάθε εὐκαιρία ποὺ παρουσιάζεται ὑπὲρ τοῦ καλοῦ ἄς τὴν ἀρπάξουμε.

Ἄς γίνουμε ἔμπειροι ψαράδες καὶ κυνηγοὶ τῶν θειοτέρων πραγμάτων. Ἔστω καὶ ἂν μᾶς μισοῦν, μᾶς χτυποῦν, μᾶς διώκουν καὶ μᾶς σταυρώνουν ἀκόμα, μὴ χάσουμε τὸ θάρρος. Ἄς ἐξαγοράζουμε κάθε στιγμή, κάνοντας καλὴ, θεάρεστη χρῆσι τοῦ χρόνου. Νὰ ἔχουμε πίστι στὸν Κύριο.

Οἱ πονηρῆς ἡμέρες θὰ τελειώσουν ὅπωςδήποτε. Λαμπρὲς ἡμέρες θὰ ἔρθουν, ἂν ὄχι ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ, ἀσφαλῶς ἐκεῖ στὸν οὐρανό. Μὴ λησμονοῦμε ποτέ ὅτι εἴμαστε «*ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*». (Ἐβρ. 11:13. Γέν 23:4). Μὴν περιορίσουμε μόνο ἐδῶ, στὰ στενὰ ὄρια τοῦ παρόντος βίου, τοὺς πόθους μας γιὰ ἓνα καλύτερο αὔριον, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχουμε βεβαίως χρέος νὰ ἐργαζώμεθα· ἄς ἀτενίζουμε μὲ τὴν πίστι μακριά, πολὺ μακριά, καὶ ἄς λέμε κ' ἐμεῖς ὅ,τι ἔλεγε καὶ ὁ ἀρχαῖος φιλόσοφος Ἀναξίμανδρος δείχνοντας τὰ ἀστέρια: «*Ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα μου*»...

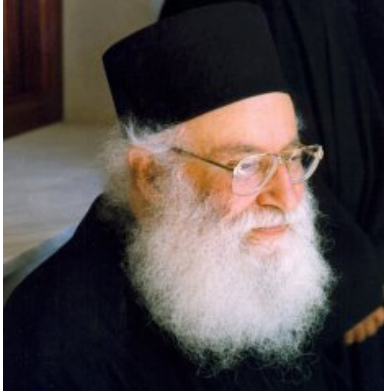


Δύσκολον εἶναι χωρὶς ἄσκησι νὰ δεσμευθῆ ἡ νεότης στὸν ζυγὸ τῆς καθαρότητος. Ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ σκοτεινιάσματος τοῦ νοῦ πηγάζει, κατὰ πρῶτον ἀπὸ τὴν ὀκνηρία, ἡ ὁποία ἐκδηλώνεται στὴν πνευματικὴ ἐργασία καὶ στὴν προσευχὴ. Διότι ἄλλη ὁδὸς πλάνης δὲν ὑπάρχει στὴν ψυχὴ, παρὰ τὸ νὰ ἐκπέσῃ προηγουμένως ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴν ἐργασία καὶ τὴν προσευχὴ. Ἐπειδὴ πέφτει εὐκόλα στὰ χέρια τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς ἡ ψυχῆ, ὅταν στερηθῆ τὴν βοήθειαν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ πάλιν ξαναλέγω ὅτι, ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ δὲν φροντίζει γιὰ τὰ ἔργα τῆς ἀρετῆς, εὐκόλα ἔλκεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἐνάντια τῶν ἀρετῶν.

Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος

Ἔχουσιν Οὗτοι τοὺς Οἴκους, Ἡμεῖς τὸν Ἐνοικον

Ἀπόσπασμα Ὁρθόδοξης Χριστιανικῆς Ὁμιλίας τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος π. Ἀθανασίου Μυτιληναίου (1927 – 2006).



Ὄταν κατέκτησε ὁ Δαυὶδ τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ ἔκρινε ὅτι ἐκεῖ ἔπρεπε νὰ χριστεῖ ὁ ναός. Βέβαια καθ' ὑπόδειξη τοῦ Θεοῦ, διότι ποτὲ δὲν ἔκανε ὁ Δαυὶδ τίποτε ἂν δὲν ἔπαιρνε τὴν πληροφορία ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἦτανε πιστὸς στὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ

Θεοῦ, ἐν ἀντιθέσει μὲ τὸν Σαοὺλ, ὁ ὁποῖος δὲν ἦτο πιστός.

Ὡστε, λέγει ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, οὐκ ἦν ναὸς ἄχρι τότε: Ὡστε λοιπὸν δὲν ὑπῆρχε μέχρι τότε ναός.

καίτοι καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ἐξέωστο, παρ' ὅτι, λέει, εἶχαν ἐξωσθεῖ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, οἱ ἐθνικοί,

τοσαῦτα θαύματα, καὶ οὐδαμοῦ ναὸς. τόσα θαύματα ἐγίνοντο, κι ὅμως δὲν ὑπῆρχε πουθενὰ ναός. Θαύματα ἐννοεῖται ἐπεμβάσεις τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

Ἄρα ὁ ναός δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ἔχει ἀπόλυτην ἀξία ἀλλὰ σχετική, ἀφοῦ εἶχαν μείνει περίπου τέσσερις αἰῶνες μὲ τὴν εἴσοδό τους εἰς τὴν γῆν Χαναάν χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει αὐτὸς ὁ ναός.

Καὶ ὕστερα, ὅπως βλέπουμε καὶ θὰ ἰδοῦμε, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἐβιάζετο νὰ ἀνοικοδομήσει ναόν, οὔτε ἐξάλλου τὸ ἐζήτησε ὁ Θεὸς αὐτό. Τὸ λέγει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός. Θὰ τὸ δοῦμε λίγο πιδ κάτω. Τοῦτο τὸ ἐζήτησε ὁ Δαυὶδ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν. Καὶ πάλι ὁ Θεὸς δὲν βιάζεται, ἀλλὰ ἀναθέτει τὸ θέμα εἰς τὸν Σολομώντα. Θὰ τὸ δοῦμε καὶ αὐτὸ λίγο πιδ κάτω ποὺ τοῦ λέει, ὄχι, ἐσὺ θὰ πεθάνεις καὶ κατόπιν ὁ ἀπόγονός σου θὰ εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ μοῦ χτίσει ναόν.

Συνεπῶς, ὁ Στέφανος—μὴν ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι ἀπολογεῖται ὁ Στέφανος—ποὺ θεωροῦσε σχετικὴ τὴν ἀξία τοῦ ναοῦ, δὲν σήμαινε ὅτι ἐβλασφήμει κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου, δηλαδή κατὰ τοῦ ναοῦ. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπολυτοποίησις τοῦ ναοῦ ἐκ μέρους τῶν Ἑβραίων, τὸ ὅτι δηλαδή ὁ Θεὸς μένει μόνο στὸ ναό, κατὰ περιεργὸν τρόπον ἀγαπητοῦ μου μένει σὰν ἀντίληψη μέχρι σήμερα. Εἶδατε καὶ τὴν περασμένη καὶ τὴν προπερασμένη φορὰ πόσο ἐπιμένουμε στὸ θέμα τοῦ ναοῦ. Ὅπως ἐπιμένει καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Στέφανος. Ἴσως πεῖτε ὅτι ἐπιτέλους, ὁ Ἅγιος Στέφανος ἀπολογεῖται. Ἀγαπητοῦ μου, ἔχει πολλὴ σημασία, θὰ τὸ δεῖτε ἀμέσως τώρα.

Οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θέλουν τὸν Θεὸ ἐγκλωβισμένον μέσα στὸν ναὸν κατὰ ἀποκλειστικότητα δική των. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός μας, λέει. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνήκει σὲ κάποιον ἄλλον. Ἀφοῦ λοιπὸν εἶναι δικός μας, ἄρα εἶναι ἐγκλωβισμένος μέσα στὸν ναὸ ποὺ θὰ τοῦ χτίσουμε ἢ ποὺ τοῦ χτίσαμε ἢ ποὺ θὰ τοῦ ξαναχτίσουμε.

Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀποκλειστικότητα πολλὲς φορὲς φάνηκε καὶ μάλιστα ὅταν κατοπινὰ ὁ Παῦλος ἀπελογεῖτο, ἐκεῖ ὅταν πῆγε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ ἔγινε πολὺ φασαρία νὰ τὸν λιντζάρουν. Καὶ ἀπολογεῖται μπροστὰ στὸν Λυσία τὸν Χιλίαρχον—ἐννοεῖται ἀπολογεῖται εἰς τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὄχι εἰς τὸν Λυσίαν. Ἐκεῖ ὁμιλεῖ καὶ λέγει πολλὰ. Ὅμιλεῖ περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ τὸν περιέμενε ὁ λαὸς καὶ φθάνει εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς σημεῖον. Καὶ αὐτὸς, λέγει, ὁ Μεσσίας ὁ Ἰησοῦς, μοῦ εἶπε νὰ πάω εἰς ἔθνη μακράν.

Ἦταν αὐτὸ ἦτανε ποὺ τοὺς ἐδαμόνισε. Διότι αὐτὸ δὲν μπορούσαν νὰ χωνέψουν... ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός μας.

Εἶναι ἐκεῖνο ποὺ λέμε κι ἐμεῖς καμιά φορὰ, περιέργως μάλιστα σὲ ἐθνικὲς ἐορτὲς ποὺ ἐλέγοντο παλαιότερα, σὲ κάτι ὁμιλίες, «ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος». Εἶναι πάρα πάρα πολὺ τραβηγμένο, «ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος». Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου ὅλου καὶ δὲν εἶναι μόνο ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Περιέργο πρᾶγμα. Παθαίνουμε βλέπετε κάτι ἀγκυλώσεις περιέργες, αὐτὲς ποὺ πάθαιναν ἱστορικὰ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι.

Ἔτσι, ἀποδοκιμάζουν τὸν Παῦλον, ἀποδοκιμάζουν καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν. Πετοῦνε χώματα στὸν ἄερα, σχίζουν τὰ ροῦχα τους, τὰ πετᾶνε στὸν ἄερα. Αἶρε τὸν τοιοῦτον, δηλαδή, σκότωσέ τον νὰ φωνάζουν εἰς τὸν Χιλίαρχον τὸν Λυσία καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς.

Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ λόγος ποὺ διατηροῦν ἀκόμη τὴν ἴδια νοοτροπία, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι δικός τους. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνήκει στοὺς ἐθνικούς. Ἦταν τότε ποὺ ἔφτασαν νὰ καταδικάσουν τὸν Στέφανον καὶ σήμερα ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ξαναχτίσουν τὸν ναόν των γιὰ νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν ὅτι πάλι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι μαζί τους, κατὰ μία σύγχρονη διακήρυξή τους ποὺ σᾶς διάβασα τὴν περασμένη Δευτέρα. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἐδημοσιεύθη εἰς τοὺς Times τῆς Νέας Ὑόρκης. Καὶ ἐκεῖ λέει, ὁ Θεὸς ἔφυγε ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Γιατί ἔφυγε ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς; Γιατί δὲν ἔχουμε ναό. Πρέπει λοιπὸν νὰ ξαναχτίσουμε τὸν ναὸ γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Θεός. Πῶς νὰ περμιένη ὁ Θεὸς τώρα 20 αἰῶνες πότε οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θὰ χτίσουν τὸν ναόν των γιὰ νὰ πάει νὰ ἐγκαθιδρυθεῖ μέσα εἰς τὸν ναόν.

Αὐτὸ χτυπάει ὁ Στέφανος καὶ δὲν ἔχει βεβαίως κανέναν σκοπὸ νὰ στραφεῖ ἐναντίον τοῦ ναοῦ. Αὐτὸ θὰ λέγαμε καὶ γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ναὸ καὶ γιὰ ὅποιοδήποτε ναὸ ἀγαπητοῦ μου. Αὔριο τὸν καταστρέφουν τὸν ναὸν αὐτόν, τὸν μεταβάλλουν σὲ μουσεῖο ἢ στάβλο

στην χειροτέρα έκδοση ἂν θέλετε ἢ χορευτικὸ κέντρον, αἶθουσα συναυλιῶν καὶ δὲν ξέρω, ᾧ μὴ γένοιτω. Ἄλλὰ γιατί; Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεός. Μήπως ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Σολομῶντος δὲν μετετρέπη σὲ ὅ,τι μετετρέπη ποῦ νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται βδέλυγμα; Τὸ βδέλυγμα ἦταν τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος ποῦ στήθηκε ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ.

Τί νομίζετε; Ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖς τότε τί θὰ κάνουμε; Βέβαια θὰ λυπούμεθα. Βέβαια θὰ ὀδυρόμεθα. Ὅχι ὅμως κατὰ τρόπον φοβερὸν ὅπως οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Ἀλλὰ τί; Ὅ,τι συνέβη στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη κάποτε ὅταν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ κατέλαβαν ὅλους τοὺς ναοὺς— ἦταν οἱ Ἀρειανοὶ—καὶ δὲν εἶχε μείνει παρὰ ἓνας μικρὸς ναῖσκος τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας. Ἄν ἦταν τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας ἢ ὀνομάστηκε τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀναστασίας ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖ ἀνεστήθη ὁ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἄλλο αὐτό. Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος ποῦ ἐξεφώνει ἐκείνους τοὺς περιφήμους θεολογικοὺς τοῦ λόγους περὶ τῆς θεότητος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶπε τὴν περιφνημὴ ἐκείνη φράση: **Ἄς μείνουν οἱ οἴκοι εἰς τοὺς αἰρετικούς κι ἄς ἔχομε ἐμεῖς τὸν οἰκοῦντα. Νὰ ἔχομε ἐμεῖς Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ κατοικεῖ, δὲν ἔχομε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὸν ναόν.**

Εἶδατε; Εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Στεφάνου, εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Παύλου, εἶναι τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ τῆς Παλαιᾶς καὶ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης. Πῆραν τὸν ναόν. Αὐτὰ ὅλα εἶναι σχήματα τοῦ παρόντος αἰῶνος. Τὸν πῆραν. Τὸν πῆραν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ. Ἐμεῖς ὅμως ἔχομε Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ κατοικεῖ εἰς τὸν ναόν καὶ κατοικεῖ σὲ μᾶς. Αὐτοὶ πῆρανε τὰ ντουβάρια, τίποτε ἄλλο.

Βλέπετε λοιπόν, ἂν ἀγαπητοί μου τότε οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἐπέιθοντο εἰς τὸν Στέφανον μὲ ὄλην αὐτὴν τὴν θεολογικὴν κατοχύρωση ποῦ τοὺς κάνει, δὲν θὰ ἔφθαναν οἱ ταλαίπωροι νὰ ὑποδεχθῶν, ἀναμένοντες ἐννοεῖται, τὸν Ἀντίχριστον ποῦ θὰ ἐκπληρώσει τὴν ἐπιθυμία τους γιὰ νὰ ξαναχτιστεῖ ὁ ναός.

Εἶναι ἀκόμη ἀξιοπρόσεκτον ὅτι τὸ φόντο ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν γεγονότων εἶναι αἰῶνες ὀλόκληροι. Πότε ὁ ναὸς κατεστράφη; Τὸ 70 μετὰ Χριστόν. Δέκα περίπου χρόνια μετὰ τὴν ὀλοκλήρωσή του. Στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀκόμη ὁ ναὸς δὲν εἶχε τελειοποιηθεῖ. Ἐμεινε τόσο λίγο ὁ ναὸς αὐτός. Ἐ, τὸ 70 κατεστράφη. Ἐθεωρήθηκε μεγίστη συμφορὰ. Ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες θεωρήσαμε μεγίστη συμφορὰ ὅτι χάσαμε τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία; Δὲν ἔχομε βεβαίως ἐκεῖνον τὸν ναόν. Ποιὸς δὲν θὰ ἠθελε νὰ τὸν ἔχει; Τί θὰ λέγαμε ὅμως; Τὸ ὅτι θὰ στερηθοῦμε τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία ἐπειδὴ χάσαμε τὸν ναὸν τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη; Καὶ ποιὸς δὲν θὰ ἠθελε νὰ τὸν ἐπανακτήσουμε; Ἀλλὰ μόνο ἐθνικοὶ λόγοι ἢ συναισθηματικοὶ λόγοι. Κι ἂν δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ ναός, μία παράγκα, κι ἂν δὲν

εἶναι μία παράγκα, μία κατακόμβη, ἓνα δωμάτιο. Κι ἂν δὲν ὑπάρχει αὐτό, τὸ δάσος, ἢ νύχτα ποῦ θὰ σκεπάξει μὲ τὰ πέπλα τῆς γιὰ νὰ μὴν φαίνονται ἐκεῖνοι ποῦ θὰ λατρεύουν τὸν Θεό.

Δὲν μᾶς ἐμποδίζει τίποτα νὰ λατρεύουμε τὸν Θεό. Ἐπιμένω πάρα πολὺ στὸ σημεῖο αὐτό. Δὲν ξέρω τί μέρες ἔρχονται. Ἐπιμένω πάρα πολὺ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ διακοπεῖ ἢ λατρεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ διακοπεῖ ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ—ὁ ἐμφανῆς θὰ διακοπεῖ ἀναμφισβήτητα ἀλλὰ ὁ κρυφὸς δὲν θὰ διακοπεῖ ποτέ. Μὴν νομίζετε ὅτι θὰ σταματήσει ἢ θρησκευτικότητά τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Μὴν τὸ πιστέψετε ποτέ αὐτό. Ποτέ, ποτέ. Γιατί ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ριζωμένος μέσα στὶς ἀνθρώπινες καρδιές κι ὅ,τι κι ἂν ἐπικρατεῖ, ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ πάντοτε καρποφορεῖ.



Μακάριος πραγματικῶς εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, ποῦ ἔχει κολλήσει τὴν «εὐχή» τοῦ Ἰησοῦ στὴν διάνοιά του (Τὸ «*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με*») καὶ φωνάζει πρὸς Αὐτὸν ἀκατάπαυστα μέσα στὴν καρδιά του, ὅπως εἶναι ἐνωμένος ὁ ἀέρας μὲ τὰ σώματά μας ἢ ἡ φλόγα μὲ τὸ κερί. Ὅταν περνᾷ ὁ ἥλιος πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν γῆ φέρνει τὴν ἡμέρα. Καὶ τὸ ἅγιον καὶ σεβάσιμον ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου, ὅταν λάμπη συνεχῶς μέσα στὸν νοῦ μας, θὰ γεννήσῃ ἀναρίθμητες ἔννοιες, λαμπρὲς σὰν τὸν ἥλιο.

Ἅγιος Ἡσύχιος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος

Ἐὰν ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς συναφθῇ μὲ τὸν Θεὸν μὲ προσευχὴ καὶ ἀγάπη, γίνεται σοφὸς καὶ ἀγαθός. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀπομακρυνθῇ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸν γίνεται ἢ κτηνώδης σὲ φιληδονία ἢ θηριώδης καὶ ἀντιμάχεται ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

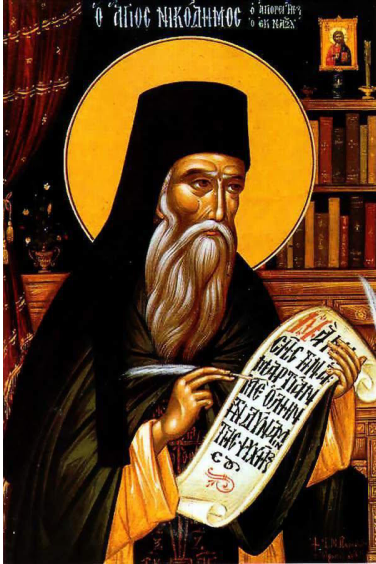
Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς

Ἡ ψυχὴ σου νὰ εἶναι καθαρὴ ἀπὸ πονηρὰς ἐνθυμήσεις καὶ νὰ φωτίζεται ἀπὸ ἀριστες ἔννοιες ἔχοντας πάντοτε στὸν νοῦ σου ἐκεῖνο, ποῦ ἔχει λεχθῇ, ὅτι ἡ φιληδονία καρδιά εἶναι φυλακὴ καὶ ἀλυσίδα τὴν ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Ἡ φιλόπονη ὅμως καὶ πρόθυμη στὸ καλὸ εἶναι πόρτα ἀνοιχτή. Πράγματι, τίς καθαρὲς ψυχές, ὅταν βγαίνουν ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ἄγγελοι τίς ὀδηγοῦν, σὰν νὰ τίς κρατοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι, πρὸς τὴν μακαρία ζωὴ. Ἐνῶ τίς λερωμένες καὶ ἀμετανόητες ψυχές, ἀλοῖμονο, δαίμονες θὰ τίς παραλάβουν.

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Ἐδέσης

Προετοιμασία κατά τὸν Καιρὸν τοῦ Θανάτου

Πηγή: «Αόρατος Πόλεμος», Μέρος 2^ο — Άγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης).



Ὁλη μας ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι ἕνας παντοτινὸς πόλεμος πάνω στὴ γῆ καὶ πρέπει νὰ πολεμοῦμε πάντοτε μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς. Ὅμως ἡ κύρια κι ἡ πιὸ σπουδαία ἡμέρα τοῦ πολέμου εἶναι κατὰ τὴν τελευταία ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Διότι ὅποιος πέση κατὰ τὴν ὥρα ἐκείνη δὲν μπορεῖ πλέον νὰ σηκωθῆ. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ μὴ θαυμάσης. Γιατὶ ἂν ὁ ἐχθρὸς τόλμησε

νὰ πάη στὸν ἀναμάρτητο Κύριό μας στὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του, ἴσως γιὰ νὰ βρῆ καὶ σὲ αὐτὸν κάποιο σφάλμα, ὅπως τὸ εἶπε μόνος ὁ Κύριος, «ἔρχεται ὁ ἄρχοντας τοῦ κόσμου, ἂν καὶ δὲν ἔχει πάνω μου καμμία ἐξουσία» (Ἰω. 14:30), πολὺ περισσότερο τολμᾷ νὰ ἔρχεται στὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς μας ἐναντίον μας ποὺ εἴμαστε ἀμαρτωλοί.^{1*}

Γι' αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνης γιὰ νὰ βρεθῆς τότε καλὰ ἐτοιμασμένος, εἶναι τὸ νὰ πολεμῆς μὲ ἀνδρεία αὐτὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῆς ζωῆς ποὺ σοῦ δόθηκε: γιατί ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πολεμεῖ καλὰ στὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ μὲ τὴν καλὴ συνήθεια ποὺ ἔχει ἀποκτήσει, εὐκόλα κερδίζει τὴν νίκη κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου. Ἀκόμη νὰ σκέπτεσαι πολλές φορές τὸν θάνατο μὲ προσοχή. Γιατὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ θὰ φοβηθῆς λιγότερο καὶ ὁ νοῦς σου θὰ εἶναι ἐλεύθερος καὶ πρόθυμος γιὰ τὸν πόλεμο. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ κόσμου ἀποφεύγουν τὸ λογισμὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὴν μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου, γιὰ νὰ μὴ κόψουν τὴν ὄρεξι καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμία ποὺ ἔχουν στὰ γήινα πράγματα, στὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι προσκολλημένοι καὶ λυποῦνται ἂν σκεφθοῦν ὅτι θὰ τὰ ἐγκαταλείψουν. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν λιγοστεύει ἡ ἄτακτη κλίσι ποὺ ἔχουν στὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ ἀποκτάει περισσότερη δύναμι. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὅταν πρόκειται νὰ χωρισθοῦν ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τόσο ἀγαπητά τους πράγματα, αἰσθάνονται μεγάλη καὶ ἀνεκδιήγητη λύπη καὶ δοκιμάζουν ἕνα μεγάλο πόνο.

Λοιπὸν γιὰ νὰ κάνης ἐσὺ καλύτερα αὐτὴν τὴν ἀπαραίτητη προετοιμασία, πρέπει μὲ τὸ λογισμὸ σου νὰ βρεθῆς μόνος σου μερικὲς φορές, χωρὶς

καμμία βοήθεια, ἐκτεθειμένος μέσα στὶς στενοχώριες τοῦ θανάτου καὶ νὰ σκεφθῆς ἐκεῖνα ποὺ μποροῦν νὰ σὲ πολεμήσουν τὸν καιρὸ ἐκεῖνο. Ἐδῶ θὰ σοῦ μιλήσω γιὰ τὴν θεραπεία αὐτῶν, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσης νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσης καλύτερα ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταία στενοχώρια. Γιατὶ τὸ κτύπημα ἐκεῖνο κι ὁ πόλεμος ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πρόκειται νὰ γίνῃ μία φορά, ὅποιος πρόκειται νὰ τὸν κάνῃ, πρέπει νὰ τὸν γνωρίζῃ καλά, γιὰ νὰ μὴ σφάλῃ κατὰ τὴ στιγμὴ ἐκείνη, διότι **μετὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει τόπος γιὰ διόρθωσι.**

† † †

[*]: Λέγει καὶ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος στὴν ἐρμηνεῖα τοῦ 7^ο ψαλμοῦ (7:3) ἐξηγώντας τὸ «*μήποτε ἀρπάσῃ ὡς λέων τὴν ψυχὴν μου, μὴ ὄντος λυτρομένου μηδὲ σφίζοντος*», ὅτι καὶ αὐτοὶ οἱ γενναῖοι ἀθλητῆς, ὅσοι πάλαιψαν μὲ τοὺς δαίμονες σὲ ὅλη τους τὴ ζωὴ καὶ γλύτωσαν ἀπὸ τὶς παγίδες καὶ τὶς ἐπιθέσεις τους, στὸ τέλος ὅμως τῆς ζωῆς τους ἐξετάζονται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος, καὶ ἂν βρεθοῦν νὰ ἔχουν κάποιες πληγὲς ἢ μολυσμοὺς ἢ ρύπους τῆς ἀμαρτίας, κρατοῦνται ἀπὸ αὐτόν ἂν ὅμως βρεθοῦν χωρὶς πληγὲς καὶ μολυσμοὺς, ἀναπαύονται ὡς ἐλεύθεροι ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό. Μερικοὶ πάλι καὶ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Θεὸς στὸν ὄφι, τὸ «*σὺ τηρήσεις αὐτοῦ (τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) πτέρναν*», τὸ ἐνόησαν ἀλληγορικὰ ὡς ἐξῆς: Ὅτι ὁ Διάβολος παρατηρεῖ πάντοτε τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ βρῆ κάποιο ἀμάρτημα γιὰ νὰ τὸν παραλάβῃ. Σημαίνει δηλαδὴ ἡ πτέρνα τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς, γιατί καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι τὸ τέλος καὶ τὸ ἄκρο τοῦ σώματος.



Ὅπως ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς αἰσθήσεις καλύτερη εἶναι ἡ ὄρασις ἔτσι καὶ ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς ἀρετὲς ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι ἡ πιὸ θεῖα καὶ ἱερή. Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεὸν συνομιλεῖ πάντοτε μαζί του ὡς γιὸς πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα καὶ ἀποστρέφεται κάθε ἐμπαθῆ σκέψη.

Νὰ σκέπτεσαι ὑπομένοντας τὸν κόπον, νὰ προσεύχεσαι μὲ ἔνταση καὶ ἐπιμονὴ καὶ νὰ ἀποστρέφεις τὶς φροντίδες καὶ τὶς σκέψεις, ποὺ ἦρθαν. Γιατὶ σὲ ταράζουν καὶ σὲ θορυβοῦν, γιὰ νὰ παραλύσουν τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴν ἔντασή σου. Μὴ λυπᾶσαι, γιατί δὲν παίρνεις ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνο, ποὺ ζητᾷς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν, γιατί θέλει νὰ σὲ εὐεργετήσῃ περισσότερο μὲ τὸ νὰ ὑπομένης καρτερικὰ στὴν προσευχὴ.

Τί ἀνώτερον ὑπάρχει ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ πλησιάσῃς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ νὰ ἀσχολῆσαι σὲ συνομιλία μαζί του;

Ὅσιος Νείλος ὁ Ἀσκητῆς

ON THE ANTICHRIST AND THE THREE LEVELS OF APOSTASY

Source: "Archbishop Averky: One Man in the Face of Apostasy," from "Orthodox Word"—1986; on the teachings of the ever-memorable Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky (+1976) of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery.

Editor's Note: Archbishop Averky of blessed memory was one of Orthodoxy's great 20th century theologians. When Saint John the Wonderworker of Shangai and San Francisco was asked a related theological question, his response was: "For the answers on all theological questions which may appear, ask Vladyka Averky for instruction, for with him I have complete spiritual unity."

† † †

What Is Meant by "Antichrist?"

Archbishop Averky viewed the Antichrist in a spiritual way, without any "doomsday" sensationalism. In order to recognize the Antichrist and that which even now prepares his coming, one must look beyond what *appears* to be good and evil, just and unjust. (*Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgement—* Jn 7:24).

One must understand the *principle* behind the Antichrist, which is the principle of *imitation* of all that is Christ's. Since his very name means the one who is "in place of Christ" or looks like Christ, the Antichrist will be the final, most deceptive embodiment of Satan's age-old attempt to "copy" Christianity, to make a new, this-worldly form of it. "The Antichrist will appear," writes I. M. Kontzevitch ("Antichrist and the Present Times"), "...not as an absolute atheist or as a follower of that which is connected with it, Bolshevism, since the latter has shown to the world every horror which results from atheism." Rather, as St. Ephraim the Syrian states, he *will come as a robber, in a manner such as to deceive all: he will be as one humble, meek, a hater (as he will say of himself) of unrighteousness, despising idols, giving preference to piety, good, lover of the poor, beautiful to an extreme degree, constant, gracious to all. He will especially esteem the Jewish race, since the Jews will await his coming. But together with all this he will work signs and*

miracles and dreadful spectacles with great authority; and he will use sly means to please all, so that people will quickly fall in love with him. He will not accept bribes, speak with anger, show a gloomy countenance, but with a decorous exterior he will take to deceiving the world, until he has become king. ("Concerning the Coming of the Lord").

With his philosophical, patristic understanding of the reality of Antichrist, Archbishop Averky understood that one need not live during his actual reign to be—in a figurative yet very real sense—his follower. One may be drawn to that which the Antichrist represents—the counterfeit of Christianity—by that which one has in common with him: an inward absence of Christ.

The purpose of all that Christ gives is to prepare people for His Heavenly Kingdom, while the motive of Antichrist is to bind people in every way possible to this earth. This distinction, though simple and clear-cut, may not be so



The Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery (1906-1976)

easily seen since Antichrist himself—like many of his predecessors—will in fact be very "spiritual," binding people to earth even with the external manifestation of things which are intended to lead them to heaven. The imitation of Christianity will only be discerned by those who have preserved a "feel" for what is intrinsically earthly and corruptible and what is heavenly and eternal. The "apostasy" of which Archbishop Averky spoke is precisely *the loss of this discernment and this desire*. Again, St. Ephraim the Syrian writes that, when the Antichrist actually comes, he will not be seen for what he actually is by *him who has his mind on the affairs of this life who is always tied to the matters of this life, although he even hears, he will not believe, and will despise him who says these things. But the saints will be strengthened, because they scorned every care for this life.*

A Christianity without "savour" is filled with *worldliness that masquerades itself as spirituality*. And to make Christianity "worldly" is to make it vulnerable to the temptation of Antichrist.

The Three Levels of Apostasy

In studying Archbishop Averky's writings on the apostasy, one can discern three levels of which he spoke, these levels

progressing from the most obvious to the most difficult to detect.

The First Level

At the first level is the loss of Christianity's "savour" by Christendom *in general*. The roots of this are found in the schism of East and West and in the medieval West's gradual formation of a "new Christianity," in which man's fallen reason—rather than divinely revealed tradition—became the criterion of truth. In essence, it was this change in perspective from the spiritual to the natural that led, through Renaissance and "Enlightenment," to the blatant materialism of our own times—a materialism that is spiritually blinding modern man. *There can be discerned*, wrote Archbishop Averky, *some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all.*

Materialism, Archbishop Averky understood, corrupts the faith of Christians without their even knowing it. Even their ostensible stand "against worldliness" or their talk of heaven may be filled with worldly conceptions if they have lost the right understanding of the "world" that is opposed by basic Christianity. Moreover, that which would, from an Orthodox viewpoint, be considered immoral, becomes permissible to a Christianity infected with worldliness. Archbishop Averky wrote:

Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can we speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless "balls," various kinds of "games," "dances" and amusements, toward which, despite their immoral and anti-Christian nature, even many modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them.

In losing touch with the essence of its faith—which is, in a word, *otherworldliness*—Christendom deprives believers of living contact with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Christians must therefore find substitutes for this grace by inducing, through self-persuasion, "spiritual experiences." At the same time they seek a substitute, in this world, for the other world that is no longer tangible to them. Of these "neo-Christians," Archbishop Averky wrote:

They want blessedness here in this world, burdened

with its multitude of sins and iniquities; and they await this blessedness with impatience. They consider one of the surest ways to attaining it to be the "ecumenical movement," the union and unification of all peoples in one new "church" which will comprise not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews, Moslems and pagans, each retaining its own convictions and errors. This imaginary "Christian" love, in the name of the future blessedness of men on earth, cannot but trample upon the Truth.

Archbishop Averky termed the belief in future blessedness on earth "neo-chiliasm"—chiliasm being the ancient heretical belief in a thousand-year reign of Christ as an earthly king. He foresaw that the outward "ecumenical unity" sought by the "neo-chiliasts" would be nothing else than an official unity supported and approved of by Antichrist.

For Archbishop Averky, the modern "ecumenical movement" was indicative of something else: the widespread disbelief in absolute Truth. Through this comes an unwillingness to take a stand for anything and a weak-willed acceptance or even justification of evil, all in the name of the most superficial ideas of "Christian love" and "peace." Archbishop Averky expressed it thus:

In our times, when there are such strong doubts about even the existence of Truth, when every "truth" is considered relative and it is considered legal for each person to hold to "his own truth," the struggle for the Truth acquires a particularly important meaning. And the person who does not sympathize with this struggle, who sees in it only a manifestation of "phariseism" and suggests "humbling oneself" before falsehood by falling away from the Truth, should naturally be recognized as a betrayer of the Truth, whoever he might be, whatever he might call or consider himself.

Those who place all their hope in this world must of necessity either give into despair or blind themselves to the rising degeneracy in all forms of public life. Their relativistic and irresolute attitude only helps to unleash the forces of Satan in the last times. As Archbishop Averky pointed out:

The "ministers of Satan," or, which is the same thing, the servants of the coming Antichrist, make use of this spiritual blindness of the majority of modern people and stubbornly and insistently do their work with genuinely satanic energy. With special efforts and with all available means, with the aid of all the resources under their control, they bind forcibly to themselves others who are wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly, cooperating with them in creating in the world circumstances and conditions appropriate for the

very near appearance of the Antichrist as the ruler of the whole world and the master of all mankind.

In another place, Archbishop Averky wrote more on this same theme:

The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist is to destroy the old world with all its former concepts and “prejudices,” in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching “new owner” who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them... One must be completely blind spiritually, completely alien to true Christianity, not to understand all this!

The Second Level

At the second level of the apostasy described by Archbishop Averky, the Orthodox churches—in “keeping in step with the times”—leave behind some of the Church’s traditional forms and ecclesiological positions which they consider “outdated,” and thus they too cut themselves off from the tradition that retains the “savour” of basic Christianity. This is one of the ways in which Orthodoxy becomes a worldly “pseudo-Orthodoxy.” The essence of Orthodoxy cannot be transmitted when the very context of receiving it is all but gone.

Archbishop Averky explained why the Orthodox Church, as St. Athanasios the Great once said, must not serve the times:

*The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord said to His disciples at the Last Supper, “You are not of this world.” We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept her unchanged, that is, **like the immutable God Himself.***

Once in the early 1960’s a seminarian heard Archbishop Averky pacing for a long time in the monastery corridor. Finally he went up to the bishop and asked him what was wrong. “Brother,” replied the righteous hierarch, contemplating, “the term ‘Orthodoxy’ has become meaningless

because *unorthodoxy* is disguising itself behind the external mask of Orthodoxy. Thus there is a need to coin a new phrase for that which we call Orthodoxy, just as there once had been a need to coin the term ‘Orthodox.’—And that is not so easy.”

Archbishop Averky perceived that, for whatever reason, Orthodox churches and church leaders have not treasured the otherworldly basis of Orthodox tradition as passed on from father to son uninterrupted through the centuries. About this he wrote:

Wherever the inherited spiritual link of grace going back to the Holy Apostles and their successors the Apostolic Men and Holy Fathers has been broken, wherever various innovations have been introduced in faith and morals with the aim of “keeping step with the times,” of “progressing,” of not getting out-of-date and of adapting to the demands and

fashions of this world lying in evil—there can be no talk of the true Church.

These “innovations” are sometimes introduced in order to make Orthodox life less of a struggle or to make it appear less “odd” in the eyes of the world. Archbishop Averky wrote that the very concept of doing this is heterodox, since the Orthodox Faith teaches *how to construct life according to the demands of Christian perfection*, whereas heterodoxy

takes from Christianity only those things which are, and to the degree to which they are, *compatible with the conditions of contemporary cultural life*. To lower Orthodoxy’s standard of ascetic struggle is to deny Christians a means of self-purification, to deny them even the chance of soul-saving repentance when they fall short of this standard—in spirit if not in letter. It is to weaken the very foundation of Orthodoxy, which, as Archbishop Averky stated, *is an ascetic faith that calls to ascetic labor in the name of the uprooting of sinful passions and the implanting of Christian virtues.*

In other cases, traditions are dissected and changed in order to feed the pride of contemporary “theologians” who, cut off from the direct, living transmission of tradition, strive to find “new ways of Orthodox theology,” to intellectually “master history” and “restore” Orthodox practice to some kind of artificial purism. They clamor, Archbishop Averky



Icon of the Ark of Salvation
The Orthodox Church amidst Persecutions
and Heresies

wrote, about how essential it is to “renew the Orthodox Church,” about some sort of “reforms in Orthodoxy,” which allegedly has become “set in its ways’ and ‘moribund’... This new breed of “Orthodox” are really no more than modern “scholastics.” They “theologize” without the proper “feel” for the traditional church atmosphere in which saints have been raised.

By their fruits shall ye know them (Mt 7:20): Traditional Orthodoxy, with all its alleged “cultural accretions” and “impurities,” has nurtured saints even in our own times; “restored” or “rediscovered” Orthodoxy, with all its claims of being more pure and better informed, has produced at best, clever men. The spiritual impotence of the latter is the result of its “theologians” “knowing better” than the modern, living repositories of Orthodox sanctity.

Churches, in “keeping step with the times,” will also lose the “savour” of Orthodoxy by being caught up in the spirit of the fashionable “ecumenical movement” which, as we have seen, is a manifestation of the process of world apostasy. Thus, Archbishop Averky stated in different places:

The destructive spirit of Apostasy has already penetrated even our Orthodox Church, extremely prominent hierarchs of which openly are proclaiming the approach of some sort of “new era” and cynically are proposing being done with all the past as they assemble to create some kind of completely “new Church” in close “ecumenical” contact and unanimity with all apostates from the true faith and Church²⁷...For a long time we have heard that they [Orthodox clergy] belong to this movement in order “to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy,” but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than “throwing powder in our eyes.” Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.

The Third Level

Finally, the third level of the apostasy that Archbishop Averky warned about is reached when Orthodox churches, even while preserving all the traditions of what they call “true Orthodoxy,” also lose the precious “savour” of their faith and become infected with a worldly spirit disguised as spirituality. This occurs through (1) the loss of basic Christian love, without which all the traditions become *condemning* rather than *grace-bearing*, and (2) the use of outward forms and supports of faith (which are intended to evoke remembrance of the other world) for worldly ends. Through these factors arises another form of “pseudo-Orthodoxy,” this time more subtle because it may be cloaked in all the right externals.

THE JESUS PRAYER

On the Prayer of Jesus, by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, Saint John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, Tennessee (1995), pp 17-23.

In beginning to speak of the prayer of Jesus, I invoke the aid of the all-good and almighty Jesus that He may assist my dullness. In beginning to speak of the prayer of Jesus, I recall the righteous Symeon’s utterance concerning the Lord: *Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against* (Luke 2:34).

Just as the Lord was and is a true sign, a sign that is spoken against, an object of dispute and disagreement between those who know Him and those who do not, so too prayer in His all Holy name, which in the fullest sense is a great and wonderful sign, has become a subject of dispute and disagreement between those who practice it and those who do not. A certain father justly remarks that this way of prayer is rejected only by those who do not know it; they reject it through prejudice and through false ideas that they have formed of it.

Without paying any attention to the outcries of prejudice and ignorance, trusting in the mercy and help of God, we offer, beloved fathers and brothers, our poor treatise (lit. “word”) on the prayer of Jesus on the basis of Holy Scripture, on the basis of Church tradition, on the basis of the writings of the fathers in which the teaching of this all-holy and all-powerful prayer is expounded. *Speechless be the deceitful lips which speak iniquity against His just and magnificent name with arrogance and contempt*, in their profound ignorance and abuse of God’s wonders. As we consider the greatness of the name of Jesus and the saving power of prayer in that name, we cry with spiritual joy and amazement: *How great is the multitude of Thy goodness, O Lord, which Thou hast hid for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that hope in Thee before the sons of men.* (Pss 30:18-20).

The prayer of Jesus is said like this: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* Originally it was said without the addition of the word sinner: this word was added to the other words of the prayer later. This word, remarks St. Nil Sorsky, which implies a consciousness and confession of the fall, is fitting for us and pleasing to God Who has commanded us to offer prayers in acknowledgment and confession of our sinfulness. The fathers allow beginners, in deference to their weakness, to divide the prayer into two halves, and sometimes to say, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner*, and sometimes, *Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* But this is only a concession or indulgence, and not at all an order or rule requiring unflinching compliance. It is much better to say constantly the same, whole prayer, without distracting and bothering the mind with changes or with concern about changes. Even he who finds a change necessary for his weakness should not allow it often. For

example, the first half of the prayer can be prayed till dinner, and the other after dinner. St. Gregory the Sinaite forbids frequent change, saying: *Trees that are often transplanted do not take root.*

Praying by the prayer of Jesus is a divine institution. It was instituted not by means of an apostle or by means of an angel; it was instituted by the Son of God and God Himself. After the mystical supper, among other sublime, final commandments and orders, the Lord Jesus Christ instituted prayer by His name. He gave this way of prayer as a new, extraordinary gift, a gift of infinite value. The apostles partly knew already the power of the name of Jesus; they healed incurable diseases by it, they reduced devils to obedience, conquered, bound and expelled them by it. This most mighty, wonderful name the Lord orders us to use in prayer. He promised that such prayer will be particularly effectual. *Whatsoever ye shall ask*, He said to the holy apostles, *the Father in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* (Jn 14:13-14). *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* (John 16:23-24).

What a wonderful gift! It is a guarantee of unending, infinite blessings! It came from the lips of the unlimited God, clothed in limited humanity and called by the human name of Savior. The name by its exterior form is limited, but it represents an unlimited object, God, from Whom it borrows infinite, divine value or worth, the power and properties of God.

O Giver of a priceless, incorruptible gift! How can we sinful mortals receive the gift? Neither our hands, nor our mind, nor our heart are capable of receiving it. Do Thou teach us to know, as far as we are able, the greatness of the gift, and its significance, and the ways of receiving it, and the ways of using it, that we may not approach the gift in a sinful manner; that we may not be punished for indiscretion and audacity, but that for the right understanding and use of the gift, we may receive from Thee other gifts, promised by Thee, known only to Thee.

From the Gospels, the Acts and the Apostolic Epistles we see the unbounded faith of the holy apostles in the name of the

Lord Jesus and their unbounded reverence for this name. By the name of the Lord Jesus they performed the most striking miracles. There is no instance from which we can learn how they prayed in the name of the Lord. But that is certainly how they prayed. How could they do otherwise when that prayer was given and commanded them by the Lord Himself, and when the order was confirmed by a twofold repetition of it? If Scripture is silent about it, it is silent only because this prayer was in general use and was so well known that it needed no special mention in Scripture. Even in the monuments of the first ages of Christianity that have come down to us, prayer in the name of the Lord is not treated separately but is only mentioned in connection with other matters.

In the life of St. Ignatius the God-bearer, Bishop of Antioch, who was crowned in Rome with a martyr's death under the emperor Trajan, we read the following: "When they

were taking him to be devoured by wild beasts, and he had the name of Jesus constantly on his lips, the pagans asked him why he unceasingly remembered that name. The saint replied that he had the name of Jesus Christ written in his heart and that he confessed with his mouth Him Whom he always carried in his heart. After the saint had been eaten by the wild beasts, by the will of God among his bones his heart was preserved intact. The infidels found it, and then remembered



what St. Ignatius had said. So they cut that heart into two halves, wishing to know whether what they had been told was true. Inside, on the two halves of the heart that had been cut open, they found an inscription in gold letters: Jesus Christ. Thus St. Ignatius was in name and in fact a God-bearer, always carrying Christ our God in his heart, written by the reflection (or meditation) of his mind as with a reed."

St. Ignatius was a disciple of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Divine, and was privileged in his childhood to see the Lord Jesus Christ personally. He was that blessed child of whom it is said in the Gospel that the Lord placed him among the apostles who had been arguing about priority, took him in His arms and said: *Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 19:3-4, cf Mk 9:36).

Certainly St. Ignatius was taught the prayer of Jesus by the holy Evangelist and practiced it in that flourishing period of Christianity like all other Christians. At that time all Christians learned the prayer of Jesus, firstly on account of the great importance of the prayer itself, and then on account of the scarcity and costliness of the handwritten holy books, on account of the rarity of literacy (most of the apostles were illiterate), and on account of the convenience, satisfaction and very special action and power of the prayer of Jesus.

In Church history we read the following incident: "A soldier called Neokorus, a native of Carthage, was in the Roman garrison guarding Jerusalem at the time when our Lord Jesus Christ suffered His voluntary passion and death for the redemption of the human race. Seeing the miracles worked at the Lord's death and resurrection, Neokorus believed in the Lord and was baptized by the apostles. After finishing his term of service, Neokorus returned to Carthage and shared the treasure of faith with his whole family. Among those who accepted Christianity was Callistratus, Neokorus' grandson. On reaching the required age, Callistratus joined the army. The detachment of soldiers to which he was drafted consisted of idolaters. They watched Callistratus and noticed that he did not worship the idols but spent a long time in prayer at night alone. Once they eavesdropped while he was praying and heard that he constantly repeated the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So they reported him to the commanding officer. Saint Callistratus, who confessed Jesus alone in the dark at night, also confessed Him publicly in the light of day, and sealed his confession with his blood."

Teaching on the prayer of Jesus appears in Church writers of the fourth century such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Isaiah the Solitary. A writer of the fifth century, St. Hesychius of Jerusalem, already complains that the practice of this prayer has greatly declined among monks. As time went on, this decline increased more and more. So the holy fathers tried by their writings to encourage the practice. The last writer on this prayer was the blessed elder, Hieromonk Seraphim of Sarov. The elder himself did not write the instructions bearing his name; they were written down from his words by one of the monks under his direction, but they are written with remarkable unction. Now the practice of the prayer of Jesus has been almost abandoned by monks and nuns. St. Hesychius names carelessness as the cause of this neglect. It must be admitted that this accusation is just.

The gracious power of the prayer of Jesus is contained in the divine name itself of the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ. Although there is abundant evidence in Holy Scripture proving the greatness of the name of God, yet the importance of this name was explained with special precision by the holy Apostle Peter before the Jewish Sanhedrin, when the council asked the Apostle *by what power, or by what name*, he had given healing to a man lame from birth. *Then Peter, filled*

with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:7-12). This witness is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle's mouth, tongue, and voice were merely the Spirit's instruments.

Another organ of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle of the Gentiles, gives similar evidence. *Whosoever, he says, shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Rom 10:13). Christ Jesus ... humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. (Phil 2:5-10).*

Seeing the distant future, David, an ancestor of Jesus according to the flesh, sang the greatness of the name of Jesus, and vividly described the effect of this name, the struggle by means of it with the principles of sin, its power to deliver those who pray by it from captivity to the passions and demons, and the triumph of those who win a spiritual victory by the name of Jesus. Let us listen to inspired David! *O Lord our Lord, he cries, how wonderful is Thy name in all the earth! For Thy magnificence is lifted high above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise, because of Thine enemies, to destroy the enemy and avenger. (Pss 8:2).* Exactly! The greatness of the name of Jesus is beyond the comprehension of rational creatures of earth and heaven. The comprehension of it is incomprehensibly grasped by child-like simplicity and faith. In this same disinterested spirit we must approach prayer in the name of Jesus and continue in that prayer. Our perseverance and attention in prayer must be like the constant striving of an infant for his mother's breasts. Then prayer in the name of Jesus will be crowned with complete success, the invisible foes will be defeated, and the enemy and avenger will be finally crushed. The enemy is called the avenger because he tries to take from those who pray (especially at times, not incessantly) after prayer what they have obtained during prayer.

In order to win a decisive victory unceasing prayer and constant vigilance are indispensable.

† † †

Editor's Note: This article is written from one perspective; the thonite tradition, on the other hand, is "*Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.* Orthodox Christians must follow the pattern assigned to them by their spiritual father.

ON THE THRICE-HOLY HYMN: “HOLY GOD, HOLY MIGHTY, HOLY IMMORTAL, HAVE MERCY UPON US”

By the saintly bishop of Florina Augoustinos N. Kantiotes (+2010), from “Orthodox Homilies on the Divine Liturgy,” vol. One, translated from Greek by Asterios Gerostergios, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts (1986), pp. 196-199.



The hymns which are chanted following the Small Entrance, and we hear the exclamation of the priest: *For Thou our God art holy, and to Thee we ascribe glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, unto ages of ages.* The Thrice-Holy hymn is then chanted: *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.*

This hymn has great importance for the Church. A historian of Byzantium, Theophanes, mentions the following event concerning this hymn. When Proclus (433 A.D.), a student of St. John Chrysostom, was Patriarch of Constantinople, the city was shaken by earthquakes continuously for four months. The inhabitants, terrified, ran outside the walls of the city to a place called Campoi, and there prayed, and with tears in their eyes asked God to stop the earthquakes.

One day, when the earth was trembling and the people were crying, *Lord have mercy*, an unseen power carried off a child from the midst of the people, raising him towards heaven. And when the child came back to earth, he said that he heard a divine voice which ordered him to tell the bishop that intercessions must be chanted as follows: *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us.* Patriarch Proclus ordered that this hymn be chanted. And when they began chanting it, the earthquakes stopped.

With prayer, with the *Holy God...*, the earthquakes stopped. Perhaps someone who is educated, and boasts of his science, will laugh upon hearing this, and say: “What’s this you’re saying to us? An earthquake is a natural phenomenon and has nothing to do with God...” But the word of God assures us that earthquakes and all the other natural phenomena which take place in the world are dependent on God’s power. The psalm says: *Who looketh on the earth and maketh it tremble, Who toucheth the mountains and they smoke.* (Pss 103:35). St. John Chrysostom says that the cause of earthquakes is God’s wrath, and the cause of God’s wrath is the sins which people do continuously, young and old, clergy and laity.

The faithful, therefore, chanted the *Holy God...* with great contrition during the terrible earthquake of Constantinople, and the miracle took place. We also chant this hymn today in church. It is chanted by fine voiced chanters who try with all their skill to chant beautifully in order to gratify the people. He who can prolong his chanting for a very long time is considered a chanter of renown. But we ask: What is the spiritual benefit of this? Does God listen to these voices? Does He become merciful of our sins because of this chanting? It is possible that because of these ostentations of the chanters, and the lack of piety and contrition of us all, we sin in the church and provoke God’s anger. Alas! How far we, contemporary Christians, are from the worship of God *in spirit and truth.* (Jn 4:23).

There is a need to return to the piety of our ancestors. We must return to the ways of ancient times, when Christians chanted the Thrice-Holy Hymn with tears in their eyes. For when the Christian is taught, and knows what is meant by all that is said and takes place in the Divine Liturgy, there is the hope that this Christian shall feel the grandeur of sacred worship.

Let us therefore see briefly what the *Thrice-Holy Hymn* means.

Holy God. We spoke about the Saints in previous homilies. But by comparison with God, what is even the most holy man? One drop in comparison with an endless ocean. One ray in comparison with the sun. God only is holy in an absolute degree; God is the source of holiness and sanctification. Man is enlightened by God and receives the power (from God) in order to live a life of holiness, which no matter what great heights it reaches, is small and unimportant in comparison with the infinite holiness of God. No one is holy like God.

Holy Mighty. Power is another attribute of God. Man is also called mighty. But man’s power, no matter how great it is, no matter what mighty things he can do—even if he flies to the stars of the heavens—is small and unimportant in comparison with the all-mightiness of God. The Lord of power is God. From Him comes every power and energy in the world. As a certain poet says, “One of God’s looks has the power to shake the earth;” it is possible for the universe to dissolve into the elements “from which it was made” and a new world to be created.

Holy Immortal. Another attribute of God is immortality. God is immortal. What does immortality mean? While all things waste away and are destroyed, God remains unaltered, imperishable, eternal, immortal. He is life. He is the source of life. And if man is immortal, he is immortal not because of himself, not, that is to say, because of his own power, but because God created him *according to His image and likeness* and gave him the gift of immortality. Man is immortal in soul, perishable in body, because of sin. But

this perishable body shall become imperishable and eternal in the kingdom of heaven.

In the Thrice-Holy Hymn, the word *Holy* is repeated three times. This threefold repetition is done purposely to show the three Persons of God, that great mystery of our faith that God is three *Hypostases* (or Persons). We worship and glorify one Divinity in three Persons. These three Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—are one Divinity. That is why we do not say in the Thrice-Holy Hymn: “You (plural) have mercy on us,” but “have Thou (singular) mercy on us.”^[1] The three attributes we have mentioned—holiness, mightiness, and immortality—are attributes of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *As Father, as Son, as Holy Spirit, O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee!*

My dear readers! We have seen the miracle that took place in Constantinople. We have seen the meaning of the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Priests, chanters, and laity: let us be careful during the time of the Thrice-Holy Hymn, and let us pray to the Triune God with pious contrition and a spirit of humility.



^[1]: In the Greek, from which we translate this, the author uses a plural construction which cannot be directly reproduced in English, except by indication: you (plural). and thou (singular). In the Thrice-Holy Hymn as given to the Church by this miraculous occurrence, the thou form is used, and definitely has a singular character.



Asaving medicine for the cure of your wounded soul is sincere repentance, done with humility and contrition of heart, with tears and sighs, with hate and aversion towards sin, and a firm decision to no longer sin... God's compassion is greater than your sins...

Have courage, faith, hope and love in God, with patience unto the end, to gain your immortal soul which the whole world is not equal to.

The most easy, brief and safe path to heaven is humility. This is the only safe and un-dangerous path... All saints through humility were elevated, honored, glorified, made wondrous and sanctified by God. If you take away humility no one would be a saint... Inner and real humility is for one to feel, that whatever he has, life, health, wealth, wisdom all are foreign, are gifts of God.

Blaspemy brings the wrath of the Lord upon the rulers, the armies and the nations... the blasphemers are the most impious and sinful of all... It is an absolute need that the wound of blasphemy be completely wiped out from the Nation in order for it to have good fortune, to be glorified and uplifted.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

THE ORTHODOX SCIENTIST TODAY

By Fr. George Metallinos of blessed memory (+2019), professor emeritus at the School of Theology of the University of Athens, Greece.



According to its epistemological definition, a scientist is the one who is (and is rightly acknowledged as) the one who has mastered a science, pursuant to specialized studies. More specifically, scientists are those who “stand above”—that is, who possess a full and certain knowledge, but also possess

the prerequisite of experience in the area of that knowledge. One might also add to the scientist's prerequisites his performance in research. His studies and the diploma that he attains is merely that person's introduction into the sphere of the science that he has been studying. His specialization in conjunction with his research within a sphere of science is that which entitles someone to be characterized as Scientist.

The non-expert is not a scientist, but rather a thinker, who relies on an arbitrary opinion—that is, on a mere conjecture. That is why we must not be surprised when improvable positions are propagated by “scientists,” especially in the realm of History. This happens, because an unsupported “knowledge” is being produced and reproduced for the deception of many – which may be embraced by the semi-literate, but not by the specialized scientist.

Science, as Defined by our Holy Fathers

The blessed Chrysostom: *There is also human wisdom (that is, in parallel to divine wisdom), which is the experience that pertains to art and to the useful things in life.* Also, according to Gregory the Theologian: *Science presupposes “study” and “intelligence.”* In other words, he acknowledges an inherent and an acquired element. Scientific knowledge is not without prerequisites. Alongside the inherent elements (intelligence, inclination) there must also be study, diligence, perseverance.

I usually tell my students that ranks and statuses are for the few; however, scientific knowledge belongs to everyone. *And your joy no-one will take away from you...* (Jn 16:22). So, in the absence of intelligence, acquired knowledge will not transform a person into a “scientist.” Knowledge presupposes the natural foundation—intelligence—which is not produced simply by studying.

A number of years ago, a University professor had published a work titled “How Even Dopes Acquire Diplomas”! Moreover, intelligence is amplified and enriched only through life experience; as an example of this statement I could mention our national hero, General Theodore Kolokotronis, who had not received any significant education. Once, while he was

sitting atop a rock outside the Athens University building that was still under construction, the (then young) king Otto arrived on horseback. The general apologized for being seated in the king's presence. Otto asked him in a friendly tone: "What were you thinking about?" Kolokotronis pointed towards the Palace (which was in plain view at the time, unobstructed as it is today, by high-rise buildings), and he circumspectly replied: "My king, I was thinking that one day, this house (the University building) will devour yours"! He did not need a degree or diploma, to have made that politically astute observation....

Furthermore, regardless of how high-level a scientific instruction may have been, it will not, on its own, either create or build human personality, as that exists independently of education. Examples are Saint Basil the Great and Saint Anthony the Great. It is History, which has "anointed" both of them as "Great." The former had (also) acquired the entirety of human wisdom, while the latter had no school education; however, their experience with uncreated divine Grace (divine wisdom) is what made them both share the characterization of "Great." Genuinely wise are only the saints. To them, human (natural) knowledge can be rendered useful only in the exercising of their *poemantic opus* (roughly translated as "pastoral work," *Ed.*). Its absence, however, does not diminish their personality or their contribution to mankind.

On the other hand, school knowledge can be linked to various moral concerns; for example, it can generate or breed ambitious plans and objectives such as a "successful career" and human "glory"—egocentrically— aspiring to recognition and financial success and ultimately to power and "the good life." This morbid mentality is expressed by a popular expression that is frequently used and reveals the weaker aspects of our civilization: "He became someone," we say of the one who rises socially; and specifically, of the one who has become wealthy. But what is oftentimes not examined is **how** that came to be!

It so happens, that those who ascend socially and financially with science as their springboard sometimes forget the purpose of their studies, which is to minister to the whole of society—to which we are lifelong debtors, given that the body of the populace (the Homeland) has provided our education and we are obliged to pay back that debt by utilizing the knowledge we acquired. Our objective, therefore, cannot be for personal recognition and relish; it should be our elevation to becoming a healthy member of the societal corpus, which functions on the basis of the principle of collaboration and reciprocation, per the Apostle Paul's teaching regarding the Church as the *body of Christ*. (1 Cor 12:27).

A Healthy Conscience

That is why building a healthy conscience is imperative for the avoidance of knowledge-related pathologies, whose basic signs are the following:

(a) The perverted use of knowledge and warping of the truth. A characteristic example is the atom bomb and the use thereafter of atomic energy for the enforcement of universal domination. The fact that one of the basic creators of the atomic bomb—Julius Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967)—recanted his participation in the misuse of atomic energy is immensely significant. "Pater Kosmas" the Saint (1714-1779) used to speak of "godless letters," while the great Feodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) had said that "without God, everything is permissible"!

(b) Puffing up, arrogance (1 Cor 8:1, *knowledge puffeth up*), which seals the behaviors of many of us. That is why James, the Lord's brother, checks us (3:13): *Who is wise and with knowledge among you? Let him show his works, by his good conduct, in the meekness of wisdom.*

Conversely, true science seeks the Truth in order to minister to fellow-man and to society. According to Clement of Alexandria (215), the whole of Hellenic philosophy is about "the seeking of truth." Thus was the meaning of science—as given by Hellenism—recognized by a Christian intellectual. This is the distinctive mark of a true scientist. According to St. Basil the Great: *The more that one examines in depth the reasons by which beings are created and how their existence is regulated by Providence, the more he will perceive the majesty of the Lord and will all the more magnify the Lord.* In other words, he spontaneously arrives at the Psalmist's confession when acknowledging the Creator: *How magnified are Your works, Lord; in wisdom You have made everything.* (Pss 103:24). However, the Saint adds: *It is not possible with a blurred eye to claim as accurate the understanding of what is viewed and nor with a blurred heart arrive at the understanding of the truth.*

Furthermore, Job had said: "To abstain from evils, that is science" (28:28), which will be repeated in the quote ascribed to Plato: "Science that is separate from virtue... cunning, not wisdom." The scientist who is honest and self respecting acts orthodoxically, unawares.

The Orthodox Scientist

Here too we can perceive what an "orthodox scientist" is. It is the one who transcends the simple scientist and his morality—which can of course exist—and who seeks to reach the in-Christ charismatic ethos with his incorporation in an in-Christ, Holy Spiritual way of life, on which he rests his entire course and his presence. He is not satisfied with a formal relationship with the Faith and with being Christian only in name; instead, he struggles to become a carrier of the tradition: that is, prophetic, apostolic and patristic. He also aligns his science (his research) with the course towards *theosis* (deification), ascribing to it a soteriological content. He believes all that the Saints do, and his conscience (*phronema*) is what shapes and determines his entire life and his scientific ethos. He lives within Grace,

with his spiritual living. The secular scientist, moving—in the best case—within the boundaries of morality, is content with moral achievements. The Orthodox scientist seeks the grace of God and surrenders his entire scientific opus to Him, as his feat of piety and philanthropy.

What, therefore, is the self-awareness of an Orthodox scientist?

1. He lives his science as a potential for *theosis* (deification). Science becomes one of the means within that course. According to the Apostle Paul: *Whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whether you are doing anything, do everything for the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31); in other words, so that God is glorified with your labours and you partake of His Grace.

2. He has the awareness of one who is the recipient of a gift, as admitted by Moses in Exodus (31:3): *And I have filled him with a divine spirit of skill and intelligence and knowledge in every work...* (referring to the architect). This is expounded by Basil the Great in his own way: *For this, woe be to the one who does not attribute the cause of prudence and knowledge (science) to God... Given that wisdom is the science of divine and human things, let him attribute the cause of these to the Holy Spirit.*"

3. The scientific opus thus acquires a spiritual character, shaping a spirit of humility and prudence. *Tell me, therefore, why you boast*—observes Basil the Great—*about good things as though they are yours, instead of confessing the giver of those gifts?* Whatever good thing we have is a gift of God. *Every perfect gift descends from above, by the Father of Lights.* (Divine Liturgy). Why then do we boast? This is what the Apostle Paul had also said: *Therefore what do you have, which you had not received? And if you had received, why do you boast as if you were not a recipient?* (1 Cor 4:7) The blessed Chrysostom is even blunter: *Why, O man, O smoke, O futile one, do you think so grandiosely?*

Allow me at this point to—confessedly—reveal a purely poemantic method of confronting the danger of vanity, as implemented by my ever-memorable Spiritual Father in Kerkyra, the humble Father George Savvanis. On the one hand, he would encourage the disposition for learning, except that he would give it an altruistic content. As he used to say, "Learn as much as you can, so that you can take the side of the one who is not learned." On the other hand, he would check one's tendency for self-importance: "You know, cleverness is a very fragile thing. If a single drop of blood seeps into the brain, even the cleverest person becomes an imbecile!" I assure you that these guidelines continue to be operative in my life to this day, with analogous dynamics along my course. May his memory be eternal!

4. The Orthodox scientist sees everything through the prism of eternity. This was also indicated by Basil the Great, in "To the Young," when evaluating human media from within the perspective of salvation: *Whichever things contribute towards it* (he is referring to one's embarking on another lifestyle—the

Christian one), *we say that one must love and pursue them, with all their might; whereas those that do not lead there, being of no value, should be disregarded.* That is, he recommends those aspects of life which have the power to reinforce one's course towards *theosis* (deification).

5. He is also aware that with his scientific opus he is participating in God's creative opus in the world—in fact, not only as a researcher, by tracing the essence of beings, but also as a teacher, by introducing his students to it. That is how every science and art is elevated, as were the scientific progress of our Holy Fathers: Basil the Great's broad scientific knowledge, Saint Gregory the Theologian's poetry, the blessed Chrysostom's rhetorical powers, the historical-critical opus of the blessed Photios, John the Damascene's extensive musicological knowledge, the scientific achievements of Eugenios Voulgaris and Nicephorus Theotokis, etc... All the Fathers and Theologians of the Church were discerned for their worldly wisdom also, except that they had made sure to incorporate it in their path towards sanctification—both their own, as well as their fellow men's.

More especially, the natural scientist (who is the most "vulnerable" to temptations that can lead to a sense of self-importance and centrifugal tendencies in matters of the Faith) has the most potential to attain knowledge pertaining to creation—to the natural world; however, if he responds as an Orthodox faithful, he knows that he is not at risk of any conflict between Faith and his science inside him. Why? Because there are two gnosiologies: of the created and the Uncreated; of the natural and the supernatural. Moreover, natural knowledge has intellect/logic as its instrument. **Supernatural knowledge (*theosis*) has the "nous" inside the heart, as our Hesychast tradition teaches us.** This is what Basil the Great elucidates: *There is wisdom, the science of divine and human things and the causes thereof... and there is human wisdom, the experience of the things of life, where we call "wise" those who are scientists of each of the useful things.*

The topic is however elucidated further by the great Eugenios Voulgaris, from within his own experience (Against Latins): *What does the wisdom of the world have in common with the wisdom of God? The wisdom of the world is a delusion, it is folly, it is moronic, according to Paul, when it is separated from the wisdom of God, which is the true Faith. This is actual wisdom: the unerring, faultless wisdom, the upright wisdom. One learns the other wisdom in the contemporary Academies, and this wisdom in the ancient Church; the other wisdom in philosophers' books, this wisdom in the writings of the Fathers; the other one with the sharpness of acumen, this one with the fervor of a pure and intimate soul; the other one with complicated cogitations of cunning arguments, this one with the simple and steadfast consent of an unhesitating faith; the other one with curious research and examination, this one with a carefree, captivity of the nous.*

Professors in natural science are the specialized scientists, but in supernatural knowledge, they are the Spiritual Fathers-Elders and finally the Saints. **Conflict occurs, only when the one type of knowledge is judged by the other one's criteria.** In our tradition however, the coexistence of both types of knowledge in the same person is possible, as is the case with many of our Saints who had also received the highest level of secular education. This is what our Church chants for the mathematician Saint Catherine: *Having received the wisdom of God since childhood, the Martyr also learnt higher studies well.*

Saint Gregory the Theologian has given us the most classic position on this matter in his Funerary Homily to Basil the Great. He first rebuts the rejection of secular wisdom: *For education is not a dishonorable thing, just because some believe so...* then adding: *...thus, we have accepted the inquisitive and theoretical element (of secular wisdom), but as for whatever leads to demons and to the depths of delusion and perdition, we have rejected it... because with these too we have benefited piety-wise, since we learned of the better from the worse, and have made their weakness the strength of our word.* This means that benefit can be derived, even from the negative elements of secular education—that is, the problem rests in the inner prerequisites, and with what conscience one views things.

6. The Orthodox scientist assists Science in transcending all the pseudo-dilemmas, by giving it a proper orientation. For example, in Mechanical Genetics priority is given to the worth of humanity and it does not absolutize research, knowing that all institutions exist for the ministering to mankind: *The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath.* (Mk 2:27). In other words, he learns to look at man and the things of man, from within the perspective of the holy Fathers, like St. Gregory of Nyssa when proclaiming to the scientists of his time that man may be an “animal,” a living being, but he is a “deifiable animal:” an animal that can become a god through grace, deified, whereas no ordinary animal can attain that height.

And it is at this precise point that the essential difference between man and animals lies, and not in quantitative differences—for example in the brain. Because, like his brother, St. Basil the Great used to say that only man is *called upon to be a god.* He has inside him the divine commandment to become a god by grace. How, then, can an Orthodox scientist not respect Man, but instead use him as a guinea pig for his research, or ruthlessly slaughter him with abortions?

This is also why he knows there is self-restriction in his research or in the exercise of his “profession.” He does not seek to substitute God, since he cannot create *ex nihilo*, (“out of nothing,” *Ed.*) but learns to preserve balances and hierarchies. Divine knowledge produces a Holy-Spiritual ethos, thus elevating science to an inter-human ministry, and the scientist to a ministrant of the Most High, inasmuch

as he is the one who can officiate in the mystery of divine philanthropy.

7. This type of scientist, who fulfils our traditional prerequisites, is especially necessary in our day and age, with the spreading of exploitation-use of science, conceitedness and the anti-human spirit and arbitrariness in the implementation of science—always to the detriment of man, who is always the victim. That was why Gregory the Theologian noted: *For, the said wise man is not—to me—a wise man; nor is the one who may have a versatile tongue, but has an unstable and untrained soul... but rather, he who speaks little about virtue, but is exemplary by his many acts, and additionally whose word is trustworthy throughout his life...* In other words, according to the holy Father, a wise man is the one who possesses a purity of heart – in which case, he does not exhaust himself with garrulous speeches about virtue, but instead proclaims it with his way of life, which then makes him trustworthy—in other words, justifies his scientific worth. The in-Christ ethos avouches the scientist.

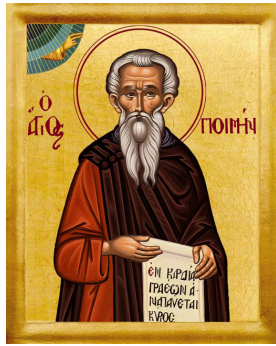
This type of scientist becomes the *leaven, that leavens the entire lump* (of dough) (1 Cor 5:6). He becomes the *light and the salt* of the scientific family and more broadly, of society (Mt 5:13). What is important, however, is that he thus acquires the potential to exert his influence on the environment “for the good.” Why, indeed, do we invoke the viewpoints of important scientists? It is because they can influence society. So, just as an “atheist” scientist can demolish consciences by propagating his denial, likewise the Orthodox scientist builds up consciences, indirectly exercising a missionary opus through his confession—his witness of scientific truth—which remains theocentric.

This is how the ever-memorable Von Braun used to theologize, when saying: “There is no conflict between Faith and Science, since Faith is confessed with the Creator and Science with the created.” On the other hand, a scientist who dares to argue that there is no room in research for creation and Creator—since everything (according to him) “originates from nothing and ends up in nothing”—can “kill” one’s conscience. He of course does not realize that this stance of his is not Science, because Science does not possess special instruments for capturing God; it is Metaphysics, in which case, he is negating himself as a scientist! I was however impressed recently, when reading a statement by our important anthropologist, Ms. Katerina Harvati: “Science gives replies to the how, and religion to the why”!

And you too, Ladies and Gentlemen, my Colleagues in Science, by making use of all the means and potentials that are available to you (journalism, mass media), but also in discussions both public and private, can, beyond the scientific truth, also offer society the divine truth.

Thus, **the more patristic you are, the truer you become.** Do not forget that!

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CONFESSION MUST BE PREPARED AND SHOULD BE MADE BEFORE EXPERIENCED SPIRITUAL FATHERS

From the writings of St. Nicodemus the Agiorite, an "Orthodox Kypseli" publication.



First of all you should examine to find out who the best spiritual father is. As Basil the Great says, people do not reveal (expose) their bodily wounds and pains to everyone but only to experienced doctors who know how to cure them. Similarly sins should be revealed only to those who can cure them... But even when you confess all your sins and hide one, out of shame, you should know that not only the sins you have confessed remain unforgiven but you also add up one more for yourself for hiding one, as is said in the confessor's book by Chrysanthos of Jerusalem. Therefore you are wisely advised by a Teacher that if you want to defeat the devil—who brings you shame for a sin—you should confess first the sin for which you feel the greatest shame. If you know how to write, brother, note down your sins on a piece of paper so as not to forget them.

You should also know that unless you properly examine your sins before confession, the sins you may have forgotten remain unforgiven through your willful forgetting. And all of this is so because

you had failed to examine your sins before confession. However, if you prepare properly before confession and happen to forget a sin, being human, this sin, some say, is forgiven along with the others you have confessed because this kind of forgetfulness is considered as a involuntary and not as a willful one.

If you prepare yourself and happen to forget this sin, after the confession you should return to your confessor to reveal even this sin. As we read in the patristic books, a certain abba could see the souls going to Hades in the same way snow comes down to earth in winter. Why was this happening? Not because Christians do not confess their sins but because they do not confess them properly without making up their minds not to repeat the same sins and also because they do not tear their hearts out, a decisive pain for correction; instead, they rend their garments, according to the prophet, falsely; *Rend your heart and not your garments.* (Joel 2:13).

There is no point, my brother, in simply saying *I have sinned for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord*, or *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*. This is what Saul (1 Sam 15:24) and Judas said (Mt 27:4). However, it was of no avail to them. **The most important thing in repentance is deciding to change your life.** Do not say; "If I can, I will be better," or that "I would not like to sin again." Do not say that. Instead, say; "I have decided to correct myself, I do not want to sin any more in the same way I do not want to drink a cup full of poison, in the same way I do not want to fall from a precipice, in the same way I do not want to kill myself."

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]

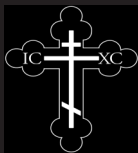
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OUR PATH TOWARDS PASCHA: DECLARING VICTORY OVER FEAR, PANIC AND VIRUSES

A spirit-filled homily given by Metropolitan Athanasios of Lemesou, Cyprus, to his flock, on March 16, 2020. His words and position stand in direct and unfortunate contrast to the actions and position of most of Orthodoxy's hierarchs, who have unconditionally surrendered the faithful to a Holy Great Lent absent of divine services, and, for many, Holy Communion.

We have been informed that be-

cause of the urgent measures that were announced by the State, and that have been taken to protect human life, our Church, not wanting to seem disobedient to these orders, has postponed the faith based homilies and the other gatherings which were scheduled in each parish

of our Metropolis. Therefore, the spiritual homily that used to take place after the Vespers services has been cancelled.

I just wanted to share with you a few words, since God blessed us to meet. Of course, we will do as much as it is possible from the human side of things. We thank the officials and the scientists, the politicians and those in governing power, who teach us and direct us to how we should face this difficult situation. We are not denying the reality of the difficult times. But for sure, as people of the Church, we have also our own way to analyze and to be critical in thinking and to evaluate the events that come through our life.



So, in this instance as well, in this difficult moment, we will deal with everything with all possible human means, scientific means and other. But for sure, and above all, we will deal with this situation with our faith: to Christ, our Panaghia, and the Saints of the Church.

The Church in difficult times has always taught us and directed us to pray. This crisis will be dealt—and can only be dealt—with prayer. We need much prayer, very much prayer. We need people who have such great strong prayer, such that can turn the

events of the world around. Because in truth, only prayer can turn around the development of events. Everything else is human. Of course, it is good to have the human approach and it is beneficial. But prayer can, in reality and in short time, turn around every-

thing and can end this difficulty. However, this difficulty has a beneficial side to it. It teaches us many things. It shows us our weakness, the temporary nature of human things. It teaches that everything around us is ephemeral. Therefore, we must understand that our first need and our first longing should be the Kingdom of God. Just as the Lord says in the Holy Gospel, *Seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you.* We will be given everything from Our Lord, the Lord of Glory; we just need to seek the Kingdom of God.

This is our true necessity and need, this is what we truly need. Of course, all other things are necessary too, but

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Please visit our website for our mission and other useful information.

Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US). This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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God knows our needs and provides. The Church is calling us to struggle and pray, to struggle to gain more prayer—prayer that streams from repentance and humility. We must repent for our personal sins, for the sins of our brethren and for the sins of the whole world. We need to offer God strong prayer, gushing out of our humble and repentant heart; so that God can have mercy on us and overturn the difficult events.

If we pray, everything will be overturned. If we do not pray, then the events will take the human course of things; and we do not know how things will be and how things will develop.

Our Churches will remain open. The Worship of God will never stop. The priests and we [i.e., the hierarch himself] will be in the position that God placed us. And as shepherds of the Church, we offer our prayers and the services for the Worship of God and for Holy Communion and Thanksgiving. We offer these for the whole world, for the whole Adam. Whoever wants to attend may approach. Whoever feels difficulty and weak or anything else, they can act as their conscience directs them. We cannot judge any man. We are called to pray for the whole world, the whole Adam, for all the human race.

Maybe someone can question themselves and say, “We that come to the Church, we will not ever get ill?” We will get ill and one day we will die. Who told us that we would remain immortal in this world? We needed the coronavirus to remind us that one day we will die? We needed the coronavirus to tell us that we can fall ill? What did the forty martyrs say? “Our actions are in *philotimo* (good honor).”

Since one day we will die, let us die honorably and being pleasing to God. Let us also remember our Saint Neophytos who said, *what other thing exists above all but the fear of God and the remembrance of death?*—to remind us of our exodus from this world and our presence in front of God.

What does the Church offer us? The strength to NOT fear; the victory against the fear of death.

We will all go through biological death, without exceptions. However, the spiritual death is a death that a faithful person who believes in God will not undergo. *He who believes in Me will have life eternal*, says our Lord. He who believes in Me will never taste death, meaning spiritual death, because the biological death we all go through. And this is death that we fear—the spiritual death—the eternal separation from God. We do not want this separation, it terrifies us, because this is



eternal separation, eternal death—the eternal separation from our Lord Christ. The biological death is human nature and will arrive one day. Even if we are saints, even if we are sinners, we will all go through the gate of the biological death.

We walk towards Pascha, the Resurrection of Christ, Who was victorious over death and Who destroyed the fear of death, and then we shall hear the night of the Resurrection: *No one fears death, because we are freed from death by our Savior.* No one should fear death because our Savior released us from the fear of biological death, and we move on to live the Resurrection. Death is conquered. There is no death. There is only life eternal. Christ is alive, the Kingdom of God is real, and will be to the ages.

With this type of faith, we will walk through this difficult time that we currently face—without fears, without panic, without human reasoning. We will walk crying out the Love of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that our life here has an end. We know that this life is just passing through, a journey through, from the temporary to the eternal—to the eternal Kingdom of God.

In these times of crisis, our faith is tested, our way of life matters, our thoughts are evaluated, and the quality of our relationship with our Father, our God, is measured: our life, our strength, our time in works of repentance, our time in prayer and in worship offered to God. The Church will remain in prayer, giving glory and worship to the Living God, without any human selfish act. With the wisdom of the Church, we will be given hope that God is above all things. I am not saying that we ignore the human side of things. Not at all. But we need to be victorious over fear, victorious over death which destroys love—the true Love, Who is Christ, the One Who destroys fears. He who loves God fears nothing. Nothing darkens his life, not even the most difficult moment. For God's love is victorious over the fear and gives us the taste of eternal life.

In our Metropolis, in our Metropolis' Church and in other Churches and on every Thursday, before or after the *Apo-deipnon* [Compline] (depending on what is best for the schedule), we will conduct the Sacrament of Holy Unction for the healing of body and soul. The Church will offer us a medicine of eternal life that will heal our body and soul. Together with the chemical and biological, human-made medications, the Church offers us the Holy Sacrament of Holy Unction, to give us strength of body and soul, so we can have peace, and deal with whatever we encounter in front of us. Life and death are both in front of us, and with faith in God and with the presence of Christ in our heart, we will take advantage of our time here on earth, and we will use this life towards the benefit of our soul and also see death as eternal life.

Death is conquered. Christ conquered death. As the fathers of the Church teach us. Let us have hope in Christ.

Let us call upon the Holy Theotokos, our Mother, and our Holy Saints, and let us walk our path in faith and peace. We should give comfort to our brethren. Just think of how much despair and fear exists; how much lack of courage and feeling unsafe exists in the hearts of men that do not have the Light of God in their lives. Our life is like a tragedy without the presence of God. It is a life of tragedy if we are without our Holy Church. Without Christ man cannot live. Without the Light of God, darkness is unbearable. This is why we are all called, all of us who believe in Christ and call upon his All Holy Name, to become instruments of God who bring messages of hope and joy, peace, calmness and stillness, courage in the hearts of our brethren calling upon the presence and the Love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen!



Let us not consider this a sign that God has abandoned us and has despised us, when we are subject to trials [sorrows]. But let it be a sign to us that the Lord cares for us. Because, by allowing trials to come, He is cleansing our sins.

St. John Chrysostom

These current catastrophes are so terrible for us, because they have come upon us because we are not firm in the Faith, and because we are not enduring them for the sake of Christ... And what is even worse, and leaves us powerless in our efforts to counteract our misfortunes, is that we do not strengthen ourselves with the power of Christ. We put our hope, not in God, but in human powers and means.

St. John of San Francisco

The Christian must stand upon the various sorrows and temptations like an anvil, which—even though it is hammered upon constantly—does not move from its place, nor does it get ruined, but stays firm, [as firm as it was in the beginning].

St. Ephraim the Syrian

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or, what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [Mt 16:26] In other words, in the visible world there is no value equivalent to the value of the human soul, or a value at which the soul can be praised and purchased. It is worth more than all worlds combined.

St. Justin Popovic

Praise God from your cross, because the cross is the only true instructor, guardian and throne of theology. Outside the cross, there can be no living knowledge of God. Do not search for Christian perfection in human virtues. There you will not find it, because it is hidden in the Cross of Christ.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

PROPHECIES CONCERNING OUR LORD'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Based on Scriptural passages, from an Orthodox pamphlet.

The prophecies below were written well over seven hundred years prior to the age of Christianity. Remarkably, however, the prophets described the events as if they were recording history from the base of the Cross. The circumstances surrounding the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ were not only foretold, but they are also documented, historical facts. The fulfillment of these Jewish Scriptural prophecies alone serve as unequivocal testimony that the God-man Jesus Christ was the awaited Messiah, Who suffered for man, in order to save him and grant him eternal life.

That He would be betrayed by His disciple: *He who ate of my bread, hath magnified the lifting of heels against me.* (Pss 40:10).

That the gentiles and the archpriests would plot against Him: *Why have the heathen raged, and the peoples meditated empty things? The kings of the earth were aroused, and the rulers were assembled together against the Lord and against His Christ.* (Pss 2:1-2).

That unjust witnesses would bear false testimony against Him: *Unjust witnesses rose up against me; things I knew not they asked me. They repaid me with evil things instead of good.* (Pss 34:13).

That He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver: *So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.* (Zech 11:12).

That the silver would be used to purchase the field of the potter: *And the Lord said unto me, "Cast it unto the potter"—a goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.* (Zech 11:13).

That He would be bound with fetters: *Woe to their soul, for they have devised an evil counsel against themselves, saying against themselves: Let us bind the just one.* (Isa 3:10).

That He would remain silent before Pilate: *But as for me, like a deaf man I heard them not, and was as a speechless man that openeth not his mouth. And I became as a man that heareth not, and that hath in his mouth no reproofs.* (Pss 37:14-15). *He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.* (Isa 53:7).

That He would be whipped, slapped, spat upon, and ridiculed: *I gave my back to scourges, and my cheeks to blows, and*

I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting. (Isa. 50:6). *For I am ready for scourges, and my sorrow is continually before me.* (Pss 37:17).

That His disciples would abandon Him: *And I waited for one that would grieve with me, but there was no one; and for them that would comfort me, but I found none* (Pss 68:25). *I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.* (Zech 13:7).

That the soldiers would make fun of Him: *And they prated against me, they that sit in the gates; and they made a song about me, they that drink wine.* (Pss 68:15).

That He would be crowned with a wreath of thorns: *Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold... the crown wherewith his mother crowned him.* (Sol 3:11).

That He would carry the Cross on His shoulders: *For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder.* (Isa 9:6).

That He would suffer for us: *He was a man in suffering, and acquainted with the bearing of sickness, for his face is*

turned from us: he was dishonored and not esteemed. He bears our sins and is pained for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But he was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities... and by his bruises we were healed. (Isa 53:3-12).

That He would die for the sins of the world: *Because of the iniquities of My people, He was led to death.* (Isa. 53:8). *And he bore the sins of many, and was delivered because of their iniquities.* (Isa. 53:12).

That He would be crucified on the Cross: *They plotted an evil device against me, saying, 'Come, let us put wood in his bread, and destroy him root and branch from the land of the living, so his name might not be remembered any longer'* (Jer. 11:18).

That He Who is crucified is the Life; but the Jews will not believe: *And thy life shall be hanging before thine eyes; and thou shalt be afraid by day and by night, and thou shalt not believe in thy life.* (Deut 28:66).

That He would be crucified in the middle of the earth: *But God is our king before the ages, He hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.* (Pss 73:13).

That He would be crucified along with the thieves: *And he was numbered among the transgressors.* (Isa 53:12).

That His hands and feet would be nailed: *"They have pierced my hands and my feet. They have numbered all my bones.* (Pss 21:16). *And I will say to him, What are these wounds between thine hands? Those with which I was wounded in my beloved house.* (Zech. 13:6).



That He would be mocked while on the Cross: *All that look upon me have laughed me to scorn; they have spoken with their lips and have wagged their heads [saying]: He hoped in the Lord; let Him deliver him, let Him save him, for He desireth him.* (Pss 21:6-8).

That they would pierce His side: *And they shall look upon Me, Whom they have pierced.* (Zech 12:10).

That water would gush forth from His holy side: *And in that day living water shall come forth out of Jerusalem.* (Zech 14:8).

That none of His bones would be broken: *They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones.* (Num 9:12).

That He would be given vinegar mixed with gall to drink: *And they gave me gall for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* (Pss 68:26).

That His clothes would be distributed and His garments parted: *They have parted my garments amongst themselves, and for my vesture have they cast lots.* (Pss 21:18).

That there would be darkness on the earth during His Crucifixion: *And it shall come to pass in that day that there shall be no light, and there shall be for one day cold and frost, and that day shall be known to the Lord, and it shall not be day nor night: but towards evening it shall be light.* (Zech 14:6-7). *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that the sun shall go down at noon, and the light shall be darkened on the earth by day.* (Amos 8:9). *The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their light. And the Lord shall cry out of Zion, and shall utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heaven and the earth shall be shaken.* (Joel 3:15-16).

That He would descend to Hades to liberate the souls in bondage: *And the gates of death open to thee for fear; and did the porters of hell quake when they saw thee.* (Job 38:17). *Mightily leading forth them that were shackled, and likewise them that embitter Him, them that dwell in tombs.* (Pss 67:7). *Hades from below was embittered to meet you.* (Isa 14:9).

That His body would not suffer corruption: *For Thou wilt not abandon my soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.* (Pss 1:10).

That He would resurrect: *Because of the distress of the beggars and the groaning of the poor, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will establish them in salvation, I will be manifest therein.* (Pss 11:6). *Arise, O God, judge the earth, for Thou shalt have an inheritance among all the nations.* (Ps. 81:8). "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered" (Pss 67:1). *Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest.* (Pss 131:8). *He Who brought up from the earth the shepherd of His sheep.* (Isa 63:11). *Prepare yourself, rise early in the morning...* "On account of this, wait for Me," says the Lord, "until the day of My rising up as a testimony. For My judgment shall be for the gathering of the nations." (Zeph 3:7-8).

That He would resurrect in three days: *Let us go, and return to the Lord our God; for he has torn and will heal us; he will*

smite and bind us up. After two days he will heal us: in the third day we shall arise and live. (Hos 6:1-3).

That many dead people would be resurrected: *The dead shall rise up; and those in the tombs shall arise.* (Isa 26:19). *Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your tombs to lead you, My people, up from their graves.* (Ezek 37:12-14).

That the myrrh-bearing women would visit His tomb: *Come hither, ye women that come from a sight; for it is a people of no understanding.* (Isa 27:11).



One of the saints said: There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was ill, lying down; and when I had embraced him, I sat with him and told him, "Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons." But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, "Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you." And I said to him, "Yes, I am very young, but I have the temptations of mighty men." And he said again, "Then it is God's will to make you wise." And I said, "How can I become wise? For every day I taste death." And in reply he said, "God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace."

St. Abba Isaac the Syrian

My blessed children, the holy Fathers teach us that a man's heart is entangled with the prickly roots of various passions that are lodged very deep within it. When a person, through enlightenment of God, attempts to uproot (in essence, to transfigure) a passion, he grips and removes the rootlets with forceps. However, as he attempts to uproot each passion, he simultaneously lacerates the heart. When the heart is cut open, it bleeds and hurts. If a person decides not to bear the pain, he gives up at that point, he abandons the struggle, and thus remains passionate and sinful. If, however, he patiently endures the pain, he removes the root of the passion and is set free

Blessed Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona

The Western Church, from the tenth century downwards, has privily brought into herself through the papacy various and strange and heretical doctrines and innovations, and so she has been torn away and removed far from the true and orthodox Church of Christ. How necessary, then, it is for you to come back and return to the ancient and unadulterated doctrines of the Church in order to attain the salvation in Christ after which you press.

Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos

[Synodal reply to the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, 1895]

REPENTANCE AND SALVATION!

A PASTORAL CIRCULAR FOR THE LENTEN TRIODION

By Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythira and Antikythera (Greece).

*Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos:
for I have befouled my soul with shameful sins
and have wasted all my life in slothfulness.*

By thine intercessions deliver me from all uncleanness.

[From the hymn “*Open Unto Me the Doors of Repentance*”]

† † †

My dear brothers and concelebrants! My brothers in Christ and beloved children of the Lord!

As we know, the Lenten Triodion lasts seventy days. It begins with the Week of the Publican and the Pharisee and ends on Holy Saturday. The Lenten Triodion includes the first three weeks of preparation for Great Lent, before Cheesefare Sunday. It also includes the sacred time of the holy and Great Forty Days, which begins with Clean Week and continues until the Friday before Lazarus Saturday. The Lenten Triodion also covers Great and Holy Week, which can be called the “Holy of Holies” of the Lenten Triodion: from Holy Monday through Holy Saturday.

At the beginning of the Lenten Triodion, we sing with contrite heart: *The doors of repentance do Thou open unto me, O Giver of life, Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos.* Repentance and salvation are the two highest and most sacred spiritual goals to which the aspirations of Orthodox believers should be directed. It is possible to attain them by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through life in the Holy Spirit and in *podvigs*—both spiritual and bodily, which are a means of returning to our common purpose: to the observance of the Divine commandments and the fulfillment of the will of God.

Repentance!

Let no one who lives in sin fall into despair, advises St. John Chrysostom. But none of the virtuous should give themselves over to carelessness. Let the virtuous not be sure of himself, for such will remain behind the repentant harlot. But let the sinner not despair, because it is possible that he will overtake the first (by sincere repentance)... When we turn away from sin and are filled with ardent love for God, He forgets the former. God is not like people. He does not punish for our previous actions (of which we sincerely repented). And if we have repented, He does not ask why we squandered so much time. He loves us and does not reject us when we return to Him. It is enough only to return in the proper manner (through sincere repentance).

When houses fall into disrepair, we always renovate them, St. John Chrysostom says in another place. We ought to do the same with ourselves. Have you sinned today? That is, has

your soul fallen into decay (have you become the old man)? Despair not, do not commit another fall, but restore your spiritual home. How? By repentance, tears, confession, and good deeds. And never stop doing it.

Repentance and salvation!

Salvation, St. John Chrysostom underlines, *is achieved not by our labors, not by our podvigs, but by love;* but not only by God’s love, and not only by our virtues. For if salvation were attained only by His love, then we would all be saved. And were it achieved simply by our virtue, then the coming of the Lord and all the acts of the Divine economy would be superfluous. However, (our salvation) is accomplished not only by Divine love, and not only by our virtue, but by the joint action of one and the other.

My brothers,

Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos, we chant during the time of the sacred and soul-saving Lenten Triodion. Repentance and salvation! Repentance is the true path of a God-loving Christian life in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Repentance is the blessed path to our Lord and God and the most God-pleasing way of life. True repentance throughout our entire life guides us along the safe path and unswervingly leads to salvation in Jesus Christ, for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12).

Life in repentance and its orientation towards salvation in Christ shields us spiritually and protects us from slavery and the yoke of the devil, and wards us from evil spirits, from sin, and from every evil.

By means of a gradual removal of non-fasting foods and the entrance into the spiritual fast, with prayer and long Church services, with constant reminders of repentance and the need for spiritual sobriety, the Lenten Triodion helps the faithful in spiritual warfare and assists in spiritual work. On the other hand, the “worldly triodion” (with a lowercase letter), that is, wasting these special days wandering along the roads and back alleys of sin, and even among carnival disguises and festivals, disorients a man and alienates him from the spirit of devout prayer, spiritual struggle, and blessed turning to the Lord in this holy time.

To the issues that deserve fervent prayer “on the field of virtues,” we add the following: a complete cessation of the fires (large and ongoing) on the continent of Australia, the cessation of the strong seismic vibrations in our neighboring country to the east, the elimination of the looming threat of war, the removal of the threats of an earthquake in the country bordering us to the north—Albania—and the speedy restoration of what has been destroyed in both countries. [And to this we should add the world devastation from Covid-19, uncovered after the authorship on this article, *Ed.*].

And most importantly: for the reconciliation and restoration of the Divinely-inspired unity and communion of

all the Local Orthodox Churches that make up the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. None of the autocephalous Local Churches, with the exception of three, accept the great canonical violation of recognizing a certain entity made up of schismatic, excommunicated, defrocked, and unordained persons as a canonical “autocephalous Church,” while completely ignoring and disdaining His Beatitude Onuphry, the canonical primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, with a whole host of canonical bishops under him and millions of faithful enduring persecution. And while the canonical Ukrainian Church endures persecution, harassment, and violence, celebrations are being held in honor of the first anniversary of the provision of “autocephaly!”

And just like the eleven autocephalous Churches, we humbly believe that this gaping wound, which is devastating for the holy Body of the One and only Orthodox, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, will not be healed if this most serious of canonical problems will not be resolved on the pan-Orthodox level, by convening a pan-Orthodox council. The passage of more and more time, the exerting of pressure, as well as pompous Divine services and joint prayers with representatives of other confessions and other religions only deepens the wounds instead of healing them. We fear that the proposed visit of the head of the Vatican in the footsteps of the apostle Paul—to those places where the great “apostle to the Gentiles” traveled—will bring no good fruits. This can happen only under one condition: if first of all, the theology and ecclesiology of the great “apostle to the Gentiles” Paul is fully recognized, with great humility and fitting modesty, and heretical teachings are renounced, accompanied by sincere and salvific repentance out of love for God.

With heartfelt wishes for a blessed, peaceful, and fruitful time of the Lenten Triodion, good repentance, and the salvation of your souls, I remain, with paternal prayers and love in Christ,

† Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythira and Antikythera



For us, the ungodly, the Master was given up. Who would not marvel? Who would not give glory? When the slaves had sinned, the Master was given up. The sons of perdition and the children of darkness went out into the darkness to arrest the Sun, Who had the power to consume them in an instant. But the Master—knowing their impudence and the force of their anger—with gentleness, by His own Authority, gave Himself up into the hands of the ungodly.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

ON OUR FALL FROM PARADISE

By Fr. John S. Romanides.

The Fathers teach that with the Fall, the human nous became darkened. The Fathers are not concerned with Adam per se, but with his nous and with the sickness that followed from its darkening. The Fathers speak about a nous void of understanding. Throughout Patristic literature, the whole issue of the Fall centers on this darkening of the human nous.

But how do we know that man fell? Just from the historical description of the Fall in Holy Scripture? And what does “the Fall” really mean? What does “Paradise” mean? What was Paradise? There are two Patristic traditions on this subject, which are summarized by St. John of Damascus, who gives us both Patristic opinions without taking a position himself on this issue.

One tradition says that Adam’s nous in Paradise was illumined. The other tradition says that the condition of his nous was such that he could behold God continuously and that this is what Paradise meant for Adam—to see the glory of God. Both the Alexandrian tradition and Cappadocian tradition (of St. Basil the Great) maintain that before the Fall, Adam beheld God with his nous, while the Antiochian tradition (of St. John Chrysostom) maintains that his nous was simply illumined.

St. John of Damascus takes no position as to whether Adam’s nous was merely illumined before the Fall, or whether it was in a state where it could continuously behold God, that is, in a state of continuous *theosis*. Why does this Father of the Church not take a position? Because what interests him is to provide two explanations for the original state of the nous and how it became darkened. But how do we know that Adam’s nous became darkened? Very simply, because we know that we ourselves now have a darkened nous. And this darkened nous needs healing. The cure has two phases: illumination and *theosis*. ***Theosis is the complete cure.***

But what does it mean to say that the nous has become darkened? It means that the noetic activity in the human heart is not functioning properly. Noetic energy begins to function properly only when man passes through purification and reaches illumination. After the Fall, the nous is in a darkened state. Why? Because it is full of thoughts (logismoi) and has been darkened by these thoughts. And when does the nous become darkened by thoughts? The nous is darkened when the thoughts of our reasoning mind [dianoia] descend into the heart and become thoughts of the nous, that is, when the location of our thoughts becomes confused between the rational mind and the nous. Thoughts are present in our nous that should not be there, because they belong to our reasoning faculty, the dianoia. The nous must be utterly empty of thoughts in order for it to remain pure and thus receptive, so that the Holy Spirit can come and dwell and remain in it.

THY CROSS WE WORSHIP, O MASTER

By Constantine Zalalas, Rochester, NY, March 2018.

The precious and life-giving Cross is the holiest symbol of our Faith. All the Holy mysteries are completed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the seal of the Holy Cross. All the Hieratical prayers—of Holy Baptism, Holy Chrism, Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, etc.—begin and end with the sign of the Cross. The Holy Temples, the Holy vessels and the liturgical vestments, and all liturgical actions are sanctified by the sign of the Holy Cross. Moreover, the Cross is the most faithful companion of every Orthodox Christian. From the moment we enter this world until we exit it in our final resting place—our tomb—we are accompanied by the blessing of the Cross. We bless ourselves with the sign of the Cross daily; we keep crosses at our homes, at our places of work and in our automobiles because we believe in the beautiful hymn of our Church.

The Cross is the guardian of the Universe; the Cross is the beauty of the Church; the Cross is the power of kings; the Cross is the staff of the Church; the Cross is the glory of angels; the Cross is the wounding of demons.

The symbol of the Cross is so indispensable that in its absence a church would be anything but a church of the Crucified Christ. The grace and power of the Cross is not due to the shape of the Cross per se but because it is the Cross of Christ. The Red Cross, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the green cross of pharmacies or doctors—all these crosses are insignia of human institutions and, as such, totally irrelevant to the Cross of Christ. The Cross of Christ, on the other hand, is the organ by which He saved the world, the altar on which He offered Himself as the perfect offering, the pure offering of the prophecy of Malachi (1:6). All the *kenosis*, poverty, humiliation, pain, affliction and death He willingly accepted for us merge on the Cross. He suffered the greatest humiliation and pain upon the Cross; He became a curse to free us from the curse of the Law and the bondage of sin. All Christ's work and all His philanthropy gravitate toward the Cross. By being bound on the Cross,

Christ loosed the tragedy of human bondage caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve; and by being obedient unto death, the death of the Cross, He re-orientated our human freedom towards our Maker, the Triune God. Upon the Cross He conquered our death, by making our death His own death and by His Resurrection He has granted to us life and incorruption. Through the Cross He reconciled us to God the Father and granted us remission of sins. On the Cross He demonstrated to us in the most convincing way that He loves us with infinite, unconditional love—a love that did not diminish an iota even during His most horrific pain and suffering. Through the Cross He brought together all of us from different and once-scattered nationalities, and further united us as members of one Body, renewing us with the water and blood that spilled out of His side, which water and blood are the two central mysteries of the Church.



He broke down the high walls that divided us, re-creating by His blood the new man of grace. On the Cross He cleansed and sanctified the sky, the air, and the earth. He was crucified under the sky, hanging in midair; and His most precious blood was dripping into the earth. On the Cross He offered an ecumenical sacrifice for the entire earth and a common cleansing for the entire human nature. That is

why He suffered outside the city and away from the Temple of Solomon, according to the theology of the Golden Mouth John. On the Cross Christ revealed to us that this transient world is not the final reality but the path towards that reality, provided that we take up the struggle to crucify our egotism. On the Cross He manifested Himself as the only Life-giver, Redeemer and Savior of the entire world. He decisively destroyed the works, power, deceit and authority of the devil over people. That is why the devil goes into a panic and trembles, being unable to behold or approach the power of the Cross of Christ.

There is a poignant story about a very holy man, John Vostrinos, who had the authority to expel unclean spirits; it is said that when they brought to him several young women who were victimized by evil spirits, he questioned the evil spirits inside of them: What do you fear the most from the things that we do in Church? And the evil spirits answered, We are mainly afraid of three things: (1) That which you

hang around your neck... (That is how much they fear the Cross: they could not even say its name...but they described it periphrastically or in a roundabout way.) (2) That bath that you are given at the church (Holy Baptism), and (3) That which you eat at your liturgies (Holy Communion).

These are the three greatest weapons against the demons; and that is why they are so viciously fought and totally distorted by sectarian and heretical Christians. The death of the Lord on the Cross is life-giving and redeeming because it was totally voluntary and willing. Christ journeyed to the Cross not as a condemned defendant but as a King, offering His life giving blood as transfusion like the Pelican who broke his chest open to revive his poisoned children. That is why He said, I have a baptism to be baptized with—a baptism of death—and how am I constrained till it be accomplished. This is why the Eastern Orthodox write on the Cross *The King of Glory* and not simply *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. They depict the Lord on the Cross as Master: with His hands spread horizontally, in total control and not hanging miserably and helplessly conquered by despair and pain, as seen in the crosses of the West.

The death of the Lord is salvific and redeeming because it was real death and not docetic (i.e., not for appearance's sake); for the One Who sacrificed Himself was sinless and unable to sin. His human nature was always united with the divine nature and forever at the state of *theosis* from the very moment of conception, hypostatically united on the One Person of God the Logos. According to the decision of the 6th Ecumenical Synod Christ had two natural wills in full accord with one another, with the human will always and deliberately following and obeying the divine will. Thus the Lord in His human nature and will could never desire anything different than His Father and the Holy Spirit; He was never tempted, and could not be tempted, for He was the only true human, who pleased God one hundred percent.

The devil's three temptations in the desert were weaker than spider webs, and the ancient serpent walked away empty-handed.

Those outside of the Church and inside of the Church, who think otherwise and ascribe a fallen human nature to Christ, try to interpret Christ with their own fallen mindset. The person of Christ cannot be interpreted by a fallen man, but the fallen man needs to be interpreted by the God-man. When we attempt to theologize about the God-man with our ill rationalism we fall prey to the scandal of the Cross—much like the unbelieving Jews and the Athenian philosophers. We empty the mystery of the Cross of Christ, according to St. Paul.

The theological pen of St. Gregory Palamas adds the following: This is the wisdom and power of God; to conquer through weakness, to elevate through humility, to make wealthy through poverty. It is not surprising that the

Lord did not wish to maintain the glory of Transfiguration which would certainly make him avoid the Cross... who would dare approach Him... His enemies would vanish like smoke... the Jews could not even look at Moses' face when he returned from the top of Mount Sinai. Likewise Pilate and Herod, Annas and Caiphas would not be able to glance at a transfigured Christ... yet He chose not to violate their free will.

Christ did not want to convince us and force us to believe by His glory and power, but to draw us to Him by His loving humility.

On His descent from Mount Tabor the conversation was not centered on His glory but He was rather preparing His disciples for the Cross. His work was to convey to us that without the life of the Cross and voluntary discomfort, we will not share in the glory of the Resurrection or Transfiguration. As the Captain of our Faith, having brought many sons to glory (through discomfort, *askesis* and suffering [like Joseph, Moses, the prophets, the seven Maccabees, and the three youths in the fire]), He, also being their captain of salvation, needed to finish His life through suffering (Heb 2:10, which is terribly mis-translated by our English Bibles): *For it was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of our salvation perfect through suffering...*

So everything was made for Christ, and everything visible and invisible was made by Christ. Christ was perfect man and perfect God from the moment of conception, so there was absolutely nothing imperfect in the human nature of Christ that needed to be perfected through suffering. In His sacrificial spirit and love He chose to be the first martyr: Not to be made perfect through suffering, but to complete his earthly life through suffering. By stretching out His hands on the Cross He would heal the sinful action of Adam, who stretched out his hands to taste the forbidden fruit.

That is why Christ severely rebuked Peter, who was suggesting to Him to avoid the Cross. He called him Satan, only a few hours after He had praised him for his God inspired confession. *Get behind Me, Satan; you are a scandal to Me, because you are not thinking in Godly terms, but you think by the logic of men.* On His way to His voluntary Passion He was saying, *Now the Son of Man is glorified.* And in other verses of the gospel, the Cross is presented as the Glory of Christ. As St. John the Chrysostom writes, the Cross before Christ was the means of shame and condemnation, but now it is the cause of honor and glory. This is also overt from the words of the Lord: *Father, glorify Me with the glory I had before the world received its existence from You...* He was referring to the Cross... **the Cross is the glory of Christ.** After His rebuke of Peter, Christ instructed the rest of His disciples to embrace the gospel of the Cross: *Anyone who wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross*

and follow Me. To the sons of Zebedee and their mother, who were seeking to be first, the Lord said, *You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink? Or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?*

So the Cross is not just a symbol or a metaphor, but the way of life for those who would like to be called Christians. As it would be inconceivable to consider Christ without the Cross, likewise it is inconceivable to be considered a Christian without sharing in the sufferings and the Cross of Christ. *Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot become My disciple.*

What does this mean for us? How can we carry our cross in a society that idolizes pleasure and comfort? We can accomplish this in three ways.

First, by undertaking the daily struggle to crucify our passions according to St. Paul: *Those of Christ have crucified their passions and their earthly desires.* (Gal 5:24). I share in the crucifixion of Christ when I struggle to uproot or transform my sinful passions: my egocentrism, my selfishness, my egotism, my self-love. Excessive self-love leads to the lack of faith and faithlessness altogether. It fosters indifference for our fellow man—and worse yet, to the use and abuse of our fellow man for our personal gratification and/or financial gain. Love of pleasure, love of possessions, love of glory and attention: all these sprout from the passion of ill self-love. The self-lover cannot be a lover of God or a lover of man. He can pretend to be a man of faith and philanthropic, but deep down he is only in love with himself. If we do not crucify our sick self-love, we cannot follow Christ and we cannot become his disciples.

We must die to the world, as St. Paul repeatedly teaches. *We must die to the world before Christ can live in us... I no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). St. Gregory Palamas calls this the first mystery of the Cross: to distance all influences of the world around me which cause me to sin. The second mystery of the Cross is to guard the mind/nous from all sinful images and remembrance of past sins, and to fight all *logismoi*, by *nepsis* and unceasing noetic prayer. By the daily struggle of *nepsis* and prayer a man begins to transform his sinful passions and tendencies; and he discovers the inner treasure, the kingdom of God within him. As he progresses, he begins to feel a spiritual warmth inside his heart, which chases away sinful thoughts and passions and which brings a deep peace and consolation to the soul and body.

According to St. Gregory, the uncreated energy of the Holy Cross was present and active in the Old Testament. The sign of the Cross was used by Moses to open the Red Sea. The sign of the Cross was used by the elderly Jacob to bless his grandchildren Manasseh and Ephraim. The resurrections worked by Elijah and Elisha prefigured the Crucifixion of

Christ. The bronze serpent hung on a vertical and horizontal wood prefigured the Crucifixion. There are at least twenty instances in the Old Testament where the uncreated energy of the Cross of Christ manifests itself. The entire procession of the Israelites in the wilderness moved in the sign of the Cross: three tribes in the front, three tribes a short distance back; three tribes to the right, and three tribes to the left.

If the power of the Cross was active in the life of all the righteous in the Old Testament, it is also certain that it was active in the life of the Most Holy Theotokos, who did nothing whatsoever to displease God. She never polluted herself, not even with a single thought, and at the tender age of three did what Abraham did in his old age. She left the home of her parents and entered the Holy of Holies where, by elevating her mind above every earthly thought, she united her nous with God and thereby maintained a constant vision of God. The power of the Cross in the righteous of the Old Testament was aiding them in their struggle against sin; whereas the energy of the Cross in the life of the spotless Virgin was an enhancement to elevate her to greater spiritual heights: from glory to glory and from *theoria* to *theoria*.

From the moment she was born she was creating an abode for the One Who could save man. She was struggling to create within her a beautiful dwelling, a dwelling that could house God. More on this we find in the homily of St. Gregory Palamas on Her Entrance to the Temple, and I quote: *At the moment the virgin entered the Holy of Holies she looked around and she rejoiced greatly for finding such a great and appropriate refuge.* Through the physical beauty of the Holy of Holies she was capable of elevating her mind to the invisible beauty of God so her mind was no longer thinking of any earthly joy or desire. This way she surpassed the needs of nature and the desires of the senses. She refused to look at anything beautiful in the earthly sense and to taste those foods that gratify the senses. Accordingly, she became the first human to become free from the tyranny of the devil, and rendered his schemes powerless; and for this victory at a very young age she received as a reward the luxury of being fed by an angel.

Thus, the first method of being crucified together with Christ is to renounce the sinful passions of our fallen Adamic nature. The second method is to forbear the involuntary afflictions of this earthly life courageously and thankfully, according to the Pauline adage: *Give thanks to God for everything...for the sweet things and the bitter things...* Painful and incurable diseases, the death of loved ones, injustice, disrespect, slander, persecutions that we will often undergo as Christians—all of these will grant us the opportunity to share in the sufferings, crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. If we become indignant under these trials we will suffer loss. If we accept these misfor-

tunes stoically—with the “what-can-we-do” attitude—we will not benefit much. If we accept these difficulties as a visitation from God for the purpose of our perfection, then we will benefit greatly.

The voluntary acceptance of pain as our cross—as the gift of God’s love for our spiritual development and perfection—elevates us to the ranks of the Holy martyrs. The Christian who courageously suffers on the bed of pain and in the process glorifies God for making him a participant in His Son’s suffering will be considered a confessor of the Faith and a contemporary martyr. According to St. Paul, if we endure by imitating Him in His suffering, we also will reign with Him.

The third method of being crucified with Christ is to embrace voluntary struggles, poverty and discomforts for the love of God. The Lord spoke about a narrow and sorrowful gate which suggests discomfort and pain. The kingdom of God suffers violence, and those who desire it must exercise a merciless combat against their sinful passions. Without this combat the old man of sin does not give up. Without prayer, fasting, abstinence, prostrations and general *askesis*, the passions of the fallen nature cannot be bridled. *You must give blood to receive the Spirit* was a common slogan among the Desert Fathers.

The strict fast of Great Lent is not an easy matter for a number, if not most, of our Christians. Without this blessed toil of fasting (for those of good health), we will not be crucified together with Christ and we will not live the joy of the Resurrection. We experience the Resurrection when we live the gospel of the Cross. Everything in our Church has the air of the Resurrection because we crucify our fallen nature year round. We don’t give up chocolate for a few weeks. We fast the majority of the time—well over 200 days per year. Our Church is the Church of the Cross and the Resurrection. We the Orthodox celebrate Holy Friday with the air of the Resurrection, while the western non-Orthodox celebrate their Pascha with the air of crucifixion: they display a cross with a purple cloth on it—nevertheless, a cross. In the Orthodox icons there is no Cross, but the joy of Adam being pulled out of the bonds of Hades.

This joy, the joy as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is hidden in the voluntary sufferings and discomfort that we undertake for the love of Christ. The pain and discomfort of asceticism and repentance is the way to blessedness. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

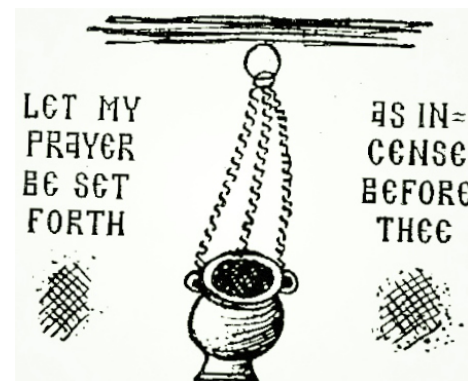
Voluntary discomfort and relative pain for the love of Christ will lead to spiritual freedom and blessedness. Most of us Orthodox, however, prefer the way of the anti-Christian world, a world that demonizes discomfort, pain and suffering. Painkillers are prescribed for every age and find their way into every cupboard, whether we really need them or not.

Christianity is about joy, they tell us. God does not want us to suffer. God wants us to feel good and be happy. But joy cannot be bought with money. True Christian joy comes after the pain and suffering for the sake of the gospel. Today we want to follow Christ empty-handed, without our cross; the idea of the Cross makes us tremble because we are enslaved to a life of comforts. Comfort is the worst enemy of Christianity, according to the Fathers. All the contemporary evils are the illegitimate children of the comfortable and Cross-despising lifestyle of the West.

The world today is facing the plagues prophesied in the Book of the Revelation, which are not the work of God but the consequences of a world that chose an anti-Christian journey, a journey that despises the Cross.

The answer is repentance. Without repentance this world will self-destruct, no doubt. It is only a matter of time. As Christians of these most perilous times, we must increase our vigilance and struggle to avoid being pulled into these strong torrents. Our life preserver is the love of the Cross of Christ: the love of discomfort, or *philoponia*. It is a matter of choice for all of us to follow either the life of the Cross or the wide path that leads to destruction. As wise spiritual investors, let us never forget the undying words of the immortal Saint Paul. I reckon that the sufferings of this age are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Amen

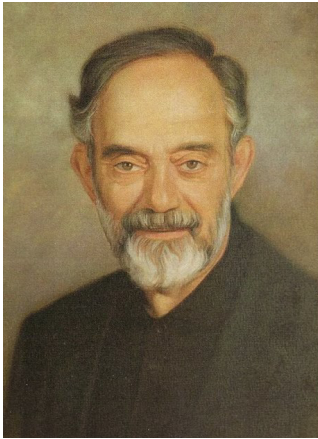


Through greed we underwent the first stripping, overcome by the bitter tasting of the fruit, and we became exiles from God. But let us turn back to repentance and, fasting from the food that gives us pleasure, let us cleanse our senses on which the enemy makes war. Let us strengthen our hearts with the hope of grace, and not with foods which brought no benefit to those who trusted in them. Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery, who disperses the darkness of ignorance by the Light of His Resurrection.

Aposticha, Vespers on the evening of the Sunday of the Last Judgement

BEFORE THE AGES

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001), from "Patristic Theology."



The phrase *before the ages* is highly significant, because the ages and time are not the same. The Fathers make a distinction between the ages and time, even though they did not know modern physics. In physics, time as understood in the past no longer exists. In the past, time was measured by the movement of the earth relative to the sun and the moon. But now, our

understanding of time has changed drastically.

But what matters to us is that the Fathers clearly distinguish between the ages and time. So the Fathers say that when God created the world, He first created the ages, then the angels, and afterwards both this world and time. In other words, the Fathers knew that time was a dimension of a particular aspect of the created universe, because the ages were the first creation to be created and not time. Time was created later on by God.

The main difference between the ages and time is that in time one event is followed in turn by another, while in the ages events do not necessarily follow one another. Instead, events and reality coexist in such a way that what happens is not necessarily entangled in the process of succession. But since man exists within time, his experience is limited to subsequent states. Existence without this process of succession is not within man's experience, but there is one exception. He can acquire this experience in the experience of *theosis*, because during *theosis* time is no longer in effect.

Only someone who has reached *theosis* has experienced a way of being that transcends existence, that transcends time, that transcends the ages, that transcends space, that transcends reason, and so forth. Someone in a state of *theosis* experiences the uncreated, but still does not know epistemologically what this uncreated reality is, because the uncreated epistemologically remains a mystery to the person in a state of *theosis*. In other words, even when God reveals Himself to someone who has reached *theosis*, God remains a Mystery. Even if someone perceives God with his nous, reason, senses and body, God nevertheless remains a Mystery, since He remains outside the boundaries and means of human knowledge.

And this is the case because human knowledge is based on similarity and difference, but there is no similarity between the created and the uncreated realms. For example,

if on the one hand we see an elephant, but do not know anything about elephants, the elephant before us does not resemble anything else. It is simply different from other animals. If we later see two elephants, we will say, "Hey, these two look alike." But if we examine them more carefully and discover that one elephant is male while the other one is female, then we will be able to see that they differ from one another in certain parts of the body. Yet in spite of these differences, they possess such an overall similarity that we can return to talking about elephants and place them in the same category with other elephants.

When someone experiences *theosis*, on the other hand, he can recognize a difference, but he cannot find a similarity with anything. Nevertheless, there is a difference. He sees something that he has never seen before in this life, but there is no similarity between what has been revealed to him and what he already knows. Why is this the case? Because the glory of God is different from everything created that he has observed within the created realm. It is different, but it is also utterly unlike anything known within creation. Why is it not similar to anything? It is not similar to anything, because it does not have color, it cannot be measured, it is not light, it is not darkness, it is not big, it is not small, it does not have a shape, it does not have a form.

This is the reason why the Fathers speak about the glory of God being like something without shape or form. Of course, to say that it is without form is to offer a rebuttal to the Platonists, since the Platonists believed in the existence of a world of forms. But when the Fathers say that the glory of God is without form, this means that it has nothing to do with Plato's conceptual world. Whenever the Fathers describe the glory of God as being without shape or form and whenever they refer to this absence of shape and form, they are making a direct assault on the opinions of Plato and Aristotle and on philosophy in general. This means that Patristic theology completely avoids those categories that belong to philosophical ways of thinking.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with someone studying philosophy as long as he rejects philosophy's teachings on the existence and nature of God. After all, philosophy trains the human mind. This is what all the hesychastic Fathers say, including St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, the Church Father whose ability to reason like a philosopher is unsurpassed. And if you read St. Dionysios the Areopagite, you will see that he even follows this same line of thought. So we can conclude that there is nothing wrong with someone spending his time with philosophy in order to train his rational faculty, in Greek *dianoia*, but it is sheer stupidity to accept the teachings of philosophy when it comes to theological subjects.

Στῶμεν Καλῶς!

Δὲν ἀποδεχόμαστε ὅτι ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος μετάδοσης ἀσθένειας μέσω τῆς Ἐκκλησίας!

Τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτη Ἐδέσσης κ. Γωήλ.

Μὲ ἀφορμὴ ὅσα ἔγιναν τὶς τελευταῖες μέρες μὲ τὴν παύση τῶν ἱεροπραξιῶν, ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ πρωτοφανοῦς ἰοῦ, ταπεινὰ θὰ θέλαμε νὰ διατυπώσουμε τὴν θέση τῆς Ἁγίας μας Ἐκκλησίας ὡς πρὸς τὸ ἐὰν μεταδίδονται οἱ ἀσθένειες μέσω τῶν Ἁγίων Μυστηρίων, ἢ μέσω τῶν ἀγιαστικῶν μέσων τῆς, τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν Ἁγίων εἰκόνων, τὸν ἀσπασμὸ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν παραμονή μας μέσα στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς.

1. Ὡς πρὸς τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας: Ὑπάρχει κοινὴ παραδοχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅτι τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μεταδώσει ἀσθένειες. Αὐτὸ πιστεύει ἡ Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἀποδεικνύει καὶ ἡ πράξις. Ἱερεῖς ποὺ ἐπὶ δεκαετίες ὑπηρετήσαν σὲ νοσοκομεῖα μὲ λοιμώδη νοσήματα, πολὺ μεταδοτικὰ καὶ ἀνίατα γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τους, οὐδέποτε νόσησαν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἦταν μέγα λάθος ἡ πράξις ἐνὸς ἱερέως τῆς Μητροπόλεως μας νὰ κοινωνήσῃ τοὺς πιστοὺς μὲ κοχλιάρια (κουταλάκια) τῆς μιᾶς χρήσεως.

2. Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων καὶ ἡ παραμονὴ στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς: Ἡ συζήτηση γι' αὐτὰ ἔχει ἓναν ἐξίσου ἰσχυρὸ συμβολισμὸ στὸν χρόνον ποὺ γίνεται. Τὴν Β' Κυριακὴ τῶν Νηστειῶν ποὺ ἐορτάσαμε τὸν ἅγιον Γρηγόριον τὸν Παλαμᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος διετράνωσε καὶ διεκήρυξε μὲ λόγια καὶ ἔργα τὴν δυνατότητα τῆς μετοχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὶς ἄκτιστες θεῖες ἐνέργειες, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ μᾶς μὲ τὴν ἀποχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὸν Κυριακάτικο ἐκκλησιασμὸ σπεύσαμε νὰ διακηρύξουμε τὴν αἴρεση τοῦ Βαρλαάμ ποὺ ἀρνοῦνταν τὴν μετοχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὶς ἄκτιστες θεῖες ἐνέργειες.

Ὁ ἱερέας εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, ἀσθενής, πεπτωκώς, ἀγωνιζόμενος γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση τοῦ ἔσω ἀνθρώπου. Ὁ ἱερέας «ἐνδεδυμένος τὴν τῆς ἱερωσύνης χάριν» μετέχει καὶ μεταδίδει τὶς ἄκτιστες Θεῖες ἐνέργειες

διὰ τῆς ἱερωσύνης καὶ ὄχι διὰ τοῦ προσωπικοῦ τοῦ ἀγιασμοῦ. Ὅταν ὑπάρχει καὶ αὐτός, φυσικά, ἔχει διπλὴ τὴν χάρη. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀσπαζόμαστε τὰ χέρια τῶν ἱερέων, μετέχουμε τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ λαμβάνουμε τὴν Θεῖα Χάρη ἐν τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς εὐλαβείας μας.

Ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Ὅσιος Παῖσιος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀσπαζόταν μὲ πολὺ πόθο τὰ χέρια τοῦ ἱερουργήσαντος ἱερέως μετὰ τὴν Θεῖα Λειτουργία, «ὁ ἱερέας δὲν ἔχει δικὰ του χέρια». Ἄν πιστεύουμε ὅτι μπορεῖ ὁ ἱερέας νὰ μεταδώσει ἀσθένειες ἀρνούμαστε τὴν χάρη τῆς ἱερωσύνης, ἀρνούμαστε τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅταν ἀμφιβάλλουμε ἢ ἀρνούμαστε μὲ τὶς πράξεις μας τὶς ἄκτιστες Θεῖες ἐνέργειες, κατασκευάζουμε ἓναν ἄλλο Θεὸ καὶ ἀρνούμαστε τὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεὸ.

3. Τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς: Ὁ ναὸς εἶναι Σῶμα τοῦ ζῶντος Θεοῦ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φέρει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου σώματος. Καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι μόνον συμβολικόν. Μέσα στὴν Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία οἱ τύποι καὶ τὰ σύμβολα περιέχουν τὴν οὐσία, τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς τηροῦμε. Καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι πὼς ὁ ἱερὸς ναὸς ὡς Σῶμα Χριστοῦ δὲν δύναται νὰ εἶναι χῶρος μετάδοσης ἀσθενειῶν. Ἄν ἀμφιβάλλουμε γι' αὐτό, ἀμφιβάλλουμε γιὰ τὸ ἐὰν ὑπάρχει ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ. Ἐξομοιώνουμε τὸν Ναὸ μὲ μία αἴθουσα συναθροίσεων.

Ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ συζήτηση καταλήγει σ' ἓναν ἔντονον προβληματισμὸ καὶ σὲ μίαν λυπηρὴ διαπίστωση. Ὁ προβληματισμὸς εἶναι: πιστεύουμε ὄντως στὸν Θεό; Καὶ ἂν ναί, σὲ ποιὸν Θεό; Σὲ ἓναν βαρλααμιτικὸ Θεὸ ποὺ κατασκευάζει ἡ λογικὴ μας; Σὲ ἓναν Θεὸ στὸν ὁποῖο ἀναγνωρίζουμε τόση χάρη, ὅση χωρᾶ τὸ φτωχὸ μυαλό μας;

Ἡ πικρὴ διαπίστωση εἶναι ὅτι χωρὶς νὰ τὸ καταλαβαίνουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ θέλουμε, βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Πάσχουμε ἀπὸ αἰρετικὸ φρόνημα, ἐνῶ διακηρύσσουμε τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μας. Βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ κινδυνεύουμε νὰ μὴν συγχωρεθοῦμε οὔτε ἐδῶ οὔτε αἰῶνια ἀμφισβητώντας τὴν χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Ὅταν φοβόμαστε νὰ προσκυνήσουμε τὶς ἱερεῖς εἰκόνες, νὰ ἀσπασθοῦμε τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερέως, νὰ βρεθοῦμε μέσα στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ, ἀρνούμαστε στὴν



πράξη την σωστική και αγιαστική Χάρη του Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Θεωρούμε ὅτι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μεταδώσει κάτι «κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον» καὶ αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ μεγίστη βλασφημία.

Ἄς ὁμολογήσουμε καὶ μὲ τὶς πράξεις μας, ὅπως ὁμολογήσαμε μὲ τὰ χεῖλιά μας, ὅτι πιστεύουμε στὴν ἔνοικοῦσα, στὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες, στοὺς ἱερεῖς, στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς, Θεία Χάρη. Ἡ μετοχή μας σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν Χάρη εἶναι ἐξάρτηση τῆς δικῆς μας πίστεως. Ὅσο πιστεύουμε, τόση Χάρη λαμβάνουμε. Ἡ ὑπαρξὴ της ὁμως δὲν ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὴν δική μας πίστη. Ὁ Θεός, «ὁ Ὦν καὶ ὁ Ἦν καὶ ὁ Ἐρχόμενος» δὲν καταργεῖται, ἐὰν ἐμεῖς δὲν Τὸν πιστεύουμε.

Κατὰ τὰ ἀνωτέρω, τὴν παύση τῶν ἱεροπραξιῶν μὲ νόμο τῆς Πολιτείας, τὴν δεχόμεστε ὡς Θεία παιδαγωγία, διότι «ἡμάρτομεν, ἠνομήσαμεν, ἠδικήσαμεν, οὐδὲ συντηρήσαμεν, οὐδὲ ἐποιήσαμεν καθὼς ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν» ὁ Κύριος. Δὲν ἀποδεχόμεστε ὁμως τὴν αἰτιολόγηση τῆς Πολιτείας, ὅτι ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος μετάδοσης τῆς ἀσθένειας μέσῳ τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἱερουργουμένων μυστηρίων.

Ἦδη Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν καὶ πάσης Ἑλλάδος κ. Ιερώνυμος καὶ ἡ Ἱερὰ Σύνοδος ἔστειλαν ἐπιστολὴ στὴν Ὑπουργὸ Παιδείας καὶ Θρησκευμάτων καὶ τὸν Γενικὸ Γραμματέα Θρησκευμάτων ἀναφορικὰ μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα καὶ βάζουν τὰ πράγματα στὴν θέση τους. Ἐν ὀλίγοις, εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ μολυνθοῦμε ἢ νὰ κολλήσουμε ὁποιαδήποτε ἀσθένεια ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη, τὶς Ἁγίες εἰκόνες, τὸν ἀσπασμὸ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς.

Ἄν πιστεύουμε ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ στὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔνοικοῦσα θεία Χάρη, θὰ ἔχουμε καὶ πλοῦσια τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ μας. Ἐὰν τὴν ἀρνούμαστε ἢ ἀμφιβάλουμε, πάσχουμε τὴν αἴρεση τοῦ Βαβυλῶν καὶ τῶν εἰκονομάχων. Ἀρνούμαστε τὸν Θεὸ καὶ βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Διὰ τοῦτο...

Στῶμεν καλῶς!

Πιστεύσωμεν ἀπλῶς καὶ ὀρθῶς, καὶ ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρός, καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἔσται πάντοτε μετὰ πάντων ἡμῶν. Ἀμήν.



Ο ὄνειδισμοὶ ἀποπλύνουν τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη. Σὲ αὐτὸ ἂς σὲ πείση καὶ ἡ σχετικὴ φράση, ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῖ ὁ λαός. Μερικοὶ κοσμικοὶ δηλαδὴ ὅταν ἐξυβρίσουν κάποιον κατὰ πρόσωπον, λέγουν μὲ καύχηση: «Τὸν τάδε τὸν ἔλουσα» (ἐννοεῖ μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶπε). Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀληθινόν.

Ἄγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης

«Θανάτου Ἐορτάζομεν Νέκρωσιν...»

Πρ. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός (+2019), Κυριακάτικη Ἐλευθεροτυπία, 17 Ἀπριλίου 2001.

Μὲ τὰ ἀπαισιότερα συναισθήματα ἀντιμετωπίζεται **Μ**σνήθως ὁ θάνατος. Ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο τόσο καυχόμεστε, δὲν μᾶς ἔχει ἐξοικειώσει μὲ τὴν μεγαλύτερη καὶ τραγικότερη πραγματικότητα στὴ ζωὴ μας, τὸν θάνατο. Οὔτε μᾶς ἔχει συμφιλιώσει μαζί του. Γι' αὐτὸ λείπει στὴ σημερινὴ κοινωνία μία ρεαλιστικὴ φιλοσοφία τοῦ θανάτου. Βέβαια, σ' αὐτὸ συντρέχουν διάφοροι λόγοι. Ὁ ὀλιγόπιστος φοβᾶται τὸν θάνατο, διότι βλέπει τὴν ἀνετομιότητά του νὰ τὸν ὑποδεχθεῖ. Ὁ ἄπιστος ἢ ἄθεος, ποὺ στηριζεῖ ὅλες τὶς ἐλπίδες του στὸν κόσμο αὐτό, βλέπει τὸν θάνατο σὰν καταστροφὴ. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀποφεύγει νὰ μιλεῖ γιὰ τὸν θάνατο ἢ χλευάζει τὸν θάνατο, ἀλλὰ στὸ βάθος τὸν φοβᾶται. Ὅπως τὸν φοβοῦνται οἱ οἰκονομικὰ εὐρωστοί, διότι θὰ τοὺς κάμει νὰ χάσουν ὅσα ἔχουν, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ προλετάριοι τοῦ κόσμου μας, μολονότι διατείνονται, ὅτι βλέπουν τὸν θάνατο σὰν σωτηρία. Διότι γι' αὐτούς, κυρίως, ἰσχύει ὁ λόγος τοῦ Δ. Σολωμοῦ: «Γλυκεῖα ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ὁ θάνατος μαυρίλα».

Γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανό, ὁμως, καὶ μάλιστα τὸν Πατερικό, δηλαδὴ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο, τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου ἔχει λυθεῖ. Ἡ Σφίγγα τοῦ θανάτου διέκοψε τὴ σιωπὴ της. Τὸ αἴνιγμα, ποὺ τόσο ἀπασχόλησε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο πνεῦμα καὶ μόνον ἡ σωκρατικὴ-πλατωνικὴ μεγαλοφυΐα μπόρεσε νὰ ψαύσει στὸν «Φαίδρο», ἔχει πιά ἐξιχνιαστῆ καὶ ἀπομυθευθεῖ. Μένει, βέβαια, καὶ γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ ὁ θάνατος «μυστήριο». «Ὦντως φοβερῶτατον τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήριο»—ψάλλουμε στὴ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία.

Τὸ μυστήριο ὁμως δὲν ἔγκειται στὴν ὑπαρξὴ του, ἀλλὰ στὶς συνέπειές του: «*Πῶς ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος βιαίως χωρίζεται...*»! Ἡ συμμετοχὴ τοῦ πιστοῦ στὸ Πάθος καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ βοηθᾶ στὴν κατανόηση τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου.

Ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ δημιούργησε τὰ πάντα «*ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων*» (ἀπὸ τὸ μηδὲν) καὶ μᾶς ἔφερε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνυπαρξία στὴν ὑπαρξὴ. Ὁ θάνατος, ἐξάλλου, εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν θέληση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δὲν εἶναι φυσικὴ κατάσταση, ἀλλὰ συνδέεται μὲ τὸ τραγικὸ γεγονός τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τῆς ἀστοχίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ μένει στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Θεοῦ. «*Ὁ Θεὸς θάνατον οὐκ ἐποίησεν*», «*φθόνῳ διαβόλου εἰσηλθεν θάνατος εἰς τὸν κόσμον*». Ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέτρεψε τὸν θάνατό μας, «*ἵνα μὴ τὸ κακὸν ἀθάνατον γένηται*».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θεολογικὴ ἐρμηνεία τοῦ θανάτου ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους μας, τοὺς ἀληθινοὺς θεολόγους. Ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὡς πτωτικὸ γεγονός, ἀδρανοποίησε καὶ νέκρωσε, τελικὰ, τὴν ζωὴ μας, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἐνοίκηση

του Θεού στην καρδιά μας, τὸ κέντρο τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας. Αὐτὸς ὁ «χωρισμὸς» ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκτιστη χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ πνευματικὸς θάνατος, ποὺ προκάλεσε καὶ τὸν σωματικὸ-βιολογικὸ θάνατό μας. Στὸν πνευματικὸ θάνατο πρέπει νὰ ζητηθεῖ ἡ αἰτία καὶ τοῦ σωματικοῦ θανάτου. Θρήνος, λοιπόν, κατὰ τὴν κήδευση κάποιου ἀγαπητοῦ μας προσώπου («*Θρηνώ καὶ ὀδύρομαι, ὅταν ἐννοήσω τὸν θάνατον...*», ψάλλουμε) δὲν συνδέεται μὲ τὸν πρόσκαιρο χωρισμὸ μας, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν αἰτία ποὺ προκάλεσε τὸν θάνατό μας, τὴν ἁμαρτία.

Ὁ σωματικὸς θάνατος εἶναι διάσπαση τῆς ἁρμονικῆς σχέσης καὶ συλλειτουργίας ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, ὡς τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ ἀνθρώπινη σάρκα νεκρώνεται, φθείρεται καί, ἐπιστρέφοντας στὸ χῶμα, διαλύεται. Ἡ ψυχὴ ὅμως δὲν φθείρεται, οὔτε διαλύεται, διότι ὁ Θεὸς τὴν δημιούργησε πνευματικῆ. Περιμένει τὸ «*κέλευσμα*» (παράγγελμα) τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ (Α΄ Θεσς. 4:16), γιὰ νὰ ξαναενωθεῖ μὲ τὸ ἀναστημένο σῶμα καὶ νὰ ζήσει αἰώνια μαζί Του, σὲ μίαν ἄλλη ζωὴ, ποὺ θὰ εἶναι ὅμως αἰώνια συνέχεια τῆς γήινης ὑπαρξῆς μας. Ὁ «*νόμος τῆς ἀφθαρσίας*» ἰσχύει ἀπόλυτα στὸ δημιουργικὸ ἔργο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τίποτε δὲν χάνεται ἀπὸ αὐτό. Γι' αὐτὸ κάθε στιγμῆς τῆς παρούσας ζωῆς ἔχει γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ σωτηριολογικὴ σημασία, διότι ἀπὸ τὸν τρόπο ποὺ τὴ ζοῦμε κρίνεται ἡ σωτηρία μας, ἡ κατάστασή μας στὴ μετὰ θάνατον ὑπαρξή μας (βλ. Β΄ Κορ. 6:7).

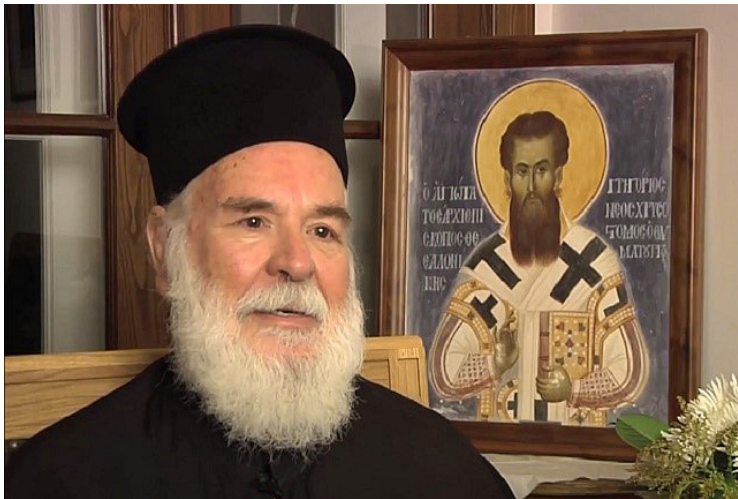
Ὁ Χριστὸς, μὲ ὅλο τὸ σωτήριο ἔργο Του, ἐπιφέρει τὴν πλήρη ἄρση ὅλων τῶν συνεπειῶν τῆς πτώσης. Συντρίβει τὴν ἁμαρτία πρῶτα στὴ δική Του ἀναμάρτητη φύση, ποὺ δὲν νικιέται ἀπὸ τὴ θανατηφόρο δύναμη τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ Του, στὸν ὁποῖο θανάτωσε τὴν δική μας ἁμαρτία, τὴν ἁμαρτία ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου (Ἰω. 1:29). Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἐνεργεῖ τιμωρητικά, ὅπως ἀπαιτοῦσε ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νόμος, ἀλλὰ ὡς Σωτήρας καὶ Ἀπελευθερωτῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπὸ τὴ δουλεία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ὅπως ἐπιβάλλει ὁ δικὸς Του νόμος. Δὲν τιμωρεῖ, συνεπῶς, τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, ὅπως συνέβη μὲ τὸν κατακλυσμὸ στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη (Γεν. κεφ. 8), ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ὅπως ὁ καλὸς γιατρὸς δὲν ζητεῖ τὸν θάνατο τοῦ ἀσθενοῦς, ἀλλὰ τῆς νόσου. Γι' αὐτὸ στὴ Θεία Λειτουργία ὀνομάζεται ὁ Χριστὸς «*ίατρος τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων ἡμῶν*».

Ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ κορύφωση τῆς νίκης Του πάνω στὴν ἁμαρτία μας καὶ γι' αὐτὸ νοσηματοδοτεῖ ὅλη τὴν ὑπαρξή μας. Ἐνῶ ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου βαδίζει πρὸς ἓνα τέλος, ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὸ φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἀποδεικνύεται χωρὶς τέλος. Διότι στὸ ὄριο ἱστορίας καὶ μεταίστευσης βρίσκεται ὁ Νικητὴς τοῦ Θανάτου, ὁ Χριστὸς, ὁ Ὁποῖος «*θανάτῳ ἐπάτησε τὸν Θάνατον*» καὶ μεις «*Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν*», τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Θανάτου.

Ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ νίκη πάνω στὸν Θάνατο. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὴν σχέση μας μὲ τὸν Χριστό, ὁ θάνατος γίνεται φοβερὸς καὶ ἀδυσώπητος. Μὲ τὸν ἀναστάντα Χριστὸ ὁ Θάνατος ἀπομυθοποιεῖται. Καταλύεται ἡ παντοδυναμία του (Ἐβρ. 2:14). Ὁ Χριστὸς κατήγγησε τὸ φόβητρο τοῦ θανάτου, ὥστε Χριστιανικὰ ὁ θάνατος νὰ νοεῖται ὡς ἡ ἀληθινὴ γέννηση καὶ ἀναμονὴ τῆς κοινῆς ἀνάστασης. Κατανοεῖται, ἔτσι, τὸ παράδοξο: **Ἐνῶ ὁ «κόσμος» γιορτάζει γενέθλια, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πανηγυρίζουμε τὴν «μνήμην», τὴν κοίμηση, τῶν Ἁγίων μας.** Διότι ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ τὸν αὐθεντικὰ Χριστιανὸ εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ γέννησή μας («*γενέθλιος ἡμέρα*») στὴν ἀληθινὴ ζωὴ.

Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς, ὅμως, ζεῖ τις περιέργες γιὰ τὸν χωρὶς Θεὸ πραγματικότητας, μετέχοντας στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος. Δὲν ἀρκεῖ γι' αὐτὸ τὸ τυπικὸ βάπτισμα. Χρειάζεται μετοχὴ στὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ καὶ ὑπαρξή. Στὰ ὅρια αὐτῆς τῆς ζωῆς ὁ πιστὸς πεθαίνει κάθε στιγμῆς τῆς ζωῆς του, νεκρώνεται, μὲ τὴν ἄσκηση καὶ τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, γιὰ νὰ ζήσει μέσα στὴ Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ «*αἰώνιος ζωὴ*». Γι' αὐτὸ μας διδάσκουν οἱ μοναχοὶ μας, οἱ αὐθεντικοὶ πιστοί: «*Ἐὰν πεθάνεις, πρὶν πεθάνεις, δὲν θὰ πεθάνεις, ὅταν πεθάνεις!*»

Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ «*ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, κὰν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται*» (Ἰω. 11:25) σημαίνει, ὅτι ἡ μέσῳ τοῦ βαπτίσματος καὶ τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς ἐνωσὴ μας μαζί Του, μᾶς συνδέει καὶ πάλι μὲ τὴν γεννήτρια τῆς ζωῆς, τὴν πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ εἶναι Αὐτὸς. Μᾶς ἐπαναφέρει στὴν κοινωνία καὶ σχέση μὲ τὸν Θεό, ποὺ ζωοποιεῖ τὸν θάνατό μας καὶ μεταμορφώνει σὲ Ζωὴ δική Του τὸν καθημερινὸ θάνατό μας. Χωρὶς νὰ εἶναι, συνεπῶς, κανεὶς ζωντανὸ μέλος τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ζήσει ἀληθινὰ, νὰ μετέχει



της ζωής του Χριστού. Ὁ ἀπλῶς βαπτισμένος ἔχει τις δυνατότητες καὶ προϋποθέσεις μετοχής σ' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι μετέχει σ' αὐτήν, ἂν δὲν μετέχει στὴν ἄσκηση καὶ τὴν ἐμπειρία τῶν ἁγίων μυστηρίων. «*Ὁὐχ ὅτι ἀπαξ γεγενήμεθα τοῦ σώματος*», λέγει ὁ Ἱ. Χρυσόστομος. Δὲν τελειώνουν, δηλαδή, ὅλα ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν σωτηρία, μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα. Μὲ αὐτὸ ἀρχίζουν. Τὸ βάπτισμα εἶναι τὸ ἀνοιγμα τῆς πύλης, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ διαβεῖ τὴν πύλη κανεὶς καὶ νὰ ζήσει ἐν Χριστῷ.

Οἱ Ἅγιοί μας, μὲ τὰ ἀκέραια καὶ ἄφθαρτα λείψανά τους (π.χ. Ἅγιος Σπυρίδων ἢ ὁ Ἅγιος Γεράσιμος) βεβαιώνουν τὴν υπέρβαση τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τῶν συνεπειῶν του (φθορᾶς) ἤδη μέσα στὴ ζωὴ μας αὐτή, ἀλλὰ καὶ δίνουν μαρτυρία τῆς αἰωνιότητος μέσα στὴν ἱστορία. Βλέποντας τοὺς Ἅγίους μας ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς (καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν ἐμπειρία ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἑπτανήσιοι ἀπὸ μικρὰ παιδιὰ), οἰκοδομεῖ τὴν δική του φιλοσοφία γιὰ τὸν θάνατο. Ἡ νίκη τοῦ Χριστοῦ δίνει τὴν δύναμη, ὥστε νὰ μὴ βλέπει ὁ πιστὸς τὸν θάνατο, ὅπως «*οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα*» (Α΄ Θεσσ. 4:14), ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ νικᾷ κάθε μορφὴ θανάτου (ἀποτυχίες, ἀρρώστιες, παθήματα). Διότι δὲν δίνει ἀπόλυτο χαρακτήρα στὴ ζωὴ αὐτή. Δὲν ἦταν οὔτε μαζοχιστὴς, οὔτε πεισιθάνατος ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὅταν ἔλεγε: «*τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχω εἰς τὸ ἀναλύσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι*» («θέλω νὰ πεθάνω καὶ νὰ εἶμαι μὲ τὸν Χριστό»). Φιλ. 10:23).

Ὁ θάνατος εἶναι γιὰ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο πιστὸ «μετάβαση» στὴν ὄντως ζωὴ. Ἕνας ὕπνος, ποὺ περιμένει τὸ ξύπνημα στὴν ἀτελεύτητη αἰωνιότητα. Βέβαια, ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τοῦ τὴν φύση ἀθάνατος. Ἡ ἀθανασία εἶναι χάρισμα τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὡς πλάσμα Του. Ἀθάνατος εἶναι μόνον ὁ ἄκτιστος (ἀδημιούργητος) Θεὸς (Α΄ Τιμ. 6:15). Ἀθανασία, ἐξάλλου, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀπλὴ ἐπιβίωση ἀλλὰ ἡ μετοχὴ στὸν «Παράδεισο», στὴ χάρη ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει καὶ ἡ εὐχή μας «*αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη*». Νὰ μετέχει, δηλαδή, ὁ πιστὸς αἰώνια στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴ βασιλεία του.

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, μὲ ὅλη τὴν δομὴ της, προσφέρει στὸν πιστὸ τὴ δυνατότητα συνεχοῦς μετοχῆς στὸν θάνατο καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τὰ μυστήρια λ.χ. εἶναι συνεχῆς πραγμάτωση αὐτῆ τῆς δυνατότητας. Μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα πεθαίνει κανεὶς μὲ τὸν Χριστό (Ρωμ. 6:3). Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ πρῶτα βαπτιστήρια, οἱ ὁμαδικές «κολυμβήθρες» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, εἶχαν συνήθως τὸ σχῆμα σταυροῦ. Τὸ βαπτιστήριον (ἢ κολυμβήθρα) εἶναι ὁ τάφος τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἡ «μήτρα» τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναγεννήσεως. Γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι τελοῦμε τὸ βάπτισμα μὲ τριπλὴ κατάδυση καὶ ἀνάδυση καὶ ὄχι μὲ ῥαντισμὸ ἢ ἐπίχυση. Ζοῦμε αἰσθητὰ καὶ ὁρατὰ τὸν θάνατο καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασή μας.

Ἡ Μετάνοια ἢ Ἐξομολόγηση εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ θάνατος (τῆς ἁμαρτίας μας) καὶ ἀνάστασή μας στὴ νέα ζωὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος. Γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι τόσο ἀναγκαῖο αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον, ὅπως καὶ ἡ ὀλοκλήρωσή του, ἡ Θεία Εὐχαριστία, ἡ μετοχὴ στὴ νίκη καὶ τὴ δόξα τοῦ ἀναστημένου Χριστοῦ, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς, ὅπου μὲ τὴν Ἀνάληψή του ἀνέβασε τὴν ἀναγεννημένη φύση μας.

Ἄν καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα μυστήρια (Εὐχέλαιο, Γάμος, Ἱερωσύνη π.χ.), προσφέρουν ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἴδια δυνατότητα. Ὁ γάμος λ.χ. εἶναι ἐνσωμάτωση τῆς νέας ζωῆς τοῦ ζευγους στὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὥστε καὶ στὴν εἰδικὴ αὐτὴ ὄψη τῆς ζωῆς τους νὰ ζοῦν τὸ ἴδιο μυστήριον τοῦ θανάτου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἀναστάσεώς τους σὲ μία ζωὴ, στὴν ὁποία Κύριος εἶναι μόνον ὁ Χριστός. Γι' αὐτὸ—ἂν θέλουμε νὰ δοῦμε τὰ πράγματα στὴν ἀληθινὴ τους ὄψη—ὁ πολιτικὸς γάμος εἶναι μὲν «πολιτικῶς» νόμιμος, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξισωθεῖ μὲ τὸ μυστήριον, διότι πραγματοποιεῖ μὲν ἓνα «νομικὸν συνάλλαγμα», ἀλλὰ δὲν μᾶς εἰσάγει στὴ ζωὴ τῆς Θείας Χάρης.

Συχνά, ὅταν μᾶς ὑποβάλλεται τὸ ἐρώτημα, τί ἔχει νὰ προσφέρει ἡ Ἐκκλησία στὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς κάθε κοινωνικῆς δυσλειτουργίας, ἡ ἀπάντησή μου εἶναι μία: ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὡς σῶμα Χριστοῦ, δὲν μοιράζει ἀσπιρίνες στοὺς πονοκεφάλους τοῦ κόσμου. Εἰσάγει σὲ μία ζωὴ, ποὺ δίνει τὴν δυνατότητα στὸν πιστὸ ἄνθρωπο νὰ νικᾷ συνεχῶς τὸν κάθε θάνατό του καὶ νὰ ὁμολογεῖ ὅπως στὸν Ἀπ. Παῦλο: «*Ὡς ἀποθνήσκοντες καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν*», «*φαινόμεστε σὺν νὰ πεθαίνουμε, καὶ ὅμως ζοῦμε*». (Β΄ Κορ. 6:9).



Ὅταν ἔρθει μέσα μας ὁ Χριστός, τότε ζοῦμε μόνον τὸ καλὸ, τὴν ἀγάπη γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον. Τὸ κακό, ἡ ἁμαρτία, τὸ μίσος ἐξαφανίζονται μόνον τους, δὲν μποροῦν, δὲν ἔχουν θέση, νὰ μείνουν.

Νὰ μὴν ἐνδιαφέρεσαι ἂν σὲ ἀγαποῦν, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἐσὺ ἀγαπᾷς τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μόνον ἔτσι γεμίζει ἡ ψυχὴ.

Στὴν ψυχὴ, ποὺ ὅλος ὁ χῶρος της εἶναι κατελιημμένος ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μπεῖ καὶ νὰ κατοικήσει ὁ διάβολος, ὅσο κι ἂν προσπαθήσει, διότι δὲν χωράει, δὲν ὑπάρχει κενὴ θέση γι' αὐτόν.

Ὁ σκοπὸς μας δὲν εἶναι νὰ καταδικάζουμε τὸ κακό, ἀλλὰ νὰ τὸ διορθώνουμε. Μὲ τὴν καταδικὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ νὰ χαθεῖ, μὲ τὴν κατανόηση καὶ βοήθεια θὰ σωθεῖ.

Ὁσίου Πορφυρίου Κουσοκαλυβίτου (+1991)

Μία Είναι ή Λύσις Διά τὸν Ἴόν...

Τοῦ κ. Παύλου Τρακάδα, θεολόγου.

Δὲν ἤθελον πολὺ οἱ χριστιανομάχοι, διὰ νὰ «ξεσπαθώσουν» κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ὡς «δῶρον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ» ἦλθεν εἰς αὐτοὺς ὅτι τὸν Ἴον μετέφεραν εἰς τὴν χώραν μας προσκυνητὰ τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων. Ὁ Θεὸς «ὡς ἠθέλησεν οὕτως καὶ ἐποίησεν», ὥστε οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ταγοὶ νὰ ἀναγκασθοῦν νὰ ἀναλάβουν τὰς εὐθύναις των οἱ δὲ ἐκκλησιομάχοι νὰ ἐκμανοῦν ἕως ὅτου συντριβοῦν.

Πράγματι δὲν ἀπέμειναν παρὰ ἐλάχιστοι ἐκ τῶν δημοσιογράφων ποὺ κάτι ἐψιθύρισαν ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἔναντι τῶν ὀρδῶν τῶν βαλλόντων κατὰ τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας ὡς μολυσματικοῦ μέσου! Ἡ προπαγάνδα ἀντέστρεψε τοὺς ὅρους καὶ κίνδυνος πλέον εἶναι ὄχι ὁ ἴος, ἀλλὰ ὁ Χριστός! Δὲν ἔλειψαν οἱ ποταποὶ χαρακτηρισμοὶ περὶ «ἀνοησιῶν», «δοξασιῶν», «σκοταδισμού» καὶ πλῆθος ἄλλων ποὺ πάντοτε ἐπιστρατεύονται ἀπὸ τοὺς «καλλιεργημένους», ποὺ δῆθεν αὐτοὶ θεωροῦν τὴν συμπόνια πρὸς τοὺς συνανθρώπους των ἀποκλειστικῶν των προνόμιον. Ἐπεστράτευσαν μάλιστα κάθε «αὐθεντίαν», ποὺ καθυποβάλλει τὸν λαόν, ἀποτεινόμενοι ἕως καὶ εἰς Καθηγητὴν τοῦ MIT, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀδιστάκτως εἶπε κατὰ λέξιν «μὴ λάβετε τὴν Θεϊαν Κοινωνία!» Βλέπετε ρίπτουν τὸν «λίθον τοῦ ἀναθέματος» κατὰ τῆς «μεταφυσικῆς αὐθεντίας», τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλὰ μετέρχονται τὸν ἴδιον «μηχανισμόν», διὰ νὰ τὴν ἀντικαταστήσουν μὲ τὴν «ἐπιστημονικὴν» τάχα ἄποψιν, ἀθεϊστικὴν εἰς τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς.

Τελικῶς τὸ σῶμα μας δὲν μᾶς ἀνήκει!

Νὰ φριξὴ κανεὶς; Καλύτερα νὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνη κανεὶς τὰ Θεϊκὰ λόγια ὁσάκις ἡ Ἐκκλησία «σταυρώνεται» ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ βλέπουν τοὺς «ἰδεολογικούς» των ἀντιπάλους εἰς τὸ ἰκρίωμα: «**Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσιν**». Εἶναι τόσον ἀφελεῖς; Εἶναι δυνατὸν ἓνας ἴος νὰ κλονίσῃ τὴν πίστιν; Προφανῶς οἱ ἴδιοι εἶναι ποὺ τρέμουν, διότι ὅταν ἐγγίξῃ ὁ θάνατος, εἰς μορφὴν ἰοῦ, τότε ὁ μόνος τρόπος διὰ νὰ καθησυχάσουν τὸν ἑαυτὸν τους ὅτι ἡ ἀπιστία τους εἶναι ἡ μόνη βεβαιότητα ποὺ τοὺς ἀπέμεινε, ἡ μόνη λύσις εἶναι νὰ ἀποδείξουν ὅτι κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν λαμβάνει τὴν πίστιν του σοβαρὰ καὶ μόνον αὐτοὶ εἶναι... συνεπεῖς μὲ τὴν ἀπιστίαν τους! Δὲν πρόκειται διὰ δοκιμασίαν τῆς πίστεώς μας ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀπιστίας τῶν πολλῶν, τῶν ὁποίων «ψύχεται ἡ ἀγάπη».

Ἀντιλαμβάνονται ὅμως ὅτι ἤδη ἔχουν ἠττηθῆ, διότι ἡ πίστις τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ὀδηγεῖ αὐτὸν ἕως τὸ «ἀπαρνησάτω ἑαυτὸν». Αὐτὸ σημαίνει νὰ εἶμαι Χριστιανός; Ἄν ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία μετέδιδεν ἀσθενείας (πρᾶγμα βεβαίως ψευδές), τότε καὶ ἐγὼ ποὺ κοινωνῶ

συνειδητὰ θέλω νὰ συμπάσχω μὲ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, ἄς ἀρρωστήσω καὶ ἐγώ, ἄς συσταυρωθῶ! Ὅλοι αὐτοὶ κόπτονται διὰ τὸν ἀλτρουισμόν, κόπτονται, ἀλλὰ ὅταν τοὺς ὑποδεικνύῃ τὴν μεγαλυτέραν πρᾶξιν ἀλληλεγγύης, τὴν Θεϊαν Μετάληψιν, τὴν ἀπορρίπτουν, προτιμοῦν τὴν ἀτομικὴν τους ἐξασφάλισιν, νὰ προφυλάξουν τὸν ἑαυτὸν τους. Ὅμως ὁ κορωνοῖδς ἦλθε, διὰ νὰ πλήξῃ τὸ θεμέλιον τῆς αὐτοδιασφαλίσεως: ἔγινεν ὁ διαπρύσιος κήρυξ ὅτι τελικὰ τὸ σῶμα μας δὲν μᾶς ἀνήκει! Εἰς τὸ ἰδικὸν τους δόγμα, ποὺ μὲ ἀλαζονείαν τὸ προηγούμενον διάστημα ἐπέβαλαν μὲ θρησκευτικὴν προσήλωσιν, ἀπήντησεν ἡ ἐκχώρησις τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ ἔλθῃ αὐτὸς ὁ ξενιστής, ποὺ κατοικεῖ εἰς τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς νὰ ἐρωτήσῃ κανένα διὰ δικαίωμα παραμονῆς.

Τοιουτοτρόπως εἰς τὴν ἔκτρωσιν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἀποτέφρωσιν ἦλθε νὰ προστεθῇ καὶ ἓνας νέος μεταφυσικὸς μηδενισμὸς καὶ μία ἀκόμη ἀπαξίωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: ἡ ἀπαίτησις νὰ τεθοῦν ἐκποδῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς οἱ ἠλικιωμένοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ μόνη τους παρηγοριά.

Πρέπει νὰ κλείσουν οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοί;

«Νὰ κλείσουν οἱ Ἐκκλησίες, νὰ κλείσουν οἱ Ἐκκλησίες», εἶναι μόνιμη ἐπωδὸς εἰς τὰ χεῖλη των. Ἄδυνατοῦν νὰ ἐννοήσουν ὅτι τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς τοὺς ἔκτισε καὶ τοὺς ἀνοίγει ὁ εὐλαβῆς κόσμος, ὄχι ἡ Διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία ἢ ἡ Πολιτεία. Οἰοσδήποτε νόμος δὲν δύναται νὰ ὑπερνικήσῃ τὴν θέλησιν τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι γεγονός διὰ χιλιάδας νόμους ποὺ ἐθεσπίσθησαν, ἀλλὰ κατηργήθησαν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολίτας. Οὔτε ἡ ἰδία ἡ Διοίκησις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν θὰ κατορθώσῃ νὰ ἐπιβάλλῃ τοιαύτην ἀπόφασιν. Μήπως καὶ ὁ Πρωθυπουργὸς ποὺ τὸ ζητεῖ, θὰ κοινωνήσῃ τὴν Κυριακὴν; Χωρὶς Θεϊαν Κοινωνίαν τότε θὰ μείνωμεν ἀπροστάτευτοι, εἶναι ὡσὰν νὰ κλείνουν τὰ νοσοκομεῖα τῆς χώρας.

Δὲν ἐδόξασε κανεὶς τὸν Θεὸν νὰ εἶπῃ: Ἐπιτέλους μίαν Σαρακοστήν κλεισμένοι εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν μας καὶ ὄχι εἰς τὰ καπηλεῖα. Ἐσταμάτησαν καὶ τὰ λαμπρὰ συλλεῖτουργα τῶν Ἐπισκόπων ποὺ ἐγίνοντο διὰ ἀσημάντους ἀφορμάς. Κατάνυξις! Ἐνας ἴος ἔφερεν εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς κοσμικούς. Ἐπαυσαν τὰ δαμονικὰ καρναβάλια ποὺ ὠδήγουν εἰς τὰ νοσοκομεῖα διὰ πλύσεις στομάχου ἢ διὰ ἀμβλώσεις. Αἱ μητέρες ἔλαβαν ἄδειαν καὶ καὶ τοὺς ἐδόθη ἡ εὐκαιρία νὰ ἀσχοληθοῦν μὲ τὰ παιδιὰ τους εἰς τὸ σπῆτι, ἂν καὶ κάποιαι εἶναι ἀμήχαναι διὰ τὸ τί νὰ τὰ κάνουν!

Δὲν εἴμεθα τόσο «ἀνάληγοι», διὰ νὰ μὴ ἀντιλαμβανώμεθα ὅτι ἐδημιουργήθησαν προβλήματα καὶ ὑπῆρξαν καὶ ἀνθρώπιναι ἀπώλειαι. Ἴσως ὅμως ἦτο καιρὸς νὰ ἀναθεωρήσωμεν τὴν ζωὴν μας. Χρειαζόμεθα δρακόντεια μέτρα ποὺ ἀποπνέουν

φόβον, διὰ νὰ συνέλθωμεν; Λόγος μετανοίας ἠκούσθη; Λόγος ἐλπίδος; Ἡ μόνον ὑγειονομικαὶ συστάσεις ἐντὸς τῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν;

Πάντως τίποτε ἀπὸ αὐτὰ δὲν θὰ ἀφυπνίσῃ τὸν κόσμον ἂν οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοὶ μείνουν κλειστοί. Μᾶς εἶναι ἄχρηστος ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἂν δὲν λειτουργῇ καὶ θὰ εἶναι ἐσφαλμένη μία παρομοία ἀπόφασις. Πόσον θὰ μείνουν κλειστοὶ οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοί; Εἶναι δυνατὸν ἡ ΔΙΣ νὰ ἀποφασίσῃ δι' ὅλην τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν; Ἐρωτήματα ποὺ ὀδηγοῦν μόνον εἰς αὐτοπαγίδευσιν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Μία κοινωνία ποὺ θέτει εἰς τὸ περιθώριον τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους (ιερεῖς) καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους (ἡλικιωμένους) δὲν θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ὀνομάζεται κοινωνία, ἀλλὰ ζούγκλα! Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ κοινωνικὴ τους εὐαισθησία; «Ἀπομονώστε τοὺς γέρους, γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσουν»; Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς προτιμοῦν νὰ πεθάνουν, παρὰ νὰ ἐγκαταλειφθοῦν μόνοι! Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ πραγματικὸς ρατσισμός! Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ «ἀρία» λογικὴ, ποὺ εὐρέθῃ νὰ γίνεται μὲ εὐσχημον τρόπον σύνθημα καὶ νεωτεριστῶν οἰκουμενιστῶν θεολόγων.

Λύσεις Ἀπιστίας...

Κατάπληξιν προεκάλεσαν αἱ ἀπόψεις τοῦ Καθηγητοῦ τῆς Δογματικῆς κ. Χρ. Σταμούλη, τοῦ θεολόγου κ. Π. Ἀνδριοπούλου καὶ τοῦ ἐλεῶ Θεοῦ δημοσιογράφου κ. Σωτ. Τζούμα, οἱ ὁποῖοι

πρότειναν οὔτε ὀλίγον οὔτε πολὺ νὰ κοινωνοῦν χώρα οἱ ἀσθενεῖς, μὲ ἄλλα σκευὴ καὶ μὲ Θεία Κοινωνία, ποὺ θὰ τὴν ἔρριπταν ἔπειτα εἰς τὰ ἀπορρίμματα!

Ἡ πρότασίς τους δὲν ἦτο παρὰ μία διαστρεβλωσίς τῶν σχολίων τοῦ Ἁγ. Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου. Ὁ δὲ κ. Ἀνδριόπουλος ἐπεκαλέσθη ἕως καὶ τὴν ἀποξήρασιν τοῦ «Ἄμνοῦ», διὰ νὰ καταδείξῃ ὅτι αὐτὸς φέρει μικρόβια! Τί ἐπερίμενε; Νὰ εἶναι ἄφθαρτος ὁ Ἅγιος Ἄρτος, ὥστε νὰ μὴ δυνάμεθα νὰ τὸν μεταλάβωμεν, καθὼς δὲν θὰ διελύετο ἀπὸ τὰ πεπτικά ὑγρά; Ἐλησμόνησε τώρα ὅτι χρόνια τὴν Μεγάλῃ Πέμπτῃ κοινωνοῦν ἑκατομμύρια κόσμοι, μετεδόθη κάποιος λοιμὸς;

Πολλὰ πράγματι αἱ εὐφάνταστοι ἰδέαι καὶ ἀπὸ Ἱεράρχας. Εἶδομεν περισσοτέρας ἀνακοινώσεις καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκείνας διὰ τὰς ἐκτρώσεις ἢ τὰ σύμφωνα συμβιώσεως... Ἄλλος εἶπε νὰ τελοῦμε τὴν Θεϊὰν Λειτουργίαν τοῦ Ἁγ. Ἰακώβου, ἐπειδὴ δίδονται ξεχωριστὰ τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα ἢ νὰ διανεμῶνται ἀτομικαὶ λαβίδες ἢ «κουταλάκια». Τότε διατί νὰ μὴ

τὸ πράττωμεν πάντοτε διὰ τὴν ἀποφυγὴν παντοίας νόσου ἀλλὰ καὶ βδελυγμίας;

Ἄλλος πρότεινε ὑπαιθροῦς Θεϊὰς Λειτουργίας. Διατί ἀπορρίπτει ὅμως τότε τὰς Λιτανείας, ποὺ αὐτὰς ἐφήρμοζον ἐν καιρῷ λοιμῶν οἱ βυζαντινοί; Ἄλλος συνεβούλευσε νὰ ψεκάζωμεν μὲ μέγαν ἁγιασμόν, λησμονῶν ὅτι ὀφείλομεν πρῶτα νὰ πράξωμεν ὅ,τιδήποτε εἶναι ἀνθρωπίνως δυνατόν καὶ ἔπειτα μὲ φειδῶ νὰ μεταχειρισθῶμεν κάθε μέσον ἁγιασμοῦ. Ἄλλος πάλιν προέτρεψε τοὺς κληρικοὺς νὰ διαμοιράσουν τὸ ποίμνιον εἰς παρεκκλήσια καὶ ἐξωκλήσια, ἄλλος ἐπέτρεψε νὰ τελοῦν δύο (διατί ὄχι καὶ τρεῖς;) Θεϊὰς Λειτουργίας οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὥστε ὁ κόσμος νὰ προσέρχεται μὲ «βάρδιες», ἐνῶ εἰς τὸν ἀντίποδα ἐκινήθη ὁ Μητροπολίτης ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔπαυσε τελείως τὰς ἀκολουθίας! Τελικῶς νὰ πολλαπλασιάσωμεν ἢ νὰ μειώσωμεν τὰς ἀκολουθίας, Σεβασμιώτατοι;

Ἡ τηλεόρασις ἀντικαθιστὰ τὴν εὐχαριστίαν;



Ἡ πλέον πονηρὰ πρότασις ἦτο ἡ παραμονὴ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ ἡ «παρακολούθησις» τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν ἀπὸ τὴν τηλεόρασις, τὸ ραδιόφωνον καὶ τὸ διαδίκτυον! Ὅποιος μάλιστα ἐπιθυμεῖ Θεϊὰν Κοινωνίαν θὰ ἔχῃ τὴν δυνατότητα... delivery! Πλήρης ἰδιωτικοποίησις τῆς

πίστεως μὲ τὴν εὐλογίαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας! Πῶς λοιπὸν νὰ μὴ ἀναμεταδώσουν πολιτικοὶ καὶ δημοσιογράφοι ὅτι ἡ πίστις εἶναι «ἀτομικὴ ὑπόθεσις» καὶ ὁ καθένας δύναται κατὰ μόναν νὰ τελέσῃ τὰ «θρησκευτικὰ του καθήκοντα»; Καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνάθροισις, τί εἶναι; Ὁμαδικὴ ἱκανοποίησις ἀτομικῶν ἀναγκῶν; Ἡ μήπως μᾶς ἀρκεῖ νὰ λειτουργῇ μόνος ὁ παπᾶς μὲ ἓνα ψάλτην, διότι εἰπώθη καὶ αὐτό.

«Τοσοῦτον χρόνον» εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἀκόμη κανεὶς δὲν ἔμαθε «τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα»; Μέσα εἰς ὅλην αὐτὴν τὴν κατάπτωσιν καὶ τραγικότητα ἔχει ἐνδιαφέρον ὅτι ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ κατέρρευσεν ὅλον τὸ οἰκοδόμημα τῆς λεγομένης εὐχαριστιακῆς ἐκκλησιολογίας. Ὅλοι ἐκεῖνοι (μαζὶ καὶ ἡ ΔΙΣ ποὺ εἰς τὸ ἀνακοινωθὲν ἔγραφε διὰ «ἄθλημα ἐλευθερίας») ἀπληρνήθησαν τὰς πομπώδεις θεωρίας των περὶ τῆς λατρευτικῆς συνάξεως ποὺ δοξολογεῖ τὸν Θεὸν κ.λπ., τὴν διέλυσαν καὶ τοὺς ἀπέμεινε μόνον τὸ «φάρμακον ἀθανασίας», ἡ θεραπευτικὴ διάστασις, ὄχι ὅμως ἀπαραιτήτως δι' ὅλους. Ἐφάνη καὶ ἡ ἀπιστία τινῶν.

Ὁ Σεβ. Ἀμερικῆς (ποῦ εἶπε νὰ κοινωνήσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀλλοδόξους) ὅπως καὶ ὁ Σεβ. Ἀλεξανδρουπόλεως ἄφησαν ἀνοικτὰ διάφορα ἐνδεχόμενα ἀκόμη καὶ διὰ τὴν Θεῖαν Κοινωνίαν.

Ἄραγε πιστεύομεν πραγματικὰ ἢ ἐπιχειροῦμεν νὰ καθησυχάσωμεν τὰς συνειδήσεις μας; Τελικὰ ὁ ἰὸς δὲν εἶναι τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως, ὅπως κάποιοι εἶπαν εἰς τὰ ραδιοφωνα ποῦ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι κατέχουν οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὰ ποῦ γνωρίζει μόνον ὁ «Πατὴρ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ», ἀλλὰ σίγουρα εἶναι ἀποκαλυπτικός.

Βεβαίως ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία δὲν μεταδίδει νοσήματα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλιν ὅσοι τὸ ἐπικαλοῦνται τὸ λέγουν ἀπλῶς, διὰ νὰ καθυποτάξουν τὸν ἐνδόμυχον φόβον ὅτι ἴσως κολλήσουν; Δι' αὐτὸ τὸ ψελλίζουν καὶ δὲν τὸ διατρανώνουν δημόσια; Ἡ μήπως πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἐπικαλούμεθα, διότι ὄντως πιστεύομεν ὅτι ἡ νίκη κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου εἶναι πρωτίστως νίκη κατὰ ὅσων ὁδηγοῦν εἰς τὸν αἰώνιον θάνατον; Διατί ὁμιλοῦμεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον μὲ τὴν ἀρνητικὴν πλευρὰν τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας π.χ. «δὲν κολλάει», «δὲν μεταδίδει», «δέν», «δέν», «δέν»... Δὲν ἔχουν ἀποτέλεσμα, διότι τελικῶς ὅσα θετικὰ καὶ νὰ εἴπωμεν, ἐὰν δὲν τὰ ἀποδειξώμεν εἰς τὴν πράξιν μὲ τὴν αὐτοθυσίαν μας, δὲν πείθουν κανένα, διότι δὲν ἔχουν οὔτε νόημα δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἰδίους.

Συνεχῶς πολλοὶ καὶ ἀνάμεσά τους Μητροπολίται προσκομίζουν ὡς ἀποδείξεις ἱστορικὰ παραδείγματα ἀπὸ περιστατικὰ ὅπου ἱερεῖς ἐκοινωνοῦν πιστοὺς μὲ λοιμώδεις νόσους, χωρὶς οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ ἀσθενοῦν. Καιρὸς νὰ τὸ κάνουν πρᾶξιν καὶ ὄχι νὰ δίδουν εἰς διακόνους ἢ ἄλλους ἱερεῖς νὰ καταλύουν τὸ ἱερὸν δισκοπότηρον. Δὲν ἠκούσαμεν οὔτε ἓνα Μητροπολίτην νὰ λέγῃ «ἐγὼ τακτικὰ πάω καὶ μεταλαμβάνω τοὺς ἀρρώστους!» Ὑπάρχουν μάλιστα καὶ Ἱεράρχαι ποῦ ἀποφεύγουν συστηματικὰ νὰ εὔρεθοῦν εἰς νοσοκομεῖα. Πῶς ὅμως νὰ κρατήσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν εἰς τὸ ὕψος τῆς, ὅταν οἱ ἴδιοι ἀντὶ νὰ προσφέρουν τὰς χεῖρας τους εἰς τὸν κόσμον διὰ χειροφίλημα προτείνουν τὸ ἐγκόλπιον; Ἐτεροι δὲ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ἔχουν εὐαισθησίαν καὶ τοὺς ἔχει ἀπαγορεύσει ὁ ἰατρὸς νὰ δίδουν τὸ χέρι τους. Ἄλλοι κυκλοφοροῦν συνεχῶς μὲ ἀπολυμαντικὸν ποῦ ἔχουν εἰς κάποιον θύλακα ἢ εἰς τὸ αὐτοκίνητον.

Αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ!

Ἡ πίστις κερδίζει καὶ τοὺς πλέον ἀντιθέους, ὅταν ἀπαστράπτῃ εἰς τὴν ταπεινώσιν τῶν κληρικῶν νὰ εὔρεθοῦν πλησίον τῶν πασχόντων καὶ ὄχι ὅταν συμβιβάζεται μὲ τὸν συρμόν, διὰ νὰ εἶναι πολιτικὰ ὀρθή. Ἐπομένως, **μία λύσις ὑπάρχει διὰ νὰ πιστεύσῃ ὁ κόσμος: νὰ μεταβῇ ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος καὶ οἱ Μητροπολίται εἰς τὰ νοσοκομεῖα καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουν ἀρρώστους.** Ἡ λύσις δὲν εἶναι νὰ ἀποφύγωμεν αὐτὴν ἢ τὴν ἄλλην ἀσθένειαν. Αὐταὶ οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως

θα ὑπάρχουν. Εἶναι βέβαιον ὅτι εἰς τὸ μέλλον θα ὑπάρξουν ἀκόμη ἰσχυρότεροι ἰοί. Τί θα πράξωμεν τότε; Θα κλείσωμεν μονίμως τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς; Θα θέσωμεν εἰς τὸ περιθώριον τὰς εὐπαθεῖς ομάδας; Ἡ μήπως ἀντ' αὐτῶν νὰ διακηρύξωμεν ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει θάνατος, διότι ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ Κυρίου τὸν συνέτριψε; Πῶς θα τὸ ἐπιτύχωμεν αὐτό, ἂν στερήσωμεν τὸν κόσμον ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπὶ γῆς Παράδεισον; Ἄν κλείσωμεν τὰς θύρας αὐτοῦ παραμονὰς τοῦ Πάσχα;



Μεγάλη Πέμπτη καὶ Θεία Κοινωνία

Ἀπὸ τὸ Περιοδικὸ «Ὁ Ὅσιος Γρηγόριος» τῆς Μονῆς Γρηγορίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους, ἀριθμ. 34.

Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἡ Μεγάλη Πέμπτη εἶναι ἡ ἡμέρα κατὰ τὴν ὁποία παραδοσιακὰ ὅλος ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος κόσμος προσέρχεται νὰ μεταλάβει τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων, ὀφείλεται στὸ γεγονός ὅτι σήμερα ἔγινε ἡ παράδοση τοῦ φρικτοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς Εὐχαριστίας κατὰ τὸν Μυστικὸ Δεῖπνο. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Χριστός, ἐν ὄψει τοῦ Πάσχα τοῦ ἐβραϊκοῦ, σὲ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ προηγούμενα (ὄχι στὸ τελευταῖο τελικὸ συμπόσιο τοῦ ἐβραϊκοῦ Πάσχα ποῦ ἔθυσαν τὸν ἀμνὸν τὸν ἐνιαύσιο) ἔφαγε μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του· καὶ ἀφοῦ πῆρε ψωμὶ στὰ χέρια Του, εὐχαρίστησε, τὸ εὐλόγησε, καὶ τοὺς τὸδωσε λέγοντάς τους: «*Λάβετε, φάγετε, τοῦτο ἔστι τὸ σῶμα μου*». Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σῶμα μου, ποῦ σὰς δίνω αὐτὴν τὴν στιγμήν, τὸ ὁποῖο «*κλάται*», «*τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον*» (τὸ ρῆμα εἶναι κλάω-κλώ, ἀπὸ κεῖ ποῦ βγαίνει καὶ ἡ λέξις τῶν μαθηματικῶν: τὰ κλάσματα, ὅπως καὶ ἡ ἀρτοκλασία: ἡ κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου, κόβουμε τοὺς ἄρτους καὶ τοὺς μοιράζουμε), γιὰ πολλοὺς, γιὰ ὄσους θέλουν νὰ σωθοῦν. Κατόπιν πῆρε ἓνα ποτήρι κρασί, τὸ εὐλόγησε, εὐχαρίστησε τὸν Οὐράνιο Πατέρα καὶ τὸ πρόσφερε στοὺς μαθητὲς Του λέγοντας: «*Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες, τοῦτο ἔστι τὸ αἷμα μου, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*».

Νά! τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας!

Πολλὲς φορὲς καὶ κατ' ἐπανάληψιν ἀναφέρθηκε στὴ Γραφὴ ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι «ὁ Ἄρτος τῆς Ζωῆς», «ὁ ἐκ τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ καταβάς». Καὶ πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ ἔρρευσε τὸ ἅγιον αἷμα Του, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔγινε τὸ «*καινὸν πόμα*», τὸ καινούριον ποτό, στὸ ὁποῖο θα μᾶς καλέσει ὁ θεσπέσιος ἱερὸς Δαμασκηνὸς τὴ νύκτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως: «*Δεῦτε πόμα πίνωμεν καινόν, οὐκ ἐκ*

πέτρας ἀγόνου τερατουργούμενον», (ὄχι μὲ τὸ θαῦμα ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Μωϋσῆς στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια, σ' ἓνα ἄγρονο βράχο, κι ἔδωσε νερὸ σὺνήθες, φυσικὸ νερὸ νὰ πιοῦνε, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἄλλου εἴδους πόμα αὐτό, εἶναι τὸ ποτὸ τῆς Ζωῆς, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔρρευσε ἀπὸ τὴν ἄχραντο πλευρὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς πληγὲς στὰ χέρια καὶ στὰ πόδια τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

Ἀπὸ τότε ἡ Εὐχαριστία συνιστᾷ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε τὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, κάνουμε τὴν Λειτουργία. Καὶ ὅπως μαζεύτηκε τὸ σιτάρι σπυρι-σπυρὶ ἀπὸ κάθε γωνιὰ τοῦ χωραφιοῦ καὶ ἀλέστηκε κι ἔγινε τὸ ψωμί, ἔτσι μαζευόμαστε καὶ μεῖς ἕνας-ἕνας ἀπὸ κάθε γωνιὰ, γύρω ἀπὸ τὸν προεστῶτα τῆς Εὐχαριστίας, καὶ ἀντιγράφοντας τὴν πρακτικὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴ Του: «*Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*» (αὐτὸ νὰ κάνετε γιὰ νὰ μὲ θυμάστε), «*καὶ ὅσες φορὲς θὰ τρώτε αὐτὸν τὸν ἄρτο καὶ θὰ πίνετε αὐτὸ τὸ κρασί, θὰ καταγγέλλετε καὶ θὰ μαρτυρεῖτε τὴν Ἀνάστασή μου, τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς Θεότητάς μου*», κι ἐμεῖς συναζόμεστε καὶ κάνουμε τὴ Λειτουργία, καὶ ἔτσι συνιστοῦμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ εἴμαστε ὅλοι καλεσμένοι νὰ μετάσχουμε αὐτῆς τῆς ἀθανάτου τραπέζης, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ προϋποθέσεις. Ὅχι ἀπαράσκευοι, ὄχι ἀκάθαροι, ὄχι ἀμετανόητοι ὅπως ὁ Ἰούδας.

Λέει ἓνα πικρὸ λόγο, ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς ἀληθινὸ, ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Ἀνάμεσά σας, λέει, ὑπάρχουν ἓνα σωρὸ ἄρρωστοι καὶ πεθαίνει πολλὸς κόσμος. Καὶ αὐτό, γιατί κοινωνεῖτε ἀναξίως*», «*ἐσθίετε καὶ πίνετε ἀναξίως*». Εἶναι πῦρ καταναλίσκων ἢ Θεία Κοινωνία. Καὶ ἢ θὰ καταναλώσει τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας, ἢ θὰ καταναλώσει καὶ θὰ ἀφανίσει ἐμᾶς τοὺς ἴδιους. Χρειαζόμαστε λοιπὸν προϋποθέσεις, καὶ ὄχι νὰ τὴν περνᾷ κανεὶς ὅτι εἶναι ὁ πρωινὸς καφὲς ποὺ πρέπει νὰ πᾶμε νὰ τὸν πιοῦμε, ἐπειδὴ ἔτσι συνηθίζουμε καὶ ἔτσι λέει τὸ πρωτόκολλο τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ἢ τὸ ἔθιμο τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ οὕτω καθ' ἑξῆς. Λέει ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος: «*Τὸν ἄξιον δὲν τὸν κάνει ἡ ἡμέρα, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι ἄξιος, ὅποιαδήποτε ἡμέρα ἔχει ἑορτῆ, ἔχει Πάσχα, ἔχει Χριστούγεννα*». Ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἔτοιμος καὶ κοινώνει ἄξιως.

Ὅσον ἄφορα τὴν προσευχὴ, τί νὰ πῶ ἐγὼ σὲ σᾶς, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἴσθε οἱ βιοῦντες τὸ μέγα μυστήριον τῆς προσευχῆς; Εἴσθε οἱ καλλιεργητὲς τῆς νοερᾶς καὶ μονολογίστου προσευχῆς. Εἴσθε ἐσεῖς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀγωνίζεσθε νὰ τηρεῖτε τὸ «*ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε*» τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου.

Μόνον γιὰ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας τοὺς προσκυνητὲς νὰ πῶ, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἔδωσε ὑπόδειγμα προσευχῆς, καὶ μάλιστα μὲ αὐτὴ τὴν προσευχὴ τὴν ἐναγώνιον κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπινὴ Του φύση.

Ἡ ἀγωνία ἦταν στὴν ἀνθρωπινὴ φύση Του, γιὰ νὰ μὴν περάσει κανενὸς ἢ ιδέα, ὅπως ἀργότερα στοὺς μονοφυσίτες, ὅτι ἦταν «*κατὰ δόκησιν ἄνθρωπος*» καὶ ὄχι τέλειος ἄνθρωπος. Γι' αὐτὸ φάνηκε ἡ ἀγωνία κι ἔσταξε ὁ ἰδρωτὰς ὡς θρόμβοι αἵματος ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπό Του. Ἦταν ἡ ἀνθρωπινὴ φύση, ἡ ὁποία βεβαίως τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς ἐκεῖνη τῆ στιγμῆ, καὶ ὄχι βεβαίως ἡ Θεία φύση, ἡ ὁποία οὐδέποτε εἶχε καμία ἀγωνία, διότι εἶναι ἀπαθὴς ὁ Θεός, καὶ οὐδέποτε εἶχε καμία ἐπιφύλαξη στὸ νὰ πιεῖ τὸ ποτήριον τὸ ὁποῖο ἔδωσε ὁ Πατέρας, τὸ νὰ δεχθεῖ δηλαδὴ τὸ Σταυρό, τὸ Πάθος, τὸ Θάνατο γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ἀδελφῶν Του, τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου.



Ἀλλὰ μᾶς ἔδωσε ὑπόδειγμα προσευχῆς. Νὰ θυμίσω μόνον ἓνα λόγο τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου, ἂν δὲν κάνω λάθος: «*μνημονευτέον Θεοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀναπνευστέον*» (Εἶναι μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη νὰ προσεύχεσαι καὶ νὰ ἐπικαλεῖσαι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἀναπνέεις). Πόση ὥρα μπορεῖ νὰ μείνει κανεὶς χωρὶς νὰ ἀναπνέει; Νὰ κλείσει τὴ μύτη του, νὰ μὴν παίρνει μέσα ὀξυγόνο; Κάποια λεπτὰ ἀντέχει τὸ σῶμα ἀπὸ τὴν λεγομένη ἄδηλη ἀναπνοή, τὸ ὀξυγόνο ποὺ εἰσπράττει μέσα ἀπὸ τοὺς πόρους τοῦ σώματος.

Ἀλλὰ πόσο; Μετὰ πεθαίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Πόσο θ' ἀντέξει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἢ ψυχὴ, χωρὶς τὴν προσευχὴ; Ἔχουμε μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ παρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ὀξυγόνο. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ὁποῖος ἀποκόπηκε ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ σταμάτησε νὰ μνημονεύει τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι νεκρός! Αὐτὸς εἶναι γιὰ μνημόσυνα μὲ πλερέζες καὶ γιὰ κλάματα καὶ θρήνους ἄνευ παραμυθίας. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι αὐτὴ ἢ ὁποία δείχνει ὅτι ἡ καρδιὰ ἀπὸ μέσα κτυπᾷ. Ὅτι ὑπάρχει ζωὴ, ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ζωντανός.

Δὲν θέλω νὰ σᾶς κουράσω περισσότερο. Μᾶς τὰ εἶπε τόσο ὡραία ἢ ἀκολουθία. Θὰ μᾶς τὰ πει περισσότερο ἢ μεγάλη ἀκολουθία τῆς ἀγρυπνίας τὸ βράδυ, τῶν Ἀχράντων Παθῶν, στὴν ὁποία ἂς ἔχουμε τεταμένη τὴν προσοχή μας καὶ ἂς ἀφήσουμε ἀνοιχτὰ τὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ δουλέψει ἡ Χάρις Του μέσα μας αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ Ἀχράντου Πάθους τὴ σωτηρία μας, ὅπως Ἐκεῖνος ξέρει καὶ κατὰ τὸ ποσοστὸ στὸ ὅποιο ἔχουμε ἔτοιμασθεῖ καὶ εἴμαστε δεκτικοὶ ὅλοι μας.

Σᾶς εὐχαριστῶ γιὰ τὴν ὑπομονή σας.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

By Elder Cleopa of Romania.

Today we celebrate the feast of feasts and the holiday of holidays. Today there is spiritual joy throughout the entire Christian world. Today our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has illumined everything through His Resurrection. Let heaven and earth rejoice together, and the earth be glad, because the light of the Resurrection of the Lord has filled with light heaven, and earth, and hell, and all the ones enslaved in the bonds of death. In the hope of the Resurrection, our Savior brought them into eternal joy when He descended into Hades. Today Jesus Christ, our Life, through His Resurrection established a new foundation of humanity and crowned all the holy miracles He worked while on earth.

Today is the day of the Resurrection of the Lord, the victory of reconciliation, the undermining of war, the crushing of death, and the defeating of the devil. It is meet and right for us today to repeat the words of the prophet Isaiah: *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* (cf. Hosea 13:14, 1 Cor 15:55).

On this day our Master Jesus Christ smashed the gates of brass and the name of death itself; He made it to no longer be called death, but sleep. Before Christ's coming and before the economy of the Cross, the name of death was frightening. And after Christ our God led Himself as a sacrifice to the Cross for us and resurrected from the dead, He transformed death into sleep, as a lover of men.

Do you see how bright the victory of the Resurrection of Christ is? We have been given countless blessings through the Resurrection of our Lord. The deceit of the devils perished through the Resurrection. Through the Resurrection we counter death. Through the Resurrection we overlook the present life. Through the Resurrection we strive for the heavenly reward. Through the Resurrection, while clothed in our bodies we draw nearer to the bodiless ones if we so desire.

Today the splendid victories took place. Today Christ our God conquered death and He undermined the tyrannical demon, and He offered us the path towards our salvation through His Resurrection. So let us all rejoice and exalt, for

our Savior conquered death and hell and worked everything for our salvation.

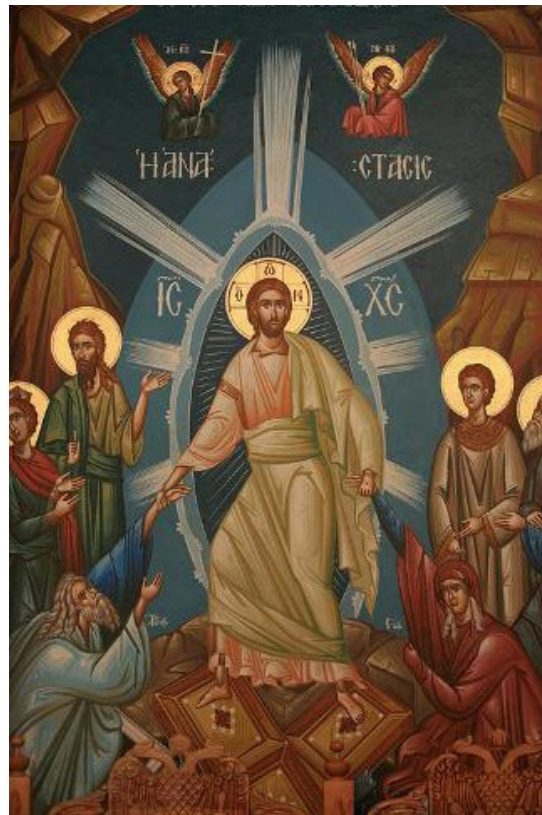
Listen to what our godly father St. John Chrysostom says: *Let us not be careless and ungrateful towards the blessings that we receive through the Resurrection of our Lord. Neither should we say, "Look, Great Lent is over, now we no longer need to worry about anything." For now more than before, we have to be very careful with our souls so that by strengthening the body we do not render the soul more helpless. That is, by caring for the servant (body), not to become careless towards the master (soul). For our spiritual labor is for the rest of our life. He also says, We are freed from the burden of fasting, but we did not also renounce the fruit of the fast. The efforts of laboring are over, but do not let go of the ambition for doing good deeds. The fasting period is over, but let the reverence remain. The bodily fast passed, but not the spiritual, which is better than the other, and the former was done for the latter.*

Through spiritual fasting we understand the working of good deeds, that all of us who were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and who believe in Christ, Who resurrected from the dead, are all obligated to do. Before all good deeds that help the salvation of our souls the most, Christian love comes first. Without love, without forgiveness, and without almsgiving there is no salvation, there is no Pascha, there is no joy in the soul, and there is no resurrection from the death of our sins, as well as no peace in our hearts.

The day of Resurrection, let us be illumined with the feast, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, brethren, even to those that hate us, let us forgive all things in the Resurrection, and so let us cry, Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

We should scrutinize all of our thoughts, all of our feelings, and all of our behaviors very well, and then approach the Holy Chalice with a broken and humble heart, with our hearts filled with faith and love for the Cup of Holy Communion, in order to receive Christ our God, Who is always present and ready to come and dwell among us, as it says so clearly in His Holy Gospel: *Whoever eats My Body and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him.* (Jn 6:56).

Are we determined to do this? It is for our benefit, for the benefit of our earthly and heavenly life. For it is only if we

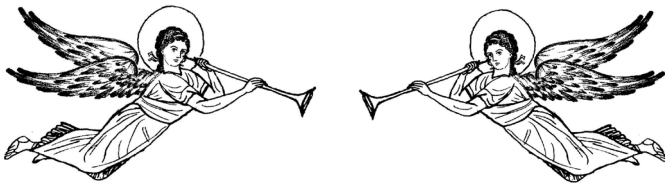


are united with our Lord Jesus Christ that we will be able to understand better and deeper the true meaning of our life on earth. We will surely embark victoriously on the path of the eternal, holy, and heavenly life.

Today is the Passover of our Lord. Today Christ, our Life, conquered death, hell, and the devil. Today the gates of Paradise and of the Kingdom of Heaven have opened to us. Today the angels rejoice together and worship God.

Therefore, let us put away all evil, all sadness, and all sin from our homes and from our hearts, and let us welcome the Resurrected Christ with joy. Let us worship the Cross upon which Christ was crucified. Let us kiss the Tomb from whence our Lord resurrected. Let us follow our Savior with faith and hope, together with the Mother of God, with the Apostles, with all the Saints, with the Holy Fathers, and all our ancestors. Let us spiritually kiss each other, brother and brother; let us reconcile; let us love one another, for today we acquired forgiveness and salvation through the Resurrection. Let no one be sad; let no one lose faith and hope due to the troubles of life, for the Resurrected Christ is with us. We carry Him inside ourselves, and He will always dwell with us, if we remain in His love and if we keep His commandments.

With this life-giving faith that gives us power and victory, let us chant together the Hymn of the Resurrection: *Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life.* Amen.



The Lamb of God communicates with us on the holy and light-bearing night of Resurrection. We pray for this when we are just beginning to prepare for Lent, and afterwards many times during the course of the Great Fast: that the Lord would vouchsafe us to partake of the Holy Mysteries on the night of Holy Pascha. At that time the grace of God acts in a special way upon men's hearts. We partake of the Christ Resurrected, we become partakers of His Resurrection. Of course, we must prepare ahead of time, and, having already communed during Great Lent, receive again the Holy Mysteries. Before Paschal Liturgy there is no time for a proper confession; this must be done earlier. And then, on that light-bearing night, having received general absolution, to draw near to the Divine Lamb, the pledge of our resurrection. No one should leave the church prematurely, rushing away to eat the meat of animals instead of receiving the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

THE PRAYER OF THE CHERUBIC HYMN

By His Eminence Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotis (+2010), Bishop of Florina, Greece, from "On the Divine Liturgy—Orthodox Homilies," Vol. Two, translated by Asterios Gerostergios, pp. 48-51, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 115 Gilbert Road, Belmont, MA (1986).

When the Cherubic Hymn, dearly beloved, is chanted, the priest stands before the Holy Table and reads the following prayer:

None is worthy, among them that are enslaved by carnal desires and pleasures, to approach or come near or minister before Thee, the King of Glory; for Thy Service is great and fearful even to the Heavenly Powers. Yet since, through Thine ineffable and immeasurable compassion, Thou hast without change or differentiation become man and taken the title of our High Priest, as Lord of All, Thou hast committed to us the celebration of this rite and of the Bloodless Sacrifice. For Thou, O Lord our God, alone dost govern all things in heaven and in earth, Thou Who sittest upon the throne of the Cherubim and art Lord of the Seraphim and King of Israel, Who only art Holy and retest among Thy Saints. To Thee I persistently call, for Thou alone art righteous and ready to hear. Look upon me Thy sinful and unprofitable servant and purify my soul and heart from an evil conscience; enable me by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, girt with the grace of the Priesthood to stand at this Thy Holy Table and to consecrate Thy Holy and Spotless Body and Thy Precious Blood. For to Thee I come near, bowing down my neck, and Thee I beseech. Turn not away Thy Face from me, neither reject me from among Thy children, but consider me worthy so that these Gifts may be brought near to Thee by me, Thy sinful and unworthy servant. For Thou art the Offerer and the Offered, the Acceptor and the Distributed, Christ our God, and to Thee we ascribe glory, with Thine Eternal Father and Thy most holy, righteous and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and from "all Ages to all Ages" Amen.

This prayer of the Cherubic Hymn is one of the most inspired and moving prayers of the Divine Liturgy. Pious celebrants of the Most High at the time when they read it become filled with so much emotion, that they shed tears and their sobbings will not let them finish this superb prayer. How great is Christ, and how small and wretched is man! The greatness of Christ and the wretchedness of man, who dares to approach the holy altar and offer the Holy Mystery—this prayer emphasizes these two things.

Christ! O Christ, Thou art the Master of all. Thou dost govern, Thou dost command all that is heavenly, all that is earthly. Thou art Lord of the angels and archangels, of the Cherubim and the Seraphim. Thou alone art holy. Thou dost find gladness and Thou dost rest there where holiness

is. Thou didst come from the heights of heaven here to earth. Thou didst come out of love for wretched man. A love which in the language of man cannot be expressed, and there is no measure to measure. Thy love is an endless ocean.

The priest, O Christ, what am I who ministers? I am thine unprofitable and worthless servant, who, even if I had kept all thy commandments, even so I am not worthy to gaze upon the height of Thy Majesty. It is a great and frightening thing for someone to serve Thee. With what hands can I touch Thee the Undeified? With what tongue can I hymn and celebrate the sacred ceremony? I am afraid, Thou might reject me. Full of fear and reverence, Christ, I bend down, I worship Thee and beseech Thee...

The priest must feel always his unworthiness, especially during the time when he is celebrating and offering the Highest Mystery. He himself should not be in his place, nor any other man, regardless of how perfect he is, but one of the angels and archangels of the heavenly world. And this could be done. Namely, every time when a Liturgy is about to be celebrated, an angel could come down from heaven, come here to earth, and celebrate the Holy Mystery. Nothing is impossible to God. Has not God sent angels many times here to earth to execute His commandments and serve the people? It would be possible for the angels and archangels to be entrusted with such a task.



What an astonishing phenomenon it would be, if upon entering the church we were to see an angel celebrating at the Holy Sanctuary! But this task, which angels and archangels would tremble to perform, has been entrusted to priests. Christ gave them the power to conduct the holy mysteries. St. John Chrysostom says that if we hypothesize that this spiritual power to remit sins and in general to perform the mysteries were given to the angels, because the angels have no conception of sin and of the temptations which people experience, they would be unable fully to understand and feel the human tragedy; likewise the people would come into contact with angels with great difficulty and reservations. But the priest, himself a sinful man who every day confronts temptations and fights the mighty fight against sin, sees on top of all that the weakness of people. He hears with great sympathy, as a fellow-sufferer, the sins of his fellow man, and is ready to give absolution to those who believe and sincerely repent.

Therefore let us thank Christ, because among the other benevolent acts towards mankind, he gave to men, to the priests, the spiritual power to forgive sins and to celebrate the mysteries in general.

The priest as a man may not be rich and powerful, wise and learned, one who impresses worldly people; he may be humble and disdained. However, from the moment when he receives and wears, as the prayer says, "the grace of ordination," he receives authority which is higher than any other. For even the most powerful and rich and learned person, as a sinner, needs to have his sins forgiven. And only the priest can give this absolution in the name of Jesus Christ. Having this kind of spiritual authority, he is above kings. He is superior to the angels and archangels, because God did not give to any of them this authority to forgive sins.

These things indeed, which we write here about the priests, are spiritual matters, and only he who believes understands and feels them. And when he sees a priest, he honors him

as he should, because the priest has spiritual power, as a representative of Christ on earth. St. Cosmas the Aitolian used to say: "If you, my child, meet on your path both a priest and an Angel, first you must greet the priest and then the Angel, because the priest who performs and celebrates is superior to the Angels and Archangels."

Today, unfortunately, in an age of anarchy, un-

belief and corruption, the priests of the Most High are not honored, and the majority of them are not even aware of the highness of their office.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us, so that indeed the priests might feel Whose soldiers they are, and the people might not despise and disparage them, but might honor them like the angels of the Lord, the Creator of all. Amen.



If you cannot be merciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner. If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a troublemaker. If you cannot be assiduous, at least in your thought be unlike a sluggard. If you are not victorious, do not exalt yourself over the vanquished. If you cannot close the mouth of a man who disparages his companions, at least refrain from joining him in this.

St. Isaac of Syria

PASCHA IS COMING: A STORY

By Elena Gaaze, translated by Dmitry Lapa, from "Orthodox Christianity," *orthochristian.com*.

Fields, forests and poor villages were slowly gliding by the train windows. The passengers were lulled by the rumble of wheels. The sun was warming the face of a young woman pleasantly. She made herself comfortable on the upper berth and took comfort knowing that Pascha was coming and it would be followed by the summer with all its wonders...

The passengers on the lower berths hadn't had time to get acquainted with each other yet, but they were already discussing the destiny of Russia. Pale and overwrought due to the spring lack of vitamins, they looked on the dark side of things. They were talking about a loss of moral values that had once been passed on from grandparents to their grandchildren.

"Oh, come off it! Turn on the TV, and you will see everything!" a history teacher who was sitting on the left by the window waved her hand and turned away from her conversation partners angrily.

An oppressive atmosphere began to reign in the compartment, and even their teeth began to ache. Everybody stared out of the window. And, as if to make things worse, heaps of last year's trash were exposed from under the snow, while the train went through squalid, neglected villages... Thus a few minutes passed in silence.

Suddenly a strong, pure girlish voice rang out from an upper berth:

"With all that, I disagree with you! I don't agree, and that's that!"

The very young woman who had attracted little attention since the beginning of the journey sat down on her berth, and now everybody was looking at her attentively and with amazement. She jumped down from her berth carefully, took her lacy knitted headscarf from under her pillow, wrapped it around her shoulders cozily, and settled down next to the history teacher.

And the tiny space of the compartment was imperceptibly transformed at once. As if the cheerless prospect of a journey with disagreeable people unexpectedly turned into the promise of an interesting and warm conversation with an old friend. The girl who was a little embarrassed looked around at her fellow travelers and introduced herself cheerfully:

"I'm Asya! Let's get to know each other!"

Igor Viktorovich looked at his fellow traveler sympathetically—he took a liking to her at once. The teacher would cast a glance at her every now and then jealously and in an unfriendly manner. The young woman was fresh and lovely, but that was not the point. The point was that there was something in her that made her nobler than all the most beautiful and wise people in the world if they didn't have it. The teacher couldn't figure out what it was, and so she was annoyed.

The fourth traveler in the compartment was a plump, modest woman with an apologetic smile on her face. Her participation in the conversation amounted to nothing more than smiling this smile and nodding her head in agreement. It looked as if she were afraid of being asked for her opinion and agreed with everybody in advance. Gazing at Asya with adoration, she relaxed and was no longer ashamed of her own black flannel dressing gown with its blue Eastern "cucumber" design and of not having had her hair done.

"I have been listening to your conversation," Asya carried

on. "What you have said is right and indeed there are reasons for despondency. But all of you have children (or already grandchildren) and you want to raise all of them," the young lady looked at Igor. "And you will never feel so discouraged that you will give up. And if you have hard moments and even despair, you endure all of this and then start over. Why? Because you love

them despite everything and hope... It is the same with our country, with Russia..."

The girl was silent for a while, as if ignoring that nobody had uttered a single word, and then went on:

"I don't know about you, but I personally can boldly say that the Lord won't abandon us and our children. And these villages..." Asya nodded to the window. "As for the statements that there is nobody to pass the traditions on to the future generations, that is untrue. Or perhaps that's true, but not only people can do that."

It was clear that the young woman was worried: she wanted to say something that was important to her and feared being misunderstood. She was speaking fast and in a confused way because the situation was obviously unfamiliar to her. Asya's companions were staring at her intently, as if fearing to miss a single word.

"Maybe you will find my opinion silly or trivial, but I will share it with you. Let us take our modern bearded Orthodox



men, whom you can see in any church. Every time I see them I cannot stop admiring the way they greet one another with a triple kiss. How beautiful it is! And it is so natural—they have somehow remembered to do this without actually having learned it! And how those who never heard about God from their parents and grandparents make the sign of the cross and pray in churches! How quickly they understand and memorize (to be more precise—remember) everything there!

“As a matter of fact, I grew up in an orphanage as an abandoned child. But it doesn’t matter. What really matters is that nobody talked with us about any Russian traditions, let alone Orthodox traditions. That place was oppressive to me, I felt so miserable, and everybody was so rude... Shame...

“But one day I came across a book at our library (for some reason, no one would borrow it). You surely know this book. It is the novel *The Idiot* by Feodor Dostoevsky. Though I was still a girl, I made out its meaning immediately: Prince Myshkin represents the ideal human being. We all must become like him—then the entire world will be happy. Words

cannot express how much I wanted to tell everybody about him and explain this! But no one would listen to me. They only laughed and said that we have no end of our own idiots. But I wasn’t hurt. The most important thing is that this prince remained with me forever instead of my parents. When I came to believe in God, I understood about whom Dostoevsky had written this novel and for what purpose the Lord had sent me this book at the right time. After the orphanage girls had given me a ‘beating in the dark’ for the umpteenth time, I was about to throw myself into the river...”

“So you changed your mind? Changed your mind after reading *The Idiot*?” the history teacher wondered, trying to make fun of Asya.

“Yes, I did,” Asya replied simply without noticing the teacher’s irony or even looking at her. “Can you explain to me how I managed to grasp this at the early age of thirteen? After all, it was the first thick book I had ever read. Therefore, God can arrange things. He can arrange everything.

“And then another miracle occurred to me. It was two years later, when I was in a boarding school where there were many children from ‘problem’ families, though they were not orphans, and their parents or other relatives would take them home for holidays. So I would stay alone and naturally had attacks of the blues. I remember sitting on my bed in the

bedroom and crying. I was turning over the pages of a book. I don’t remember how I had found it. On its cover was written: *Kustodiev. Life and Works*. The book, though small, was printed on glossy paper, and the reproductions were bright and fine. I was leafing it through automatically, seeing some merchant women, samovars [a samovar is a large decorated container for heating water, traditionally used in Russia for making tea.—*Trans.*], and so on...

“All of these things had nothing to do with my life. I had never been to any museums before then. We were only taken to the circus and the cinema. Thus I was looking through the book, while thinking of something else. And suddenly I saw ‘Maslenitsa’! A pearly winter town down in a valley, with a sledge and bright, well-dressed people in the foreground, embroidered on silk as on a mirror-like surface. I was overcome with joy! Shivers still run down my spine. I even felt the ‘needles’ of little pieces of ice that fly from under the horses’ hooves onto my face. Like a whirlwind, I got carried away to that town, heard the noise of the celebrations, the ringing



of church bells and little sleigh bells. And I heard that particular laughter (then still unfamiliar to me)—airy, open, merry and happy!

“Maslenitsa” by Boris Kustodiev.

“And suddenly all of this appeared so familiar to me. I realized that all of this was mine—I even felt the weight of my light brown braid around my head, saw a reflection of my rosy face

in the samovar, and felt the coldness of the chilly water in the ice hole, as if I were rinsing out my linen... And those swinging movements of strong hands—all of it is familiar to me... The healthy smell of sheets, so stiff, and how they are brought back home from the frost. And I felt the smell of the veranda floor after it has been washed with cold water in hot weather...

“And there were many other sensations that I couldn’t have experienced in real life. And what about the scent of Pascha? It was then that I felt and recognized it—this smell is sweet and meek, and there is peace and quiet in it. I even sensed the beard of a salesman exchanging a triple kiss with me [as the Paschal salutation.—*Trans.*], smelling of rustic tobacco!” Asya broke into laughter with embarrassment.

“I still keep this joy in my soul. Can you answer me where did it fall on me (like a bolt from the blue) from?”

“I believe God gave it to me then as a guarantee so that I would not lose heart. And He can give it to anyone. All we

need to do is ask: 'I am yours, O Lord! Please, never abandon me. I want to rejoice in You and don't need anything else!'"

The teacher was listening to Asya, first smiling condescendingly, and then shrinking back in fear. Igor Viktorovich was looking at Asya fixedly and intently. And Tatiana, a simple chubby woman, was looking at her with understanding. When Asya stopped talking, Tatiana started speaking timidly and worriedly:

"All that you have just said is known to me in some sense. But I would have never been able to explain this in words, like you. Thank you for this. When I was pregnant with my first baby and felt its movement for the first time, this sensation seemed familiar to me. And I always recognized the sensation when milk was coming, these occasional pricks. Yes, exactly," Tatiana went back in her mind to her firstborn, feeling awkward about her own confession. She doubted if it was appropriate for her to talk about these things. But there was a timid, happy smile shining on her face that had already turned rosy.

"How many children do you have?" Igor Viktorovich wondered.

"Five," Tatiana replied simply.

There was an exhalation, either of amazement or admiration, in the compartment.

Asya said:

"How beautiful and happy you are..."

Now Tatiana, who earlier had seemed oppressed and worn out, indeed looked happy, beautiful, strong, calm, and well-built.

"Where are you going alone?" the teacher tried her best to change to an ironic, condescending tone again.

"To a monastery, to my husband," and Tatiana told her the name of the monastery. "He is helping them in construction work. He has a clever pair of hands, so they suggested that we move there all together."

"Are you really going to live in the monastery with all of your children?" the teacher asked in a choked voice.

"Certainly not!" Tatiana answered, laughing. "We will live in a village nearby. I am going to see the house. My sister is staying with the children, while I am away, because it would have been too expensive for us to travel together. But she must manage alone, she is doing it not for the first time. We do have potential buyers seeing our apartment... We have nothing to do in the city. I realized it long ago."

"How are you going to give an education to your children there?" the teacher wondered in a totally unfriendly tone.

"Their souls need to be saved," Tatiana answered simply and turned to the window.

It got quiet in the compartment. Each was immersed in his own thoughts.

Tatiana was trying to stifle her concerns about her children by dreams of the sixth baby (and she suspected she was already

pregnant), fancying a cozy house in which they would all live together in harmony. She imagined how they would go to church, and all the girls would wear white headscarves... They couldn't enjoy such a happy life in the city, where it was inconvenient for them to travel long distances. In the country there would be no "awful" doctors who each time detected new diseases in her, alarmed her with prospects of death, and tried to persuade her to have an abortion, though they themselves had become dead long ago... There, in the open air, she would recover, get her blood levels back to normal, and would stop fainting (which scared her children stiff)...

And Igor Viktorovich suddenly recalled... Ryzhik. This was a little squirrel-like baby rabbit that he loved so dearly when he was a boy about five. It was at his grandmother's in the village—he took it away from the mother rabbit and laid it into a big basket. Then he placed the basket under the bed, fed the bunny on grass and watched it hop around the room. Ryzhik had a strikingly clever muzzle and expressive, big, black eyes. In the compartment, Igor Viktorovich suddenly clearly felt the tenderness of its furry skin on his cheek and its smell of a baby, a winter felt boot, and milk. As he looked at this naïve girl, Asya, he had very similar feelings and was so grateful to her for her fantasies, in which there was something real, something very beautiful and stirring. And Ryzhik came back to his memory again.

One day after he, little Igor, had spent the whole day by the river, he completely forgot his bunny, giving it neither food nor drink. He didn't remember his pet until the nighttime. He jumped out of bed, turned on the light, and took the basket from under the bed... The baby rabbit, though still warm, was dead. Instantly the boy realized that he would never be able to survive this loss and his own guilt. He called his grandmother with his speechless lips, and she heard his silent call and woke up. Then she wrapped Ryzhik into her shawl and went up to the icons. Igor Viktorovich recalled how he had prayed—for the first and last time—while weeping loudly and clasping his hands to his breast. And next he clasped the rabbit that had come back to life to his breast, enjoying the strong pushes of its hind legs with which it scratched his belly all over that night. Later his mother explained that the bunny had not died: it had just been in a dead faint; but as soon as grandmother warmed it the pet came around; but the dead cannot be revived.

At that moment the sense of the miracle (which he had nearly gotten used to and which had made his life so full and wonderful) left the boy. Why did his mother do it? Then Igor Viktorovich remembered his son with his daughter-in-law, and his grandson, whom he had not seen for a year. And he suddenly understood why he found the teacher in the compartment so disagreeable—she reminded him of his own wife. She too could ask her son who had brought his girlfriend home with him for the first time: "Where on earth

did you dig her up?” It is good that she didn’t ask that in the girlfriend’s presence, though she could have done this... The girl was like Asya and even Tatiana—they were “from the same production line”. The future wife “didn’t suit his wife’s tastes.” He, Igor Viktorovich, a very busy factory director, had tried not to get into the heart of the conflict with his son’s family, though he missed them. Now he began to see things in a different light. Glory be to God that he had refused to travel in a sleeper and bought a ticket to an ordinary car and thus met Asya... Glory to God.

The teacher was sitting, trying not to think about anything, and scrutinizing her own hands. She had always been proud of them—they were narrow, with long aristocratic fingers and a perfect manicure. But now they looked like the talons of a bird of prey. It seemed as if all of her five unborn babies were kicking in her lower abdomen. This is what she had already experienced before and ended up in hospital... What if the same thing was happening again? And she was overwhelmed by intense hatred towards these two women—her fellow travelers. “They are to blame for everything! Why are they here?”

And Asya, filled with love for all these people who were nearly strangers to her, looked at a Russian cemetery that was gliding by outside the train windows—it was gaily decorated and “merry” before Pascha. Newly painted fences, with tender paper flowers attached to delicate crosses fluttering in the wind. Although the cemetery was quite far off, and, of course, she couldn’t have seen all of this, Asya who had never been to any cemetery before knew all about these flowers perfectly well.

And it seemed to Asya that the waves of love that she felt so keenly and that were flowing from the shabby village houses to the well-groomed graves and back—from the departed to the living—were washing over her, Tatiana, Igor Viktorovich, and even the history teacher who opposed them...



THE “NEW MAN” OF THE “THIRD INDETERMINATE GENDER”

By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou.

Until now we knew that there were two genders, the male and the female, or man and woman. There were also some who wavered from this for various reasons, primarily due to the passions. But recently there has arisen another person of the “third gender,” as it has been named by the

courts, after many years of struggle made by such people of an “indeterminate gender” or “third gender.”

Someone named Norrie May-Welby, who was born in Scotland as a man, later went to Australia where he underwent gender reassignment surgery to become a woman, because he believed that he did not feel comfortable as an individual of the female gender, so he decided to discontinue hormone therapy to have an operation to avoid belonging to a “predetermined” gender. Then he began a long struggle to be legally recognized as a person of an “indeterminate” gender.

On Wednesday 2 April 2014 “the Supreme Court of Australia ruled that the State of New South Wales should recognize the existence of this third ‘indeterminate’ gender to which Norrie May-Welby belongs” (Ta Nea, 04/04/2014). Thus was born a person of an “indeterminate gender” (non-specific sex), who is neither a man or a woman.

One is struck by the point to which a person can reach, who is frustrated by all things and wants to taste new experiences and situations. There are many who, claiming human rights for all people, are ready to accept and adopt such a mindset. But if we start accepting human rights without any necessary restrictions, then we will arrive at a social catastrophe.

Existential philosophy, when speaking about freedom, says that the biggest problem with freedom is what we are “given from existence”, that we do not have the right or ability to choose our gender, but it is given to us without the possibility of making a choice. Well, now this personal right has been loosed and is even recognized by the State. But where can society reach with such considerations?

The duality of gender was given to us, and indeed has a biological infrastructure. God created people as man and woman and in this way people developed in society, and thus the human race multiplied. Unfortunately, due to many causes, there exists today in society “genetic corruption” and man himself intervenes in this issue.

In the Church, however, we have the ability to transcend what has been “given from existence” with the life in Christ. Saint Maximos the Confessor, identifying the five divisions (namely uncreated and created, mental and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and ecumene, man and woman), writes that in the life in Christ we begin to transcend the division of man and woman and proceed to transcend all divisions. The saints of the Church live in an angelic state, as it is written in the *troparion*, *like angels in the world let us celebrate*, but they also become angels in heaven, according to words of Christ, *they will be as angels in heaven*. (Mt 22:30).

When people do not know and cannot become an angel in Christ, then in their mania they voluntarily become a person of an “indeterminate gender,” and even worse, since even animals have a distinction of gender.

A MIRACLE BY THE ALL-HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

THE MOTHER OF GOD GAVE EYES TO A YOUNG MAN THAT HAD HIS EYES PLUCKED OUT...

An account of the ineffable miracle wrought by the holy icon of our all-holy lady the Theotokos of Cassiope for the unjustly-blinded Stephen who wondrously received eyes again. From "Orthodox Life," Vol. 36, No. 3, May-June 1986, published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York.

When Simon Leone Balbi was governor of Corfu, in the year of our salvation 1530, a youth named Stephen was returning from the city to his village, having accomplished his purpose. On the way, he encountered other wayfarers with whom he walked together. At some distance from the city they encountered certain youths who were returning from the mill bringing with them flour. Whereupon Stephen's fellow travellers, because they were vile men and of evil counsel, said "What hinders us from taking this flour and dividing it among ourselves. No one will see us."

But Stephen, being a just man, as soon as he heard these things, endeavored to hinder them as much as he could with many admonishments, saying that this which they were plotting to do was a beastly thing, and that if they did it they would not escape just punishment as thieves and evil-doers. But they, like asps, stopping up their ears (Ps. 57:4), would not listen, rather they even attempted to convince Stephen to become an accomplice to the robbery. He, on his part, would in no wise consent to this. Whereupon, having first beaten the youths, they seized the flour and proceeded to their homes rejoicing. The youths, on their part, when they returned home empty-handed and weeping, related to their relatives what had happened. And they, searching diligently, ascertained who the thieves were and reported the deed to the ruler.

Stephen was also accused together with the thieves, since the victims had seen him in their company, yet they did not know that he had tried to hinder them and that he had not aided them in any way. Those that were guilty of the theft, knowing their guilt, hid in order not to be apprehended and be punished as was meet. But Stephen, since he was innocent, went to the city without any fear. Hence, when he approached, he was recognized and arrested by the soldiers of the ruler and cast into prison. Afterwards, he was led bound before the governor for interrogation. On being questioned, he told the whole truth, that is, that he was walking together with the thieves, but that he took no part in the robbery and that he was unjustly accused. But in vain did he strive to convince the ruler. The words of the just Stephen appeared to the judge as false, for the judge thought him to be a thief and like the others.

Judged guilty unjustly, therefore, by the governor, the innocent Stephen was called upon to choose which punishment he preferred, the privation of his eyes or the cutting off of his

hands. And because the punishment of the privation of his eyes seemed lighter to Stephen, he chose this. Whereupon, leading him weeping and mourning to the customary place of punishment, they gouged out his eyes in the presence of many people. After he was blinded, his mother, weeping and lamenting, brought him to the church of St. Lazarus in order to seek alms.

But most of the people in that place mocked and reproached him as one who had justly suffered punishment, that as a thief he forcefully took what did not belong to him. On the other hand, since they who took compassion on him were few indeed, he thought—according to divine providence, of course—to go with his mother to the church of the Theotokos which was in the village of Cassiope, by the sea, and which was at a distance of eighteen miles from the city of Corfu. In this church there is found the wonderworking icon of the Theotokos, and having an adequate quay outside the church, the boats would all moor there out of reverence for the All-Holy Theotokos. It is at this place that Stephen thought to go and ask for alms from those who came to reverence the holy icon of the Theotokos. His mother also agreed to this.

They went, therefore, to the church of the Mother of God, and after worshipping as was proper, with laments and sighs they recounted to the monk that was there the unjust misfortune which they had suffered and the reason why they betook themselves there. They also asked for a small cell in which to stay. He replied that until the brother who had the keys for the cells returned (for he was absent), they could stay in the church. Stephen's mother, exhausted as she was from the journey, reclined and fell asleep immediately.

But Stephen, unable to sleep because of his pains, fell asleep only a little and very lightly at that. During the night—O thy marvels, most holy Theotokos—he felt hands touching him and pressing against his eyes so much that he awoke crying out loudly and wondering who it was that had touched him so firmly. Beholding a certain Lady resplendent and full of light, who disappeared in a few moments, he thought to himself that it was a dream and not real. But on turning, he saw the icon lamps lit and he marvelled greatly, and was perplexed concerning how and what it was that had taken place. Awakening his mother, he said to her, "Who lit the lamps?" She on her part, thinking that her son was seeing a delusion in his sleep, began to weep and told him to be quiet and go to sleep. "Woe is me," she said, "not only hath he lost his eyes, but now he hath lost his mind also from the shock and pain, and, though being without eyes, he saith that he seeth."

But Stephen would not listen, and insisted that he actually saw the lamps, and even the holy icon of the Mother of God, and that what he was saying was not of his fancy. Then he related to her what had happened to him a little earlier, and that he had called out to her, but that she did not hear him because

she had been sound asleep. His mother, therefore, perceived that this must be a divine manifestation. Whereupon, she arose immediately, and gazing carefully at the face of Stephen, she observed that truly he had eyes, and that whereas formerly he had had dark eyes, he now had blue eyes. Wherefore, from the great joy and awesome fear which overcame her she began to shout loudly and to weep, glorifying God and calling continually upon the name of the most-glorious Mother of God. Both she and her son began to clap their hands and to magnify the all-holy Theotokos.

Hearing the shouts and the clamor, and because it was before the appointed time of arising for the services, the monk who took care of the church became angry and began to reproach them as unruly and evil people, adding that they had been justly punished as such. But Stephen and his mother only continued shouting and relating the marvels of God. The monk, astonished and disbelieving because of the greatness of the miracle, came down into the church. He then beheld him who but a little before had been blind, now having eyes and seeing. Wherefore he departed immediately for the city. Finding the governor Balbi in the court house, he cried out against him, and accused him of being lawless. But those present attempted to expel the monk, saying to him, "It is not lawful to dare with such audacity to confront those which are in authority, and to be haughty and high-minded in such a manner." He, on his part, shouted even more so, saying, "If Stephen had not been unjustly blinded by him, God would not have given him other eyes through the intercession of the Theotokos!"

On hearing this, the governor sent certain notables, who, on their return, reported that the words of the monk were true. Then Balbi, accompanied by notables, went himself to the shrine, by means of the governor's caravel, and all beheld with their own eyes this great miracle and, as was meet, they marvelled greatly.

But the governor Balbi still entertained a doubt, thinking that it was not Stephen himself whom he saw, or that he had not truly been blinded, even as the Jews also had similar doubts concerning the blind man to whom our Lord Jesus Christ gave eyes. The greatness of the miracle did not permit the governor and certain others to accept it immediately. On returning to the city, therefore, Balbi called the executioner and said to him, "Did you take out Stephen's eyes even as I had ordered?" The executioner verified then that indeed he

had blinded him, and that the eyes which had been gouged out were still in the bucket, since it had been only the day before that he had done it. He went, therefore, and brought the eyes. When the governor saw them, he believed that the miracle was genuine, especially since he saw that the eyes were of a hue different from those which Stephen had received anew. It should also be noted that on Stephen's face there were still evident the wounds of the iron implement by which his eyes had been gouged out.

This, of course, happened by divine providence, so that the miracle might be proclaimed and be believed in as indisputable, that is, by the scars and the different color of the eyes.

For if the eyes had been of the same hue, many might have said that they were the same eyes and that they had not been taken out. In this manner, therefore, the miracle was reported throughout all of Corfu and was believed by all. Then Balbi called Stephen and asked his forgiveness for the injustice which he had inflicted upon him out of ignorance. Rewarding him with goodly gifts and attending to him with much kindness, he sent him immediately to his home. Afterwards, the governor was very diligent to renovate the courtyard of the church and to embellish the shrine of the Mother of God at Cassiope.

Many who at that time had doubts about the Orthodox Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ were made steadfast through this extraordinary and ineffable miracle. Beholding what had taken place and had been demonstrated in their own time, they came to

believe in those things which are mentioned in the Divine Scriptures and which are usually believed in by hearing alone. As for those who remained in unbelief and would not honor this ineffable miracle, they were put to shame, for having eyes in order to see, even as the holy Prophet Ezekiel says, they saw not, and having ears to hear, they heard not.

Let us all run, therefore, with faith and piety to the luminous Virgin and Theotokos Mary, and let us beseech her as one who has audience, that she may illumine the eyes of our understanding, lest we walk in the darkness of unbelief and sin, and that she may intercede with God, Who was born of her, to rescue us from every temptation of the evil one and deem us worthy of the celestial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, thanksgiving, honor, and worship, with His Father Who is without beginning, and the All-holy and good and life giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



**The Miraculous Icon of
Panaghia of Cassiope
[commemorated on May 8th]**

ON THE DREADED DAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.



The day of the Last Judgment! That day no one knows—only God the Father knows—but its signs are given in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) of the holy Apostle John the Theologian.

Apocalypse speaks of the events at the end of the world and of the Last Judgment, primarily in images and in a veiled manner. However, the Holy Fathers

have explained these images, and there is an authentic Church tradition that speaks clearly concerning the signs of the approach of the end, and concerning the Last Judgment.

Before the end of life on earth there will be agitation, wars, civil war, hunger, earthquakes... Men will suffer from fear, will die from expectation of calamity. There will be no life, no joy of life but a tormented state of falling away from life. Nevertheless there will be a falling away not only from life but from faith also, and *when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8). Men will become proud, ungrateful, rejecting Divine Law. Together with the falling away from life will be a weakening of moral life. There will be an exhaustion of good and an increase of evil.

Of these times, the holy Apostle John the Theologian speaks in his God-inspired work, the Apocalypse. He says that he *was in the Spirit* when he wrote it; this means that the Holy Spirit Himself was in him, when under the form of various images, the fate of the Church and the world was opened to him, and so this is a Divine Revelation.

The Apocalypse represents the fate of the Church in the image of a woman who hides herself in the wilderness: she does not show herself in public life. In public life, forces that prepare the possibility for the appearance of Antichrist will play the leading role. Antichrist will be a man, and not the devil incarnate. “Anti” signifies “in place of” or “against.” Antichrist is a man who desires to be in place of Christ, to occupy His place and possess what Christ should possess. He desires to possess the attraction of Christ and authority over the whole world. Moreover, Antichrist will receive that authority before his destruction and the destruction of the world.

What is known of this man—Antichrist? His precise ancestry is unknown: his father is completely unknown, and his mother a foul pretended virgin. He will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan. He will be very intelligent and endowed with skill in handling people. He will be fascinating and kind.

The philosopher Vladimir Soloviev worked a long time at presenting the advent and person of Antichrist. He carefully made use of all material on this question, not only Patristic, but also Moslem, and he worked out a brilliant picture.

Before the advent of Antichrist, there was a preparation in the world, the possibility of his appearance. *The mystery of iniquity doth already work.* (2 Thes 2:7). The forces preparing for his appearance fight above all against the lawful Imperial authority. The holy Apostle Paul says that Antichrist cannot be manifested *until what withholdeth is taken away.* (2 Thes. 2:7). St. John Chrysostom explains that the *withholding one* is the lawful pious authority: such an authority fights with evil. For this reason the *mystery*, already at work in the world, fights with this authority; it desires a lawless authority. When the *mystery* decisively achieves that authority, nothing will hinder the appearance of Antichrist any longer.

Fascinating, intelligent, kind, he will be merciful—he will act with mercy and goodness; but not for the sake of mercy and goodness, but for the strengthening of his own authority. When he will have strengthened it to the point where the whole world acknowledges him, then he will reveal his face.

For his capital, he will choose Jerusalem, because it was here that the Savior revealed His Divine teaching and His person. It was here that the entire world was called to the blessedness of goodness and salvation. The world did not acknowledge Christ and crucified Him in Jerusalem; whereas, the whole world will acknowledge the Antichrist’s authority and Jerusalem will become the capital of the world.

Having attained the pinnacle of authority, Antichrist will demand the acknowledgement that he has attained what no earthly power had ever attained or could attain and then demand the worship of himself as a higher being, as a god.

Vladimir Soloviev describes the character of his activity well, as “Supreme Ruler.” He will do what is pleasing to all—on the condition of being recognized as Supreme Authority. He will allow the Church to exist, permit Her Divine services, promise to build magnificent churches... on the condition, that all recognize him as “Supreme Being” and worship him. Antichrist will have a personal hatred for Christ; he will see Him as a rival and look upon Him as a personal enemy. He will live by this hatred and rejoice in men’s apostasy from Christ.

Under Antichrist, there will be an immense falling away from the faith. Many bishops will change in faith and in justification will point to the brilliant situation of the Church.

The search for compromise will be the characteristic disposition of men. Straight-forwardness of confession will disappear. Men will cleverly justify their fall, and gracious evil will support such a general disposition. There will be the habit of apostasy from truth and the sweetness of compromise and sin in men.

Antichrist will allow men everything, as long as they “fall down and worship him”; and the whole world will submit to him. Then there will appear the two righteous men, who will fearlessly preach the faith and accuse Antichrist. According to Church tradition, they are the two Prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah and Enoch, who did not taste of death, but will taste it now for three days, and in three days they must rise. Their death will call forth the great rejoicing of Antichrist and his servants. Their resurrection will plunge them into great confusion and terror. Then, the end of the world will come.

The Apostle Peter said that the first world was made out of water—an image of the primordial chaos, and perished by water—in the Flood. Now the world is reserved unto fire. *The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* (2 Pet 3:10). All the elements will ignite. This present world will perish in a single instant. In an instant all will be changed. Moreover, the Sign of the Son of God, the Sign of the Cross, will appear. The whole world, having willingly submitted to Antichrist, will weep. Everything is finished forever: Antichrist killed, the end of his kingdom of warfare with Christ, the end, and one is held accountable; one must answer to the true God.

“The end of the world” signifies not the annihilation of the world, but its transformation. Everything will be transformed suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye. The dead will rise in new bodies: their own, but renewed, just as the Savior rose in His own body and traces of wounds from the nails and spear were on it, yet it possessed new faculties, and in this sense it was a new body. It is not clear whether this new body will be the same as Adam was made, or whether it will be an entirely new body.

Afterward, the Lord will appear in glory on the clouds. Trumpets will sound, loud, with power! They will sound in the soul and conscience! All will become clear to the human conscience. The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Last Judgment, relates how *the Ancient of Days, the Judge sits on His throne, and before Him is a fiery stream.* (cf. Dan 7:9-10). Fire is a purifying element; it burns sin. Woe to a man if sin has become a part of his nature: then the fire will burn the man, himself. This fire will be kindled within man: seeing the Cross, some will rejoice, but others will fall into confusion,

terror, and despair. Thus, men will be divided instantly. The very state of a man’s soul casts him to one side or the other, to right or to left.

The more consciously and persistently man strives toward God in his life, the greater will be his joy when he hears: *Come unto Me, ye blessed.* Conversely: the same words will call the fire of horror and torture to those who did not desire Him, who fled and fought or blasphemed Him during their lifetime!

The Last Judgment knows of no witnesses or written protocols! Everything is inscribed in the souls of men and these records, these “books,” are opened at the Judgment. Everything becomes clear to all and to oneself. Moreover, some will go to joy, while others—to horror.

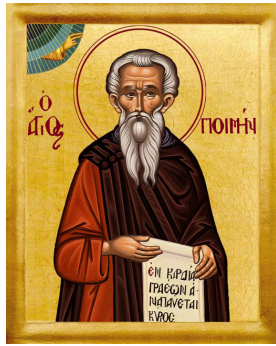
When “the books are opened,” it will become clear that the roots of all vices lie

in the human soul. Here is a drunkard or a lecher: when the body has died, some may think that sin is dead too. No! There was an inclination to sin in the soul, and that sin was sweet to the soul; and if the soul has not repented and has not freed itself of the sin, it will come to the Last Judgment with the same desire for sin. It will never satisfy that desire and in that soul there will be the suffering of hatred. It will accuse everyone and everything in its tortured condition; it will hate everyone and everything. *There will be gnashing of teeth* of powerless malice and the unquenchable fire of hatred.

A fiery gehenna—such is the inner fire. *There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.* Such is the state of hell.



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THE LETTER OF THE LAW CAN BE QUITE DEADLY

By St. Paisios the Athonite.

Once asked someone: “What type of warrior do you consider yourself to be? Christ’s warrior or temptation’s warrior? Are you aware that the evil of temptation also has its own warriors?”

A Christian must not be fanatic; he must have love for and be sensitive towards all people. Those who inconsiderately toss out comments, even if they are true, can cause harm.

I met a theologian who was extremely pious, but had the habit of speaking to the (secular) people around him in a very blunt manner; his method penetrated the listener so deeply that it shook them severely. He told me once: “During a gathering, I said such and such a thing to a lady.” But the way that he said it, he crushed her. “Look,” I said to him, “you may be tossing golden crowns studded with diamonds to other people, but the way that you throw them can smash heads, not only the sensitive ones, but the sound ones as well.”

Let’s not stone our fellow-man in a so-called “Christian manner.” The person who—in the presence of others—checks someone for having sinned (or speaks in an impassioned manner about a certain person) is not moved by the Spirit of God; he is moved by another spirit.

The way of the Church is love; it differs from the way of the legalists. The Church sees everything with tolerance and seeks to help each person, whatever he may have done, however sinful he may be.

I have observed a peculiar kind of logic in certain pious people. Their piety is a good thing, as is their predisposition for good; however, a certain spiritual discernment and amplitude is required so that their piety is not accompanied by narrow mindedness or strong-headedness. Someone who is truly in a spiritual state must possess and exemplify spiritual discernment; otherwise he will forever remain attached to the “letter of the Law,” and the letter of the Law can be quite deadly.

A truly humble person never behaves like a teacher; he listens, and, whenever his opinion is requested, he responds humbly. In other words, he responds like a student. He who believes that he is capable of correcting others is filled with egotism.

A person that begins to do something with a good intention and eventually reaches an extreme point lacks true discernment. His actions exemplify a latent type of egotism that is hidden beneath this behavior; he is unaware of it, because he does not know himself that well, which is why he goes to extremes.

Quite often, people begin with good intentions, but look where they may find themselves! This was the case with the “icon-worshippers” and the “icon-combatters” in the past: both cases were extremes! The former had reached the point of scraping icons of Christ and placing the scrapings into the Holy Chalice in order to “improve” Holy Communion; the latter, on the other hand, burnt and totally discarded all icons. That is why the Church was obliged to place icons in higher places, out of reach, and, when the dispute was over, lowered them so that we can venerate them and thus confer the appropriate honor to the persons portrayed therein.

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]

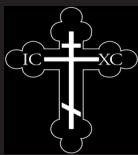
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AN ESSENTIAL EPISTLE ON THE GREATEST BLASPHEMY OF OUR DAYS

By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" editor, May 27th, 2020.

Today, at the end of the most tragic Lenten and Paschal season His Bride has ever lived, we celebrate the Apodosis of Pascha and tomorrow Orthodoxy observes His Holy Ascension. Sadly, most Orthodox churches shall remain either closed or with limited (at best) participation, as priests all over the western world willingly implemented the directives of their hierarchs to "ensure the safety of the flock." Those who seek to finally receive His Holy Body and Blood shall be exposed to the machinations and blasphemous creativity of the various hierarchs and dioceses, with very few exceptions, and no spiritual basis whatsoever; as always, their justification shall remain that it is all for "the health and safety of the faithful." This comes as even CDC declares the mortality rate of Covid-19 to be at levels of any other ordinary flu virus. In the end, once all data is gathered, a handful of honest world leaders will inform their citizens that this entire reaction to Covid-19 was not just unnecessary but completely destructive. Honest historians shall catalogue it as one of humanity's darkest pages.

Let us return, however, to the topic at hand. As has been the case in past ecumenist-related positions, selected theologians (of rather peculiar background and questionable educational reputation) will misquote one or two Church Fathers, or call upon the Church's history to justify whatever hierarchal invention has been presented to the faithful. Such quotes are always out of context, and, without exception,

inaccurate when the faithful are presented with the source document in its totality. The faithful, on the other hand, stand aside, trying to determine the why's and the how's, and all in the midst of a likely economic devastation for their families.

Let us examine recent and current ecclesiastical events a little closer.

The Closure of Churches Elimination of the Eucharist for the Faithful

Our Lord tells us that *He is the bread (manna) from Heaven* (Jn 6:35, 38). *I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.* (Jn 6:35). He also instructed us that to eat of this *New Bread* meant *never seeing death* (Jn 6:49-50). He says *...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.* (Jn 6:53). And, as if to settle completely the issue, Jesus adds, **for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.** (Jn 6:55).

It is the result of these divine admonitions that the Holy Church decreed the mandatory, frequent inclusion of the Eucharist as well as their liturgical participation of the flock into their lives. Specifically, the ninth Apostolic Canon required that: *All those faithful who enter and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for prayer and Holy Communion must be excommunicated, on the ground that they are causing the Church a breach of order.* As the Church evolved through its early history, church attendance was also included within the Church canons: *In case any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or anyone else on the list of the Clergy, or any layman, without any graver necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks,*

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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while living in the city, if he be a Cleric, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from Communion. (Canon LXXX, “The Rudder,” p. 384). Naturally, the faithful who desired to attend and partake of the Holy Gifts, during this Covid-19 crisis, bear no accountability—such accountability is placed upon those who closed the churches and established attendance restrictions.

In spite of the aforementioned scriptural passages and Church decrees, the majority of the western hierarchs willingly (and sadly without any opposition whatsoever) agreed to withhold the Holy Gifts from His flock. The admonitions of the courageous Greek priest Fr. Vasileios Volouthakis (during his Holy Friday homily) remain available in the digital media to remind all of the atrocity of such decision: “The hierarchs and the archons of the people consented to scourge and imprison Jesus, so that they can debar and boycott Him away from His flock, Shame on the hierarchs and the civil leaders of the people, shame on them. This shame shall never be erased from history; this indignation of the flock shall never be erased from its conscience. The wrath and the curse of God shall come upon the heads of all those who decided to withhold the Body and Blood of our Lord from the faithful... Shame! What has become of the Church of Greece? Shame! I am shamed and question as to why the people of God are not as astonished as I would have expected. They have imprisoned us and closed the churches over a deception, an obvious medical deception...” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI3cbQYchHE>).

It has been said by those in positions of ecclesiastical authority that since local synods had decided the closure of the churches, any exception is unacceptable and constitutes disobedience; there is nothing further from the truth. The

decision of a (geographically) local synod is never binding to the flock; the people are not obliged to follow such local synodical decision. The final judge of the validity of such a decision is the flock, and this is 100% patristically based, throughout the long history of the Church. Let us be reminded of the many cases whereby local synods adopted heretical views only to be rejected by the people and reversed in subsequent synodical gatherings. Of course, should such closure be warranted indeed, then the lead hierarchs should have called a pan-Orthodox Synod before uniquely deciding and acting on their own and inflicting such great spiritual harm upon the flock.

And now, after several months of longing and suffering, our Orthodox Church's life enters a new phase; it comes just days after the multi-week shut-down of the liturgical life for the faithful, throughout the Great Holy Lent, Pascha, and most of the post Paschal time period. Let us be reminded that serious pandemics, Muslim and German occupations, communism, world wars, civil wars and earthquakes never before resulted in the closure of churches. His flock withstood during the last few months an event that is indeed unique to the Church's 2,000-year history! The clergy's “instructions” to observe the services via live webcasts has been ludicrous and horrific; is Orthodoxy entering the phase of televangelism now? How embarrassing and shameful to consider that standing in front of a television with lit Paschal candles is a form of *oikonomia* for the celebration of His Resurrection by the faithful. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of souls, and especially young children, were prohibited from receiving His Body and Blood. Needy souls were not allowed to have Holy Confession, unless it was “in secret,” and never in their parish church. Why? Was

the Covid-19 virus present only in the parish churches but not in the crowded stores and pharmacies?

Celebrant clergy (in empty churches and with just a chanter and perhaps a deacon) read aloud during the Pascha services the words of St. John Chrysostom: *Wherefore, enter you all into the joy of your Lord; and receive your reward, both the first, and likewise the second. You rich and poor together, hold high festival. You sober and you heedless, honor the day. Rejoice today, both you who have fasted and you who have disregarded the fast. The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously. The calf is fattened; let no one go hungry away.* Yet the flock went hungry, they did not participate in the Holy Eucharist; they stood staring at cold television sets that exemplified resemblances of something religious yet so far away. The few souls that dared to defy orders, mostly in Greece and other eastern European nations, found themselves fined and / or arrested. Blessed be the clergy that found ways around the bishopric and civil directives!

There is, however, an even greater tragedy: We wonder: how many souls departed this temporary earthly life, un-confessed and un-communed, as the great majority of western clergy eagerly over-adopted and blindly followed the shutdown directives? Is there any spiritual accountability towards such a spiritual tragedy? No Covid-19 death can possibly outweigh the heart-break of a dying man or woman (and especially a child) who desires but is unable to confess and receive the Holy Sacraments before departing this life.

We would also be remiss if we did not emphasize that these ridiculous restrictions took place even in states such as Arizona, whereby its governor included religious activities as Constitutionally protected (which means that the Arizona Governor, just like several governors in the USA, deemed religious activities as community essential). This, however, meant nothing to the bishops as they blindly made their directives universal in all cities and states, irrespective of local laws and limited restrictions within several geographic regions. As a brethren reminded us, “it is as if they were in competition to outdo the civil authorities!”

Luckily, not all clergy complied with the bishopric directives—there have been a handful of exceptions and a few, very few blessed souls were afforded the observance of a somewhat normal Lenten and Paschal season.

We stand in appreciation of the position taken by the civil authorities in the United States, via President Trump, on May

22nd, 2020: “Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential but left out churches and other houses of worship—that’s not right—so I’m correcting this injustice. I am ordering governors to allow houses of worship to open immediately, declaring them “essential” to American life during COVID-19. So, the governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now, this weekend. If they don’t do it, I will override the governors. In America, we need more prayer, not less.”

This directive was followed by several churches; tragically, some of them (rather most of the Orthodox churches in America), selected to still remain closed to the faithful for the weekend of May 24th, as bishops gathered with legal advisors to compose policies and procedures, again in the interest of “the health and safety of the faithful.” We have been provided multi-page documents originated by several dioceses; all of them have their own unique rules and

regulations, especially as it relates to the delivery of the Holy Eucharist. The exhaustive details and specific guidelines developed by most dioceses compete and likely exceed anything corporate entities such as Home Depot and Costco have developed. Worship in most Orthodox churches have



now become a complex process.

The “New” Eucharistic Approach

For two thousand years, clergy has been transmitting the grace of the Holy Mysteries in a similar manner, always having celebrants and participants alike, come in contact with the Holy Chalice (and *lavitha* in second millennium). Modern logic or ungodly doubts have been absent; such blasphemous thoughts never entered the teaching or practices of the Church, until now. Participants witnessed a perpetual great miracle. Is it possible that now, because of a new-found flu virus, the Holy Communion can cause sickness or the slightest damage? Is it possible for the Body and Blood of our Lord and God to contaminate our body and blood?

For centuries, the same Holy Chalice and the same *tongs* have been in use, never washed, never disinfected. The priests of the nursing homes and hospitals, even the ones for the most infectious diseases, give the Holy Communion to the faithful and reverently consume the Gifts and live long, healthy lives.

It is this history and experience that lead us to the only logical and acceptable conclusion: the proposed deviations in the delivery of Holy Communion to the faithful, either via “plastic

spoons” or dipping of the *lavitha* into alcohol for ... sterilization, or the use of several “spoons,” (as directed by the GOA Archbishop) all constitute an absolute blasphemy towards the Holy Spirit. For any person, hierarch or otherwise, to infer or to explicitly state that the current method poses any threat to the faithful who approach the Holy Chalice with faith and fear of God is preposterous and unfounded in the long history on the Church. It is best that any person who has any doubts (i.e., lack of faith) relative to the sanctity of the Holy Eucharist, as it has been delivered to the faithful for nearly 1,000 years, to not approach the Holy Chalice.

The faithful ought to question any clergy and especially any bishop wishing to deviate from Holy Tradition: during their own lifetime of receiving Holy Communion, how many faithful approached the Chalice with herpes, AIDS, hepatitis, flu and colds, mouth cancers and every other common or uncommon disease of our days? Why is it that parishes and communities never experienced any related pandemics? Why are the priests (who consume the remnant of the Holy Gifts in the end) still alive? What has changed with Covid-19, when medical evidence every day points to its “ordinary flu strain” nature?

Let us also make a necessary correction towards the terminology utilized by clergy eager to abandon traditional Eucharistic methods. The Holy Eucharist is being delivered via “tongs”—*lavitha* in Gk; it is not a “spoon,”—*κοχλίτριον* in Gk. The term *lavitha* refers to the burning coal given to Isaiah by an Angel with tongs. (Isa 6:6-6:7: *Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*)

We suspect that other plans are hiding behind such measures and we are quite confident that even post-pandemic, most of the established liturgical deviations will be maintained. How else would the ecumenist movement be able to join with the Latins and share the same format of Eucharist? Are Latin-type “wafers” the next plan by the appointed hierarchy of the Orthodox Church?

A New Iconoclasm?

We wish to also address the new iconoclastic directives prohibiting the kissing of the priest’s right hand, delivery of the *antithoron* in small zip-lock baggies (and not by the priest openly, as before), and especially the veneration and kissing of holy icons.

The faithful kiss the priest’s right hand from time to time and always when he delivers *antithoron*. This is an act of veneration. The people are venerating the High Priesthood of Christ, of which the parish priest is simply a participant. They also venerate the hand that sanctifies the Holy Gifts; to contemplate the likely spread of a virus via the hand that just sanctified bread and wine into His Body and Blood is as illogical and blasphemous as the questioning of the Holy Eucharist’s delivery via the *lavitha*.

With regard to the holy icons, all Orthodox hierarchs and clergy have been taught in theological schools the mandatory veneration of icons, as based on the 7th Ecumenical Synod. Let us be reminded on the significance of icons within the liturgical life of the Church.

The power of iconography is not in the matter but in who icons point to, in who lies behind the images. Saint Basil the Great had written long before: *The honor given to the image passes on to the prototype that lies behind it.* The doctrinal significance of icons is that they proclaim the Incarnation. Therefore, the Fathers of the Church decreed that not only are icons permissible but that it is essential to have them—for to reject them is to deny Christ’s humanity, his materiality. Therefore, the Fathers continued, *as the sacred and life-giving Cross is everywhere set up as a symbol, so also should the images of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the holy angels, as well as those of the saints and other pious and holy men be exhibited on the walls of churches, in homes and in all conspicuous places, by the roadside and everywhere, to be revered by all who see them.* The Fathers made it clear that icons are both teaching devices and also means of grace, points of contact with God and the saints.

The Seventh Ecumenical Synod among it decrees stipulated that *that veneration and honor shall be paid to the representations of the Lord and of the Saints and that they should be bowed to, and saluted with kisses, and attended with lights and the offering of incense.* And for the greater establishment of the veneration of the holy images, the Seventh Ecumenical Synod anathematized all those who made war against the images, and set forth the veneration, and established it forever, as is evident from the ninth canon of that synod. *That none of the books containing the heresy of the traducers of the Christians are to be hid. ALL the childish devices and mad ravings which have been falsely written against the venerable images, must be delivered up to the Episcopate of Constantinople, that they may be locked away with other*



heretical books. And if anyone is found hiding such books, if he be a bishop or presbyter or deacon, let him be deposed; but if he be a monk or layman, let him be anathema. (Canon IX, 7th Ecumenical Synod).

Concluding Thoughts

One of the greatest pandemics in modern history was that of 1918. Albeit forgotten, it was virus-based pandemic that lasted about 15 months, from spring 1918 to early summer 1919. It infected 500 million people—about a third of the world’s population at the time. Humanity experienced 50,000,000 deaths. Humanity had to concurrently deal with World War I. The Covid-19 experience stands in minuscule comparison, both in terms of its ferocity as well as its mortality. Yet there were no church closures—on the contrary, people flooded the churches in prayer to be delivered from this (true) pandemic. In the adjacent picture, we see the faithful overflowing a cathedral in San Francisco as they crowd fills the street in prayer, with no regard towards “social distancing.” And none of them with any “masks.”

The Covid-19 time-period comes not long after the sad and tragic schism our Church experienced following the Ukrainian mess caused by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The manner by which the Church’s hierarchs are addressing “post-pandemic liturgical practices” will only further divide His Bride and deepen, or perhaps even cause, new schisms. It is rather

apparent that great confusion, anxiety, sadness and a form of a psychological withdrawal is prevailing amongst most the flock. What most of the clergy has and continues to call *oikonomia* we call *paranomia* (lawlessness). And we do not stand alone in our characterization.

The mess that the great majority of western bishops created with this “event,” in the final word, is the clearest indication yet of the complete lack of any spiritual leadership on their part. It is tragic that in this one crucial moment in history, the Ecumenical Patriarchate is blindingly absent. We believe that if the Church of Constantinople had not fallen into its multi-decade ecumenical delusion(s) and preserved the Church’s dogma, then it would command respect among hierarchs and flocks worldwide and all bishops would have looked and followed Phanar’s patristically-based lead. Such fallen, confusing and uncoordinated rules, regulations, policies, procedures and liturgical practices would not have been possible.

In his one and only address to the faithful, the Ecumenical Patriarch exclaimed: “Perhaps some of you have felt that these drastic measures undermine or harm our faith. However, that which is at stake is not our faith—it is the faithful. It is not Christ—it is our Christians. It is not the divine-man—but human beings.”

We beg to differ with the Bishop of Constantinople—since when have wars, serious pandemics, hunger and martyrdom ever compromised the faithful flock? We dare suggest that if anything, they have strengthened it. We instead believe that the newly found liturgical practices being adopted by hierarchs worldwide do undermine the Faith 100%; such practices and teachings damage the possibility of spiritual healing for a great majority of the flock. It is the therapeutic nature of the Church as a spiritual hospital, providing a means for acquiring divine power and grace for the healing of diseases of soul and body, that our bishops must focus upon. As such, litanies and Holy Unction, Confession and Holy Communion are what

the faithful need; worldly pre-occupations with new social norms, isolation, fear, seclusion, and dissociative imaginations are neither Orthodox nor beneficial whatsoever. They are instead the direct product of the Evil One’s influence upon the current **true pandemic of faithlessness**.

As we close our painful post-Paschal thoughts, we also self-reflect and conclude that a lot of what we are experiencing is likely the

result of our (the flock’s) fallen spiritual state. May we improve ourselves, for we remain convinced that should the flock (under the leadership of few brave and patristically-bound dedicated shepherds) repent and pray, God shall send us the bishops we desire. Until then, we will be “stuck” with the hierarchs that we deserve...

Let us stand well, let us stand with fear...



The Holy Orthodox Faith, my beloved, is something that is extremely fragile; She is like a human eye: it cannot tolerate even a loose eyelash. Our Faith is never to be mixed with or allow the entry of any foreign elements. She must remain pure, undefiled, immaculate and untainted.

Blessed Bishop Augustinos Kantiotos of Florina (+2010)

ON THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By the blessed Augoustinos Kantiotis bishop of Florina (+2010), from "Follow Me," Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts (1989), pp. 305-312.

The Image of the Good Shepherd

To represent the love that Peter and the disciples should have, the Lord presented Himself as a shepherd. It is not the first time the Lord used the image of a shepherd; He spoke one other time about shepherds and flock, both in the Old Testament and the New (Pss 22:1-5, 77:72-73, 13, Zach 10:3; Nah 3:18; Isa 40:11, 63:11; Jer 2:8, 3:1-3, 15, 10:21, 12:10; Ezek 34:2-30, 37:24; Mt 9:36, 10:16, 18:12, 25:32-33; Jn 10:1-17; 1 Pet 2:25; Heb 13:20; Eph 4:12). In the Gospel of John (10:1-17) two images are presented. One is the bad shepherd who enters the sheepfold, not through a gate, but another way, and is therefore not a real shepherd but a robber and thief who owes obedience to no one. The other is the beautiful image of the good shepherd who labors and sacrifices himself for the sheep. The Good Shepherd is Christ Himself. He said, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.* (Jn 10:11).

Those who live in the highlands, the livestock-breeding areas of Greece, have a vivid picture of the laborious life shepherds lead. At sunrise they get up and lead their sheep to the cool meadows and to clear water. They guard them from the intense heat of summer and the chill of winter. They care for the sick sheep and heal the wounds of those who have fallen and injured themselves, allowing them to rest in the shade of trees. They amuse the sheep with flutes but carry a sling and weapons to drive away packs of robbers and thieves like the beasts of the forest that come out at night to devour the sheep.

A beautiful image of the shepherd can be found in 1 Samuel (17:34-35). David was a shepherd, the youngest son of Jesse. Let's see how he describes his own life as a shepherd. When, as an adolescent he presented himself to King Saul, seeking permission to do battle against the giant, Goliath, he said: *I watched over my father's flock in the wilderness, where there are wild beasts, lions and bears. I did not allow them to come near. I struck them. One day a lion ... snatched a sheep from me, but I did not let him leave undefeated. I defeated him. I took the sheep from his mouth. He attacked me, but I took the*

lion by the throat and struck. I squeezed his throat and strangled him. O King, I fought and defeated the beast that wanted to eat my sheep, how can I allow that dishonorable foreigner Goliath, who frightens the people of God, to go on? I look at him as one of the beasts of the desert which I attack, fight, and strangle. It was the shepherd's life David had in mind when, as king of Israel, he wrote the 23rd Psalm.

In this beautiful psalm, the Lord is presented as a shepherd and believers as sheep that go in love under the strong protection of their Good Shepherd. It is as if David were saying, "Lord, when I was a shepherd, I let no sheep be devoured by beasts. My sheep were secure under my pastorage; how shall I not be safe in Your love and protection, for You must see me as a sheep in Your holy flock. If you are my shepherd, how could I hunger, thirst, or become the food of wild beasts? No, Lord, You love me; You care for me; it is my steadfast belief that *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.* (Ps 23:1-2).

The image of the good shepherd should be in the minds of all those who lead those souls for whom Christ shed His precious Blood.

The Care of Souls

Have you been installed as the pastor of a parish or diocese? Look out for yourself and your flock. Be an affectionate father and a vigilant guardian of Jesus' holy flock. Not a single sheep should perish. You should undertake the various concerns for the sheep. Are there children in your district? Treat them with special affection.

They are like those children whom Christ loved and blessed. They are the favored lambs of your flock. By reason of their age, they are in special need of good care, especially in difficult times when the cold winds of disbelief and corruption blow, chilling the sheep. Are there young adults? They are still inexperienced, like the young sheep that leave the fold for the first time. Warn them about the cliffs. Are there mature, older people in spirit rather than body? Like the lambs that stop nursing and feed on the grass, so these seek suitable food.

It is your duty to discover, to constantly uncover. You must not leave your sheep without food for even one day. Lead your reasoning sheep to the green fields, to the meadows, to the boundless pages of Holy Scripture. Guide them to the crystal waters of the great Fathers and Teachers of the



Gospel. In hot times, in times of pain and affliction, let your sheep rest beneath the shadow of the Cross, and if there are times of leisure and gaiety, entertain your sheep with your pipes, with sweet songs of love for Christ. But while playing your pipes, *have your sling ready beside you*. Before you know it, **the wild beasts of the plains—the faithless, the godless, and the heretical—will try to make inroads into Christ’s flock**. Draw your sling; use words of rebuke to drive the beasts away. Be ever vigilant.

If, however, you are informed that a reasoning sheep, attracted by a little grass on a sheer cliff, has slipped and fallen over the precipice of sin and deception, do not delay. Run and do everything you can to pull your sheep from the rocks of destruction. Save it, even if it is in the mouth of a lion, wolf, or bear. Was it hurt by its fall? Clean the wound. Use oil and wine. Did it become sick? Call the physicians; furnish a suitable, effective medicine for every ailment of soul. Has it been assailed by an incurable illness? Has it become mangy? Though you are very sad, do not hesitate. Distance it as quickly as possible from the flock, so that the illness is not transmitted to the healthy sheep. (For an analogy of one with spiritual malignancy to a mangy sheep, whereby because of the seriousness of the illness, the persistence of evil, and the contagiousness of the disease, the animal must be separated from the flock).

A bright reminder of the pastor’s spiritual love is an epistle of St. Basil which he sent to a fallen monk. He first scolds him for his great fall by which so many souls were offended, but does not want to leave him to fall into the terrible gulf of despair. He appeals to him, saying: *Arise quickly; raise your eyes to heaven, come into consciousness, cease from your evil... It is salvation; it is repair. Be of good courage, do not despair*. (Epistle 44, “To a Fallen Monk”).

Be vigilant at all times. Constantly listen in the mystical ears of your soul to the command of the Chief Shepherd Christ, *Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep*.

The Lord’s words resounded in the ears of Peter. The image of the good shepherd was stamped on his mind. Addressing himself to the presbyters of the Church, Peter gave them this icon of the good shepherd and said: *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*. (1 Pet 5:2-4).

Questions for Today’s Pastors

Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. We who call ourselves pastors should stop and meditate on these words of the Lord. Make them a spiritual scale to weigh yourself. Come and be weighed, everyone, from deacon to patriarch. Let each place his hand on his chest and ask, “Have I taken an interest in souls? Have I been concerned with bringing up

a new generation in the Lord? Do my lambs listen to my voice and come to me? Are my young people led by my love, by suitable teaching? Do I feed hungering Christian souls with choice food? Do I speed to save those in spiritual and natural human danger? Do I play the pipes, yet carry my sling? Do I claim the law of God? Do I champion the rights of my holy flock? Do I make war against evil? Do I fight the beasts, so that I can say with Paul “I am ready, like the ever-memorable shepherds and teachers of the Church, to sacrifice myself when my flock is in danger? Does the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom move me?”

In the official journalistic arm of the Church of Greece, a modern church writer, Constantine Callinicos, published three weighty articles on the catechism of our children, titled “Feed My Lambs.” In these articles he answers the complaints of those who fight against catechetical schools. He considers the catechesis of children and the young most important to the life of the Church—Didactic and moving is this blessed writer’s lines to the catechists through which he closes these articles: *Feed My lambs* is the Lord’s command, and conforming to this, Greek catechist, close your ears to the later arguments of inactivity. Consecrate your life to the form of the conscious and unbreakable members of Christ. Love those souls for whom Christ died. Teach to them the perceived and undoubted faith of our Orthodox Church. Make them into the invincible arrows of propagandists. Show them that the Christian religion is not only a frown but a smile, a poem, a song and vigor of body and soul, and armor for tomorrow. Find together with the blessings of God you will rejoice all your life in the gratitude of your students. Truly I tell you, the hairs of these little children will grow white, but their memory of you, who guided them from the proper age to Christ our Savior, will never fade.” (“Ecclesia,” vol 1924, p. 125).

Shepherds of the twentieth century, answer these and a thousand other questions that come from the depths of your hearts as to whether you are on course as spiritual guides. If your conscience answers, “yes,” you can say that you love Jesus the Nazarene, and as a sure sign of this love you have His concern for the sheep. But if the answer is “no,” then you should fear because you do not love Jesus the Nazarene; you are His enemy and foe, and from the inside, from the altar, you make the worst war against His holy religion, undermining and throwing down the strongholds of faith and morals. Because of you, His name is blasphemed among the Gentiles. Because of you the tabernacle of David has become poor. Because of you, the sheep have become swine and the churches are without congregations.

The Church is in a miserable condition today. Many who are celebrants of the Mysteries and many who are endowed with the *Epitrachelion* and *Omophorion* are also exploiters of the sacred and the holy, merchants and traders of Christ.

How many shepherds are there in whom we recognize the Good Shepherd?

The Sweet Hope

In the midst of this gloom there is a ray of hope. What is it? It is the three or more thousand young people who in the last years studied in theological schools and seminaries and are still there. These are the candidate pastors and teachers of tomorrow.

Will these young men augment the number of bad shepherds? It would be the greatest spiritual calamity if these young people imitate the worst examples of the past generation. Let them not copy the example of the bad shepherds, but let them extend the Church into the Future with the heroes and martyrs among the clergy in mind. Even though they are young, let them gaze upon the shining examples like the 300 or more priests who were slaughtered on a day of national tragedy, putting up their lives for their sheep. Let them gaze at the icon of the Crucifixion, the good Shepherd, and let them hear His voice which says to every one of us: "My child, do you wish to be a missionary? Do you wish to become a clergyman in these days? Do you love Me more than all your parishioners? Do you love Me more than these?"

To these questions do not be quick to answer. Search deep in your heart. Meet with an experienced spiritual father, and if, after a thorough and strict investigation of your inner life, your conscience tells you a true desire for Christ burns in your heart, then kneel before the Crucifix and say the prayer of your heart, "Lord, I love You." You will hear His voice reach the depths of your soul saying, *Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep.*

Amen.



My blessed children, the holy Fathers teach that a man's heart is entangled with the prickly roots of various passions which are lodged very deep within it. When a person, through enlightenment of God, attempts to uproot (in essence, to transfigure) a passion, he grips and removes the rootlets with forceps. However, as he attempts to uproot each passion, he simultaneously lacerates the heart. When the heart is cut open, it bleeds and hurts. If a person decides not to bear the pain, he gives up at that point, he abandons the struggle, and thus remains passionate and sinful. If, however, he patiently endures the pain, he removes the root of the passion and is set free.

Blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)

ON THE MODERN WORLD

By the saintly Archbishop Averky of blessed memory (+1976).

We are living in a strange time, when all the true and healthy Christian concepts are being replaced by false and deceitful concepts, discovered often with an evil intention with the undoubted intention, naturally, of drawing people away from the right path of a truly Christian life. In all of this there can be discerned some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all.

We must be clearly aware of the kind of time in which we live. Indeed, only a spiritually blind man, or one who had already sold his soul to the enemies of our holy faith and Church, could fail to sense the spirit of the approaching Antichrist in everything which is now happening in the world. Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can one speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless "balls," various kinds of "games," "dances" and amusements toward which, despite their immoral, anti-Christian nature, even my modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them.

A terrible, unrelieved, hopeless unscrupulousness has taken possession of many people. The true doctrine of the faith and the Church for which the first Christians died in such tortures has become a hollow sound for the majority of modern "Christians." They neither know this doctrine, nor do they desire to know it, for they are indifferent to it.

Dull, cold indifference to almost anything which bears the imprint of ideological content and seeking in everything only one's own personal advantage. This is the character of our time.

This lack of ideological content, this unscrupulousness accompanied by departure from the true faith and the Church and by indifference to them is the basic, fundamental sin of which we, Russian Orthodox Christians, must repent.

It is not for us to enjoy ourselves, to amuse ourselves, to dance on the grave of Russia, brought down to its deathbed by us, but rather to repent in tears, really to repent, as the Holy Church teaches us, with a firm intention to change our life radically, to renew our spirit.

HOW AND HOW MUCH TO PRAY

Source: "Watchfulness and Prayer, Themes from the Philokalia, No. 1," published by the Holy Monastery of St. Gregory Palamas, Koufalia, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2nd edition (1998), pg. 60-69.

We know people who can walk in the midst of noise and the crowds of Athens, who can walk through Omonoia Square (center of Athens, Greece, *Ed.*) and the most central streets of the capital with their mind undistracted, free, surrendered to unceasing prayer. This means that the prayer has brought about in their souls the divine attraction of Christ, the sacred magnetism of Heaven and Heavenly life.

Nikitas Stithatos writes: *He who succeeds in attaining real prayer and floods his being with the love of Christ, does not become a prisoner to his emotions nor does he become attached to anything.* [St. Nikitas Stithatos was the disciple and biographer of St. Symeon the New Theologian; he is far less well known to us than St. Symeon himself. Born around the beginning of the eleventh century, at an early age (c. 1020) Nikitas entered the monastery of Studios at Constantinople, and there he remained as a monk for the rest of his life, being ordained in due course to the priesthood. His personal contact with the New Theologian cannot have lasted very long, for the latter died in 1022. *Ed.*].

My brother, pray with simplicity and peace, calmly and plainly, like the gentle breeze, like your breath. Only concentrate all your emotions, all your will around the holy Name of the Lord. Let His Name penetrate your soul like a drop of oil saturates a cloth. Surrender all your being and lock it inside His Name.

Yet you will never soften your soul, you will not make it fruitful, fertile, *good soil* (Mt 13:8), until you teach it to cry and mourn, and be contrite before the Cross of the Lord for its sinfulness and for the sins of the whole world, in which it feels it has a share.

Even today there are ascetics, who weep with a universal, life-long lament as they pray for the evil of the world.

Once in a while, before you begin, or during prayer, during a break, and also after fatigue, open the Holy Scripture and take delight in its divine meadows. You will find *green pastures* to "lie down" (Pss 23:2); you will discover the natural environment your soul seeks. Its hunger and thirst for Christ will be satisfied. Christ is the focal point of Holy Scripture. That is why the prayer of the heart will make you embrace

Holy Scripture consuming you with longing for it. And Holy Scripture will again spontaneously return the Name of Christ to your lips and heart.

In order for every prayer to be acceptable to God and bring forth fruit, it must be said with concentration and the gathering of the mind. If you have a lot of concerns in your work, turn your mind to Christ and unceasing prayer, which will give you strength and will guard you so that the *thorns of the cares of the world* (Mt 13:22) will not choke you.

At the appointed hour of the prayer rule *lay aside all worldly cares* (Cherubic hymn) and lift up your mind and heart unto the Lord. In order to fly, every bird first rallies around and then centralizes its strength. The greatest success for the cultivation of the prayer of the heart is precisely that concentration of the intellect, the release from every parasite that sucks it dry. We, beginners, need to curb our intellect and force it to stay within itself and occupy itself exclusively

with the words of the prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.*

St. Nicodemus the Hagiote and many holy Fathers advise the beginners to bow the head and briefly hold the breath as a means of helping the intellect in its self-concentration: *Lord Jesus Christ—inhale—have mercy on me—exhale.*

This can be done for a short time until our intellect is curbed. Later on, let the prayer roll lightly like a stream and, without interruption, water the interior depths of our being. All our attention should be given to the words of the *prayer*.

Another proven way of saying the *prayer* is to take a deep breath while reciting it five, six, or seven times: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*

In the beginning, as we said, let us force ourselves to say the *prayer* out loud or whispered with a fast cadence, so that the intellect will not have time to form any distracting thoughts. After a considerable time, our intellect will then get used to praying mentally and will become sweetened, as if it had tasted honey. We will want to say the *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me* continually, and whenever we break off, the interruption will sadden us.

Our intellect is the *purveyor of the soul*. Its task is to take what it sees and hears to the heart, the center of man's spiritual and physical being. Therefore, when we say the *prayer* and do not think about anything else, but pay attention to its words, then while we breathe lightly, the intellect with its own effort and will takes the prayer down to the heart



and keeps it there, reciting it rhythmically. This goes on until the Grace of God overshadows our soul. His Grace is the moving force. It moves everything.

In the beginning the Grace of the prayer is purifying; afterwards it becomes enlightening. Grace will come after much struggle and effort, tears and mourning, provided we pray wherever we are: walking, lying down, standing up, working, night and day. When the intellect tires, the prayer should be recited orally. When the lips tire, it should be given back to the intellect, until it is filled, saturated. Then the prayer will become energy. In other words, at that time Grace works even without the will of man, when someone may be eating, sleeping, working, or walking, while within him the "prayer" awakens and shouts, flooding him with peace and heavenly joy.

When at last you have prayed sufficiently, according to what you want, you can stop at one or two words of the prayer where your spirit finds rest and your heart is sweetened. For example, let your intellect and lips repeatedly say, *Jesus Jesus, my Jesus, or my Lord*, slowly and without interruption, with longing that brings tears, with compunction and love.

St Basil the Great notes: *An intellect undistracted by external things and not dispersed through the senses among worldly things, returns to itself, and from itself it ascends to God by an unerring path.*

We discover the realm of God when the intellect turns and enters the heart. *The Kingdom of God is within us.* When man returns unto himself, he feels with uncontained longing the yearning for the pristine beauty which is found in the Name and Person of Jesus Christ.

Every word of the prayer locks inside it a depth of the knowledge and wisdom of God. We can live all of Jesus, all the Gospels, all the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, all the mystery of the world, by means of the Name of the Lord Jesus. Within that cry of the seeking of divine mercy we are conscious of all the grandeur of the Divine Incarnation, the pain of the Fall, and the joy of our Adoption.

The struggle to keep the *prayer* inside our intellect is not only due to its natural weakness and tendency to wander, it also results from the rabid and covert attack of the devil. However, in time our persistence will win. Our mind be-

longs to God and, little by little, it must become the *mind of Christ*.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite calls the return of our intellect to itself and subsequently to the heart unwavering, cyclic. For just as the circumference of a circle returns again to itself and unites, so also with the intellect: it returns to itself by means of this cyclic motion and becomes one.

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes: *Once in the heart, do not let your intellect remain idle, but find the indwelling Logos that enables us to think and compose Spiritual works, judge and examine inwardly and read entire books without the mouth speaking a word. Once the intellect has found this "indwelling Logos," do not allow it to say anything else but the words of the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Just as God transcends all sensible and intelligible things, so must the intellect rise above things perceptible and intelligible in order to unite with God.*

Let your will with love adhere completely to the words of the prayer, so that the intellect, the *indwelling Logos* and your will, these three aspects of your soul, may become one. Thus, it appears that man is an icon of the Holy Trinity, as St. Gregory Palamas writes: *When the single mind is threefold, while yet remaining single, it is united with the Divine Threefold Oneness, closes the door to delusion and rises above the domination of the flesh, the world, and the prince of this world.*

The quantity of prayer depends entirely on our volition. The holy Fathers write that one cannot practice perfect prayer of the heart without devoting a great deal of time to it.

How much should we pray, then? Unceasingly. Without interruption. Since the devil, the enemy of our soul, fights us without ceasing, we too should unceasingly make use of the fearful and omnipotent weapon of the divine Name.

Since we are in danger of falling into sin every moment and of grieving the Lord, let us unceasingly repeat His saving Name. Let us also ask Him for His mercy. St. Diadochos of Photiki says that when man calls-upon the Name of God as frequently as he can, he does not fall easily into sin.

As long as we desire to find Jesus incessantly within us, let us call Him unceasingly. Inasmuch as we want our heart to be ablaze with the incorporeal fire of divine love, let us nourish this fire with unceasing prayer. And, as long as we do not want our mind to be imprisoned by vain and cunning



thoughts, let us give it the “loftier thought” of unceasing prayer. Let this become its “good change,” its pleasure, its delight, its nourishment: the sweeter-than-honey Name of Jesus.

My brother, frequent repetition and ceaselessness of prayer will bring you the fruit that you desire. Do not worry if, in spite of all your effort, you feel internal dryness. Persist. Fruit is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth.* (Jn 3:8). What God asks of us is to pray, to pray as often as we breathe.

It is imperative that we “pursue the prayer” for many years with a system, with asceticism by forcing ourselves. For our mind is scattered, diffused, and with difficulty is restrained in the center, its objective, its happiness which is Jesus. But with time, however, a blessed day will come when, instead of us “pursuing the prayer,” it will pursue us. It will spring out, it will gush up, it will overflow from inside the heart, it will charm the mind with the very delightful name, the “name which is above every name.” (Phil 2:9). A blessed time will come then, when although we may be walking, talking, eating, sleeping, the heart will talk to Christ, her adored Bridegroom. “I sleep, but my heart is

Awake. (Cant 5:2)

Apart from our attempt to pray everywhere and always, under whatever circumstances, it is imperative for us to have daily a designated period in a specific quiet place for regular prayer of the heart. This will be regulated by our spiritual father.

Frequent practice of [prayer] will teach us attentiveness. Quantity will certainly lead on to quality. *If you want to learn to do something well whatever it may be you must do it as often as possible.* (*The Way of the Pilgrim*, p. 209). In deed. That is how it is. The athlete who wants to succeed in a certain sport struggles, trains and repeats his attempt to improve his performance and to assure victory. The scientist repeats the experiment in his laboratory—even if he fails many times—for a conquest in the field of medicine, technology, etc. The artist repaints the same work many times until he ends with his classic creation.

The same thing happens with the Christian who wants to become an athlete, craftsman and artist of prayer. He repeats the words of the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ... have mercy on me.* In the beginning with effort, with patience on the untamable mind, but with longing and assurance that he will gain victory over his former nature. He will conquer the Name of Jesus, he will imprint it perfectly with the seal of prayer.

Staretz Amvrosy, one of the renowned ascetics of the Russian Church, insisted a great deal on the cultivation of the Jesus Prayer. He had the advice of St. John Climacus as the rule of his life. *Flog your enemies with the Name of Jesus; for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth.* (Ladder

21:7). He would relate much to stress the importance of mental prayer. Amongst others, he would tell this impressive story also:

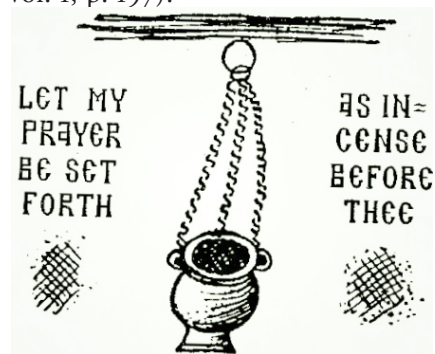
“A certain devout Christian had a myna bird in his house, which he was teaching to speak. The bird also learned the words, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*, which that Christian repeated often. One summer day it found the window open and flew out to the street. Then a hawk saw it from on high and rushed toward it. The bird, surprised by the attack, instead of another cry, cried out the prayer, and the hawk—an extraordinary thing—pulled back at once as if someone was chasing it away.

“What do we notice here?” the Staretz concluded. “That, even if the Jesus prayer is said unconsciously, it has its results and makes possible the impossible.”

Struggle, therefore, brother, with all your strength to pray without interruption. The more you persist, the faster you will become accustomed to it. The tongue and lips get used to the prayer and, without you realizing it, the companionship of the prayer will become your permanent property. If at some time, for some reason, it stops, you will feel as though you are missing something vital. Your mind will seek Jesus with longing. For frequent prayer creates such a strong habit that will soon become second nature. That is the goal you must attain.

You cannot be called a Christian if you do not pray often. All the saints prayed continually and with ardor. Therefore, become a practitioner of unceasing prayer. It will give enlightenment to your mind, because it will always be found underneath and within the enlightening Name of Jesus Who is the Sun of Righteousness and the light of the world.

Truly blessed is the man whose mind and heart are as closely attached to the Jesus Prayer... as air to the body or flame to the wax. The sun rising over the earth creates daylight and the venerable and holy Name of the Lord Jesus; shining continually in the mind gives birth to countless intellections radiant as the sun. (St. Hesychios the Priest, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 197).



The spiritual level of a family is not measured by the quantity of prayers, but in the degree of harmony and spiritual rest that they have in their household.

Mother Magdalena of Essex

TIMELY PROPHECIES

From various Orthodox sources.

How will the clergy and monks be in the latter days? What do our saints say?

Saint Hippolytus of Rome: *The shepherds will be like wolves; the priests will embrace falsehood; the monks will lust after the things of the world.*

Saint Kosmas Aitolos: *A time will come when the harmony that exists now between clergy and laymen will not be. Clergymen will become worse and more impious than everyone.*

Abba Pambo: *And I'll tell you this, my child, that the days will come when the Christians will add to and will take away from, and will alter the books of the Holy Evangelists, and of the Holy Apostles, and of the Divine Prophets, and of the Holy Fathers. They will tone down the Holy Scriptures and will compose troparia, hymns, and writings technologically. Their nous (souls) will be spilled out among them, and will become alienated from its Heavenly Prototype. For this reason, the Holy Fathers had previously encouraged the monks of the desert to write down the lives of the Fathers not onto parchment, but onto paper, because the coming generation will change them to suit their own personal tastes. So you see, the evil that comes will be horrible.*

Saint Nilus the Myrrhstreamer of Mount Athos: *When the advent of Antichrist draws near, people's reasoning will be obscured because of carnal passions while profanity and indecency will prevail. People will become unrecognizable; people's faces will be disfigured; men will not be distinguishable from women because of their shameless garments and the hair on their heads. Then they will become wild and will resemble the beasts because they will be seduced by Antichrist... The Churches of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors, and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all... The Christians' shepherds, Archpriests and priests, will be conceited and will no longer recognize the right path from the left...*

Abba Moses: *In those days ... in the church will prevail abbots and shepherds without any practice in a life of virtues, lacking faith... unable to distinguish a righteous path from the wrong one, complacent and preoccupied with the daily cares... having attained their position via bribes... not knowing how to catechize and lead the flock. The ignorance, negligence, scorn*

and disdain of shepherds shall result in the abandonment and loss of many brethren.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: *We seek our own sign of His coming; we Churchmen seek a sign proper to the Church. And the Savior says, "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." (Mt 24:10). If you hear that bishops advance against bishops, and clergy against clergy, and laity against laity even unto blood, be not troubled; for it has been written before.*

A long time ago (during the 4th century) when some monks inquired as to how people will live during the several upcoming generation and how the monks and clergy shall behave, Abba Ischyron said the following: *We ourselves have fulfilled the commandments of God. Those that come after us, will struggle to achieve half of our works. And those who come after them, the men of that generation will not accomplish any works at all and great temptations will come upon them; and those who shall patiently endure and hold the Faith to the end, they will be deemed greater than any of us or our Fathers (the saints).*

Saint Ambrosy of Optina (also known as Starets Ambrosy): *Hard times will come; and as the Apostle says, behold, due to poverty in piety heresies and schisms will appear in the churches; and as the Holy Fathers foretold, then on the thrones of hierarchs and in monasteries there will be no men to be found that are tested and experienced in the spiritual life. Wherefore, heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many. The enemy of mankind will act skillfully, and whenever possible he will lead the chosen ones to heresy. He will not begin by discarding the dogmas on the Holy*

Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ, or the Theotokos, but will unnoticeably start to distort the Teachings of the Holy Fathers, in other words the teachings of the Church herself. The cunning of the enemy and his "tipics" (ways) will be noticed by very few -- only those that are most experienced in spiritual life. Heretics will take over the Church, everywhere, and they will appoint their servants, and spirituality will be neglected. But the Lord will not leave His servants without protection. Truly, their real duty is persecution of true pastors and their imprisonment; for without that, the spiritual flock may not become captured by the heretics. Therefore, my son, when you see in the Churches mocking of the Divine act, of the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and of God's established order, know that the heretics are already present. Be also aware that, for some time, they might hide their evil intentions, or they might covertly deform the divine faith, so that they better succeed by deceiving and tricking the inexperienced.



Ὑπακοή στους Ἁγίους Σὲ τοῦτα τὰ ἁγιασμένα χώματα μάθαμε νὰ κάνουμε ὕπακοή στους ἁγίους καὶ τοὺς ἡρώες μας

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

Οἱ καμπάνες καὶ τὰ σήμαντρα νὰ μὴν χτυποῦν, τὰ μεγάφωνα γιὰ νὰ ἀκοῦν οἱ ἐνοριῖτες κλειστά. Μὲς στὸ ναὸ μόνο ὁ παπᾶς καὶ ὁ ψάλτης. Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία ἐστὶ μετὰδοσης τῆς ἀσθένειας. Ἀστυνομία καὶ συλλήψεις. Πρόστιμα καὶ φυλάκιση.

Ὅπως τὰ παραθέτω νομίζεις ὅτι διαβάξεις εἰκόνας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας ἢ τῆς κομμουνιστικῆς Σοβιετίας καὶ τὶς διώξεις τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ. Ἀντίσταση καμμία. «Τώρα νὰ ὑπακούσουμε στὸ κράτος καὶ μετὰ ... χαρὲς καὶ πανηγύρια». Μάλιστα. Βγαίνει ὁ Ναυπάκτου ὡς κυβερνητικὸς ἐκπρόσωπος καὶ ὁ Πέτσας ὡς ἐκπρόσωπος τῆς Ἱεραρχίας. Οὔτε ἓνα ὄχι δὲν ἀκούστηκε. Παραπέμπουν στοὺς Πατέρες,

οἱ ὁποῖοι τοὺς διαψεύδουν καὶ τοὺς ἐλέγχουν καὶ ψάχνουν ἐναγωνίως κείμενα ὑποστηρικτικὰ τοῦ προσκυνήματος στοὺς ἐφήμερους ἄρχοντες.

Τί διαβάζουμε ὁμῶς στὴν Ἱερὰ Ἱστορία; Τί ἔπρατταν οἱ ἅγιοι ὅταν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐθαιρετοῦσε εἰς βάρος τῆς Πίστεως;

Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἀποστόμωσε μὲ τὴν ἀνδρεία καὶ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη ἀρχοντιά του τὸν ἱταμὸ ὕπαρχο Μόδεστο καὶ τὶς ἀπειλές του: «Τὴν δὲ βασιλέως φιλίαν μέγα μὲν ἠγοῦμαι μετ' εὐσεβείας, ἄνευ δὲ ταύτης ὀλεθρίαν ἀποκαλῶ». (Ἀναφερόταν στὸν αὐτοκράτορα Οὐάλη, ὁ ὁποῖος ταχθεὶς ὑπὲρ τῶν αἰρετικῶν Ἀρειανῶν, ἤθελε νὰ καταβάλλει κάθε ἀντίσταση).

Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀμβρόσιος, ἐπίσκοπος Μεδιολάνων, ἠλεγξε δριμύτατα καὶ ἀπαγόρευσε στὸν Μέγα Θεοδόσιο τὴν εἴσοδο στὸν ναὸ, λέγοντάς του ὅτι ἐπιβάλλεται, ὅπως μιμήθηκε τὸν Δαυὶδ στὸ ἀποτρόπαιο ἔγκλημά του, νὰ τὸν μιμηθεῖ καὶ στὴν υψοποιοῦ μετάνοια. Καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἀναγκάστηκε, μετὰ τῆς συνοδείας του, νὰ... ἀποχωρήσει συντετριμμένος καὶ νὰ ὑποβληθεῖ σὲ ὀκτάμηνο μετάνοια γιὰ τὴν σφαγὴ τῶν ἀθῶων στὸν ἱππόδρομο τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης.

Ὁ στῦλος καὶ πρόμαχος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἅγιος Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, ὅταν σχεδὸν ὅλη ἡ ἀντιπροσωπεία, ποὺ συνόδευε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα

Ἰωάννη Ἡ' τὸν Παλαιολόγο, στὴν ψευτοσύνοδο Φερράρας-Φλωρεντίας, κραύγαζε «στέργομεν, καλὸν ἐστὶν ἡ ἔνωσις», ἀρνήθηκε ὁ ἅγιος νὰ ὑπακούσει στὶς ὀργισμένες προτροπές τοῦ Ἰωάννη. Ἐπιτίμησε μάλιστα καὶ τὸν θλιβερὸ λατινόφρονα Βησσαρίωνα, τὸ παπικὸ «κοπέλι». Ἡ ὑπερήφανη καὶ ἀγέρωχη στάση τοῦ ἁγίου προκάλεσε τὸν σεβασμὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ποὺ τὸν διαβεβαίωσε ὅτι θὰ τοῦ ἐξασφαλίσαι ἀνενόχλητη παλιννόστηση. (Καὶ ἡ ἐπιτημένη καὶ ἀταπεινῶτη παπικὴ ὀφρὺς ὁμολόγησε τὸ περίφημο «οὐδὲν ἐποιήσαμεν», θρίαμβος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τοῦ Γένους μας. Φοβάμαι ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς «οὐδὲν» τῆς παπικῆς ἀποτυχίας, κινδυνεύει σήμερα νὰ διαγραφεῖ καὶ νὰ παραμείνει μόνο του τὸ κακοφοβερόν «ἐποιήσαμεν»).

Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, μὲ ὑπέροχη παρηρσία καὶ ἀκατάβλητη τόλμη, στηλίτευσε τὴν αὐτοκράτειρα Εὐδοξία, γιὰ τὴν ἀνέγερση, ἐπὶ πορφυροῦ κίονος, ἀνδριάντα τῆς, ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸν ναὸ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας. Ἀντηχεῖ στοὺς αἰῶνες ἡ ἀνδροκάρδιος φράση του: «Πάλιν Ἡρωδιάς μαίνεται, πάλιν ταράσσεται, πάλιν ὀρχεῖται, πάλιν ἐπὶ πίνακι τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Ἰωάννου ζητεῖ λαβεῖν». Γιὰ ἓνα ἄγαλμα ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἀντέδρασε ἔτσι



ὁ ἅγιος. Σήμερα ποὺ οἱ ποικιλώνυμοι ἐκκλησιομάχοι διασύρουν τὴν πίστη, τοὺς ἐπαινοῦν καὶ σκύβουν τὸ κεφάλι στὰ ἐντάλματά τους. (Πόσοι ἀπὸ τοὺς σημερινούς «ἄρχοντες» τοῦ λαοῦ, ἀνταποκρίνονται στὶς προδιαγραφές ποὺ θέτει ὁ ἅγιος Χρυσόστομος: «Τὸν γὰρ ἄρχοντα παντὸς λαμπτήρος λαμπρότερον εἶναι δεῖ καὶ βίον ἔχειν ἀκηλίδωτον, ὥστε πάντας πρὸς ἐκείνον ὄραν καὶ πρὸς τὸν αὐτοῦ βίον τὸν οἰκεῖον χαρακτηρίζει». Ποιὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς σημερινούς ἔχει «βίον ἀκηλίδωτον» καὶ ἀποτελεῖ παράδειγμα-«οἰκεῖον»—πρὸς μίμηση;).

Διαβάσαμε καὶ εἶδαμε τοῦτες τὶς ἡμέρες γιὰ ἐλάφια καὶ ἀρκούδες, ζῶα μικρὰ μετὰ μεγάλων, ποὺ σεργιανίζουν ξεφρόντιστα στὶς ἔρημες πόλεις τῆς τρομοκρατημένης Εὐρώπης. Θυμήθηκα ἓνα κείμενο τοῦ ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς. Περιέχεται στὸ ἐκπληκτικὸ βιβλίο, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐξέδωσαν οἱ θαυμάσιες ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη»—πολὺ σπουδαῖο τὸ ἔργο τους, ἔργο ἀποστολικό, τὸ ὁποῖο δροσιζει καὶ

ἀναπαύει πολλές ψυχές. Τὸ βιβλίο τιτλοφορεῖται: «Μέσα Ἀπὸ τὸ Παράθυρο τῆς Φυλακῆς, Μηνύματα στὸ Λαό». Πόνημα περισπούδαστο, «κάθε του λόγος εἶναι Εὐαγγέλιο, κάθε λέξη του ἓνα μικρὸ Εὐαγγέλιο», ὅπως γράφει στὸν πρόλογο ὁ ἕτερος Σέρβος ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς. Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος, τὸ 1944, μεταφέρθηκε στὸ γνωστὸ κολαστήριό τοῦ Νταχάου, ὅπου καὶ συνέγραψε τὰ κείμενα τοῦ βιβλίου.

Στὸ πόνημά του ἀκτινοσκοπεῖ μὲ ἀκριβεία τὸν λεγόμενο εὐρωπαϊκὸ πολιτισμὸ, τὸν ἄθεο πολιτισμὸ τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τοῦ Λούθηρου.

Γράφει στὴ σελίδα 108: «Στενοχωριέμαι γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη, γιατί θὰ καταστραφεῖ ὅπως ἡ Καπερναοῦμ. Οἱ περήφανοι πύργοι της θὰ καταστραφοῦν καὶ οἱ λεωφόροι της θὰ μετατραποῦν σὲ τόπους ποὺ θὰ φυτρώσουν θάμνοι μὲ ἀγκάθια, ὅπου θὰ κάνουν τὴ φωλιά τους τὰ φίδια. Στὸν τόπο ποὺ τώρα ἀκούγονται φωνὲς ἐναντίον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ ἀκούγονται κραυγὲς ἀπὸ κουκουβάγιες καὶ τσακάλια.

Τὴ στιγμή ποὺ ἡ Εὐρώπη νόμισε γὰ τὸν ἑαυτὴ της πὼς ἐκπολιτίστηκε, τότε ἦταν ποὺ ἀγρίεψε. Τὴ στιγμή ποὺ νόμισε πὼς τὰ ἤξερε ὅλα, τότε ἦταν ποὺ παραφρόνησε. Τὴ στιγμή ποὺ νόμισε ὅτι ἀπέκτησε μεγάλη δύναμη, τότε ἦταν ποὺ ἔχασε ὅλη τὴ δύναμη».

Τὴν Μεγάλὴ Ἑβδομάδα δὲν ἀκούσαμε ψαλμοδίες καὶ καμπάνες στὶς πόλεις, ἀλλὰ σκυλιὰ νὰ γαβγίζουν καὶ τσακάλια νὰ οὐρλιάζουν. Θὰ μᾶς ἀπαντήσουν ποτὲ γιατί ἀπαγορεύτηκαν αὐτά; Ἄν αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ τότε τί εἶναι; Καὶ σὲ τοῦτα τὰ ἁγιασμένα χῶματα μάθαμε νὰ κάνουμε ὑπακοὴ στοὺς ἁγίους καὶ στοὺς ἥρωές μας. «**Ὅταν μοῦ πειράζουν τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ Θρησκεία μου, θὰ μιλήσω. θὰ νεργήσω κι ὅτι θέλουν ἄς μοῦ κάμουν**».



Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὁ κόσμος, δὲν θὰ διορθωθῇ ἀπὸ ἑσένα Ἐνὼ ἐσὺ θὰ διορθωθῆς, θὰ τελειωθῆς, θὰ φωτισθῆς, διὰ νὰ φωτίσης τοὺς θέλοντας.

Τὸν κόσμον μόνον ὁ πόλεμος θὰ τὸν διορθώσῃ ὅπου ἤδη θὰ ἔλθῃ ἢ καὶ ἔρχεται μετὰ καλπασμοῦ. Ἡ δυστυχία θὰ φέρῃ πολλοὺς εἰς συναίσθησιν· οἱ δὲ ἀμετανόητοι, ἀναπολόγητοι!

Ἅγιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστῆς

Πίσω Ἀπὸ τὸν Πόνο καὶ τὶς Κακουχίες, Κρύβεται Τεράστια Εὐλογία Ἀνθρωπέ μου!

Ἅγιος Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ Φιλοθέου καὶ Ἀριζόνας. (+2019).

Δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μποῦν οἱ πιστοὶ στὴν βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο, παρὰ μόνον μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν στενὴ πύλη τῶν πειρασμῶν καὶ τῶν θλίψεων. Καὶ ὅσο πιὸ γρήγορα τὸ καταλάβει αὐτὸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, τόσο πιὸ ἀνώδυνα θὰ ἐπιβιώσει. Ψεύτικος εἶναι τοῦτος δὲ ὁ κόσμος. Ψεύτικος καὶ εἰκονικός. Σὲ ρουφάει σὰν μαύρη τρύπα, σὲ κάνει νὰ ξεχνᾷς ποῦ ἀνήκεις καὶ γιατί δημιουργήθηκες. Χάνεις τὸν προσανατολισμὸ σου ἀνθρωπέ μου, καὶ τὰ βάζεις μὲ Αὐτὸν ποὺ σὲ ἐπαναφέρει στὸν χαμένο σου δρόμο. Πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο καὶ τὶς κακουχίες, κρύβεται τεράστια εὐλογία ἀνθρωπέ μου. Ὁ ὑπέροχος σου ὁμως ἐγωισμὸς, δὲν σ' ἀφήνει νὰ τὴν δεῖς.

Γιατί τόσο ἐγωισμὸ ἀνθρωπέ μου; Πηλὸς εἶσαι καὶ τίποτα σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο δὲν σοῦ ἀνήκει. Ὅλα δανεικὰ τὰ πῆρες. Γιατί τόσοσ πόνος τώρα ποῦ καλεῖσαι νὰ τὰ ἐπιστρέψεις; Δὲν ξέρεις ἀνθρωπέ μου πὼς τὰ δανεικὰ ἐπιστρέφονται; Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ζεῖς ἀνθρώπινα καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκεις τὰ ἀθάνατα. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ξεδιψάσεις μὲ θαλασσινὸ νερό. Δὲν γίνεται νὰ ζεῖς εὐτυχημένος, ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμή ποὺ ζεῖς στὴν ἐξορία, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα σου. Δὲν πλάστηκες γιὰ τὰ γίγνα, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὰ οὐράνια καὶ ὅσο σωστὰ καὶ ἂν ζεῖς στὴν γῆ, ὁ πόνος τῆς ἐξορίας πάντα θὰ σὲ ἀκολουθεῖ. Τὸ ξέρω ἀνθρωπέ μου, πὼς δὲν εὐθύνεσαι ἐσὺ προσωπικὰ γιὰ τὴν πτώση τῶν πρωτόπλαστων, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ γνωρίζει καὶ ὁ Θεός! Ὅχι μόνον τὸ γνωρίζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ μερμινᾶ καθημερινά, ὥστε νὰ ξαναεπιστρέψεις ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἀνήκεις. Ὁ Παράδεισος εἶναι ἐκεῖ ἀνθρωπέ μου καὶ σὲ περιμένει. Θέλει ὁμως σκληρὸ ἀγῶνα καὶ αὐτοθυσία! Γιατί σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τότε, αὐτὸς τώρα δὲν χαρίζεται ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀλλὰ κερδίζεται!

Πὼς προσπαθεῖς ἀνθρωπέ μου νὰ πείσεις τὸν Θεὸ πὼς ἄδικα ἐκδιώχθηκες ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, ὅταν ἀκόμη καὶ τώρα, μετὰ ἀπὸ τόσες χιλιάδες χρόνια, ἐξακολουθεῖς νὰ ἀκοῦς τὸν ὄφι καὶ νὰ πράττεις τὰ δικά του ἔργα. Δὲν ἀνήκουν ἀνθρωπέ μου ὅλα αὐτὰ στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια. Δὲν εἶναι μία παλιὰ ἱστορία τῶν ἁγίων βιβλίων. Στὸ ἴδιο ἔργο θεατὲς εἴμαστε ἀκόμη. Δὲν μαθαίνεις ἀνθρωπέ μου, δὲν μαθαίνει! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ἔχει κλειδὶ ὁ Παράδεισος!

Ὁ Θεὸς ὁμως δὲν ἄλλαξε. Δίκαιος εἶναι ἀκόμη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἴδιο κλειδὶ θὰ πάρουν ὅλοι. Δὲν θὰ ταιριάζει ὁμως ὅλων στὴν κλειδαριά. Πρέπει νὰ σκαλιστεῖ σωστὰ ἀνθρωπέ μου τὸ κλειδί. Νὰ πάρει τὸ κατάλληλο σχῆμα καὶ μέγεθος. Πρέπει νὰ ἀφαιρεθοῦν κομμάτια ἀπὸ αὐτό. Καὶ κάθε φορὰ ποὺ θὰ ἀφαιρεῖται ἓνα κομμάτι, ἐσὺ θὰ πονᾷς. Πρέπει νὰ σκαλιστεῖ ἀνθρωπέ μου τὸ κλειδί, ἀλλιῶς δὲν θὰ ταιριάζει. Πρέπει νὰ πονέσεις ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀλλιῶς δὲν θὰ εἰσέλθεις...

Ὅπως δὲ οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ στήν Διάρκεια τῆς Δουλείας Ἔσωσαν τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ Ὁδήγησαν στὸ 1821, Ἔτσι καὶ Σήμερα οἱ Πατερικὰ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ θὰ Διαφυλάξουν τὸ Γένος ἀπὸ τὰ Ἐπερχόμενα Δεινὰ

Τοῦ π. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνοῦ (+2019), «ΟΦΕΙΛΗ ΑΓΑΠΗΣ», π. Γ. Δ. Μεταλληνοῦ ὁμοτ. Κάθ. Πανεπ. Ἀθηνῶν, ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη».

Ἀποφρὰς ἡμέρα διὰ τὸ Γένος μας δὲν εἶναι μόνον ἡ 29η Μαΐου 1453, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ 12/13η Ἀπριλίου τοῦ 1204, ὅταν ἔπεσε ἡ Βασιλεύουσα καὶ ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νέας Ρώμης-Ρωμανίας στοὺς Φράγκους τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας. Ὑπάρχει, μάλιστα, γενετική σχέση μεταξύ τους.

Τὸ φιλοδυτικὸ ρεῦμα ἀποτελοῦσαν κυρίως διανοούμενοι καὶ πολιτικοί, οὐνίτες ἢ οὐνιτίζοντες. Οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοί, δηλαδή, ὁ Κλήρος, οἱ Μοναχοὶ καὶ τὸ εὐρὸν Λαϊκὸ σῶμα, διατηροῦσαν μόνιμη, μετὰ τὸ 1204, δυσπιστία ἐναντι τῆς Δύσεως. Ὁ δὲ ἀντιδυτικισμὸς τῆς (Ὁρθόδοξου) Ἀνατολῆς συνιστοῦσε στὸν λαὸ περισσότερο αὐτοάμυνα καὶ αὐτοπροστασία.

Ἡ συνείδηση αὐτῆ τῶν Ἀθηνωτικῶν θὰ κωδικοποιηθεῖ στὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ (18ος αἰ): «Καὶ διατὶ δὲν ἤφερεν ὁ Θεὸς ἄλλον βασιλέα, πὺ ἦταν τόσα ρηγάτα ἐδῶ κοντὰ νὰ τοὺς τὸ δώση, μόνον ἤφερε τὸν Τοῦρκον μέσαθεν ἀπὸ τὴν Κόκκινην Μηλιὰ καὶ τοῦ τὸ ἐχάρισεν; Ἦξερεν ὁ Θεὸς πὺς τὰ ἄλλα ρηγάτα μᾶς βλάπτουν εἰς τὴν πίστιν, καὶ (= ἐνῶ) ὁ Τοῦρκος, δὲν μᾶς βλάπτει. Ἄσπρα δώσ' του καὶ καβαλλίκευσέ τον ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι. Καὶ διὰ νὰ μὴ κολασθοῦμεν, τὸ ἔδωσε τοῦ Τοῦρκου καὶ τὸν ἔχει ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Τοῦρκον ὡσὰν σκύλον νὰ μᾶς φυλάη».

Οἱ ἀλώσεις τοῦ 1204 καὶ τοῦ 1453 ἀπειλοῦσαν γεωγραφικὰ σύνορα καὶ προκάλεσαν δουλείες σωμάτων. Ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ φρόνημά μας ἔμειναν ἀδούλωτα καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἐπιβίωσαμε, κατορθώνοντας νὰ φθάσουμε στὸ 1821. Σήμερα τὰ σύνορά μας βρίσκονται στήν ψυχὴ μας. Αὐτὴ ἀπειλεῖται μὲ νέα (τρίτη) ἄλωση. Ἡ Ὑπερδύναμη τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς, μὲ ὅλες τὶς συνιστώσες της, ἔχει ἀποβεῖ «καθολικὴ μας μητρόπολη» καὶ μόνιμο σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς,

καθορίζοντας καὶ προσδιορίζοντας σύνολο τὸν ἐθνικὸ μας βίον, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημά μας, μὲ τὴν ἐξωπροσδιοριζόμενη παιδεία. Χρειάζεται συνεπῶς παράλληλη καλλιέργεια τῆς ἐθνοκεντρικότητας, ὄχι ὡς σοβινιστικὴ ἐχθρότητα, ἀλλ' ὡς λυτρωτικὸ ἀντίβαρο στὸν οἰκουμενιστικὸ ὁδοστρωτήρα (πολιτικὰ καὶ πνευματικὰ), πὺ ἰσοπεδώνει τὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἐκθεμελιώνει τὰ σύνορα τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ συνειδησῶν μας.

Οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ὅσοι διατηροῦν τὴν αὐθεντικότητά τῶν Ἁγίων μας, μένοντας ξένοι πρὸς κάθε ἐννοια φανατισμοῦ καὶ μισαλλοδοξίας, ταυτίζονται μὲ τὴν «μαγιά» τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη, σώζοντας τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ τὸ Γένος-Ἔθνος στήν συνείδηση καὶ τὴν ζωὴ τους, ἀπρόθυμοι πάντοτε νὰ θυσιάσουν στὰ εἴδωλα τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς καὶ αἶροντες τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ μαρτυρίου καὶ τῆς παντοειδοῦς θυσίας.

Τὸ μέλλον τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικότητας στὸν τόπο μᾶς εἶναι ἀλληλένδετο μὲ τὴν στάση τῶν «Ἀθηνωτικῶν» στήν σημερινὴ φοβερότερη καὶ ὑπουλότερη ἀπόπειρα τῆς Φραγκιάς νὰ ὑποτάξει, δηλαδή νὰ διαλύσει, τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη καὶ τὸ Γένος μας. Ὅπως δὲ οἱ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ στήν διάρκεια τῆς ποικιλώνυμης δουλείας ἔσωσαν τὸ Γένος, μὲ ὅλα τὰ συστατικά του, καὶ τὸ ὠδήγησαν ἀκμαῖο στὸ 1821, ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα οἱ πατερικὰ Ἀθηνωτικοὶ θὰ διαφυλάξουν τὸ Γένος ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ.



Ἡ αἴθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας δὲν εἶναι αἴθουσα κάποιας μασονικῆς στοᾶς, ὅπου ὠρισμένα μόνον ἄτομα συνεδριάζουν καὶ λαμβάνουν μυστικὰς ἀποφάσεις. Ὅχι! Ἡ αἴθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ὡς τὸ ὑπερῶν τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, ὅπου ἔπνεε ἡ αὔρα τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος: «Ὁὐ δὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ ἐλευθερία» (Β' Κορ. 3:17).

Θρυλικὸς Γέρον Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010)

Ἐκθρονισμοὶ καὶ Ἐνθρονισμοὶ

Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Ἁγίου Μητροπολίτου Φλωρινῆς Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010), ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ», 2 Ἰουλίου 2017, ἀριθ. φύλλον 2024, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεία Τερά Μονὴ Ἁγίου Αὐγουστίνου Φλωρινῆ, imaaflo@yahoo.gr



Ὅπως ὅλα τὰ θαύματα ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἀγαπητοί μου, τοῦ ἔδιναν ἀφορμὲς γιὰ νὰ διδάξη τὸ λαὸ ψυχοσωτήριες ἀλήθειες, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ θεραπεία τοῦ δούλου τοῦ ἑκατοντάρχου τῆς Καπερναοῦμ τοῦ ἔδωσε ἀφορμὴ νὰ πῆ μία ἀλήθεια, ἡ ὁποία πιστοποιεῖται μὲ ἀναρίθμητα

παραδείγματα. Τὴν ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ τὴν διατύπωσε μὲ τὰ ἑξῆς λόγια.

«Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἤξουσι καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβλήθησονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.» (Ματθ. 8:11-12). Πάνω στὴν ἀλήθεια αὐτὴ θὰ μιλήσουμε τώρα.

Τί σημαίνουν τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος; Ὅτι **οἱ μὲν Ἰουδαῖοι**, ποὺ ἦταν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας», λόγῳ τῆς ἀθλίας διαγωγῆς τους ἀπέναντι στὸν Κύριο **θὰ ἐκδιωχθῶν** ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνάκτορα τῆς θεϊκῆς εὐνοίας καὶ θὰ ῥιχτοῦν στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς αἰωνίου κολάσεως, **οἱ δὲ εἰδωλολάτρες**—αὐτοὶ εἶνε οἱ «ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν»—λόγῳ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς μετανοίας ποὺ θὰ δεῖξουν ἀκούγοντας τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, **θὰ γίνουν δεκτοὶ** στὰ ἀνάκτορα τῶν οὐρανῶν καὶ θὰ καταλάβουν τὶς θέσεις ἐκεῖνες, ποὺ εἶχαν προετοιμασθῆ στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν γιὰ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους.

Καὶ ποῖο ἦταν ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔκανε τὸν Κύριο νὰ πῆ τὰ λόγια αὐτά; Ἡ εἰλικρινὴς, βαθειὰ καὶ ἔμπρακτη «πίστις» (ἔ.ἀ. 8:10), ποὺ ἔδειξε ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος ἐξ ἀφορμῆς τῆς ἀσθενείας τοῦ δούλου του. Μολονότι ὁ ἀξιωματικὸς αὐτὸς ἦταν ὄχι Ἰουδαῖος ἀλλὰ Ῥωμαῖος καὶ ἀνῆκε σὲ ξένη θρησκεία, μολονότι ἔβλεπε τὸ δοῦλο του νὰ βρῆται στὶς τελευταῖες του στιγμὲς καὶ κάθε ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας του νὰ χάνεται, μολονότι τὸ ἀξίωμα ποὺ κατεῖχε—ἢ μᾶλλον ὁ ἐγωισμὸς ποὺ δημιουργοῦν σὲ ψυχρὲς ἐπιπόλαιες τὰ ἀξιώματα—θὰ γινόταν ἐμπόδιο ὥστε νὰ μὴν πλησιάσῃ τὸν ἀπλοῖκὸ Διδάσκαλο καὶ νὰ μὴν ταπεινωθῆ σ' αὐτὸν ζητώντας τὴ βοήθειά του, παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὁ ἑκατόνταρχος **ἐκτιμᾷ τὸν Ἰησοῦ**

ἀσυγκρίτως περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.

Νιώθει καὶ πιστεύει ὅτι καὶ ἓνας μόνος λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου ἔχει τὴ δύναμι νὰ θεραπεύῃ καὶ τὴ χειρότερη ἀσθένεια, ὅπως αὐτὴ τοῦ δούλου του, ποὺ τὸν βασάνιζε «δεινῶς». (ἔ.ἀ. 8:6). Γι' αὐτὸ στέκει μπροστὰ του μὲ εὐλάβεια καὶ σεβασμὸ, ὅπως στέκει μπροστὰ στὸ βασιλιά ὁ ἀπλὸς στρατιώτης. Δὲν κοιτάζει τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ ἐμβλήματα τοῦ ἀξιώματός του ἀλλὰ συναισθάνεται τὴν ἀθλιότητα ποὺ κάθε ἄνθρωπος ἔχει, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀξιωματοῦχος ὁμολογεῖ τὴ μηδαμινότητά του ἀπέναντι στὸν Κύριο λέγοντας: «Κύριε, οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς ἵνα μου ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθῃς»· δὲν εἶμαι, Κύριε, ἄξιος νὰ σὲ δεχθῶ στὸ σπίτι μου. (ἔ.ἀ. 8:8).

Ποῖός ἀπὸ τοὺς φαρισαίους, ποὺ ἔβλεπαν ἕναν ἀξιωματικὸ νὰ ζῆ στὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ ὄχι ὅπως αὐτοί, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ φανταστῆ, ὅτι στὴν καρδιά τοῦ Ῥωμαίου αὐτοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ εἶχε ἐνθρονισθῆ τέτοια πίστι καὶ ἀρετή; Αὐτοί, **οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι**, παρ' ὅλη τὴν προγονικὴ τους δόξα καὶ τὴν ἐξωτερικὴ τους θρησκευτικότητα, ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ καὶ τῆς κακίας τους, **ἀπομακρύνονταν συνεχῶς** ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰησοῦ καὶ κινδύνευαν νὰ χάσουν τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ψυχῶν τους, ἐνῶ αὐτὸς, **ἓνας ἐθνικὸς ἑκατόνταρχος**, ποὺ γεννήθηκε καὶ ἀνατράφηκε σὲ εἰδωλολατρικὸ περιβάλλον, **πλησιάζει τώρα τὸ Χριστό**, προσκολλᾶται σ' αὐτὸν καὶ σφύζεται!

Ἄλλὰ ἡ προφητεία αὐτὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅτι οἱ μὲν Ἰουδαῖοι, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ αὐτούς, θ' ἀποσκιρτήσουν καὶ θὰ χαθοῦν, ἐνῶ οἱ ἐθνικοὶ, οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες, θὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὸ Θεὸ καὶ θὰ σωθοῦν, **ἡ προφητεία αὐτὴ ἐξακολουθεῖ καὶ μέχρι σήμερα νὰ ἐκπληρώνεται**. Γιατὶ ὅ,τι συνέβη μεταξὺ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, συμβαίνει τώρα μεταξὺ τῶν Χριστιανῶν.

Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ζοῦν στοὺς κόλπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· αὐτοὶ εἶνε κατ' ἐξοχὴν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας». Ζοῦν αὐτοὶ σὲ στενὴ ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸν Κύριο· τὸ νόμο του μελετοῦν, στοὺς ναοὺς του συχνάζουν, ἐξομολογοῦνται, κοινωνοῦν, μετέχουν σὲ ὅλες ἐκεῖνες τὶς εὐλογίες ποὺ ἀπολαμβάνουν «οἱ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας», τὰ παιδιά τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Πατέρα. Ἄλλ' ἐὰν δὲν προσέξουν, ἐὰν δὲν ἐκτιμῆσουν ὅπως πρέπει καὶ ὅσο πρέπει τὴ μεγάλη τιμὴ ποὺ τοὺς ἔκανε ὁ Κύριος νὰ τοὺς ὀνομάξῃ «τέκνα Θεοῦ» (Ἰω. 1,12-11,52), «ἀδελφούς» του (Ματθ. 28:10), «υἱοὺς τῆς βασιλείας» (ἔ.ἀ. 8:12, 13:38) καὶ «φίλους» του (Λουκ. 12:4, Ἰω. 15:14), ἐὰν δὲν δεῖξουν διαγωγὴ σύμφωνη μὲ τὴν ὑψηλὴ κλήσι τους, ὑπάρχει φόβος νὰ ἐκπέσουν ἀπὸ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ· νὰ πάθουν δηλαδὴ δυστύχημα μεγαλύτερο ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ παθαίνει ἓνας **βασιλιάς** ἐνδόξου κράτους ποὺ λόγῳ σφαλμάτων του ἐκθρονίζεται, γίνεται ἐκπτωτος, χάνει τὰ μεγαλεῖα του, πέφτει σὲ ἀφάνεια καὶ πεθαίνει πικραμένος στὰ ξένα. Εἶνε δυστυχησμένος ὁ βασιλιάς αὐτός; ἔ, πολὺ πιὸ

δυστυχοσιμένοι εἶνε «ὁ υἱὸς τῆς βασιλείας»· γιατί χάνει θέσι - θρόνο ἐνδοξότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλο θρόνο τῆς γῆς.

Παραδείγματα τέτοιων τρομερῶν πνευματικῶν ἐκθρονίσεων ἔχουμε, ὅπως εἶπαμε, ἀναρίθμητα. Ἐνα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ εἶνε ὁ **Ἰούδας**. Ἦταν κι αὐτὸς «υἱὸς τῆς βασιλείας», ἕνας ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ὁ Κύριος εἶπε πὼς θὰ καθίσουν «ἐπὶ δώδεκα θρόνους κρίνοντες τὰς δώδεκα φυλὰς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ» (Ματθ. 19:28, Λουκ. 22:30), γιατί ἡ θέσι ποὺ εἶχε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὁ Ἰούδας κοντὰ στὸ Χριστὸ ἦταν ἀσυγκρίτως ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ ἕνα κοσμικὸ θρόνο. Καὶ ὅμως ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλοχρηματίας του πέφτει. Πέφτει, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ μία πόρνη καὶ ἕνας ληστής—ἡ μὲν πόρνη μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας, ὁ δὲ ληστής μὲ τὴ θερμὴ προσευχὴ του «*Μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε, ὅταν ἔλθῃς ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ σου*» (Λουκ. 23:42)—ἐπιστρέφουν ὅπως οἱ ἄσωτοι υἱοὶ καὶ καταλαμβάνουν θέσι περιλάμπρη στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Τὰ παραδείγματα αὐτά, ποὺ πολλὰ παρόμοια μπορεῖς νὰ μελετήσῃς στὴν ἀγία Γραφή, στὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία, καὶ νὰ δῆς στὴ ζωὴ τῆς συγχρόνου Ἐκκλησίας, ἐπιβεβαιώνουν τὰ προφητικὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρέπει νὰ βάζουν σὲ φόβο τὶς ψυχές μας. Τί εἶσαι, ἀδελφέ μου, **ἄγιος**; Ἔστω ὅτι εἶσαι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι πρέπει νὰ φοβάσαι τὴν **πτῶσι**. Ἄνοιξε τὰ μάτια σου νὰ δῆς πόσοι, ποὺ ἔφτασαν στὰ ὕψη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔστησαν τὴ φωλιά τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ ἄστρα (βλ. Ἦσ. 14:12-13), ἔπεσαν καὶ τσακίστηκαν· καὶ ἡ πτῶσι τους ἦταν τόσο πιδὸ μεγάλη ὅσο μεγαλύτερο ἦταν τὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀρετῆς ὅπου εἶχαν ἀνεβῆ. Δὲς τὶς πτώσεις τῶν Ἰουδαίων, τοῦ Ἰούδα, τοῦ διακόνου Νικολάου (ποὺ ἔγινε ἀρχηγὸς τῶν νικολαϊτῶν, τῆς πιδὸ αἰσχροῦς αἰρέσεως), τοῦ Ἀρείου καὶ τόσων ἄλλων. Ἐὰν αὐτοὶ ἔπεσαν καὶ ἐκδιώχθηκαν, πόσο μᾶλλον ἐσὺ μπορεῖ νὰ πέσης καὶ νὰ χαθῆς; Βλέπε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν πεσόντων καὶ μὴ μετανοησάντων πλέον, βλέπε τοὺς γκρεμοὺς καὶ τὰ βάραθρα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, βλέπε τὴν ἀσθένεια τῶν ψυχικῶν σου δυνάμεων, καὶ νὰ καλλιερῆς μέσα σου ἐκεῖνο τὸ φόβο ποὺ τόσο ἔντονα συνιστᾷ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος λέγοντας: «*Μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε*». (Φιλιπ. 2:12).

Ἄς φοβώμαστε, ἀλλ' **ἄς μὴ ἀπελπίζώμαστε** οὔτε γιὰ τὴ δικὴ μας σωτηρία οὔτε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ἄλλων ποὺ ζοῦν τώρα μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ. Ἔπεσε; Μπορεῖς νὰ σηκωθῆς καὶ νὰ βαδίσης καὶ πάλι τὸ δρόμο τῆς σωτηρίας. Δὲς τὶς πτώσεις τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ τοῦ Δαυίδ· ἔπεσαν, ἀλλὰ πάλι σηκώθηκαν καὶ ἐπανεκτίστησαν τὶς θέσεις ποὺ πρὸς στιγμὴν εἶχαν χάσει. Ζοῦν μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ οἱ ἄλλοι; Μὴν τοὺς ἀπελπίσης, μὴν τοὺς περιφρονήσης. Ποῦ ξέρεις, ἐὰν αὐτοὶ ποὺ ζοῦν σήμερα τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀσώτου, μίπως αὔριο μμηθοῦν καὶ τὴ μετάνοια τοῦ ἀσώτου; Εἶνε σήμερα «υἱοὶ γεέννης» (Ματθ. 23:15), ἀλλ' αὔριο

γίνονται «υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας». Ζοῦν σήμερα στοὺς σταύλους τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ αὔριο φιλοξενοῦνται στὰ θεϊκὰ ἀνάκτορα· εἶνε σήμερα ῥακένδυτοι, ἀλλὰ αὔριο εἶνε ντυμένοι ὅπως οἱ πρίγκιπες τῶν οὐρανῶν· εἶνε σήμερα ἐκπτωτοι, ἀλλ' αὔριο ἐνθρονίζονται!

Ἀδελφοί μου! Ἐφ' ὅσον ζοῦμε σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο, ὅπου κάθε μέρα συμβαίνουν ἀκατάπανστες ἀλλοιώσεις, ὄχι μόνο στὸ βασίλειο τῆς φύσεως ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ βασίλειο τῆς χάριτος, ἄς ταπεινοφρονούμε· ἄς φοβώμαστε, ἐνθυμούμενοι αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Κύριός μας· «*Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν ἔξουσι καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται μετὰ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν, οἱ δὲ υἱοὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκβλήθησονται εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον*».

(†) **ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος**



Ἡ Ὁρθὴ Ἀποψη τοῦ Ἁγίου Χρυσόστομου γιὰ τὴν Προσευχὴ στό Σπίτι καὶ στό Ναό

Εὔξασθαι μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας δυνατὸν, οὕτω δὲ εὔξασθαι ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀδύνατον, ὅπου πατέρων πλήθος τοσοῦτον, ὅπου βοῆ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἀναπέμπεται. Οὐχ οὕτως εἰσακούη κατὰ σαυτὸν τὸν Δεσπότην παρακαλῶν, ὡς μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τῶν σῶν. Ἐνταῦθα γὰρ ἐστὶ τι πλέον, οἷον ἡ ὁμόνοια καὶ ἡ συμφωνία καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης ὁ σύνδεσμος, καὶ αἱ τῶν ἱερέων εὐχαί. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο οἱ ἱερεῖς προεστήμασιν, ἵνα αἱ τοῦ πλήθους εὐχαὶ ἀσθενέστεραι οὔσαι, τῶν δυνατωτέρων τούτων ἐπιλαβόμεναι, ὁ-μοῦ συνανέλθωσιν αὐταῖς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.

Μετάφραση: Βέβαια εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ποσευχηθῆς καὶ στὴν οἰκία σου, εἶναι ἀδύνατο ὅμως νὰ προσευχηθῆς ἔτσι, ὅπως προσεύχεσαι στὴν ἐκκλησία, ὅπου ὑπάρχει τόσο πλήθος πατέρων, ὅπου ἀναπέμπεται ἀπὸ ὅλους μαζὶ κοινὴ προσευχὴ πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Δέν εἰσακούεσαι τόσο πολὺ παρακαλῶντας μόνος σου τὸν Κύριο, ὅσο ὅταν τὸν παρακαλῆς μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου. Διότι ἐδῶ στὴν ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει κατὰ τὸ ἐπὶ πλέον, ὅπως δηλαδὴ ἡ ὁμόνοια, ἡ συμφωνία, ὁ σύνδεσμος τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ οἱ εὐχὲς τῶν ἱερέων. Γι' αὐτὸ βέβαια καὶ ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν εἶναι οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὥστε οἱ εὐχὲς τοῦ πλήθους, ποὺ εἶναι ἀσθενέστερες, ἐνισχυόμενες μὲ τὶς δυνατότερες εὐχὲς αὐτῶν, νὰ ἀνεβοῦν μαζὶ μὲ αὐτὲς στὸν οὐρανόν.

Ἐπομένως, ἀπὸ τό σπῆτι δέν εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ συμμετέχουμε στὴν θεία Λειτουργία καὶ νὰ «κοινωνᾶμε»...

Ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους Φώτης Κόντογλου

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Θεολόγος.

«Ὅποτε καθίσω καὶ λογαριάσω τί γερό, τί ἀκατάλυτο ἔχω στὴν βιβλιοθήκη μου, τί θὰ μπορούσα νὰ πιάσω σὲ μίαν ὥρα ἀνάγκης καὶ νὰ στυλωθῶ, πιάνω τὸν Κόντογλου...»

[Γιῶργος Ἰωάννου]

† † †

Στις 13 Ἰουλίου τοῦ 1965 κλείνει γιὰ πάντα τὰ μάτια τοῦ ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους, ὁ «ἀρχαῖος» ἄνθρωπος τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Κατὰ τὸ ξόδι του, ὁ τότε ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶπε μεταξὺ ἄλλων: «Τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα προπέμπομεν σήμερον, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρα, ὁ ὁποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ καταταγῆ, χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴν, μεταξὺ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν τῆς Πίστεως. Διότι οἱ ὁμολογηταὶ τῆς Πίστεως αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ἔκαμνον, ὅ,τι ἔκαμνε καὶ ὁ ἀείμνηστος Φώτιος. Ἐστάθη εὐθυτενῆς, ἐστάθη γενναῖος ἀπέναντι τῶν πολεμίων τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἡμῶν Πίστεως καὶ ἐγκατάλειψεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν μίαν παράδοσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γραπτὸν λόγον, ἵνα ἡ νεωτέρα γενεὰ ἐκπαιδεύεται εἰς τὰ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὰ νάματα...».

Ὅταν αὐτὰ λέγονται ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χρυσοστόμου Χατζησταύρου, Μακεδονομάχου, ἀρχιδιακόνου καὶ δεξι χέρι τοῦ ἐθνοϊερομάρτυρος Χρυσοστόμου Σμύρνης ἀλλὰ καὶ προμάχου καὶ ὑπερασπιστῆ τῆς ἀγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας μας, τότε **«τί ἔτι χρεῖαν ἔχομεν μαρτύρων»;**

Ὅντως ἔζησε ὀσιακά, ὀρθόδοξα ὁ μαστρο-Φώτης, ποὺ φέτος τιμᾶμε τὰ 55 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν κοίμησή του.

Ἀφήνουμε ὅμως τὸν ἴδιο νὰ διηγηθεῖ τὸν βίο καὶ τὴν πολιτεία του, σὲ ἐπιστολή του στὶς 5 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1964 στὸν ἐπίσης μακαριστὸ γέροντα Θεόκλητο Διονυσιάτη. Περιλαμβάνεται στὴν ἐξαίρετη ἔκδοσι τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Κοινοβίου Ὁσίου Νικοδήμου Πενταλόφου Παιονίας Κιλκίς, «Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του». (Γουμένισσα 2003, σελ. 64-66):

«Εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου, ποτὲ δὲν ἐσκέφθην διὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισίν μας οικονομικῶς. Μοῦ ἦλθαν καὶ μοῦ ἔρχονται εὐκαιρίαι διὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσω πολλὰ χρήματα (προτάσεις ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸν

νὰ ζωγραφίσω ναοὺς καὶ μέγαρα, δι' ἐκδόσεις βιβλίων προπάντων κοσμικῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέχνης, διὰ δημοσιεύματα παντὸς εἴδους, ἱστορικά, λαογραφικά, αἰσθητικά, περιγραφικὰ ταξιδιῶν, κλπ). Τίποτε δὲν δέχομαι. Θέλω νὰ μείνω ἀκτῆμων καὶ ν' ἀποθάνω τοιοῦτος. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ μὴν συνδέεται μὲ τίποτα μὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον. Οὔτε εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν δὲν ἐδέχθην νὰ ἔμπω, παρ' ὅλας τὰς προσκλήσεις ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν. Ὅχι ἀξιώματα. Ὅχι πρωτοκαθεδρία. Ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ ἱκρίωμα ἐργάζομαι σκληρῶς, ἰδρώνω, τσακίζομαι, ἀκόμα σήμερα, μὲ πόδι τσακισμένο.

Πέρασα τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐπάνω στὴν σκαλωσιάν, ὡς στυλίτης. Μὲ χαρὰν ὑπηρετῶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἡ ὁποία ὑπῆρξεν ἀδιάφορος διὰ τὸ ἔργον τῆς ἀγιογραφίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐχθρική. Τώρα δέ, μὲ τὰ παπικά, οἱ πλείστοι τῶν προϊσταμένων



τῶν ναῶν, ὄντες ὅλοι φιλο-παπικοί, δὲν μὲ θέλουν ὡς ἀγιογράφων καὶ μόλις ζῶ ἀπὸ τὴν μίαν ἐκκλησίαν ποὺ ἔχω, ἐνῶ τιποτένιοι μογιατζήδες καὶ ἀνάξιοι μαθηταί μου ἔχουν ἐργασίαν ποὺ δὲν προφθάνουν, πλουτίζουν, καθ' ὅσον συναλλάσσονται μὲ τοὺς ἐπιτρόπους καὶ τοὺς προϊσταμένους τῶν ναῶν καὶ

μουντζουρώνουν τοὺς τοίχους, μὴ πατῶντες εἰς τὴν λειτουργίαν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ σαρκάζοντες τὰ τῆς θρησκείας. Ἐγὼ εἰς αὐτὰς τὰς ἐπιφορὰς τοῦ σατανᾶ ἀντιτάσσω τὴν πίστιν μου. Καὶ ἐνῶ διασαλπίζεται ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἡ φήμη μου ὡς «πρυτάνεως» τῆς β. (=Βυζαντινῆς) τέχνης κ.τ. (=κ.τ.λπ.), ἐγὼ πολλάκις δὲν ἔχω ἐργασίαν. Οἱ Ζωῖκοί, παρ' ὅτι ἔρχονται νὰ μὲ ἰδοῦν, δὲν μὲ χωνεύουν. Οἱ καθηγηταὶ τοῦ Πανεπ. (θεολόγοι) μὲ μισοῦν, καὶ μὲ ἐδίωξαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγιογράφησιν τῆς Καπνικαρέας καὶ πῆραν ἕναν ἄθλιον μαθητὴν μου. Οἱ Οὐνίτες μοῦ πρότειναν νὰ ζωγραφίσω τὴν ἐκκλησίαν των καὶ τοὺς ἐδίωξα, ἀλλὰ ἔσπευσε νὰ τὴν ζωγραφίσῃ ὁ Κοψίδης, πρ. μαθητῆς μου. Οὐδεὶς ἀνθίσταται εἰς τὸν μαμωνᾶν. Βασιλεία αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχι τοῦ Χριστοῦ...

...Λοιπόν, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, δὲν ἀφήνομεν τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅσα κερδίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασίαν μου, τόσον, ὥστε συχνὰ νὰ δανειζόμεθα διὰ νὰ βοηθήσωμεν

ἄλλους. Ὅταν ἐπάθαμεν τὸ δυστύχημα, ἀπεκαλύφθη ἡ ἀπενταρτία μας, καὶ ἔτσι ἐπίστευσαν καὶ κάποιοι φίλοι μας ὅτι ὄντως δὲν εἶχαμεν χρήματα. Ἐπιροίπτομεν τὴν μέριμνά μας ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον τὸν Θεὸν μας. Αὐτά, σὰς παρακαλῶ, νὰ φυλαχθοῦν μεταξὺ μας».

Ὁ Κόντογλου ἀνήκει στοὺς λίγους, τοὺς ἐλάχιστους πνευματικούς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ ὅσο ζοῦσε δὲν φιλοῦσε «κατουρημένες» ποδιές, ἀλλὰ μάστιζε ἀλύπητα μὲ τὴν μάχαιρα τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης τοὺς Γραικύλους τῆς σήμερον, τοὺς προσκυνημένους εὐρωλιγουρηδες.

Τρεῖς κυρίως ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογημένη Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821 καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἶχαν συλλάβει ἐναργέστατα καὶ μὲ ἀξιοθαύμαστη συνέπεια λόγου καὶ πράξης τὸν πνευματικό μας ἑξανδραποδισμό: ὁ Μακρυγιάννης, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης καὶ ὁ Κόντογλου, σὰν νὰ παρέδιδε ὁ ἓνας στὸν ἄλλο τὴν σκυτάλη τῆς γνήσιας παράδοσης τοῦ Γένους καὶ τὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀπόσπηση τῶν μiasμάτων τοῦ Φραγκολεβαντισμοῦ καὶ τῆς δυτικολαγνεῖας, ποὺ σάπισαν—τὸ βλέπουμε στίς ἡμέρες μας—τὸ «ὀλόδροσο δέντρο τῆς φυλῆς μας».

Γράφει γιὰ ὅλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαγμένους στὴν σκοτεινὴ καὶ δυσώδη Εὐρώπη, ποὺ ἐπιστρέφουν στὴν φτωχὴ πατρίδα καὶ ληλατοῦν κυρίως τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς:

«Οἱ περισσότεροι σπουδαστές μας, μόλις πατήσουνε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπομένουνε ἐμβρόντητοι ἀπὸ τὶς ψευτοφιλοσοφίες ποὺ διδάσκουνε κάποιοι σπουδαῖοι καθηγητές, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ ξένη γλῶσσα. Ἡ ξένη γλῶσσα τοὺς κάνει μεγάλη ἐντύπωση! Κατάπληξη τοὺς κάνουνε καὶ οἱ μεγάλες πολιτείες, οἱ φαρδιοὶ δρόμοι, τὰ μεγάλα χτίρια, οἱ λεωφόροι, τὰ τραῖνα, οἱ λογιῆς-λογιῆς μηχανές, οἱ ἀγορές, τὸ πολὺν χρῆμα, τὰ βλοσυρὰ Πανεπιστήμια. Κι αὐτὸ γίνεται, γιατί οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές εἶναι χωριατόπουλα, ποὺ νοιώθουνε μέσα τους ντροπὴ γιὰ τὸ χωριὸ τους, κι ὅ,τι βλέπουνε κι ἀκοῦνε, εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς οὐρανοκατέβατο!

Τοὺς ξέρω καλὰ αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές, γιατί

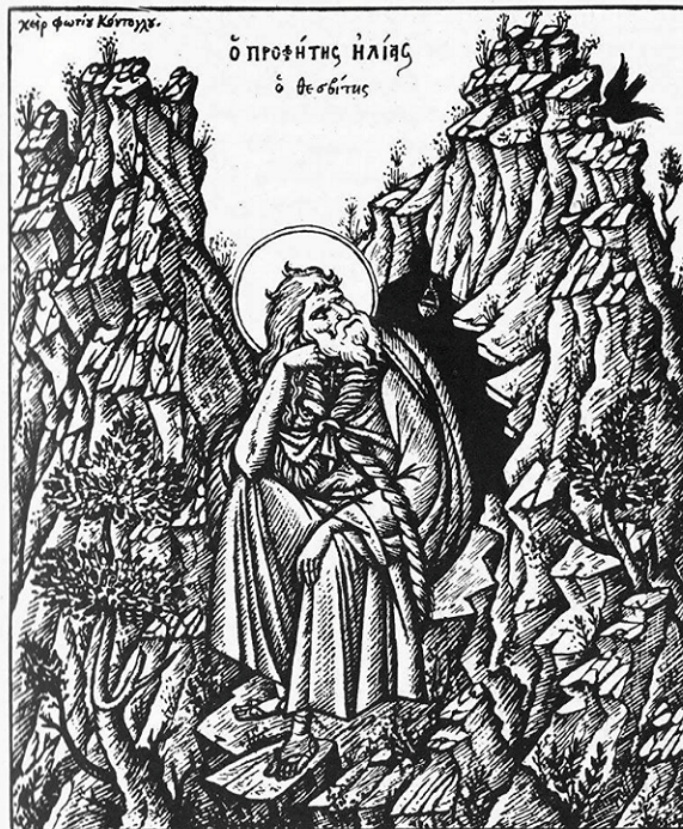
καὶ ἐμεῖς περάσαμε ἀπὸ κείνες τὶς χώρες, καὶ ζήσαμε σ' αὐτὲς κάμποσα χρόνια. Ὅποτε ἐρχόντανε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἦτανε, στὴν ἀρχή, σασιτισμένοι καὶ ζαρωμένοι, σὰν καὶ κείνα τὰ μαντρόσκυλα ποὺ ἀκολουθήσανε τὸν τσομπάνο καὶ βρεθήκανε στὸ κέντρο τῆς πολιτείας, μέσα στὴν ὄχλοβοῆ κι ἀνάμεσα στ' αὐτοκίνητα, καὶ σαστίσανε, τὰ κακόμοιρα, καὶ βάζουνε τὴν οὐρὰ τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ σκέλια τους, τρομοκρατημένα. Μὰ σὰν γυρῖσουνε στὸ μαντρί, τὴν ξανασηκώνουνε περήφανα, καὶ γίνονται θηρία ἀνήμερα. Μ' αὐτὰ τὰ σκυλιὰ μοιάζανε, στὰ μάτια τὰ δικὰ μας, ποὺ εἶχαμε

ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ χρόνια στίς μεγάλες πολιτείες, ἐκεῖνα τὰ νεοφερμένα Ἑλληνόπουλα, ποὺ μᾶς θεωρούσανε στὴν ἀρχὴ σὰν προστάτες τους. Κ' ἦτανε ταπεινὰ καὶ φρόνιμα. Μὰ μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ξεθαρρεύανε, καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ παίρνανε στὸ τέλος ἓναν ἐγωϊσμὸ σιχαμερόν, μιλώντας μὲ καταφρόνηση γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους. Καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ σὰν γυρῖζανε πίσω στὴν Ἑλλάδα, κάνανε τὰ θηρία, κάνανε τοὺς πάνσοφους, κάνανε τοὺς προφέσσορας, μιλώντας ὀλοένα γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη καὶ γιὰ τὴν κακομοιριά τῆ δικῆς μας σὲ ὅλα τὰ πράγματα.

Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω, πὼς ἡ Εὐρώπη εἶναι ἡ

δοκιμαστικὴ πέτρα γιὰ κάθε ἓναν ἀπὸ μας, ποὺ θὰ πάει σὲ κάποια χώρα τῆς: ἢ θὰ γίνῃ πύθνηκος ξενόδουλος, θαυμάζοντας σὰν οὐρανοκατέβατα ὅλα ὅσα βλέπει κι ἀκοῦει σὲ κείνη τὴ χώρα, καὶ θ' ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του, ἢ θὰ καταλάβῃ πόσο ψεύτικα εἶναι τὰ φανταχτερὰ στολίδια τῆς, καὶ πόση βαρβαρότητα ὑπάρχει κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτισμένη ἐπιφάνειά τῆς, καὶ θὰ ἀγαπήσῃ μὲ πάθος τὸν τόπο του, νοιώθοντας «μὲ ἐπίγνωση» τὴν πνευματικὴ τῆς εὐγένεια καὶ τὴν ὑπεροχὴ μας, μπροστὰ σὲ κείνες τὶς ἀνθρωπομερμηγιές». («Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο», ἐκδόσεις «Ἀκρίτας», σελ. 226-227).

Ἀτίμητη καὶ ἀνυπολόγιστη ὅμως εἶναι ἡ συμβολὴ του στὴν ἀναχαίτιση τῶν παπικῶν καὶ προτεσταντικῶν



κακοηθειῶν σὸ δὴθος καὶ τὸ δόγμα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. «**Ὁ παπισμὸς εἶναι ἡ πιδ σατανικὴ διαστροφὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος**» θὰ γράψει σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του στὸν Γέροντα Θεόκλητο.

Χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴ ὑπῆρξε ὁ πρῶτος εὐαγγελιστὴς καὶ διδάσκαλος στὴν Ἑλλάδα τῆς Βυζαντινῆς ἀγιογραφίας. Ἐπαναφέρει τὴν ἀγιογραφία στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη περπατησιά της, γιατί «εἶχεν ἀλωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς χαλκομανίες τοῦ δυτικοῦ ἀνθρωπισμοῦ, τὶς “γενοβέφεζ” —ὅπως τὶς ἔλεγε— πὺ εἶχαν κυριαρχήσει στοὺς ἀγιορεῖτες ἀγιογράφους μέσω τῶν ρωσικῶν παραγγελιῶν». («Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του», σελ. 204).

Μὲ ἀγωνία διαβλέπει τὴν ἀλλοτριώση τοῦ Γένους σ’ ὅλες τὶς καλλιτεχνικὲς του φανερώσεις ἐξαιτίας τῆς πνευματικῆς πανούκλας πὺ ὀνομάζεται ἐξευρωπαϊσμός.

«Καμαρῶστε τί “ἔργα” παρουσιάζουν οἱ “τέχνες” σήμερα. Εἶναι νὰ φράζει κανένας τὰ μάτια του. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πασαλείμματα ἀπάνω στοὺς μουσαμάδες, πὺ λέγονται “ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς”, ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια πὺ παρουσιάζονται γιὰ “ἔργα γλυπτικῆς” σὲ κάνουνε ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ πὺ φανερώνουν αὐτὰ τὰ τερατοურγήματα...». («Μυστικὰ Ἄνθη», ἐκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 14).

Δὲν ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνύστακτο ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ τυμπανιαῖας ἀποφορᾶς—σήμερα— πτώμα τῆς Παιδείας.

«Τώρα, ἄς ποῦμε καὶ τὰ σημερινά μας. Τὰ σχολεῖα, ἂν βγάλει κανένας λίγα στὴν μπάντα, τ’ ἄλλα ὅλα δουλεύουν γιὰ νὰ βγάλουνε λεβαντίνους κι ὄχι Ἑλληνες, μ’ ὅλα τὰ ψευτοελληνικὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πασαλείμματα. Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ’ αὐτοὺς πὺ διδάσκουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας κινήσανε ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, καὶ πέσανε μὲ τὰ μοῦτρα στὰ “μοντέρνα”. Γινήχανε θεριακλῆδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ. Ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὁ λογισμὸς τους, μέρα-νύχτα, στριφογυρίζει στὶς μοντέρνες ἀνοησίες. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα δὲν θέλουνε μὲ νὰ τὴν ἀκούσουνε, τὴν “Ψωροκώσταινα”! Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιδ ἀντιπαθητικὸ καὶ πιδ μικρόμυαλο πλάσμα ἀπὸ τὸν ξιπασμένο ἄνθρωπο, πὺ ἀρνήθηκε τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του καὶ ρεμπεύεται κιόλας γι’ αὐτὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα.

Λοιπὸν, ἀπὸ τέτοιους δασκάλους τί θὰ μάθουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας, τὰ κακόμοιρα τὰ παιδιὰ μας; Θὰ μάθουνε, πὺς γιὰ νὰ γίνει κανένας σπονδαῖος καὶ γιὰ νὰ φαίνεται πὺς εἶναι ἔξυπνος, πρέπει νὰ μὴν ἔχει τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ ἀπάνω του. Ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ μόρτικο ὕφος, πὺ εἶναι σήμερα τῆς μοντέρνας

μόδας, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ξενικό, τεντυμποϊκό.

Εἶτε βιβλίο, εἶτε τραγούδι, εἶτε παιδικὸ θέατρο, εἶτε χορός, εἶτε προσευχή, ὅλα πρέπει νὰ μὴν εἶναι Ἑλληνικά, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλὰ γιὰ τοὺς μαθητὲς τῶν σχολειῶν μας. Στὰ βιβλία, στὰ παιδικὰ θέατρα, στὰ παραμῦθια καὶ στὰ βλακώδη ἀναγνώσματα, ὅλα εἶναι ξανθὰ. Ὅλα! Ἄνθρωποι, ζῶα, σύννεφα, τοποθεσίες. Ἄν ἦτανε μπορετὸ νὰ γίνει κ’ ἡ θάλασσα ξανθιά». («Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο», σελ. 183-184).

Δασκάλους «θεριακλῆδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ», «ἀναγνώσματα βλακώδη» ἐντοπίζει μὲ ἐκπληκτικὴ διορατικότητά ὁ Κόντογλου στὶς σημερινὲς καὶ διαχρονικὲς γάγγραινες τῆς πολὺπαθῆς Παιδείας!

Κορφολουγοῦμε, ὡς ἐπίλογο, ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ του ἀνθῶνα τοῦτα τὰ ἐλάχιστα (τίποτε ἄλλο, ἐξᾶλλου, δὲν «ζωγραφίζει» καλύτερα τὸν Φώτη Κόντογλου ἀπ’ ὅτι τὰ ἴδια τὰ γραψίματά του): «Ὅσοι ἀπομείναμε πιστοὶ στὴν παράδοση, ὅσοι δὲν ἀρνηθήκαμε τὸ γάλα πὺ βυζιάσαμε, ἀγωνιζόμαστε, ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ, καταπάνω στὴν ψευτιά. Καταπάνω σ’ αὐτοὺς πὺ θέλουνε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἕνα κουφάρι χωρὶς ψυχή, ἕνα λουλούδι χωρὶς μυρονδιά. Κουράγιο! Ὁ καιρὸς θὰ δείξει ποιὸς ἔχει δίκιο, ἂν καὶ δὲ χρειάζεται ὀλότελα αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπόδειξη». («Ἡ Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη», ἐκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 324).

Κατάντησε ἡ πατρίδα μας κουφάρι ἄψυχο, παίγνιο τῶν Εὐρωπαϊκῶν κακεργετῶν. Τὸν δρόμο γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὰ φτερὰ τὰ πρωτινά μας, τὰ μεγάλα, μᾶς τὸν δίδαξε ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου: πίσω στὴν Παράδοσή μας. Ἔως πότε θὰ εἴμεθα ἀχαρκτηριστοὶ Γραικύλοι;



Ἀπὸ ἕξι μέρη μᾶς πολεμοῦν οἱ δαίμονες, καθὼς λέγουν οἱ Πατέρες καὶ μάλιστα ὁ Ἅγιος Μελέτιος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς: Ἀπὸ τὰ ἄνω καὶ κάτω, ἀπὸ δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν. Καὶ ἄνω εἶναι αἱ ὑπὲρ τὴν δύνάμιν μας ὑπερβολαί, ὅπου κάμνομεν εἰς τὴν ἀρετὴν, κάτω δὲ αἱ ἐκ τῆς ἀμελείας μας ἐλλείψεις, ὅπου παθαίνομεν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν ἀρετὴν (διὰ τοῦτο εἶπον οἱ Πατέρες, ὅτι τὰ ἄκρα εἶναι τῶν δαιμόνων) καὶ δεξιὰ μὲν λέγονται, ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μὲ δεξιὰν αἰτίαν καὶ πρόφασιν τοῦ καλοῦ μᾶς ῥίπτουν εἰς τὸ κακόν. Ἀριστερὰ δέ, ὅταν ἀπὸ φανερὰν αἰτίαν τοῦ κακοῦ, μᾶς κάμνωσιν νὰ ἁμαρτάνωμεν. Καὶ ἔμπροσθεν μὲν εἶναι, ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μᾶς πολεμοῦν μὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ ἐνθυμίσεις τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπου μέλλουν νὰ ἔλθουν, ὀπισθεν δὲ ὅταν μᾶς πολεμοῦν μὲ τὶς ἐνθυμίσεις καὶ προλήψεις τῶν περασμένων πραγμάτων.

Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορεῖτης

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS ARE DUTY-BOUND TO HAVE TRUE ORTHODOX BISHOPS!

Originally published in "Orthodox Heritage," vol. 1, issue no. 11, under the title "The Seat of Moses: Its Powers and Perils." This article is being re-published in line with the perilous times and current ecclesiastical events which confront the faithful in our days.

What can we do? These are our bishops. We know that they have betrayed Orthodoxy and that they are breaking the Holy Canons that tell us that we must avoid all prayers with the heterodox. We know that they believe in the Anglican Branch Theory and practice "eucharistic hospitality," and that they preach "Marxist Christianity," and that their joys and sorrows are one with their theistic overlords. We know that they are wolves in sheep's clothing, that they are traitors to Orthodoxy, and disdainers of the writings of the holy Apostles and the holy fathers of the Church. But what can we do? Willingly or unwillingly one is forced to remain with the hierarchy that has been given us, for without a bishop there is no Church. We have to obey our bishops, don't we?

† † †

Orthodox Christians are duty bound to have Orthodox bishops. They are obliged to obey their bishops only if their bishops obey Holy Tradition, as it is embodied in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Canons and the teachings of the Church Fathers. If the bishops are not obedient to the Church, we are not obliged to be obedient to them. Indeed, how can one demand obedience to disobedience? Why should one show reverence to irreverence?

The Orthodox Church has criteria by which the Orthodoxy of all—bishops, clergy and lay people alike—is evaluated. These criteria are the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, as it is expressed in the Holy Canons and writings of the saints of God and the holy Church Fathers. As a result, there is no room here either for anarchy or for despotism. There is no danger of slipping into dictatorial Papism or into free-for-all Protestantism. On many occasions, when discussing such matters with Roman Catholic priests or monks, we have made it abundantly clear to them that, "All Orthodox bishops are infallible—until they make a mistake..."

Our Orthodox bishops know exactly where they stand and they know they must stand there correctly or they will have to answer to God and to the people of God. At their ordination to the episcopacy, they make three solemn declarations and vows before God and the Orthodox faithful. In the first declaration, the candidate recites the Creed wherein, among other things, he declares his belief not in the Anglican Branch Theory, but in the Undivided Church which is *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*. He professes that the Holy Spirit

proceeds *from the Father*—not "from the Father and the Son" as the heretical denominations aver. In the second declaration he pronounces the Orthodox Catholic faith regarding the Person of the Son of God, and here he denounces the doctrines of Sabes, Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus and all the other Monophysites and Monothelites. In the third declaration, the candidate professes the Orthodox Faith concerning the Holy Trinity, adding also the words, *I believe also in the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church's traditions and interpretations concerning God and things divine*. Furthermore, he denounces those who do not accept the holy icons as the Church has accepted them. And at the end of the declaration, he states, *I anathematize and openly proclaim with a great voice: To every heretic anathema. To all heretics, anathema!* [*Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), pp. 166-76].

These are indeed very strong and frightful words. The candidate for the episcopacy is here proclaiming before God and the people of God that he will uphold and defend every aspect of the Orthodox Faith, and he calls the Church's anathema and excommunication upon those who refuse to obey the voice of Christ Who has spoken in His holy Church: *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* (Mt 18:18).

Of course, like every other mortal, bishops too have failings—for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23). But, like all other mortals, they too struggle with their weaknesses and try as best as they can to overcome them. Like everyone else, they are not always successful. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they too have human flaws, as long as they uphold and defend and teach the Orthodox faith, they are being faithful to the confession of faith and the vows that they made at their ordination. We do not revere our bishops; they too are mortal, and therefore have failings like the rest of us. We revere and love them because, though mortals and, therefore, possessing human failings, they have taken upon themselves the heavy task of: (1) Defending and propagating the Holy Orthodox and Catholic Faith, (2) striving to cultivate an increase in the piety and fervor for God of the flock with which they have been entrusted, and (3) seeking by all means to increase that flock.

They are the living icons of Christ our Savior. It is by their authority that all the Holy Mysteries are performed in the Church. Furthermore, since they are the true icons of Christ our Lord and Teacher, it is their duty to rightly divide the Word of Truth and to observe and uphold the Holy Canons, to maintain and extend that Truth of which they are icons, and to see to it that their flock does the same. The English word "bishop" comes from the Greek word *episcopos*, which means "overseer," and this term describes their duties and obligations well; if they fulfill these obligations, we revere and honor them as our fathers and tutors in Christ. Such

holy bishops, faithful to their commitment towards observing and upholding the Holy Canons, came together in the Ecumenical and Local Councils in defense of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. As Chrysostom Stratman expressed it:

These authentic shepherds of the Lord's flock had but one concern, the welfare and safety of those entrusted to them. Guiding, nourishing, and protecting their sheep was their one earthly occupation and preoccupation. They lived for Christ's flock and many died for it, as did the great and holy St. John Chrysostomos...

[*The Ecumenists* (Oak Park, III.), p.7]

Granted that not all bishops are saints, and perhaps a few are totally unworthy of their calling; what does Our Savior teach us in regard to this point? Our Lord and God taught us that those religious leaders who do not observe the laws of God stand convicted of hypocrisy, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old. Nevertheless, as long as they continue to teach us the law of God—even though they themselves do not observe it—we are to obey them. Our Savior said:

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. [Mt 23:2-10].

Here too, in our Savior's words, we find the key to understanding the difference between human sin and blasphemous heresy: Sin is a transgression of the Gospel's precepts. Heresy, on the other hand, is an **alteration** of those precepts.

So, as long as our hierarchs sit in the seat of Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and Saints—that is to say, as long as they continue to teach the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration—we are to obey them, even though they themselves, perhaps, are not in order personally. On the other hand, if they openly and without shame teach heresy—that is, change the teachings that have been delivered unto us by the Saints of God—then we are not under any obligation whatsoever to listen to them or to obey them. They no longer sit in the seat of Moses.

What, then, should one do if one is faced with the possibility that one's bishop has gone astray in matters of the faith?

"We are just simply, Orthodox Christians. What do we know about theological matters anyway?"

This is a typical statement, heard too often. The answer, of course, is that **we are the rational flock of Christ**. As conscientious Orthodox Christians, we are expected to know our Orthodox Faith well and to live it. This means that we have been attending and listening carefully to the Divine Services. We have been reading the Holy Scriptures together with the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. We have been studying the Lives of the Saints, the Holy Canons and Church History. We have been keeping the holy fasts and cultivating the life of prayer. We have been trying to keep the commandments, struggling with our passions, and striving to grow in true love for God and man. If we have not been doing these things, we are not conscientious, practicing Orthodox Christians. We are not a rational flock.

This is what the *Apostolic Constitutions* say about what kind of flock we are supposed to be:

The sheep and rams are rational, and not irrational, so that no layman may ever say that. "I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me." For even as the sheep which follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that that which follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death, for he shall utterly devour it. [Apostolic Constitutions, 2:19 (PG I.633)]

Nor should we forget what the Orthodox Patriarchs of the East wrote in their *Answer to Pope Pius the IX* in 1848, "...the guardians and defenders of the faith is the very body of the Church, that is, the people..." (J.Karmiris, ed., *Ta Dogmatica kai Symbolica Mnemeia* [Athens, 1953], vol.2, p. 920).

Let us return now to the question we mentioned above. What does an Orthodox Christian do when he ascertains beyond a shadow of a doubt that his bishop is openly and stubbornly preaching heresy? Fortunately, we have an abundance of examples that tell exactly how we must proceed should such a dire and grievous situation ever arise. Church History, the Lives of the Saints, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Holy canons all provide guidance for us.

To begin with, the first thing an Orthodox Christian must do—once he is sure his bishop no longer preaches Orthodoxy—is to find the nearest bishop who does preach Orthodoxy.

Although this is the first, and easiest, solution to the problem, things do not always work out so simply. There have been occasions when the entire hierarchy of an area fell into heresy, as occurred in all North Africa during the Arian controversy in the fourth century, and in the Polish occupied territories with the so-called Union of Brest during the seventeenth century. There have been other occasions in the Church's history when the Orthodox Christians did not know who the nearest Orthodox bishop was. Such was the plight of the Orthodox Christians during the iconoclast

period. What did they do when all the bishops known to them were iconoclast? There simply were no Orthodox bishops at the head of the dioceses in the Byzantine Empire at that time. The Orthodox bishops who had not died at the hands of their tormentors were languishing in prisons and exile, and the Orthodox Christians hardly knew where they were or if they were alive or dead.

What did the Christians do then? They simply commemorated “our Archbishop” or “Metropolitan” or “Bishop” without mentioning any name, and by this they meant the nearest true and faithful Orthodox bishop whose name, at the moment, was unknown to them (the bishop who still teaches the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration.) This practice is used to this day by the zealot fathers of the Holy Mountain who refuse to commemorate the Patriarch Bartholomew (and Demetrios before him) of Constantinople, and who instead use the formula “for every episcopate of the Orthodox which rightly divideth the word of truth.”

The life of Saint Maximus is also instructive for us. Saint Maximus, though only a simple monk, resisted and cut off communion with every patriarch, metropolitan, archbishop and bishop in the East because of their having been infected with the heresy of Monothelitism. During the first imprisonment of the Saint, the messengers from the Ecumenical Patriarch asked him:

“To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once, lest fashioning for yourself some new and strange pathway, you fall into that which you do not even expect!”

To this the righteous man wisely replied “Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith. It was for this confession that He called Peter blessed, and He declared that He would found His Church upon this confession. However, I wish to know the contents of your confession, on the basis of which all

churches, as you say, have entered into communion. If it is not opposed to the truth, then neither will I be separated from it.”

The confession which they were proposing to the Saint was not Orthodox, of course, and so he refused to comply with their coercions. Furthermore, they were lying about the See of Rome which, in fact, had remained Orthodox. Sometime later, at his last interrogation by the Byzantine authorities, the following dialogue took place:

The Saint said, “They [the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria and all the other heretical bishops of the East] have been deposed and deprived of the priest-

hood at the local council which took place recently in Rome. What Mysteries, then, can they perform? Or what spirit will descend upon those who are ordained by them?”

“Then you alone will be saved, and all others will perish?” they objected.

To this the Saint replied: “When all the people in Babylon were worshipping the golden idol, the Three Holy Children did not condemn anyone to perdition. They did not concern themselves with the doings of others, but took care only for themselves, lest they should fall away from true piety. In precisely the same way, when Daniel was cast into

the lion’s den, he did not condemn any of those who, fulfilling the law of Darius, did not wish to pray to God, but he kept in mind his own duty, and desired rather to die than to sin against his conscience by transgressing the Law of God. God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone am being saved! However, I shall sooner agree to die than to apostatize in any way from the true faith and thereby suffer torments of conscience.”

“But what will you do,” inquired the envoys, “when the Romans are united to the Byzantines? Yesterday, indeed, two delegates arrived from Rome and tomorrow, the Lord’s day, they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Patriarch.”

The Saint replied, “Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communi-



cate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: **The Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.**”

As history had demonstrated, Saint Maximus—who was only a simple monk and not even ordained—and his two disciples were the ones who were Orthodox, and all those illustrious, famous and influential Patriarchs and Metropolitan whom the Saint had written against were the ones who were in heresy. When the Sixth Ecumenical Council was finally convened, among those condemned for heresy were four patriarchs of Constantinople, one Pope of Rome, one Patriarch of Alexandria, two Patriarchs of Antioch and a multitude of other Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops. **During all those years, that one simple monk was right, and all those notable bishops were wrong.**

In the Life of Saint Hypatius of Rufinianus (commemorated on June 18th), we find the following account:

When Nestorius came from Antioch in order to become Patriarch of the illustrious Imperial City of Constantinople (he was brought there by Dionysius, who had become *magister militum per orientem*—a Roman honorary military title of significance), Saint Hypatius saw a vision, at the very moment in the holy Church of the Capital that some laymen installed him (Nestorius) upon the throne; and immediately a voice announced, “In three and a half years this tare will be uprooted.” Thus Saint Hypatius began to say to certain persons and particularly to the brethren of his monastery, “I have great anxiety over this man who has come, my children, for I have seen that he will turn aside from the faith; but he will reign only three and a half years.”

Thus, when he passed by the Saint’s monastery, Nestorius did not wish to go to meet him—he had accidentally learned what the Saint had said—although he had hitherto visited everywhere, including all the monasteries and Church dignitaries and abbots, as he made his way to the Capital. When he had entered the Capital and had become Patriarch, he immediately sent clergymen to Saint Hypatius with the message, “Go say to that dreamer: ‘I shall reign for twenty years in the City and where are your dreams?’”

Saint Hypatius replied to them, “Tell the Patriarch that if it comes to pass as I discerned it, it was a revelation; if not, it was a dream and I, as a man, imagined it.” Thus embarrassed by the answer which they brought back to him, Nestorius sometime after sent other people in order to ensnare him in certain of his words. But after having tempted him with troublesome and useless questions, they were not only unable to trap him in his words, but they left his presence filled with admiration for him,

having understood that the Saint possessed great intelligence. It was for this reason that Nestorius left him in peace and did not send anyone else to him.

The three years having passed, little by little the evil treasure of his heart began to show itself. For in his sermons he said abominable things about the Lord which were to fall again upon his own head, and which are not permitted for us to repeat. This evil man did not know the Holy Scriptures, which say, “Who shall declare his generation?”, and, “Search not into things too deep for thee.” When he understood that Nestorius held opinions contrary to those which should be acknowledged, Saint Hypatius immediately, in the church of the Apostles, erased his name from the *diptychs*, so that it should no longer be at the Oblation (the Eucharist offering).

When the most pious Bishop Eulalis learned of this, he was anxious about the outcome of the affair. And seeing that it had been noised abroad, Nestorius also ordered him to reprimand Hypatius. For Nestorius was still powerful in the city. Bishop Eulalius spoke this to Hypatius: “Why have you erased his name without understanding what the consequence of it would be?” Saint Hypatius replied, “From the time that I learned that he said unrighteous things about the Lord, I have no longer been in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; for he is not a bishop.” Then the bishop, in anger, said, “Be off with you! Make amends for what you have done, for I shall take measures against you.” Saint Hypatius replied: “Do as you wish. As for me, I have decided to suffer anything, and it is with this in mind that I have done this.”

Now when Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor and said to him, “Say to the Emperor: ‘Pronounce your sentence against Nestorius.’” And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of the day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day, the three and a half years having passed, as the Lord had foretold the Saint. And some days later the decree of the deposition was brought. It was read in the presence of all the clergy and people, Bishop Eulalius and Saint Hypatius being present together in Church.

The significant point in this account is that the Saint ceased commemorating Nestorius even **before** any Synodal decision had been made against the latter. Furthermore, the Saint declared, “I am no longer in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; **for he is not a bishop.**” All this was said and done **before** any Church Council had condemned Nestorius’ heresy. And indeed, heresy is heresy whether or

not a Council condemns it. It is not, after all, the decision of the Council that makes the heresy a heresy. Rather, following in the path of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, the Church Councils openly proclaimed the true Orthodox doctrine, while at the same time demonstrating in what points heresy had deviated from that doctrine.

The Holy Canons are not silent in this regard either. Here is what the 15th Canon of the First and Second Council sets forth:

If any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proved to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents [i.e., prelates] stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. **But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox.** For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.

Regarding this matter, the following is noted in the book *Against False Union*:

The communion with and respect of one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that local church remains in the Church, that is as long as it lives and proceeds in Spirit and Truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms." On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and

even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

As we saw from the few examples cited above—and there are countless others—the Orthodox faithful did not mince words, nor were they afraid to take immediate action when they ascertained that their bishop had strayed from Orthodoxy. Inevitably, there were those who found fault with this "extreme" course of action. The latter were not so much disturbed by the heresy of their bishop as they were by the words and actions of the "zealots," as they usually labeled the conscientious flock. These "super-correct" extremists were disturbing the peace of the Church and fomenting schism, said they. How did those "unhealthy elements" dare to rebuke the bishop and cut off communion with him **before** any Synodal clarification? As we have seen, Saint Hypatius and Saint Maximus the Confessor gave us two concrete examples of how they dared. Saint Theodore the Studite and Saint Mark of Ephesus also dared, and today the church honors and reveres them for doing so.

The Church—which had just weathered the century long onslaught of iconoclasm—saw that there were often occasions when, for one reason or another, there was no possibility of calling an Orthodox Council. Precisely for this very reason, therefore, the First and Second Council which convened in Constantinople in 861 formulated the Fifteenth Canon, which merely articulated and gave canonical expression to the ancient practice of the Church, to wit, that the Orthodox Christians should "**wall themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification.**" Thus, should the Orthodox faithful ever find themselves in an extreme situation—doctrinally speaking—they were encouraged and protected by this canon—no matter what they were called by others, and no matter what sanctions and actions the erring bishop threatened to take against them. Actually, church History has demonstrated repeatedly that the believers who were the first to react against heresy were wholly justified in their course of action on every occasion.

This, then, is the Orthodox understanding and the ancient practice of the Church in this matter. As we mentioned in the beginning, there is room here neither for anarchy, nor for despotism. We have criteria, and these criteria are the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, Church History, and the Holy Canons.

This witness, this Faith is sealed with the blood of the martyrs and confessors of the Church. And truly, since the Church is built upon this rock, how is it possible for the gates of Hades to prevail against Her?

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear! (Mt 11:15).

THE BREAD, THE WINE, AND THE MODE OF BEING

By Fr. Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, Ph.D., Hieromonk at the Holy Monastery of Koutloumoussiou, Holy Mountain.

The recent reappearance of the ancient terror of a pandemic has prompted fertile conversation among theologians and literary people across the world. Various opinions have been articulated, such as that disease can be transmitted through the current way of distributing Holy Communion, or that the Eucharistic Gifts themselves can be bearers and transmitters of pathogenic germs. It is said that since the bread and the wine do not alter their essence and essential properties, it follows that they are subject to decay and can also spread toxic viruses. This idea has supposedly found Christological grounds as well in that the human body of Christ is a carrier of germs which can be harmful to us, though not to Him; after all, germs themselves are not bad, since there is nothing bad in creation.

Within this framework the following evidence drawn from the writings of the Fathers might be relevant and useful.

Undoubtedly, there is nothing bad in creation. No form of life, nor even natural destruction can be considered as bad, because evil is only that which alienates us from God. However, at the same time one should not ignore or deny the products of personal sin, such as, for example, a dangerous laboratory hybrid, as well as the effects of the ancestral Fall, namely decay and death, to which the human being has been submitted. Now, God's incarnation manifested something entirely new in the world.

Let us open a short parenthesis to delineate the Orthodox belief regarding the Eucharistic elements. Do we hold that they are merely a representation of the Lord's presence in the congregation, as is the general understanding in Protestantism? In this case, the holy bread could be offered in sterilized bags and the holy wine in certified sealed bottles. If, on the other hand, in accord with the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the holy gifts are Christ with respect to their essence, then either we must commit ourselves to worshipping the gifts or fall into unbelief when thinking they can be corrupted.

The Greek Fathers speak neither of transubstantiation nor symbolic function but of the "change" of the material ele-

ments. This "change" signifies a new mode of being, inaugurated through the appearance of God in the flesh. Here we must consider the patristic distinction between the *logos of nature* and the *mode of existence*, a distinction which is useful for an Orthodox approach to the mystery of Christ.

The Fathers use this distinction as a tool for explaining God's miracles in history. When God intervenes to perform a wondrous act, He does not alter the nature of things—that is, their logos or principle; instead He innovates the manner in which their nature operates, so as to fulfill the divine economy. The innovated mode means nature operating beyond its own ordinance, beyond its limits, translating the human being "into another form of life," as for instance when Noah remained unharmed amid wild animals and holy men would walk upon the waters.

The Incarnation was the climax of all divine interventions. The incomprehensible mystery that took place in the Logos Incarnate was the indissoluble union of divine and human nature. Such union meant the exchange of the nat-



ural properties in Christ, in the same way that a blade becomes fire when thrown into fire while at the same time fire acquires a sharp edge. Human nature remains intact while its mode of existence is altered. This is why Christ was born both in a divine and a human way, that is, carried by a woman, yet without labour pains and corruption. He was not subjugated to nature; instead, elevating it to Himself, He made nature "a transcendental mystery" Christ's human nature operates in a divine mode, and it operates in a divine mode because it carries the fullness of divine activity.⁽¹⁾

This same reality and understanding can be applied to the Eucharistic mystery. Here also an alteration of the material elements takes place. Neither is their logos or essence changed, nor their natural properties, but their condition and conduct, that is, their mode of being. Just as in Christ everything human has a transcendental mode, since human nature in Him has the fullness of divinity, so the Eucharistic Gifts receive and transmit to its participants the same *theandric* activity of Christ. We partake, therefore, not of something that is subject to decay and deterioration, but of God Himself, through matter that has become life-giving, as the very flesh of Christ is life-giving.

Clearly, authentic communion has to do not only with the presence of Christ in bread and wine but also with His pres-

ence within us. Union and assimilation with God is not accomplished without the good resolve (*prohairesis*) and synergy of man, nor is it exclusively fulfilled in the Eucharist.⁽²⁾ We need to follow and wholeheartedly imitate Christ freely and be born in the Spirit. Divine activity operates in various inscrutable ways according to the measure of each one's faith and longing.

Thus, when Christ is offered as bread, He does not alter the nature of bread but its "economy." Christ's human nature was passible (capable of feeling-suffering, *Ed.*), yet, one with the Divinity, and for this reason it could not be seized and possessed by death. And as His body was dead and risen, since it was never detached from Divinity, similarly, when we receive this body we foretaste the resurrection. Just as Christ suffers as a human being, yet acts as God, in the same way the consecrated elements, though subject to "suffering" and corruption, act upon us as uncreated divinity. As St. Cyril of Alexandria says: *The body of Christ is holy and has the power to vanquish every illness. It was and is holy, not merely as flesh with its natural powers, but as the temple of the indwelling divine Logos, who sanctifies His flesh with His Spirit. This is why Christ vivifies the daughter of the leader of the synagogue not only through His omnipotent command but also with His bodily touch.* (Ἀναστασίου, *Doctrina Patrum*, σελ. 129, 131-32).

Therefore, to those that receive communion with faith and true repentance the Lord's body becomes a "safeguard," "for strength, healing and health of soul and body," maintenance and deification of human nature.⁽³⁾

The consecrated elements operate as the deified body of Jesus. Through matter, God grants life uncorrupted. And although immortality is an eschatological condition, and we shall all, sooner or later, cross to the other side of the bank, yet "doses" of incorruption are given in this mortal life according to the measure of each one's faith, longing, godly fear and love.



(1) See Maximus the Confessor, PG 91.298-300, 344, 1048-1056, 1273-1276, 1341-1345.

(2) See Chrysostom Koutloumousianos, *The One and the Three: Nature, Person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition*, James Clarke, Cambridge 2015, pp. 119-22, 132-34, 150-53.

(3) John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 87. Also see *Prayer before the Holy Communion*, and Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Oration*, 37.



If you could see what Grace comes down in Liturgy, you would be ready to gather the dust from the floor of the Temple and wash your face with it.

St. Gabriel Urgebadze (+1995)

A STORY FROM THE TRAVELS OF THE HOLY APOSTLE THOMAS

By Fr. Moses Samaan; we offer this beautiful story of how St. Thomas began to bring many Indians to the knowledge of God. It comes from the First Book of the "Evergetinos."



The great Apostle Thomas was placed by the Lord in the service of a businessman, Abban, as one very able in the art of construction. Together with the businessman Abban, St. Thomas arrived in the land of India. There he was led before the king of the land. The king asked him, with interest, about his skills, and the Apostle Thomas assured him that he was among the most accomplished builders and demonstrated to him

adequately his skills in this art.

Indeed, from all that he said about his art, St. Thomas was reckoned by all those hearing him to be a remarkable architect, for which reason the king entrusted him with a plentiful amount of money to build him a palace in a certain part of his kingdom.

No sooner had the Apostle Thomas received the king's money, plentiful as it was, he distributed all of it to the poor and to all who were in need.

After a short time, the king sent emissaries to the place which he had indicated that his palace be built, so as to see the construction. He was astonished, however, to learn from his emissaries, when they returned, that Thomas had not even laid the foundations for the building and that all of the money that the king had entrusted to him had been distributed among the poor. The king then became furious and commanded that the Apostle be tied up, hands behind his back, and brought before him.

Quicker than he could say it, the king's command was fulfilled and the Apostle Thomas was brought before him. The king said to him with uncontrollable anger: "Did you finish my palace?"

"Yes," the Apostle Thomas quietly answered him, "and a very beautiful one."

"All right, then," the king said sternly, "let us go to see it."

"It is not possible in the present life, O king, to see the castle which I am preparing for you. At your departure from this world, however, you will see it, and you will enjoy it with great happiness and rejoicing," the holy Apostle responded.

These words of the Apostle Thomas, King Gundaphor (that was his name) considered deceitful, and did not believe them to be true.

In the meantime, he was told that the Apostle Thomas was poor and had nothing that he could confiscate. Having thus lost any hope that he could get his money back, he decided, under the influence of his rage, that only the death of the Apostle Thomas would satisfy his anger. So, he arranged to have the Apostle skinned alive and afterwards thrown into a fire to be burned. But He who brings about all things by His omnipotence and calls them into accord with His Divine Will conveniently arranged for a change in the course of events through a fatal blow to Gad, who was the brother of King Gundaphor. And behold what happened. This Gad was even more upset than his brother the king at St. Thomas' failure to build their palace; and being more greatly infuriated by the Apostle, who had supposedly swindled them, he encouraged the king to proceed with Thomas' punishment. In the interim, however, Gad died.

The death of Gad, however, prompted the postponement of the Apostle Thomas' death. Owing to the magnitude of the calamity of Gad's death, the king forgot about his condemnation of St. Thomas and busied himself with the funeral arrangements for the dead Gad.

But what an astonishing miracle God performed—He Who wishes not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his sin and live the life of virtue.

As soon as Gad died, Angels took his soul and showed him the everlasting abodes that exist in the other world for those who are saved from sin. Gad's soul was so overwhelmed by the beauty, the magnitude, and the extraordinary brightness of one of these heavenly mansions, that he set aside all else and persistently pleaded with his Angelic guides to let him live in just one of the smallest of the rooms in the mansion.

The Angelic guides, however, would not consent to his request, pointing out that the mansion belonged to his brother Gundaphor, and that it had been built by someone from a foreign place by the name of Thomas.

Upon hearing this, Gad began with even greater zeal to implore his Angelic guides to go back and return to the world, so that he could buy this dazzling castle from his brother.

And what should happen thereupon?

At the beckoning of Him Who orders all things, it was appointed that Gad's soul should return to his dead body, not only to save the Apostle from death, but to save many souls with the miracle of Gad's resurrection.

Now, those who were caring for his burial, while wrapping Gad's dead body in funeral linens, suddenly saw the soulless body begin, little by little, to come to life. Amazed, they immediately ran to King Gundaphor to relate to him this unheard-of event.

Astonished, the king hastily ran to the side of his dead brother. And, oh, the wonder! Gad, up to this time dead, opened his lips, which had been sealed by death, and, as though waking up from sleep, insistently began to plead with his brother, saying:

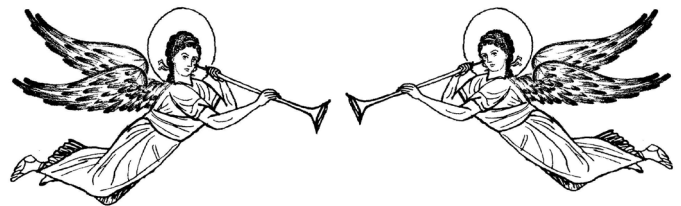
"If you love me, my brother, fulfill my request to buy the beautiful palace which Thomas the Christian has built for you in Heaven."

Carefully listening to these words, the king well understood their meaning and recognized that the Apostle Thomas was in fact an Apostle of God and that the God Whom the Apostle Thomas proclaimed was indeed a true God and a lover of man; forthwith his soul was enlightened with the brilliance of faith, and he answered his brother:

"My brother, I cannot sell you that building, the acquisition of which did not come so easily. Rather, I believe it easier to take the building for myself and to introduce you to the architect who made it—who by Divine Providence is still alive—and he can make a similar castle on your behalf."

Immediately the king commanded that Thomas be brought before him, who in the meantime was freed from prison and from his fetters. When the Apostle appeared, both of the two brothers fell at his feet and asked forgiveness for the wrong which they had brought upon him—albeit out of ignorance—and asked him to preach in their country the God Whom they knew not and His commandments, that they might live all of their lives in accord with His Will and thus merit the eternal and unseen good things, the images and types of which Gad had, indeed, been deemed worthy to foresee.

The Apostle Thomas heard all of this with amazement and marveled at the depth of God's Providence; immediately, then, he suitably thanked God and catechized them. Thereafter, he baptized all of them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He also baptized other numberless throngs of Indians, who came to believe in God on account of the miracle which had taken place.



On earth, everything is temporary—brief, transitory. Soon, everything will pass by—that which is pleasant and delightful, as well as what is lamentable and sorrowful. If we have chosen for ourselves the glorious path of piety, then we must remember and not forget the words of the Apostle: *All that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution.* (2 Tim 3:12)."

St. Ambrose (+1891)

THE HERMIT AND THE BANDIT

From the manuscripts of Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, translated by NS.

There once was a hermit who labored in the wilderness for seventy years, fasting, holding vigils, and always exercising much watchfulness. In all of these years that he labored serving God, he was not deemed worthy to neither see any visions nor experience any divine revelation. For this reason he fell to thinking:

“There is a likely some reason of which I am not aware, that makes God not pleased with my labors. This must be why I have never experienced any revelation or any mystery.”

Contemplating these things, the elder began to labor and to pray to God with more vehemence, saying:

“Lord, if my labor is truly pleasing to You and if You receive my works, I the sinful and unworthy one beseech You to give me just a drop of Your spiritual gifts, so that through the vision of some mystery I will be informed that You have heard my prayer. Thus, I will be able to commit my ascetic life to You with more courage and trust.”

Praying in this manner, the elder heard a voice from God which said, *If you desire to see My glory, go deeper into the wilderness and there many mysteries will be revealed to you.*

As soon as he heard the voice, the elder left his cell at once. After wandering for a while, he encountered a bandit who, as soon as he saw him, overtook him with all of his strength, desiring to kill him. After he caught the elder, the bandit said:

“It is good that I met you, Abba, because now I will complete my work and be saved!”

“But how will you be saved if you kill me?” asked the astonished elder.

“We bandits have the following law and faith: the one who is able to kill one hundred people will go to Paradise. Therefore, having labored much until now, I have killed ninety-nine, and lacking one, I have striven much to fulfill the last and to be saved. That is why you have given me much joy, and I thank you because today, through you, I will become worthy to indulge in Paradise!”

Having heard this, the bewildered elder trembled from the unexpected and desperate situation in which he found himself. Then, raising the eyes of his mind towards God, he said:

“Is this Your glory, Master and Lord, which You have willed to show me, Your servant? Such counsel have You given me, the sinner, to leave from my cell in order to inform me with such a mystery? With such gifts have You rewarded my labors? Now I have known in truth, Lord, that all of my asceticism has been in vain and all of my prayers have been accounted before You as something worthy of loathing and disgust. Even so, I give thanks to You for Your love of man, that You have punished my unworthiness as is meet, for my innumerable sins, and

that You have given me over into the hands of this bandit and murderer!”

Saying things such as these with pain, the elder began to thirst. Afterwards he said to the bandit:

“My son, since the Lord, due to my many sins, has given me over into your hands in order for you to kill me and take me from this life, as the wicked man that I am—and behold, your wish has been fulfilled—I beseech you to also fulfill one small wish of mine. Give me a little water to drink, and then you can cut off my head.”

As soon as the bandit heard these words of the elder and desiring to fulfill his request, with much joy he put his sword back into the sheath, and bringing forth from his chest pocket a small vessel, he went down to the river nearby to fill it with water and bring it back to the elder to drink. Yet while he was there filling the vessel, he gave up his soul and died.

Time having passed and not seeing the bandit returning, the elder thought to himself:

“Perhaps he became tired and fell asleep, and that is why he is delaying in returning? Maybe this is my chance to escape and return to my cell? But I am old and am afraid that I do not have the strength to run. Being weak, I will tire quickly, and he will catch me. Thus having enraged him all the more, he will torture me without mercy, cutting me up into many pieces. So I better not run but should rather go to the river to see what he is doing.”

Thinking upon this, the elder went down to the river and found the bandit dead, for which he wondered greatly. Raising his hands towards Heaven, he said:

“Lord, Lover of men, if You do not reveal this mystery to me, I will not lower my hands. Let your compassion be upon this labor of mine and show it to me!”

With this prayer on his lips, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said:

“Do you see, Abba, the one who lies dead before you? For your sake he received this sudden death, so that you could escape and not be killed. For this reason you should bury him as one saved. Since he did obedience to you and for the fact that he put his sword back into the sheath in order to bring water to quench your thirst, the rage of God was quenched, and He received him as a worker of obedience. Furthermore, his admission to killing ninety-nine people was accounted as a confession. Therefore bury him and commemorate him with those who have been saved. Through this you should know the abyss of love for men and the compassion of God. Now go back to your cell rejoicing, and be more zealous in your prayers. Do not say that you are sinful and unworthy of revelations. Behold the mystery which God has revealed to you. And you should also know this: all of your ascetic labors have been received by God, for there is never a labor which has been done for God which does not rise up before him.”

Upon hearing these things, the elder buried the dead.

FROM GOD, WE SHOULD EXPECT NOTHING LESS THAN THE IMPOSSIBLE

By Fr. Rafael Noica, translated from Romanian by NS.



I have received many letters to which I can never respond. I have spoken with many, and I have concluded that just about every person today is experiencing each his own personal tragedy; every person is overwhelmed by pain and despair. However, let us listen to what St. Paul says: *God has illumined our hearts to shine the knowledge of His glory towards Christ. This treasure we have in earthen vessels*, I am paraphrasing a little, *in order to understand that the excellency of the power is not of man, it does not come from us, but is from God.* Thus, the Apostle says, *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus... Why? ... that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.* (cf. 2 Cor 4:6-10).

If St. Paul would not have *lived* the love of God for man, oppressed as he was on all sides, he would have been distressed; in confusion, he would have despaired; being persecuted, he would have felt forsaken—how many among us today feel forsaken by God? Being cast down, he would have also been destroyed, as many which despair today—God forbid—cast themselves down, and it is difficult for them, or maybe even impossible, to ever rise again.

We should never forget that God loves man deeply, and because of this love, He can never abandon him. And whatever might happen to man, no matter how atrocious and awful, even if he no longer sees a way of escape, there is one thing left—the word of St. Silouan, which is more relevant today than ever before: *Keep your mind in hell and do not despair.* Behold how St. Paul, just as St Silouan did, kept his mind in hell, as the holy Apostle instructs us. He sees himself oppressed, he sees himself in great perplexities, he sees himself cast down, he sees himself persecuted; however, in none of these cases does he ever despair. What does it mean to not despair? It does not mean that you do not feel any or even get tempted by despair, even to your limit sometimes, when you reach a point of desolation and no longer know what else to do. At the moment of anguish, however, when you no longer know what else to do, you extend your thoughts to the one indiscriminate consolation, and whatever may be at hand, knowing that although you do not feel it now, God loves you.

I have advised several people last year, especially youths from abroad: when you feel that life is too difficult and you are unable to reach any measure of a godly virtue, you should know that it is not just difficult, it is impossible. Your own nature witnesses this thought to you, it gives testimony from within that this idea, this word, is impossible; but from our God we should expect nothing less than the impossible! Nothing less than impossible since if God is our God, well then the impossible is that which we expect from Him and that which only He can deliver; **for Him nothing is impossible.** And the thing which is impossible, due the love and the power of God, you will see working in you. I pray to God to receive this word and to strengthen your faith, which is both a prayer for me as well as for you.

The commandments of God are a divine revelation to intoxicate us, to sweeten us with the beauty of His Image, and to draw us towards His Kingdom. However, on our own, this accomplishment is not possible, yet that which is impossible, for the love of God and for His almighty power, we expect to see working in us.

There Is No Need to Despair

Why were we told to not despair? St. Paul enlightens and clarifies for us the strength of this divine love: he tells us that if divine instruction is for us to love God with all of our soul, heart, mind, and with all of our human strength, then God, in His own divine way, He equally and in a significantly deeper manner loves His creation, which He Himself fashioned. That is indeed how God loves Adam. In other words, to save Adam, He gave everything upon the Cross: from all of His Being, from all that He was and all that He had. Out of fellowship and love for man, He sacrificed even to the last drop of His blood for this one person who had so grievously sinned against Him. Why? Because He was the only One Who was capable of passing through into Hades and be resurrected from the dead; he thus forged a new path towards life, a path which Adam and his descendants had not reached, that is, the Resurrected Man sitting on the right hand of the Father.

Therefore, during all of our gloomiest and darkest days and moments, we have and should always employ a safety net, as circus acrobats put underneath them when they perform dangerous acts. The safety net is this: do not despair. When He says *Do not despair* God does not forbid the oncoming of hopelessness, but He is saying that we do not need to despair. In this way we can live through our gloom and doom moments, face them and say “Yes, this is how things might be, but for the sake of God I refuse to believe and live in despair,” and go on with our life accordingly, just as He would expect us to do. *Waiting, I waited patiently for the Lord*, says a psalm, *and He was attentive unto me* (cf. Pss 39:1)—and do so until the Lord descends and attends unto us. And truly He will come!

Despair—those innermost depths of despair—are a threshold through which we must pass, which in the hands of God

are nothing but a premise for our resurrection from that state, for salvation. The Apostle also says that *we the living are continually given over to death for Jesus*. Why? *So that the life of Jesus should be shown in our bodies of death*. (2 Cor 4:11). It is difficult for man to believe in the moment of despair that God gives to him this pain—or rather that He allows it since God gives nothing bad but only allows it. It is difficult for us to believe that this pain which is allowed for us to experience is given in order for us to also see the Resurrection of Jesus. Because if we, as St. Paul says elsewhere, with the baptism of Jesus—baptism in Greek means submersion—are submerged with Christ into the death of Christ, it is only in this manner that we can also know His Resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:4-5) as also the life of Christ may in turn be in us, and the life of Christ is eternal life. Therefore, even in our animal-like, biological nature which we now live—and I say this without insulting human nature but simply as the reality of our current temporal life—yet from this present state of ours, God still wants to grant us the knowledge of resurrection, which after what we call death will be able to be seen with more clarity and transparency, especially after the general Resurrection (i.e., Second Coming, *Ed.*).

When Conditions Are So Tragic, The Power of God Also Manifests Itself

Our salvation is in God's Hands; as long as salvation is possible through Him, from now on, we should know we should view it as a paradoxical "event," an event that is both puzzling and enigmatic. Bottom line: there is no need to despair. "God," I once said to someone, "will not conquer the world." And when he began to panic, I added, "He has conquered it already; He no longer needs to conquer it again!" But His conquering is often revealed in paradoxical forms—His glory in this world is perhaps more grand now than ever before. Thus, when conditions become so tragic (a common phenomenon in our days), when there is only one thing left to do, and with a desperate hope we turn to the thought and prayer that maybe Someone up there hears us, it is then that the power of God begins to manifest itself.

An Orthodox nun from Beirut was telling me that one Pascha night, while Lebanon was in the midst of an awful war, they did not know whether they were going to be able to celebrate Paschal services or not—yet the Orthodox clergy decided to serve anyway. She told me that at any given moment a bomb, a grenade, a mortar shell, or who knows what could have fallen from anywhere. But nothing fell, and they served on the night of Pascha in the hope of the Resurrection and while also having the great fear of bombardment. She said, "Never have I felt such a feeling of the Resurrection as on that night!" Again I say that during the most terrible moments of our life is when we begin to live and experience more perfectly than ever the presence of this God of ours, the God Who otherwise may have seemed that He did not exist.

Brothers and sisters, these things which I am sharing with you are not from theory but from painful experience, I am sharing them with trust and confidence. May God do the rest, may He put into your hearts patience and trust. And you should know that man is powerless, but this does not mean that your life is compromised. For the days which are coming, man is more and more alone, and I do not know where this loneliness will end up. But if you remain alone in the whole world, do not forget that Christ was alone in the whole world, slandered by all, and those who loved Him were far from Him. Remaining alone, weak, and apparently abandoned by all, you are likened to Christ Who also was slandered—if you want a reason to not despair. We continue in those states, and we await God; He will come and will have mercy upon us. May God do this for you, and as Elder Cleopa used to say, **may we all meet each other at the gates of Paradise!**



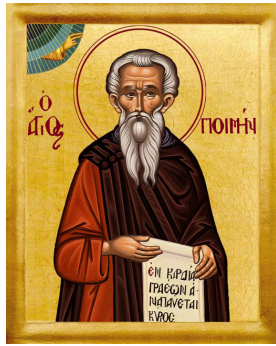
My brothers and sisters, you ought to detest every friendship with evil and wicked men and to avoid their company. Thus does God exhort you through Isaiah: *Go ye out from the midst of [them and] separate yourselves*. (Isa 52:11). Thus does St. Paul command you: *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person*. (1 Cor 5:13); and again: *That he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you*. (1 Cor 5:2). Thus did the Prophet David resolve never to consort even with the most elect of wicked men: *With men that work iniquity, and I shall not join with their chosen*." (Pss 140:4)

What am I saying? Even if wicked men are such necessary friends, relatives, and familiars to you as is your right eye, you should likewise hate and abhor their company; for their company becomes a stumbling block for you by transmitting their evil to your soul like a scabies and a plague: *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners* (1 Cor 15:33), causing others to be scandalized at you and supposing that you, too, are as evil as they. Hence, the Lord said about these men: *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee*. (Mt 5:29).

St. Chrysostomos also says: *Therefore, let no one have an immoral man for his friend. For if, when we have immoral sons, we disown them, without regard for nature or its laws, or for the constraint that it imposes on us, much more ought we to shun our friends and acquaintances when they are wicked. For even if we receive no harm from them, we shall not in any case be able to avoid incurring a bad reputation, since those outside our circles do not scrutinize our lives, but judge us by our companions*.

St. Nikodemus the Hagiorite: "Christian Morality"

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ON THE LATTER DAYS...

By St. Hippolytus of Rome (+236), from "The Anti-Nicene Fathers, vol. V: Fathers of the Third Century," pp. 243-244.

Wherefore all shall walk after their own will. And the children will lay hands on their parents. The wife will give up her own husband to death, and the husband will bring his own wife to judgment like a criminal. Masters will lord it over their servants savagely, and servants will assume an unruly demeanor toward their masters. None will reverence the grey hairs of the elderly, and none will have pity upon the comeliness of the youthful.

The temples of God will be like houses, and there will be overturnings of the churches everywhere. The Scriptures will be despised, and everywhere they will sing the songs of the adversary.

Fornications, and adulteries, and perjuries will fill the land; sorceries, and incantations, and divinations will follow after these with all force and zeal. And, on the whole, from among those who profess to be Christians will rise up then false prophets, false apostles, impostors, mischief-makers, evil-doers, liars against each other, adulterers, fornicators, robbers, grasping, perjured, mendacious, hating each other.

The shepherds will be like wolves; the priests will embrace falsehood; the monks will lust after the things of the world; the rich will assume hardness of heart; the rulers will not help the poor; the powerful will cast off all pity; the judges will remove justice from the just, and, blinded with bribes, they will call in unrighteousness.

And what am I to say with respect to men, when the very elements themselves will disown their order?

There will be earthquakes in every city, and plagues in every country; and monstrous thunderings and frightful lightnings will burn up both houses and fields. Storms of winds will disturb both sea and land excessively; and there will be unfruitfulness on the earth, and a roaring in the sea, and an intolerable agitation on account of souls and the destruction of men.

There will be signs in the sun, and signs in the moon, deflections in the stars, distresses of nations, intemperateness in the atmosphere, discharges of hail upon the face of the earth, winters of excessive severity, different frosts, inexorable scorching winds, unexpected thunderings, unlooked-for conflagrations; and in general, lamentation and mourning in the whole earth, without consolation. For, *because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.* (Mt. 24:12).

By reason of the agitation and confusion of all these, the Lord of the universe cries in the Gospel, saying: *Take heed that ye be not deceived; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not yet by and by.* (Lk 21:8-9).

Let us then observe the word of the Saviour, how He always admonished us with a view to our security: *Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.*

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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A GREAT SIGN

A HOMILY ON THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

Excerpts from a 2014 homily, by Fr. Matthew Baker (+2015).

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.

[Rev 12:1]

† † †

Today we celebrate a great and joyous solemnity: the falling asleep of the Mother of God in Jerusalem, and her bodily translation into glory.

The Whole Mystery of the Economy

The readings this evening—from Genesis, Ezekial, and Proverbs—present us with a series of images, all with reference to the Theotokos. She is the ladder ascending from earth to heaven, beheld by the patriarch Jacob in a vision (Gen. 28:12). She is Beth-el, God's house, and the gate of heaven (Gen 28:17). She is the east gate of the Temple sanctuary, which remains shut—virginal: no man enters, *for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it*, as Ezekiel prophesies (Ezek 44:2). She is wisdom, or the house of wisdom, of which king Solomon speaks. (Prov 9:1).

These readings—from Genesis, Ezekiel, and Proverbs—represent the three divisions of the Jewish Bible: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Together they comprise a “bouquet” representing the whole of what we call the Old Covenant. It is as if to say: Mary is the sum towards which the whole history of Israel was pointing all along. She is the daughter of Zion, the hinge of salvation history. In her is the beginning of the New Covenant.

In the words of St John of Damascus, *in the name Theotokos is contained the whole mystery of the economy*. Economy—oikonomia, as we often hear in our

hymns—refers to God's ordering of His *household*, His governance of creation and history according to His plan for our salvation and glorification. There is an order to God's plan, and a unity of meaning. This unity is revealed in the person of the Holy Virgin.

Mary's role in this economy, her identity as *Mother*, does not end with giving birth or rearing her child. We see her not only at the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus, but also at His first miracle in Cana, at the foot of the Cross, and with the Church at Pentecost. As St. John of Damascus said, *the whole mystery of the economy*.

In the festal cycle of our liturgical year, which begins September 1, the first great feast is the birth of the Theotokos, on Sept 8. The last great feast is today, her falling asleep and bodily assumption into heaven. Our liturgical remembrance of Christ's work of salvation begins and ends with Mary. We begin with her birth, we end with her glorification. Indeed, *in the name Theotokos is contained the whole mystery of the economy*.

A Woman Clothed with the Sun

At the end of his life, in exile on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John had a vision. “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” (Rev. 12:1). Most commentators take this image from the book of Apocalypse to be referring to the Church, or the remnant Israel. Some, however, see here an image of Mary, especially as she is the daughter of Zion, and she typifies the Church. Some even see an image of her bodily assumption.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun. (Rev 12:1). In the bodily translation of the Virgin, the Church recognizes a *great sign*. A prophetic sign, that speaks to us of our

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destiny, of the meaning of death, of bodies, of human relations. This sign tells us: death is not the final end of the human being. We are not lastly, as the philosopher Heidegger thought, only “being-unto-death.” Finite time and death are not our ultimate horizon. The mother of Jesus was *translated unto life*.

This sign tells us: a *heaven* of pure spirits is not our last estate. Christians are not Platonists! The body is not the soul’s prison, a cocoon to be sloughed off for the *true self* to emerge like a butterfly. Plato was wrong: our true person, as God intended it, is not just soul, but also body. Salvation of the person means salvation of the body.

This sign tells us: through the resurrection of Jesus, each one of us will rise again in our body, restored, as we were also once conceived in our mother’s womb: as male or female. *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun.* (Rev 12:1). Risen to glory, Mary is still Woman.

Certain ancient heretics, called Gnostics, believed that here was something to be overcome: in the kingdom of heaven, there would be no male and female, or perhaps women would become like men (Gospel of Thomas, *logion* 114). These Gnostics scorned marriage, and especially procreation. They sought liberation from the bonds of nature.

We still have our Gnostics today. Our Gnostics would like us to think of man and woman, mother and father, as interchangeable, shifting identities: not the Creator’s good

and lasting design, but inventions of society, or plastic self-constructions.

But today the Church holds out to us a different vision. It is a sign to our age, *a sign of contradiction*. (Lk 2:34). *You were translated to life, O Mother of Life*. This sign says: risen to glory, Mary is still Mother. In the bodily glorification of Mary, we are given an image, a pre-installment, of the glory of the Kingdom which we hope to inherit. It is fully embodied glory, wherein the beauty of created difference is preserved. A glory in which

natural bonds of love will not be dissolved. A glory in which each of us will remain mother or father, and son or daughter, to someone. And to everyone who, like the beloved disciple, has rested a head upon the Lord’s bosom, or stood by his Cross in prayer, Christ will say: *Son, behold thy Mother.* (Jn 19:27).

There is no human person more exalted than the Virgin Mary, the Panaghia. And there is no greater title for her in our theological glossary than *Mother*. This should tell us something. This word, mother, extends far beyond physical childbearing. It names an all-encompassing human concern, a spiritual bond, a calling from God. This spiritual maternity, beyond blood offspring, is the gift and calling of every woman: married or unmarried; bearer of many, one or none. It is a gift, of which every one of us—all humanity—is the blessed beneficiary. This is the good gift of our Creator—not our fashioning. And as today’s feast reminds us, it does not end in death.



REGARDING THE LOWLINESS (HUMILITY) OF MIND

Source: "Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza: Various Soul-Profiting Instructions to His Disciples," translated by Most Reverend Chrysostomos, Metropolitan Emeritus of Etna, "Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies," Etna, CA (2017), pp. 52-66.

The Greek title of this Instruction, «Περὶ Ταπεινοφροσύνης», literally means "regarding lowliness (or humility) of mind" «ταπεινότητα φρονήματος». The Greek word «ταπεινότης», humility, denoting a «ταπεινή κατάσταση» or humble state is nearly synonymous with «ταπεινοφροσύνη». However, in the Orthodox Hesychastic tradition, lowliness or humility of mind refers to a refinement of thoughts by a humble outlook or mentality that eventually leads to the attainment of the virtue of humility in the heart (which is, according to Orthodox Patristic teaching, the seat of the soul). The state of the heart responds to the purity of the mind and thoughts, and the two, working in synergy by Grace, give rise to genuine and abundant humility. It is for this reason that St. Paul attributes lowliness of mind to the elect of God in his Epistle to the Colossians (3:12).

† † †

One of the Fathers said: *More than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind, being ready at every word we hear to say, 'Forgive me,' for with the weapon of lowliness of mind, all of the snares of the Enemy and Adversary are destroyed.*

Let us investigate the deeper meaning of the Elder's words. Why does he say that "more than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," and does not say, preferably, "more than anything else, we have need of self-control," inasmuch as the Apostle Paul tells us that *Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things?* (1 Cor 9:25). Or why does he not say that, more than anything else, we need fear of God, since Holy Scripture says: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?* (Pss 110:10). And again, in another place, it is said: *By the fear of the Lord everyone departs from evil.* (Prov 16:6). Why does he not say, "more than all else, we need almsgiving and faith," inasmuch as Holy Scripture says that *by alms and by faith sins are purged away*, (Prov 15:27) while the Apostle Paul says, *without faith it is impossible to please God?* (Heb 11:6).

If, then, it is not possible to please God without faith, if sins are cleansed by almsgiving and faith, if with fear of the Lord everyone avoids every evil, if the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, and if he who struggles is temperate (self-

controlled) in all things, how can he say that "more than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," yet leave out all of the other things that are so necessary?

The Elder wishes to show us that neither the fear of God, nor almsgiving, nor faith, nor self-control, nor any other virtue can be efficacious without lowliness of mind. For this reason he says: "More than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," that we might be prepared at every word we hear to say, "Forgive me," since with the weapon of lowliness of mind all of the snares of the Enemy and Adversary are destroyed.

See, therefore, my brothers, how great is the power of lowliness of mind. Look how effective it is to say, "Forgive me." But why, also, is the Devil called both the Enemy and the Adversary? He is called the Enemy because he is a misanthrope, a hater of good, and treacherous. And he is called the Adversary because he undertakes to impede everything that is good.

Does a person wish to pray? He places himself in the way, impeding one by evil thoughts, by captivating the mind, and by spiritual listlessness. Does one wish to give alms? He impedes him with greed or niggardliness (cheapness, *Ed.*). Does someone wish to keep vigil? He impedes him with sloth and indolence. In this way, he opposes us in everything, in every good thing that we tackle. For that reason he is called not only the Enemy, but the Adversary. With lowliness of mind, therefore, every misanthropic and hostile action of the Devil is neutralized.

A Great Virtue!

Indeed, lowliness of mind is truly a great virtue. And everyone of the saints went forth with lowliness of mind and with toil and made short the path, as it is said: *Look upon my lowliness and my toil, and forgive all my sins.* (Pss 24:18). For we can surely enter into the Kingdom of Heaven by humility alone, as Abba John the Elder used to say, though at a slower pace. Let us also, then, humble ourselves a little, and we will be saved. And if, being weakened by illness, we cannot toil, let us at least take care to be humble. I believe that, in God's mercy, by virtue of the little done with humility, we too will be found in the realm of those Saints who so assiduously toiled and labored in God. Yes, we are ill and cannot toil; but can we not humble ourselves?

Blessed, my brothers, is he who possesses humility. Humility is formidable. And on the mark was that holy man who described one who has true humility in saying that: *Humility is neither angered, nor does it anger anyone.* (Attrib-



uted to Abba Mattoes, 5th century). This may seem to be a curious thing, since humility, in fact, stands in opposition to vainglory, and it ostensibly guards a person against it in particular. Now, one can become angry over money or food. Why, then, does he say that humility is neither angered nor angers anyone?

Humility is a formidable virtue and has the power to bestow Grace upon the soul. Thus, when this Grace of God comes, it protects the soul from these other two weighty passions (i.e., anger and angering another). For what is more weighty than for one to become angry or to anger his neighbor? As Abba Makarios also said: *It is totally alien to a monastic to become angry.* In fact, if this is not quickly covered by humility, little by little one will succumb to a demonic state, unhinging himself and others. So it is said that: *Humility neither renders one angry nor angers anyone.*

However, why does he say that humility covers these two great passions? Humility protects the soul from every passion, from every temptation. When St. Anthony saw all of the snares of the Devil laid out and, groaning, asked of God, “Alas, who can be saved from these?” what did God say to him? He answered him: *Humility overcomes them.* And what other wondrous thing did He add? He added: *They cannot even approach it* (i.e., humility).

Do you see the power, my brothers, of the grace of this virtue? Nothing is stronger than humility, and nothing vanquishes it. And if something regrettable happens to a humble man, immediately he rouses himself before such things, chastising himself as though he deserves all that takes place. He does not abide by the judgment of another or burden another with the cause of such; and in this way, he prevails without becoming upset, without chagrin, and is perfectly at peace. For this reason, he never becomes angry; nor does he anger anyone. It is thus meet that the saint said, *Above all else, we have need of humility.*

The Forms of Pride and Humility

Now, there are two forms of humility, just as there are two kinds of pride. The first kind of pride is when one disdains his brother, when he demeans him as being nothing, and considers himself to be above him. If such a one does not speedily come to his senses and diligently work to correct himself, bit by bit, he will arrive at the second kind of pride and degenerate to the point of showing arrogance before God Himself, ascribing whatever he achieves to himself and not to God.

Indeed, my brothers, I once knew a man who ended up in this deplorable condition. At first, if some brother would say something to him, he would spit and say: “Who is he? No one is worth anything except Zosimas and his disciples.” Later, he began to run down them, too, and say: “No one but Makarios is worth anything.” And not long after, he again began to say: “Who is Makarios? He is a nothing,

Only Basil and Gregory are of worth.” And after a time, he also demeaned them, saying: “Who are Basil and Gregory? Only Peter and Paul are worth anything.” I told him, “And shortly you will reject them.” Believe me, after a short time he started saying, “Who are Peter and Paul? Nobodies. Only the Holy Trinity is worthwhile.” Thereafter, he showed arrogance towards God Himself, and thereby lost his mind. For this reason, my brethren, we must struggle against the first form of pride, so that we do not shortly fall to total pride.

Now, there is also pride of a worldly kind and of a monastic kind. Worldly pride obtains when one is arrogant on account of his brother, thinking himself richer, more attractive, better dressed, or more gallant than he. So, when we ourselves are caught in vanity over such things, or think that our monastery is bigger or more wealthy, or that we have many brothers, we should know that we are still in the thick of worldly pride. Moreover, it happens that at times one is vain about various natural charisma. Heed what I mean: Someone shows vanity because he has a good voice or sings beautifully, or is skilled and performs with diligence and precision and serves unpretentiously. These are more refined forms of pride than the foregoing, but they too, nevertheless, belong to the realm of worldly pride.

One has monastic pride if he is vainglorious about doing vigils, or when he thinks himself pious, virtuous, or illustrious. It so happens, many times, that one will humble himself in order to be praised. These things belong to the realm of monastic pride. It is preferable, of course, given that all are prideful, to show pride with regard to monastic things than worldly ones. Note, then, that we have said what the first form of pride is, as well as the second; similarly, we have said what worldly and monastic pride are. Let us now learn what the two forms of humility are.

The first kind of humility is when someone considers his brother wiser and in all ways better than himself and, in a word, as that holy one said, to consider oneself “worse than all others.” The second kind of humility is for one to attribute his every success and every accomplishment to the Grace of God. This is the perfect humility that the saints had. This humility is created in the soul as a natural result of faith and the subservient keeping of the commandments of God. Just as the branches of trees producing much fruit are bent by this fruit downward, while barren branches that produce no fruit grow high and stand upright—indeed, some trees, since their branches grow straight up, produce no fruit, though if one takes rocks and affixes them to the branches, pulling them downward, then they will bear fruit—thus it is with the soul. When it is made humble, it produces fruit; and the more fruit that it produces, so much more is it humbled. Hence, the saints, the closer they draw to God, the more they see themselves as sinners.

The Humility of the Saints

I remember once a certain nobleman from Gaza who, hearing us speaking of humility and saying that the closer one is to God, the more sinful he considers himself, was surprised and asked: "How does that come to be?" And not knowing, he wished to learn. I said to him, "Sir, tell me how you view yourself when you are in your city?" He said to me: "I consider myself one of the principals and an influential citizen of the city." I said to him: "If you were to leave and go to Caesarea, how would you view yourself there?" He said: "I would see myself as a most lowly and insignificant man among the local noblemen." I said: "If you leave and go to Antioch, how will you think of yourself?" He told me: "I would think of myself as an uncouth villager." I said to him: "If you go to Constantinople, in the presence of the Emperor, how would you see yourself there?" He said to me: "I would feel like a pauper." And I then said: "Now you see precisely what the saints are like. The nearer they are to God, so much the more they see themselves as sinners."

For this reason, when Abraham beheld the Lord, he called himself *dust and ashes*. (Gen 18:27). And Isaiah said, *Oh, how wretched and unclean I am*. (Isa 6:5). The same thing occurred with Daniel. When he was in the lions' den and Avvakoum came, holding food and saying, "Take the food that God has sent you," what did Daniel say? *God has remembered me*. (Dan 6:16). Do you see what humility he had in His heart? Though he found himself in the lions' den and they did not disturb him, and not just one time, but also a second time, after all that he said with astonishment: *God remembered me*.

Do you see the humility of the saints? Do you see the humble sentiments that they nourished in their hearts? Out of humility, avoiding glory, even when sent by God to the aid of other men, the saints resisted. For just as someone wearing a pure silk garment dodges, when a soiled rag is thrown at him, so as not to soil his expensive clothing, so the saints, clothed with virtues, evaded human glory, so as not to be fouled by it. Those who desire glory are like unto a naked person who seeks to find some rag or whatever to cover his nakedness. And such is a person who is naked of virtues, who seeks after the glory of men. Therefore, when the saints were appointed by God to help others, out of humility they did not agree to do so. Rather, Moses, for one, said: *I beseech thee, Lord, choose another who is able;*

I am weak in speech, and slow of tongue. (Exo 4:10). And Jeremiah the Prophet, on his part, said: *I am a child*. (Jer 1:6). And every one of the saints achieved this humility, as we have said, by the faithful application of the commandments. No one, however, can express with words how this humility is formed within the soul of man, unless he learns it by the experience of the ascetic life. **With words, one cannot learn it.**

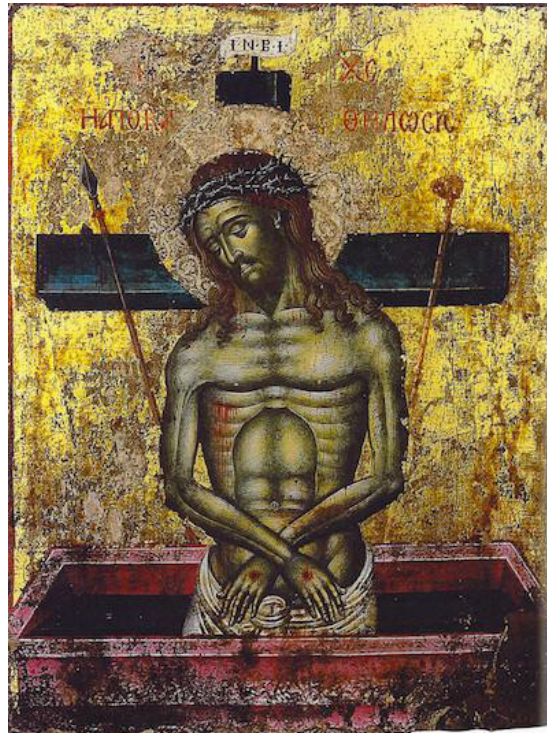
The Path to Humility

Abba Zosimas was once speaking about humility and a sophist who was there, listening to what was being said, wanted to know precisely what he was talking about. [A sophist was, in ancient Greek and Roman society, an intellectual or teacher who used the methods of philosophy to teach the precepts of virtuous living. *Trans.*] He asked the Abba: "Tell me how

it is that you call yourself a sinner? Do you not know that you are a holy man? Do you not know that you have virtues? Do you not see that you keep the commandments? How, doing all of this, can you be a sinner?" The Elder, however, could not find a way to reply. He told him only: "I do not know how to explain it, but this is how I feel: sinful." But the sophist persisted, wanting to know how such a thing could be. And the Elder, with his holy simplicity, said: "Do not misconstrue me, I truly am a sinner."

As soon as I saw that the Elder did not know how to respond, I said to him: "I wonder if, perhaps, this is similar to the knowledge of philosophy or medicine; that is, slowly, as the physician or philosopher comes to learn well his art and how to apply it, the practice of philosophy or medicine becomes for him an entrenched and automatic ability incorporated into his person, though he cannot say or explain how he came to acquire that ability. Slowly, as I said, the soul acquires this ability through active application. So it is, after this fashion, with humility; somehow, **by the keeping of the commandments, this entrenched quality comes about, without one being able to explain it.**" The moment that Abba Zosimas heard this, he immediately embraced me with joy and said: "You grasped it; it is just as you say." This also satisfied the sophist, and he accepted the explanation.

While, on the one hand, the ancient Elders have told us some things about what humility is, on the other hand, no one can portray in words that quality which is created within the soul by humility.



When Abba Agathon (4th century) was near death and the brothers said to him, "Are you afraid, Father?" he told them: "For the whole of my life, I have done what I could to observe the commandments, but I am a man. How do I know if my deeds pleased God? For God judges in one way and man in another." Note, now, how this Elder opened our eyes, that we might comprehend humility, and how he showed us the way to achieve it. However, what its nature is and how the soul acquires it, as I have many times said, no one can say; nor can we grasp it with our logical minds, except if the soul itself, by means of practicing it, is made worthy to learn of it. Yet the Fathers have told us what it is that can bestow it on man. Indeed, it is said in the writings of the Elders that a brother inquired of a certain Elder, saying: "What is humility?" And the Elder said: "Humility is a great and divine work. And the path that leads to humility is that of bodily labors that beget understanding; of considering oneself lower than any created thing; and, yet again, of praying without ceasing." This is the path that takes one to humility. The nature of humility, however, is divine and beyond comprehension.

[Note: Bodily labors, however heavy and exhausting they may be, do not by themselves lead to humility, nor do they have value in and of themselves; rather, they constitute a means for the acquisition of spiritual poverty and purity.]

Bodily Labors and Lowliness of Mind

Why, however, does he say that bodily labors lead the soul to humility? For what reason are bodily labors a virtue of the soul? Because, as we noted earlier, it is by considering oneself below every created thing that one wars against the first kind of pride. For how can one consider himself more important than his brother, or become prideful over something or denigrate someone, when he thinks himself lower than all creation?

And similarly, it is obvious that *unceasing prayer* wages war against the second kind of pride, since it is crystal clear that a pious man, a reverent person, since he knows that the soul can achieve no good thing without the help and protection of God, does not cease to ask God to have mercy on him. Moreover, one who prays unceasingly, even if he is capable of achieving something, knows with Whose strength he achieves it. Therefore, he cannot become prideful or attribute it to his own strength, but attributes to God every achievement, always thanking and beseeching Him, fearing that he might lose God's aid and that his own ailing and weak character might show forth. So, too, with the help of lowliness of mind, he prays, and with prayer he is made humble. And the more that he excels at something, so much the more he becomes humble; and to the extent that he is made humble, he is aided and flourishes under the power of lowliness of mind.

Why, then, does the Elder say that bodily labor brings about lowliness of mind? What relationship does bodily labor have with the disposition of the soul?

I will explain this to you: As St. Gregory says, When the soul fell away from the keeping of the commandments of God due to disobedience, it gave itself over to wretchedness, and to the love of pleasure and self-sufficiency, which lead to spiritual delusion; having come to love the things of the body, in a certain way it identified itself with the body, becoming wholly carnal: *My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men forever, because they are flesh.* (Gen 6:3). From then on, therefore, this wretched soul has suffered together with the body and conforms with all that it does.

This is why the Elder said that bodily labor leads to lowliness of mind. Wherefore, the proclivities of the soul of a healthy man differ from those of an ill man, those of a hungry man from one who is quelled of thirst or hunger. And again, similarly, the qualities of the soul of a man who rides a horse differ from those of one seated on a donkey, those of one seated on a throne from a man seated on the ground, and those of one well dressed from one dressed in rags.

Labor, therefore, humbles the soul. And when the body is humbled, the soul is humbled with it. Thus did the aforementioned Elder rightly say that bodily labor leads to humility. And thus it is that, when Evagrius was assailed by blasphemy, (in that he was aware that blasphemy comes forth from pride and that when the body is humbled the soul is humbled with it), for forty whole days he remained outside, without shelter, until, like a wild animal, as his biographer says, he was covered by ticks. He did not undertake this effort to cure his blasphemy, but to evoke humility. So the Elder was correct in saying that bodily labor leads to humility.

May God, Who is good, grant us humility, for it delivers a man from great evils and protects him from great temptations.



When God created man, He sowed something divine within him: a certain kind of reason, warm and bright, illuminating his *nous* (*the eye, or energy of the soul*) and showing him how to distinguish between good and evil. This is called conscience, and is the natural law. The Patriarchs [*Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc.*] and all the saints followed the law, that is, the law of conscience, before the written law was given; and they were pleasing to God. However, since—through the advance of sin—natural law was buried in the ground and trampled upon by men, we needed the written law, the holy prophets and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. All this in order to rediscover and to rebuild it, to reignite that spark ... by keeping His holy commandments.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

SIGNS OF APOSTASY

Source: "Archbishop Averky: One Man in the Face of Apostasy," from "Orthodox Word"—1986; on the teachings of the ever-memorable Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky (+1976) of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery.

Party Politics

Archbishop Averky saw that, once the savor of Orthodoxy is lost and the Church comes to be regarded first of all as an earthly organization, membership in the Mystical Body of Christ becomes confused with membership in one or another administrative church party. People's lives may then be ruined under the pretext of "cleaning up the Church" if these people do not seem advantageous to the organization. Clergy, lay people and monastics are pitted against and made to distrust each other in order to protect the worldly interests of their respective parties. One church group may split off from another and seek to legitimize its position with any number of legal and canonical formulas.

Various church parties may join to form "super-parties" in order to make themselves feel more legitimate; they may speak of their outward unity as if this represents the true spiritual unity of the Church, but they betray how merely political this unity actually is when they dismiss or use polemics against those Orthodox groups which have not joined their organizations. Those with a "party mentality" may lose the very idea of sanctity, glorifying church figures primarily because they are "recognized" by their particular party or are its most prominent spokesmen. "Canonicity," a major weapon in party polemics, comes to be manipulated quite arbitrarily and becomes wrongly confused with one party's "recognition" by other parties. Accordingly, one appears to become "canonical" when one uses the most effective propaganda.

Archbishop Averky was repulsed by this realm of what he called "party politics," seeing that it had nothing to do with basic Christianity.

Although party politics have indeed reached an extreme in these last times *when the love of many grows cold* (Mt 24:12), the "party mentality" is not, of course, new to the modern age: it is a common tendency of the fallen, carnal side of humanity. Even St. Paul had to deal with it when writing to the church at Corinth: *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in*

the name of Paul? While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? (1 Cor 1:12-13, 3:4).

To make the Church a tool of political intrigues, Archbishop Averky said, is "to subject the eternal to the temporal, the heavenly to the earthly, the holy to the sinful." In his article Holy Zeal, he stated further:

"And there is likewise a false, lying zeal, behind the mask of which is concealed the foaming of ordinary human passions—most frequently pride, love of power and honor, and the interests of party politics like that which plays the leading role in political struggles, and for which there can be no place in spiritual life, in public church life, but which unfortunately is often to be encountered in our time and is a chief instigator of every imaginable quarrel and disturbance in the Church, the managers and instigators of which often hide themselves behind some kind of supposed idealism but in reality pursue only their own

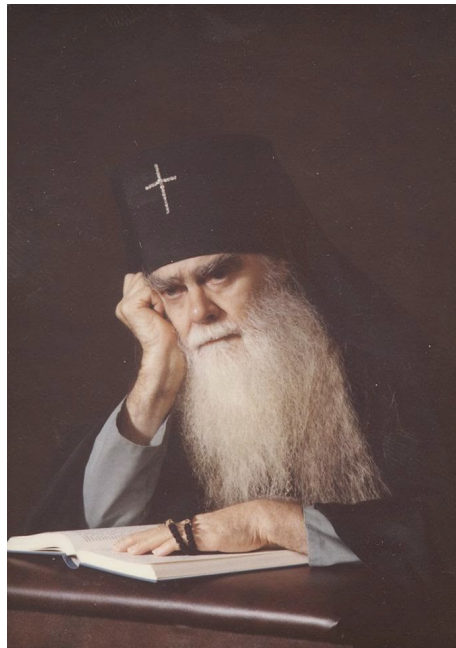
personal aims, striving to please not God but their own self-concern, and being zealous not for God's glory but for their own glory and the glory of the colleagues and partisans of their party. All of this, it goes without saying, is profoundly foreign to true holy zeal, hostile to it, is sinful and criminal, for it only compromises our Holy Faith and Church!"

"The Church," emphasized Archbishop Averky in another place, "was given to us for the salvation of our souls and for nothing else! We cannot make it a tool or an arena for the play of our passions and for the settling of our personal accounts."

As far as Archbishop Averky was concerned, party politics were boring no matter what party was involved. They were hardly worth giving one's life for—

giving up the chance for a wife and family as he had done when becoming a monk. Ironically, it was precisely his lack of unanimity with those of a "party mentality" that made him the victim of their politics. He was dismissed as a permanent member of his council of bishops because he refused to be guided by a "party-line" rather than by his own conscience. Seeing that party politics had infiltrated not only other groups, but his own as well, he once told one of his former seminarians, "does it not follow from this that the grace of the Holy Spirit is leaving our synod?"

Still, it may be wondered why Archbishop Averky spoke so openly about the "uninspiring" phenomenon of party politics. Would it not have been better just to pretend that all the other Orthodox groups did not exist and to



Archbishop Averky
(+1976)

confine one's attention to one's own circle? No, for Archbishop Averky, this would have been a shirking of his responsibility as an Apostle of Christ. Party politics were poisoning the mission of Orthodoxy in the Free World, turning converts away and making believers listen to the whispers of the devil rather than to the words of Life. To keep silent would have been a crime, since if this issue was not addressed openly, how else would spiritual seekers find the true essence of Orthodoxy, which is inherently above party politics? How would they experience the living reality of the true Church, which, as Archbishop Averky said, is "the close-knit spiritual union of all who truly believe in Christ?"

"Only holy zeal for God, for Christ," wrote the archbishop, "without any admixture of any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning politics, must guide us in all deeds and actions."

Role-Playing

Archbishop Averky detected another sign that Orthodox churches, even when they adhered to all the outward forms, were losing Orthodoxy's savour. This was the fact that Orthodox leaders and spokesmen were having to play "roles."

Role-playing occurs when small men, out of worldly ambition, want to take on positions which have been instituted in the Church for men of higher spiritual calibre. In most cases, those playing roles, having no real spiritual authority themselves, have to acquire this authority outwardly by resorting to what Archbishop Averky called "man-pleasing." This was spoken of by St. Paul, who in the first years of Christianity had to point out the distinction between the true representatives of Christ and the "man-pleasers:" *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Gal 1:10). But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, Who trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory... (1 Thess 2:4-6).*

In "man-pleasing," one must flatter the right people and, conversely, destroy potential opponents at the right junctures; one must "take into consideration" influential people, regardless of whether this accords with one's conscience. Finally, one must give out awards and ranks and publicize this, thereby binding oneself to alies by mutual "recognition" rather than by heartfelt love. "How many," wrote Archbishop Averky, "give their hearts to the distraction of exalted callings, ranks, orders and awards, being ready to acquire them by any means at all, even by trampling down their consciences."

Archbishop Averky indicated that role-playing may also bring about hostility and divisions in the Church:

"To start the cruel hostility and dissension which cut off at the root the peaceful course of parish life and break up and destroy the parish it is sufficient for just one such person to appear in a parish—a person who imagines that he is the 'hub of the universe,' that everyone should take account only of him and obey him in everything, that all his judgements and evaluations are infallible and without error... For people of this sort it is as if the voice of conscience does not exist and they do not recognize the Law of God: they are capable of every sort of tendentious distortion of the truth, of any sort of lie and malicious slander against those people who do not agree with their conceited inclinations, who do not approve of their attitude of self-satisfaction and their unrestrained desire to play the leading role everywhere, even if those people by lawfully appointed and truly good pastors and men of prayer, of whom there are fewer and fewer nowadays, and who ought to be valued, not persecuted with lies and slander for purely personal, conceited reasons, which is a foul and repulsive sin in the eyes of God.

"It is just such people, possessed by the mad passion of self-love, who are being used by the powers of darkness, the servants of the coming Antichrist, to disrupt and destroy the Church, starting with its individual parishes... They are genuinely living without a conscience!"

In role-playing, a person acts in the way the world expects one in a "respected" position to act. This is the opposite of that which characterizes the authentic modern "links" with Orthodox traditions: a complete naturalness, lack of pretense, and freedom of spirit, with no attempt to fit into some prescribed category.

Of one role-playing church leader, Archbishop Averky said that he wore a "mask." "There are such hypocrites," he wrote, "who like to appear saintly and pious, when, in fact, they are not at all that way, but they will have to answer to God for they attempt to deceive the trusting, and they do so for personal gain."

Role-playing may take many forms. One may take on the role of an authority on spiritual life or even of a "Holy Elder," misapplying lofty standards to the low spiritual calibre of modern times. Using St. Paul's phrase, Archbishop Averky identified this as "zeal without understanding—zeal which loses its value because of the absence in it of a most important Christian virtue: discernment, and therefore, in place of profit can bring harm."

Another kind of role-playing is to be found in false spokesmen of Orthodoxy. We have already discussed the "theologians" of a "restored," innovative Orthodoxy. Such false teachers are to be found, however, not only in the more "liberal" circles, but also among the "patristic experts" and "scholars" of the "conservatives" and "traditionalists." False Orthodox spokesmen may make one feel that one has finally "figured out" Orthodoxy, but most often they leave

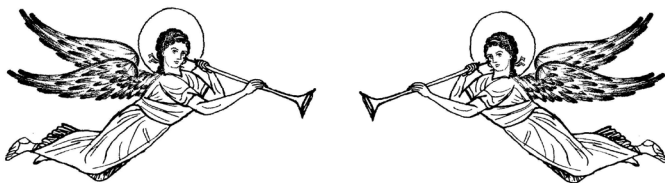
one's soul unmoved and unchanged. Of them, Archbishop Averky remarked:

"Alas! How few people there are in our times, even among the 'educated', and at times even among contemporary 'theologians' and those in the ranks of clergy, who understand correctly what Orthodox is and wherein its essence lies. They approach this question in an utterly external, formal manner and resolve it too primitively, even naively, overlooking its depths completely and not at all seeing the fullness of its spiritual contents."

Once, when some clergymen were attacking the memory of a 14th century saint because he did not fit in with their concept of "traditionalism," Archbishop Averky called them "puppy theologians." They were followers (to borrow a term coined by Fr. Seraphim Rose) of "external wisdom." The so-called "liberal" and false "traditionalist" Orthodox teachers were, in Archbishop Averky's view, but two sides of the same coin. They both had a touch of modern criticism, a love of glitter and an attitude of "knowing better," having received Orthodoxy by doing research and forming "reasonable" conclusions rather than by learning from its living vessels. Outward contact with a genuine bearer of tradition is not enough; there must be a loving kinship and "oneness of soul" with that bearer.

The presence or lack of this kinship, it is true, may be hard to discern from the outside, especially when one is not aware of the world of piety in which a true carrier of tradition has been born. For example, one might at first think that Archbishop Averky, from the bold, unequivocal tone of his writings, had the attitude of "knowing better." However, when one comes to understand the spirit of his first and second generation spiritual fathers, Theophan of Poltava and Theophan the Recluse, then one will see that he was entirely in their tradition, that he received everything from them.

Like all true Fathers of the Church, Archbishop Averky taught others not because he had an inflated view of his own knowledge or significance, but because he felt personally responsible for the priceless treasure that had been passed on to him from holy teachers.



Sin reigns ruthlessly among the people of today, smiting both the body and soul with its death-wielding venom. And for so long as sin maintains its dominion, there can be no liberation or deliverance from the world from all the evils that best it, and it is even meaningless to talk of its prosperity and preservation.

Archbishop Averky

LIFE AFTER DEATH

A DESCRIPTION OF THE FIRST 40 DAYS AFTER DEATH

A Homily by St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Limitless and without consolation would have been our sorrow for close ones who are dying, if the Lord had not given us eternal life. Our life would be pointless if it ended with death. What benefit would there then be from virtue and good deed? Then they would be correct who say: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

But man was created for immortality, and by His resurrection Christ opened the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom, of eternal blessedness for those who have believed in Him and have lived righteously. Our earthly life is a preparation for the future life, and this preparation ends with our death. *It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.* (Heb 9:27). Then a man leaves all his earthly cares; the body disintegrates, in order to rise anew at the General Resurrection. Often this spiritual vision begins in the dying even before death, and while still seeing those around them and even speaking with them, they see what others do not see.

But when it leaves the body, the soul finds itself among other spirits, good and bad. Usually it inclines toward those which are more akin to it in spirit, and if while in the body it was under the influence of certain ones, it will remain in dependence upon them when it leaves the body, however unpleasant they may turn out to be upon encountering them.

For the course of two days the soul enjoys relative freedom and can visit places on earth which were dear to it, but on the third day it moves into other spheres. At this time (the third day), it passes through legions of evil spirits which obstruct its path and accuse it of various sins, to which they themselves had tempted it. According to various revelations there are twenty such obstacles, the so-called *toll-houses*, at each of which one or another form of sin is tested; after passing through one the soul comes upon the next one, and only after successfully passing through all of them can the soul continue its path without being immediately cast into Gehenna. How terrible these demons and their toll-houses are may be seen in the fact that the Mother of God Herself, when informed by the Archangel Gabriel of Her approaching death, answering Her prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared from heaven to receive the soul of His Most Pure Mother and conduct it to heaven. Terrible indeed is the third day for the soul of the departed, and for this reason it especially needs prayers then for itself.

Then, having successfully passed through the toll-houses and bowed down before God, the soul for the course of 37

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 Starets Alexis of the Goloseyevsky Hermitage, of the Kiev-Caves Lavra, who died in 1916) was conducting the re-vesting of the relics; having become 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). "How can you, O Saint, ask my prayers, when you yourself stand at the heavenly Throne and grant to people God's mercy?" The priest-monk asked. "Yes, that is true," replied St. Theodosius, "but the offering at the Liturgy is more powerful than my prayer." Therefore, *panikhidas* (i.e., *Trisagion* Prayers for the Dead) and prayer at home for the dead are beneficial to them, as are good deeds done in their memory, such as alms or contributions to the church. But especially beneficial for them is commemoration at the Divine Liturgy.

There have been many appearances of the dead and other occurrences which confirm how beneficial is the commemoration of the dead. Many who died in repentance, but who were unable to manifest this while they were alive, have been freed from tortures and have obtained repose. In Church prayers are ever offered for the repose of the dead, and on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, in the kneeling prayers at vespers, there is even a special petition "for those in hell."

Every one of us who desires to manifest his love for the dead and give them real help, can do this best of all through

prayer for them, and particularly by commemorating them at the Liturgy, when the particles which are cut out for the living and the dead are let fall into the Blood of the Lord with the words: *Wash away, O Lord, the sins of those here commemorated by Thy Precious Blood and by the prayers of Thy saints.* We can do nothing better or greater for the dead than to pray for them, offering commemoration for them at the Liturgy. Of this they are always in need, and especially during those forty days when the soul of the deceased is proceeding on its path to the eternal habitations. The body feels nothing then: it does not see its close ones who have assembled, does not smell the fragrance of the flowers, does not hear the funeral orations. But the soul senses the prayers offered for it and is grateful to those who make them and is spiritually close to them.



St. John Maximovitch serving in Tunis, surrounded by the Uncreated Light (1952)

O relatives and close ones of the dead! Do for them what is needful for them and within your power. Use your money not for outward adornment of the coffin and grave, but in order to help those in need, in memory of your close ones who have died, for churches, where prayers for them are offered. Show mercy to the dead, take care of their souls.

Before us all stands the same path, and how we shall then wish that we would be remembered in prayer! Let us therefore be ourselves merciful to the dead. As soon as someone has reposed, immediately call or inform a priest, so he can read the prayers appointed to be read over all Orthodox Christians after death. Try, if it be possible, to have the funeral in Church and to have

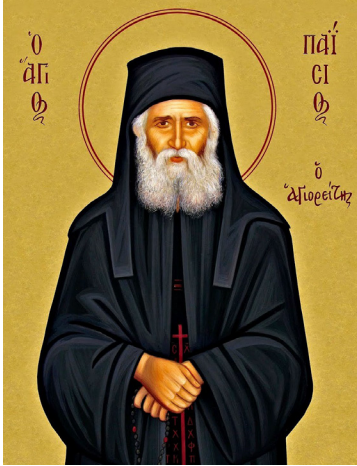
the Psalter read over the deceased until the funeral. Most definitely arrange at once for the serving of the forty-day memorial, that is, daily commemoration at the Liturgy for the course of forty days.

If the funeral is in a church where there are no daily services, the relatives should take care to order the forty-day memorial wherever there are daily services. It is likewise good to send contributions for commemoration to monasteries, as well as to Jerusalem, where there is constant prayer at the holy places.

Let us take care for those who have departed into the other world before us, in order to do for them all that we can, remembering that *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

ST. PAISIOS' SEVEN TANGERINES

By Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki.



It was February, 1988. It was very cold in Karyes (capital of Holy Mountain, *Ed.*). It was high above sea level. The humidity usually hampered our movements. But now the weather was dry. The wind was blowing and it was enjoyable if you were suitably dressed. The evening was falling. The sun had just hid beyond the mountain. Elder Paisios

and I were walking along a path. We met Fr. Kallinikos from Koutlousiou skete on our way.

We were approaching the skete's wooden bridge and were surrounded only by bare, lifeless hazel-trees with their bare branches.

"Hmm. Who brought me tangerines?" Elder Paisios wondered with surprise.

In the distance, over sixty-five yards away, we could make out the door of the elder's kallyva (hut, *Ed.*) in the yard, along with something red—or, to be more exact, something orange—hanging on the doorknob. We couldn't see what exactly was hanging there because of the distance.

A little while later we approached the elder's kallyva. In front of ourselves we indeed could see a large transparent, orange cellophane bag full of tangerines. How had he spotted them from so far away? How had he figured out that those were tangerines and not oranges, for example? After all, the bag was orange, and there could have been apples in it!

"Ah, I adore tangerines!" Elder Paisios said with obviously feigned greed in his voice. "I'll take three tangerines... No, let me take five... No, if there is such a brilliant opportunity, I'd better take seven!" he said with a charming smile.

"Fr. Kallinikos, please take the other tangerines and bring them to Elder Joseph who lives in front of my kallyva."

Elder Joseph was an elderly monk who struggled at Koutlousiou Skete. Though he was 103 years old, he would work in his kitchen garden every day.

Fr. Kallinikos received Fr. Paisios's blessing and left. Then Elder Paisios and I entered his little cell. There he asked me to read one of his handwritten texts. About twenty minutes passed and we heard someone knock at the kallyva's entrance door. I thought it was some pilgrim wishing to speak to the elder.

"Geronda, shall I open the door?" I asked.

"You'd better not do it. If they are curious pilgrims, they will leave soon. But if they are suffering and spiritually hungry people, they will insist on meeting with me."

We continued our reading. A few minutes later someone knocked at the door again.

"Geronda, what shall we do this time?" I asked again.

A strip of bedsheet was hanging over his window instead of a curtain.

"Look at them from the side so that they can't see you. And tell me how many of them there are."

"I can't count them. I can't see them from here," I replied.

"Well, did you really learn mathematics? What did you do in America for so many years? Let's wait. They'll knock again."

And he was right. A few minutes later the pilgrims knocked at the door for the third time.

"Now I'll go and try to count them. True, I didn't finish primary school, but I'll manage," he said to me.

The elder stood up and opened the door of the kallyva.

"Guys, why have you arrived at this time? What have you come to me for?"

"Geronda, we want to talk with you a little. May we speak to you?"

"Yes, you may. But let me treat you to something first. How many of you are here? One, two... seven. Let's see, what can we find in our 'shop' right now."

Elder Paisios stepped back into his cell and soon came out with seven tangerines.

"What a marvelous person he is!" I thought with surprise. "How did he know how many tangerines he should leave for himself? Did he foresee this? Did God enlighten him, while he was unconscious of it?"

"Where have you come from?" the elder wondered.

"We are from Athens. Bruce and John are from the USA."

"From the USA? So if we treat them to tangerines, the whole world will laugh at us! Let me look for something American in the 'supermarket'."

He left again and soon returned with a packet of American biscuits and a bag full of many varieties of nuts of a well-known American brand. Stunned, the young men expressed their amazement and were deeply impressed.

"Geronda, what does the *semantron* (a percussion instrument used in monasteries to summon the monastics to prayer, *Ed.*) beaten at Orthodox monasteries symbolize?" one of them asked timidly.

"I don't know what it symbolizes. And it doesn't matter. The one who multiplies his God-given talents instead of beating the *semantron* is worth a lot. Listen, it is late and it's time for you to leave. I would like to make only one remark: The problem with Americans is that in English they always capitalize the pronoun 'I', while we Greeks

don't always capitalize our pronoun 'ἐγώ' [meaning "I" in Greek, *Ed.*]."

The pilgrims laughed at the funny remark and the Americans asked:

"What does it mean? What ought we to do?"

"My children, remove the word 'ego' from your vocabulary! Egoism is a great enemy of ours. All of us without exception should struggle against it."

Nobility, gentleness and refinement are among the elements of holiness. Elder Paisios neither spoke about wisdom, nor pronounced theological words, nor spoke about supernatural revelations. But he did fill the hearts of all pilgrims. He would think soberly, hiding his gift of grace, treating his visitors in a courteous, beautiful, and original manner, instructing them with his words and comforting them by his presence. He would convince everybody of the greatest things without trying to convince anybody of anything. You would be enlightened, rejoice and find consolation with him. You would feel like Mary at Jesus's feet or like the apostles on Mount Tabor (the mountain of the Transfiguration), and you would want to stay in his cell forever.



We must take advantage of our time and use it wisely, so that we enrich ourselves in Christ unto eternal life. When we waste our time aimlessly, without making spiritual gains, we depart from this life empty-handed. ...

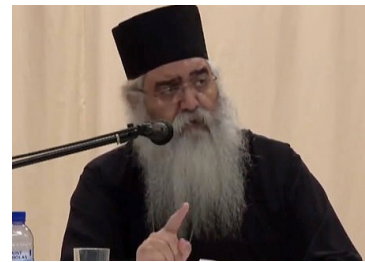
For this reason, we should try to do something good each day with the time our Christ gives to us. For example, it is beneficial when we carry out the instructions of our spiritual father who advises us: "My child, try to complete your morning prayers, do your prostrations and read the Gospel. In the evening read the Supplicatory Canon. Before retiring at night, say your prayers again [like the Small Compline] and do your prostrations. Remember God constantly! Always keep Him in mind. Say the Jesus Prayer and expel evil thoughts."

When someone carries out these directions, he fills the page of each day with earnings. If, however, you never go consult with a spiritual father, and he does not put things in order for you, then—as the spool of life is slowly reeled in—you will reach the end of your rope, and you will not have many things in your possession. This is why a person's life is enriched when he is obedient to a spiritual father. At some point in the future, such a person will appear before God full of virtues, as a tree whose branches are heavy and abounding with plentiful fruit."

Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona,
The Enlightener of America (+2019)

SHOULD WE SEND OUR KIDS TO SCHOOL IF THEY ARE REQUIRING THEM TO WEAR MASKS?

By Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou, from a Q&A session held by the Metropolitan on August 22nd, 2020, in the yard of the chapel dedicated to Panaghia Katafigiotissa, at Platanistasa, Cyprus. Translated and transcribed by "Orthodox Ethos," <https://orthodoxethos.com/>.



Question: They want our kids, from 6 years up, to wear masks in school. What should we do?

Answer: Listen, my brother Aristeides, you who ask this good question: "Our children and our eyes!" [A Greek saying meaning "all your attention and care on your kids!"]. "Your kids and your eyes!" Both the [human] eyes and the mouth wish for a face that will see God—without a mask.

The ancient Greeks—do you know where they would put on masks? In the tragedies (theatre). And the comedies.

If our children grow accustomed to masks from now, in twenty years we'll have a society of demons. Did you hear that? Not of humans: of demons! My opinion is this: find a way so that your children may never wear a mask. This is my opinion. I'm speaking to you responsibly. It is better that they remain without the so-called education of Europe for a few months, or a few years. And what an education! What a joke! You should do school at home. Did you hear? School at home! Do churches at home. Do pharmacies at home.

You will see that soon they will be telling you that they have run out of medicine. They want to push society over into chaos, into terror. They want us to be scared, *chaosed*—see what a beautiful word the old Cypriots have, "chaosed." It's when you don't know what is happening with you: *Deep calleth unto deep*. (Pss 41:7). It is all so that we'll say to them, "The vaccine! Please give us a vaccine!" So, they are after our will, they are after our freedom: in brief, they are after our soul. It's not simply the European "rights" that they want to steal from us. Do not be deceived. They are after our immortal soul!



Sin has reigned over us and the inventor and father of sin has lorded it over all who dwell under the sky, provoking the transgression of the divine laws. In Christ, however, we see human nature, enjoying freedom of access to God.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

Λιτανείες και Ασθένειες

Κάποτε οι Λιτανείες Σταματούσαν Λοιμικές Ασθένειες. Προσοχή: Σήμερα Μας Λένε Μερικοί Αρχιερείς Ότι Μεταδίδουν Ασθένειες....

ΠΗΓΗ: Έπικαιρο άρθρο από το «Ρωμαίικο Όδοιπορικό», 10 Αύγουστου, 2020.

Με λίγα λόγια ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών και πάσης Ελλάδος αυτό μας λέει.

Με υπεύθυνη θέση, η Έκκλησία της Ελλάδος τηρεί την ίδια γραμμή των απαγορεύσεων για το «υπέρτατο αγαθό» που μας έδωσε από τον Θεό, την σωματική Υγεία. Για την πνευματική υγεία ούτε λόγος βέβαια... Ούτε από τον Αρχιεπίσκοπο, ούτε από κανέναν από την Ίερά Σύνοδο.

Όσο για τους υπόλοιπους Μητροπολίτες, εκτός ελαχίστων εξαιρέσεων, με κάτι αδύναμες και εκ του ασφαλούς αντιδράσεις, «σιγή ιχθύος», μὴν τυχόν και στεναχωρήσουμε κανέναν, μὴν μᾶς συμβεί και κανὰ κακό...

Καὶ πῶς νὰ γίνει λόγος γιὰ πνευματικὴ υγεία; Μήπως τὴν ἔχουν οἱ ἴδιοι;

Δυστυχῶς περάσαμε στὰ χειρότερα, ἔχουμε τὴν Δ.Ι.Σ. νὰ προτρέχει τῶν κυβερνῶντων καὶ νὰ κάνει πρώτη συστάσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση αὐτοῦ τοῦ τόσο «θανατηφόρου κοροναϊοῦ», ποὺ ὅπου καὶ ἂν βρεθοῦμε «μᾶς κυνηγάει γιὰ νὰ μᾶς σκοτώσει». Εἶναι τόσο μεγάλη ἡ ἀνησυχία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γιὰ ἐμᾶς, γιὰ



τὴν υγεία μας, ποὺ προνόησε ἐδῶ καὶ μέρες γιὰ τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ, νὰ κάνει λόγο «γιὰ λιτανεῖες χωρὶς συνωστισμό καὶ σύντομες σὲ διάρκεια». Ἐδῶ πρέπει νὰ ξερετε, ὅτι ὁ κορονοϊὸς κυνηγᾷ τὶς μεγάλες σὲ διάρκεια ἀκολουθίες, λιτανεῖες κ.λπ., ἀλλὰ ὄχι τὶς σύντομες σὲ διάρκεια...

Ὁ Ἅγιος Αρχιεπίσκοπός μας, κατὰ δήλωσή του, μᾶς λέει πῶς εἶναι εὐχαριστημένος καὶ περήφανος ποὺ στάθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐμφανίσεως τῆς «πανδημίας» στὸ πλευρὸ τῆς υπεύθυνης κυβερνήσεως καὶ εὐτυχῶς ὄχι στὸ πλευρὸ κάποιων μὲ «υπερβάλλοντα ζῆλο» Χριστιανῶν, ποὺ πιστεύουν ὅτι μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς δὲν ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος νὰ κολλήσῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὅποιαδήποτε ἀσθένεια ἢ ὅτι οἱ λιτανεῖες μποροῦν νὰ σταματήσουν μιὰ πανδημία.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ υπεύθυνη καὶ ἀγία ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς πανδημίας ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ ὄχι μόνον αὐτό. Κατὰ δήλωσήν του, «ἔχουμε γίνει καὶ

ἐπαινετὸ παράδειγμα σὲ ὁλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη», ποὺ «προστατεύσαμε τὸ ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς καὶ υγείας».

Ἐὰν βγάξετε νόημα ἐσεῖς, ἄλλο τόσο βγάζω καὶ ἐγώ... «τὸ ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς καὶ υγείας»... ποῖο εἶναι τελικὰ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθό;

Βέβαια καταλαβαίνουμε τι θέλει νὰ μᾶς πεῖ, ὅπως καταλαβαίνουμε καὶ τὸ τί τοῦ λένε κάθε φορὰ νὰ μᾶς λέει, ἀλλὰ μεγάλος ἄνθρωπος εἶναι, θὰ κάνει καὶ κάποια «λαθάρια» καὶ κάποιες φορὲς τὰ μερδεύει.

Μᾶς λέει πάλι, ὅτι χωρὶς τοὺς ἄνθρώπους οὔτε Πολιτεία ὑπάρχει οὔτε Ἐκκλησία. Τὸν ρωτοῦμε λοιπόν, Ἐκκλησία χωρὶς Χριστὸ ὑπάρχει; Διότι δὲν εἶδαμε ποθενὰ νὰ ἀναφέρει κάτι τέτοιο, ἐκτὸς καὶ γιὰ τὸν Αρχιεπίσκοπο, Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ κτίσμα, ὁ ναὸς καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα εἶναι φαντασίες μας καὶ ζηλωτικὲς καταστάσεις ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν θέση στὸ σήμερα, διότι τὰ πράγματα ἄλλαξαν καὶ προχωρᾶμε μπροστὰ.

Συνεχίζει τὴν δήλωσή του: «Ἀποστολὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν εἶναι ἄλλη, ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ διακονεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο θυσιαστικά κ.λπ. γιὰ τὸ πρόσωπό του καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὑπαρξή του».

Γιὰ ποῖο πρόσωπο ἐννοεῖ, γιὰ αὐτὸ μὲ τὸ φῶμα ποὺ μοιάζουμε σὰν τὰ σκυλιὰ ποὺ τοὺς τὸ φοροῦν γιὰ νὰ μὴν δαγκώσουν κάποιον ἄνθρωπο; Γιὰ ποῖα ὑπαρξή του, γιὰ μιὰ ὑπαρξή χωρὶς Χριστὸ, παραδομένη μόνο στὴν ὕλη καὶ στὶς ἀνθρώπινες δυνάμεις;

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἐκστομίζονται τέτοιες δηλώσεις ἀπὸ ἓναν

Ἑλλη-νορθόδοξο Αρχιεπίσκοπο; Ὑπηρετεῖ τὴν Ἐκκλησία αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος; Τόσο ἀθεολόγητος εἶναι ἢ τόσο ὀλιγόπιστος γιὰ νὰ μὴν πῶ τελείως ἄπιστος, ποὺ παραδόθηκε στὴν ὑπηρεσία τῆς ἄθλιας καὶ ἀντίχριστης κυβερνήσεως ποὺ μᾶς κυβερνᾷ; Μιᾶς κυβερνήσεως ποὺ συνεχίζει μὲ ὑπέροτρο ζῆλο τὸ καταστροφικὸ ἔργο τῆς προηγούμενης, μὲ τελειωτικὸ σκοπὸ τὴν πλήρη ἀποδόμηση τῆς Πίστεώς μας καὶ τὴν ὑποταγὴ μας στὶς ἐπιταγὲς τῶν παγκοσμιοποιητῶν.

Ἐπιτέλους, θὰ βρεθοῦν κάποιοι Ἐπίσκοποι παλληκάρια νὰ ζητήσουν τὴν καθάρσῃ του καὶ τὴν καθάρσῃ ὅλων ὧν στέκονται στὸ πλευρὸ του καὶ στηρίζουν τὶς ἀντίχριστες θέσεις του; Καὶ λέω καθάρσῃ τους, διότι πολλὲς ἐπιστολὲς ἔχουν σταλεῖ καὶ στὸν ἴδιο καὶ στὴν Δ.Ι.Σ. γιὰ ἀλλαγὴ γραμμῆς καὶ μετάνοια γιὰ ὅσα κάνουν καὶ νὰ πάψουν νὰ συγχύζουν καὶ νὰ

πλανοῦν τοὺς πιστοὺς, μὲ τις νεοπατερικὲς ἐρημηνεῖες καὶ διδασκαλίες τους, ἀλλὰ κανένα ἀποτέλεσμα, ὅλους τοὺς ἔχουν γράψει στὰ παλαιὰ των ὑποδήματα.

Ὅλοι βλέπουμε καθαρὰ τὸν πόλεμο ποὺ ἔχουν στήσει οἱ ἀντίχριστες δυνάμεις ἐναντίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν πιστῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀπόλυτη συνεργασία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου καὶ τῆς ἀνιερῆς συνόδου, ποὺ ἀποδόμησαν καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ ἀποτελειώσουν ὅτι Ὁρθόδοξο ἔχει ἀπομείνει μέσα στὶς καρδιὲς καὶ συνειδήσεις τῶν πιστῶν.

Ἐναπομείναντες πιστοὶ ἀρχιερεῖς, ἱερεῖς, μοναχοὶ, μοναχὲς καὶ πιστὲ λαὲ πόσο ἀκόμα θὰ ὑπομένουμε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀντίχριστους καὶ Προδότες τῆς Πίστεώς μας καὶ Πατρίδος; Πόσο ἀκόμα θὰ τοὺς ἀφήνουμε νὰ δηλητηριάζουν τίς ψυχές μας μὲ τίς βλάσφημες καὶ προδοτικὲς τοὺς ἀποφάσεις, στερῶντας μας τοὺς ναοὺς μας γιὰ τὴν λατρεία μας στὸν Κύριό μας, στερῶντας μας τὴν συμμετοχὴ μας στὶς ἀκολουθίες καὶ στὴν Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας μας ὅπως πρέπει, χωρὶς φίμωτρα καὶ ἀποστάσεις καὶ γενικὰ ὅπως αὐτοὶ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν;

Δὲν βλέπουμε πὼς ἂν τοὺς ἀφήσουμε ἀνενόηλους σὲ λίγο θὰ ἀπαγορεύσουν διὰ παντὸς ὅλες τίς ἀκολουθίες, Θείες Λειτουργίες, μυστήρια κ.λπ. καὶ θὰ μετατρέψουν τοὺς ναοὺς μας σὲ ἀπλοὺς χώρους προσωπικῆς προσευχῆς καὶ αὐτὸ πάντα μὲ τὰ δικά τους μέτρα;

Πόσο μακρὰ εἶναι ὁ κίνδυνος νὰ μετατραποῦν οἱ ναοὶ μας στὸ μέλλον μὲ τὴν σημερινὴ ἀδράνεία μας, σὲ μουσεῖα ἢ τζαμιά βλέποντας τὴν μωαμεθανολατρεία ἀπὸ κάποιους ταγοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας; Μήπως ξεχάσαμε τὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο ποὺ κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή του σὲ hotspot, ἔβγαλε τὸ ἐγκόλπιο του γιὰ νὰ μὴν προσβάλλει τοὺς μωαμεθανοὺς;

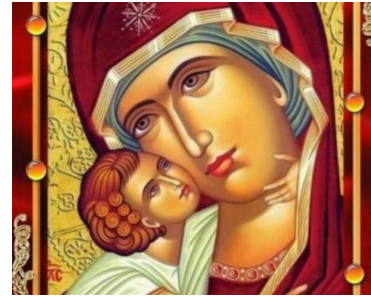
Ξεχάσαμε πόσες φορὲς χρησιμοποιήθηκε σὲ πόσες περιστάσεις ἢ ἴδια δικαιολογία σὲ σημεῖο τέτοιο ποὺ νὰ ἔχουν ἀποδομηθεῖ σωρεῖα ἀπὸ τὰ τῆς Πίστεώς μας;

Πότε θὰ βροντοφωνάξουμε ὅλοι μαζί γιὰ τὴν ἀντικατάστασή τους μήπως καὶ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἐπέμβει ὅπως Ἐκεῖνος γνωρίζει; Δὲν βλέπουμε τί ἔρχεται, δὲν πήραμε κανένα μάθημα ἀπὸ τὰ ὅσα δεινὰ μᾶς ἔχουν βρῆ μέχρι τώρα; Πὼς νὰ μεσιτεύσει ἡ Μεγαλόχαρη τῆς Τήνου, ἡ Παναγία ἢ Σουμελᾶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὅπου ὑπάρχει ναὸς ἀφιερωμένος στὴν κοίμησή της, ἀφοῦ ἀπαγορεύτηκε ἡ λιτάνευση τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ θαυματουργῶν εἰκόνων της;

Ἄς προσευχηθοῦμε ὅλοι μὲ τίς μεσιτεῖες τῆς γλυκειᾶς μας Παναγίας, νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Κύριος καὶ νὰ φωτίσει κάποιους ἀπ' τοὺς πλανημένους ταγοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὴν Ὁρθὴ Πίστη καὶ παίρνοντας τὰ ἡνία, νὰ ὀδηγήσουν τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο λαὸ μας, στὴν μετάνοια, στὸ φῶς καὶ στὴν ἀληθινὴ Πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας! Ἀμήν!

Τὰ Χαρακτηριστικά τοῦ Προσώπου τῆς Παναγίας

Ἅγιος Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης.



Ἐῖχε τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ σώματος μέσον καὶ σύμμετρον, δὲν ἐπαρουσιάζετο εἰς κάθε ἄνθρωπον ἢ το μακρὰν ἀπὸ τὸν γέλωτα καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ κάθε ταραχὴν καὶ θυμόν.

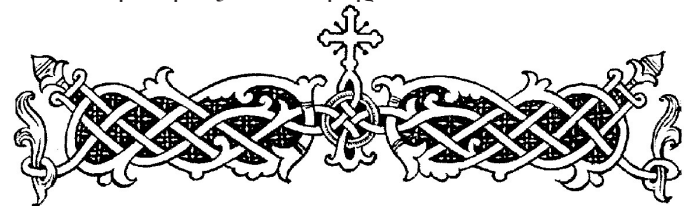
Τὸ χρῶμα τοῦ Θεοδόχου τῆς σώματος ἦτο ὅμοιο μὲ τὸ χρῶμα τοῦ σιταριοῦ. Εῖχε ξανθὰς τὰς τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς, εῖχεν ὀφθαλμοὺς πολλὰ ὠραίους, χρωματισμένους μὲ θεῖαν σεμνότητα, ὠραιομένους μὲ κόρας ὀξεῖς καὶ ὁμοίας μὲ τὴν ἐλαίαν καὶ καλλυνομένας μὲ βλεφαρίδας φαιδροπρεπεῖς.

Εῖχε τὰ ὀφρύδια μαῦρα, κυκλικῶς σχηματισμένα. Εῖχε τὴν μύτην ὁμαλὴν καὶ εὐθείαν.

Τὰ πανάμωμα χεῖλη τῆς ἦτον ἀνθηρά, λάμποντα κοσμίως μὲ ἐρυθρὸν χρῶμα καὶ γέμοντα ἀπὸ τὴν τῶν λόγων γλυκύτητα.

Εῖχε τὸ ἱεροπρεπὲς πρόσωπον ὀλίγον μακρὺ, εῖχε τὰς θεοδόχους χεῖρας τῆς μακρὰς καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους τῶν χειρῶν μακροὺς μὲ λεπτότητα.

Καὶ διὰ νὰ εἰποῦμεν καθολικῶς, ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος ἦτο κατὰ τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος γεμάτη τόση Θεῖαν Χάριν καὶ σεβασμιότητα, ὥστε ὅπου ὅστις ἔβλεπεν Αὐτήν, ἐλάμβανε εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν του κάποιον φόβον καὶ εὐλάβειαν καὶ χωρὶς νὰ Τὴν ἠξεύρη προτύτερα, ἐγνώριζεν ἀπὸ μόνον τὸν ἐξωτερικὸν χαρακτήρα τῆς ὅτι Αὕτη ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ Μήτηρ Θεοῦ...



Δὲν σοῦ λείπει ἡ εὐτυχία. Ὁ Χριστὸς σοῦ λείπει... Ἄν ὑπάρχει ἁμαρτία στὴ μέση, εὐτυχία δὲν ὑπάρχει. Δὲν δημιουργεῖ τὴν εὐτυχία τὸ χρῆμα, οὔτε τὴν δυστυχία ἢ φτώχεια. Ὁ Χριστὸς δημιουργεῖ τὴν εὐτυχία καὶ ὁ Διάβολος τὴν δυστυχία. Εἶναι ἄφρων ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἐπιδιώκει τὴν εὐτυχία, ἄνευ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα εἶναι δυστυχημένοι, διότι εἶναι πνευματικὰ ἀποτυχημένοι καὶ ἀναζητοῦν τὴν χαρὰ στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἐφόσον ἡ πραγματικὴ χαρὰ βρῖσκεται στὴν ἀναμαρτησία.

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος (+1982)

Ὁ ἀείμνητος Ἱεροκλήρυκας τῶν καιρῶν μας

Ἑσεῖς τί Ζητᾶτε στή Ζωή σας;

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικό Κυριακή, 30 Απριλίου 2017, γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης πρώην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Αὐγουστῖνος Καντιώτης, (+2010).

Ἐδῶ στὸ ναὸ παρουσιάζομαι σήμερα ἐνώπιόν σας, ἀδελφοί μου, γιὰ νὰ μιλήσω. Θὰ σᾶς παρακαλέσω νὰ κάνετε ὑπομονὴ λίγα λεπτά, γιὰ ν' ἀκούσετε λόγια ἀπλᾶ.

Ὅταν, ἀγαπητοί μου, συμβῆ κάπου ἔγκλημα, τὸ μέρος αὐτό, ὁ τόπος ποὺ σκοτώνεται ἄνθρωπος καὶ βιάζεται μὲ αἷμα, ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ἐκείνη ἀποκτᾶ κάποια ἀγριότητα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν ἀποφεύγουν· γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιά, τὴ νύχτα ἰδίως, φοβοῦνται νὰ περάσουν ἀπὸ 'κεῖ. Ὑπάρχουν καὶ λαϊκὲς παραδόσεις—ποὺ βέβαια δὲν εἶνε σωστές, ἀλλ' ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει ἐκφράζουν αὐτὴ τὴν ἀντίληψη—ὅτι ἐκεῖ ποὺ χύνεται αἷμα ἄδικα ὁ τόπος βρυσκολαιάζει. Στὸν κόσμον ὅλο, ὅπως καὶ στὸν τόπο μας, πολλὰ ἐγκλήματα ἔχουν γίνεῖ, ἰδίως τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια, καὶ νομίζει κανεὶς ὅτι ἔχουν βρυσκολαιάσει τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὰ λαγκαθὰ μας καὶ βογγᾶ ἡ γῆ μας.

Ἄλλ' ἂν μὲ ρωτήσετε, ποῖο εἶνε τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἔγκλημα ποὺ ἔγινε ποτὲ πάνω στὴ γῆ, θὰ σᾶς πῶ ὅτι εἶνε ἡ Σταύρωσις τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἦταν ἕνας ἀτελής ἄνθρωπος ὅπως ὅλοι ἐμεῖς εἶνε ὁ Ἄθως καὶ Ἀναμάρτητος. Δὲν εἶχε κάνει καμμία ἁμαρτία, καὶ συνεπῶς δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ ὑποστῇ αὐτὸ τὸν ἀτιμωτικὸ θάνατον ποὺ ὑπέστη. Ἐκρυσπε ὁ ἥλιος τὶς ἀκτίνες του, σείστηκε ἡ γῆ, σχίστηκε τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ, ἀνοιξαν τὰ μνήματα. Τρόμος καὶ φόβος κατέλαβε ὅλους ἐκείνους ποὺ εἶχαν συντελέσει στὴν Σταύρωσί Του (βλ. Ματθ. 27:51. Λουκ. 23:45). «Πατεῖς με - πατῶ σε» ἔφυγαν ἀπὸ τὸ Γολγοθᾶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ φαρισαῖοι, δὲν ἔμεινε κανένας ἐκεῖ.

Ἐμεινε μόνος ὁ Χριστὸς κρεμασμένος ἐπ' αὐτὸν σταυρὸν. Ἐκεῖ ἦταν μόνος οἱ στρατιῶτες κι ὁ ἐκατόνταρχος, γιὰ νὰ ἐκτελέσουν τὴ διαταγὴ τῆς προϊσταμένης τους ἀρχῆς, ποὺ ἦταν νὰ φρουροῦν τὰ πτώματα τῶν ἐκτελεσθέντων. Αὐτοὶ καὶ μετὰ τὴν Ἀποκαθήλωσι, ἡ ὁποία ἔγινε μὲ εὐλάβεια ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τοῦ Ἰωσήφ καὶ τοῦ Νικοδήμου, ἔμειναν τὴ νύχτα ἐκεῖ καὶ φύλαγαν τὸν τάφον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴν ποὺ εἶχαν ἀπὸ τὸν Πόντιον Πιλάτον, ἔτοιμοι καὶ νὰ ἐκτελέσουν ἀκόμη ἐπὶ τόπου ὅποιον ποὺ θὰ τολμοῦσε νὰ πλησιάσῃ. Νύχτα μυστηρίου, νύχτα φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐκάλυπτε τὸ μέρος. Ποιὸς τολμοῦσε νὰ πάῃ ἐκεῖ; μήπως ὁ Πέτρος ἢ κανεὶς ἄλλος ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ Κυρίου; Κανεὶς.

Καὶ ὅμως στὸν φρικτὸ ἐκεῖνον τόπον τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ καὶ τοῦ τάφου πῆγαν—ποιοί; Κάποιες γυναῖκες, οἱ μυροφόρες· κι αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ αἰώνιον ἔπαινό τους, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας ἐορτάζει καὶ τὴν ἱερὰ

μνήμη τους. Αὐτές, τὸ «ἀσθενὲς» λεγόμενο φύλον, ποὺ ἀγαποῦσαν τὸ Χριστὸ πάνω ἀπὸ ὅ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο, δὲν φοβήθηκαν οὔτε τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς νύχτας οὔτε τοὺς ὀπλισμένους στρατιῶτες οὔτε τὴ μεγάλη πέτρα ποὺ ἔφραζε τὴν εἴσοδον τοῦ τάφου. Λὲς καὶ εἶχαν φτερὰ στὰ πόδια ἔτρεξαν καὶ πρὶν τὴν ἀνατολὴν τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ βρέθηκαν ἐκεῖ. Γι' αὐτὸ, ὡς ἀμοιβὴ τῆς φλογερῆς ἀγάπης τους, τοῦ κόπου καὶ τῆς θυσίας τους, ἄκουσαν πρῶτες αὐτὲς ἀπ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμον τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη».

Δὲν θέλω, ἀγαπητοί μου, νὰ σᾶς κουράσω μόνον μιὰ σκέψιν νὰ κάνουμε πάνω στὰ λόγια ποὺ εἶπε ὁ φτερωτὸς ἄγγελος στὶς μυροφόρες.

Ὁ ἄγγελος τοὺς εἶπε: «Μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε», μὴν τρομάζετε (Μάρκ. 16:6), «μὴ φοβᾶσθε ἐσεῖς» (Ματθ. 28:5). Ἑσεῖς δὲν ἔχετε τὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ Πιλάτου, τοῦ Ἄννα, τοῦ Καιάφα ἢ τοῦ Ἰούδα. Ξέρω, ὅτι ἐσεῖς ἀνεβήκατε ἐδῶ μὲ αὐταπάρνησι κι ἀπὸ ἀγάπην. Ξέρω πολὺ καλὰ τί θέλετε· ξέρω ὅτι, περισσότερον ἀπὸ ὅ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο στὸν κόσμον αὐτόν, ἐσεῖς «ζητεῖτε Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζαρητὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον»· λοι πὸν «ἠγέρθη, οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν» (Μάρκ. 16:6).

Αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶπε καὶ βεβαίωσε ὁ ἄγγελος, ὅτι οἱ γυναῖκες ἐκεῖνες ζητοῦσαν Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, αὐτὸ σὰν νὰ τ' ἀκούω τώρα καὶ ἐδῶ νὰ τὸ λὲθ σ' ἐμᾶς. Ἐὰν λοιπὸν ἕνας ἄγγελος, ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ποὺ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν μας μᾶς συνοδεύουν καὶ ἀοράτως βρίσκονται ἀνάμεσά μας, ἂν ἕνας ἄγγελος μᾶς κἀνῃ τὸ ἐρώτημα «Τί ζητᾶτε, τί θέλετε;»· ἂν τὸ κἀνῃ σ' ἐμένα, σ' ἐσᾶς, στὸν ἀνώτατον ἄρχοντα, σ' αὐτόν ποὺ εἶνε μέσα στὸ κατὰσθημα ἢ στὴν τράπεζα, ἢ στὸν ἐργοστασιαρχὸν, στὸν ἐργάτην, στὴν γυναῖκα, στὸ παιδί, ἂν ὁ ἄγγελος μᾶς πῇ «Τί ζητᾶτε στὸν κόσμον αὐτό, τί ψάχνετε νὰ βρῆτε;», ποιά θὰ εἶνε ἡ ἀπάντησί μας; Οἱ μυροφόρες γυναῖκες ζητοῦσαν ὄντως, ἐκατὸ τοῖς ἐκατό, «Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζαρητὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον»· ἐμεῖς τί ζητᾶμε, τί ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε στὸν κόσμον αὐτόν;

Ἄν εἴμαστε εἰλικρινεῖς, ἂν βάλῃ ὁ καθένας τὸ χεῖρ στὴν καρδιὰ καὶ ἐρευνήσῃ τὸ ἐσωτερικὸν του, ἐνδοσκοπήσῃ τὸν ἑαυτόν του, τότε θὰ ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸ Ναζωραῖο ζητᾶμε. Φοβᾶμαι ὅτι ὅπως τὰ πεινασμένα σκυλιὰ τρέχουν δεξιὰ - ἀριστερὰ νὰ βροῦν κρέατα σάπια, ἔτσι κι ἐμεῖς γυρίζουμε ψάχνοντας στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὶς ἀγνιὲς τοῦ κόσμου. Τί ζητοῦν οἱ ἄντρες, οἱ γυναῖκες, οἱ νέοι καὶ οἱ νέες μας; Τί ζητᾶει ὁ κόσμος; Ζητᾶει λεφτὰ - χρήματα, ζητᾶει δόξα - τιμὴ - ἀξιώματα, ζητᾶει ἡδονές - διασκέδασεις - γλέντια. Ὁ κόσμος ζητᾶει κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸ Ναζωραῖο.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει δυστυχῶς ζήτησις ἀνωτέρων πραγμάτων, δὲν ἐκτιμοῦμε ἐμεῖς τὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ τὰ ἅγια πράγματα. Κάποιος μῦθος τοῦ Αἰσώπου λέει, ὅτι σὲ μιὰ αὐλὴ ἕνας κόκορας σκάλιζε ζητώντας νὰ βρῆ σκουλήκια καὶ σπόρους. Ψάχνοντας, τὸ νύχι του σκόνταψε—ποῦ

σ' ένα διαμάντι. Και τὸ ἀνόητο πουλὶ τὸ κλώτσησε, τὸ πέταξε πέρα, τὸ περιφρόνησε. Δὲν μπορούσε νὰ τὸ ἐκτιμήσῃ· σκουλήκι ἤθελε, ὄχι διαμάντι. Ἔτσι κ' ἐμεῖς περιφρονοῦμε τὰ μεγάλα καὶ πολύτιμα πράγματα, ζητᾶμε μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα καὶ σ' αὐτὰ δίνουμε ὅλη τὴν καρδιά μας.

Νὰ ποῦμε τὴν ἀλήθεια· ἀκόμη καὶ μέσα στὴν ἐκκλησία, σὰς ἐρωτῶ, ποιὸς ἀπὸ τὸ «*Εὐλογημένη ἡ βασιλεία...*» μέχρι τὸ «*Δι' εὐχῶν...*» ἔχει τὸ μυαλὸ καὶ τὴν καρδιά του στὸ Θεό; Ὁ καθένας τότε θὰ βρῆ νὰ σκεφτῆ ὁ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο. Εἴμαστε—ἄς ἐπιτραπῆ ἡ λέξι—θεομπαίχτες, καὶ θὰ μᾶς κλείσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὶς ἐκκλησιές. Στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια τὰ εὐλογημένα, ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν οὔτε ραδιόφωνα οὔτε τηλεοράσεις, ἀλλὰ εἶχαν πίστι, ἔμπαιναν στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ «*ὄρθρου βαθέος*», ἔπιαναν μιὰ γωνιὰ καὶ προσεύχονταν χωρὶς νὰ κοιτάζουν ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο, κι ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια τους ἔτρεχαν δάκρυα ποὺ ἔβρεχαν τὰ πλακάκια. Ποῦ τώρα εὐλάβεια, ποῦ πίστις, ποῦ δάκρυα! Οὔτε καὶ τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ τὴν ἱερὰ δὲν ζητοῦμε Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον.

Καὶ θὰ θυμηθῶ πρὶν τελειώσω κάτι ποὺ εἶπε ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός. Ἔνας πραγματευτῆς - ἔμπορος πενήντα χρόνια γύριζε καὶ ἔψαχνε στὸν κόσμον νὰ βρῆ καλὰ πράγματα, πολύτιμα πετράδια, καὶ τὰ μάζευε σ' ἓναν τορβά. Ὄταν ὁ τορβάς γέμισε, τὰ πῆγε ὅλα σ' ἓνα σαράφη - χρηματιστῆ. Αὐτός, ἀφοῦ τὰ ἐξέτασε ὅλα, τοῦ λέει: Ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀπ' ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πετράδια ἓνα μόνο ἀξίζει, τοῦτο τὸ μικρὸ, τὸ διαμάντι· ὅλα τ' ἄλλα εἶνε ψεύτικα, πέταξέ τα στὸ ῥέμα. Δὲν τὸν πίστεψε καὶ πῆγε σὲ δεύτερο, σὲ τρίτο, σὲ τέταρτο σαράφη· κι αὐτοὶ τὸ ἴδιο τοῦ εἶπαν, ὅτι πράγματι ἓνα μόνο ἀξίζει, τὸ διαμάντι. Τὸ πῆρε λοιπὸν τὸ διαμάντι καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐξακριβώσῃ τὴν ἀξία του, ὅταν στὸ δρόμο εἶδε ἓνα τυφλὸ, κάνει μὲ τὸ διαμάντι τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, τὸ ἀγγίζει στὸ μάτι του, καὶ ὁ τυφλὸς εἶδε τὸ φῶς του. Παρακάτω βλέπει ἓνα κουφὸ, τὸ ἀγγίζει στὸ αὐτί του κάνοντάς τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, καὶ ὁ κουφὸς ἀκούει. Παρακάτω βλέπει μιὰ γριὰ κ' ἓνα γέρο, τὸ ἀγγίζει πάνω τους καὶ γίνονται νέοι. Παρακάτω περνοῦσε μιὰ κηδεῖα, ἀγγίζει τὸ διαμάντι πάνω στὸ νεκρὸ καὶ ὁ νεκρὸς ἀνασταίνεται. Ποιὰ εἶνε ἡ ἐρμηνεία· ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε οἱ πραγματευτὰδες, ὅλοι μας, ποὺ ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε ἀλήθεια στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο, καὶ μαζεύουμε καὶ μαζεύουμε... Πεύτικα εἶνε ὅλα, ἓνα ἔχει ἀξία, τὸ διαμάντι, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Ὄπου τὸ ἀγγίξῃς, κάνει θαύματα, ἀρκεῖ νὰ πιστεῦς πραγματικά. Αὐτὸ τὸ διαμάντι, τὴν πίστι στὸ Χριστό, ἀξίζει νὰ ζητᾶμε.

Στὸ ἐρώτημα λοιπὸν «τί ζητᾶτε;» ἄς ἀπαντήσουμε κ' ἐμεῖς, ἀγαπητοὶ μου· «Χριστέ μου, δὲν ζητᾶμε τίποτε ἄλλο· σὺ φτάνεις!». Αὐτὸν νὰ ζητᾶμε, τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο. Καὶ πῶς νὰ τὸν ζητᾶμε; Θεομά, ὄχι ψυχρά· ὅπως ὁ πεινασμένος τὸ καρβέλι, ὅπως ὁ διψασμένος

τὸ νερό, ὅπως τὸ μικρὸ παιδὶ τὴ μάνα του, ὅπως ὁ φυλακισμένος τὴ λευτεριά του, ὅπως ὁ φτωχὸς τὴν ἄνεσί του, ὅπως ἡ μέλισσα τὸ ἄνθος, ὅπως τὸ ἀρνάκι τὴ γλῶνη.

Ζητᾶτε Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο, καὶ τότε θὰ εἴστε εὐτυχισμένοι ἑκατὸ τοῖς ἑκατό. Ὅποιος ἔχει τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο, ἔχει τὸ Θεό, τὴν εὐτυχία, τὴ χαρά. Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, ὃν ὑμνεῖ πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων ἀμήν.



Τώρα θὰ εἶναι τὸ ξεκαθάρισμα.....!!!!

Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πειρασμὸς τώρα ποὺ συμβαίνει μὲ τὸν λεγόμενο κορωνοϊό, ἄλλοι τὸν λέν κορωνοϊό, μερικοὶ εἰρωνες κοροδοϊό. Ὅτι καὶ νὰ ἴναι, πρῶτα καὶ κύρια ξέρετε τί εἶναι; Εἶναι ἡ δοκιμασία τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Πρῶτα ἡμῶν τῶν ρασοφόρων, πατριαρχῶν, ἀρχιερέων, ἱερέων, διακόνων, ψαλτῶν, καλογήρων.

Καὶ ποὺ εἴσατε ἀκόμα. Αὐτὴ ἡ χρονιὰ ἴσως καὶ ἡ ἄλλη, λὲν αὐτοὶ ποὺ βλέπουν, θὰ εἶναι οἱ χρονιές τῶν ἐξετάσεων. Θὰ δώσουμε ἐξετάσεις μὲ ἀφορμὲς πολλές. Ὅχι μόνον ἀρρώστιες. Μὲ διάφορες ἀφορμὲς. Μιὰ θὰ φεύγει, ἄλλη θὰ ἔρχεται. Μᾶς προετοίμασαν οἱ ἅγιοι ἀλλὰ ποιὸς τοὺς βάζει αὐτὶ τοὺς ἀγίους;

Γιατί θὰ ἔχουμε αὐτὲς τὶς ἐξετάσεις; Γιατί χρειάζεται ὁ Χριστός, τοὺς δικούς του ἀνθρώπους τώρα. Γιὰ νὰ φτιάξῃ «**τὸ καινούργιο πλήρωμα τοῦ σκάφους Του**». Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἀποφάσισε ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ ἀποκαθαρίσῃ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτοῦ τοῦ σκάφους. Καὶ πλήρωμα δὲν εἴσατε μόνον ἐσεῖς οἱ ἀπλοὶ Χριστιανοί. Εἶναι καὶ οἱ κυβερνήτες, οἱ δεσποτὰδες καὶ οἱ πατριαρχὰδες, εἶναι καὶ οἱ παπὰδες, εἶναι καὶ οἱ μοῦτσοι καὶ οἱ ναῦτες ὅπως εἶναι οἱ διάκονοι καὶ οἱ καλόγεροι καὶ οἱ ψαλτάδες.

Τώρα θὰ δώσουμε ἐξετάσεις ὅλοι. Κανένας μὴν ἔχει πεποίθησι στὲς παλαιές περγαμινές του. Μὰ ἐγὼ ἔκαμα τόσα προσκυνήματα, μὰ ἐγὼ εἶχα τὸν τάδε Γέροντα, τὸν τάδε ἅγιο. Τώρα, σὰν νὰ ξεκινᾶ καινούργια ζωὴ. Καὶ θέλει ὁ Χριστός, τώρα ποὺ εἶναι τὸ μεταίχιμο, ἀπὸ τὴν παλαιὰ ζωὴ στὴν νέα ἐποχὴ, ὄχι τοῦ ὑδροχόου ποὺ λὲν αὐτοὶ οἱ δαίμονες τῆς νέας ἐποχῆς. Ὅχι. Ἡ νέα ἐποχὴ ποὺ προετοιμάζει τὸ σχέδιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν ἔχει μόνον σχέδια ὁ Κίσινγκερ καὶ ὁ Μπιλ Γκέιτς καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι καὶ οἱ Ρῶσοι μεγιστάνες καὶ ὀλιγάρχες. Ὅχι. Ἔχει σχέδια καὶ ὁ Χριστός. Καὶ μᾶς ἀγαπᾶ πῶς πολὺ ἀπὸ ὅλους. Πῶς πολὺ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ μάνα μας ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀγαπᾶ...

Ὁ Πανιερώτατος Μητρο. Μόρφου Νεόφυτος

Ἄχριστη (καὶ Ἄχρηστη) Μασκοφορία

Γράφει ὁ Κώστας Νούσης, Θεολόγος - Φιλολόγος.

Ἐὰν θέλεις νὰ ὑποστηρίξεις τὴ χρήση τῆς μάσκας μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς, μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ κάνεις ἐπιλέγοντας ἐπιχειρήματα ὠραιοφανῆ καὶ πνευματόσχημα.

Τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει γιὰ κάθε προεπιλεγμένη θεωρητικὴ στάση καὶ ἐπιλογή. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, μπορεῖς νὰ ἐπικαλεστεῖς τὴν ἀποβολὴ τῆς μάσκας τῆς ὑποκρισίας καὶ νὰ ἀποδεχτεῖς τὴν ἰατρικὴ συμβουλὴ περὶ τῆς μασκοφορίας στὶς ἐκκλησίες. Εἶναι δεδομένο πὼς ὅ,τι ἐπιλέξεις, μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ τεκμηριώσεις μὲ τὶς ἀνάλογες κοπτορραφές, ἀκόμη καὶ μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἀγία Γραφή. Προαιώνιο κόλπο τῶν αἰρετικῶν...

Εἶναι σεβαστὴ, βέβαια, κάθε ἀποψη, ὡστόσο θὰ πρέπει νὰ τὴν τεστάρουμε πάνω στὴν κρησάρα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης παράδοσης, εἰδικὰ ὅταν πρόκειται γιὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ζήτημα.

Γιὰ τὸν γράφοντα, τὰ ὄρια μεταξὺ γραφικότητας καὶ βλασφημίας εἶναι εὐκόλως προσπελάσιμα ἔνθεν κακεῖθεν καὶ αὐτὸ φάνηκε στὴν πρόσφατη φωτογραφία, στὴν ὁποία ρουμάνος κληρικὸς μὲ μάσκα κοινονοῦσε τοὺς πιστοὺς! Ἐὰν καὶ σὲ αὐτὸ χωράει ἡ πρόκριση τῶν «ιατρικῶν συμβουλῶν», τότε δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσει κάποιος τὴ συνέχεια τοῦ παρόντος κειμένου.

Τὸ πρῶτο καὶ κυριότερο εἶναι πὼς οὔτε ἰατρικῶς ἔχει γίνε ἀποδεκτὴ ἡ εὐρεία χρῆση τῆς μάσκας. Τὸ ὅτι ὑπάρχει μία ἐπιστημονικὴ μονομέρεια στὴ χρῆση καὶ ἀποδοχὴ συγκεκριμένων ἐπιστημονικῶν ἀπόψεων, αὐτὸ εἶναι ζήτημα ὄχι τῆς παρουσίας διαπραγματεύσεως.

Ἐάν, ὁμως, ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ὄντως εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη προστασία ἀπὸ τὶς μεταδοτικὰ νοσήματα, τότε προκύπτει τὸ πρῶτο πρόβλημα—ἀναφερόμαστε πάντοτε στὴ θεολογικὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ θέματος: ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ στὸ ἐξῆς θὰ εἰσερχόμαστε στοὺς ναοὺς μὲ μάσκες, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι κλειστοὶ χώροι;

Τὸ ζήτημα εἶναι καὶ πολιτικοκοινωνικό, ἀλλὰ εἶπαμε δὲν θὰ τὸ πιάσουμε ἀπὸ κεῖ. Καὶ διογκώνεται μὲ τὴν ἀπλή σκέψη ὅτι πάντοτε θὰ ὑπάρχει κάτι μεταδοτικὸ γύρω μας, ὅπως ἡ κοινὴ γρίπη. Ἐὰν ἀποδεχτοῦμε τὴ μάσκα στὴν ἐκκλησία μὲ «θεολογικὰ» κριτήρια, τότε ἀπλὰ καταρρίπτουμε μία Χριστιανικὴ παράδοση αἰώνων, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ἡ προσφυγὴ στὴ Θεία βοήθεια εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο φάρμακο ἐναντίον σὲ κάθε πανδημία καὶ κάθε Θεομηνία.

Αὐτὸ φυσικὰ δὲν καταργεῖ τὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὸν σεβασμὸ πρὸς τὴν τελευταία. Ἀπλὰ ὀριοθετεῖ τὶς περιοχὰς δράσεως θρησκείας καὶ ἐπιστήμης, γιὰ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ ἀνούσιων συγκρούσεων καὶ παρεξηγήσεων. Κάποτε,

λοιπόν, βγάξαμε τὰ Λείψανα καὶ τὰ λιτανεύαμε μαζί μὲ τὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες. Κάναμε Εὐχέλαια, Παρακλήσεις καὶ Λειτουργίες, ὥστε νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Κύριος καὶ νὰ παύσει τὰ δεινά. Τώρα, ὄχι μόνον δὲν κάνουμε Λειτουργίες καὶ Λιτανεῖες—πρὸς ἀποφυγὴ τάχα «συνωστισμοῦ»—ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπαγορεύουμε μέσω τῆς μάσκας τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν φορέων τῆς Χάριτος... Πόσο πλανιόνταν, φαίνεται, οἱ ἀρχαῖοι καὶ παλαιότεροι Χριστιανοὶ καὶ πόσο ξεπεράσαμε ἐμεῖς οἱ σύγχρονοι αὐτὲς τὶς «προλήψεις»—ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει...

Γιὰ νὰ μὴ θεωρητικολογοῦμε συνέχεια, ἄς δοῦμε πρακτικὰ, βῆμα - βῆμα, τὴ βλασφημία ποὺ διαπράττει ὁ μασκοφόρος Χριστιανὸς καὶ ὅσοι τὸν συμβουλεύουν σχετικὰ, ἔστω καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ συνειδητοποιοῦν. Εἰσέρχεται ὁ πιστὸς στὸν Ναό. Φοράει τὴ μάσκα του ἤδη. Πὼς θὰ προσκυνήσει τὶς εἰκόνες; Μὲ ἢ χωρὶς τὴ μάσκα; Ἄν μὲ αὐτὴν, τότε καλύτερα νὰ μὴν πλησιάσει καθόλου τὶς ἅγιες εἰκόνες. Ἡ ὑπόκριση εἶναι κινεζικὸ ἢ γενικότερα ξενικὸ ἔθιμο. Ἐμεῖς κατασπαζόμαστε τὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες, πιστεύοντας ἀκράδαντα στὴν ἐπιπολάζουσα σὲ αὐτὲς Ἄκριστη Θεία Χάρη.

Προχωρᾶμε παρακάτω ἀκολουθώντας τὸν μασκοφόρο Ὁρθόδοξο προσκυνητὴ. Στέκεται μὲ τὴ μάσκα του σὲ κάποια ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τοὺς γύρω του, ὅποτε δὲν χαιρετᾷ τοὺς ἀδελφούς του, παρὰ μόνον διὰ νεύματος ἢ ὑποκλίσεως. Ἡ κοινωνία τῶν προσώπων, δομικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς λατρείας μας, ἀρχίζει ἤδη νὰ ἀποδομεῖται μέσα στὴν περιχαράκωση μίας καθαρὰ ἀτομιστικῆς εὐσέβειας.

Ὁ φόβος τῆς ἀσθένειας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου ἐπικρατεῖ ἐπὶ τῆς παρουσίας Χάριτος στὸν ναὸ καὶ στὴ Θεία λατρεία. Ἡ νίκη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ θανάτου φαντάζει παραμῦθι, ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι τουλάχιστον... Ἡ αὐτοαπομονωτικὴ προστασία τοῦ ἐγὼ καταργεῖ κάθε πίστη καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸν Θεάνθρωπο καὶ παραμερίζει ἀπαξιωτικὰ τὸν παραπλησίως συμπροσευχόμενο συνάνθρωπο.

Ἦδη ἡ Ἐκκλησία μετατρέπεται σὲ ἓναν ἀπλὸ οἶκο προσευχῆς (= Προτεσταντισμός), μακριὰ ἀπὸ κάθε μυστηριακὴ διάσταση, ὅπως ἔχουμε στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μας. Καὶ ἡ ἐπόμενη κίνηση, εὐλόγως, προκύπτει ἀπὸ τὰ πράγματα: τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν ναῶν ὡς περιπτῶν καὶ ἐπικίνδυνων, ἐφόσον ἡ προσευχὴ μπορεῖ νὰ τελεσθεῖ ἀτομικὰ καὶ ἄρα πὶδ ἀκίνδυνα...

Φτάνουμε στὴν κορυφωση. Ὁ Χριστὸς διὰ τοῦ ἱερέως μας καλεῖ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε. Ἡ πὶδ τίμια καὶ λογικὴ στάση, μὲ βάση τουλάχιστον τὰ προηγηθέντα, θὰ ἦταν νὰ μὴν πλησιάσει ὁ μασκοφόρος στὴν κεντρικὴ «ἐστία μικροβίων», ποὺ εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ Ποτήριον, ἢ κοινὴ Λαβίδα, τὸ κοινὸ μάκτρο. Ἐφόσον ἤδη ὁ πιστὸς αὐτὸς «προστατεύθηκε» μὲ

τὴ μάσκα ἀπὸ κάθε πιθανὸ προηγούμενο κίνδυνο— ἤδη προαναφερθέντων—θὰ ἦταν τουλάχιστον ἀνακόλουθος εἰς ἑαυτόν, νὰ μὴν πῶ σχιζοφρενής, ἐὰν προσέλθει στὴ Θεία Μετάληψη.

Στὴν περίπτωσι, βέβαια, ποὺ πάει νὰ κοινωνήσῃ μὲ ἰσχυρὴ πίστι στὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια, δηλαδὴ στὴν Ἄκτιστη Χάρι ποὺ ἀπορρέει ἐξ αὐτῶν, τότε εἶναι νὰ ἀπορεῖ κανεὶς γιὰ ποῖον λόγο δὲν ἐμπιστεύεται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὴν εἴσοδο στὸν Ναὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ἴδια Χάρι ποὺ εἶναι παροῦσα στὰ λείψανα, στὶς εἰκόνες κλπ. Ἐδῶ πῶς ἡ σχιζοειδέεια εἶναι πιὸ ὁρατὴ...

Οἱ θιασῶτες τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς μασκαράτας θεωρίας ἐντὸς τῶν ναῶν θὰ ἐπικαλεστοῦν ὡσεὶ ἔσχατον ἐπιχειρήματα τὸν σεβασμὸ στὴν ἐπιστήμη μὲ διάκριση καὶ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τῶν ζηλωτικῶν—τῶν ἡμετέρων, ὑποτίθεται, δηλαδὴ—ἀκροτήτων. Ὅμως, ὡς προαπεδείχθη, ἐκόντες ἄκοντες οἱ μασκοφόροι ὀδηγοῦνται σὲ βλάσφημες κινήσεις. Συνεχίζουμε τὴ συνοδοιπορίαν μὲ τὸν μασκοφόρο ἀδελφὸ: ἀφοῦ κοινωνήσῃ, τότε θὰ πρέπει νὰ ξαναφορέσῃ τὴ μάσκα τοῦ ἡ μήπως ὄχι;

Ἐὰν ναί, τότε εἶναι σὰν νὰ παραδέχεται ὅτι ὁ ἄρτι εἰσαχθεὶς ἐντὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι, ἂν ὄχι ἐστία μόλυνσις, σίγουρα πάντως ἀνενεργὸς καὶ ἀδύναμος νὰ προστατέψῃ τὰ παιδιὰ Του ἀπὸ ἑνα μικροβίον! Καλύτερα, λοιπόν, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς νὰ μὴν πάει νὰ κοινωνήσῃ καθόλου, ἕως ὅτου τοποθετηθεῖ Ὁρθόδοξα καὶ μὲ πίστι ἐναντι τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων. Προτιμότερο ἴσως νὰ μὴν ἐκκλησιασθεῖ καθόλου...

Ἡ λειτουργία τελείωσε. Βγαίνουμε σιγὰ - σιγὰ ἀπὸ τὸν ναό. Νὰ πάει ὁ μασκοφόρος ἀδελφός μας νὰ πάρῃ ἀντίδωρο καὶ νὰ φιλήσῃ τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερουργοῦντος; Ἄ πὰ πὰ πά... Μὲ τίποτε! Καταστρέφει ὅ,τι ἔχτισε μέχρι στιγμῆς. Τουναντίον, πρέπει νὰ φύγῃ τρέχοντας, χωρὶς νὰ ἀσπαστεῖ εἰκόνες καὶ νὰ χαιρετήσῃ κανέναν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφόν, ἐκτὸς μόνο «δι' ἀγκῶνων». Μὲ λίγα λόγια, οὐσιαστικὰ θὰ ἀπέλθῃ ἀκοινωνήτος...

Στὴν ἐπιστροφή στὸ σπίτι του θὰ κατανοήσῃ, ἐφόσον εἶναι ἐχέφρων καὶ σκεπτόμενος, ὅτι δὲν ὑφίσταται σοβαρὸς λόγος νὰ ξαναπάει σύντομα στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἐκτὸς ἂν ἔρθῃ κάποια τεράστια ἐορτὴ τύπου Χριστουγέννων καὶ Πάσχα ἢ ἐφόσον δώσῃ τὸ πράσινο φῶς ἕνας Τσιόδρας καὶ ἕνας Χαρδαλιάς...

Τὸ πρόβλημα, θὰ ἀπαντήσουμε στοὺς πνευστιῶνας θιασῶτες τῆς (ἀν)ἱερῆς μασκοφορίας, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἱατρικὴ σύστασις, ἀλλὰ ἡ πίστι μας στὴν ἄκτιστη Χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴν ὁποία «κολυμπᾶμε» κυριολεκτικὰ μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς καὶ στὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς τελούμενα. Ἐχει ἀκούσει ὁ γράφων ἕνα κάρο ἡλίθια καὶ ἄσχετα ἐπιχειρήματα, π.χ. ὅτι μέσα στὸν ναὸ μπορούμε νὰ γλιστρήσουμε, ὅτι βίασαν οἱ Τοῦρκοι τὶς Χριστιανὲς μέσα στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία κατὰ τὴν Ἄλωσι.

Ὅποτε ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μᾶς προστατεύει πάντοτε ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ! Ὡραία συλλογιστικὴ! Κανεὶς δὲν μίλησε γιὰ μαγικὴ ἀντίληψη περὶ τῶν Μυστηρίων καὶ τῆς ἐνέργειας τοῦ Θεοῦ χωρὶς προϋποθέσεις. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν καταλάβῃ οἱ κύριοι αὐτοί, ὡστόσο, εἶναι πῶς ἀπιστοῦν κατὰ βάθος στὴ Θεία Χάρι, στὴν Ἄκτιστη Ἐνέργεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ αὐτό, φυσικὰ, δὲν εἶναι κάτι ἄλλο παρὰ Εἰκονομαχία καὶ Βαρλααμισμὸς...

Φυσικὰ καὶ δὲν θὰ ἐκπειράσουμε τὸν Κύριον ποθενά, οὔτε μέσα στὸν οἶκον Του. Ὅμως καὶ σὲ καμιά περίπτωση δὲν θὰ ὑποστηρίξω θεολογικὰ τὴ δική μου ὑποχονδρία - μικροβιοφοβία καὶ τὸν ἀτομικισμὸ μου (τὸν ἀπάλευτο φόβον γιὰ τὸν θάνατον) σὲ βάρος τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης λατρείας, πίστεως καὶ παράδοσις.

Ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν ὁ Νεὸς Θεολόγος θεωροῦσε βλασφημίαν τὴν ἀπιστίαν τῶν συγχρόνων του στὴ μέθεξι τῆς Θείας Χάρους καὶ στὴν ὄραση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πολὺ φοβᾶμαι ὅτι τὸ ἴδιο, ἀλλὰ σὲ πολὺ μεγαλύτερον βαθμὸν, βιώνουμε καὶ τώρα—«λογικόν», πέρασαν καὶ χίλια χρόνια ἀπὸ τότε— καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, ἡ βαθύτερη ρίζα τῶν σχετικῶν προβλημάτων.

Στὴν οὐσία, δηλαδὴ, δὲν εἴμαστε Ὁρθόδοξοι. Ἐχομε πλήρως ἐκδυτικισθεῖ καὶ γιὰ μᾶς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει μετατραπῆ σὲ ἐργαλεῖο ἱκανοποίησης τῶν θρησκευτικῶν μας ἀναγκῶν, μέχρι βέβαια το σημεῖον στὸ ὁποῖον δὲν ξεβολευόμαστε ἐν γένει. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ νόσος τῆς ἀπιστίας - βλασφημίας ἔχει μεταδοθεῖ καὶ στοὺς ἱερωμένους. Δὲν ἐξηγεῖται ἄλλως ἢ τόσο καρδιακὴ συμπόρευσις ἐνίων μὲ τὶς ἀθεολόγητες καὶ ἀντορθόδοξες κρατικὲς διαταγὰς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας.

Τὸ παρήγορον εἶναι ὅτι, ἐξαιρουμένων τῶν μεγάλων ναῶν τῶν ἀστικῶν κέντρων, στὶς ὁποῖες ἡ διοίκησις εἶναι πιότερο συμπορευομένη μὲ τὴν κρατικὴν, ὁ λαὸς ἔχει ἀγνοήσῃ ἐπιδεικτικὰ τὴ μάσκα καὶ εἰσέρχεται ἄφοβα στοὺς ναοὺς, προκειμένου νὰ λατρεύσῃ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσῃ.

Ὁ ἱερέας καὶ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος εἶναι πρῶτιστα λειτουργοὶ τοῦ Ὑψίστου καὶ ὄχι κρατικοὶ ὑπάλληλοι. Φαίνεται τὸ ξεχνᾶνε συνήθως καὶ προκρίνουν τὸν διοικητικὸν τοῦ ρόλου. Εἶναι γεροντός, βέβαια, ὅτι τὸ θέμα ποὺ προέκυψε μᾶς ξαφνίασε ὅλους. Ἔτσι χωράει καὶ πολλὴ οἰκονομία. Ὅχι ὅμως καὶ βλάσφημη ἐσωτερικὴ καὶ ἐξωτερικὴ συστράτευσις μὲ τοὺς ἄθεους κυβερνῶντες, ἐντὸς καὶ ἐκτὸς Ἑλλάδος. Στὴν περίπτωσι αὐτῇ, ἀντὶ ἀνόητων καὶ ἀθεολόγητων ποιμαντικῶν πρακτικῶν καὶ συστάσεων, κρεῖττον ἢ σιωπῆ.

Γιὰ νὰ μὴν καταστήσουμε τὴ μασκαράταν ἐντὸς τῶν ναῶν παντελῶς ἄχρηστη (βοοῦν ἤδη οἱ ἐπιστήμονες), ἐξάπαντος δὲ καὶ ἄχρηστη, ὅπως βροντοφωνάζει μίαν Ὁρθόδοξον παράδοσιν χιλιετιῶν...

Ἡ Τελικὴ Νίκη Τοῦ Καλοῦ

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Ὁμιλίες Β΄», Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς, Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξη Κυψέλη», <https://www.orthodoxoskypseli.gr/>, Θεσσαλονίκη. Ἀντιγραφή-ἐπιμέλεια: Σάββας Ἡλιάδης - Δάσκαλος.

Στις δύσκολες ὥρες ποὺ περνᾶ σήμερα ἡ πατρίδα μας ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος, εἶναι φυσικό, κάποιους συνανθρώπους μας νὰ τοὺς καταλαμβάνει τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς φοβίας, τῆς ἀπαισιοδοξίας καὶ ἀκόμη χειρότερα, τοῦ ἀδιεξόδου. Κάποιες δυνάμεις, δυστυχῶς, σκοπίμως ἢ μὴ, ἐπιβαρύνουν τὸ κλίμα καί, καθὼς φαίνεται, τρομοκρατοῦν τὸν κόσμο καὶ τὸν κρατοῦν σὲ ἠθικὴ καὶ πνευματικὴ καταστολή. Τέτοιες ὥρες οἱ δικές μας φωνές εἶναι πολὺ ἰσχνές καὶ ἀδύναμες καὶ ἐλάχιστα μποροῦν νὰ βοηθήσουν στὴν καλλιέργεια ἀνδρείου ἐν Χριστῷ φρονήματος.

Τώρα εἶναι ἡ ὥρα ποὺ οἱ ψυχές ἔχουν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὸν λόγο τῶν ἁγίων. Τὸν λόγο τῆς ἀλήθειας, ποὺ τις ἐλευθερώνει, τις εἰρηνεύει καὶ τις ἀντρεϊεύει. Ἐνα τέτοιο λόγο—ἀπόσπασμα ὁμιλίας του—φωτισμένο καὶ παρηγορητικό, θὰ μᾶς ἀπευθύνει ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμίροβιτς: Ὅ,τι κι ἂν συμβαίνει στὴ ζωὴ, εἶναι ἀπολύτως βέβαιο καὶ πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστεύουμε ἀκράδαντα, πὼς τελικὰ θὰ νικήσει τὸ καλό!

† † †

Ἀκοῦστε μιὰ ἀπλή, ἀπλή ἱστορία, μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ δίνει ἀπάντηση στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ εἶναι ἀπαισιόδοξοι λόγω τῆς ἀδυναμίας τους καὶ τῆς ὀλιγοψυχίας τους.

Κάποτε ἓνα Παιδί γεννήθηκε σὲ μιὰ σπηλιά. Πολλὰ παιδιὰ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, παρόλο ποὺ γεννήθηκαν σὲ δωμάτια φωτεινά, σὲ κούνιες μὲ πούπουλα καὶ μετάξι, παραπονιοῦνται γιὰ τὴν ἐπικράτηση τῆς δύναμης τοῦ κακοῦ. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν σπηλιά, στὴν φάτνη μὲ ἄχυρα, ποτὲ δὲν παραπονέθηκε, γιὰτὶ πίστευε στὸν Θεὸ καὶ στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν σπηλιά καὶ στὰ ἄχυρα ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ ἀφήσει τὴν γενέτειρά του, ποὺ εἶναι τόσο ἀγαπητὴ στὴν κάθε παιδικὴ καρδιὰ καὶ νὰ φύγει μὲ τοὺς γονεῖς Του σὲ μιὰ μακρινὴ ξένη χώρα, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν τύραννο, ποὺ τὸν καταδίωκε στὴν πατρίδα Του. Τὰ ἄλλα παιδιὰ, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν ἔνωσαν τὸ πικρὸ ψωμί τῆς ξένης πατρίδας, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν καταδιώχθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν κυβερνήτη τῆς πατρίδας τους,

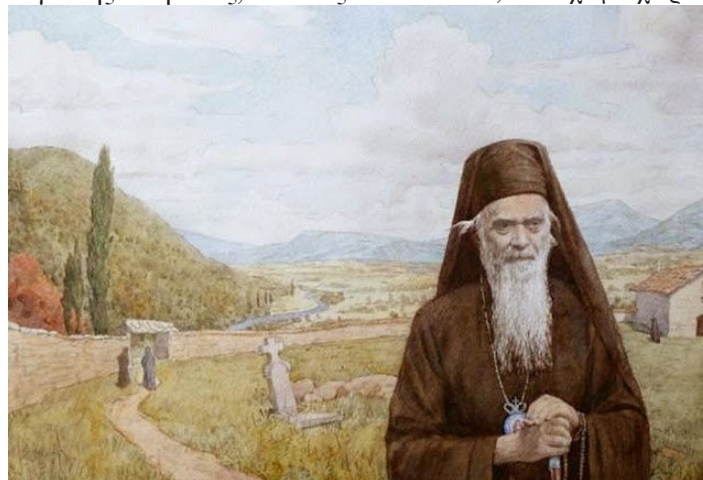
παρόλο ποὺ τὸ μόνο ποὺ αἰσθάνθηκαν ἦταν ἡ πατρικὴ στοργὴ καὶ τρυφερότητα, παραπονιοῦνται καὶ πιστεύουν πὼς τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πιὸ δυνατὸ ἀπὸ τὸ καλό. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Παιδί, παρόλο ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν παιδικὴ ἡλικία αἰσθάνθηκε τὴν κακία, τὴν τυραννία, τὴν δολιότητα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν σκληρὴ ζωὴ τῆς ξενιτιάς, δὲν ἔχασε τὴν πίστη Του. Ἀντίθετα, μέσα του συνεχῶς δυνάμωνε ἡ πίστη γιὰ τὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί μεγάλωσε καὶ ἔγινε ἓνα Ἄγורי, ποὺ ἔμαθε νὰ ἀσκεῖ τὴν κοπιαστικὴ δουλειὰ τοῦ μαραγκοῦ. Πολλὰ ἄγوريا, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν κάνουν καμιὰ κοπιαστικὴ ἐργασία, μέχρι νὰ φτάσουν σὲ ὠριμὴ ἡλικία, πάλι παραπονιοῦνται γιὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμὸ τοῦ κακοῦ στὸν κόσμο. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Ἄγורי, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ πελεκάει τὸ ξύλο μὲ τὸ τσεκουρι καὶ μ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο νὰ κερδίζει τὸ ψωμί Του, δὲν παραπονέθηκε ποτὲ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ γιὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμὸ τῆς κακίας στὸν κόσμο. Ἀντίθετα, ἄντεχε μὲ χαρὰ κάθε δυσκολία καὶ ἔφερνε σὲ πέρας τὴν δουλειὰ Του, πιστεύοντας στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν φάτνη μὲ τὰ ἄχυρα καὶ ἔφυγε νωρὶς ἀπὸ τὴν γενέτειρά του, λόγω τῆς τυραννίας ποὺ ὑπῆρχε ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν νεαρή Του ἡλικία ἔκανε τὴν ἐπίπονη ἐργασία τοῦ ξυλουργοῦ, μεγάλωσε ἓνας Ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγάπησε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,

τὸν κόσμο, τὴν ζωὴ. Μεγάλωσε ἓνας Ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ θέλησε νὰ δυναμώσει τὴν πίστη τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Καὶ δὲν ἦταν εὔκολο νὰ δυναμώσει τὴν πίστη τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, γιὰτὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν καταπιεσμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν φτώχεια, τὰ βάσανα, τὴν ἀμάθεια, τὶς ἀρρώστειες. Ἔτσι, δὲν μπόρεσαν νὰ πιστέψουν στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, γιὰτὶ τὸ κακὸ, ὅπως τὰ ἀγριόχορτα ποὺ πνίγουν τὸ φυτὸ, εἶχε σκοτώσει τὴν πίστη στὴν ψυχὴ τους. Κάποιοι πλούσιοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ κέρδισαν μὲ δόλιο τρόπο τὴν ἐξουσία καὶ τὰ πλούτη τους, δὲν εἶχαν τὴν τόλμη νὰ πιστέψουν στὸ καλό, ἐπειδὴ τὸ καλὸ ἦταν ἀντίθετο μὲ τὸν πλοῦτο τους καὶ τὴν ἐξουσία τους.

Ὁ δαίμονας τοῦ κακοῦ στὴ συνέχεια θέλησε νὰ βάλει αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ δίδασκε στοὺς ἀνθρώπους πὼς ἡ ἔσχατη νίκη ἀνήκει στὸ καλὸ καὶ ὄχι στὸ κακὸ. Τοῦ ἔδειξε ὅλα τὰ βασίλεια τῆς γῆς καὶ Τοῦ εἶπε: *Θὰ σοῦ δώσω ὅλη αὐτὴν τὴν ἐξουσία*



καὶ τὴν λαμπρότητα αὐτῶν τῶν βασιλείων. Σὲ ἐμένα ἔχει παραδοθεῖ καὶ τὴν δίνω σὲ ὅποιον ἐγὼ θέλω. Ἄν, λοιπόν, μὲ προσκυνήσεις, θὰ εἶναι ὅλη δική σου. (Λουκ. 4:6-7). Δὲν κατάφερε ὁμοῦ αὐτὸς ὁ στιγμιαίος θρίαμβος τῆς κακίας, ποὺ ὑπάρχει σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον, νὰ ἐντυπωσιάσει Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ πιστεῦε σταθερὰ ὅτι ὁ ἔσχατος καὶ αἰώνιος θρίαμβος θὰ ἀνήκει στὸ καλὸ. Ἔτσι, ἀρνήθηκε τὴν πρόταση τοῦ δαίμονα, λέγοντας: Φύγε ἀπὸ μπροστά μου, σατανᾶ. Ἡ Γραφή λέει: Τὸν Κύριο, τὸν Θεὸ σου θὰ προσκυνᾷς καὶ μόνον αὐτὸν θὰ λατρεύεις. (Λουκ. 4:8).

Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ δὲν ἤθελε νὰ προσκυνήσει τὸν δαίμονα τοῦ κακοῦ, παρόλο ποὺ Τοῦ πρόσφερε ὅλα τὰ βασίλεια τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ἄνθρωποι τον χλεύασαν, λόγω τῆς πίστεως του στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Δὲν Τὸν χλεύασαν οἱ ἀσήμαντοι, Τὸν χλεύασαν οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ τοῦ λαοῦ του. Ἀλίμονο γιὰ ἕναν λαό, ὅταν οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ του δὲν πιστεύουν στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Θὰ καταρρεύσουν καὶ ὁ λαὸς καὶ οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ του. Θὰ καταρρεύσουν, ὅπως κατέρρευσε καὶ ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ κυβερνοῦνταν ἀπὸ ἀνανδρους καὶ ὑποκριτὲς πατριῶτες. Θὰ σκοντάψει καὶ θὰ πέσει, ὅπως ὅταν σκοντάφτουν καὶ πέφτουν οἱ τυφλοὶ, ὅταν ὀδηγοῦνται ἀπὸ τυφλοῦς.

Καὶ τελικὰ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ὁποῖος γεννήθηκε στὴν φάτνη μὲ τὰ ἄχυρα οὔτε ὅταν Τὸν φυλάκισαν, Τὸν ἔφτυσαν, Τὸν μαστίγωσαν, Τὸν ἔβαλαν μαζί μὲ τοὺς ληστὲς, Τὸν καταδίκασαν σὲ θάνατο, Τὸν σταύρωσαν, δὲν ἔχασε τὴν πίστη Του στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Αὐτὸς ὅλα τὰ ἄντεξε, μένοντας σταθερὸ στὴν πίστη Του, πὼς ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ κακοῦ εἶναι στιγμιαία καὶ πὼς στὸ τέλος τὸ καλὸ θὰ νικήσει!

Καὶ πραγματικά, ὅταν Τὸν σταύρωσαν στὸν Γολγοθᾶ, ἡ κακία ἀληθινὰ θριάμβευσε. Ποτὲ ὁ θρίαμβος τοῦ κακοῦ δὲν φάνηκε τόσο ὀλοκληρωτικός, ὅσο ἐκείνη τὴ στιγμὴ. Ὅταν αὐτὸς, ὁ Δίκαιος καὶ Ἀμερόληπτος Ἄνθρωπος, ἐξέπνευσε ἐξαιτίας τοῦ μαρτυρίου, στὴν ψυχὴ τῆς Μητέρας Του καὶ τῶν φίλων Του, ποὺ στέκονταν στενοχωρημένοι κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν σταυρὸ, ἐνισχύθηκε ἡ πίστη στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ κακοῦ. Ἡ πίστη τους στὴν νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, ποὺ εἶχε δυναμώσει στὴν ψυχὴ τους ὁ Χριστὸς, ζώντας τόσες μέρες μαζί τους, ἔσβησε, ὅπως σβήνει ἡ φλόγα τοῦ κεριοῦ, ὅταν φυσάει τὴν νύκτα ὁ ἀέρας.

Οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου καὶ Δίκαιου Ἀνθρώπου γύρισαν τὸ βράδυ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, βοηθώντας τὴν πονεμένη Μάνα νὰ περπατάει πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν πέτρινο λόφο. Ἐνῶ ἡ Μάνα πίσω ἀπὸ τὴν πλάτη της ἄφηνε τὸν Γολγοθᾶ, ὁ Γολγοθᾶς ἀσταμάτητα ἦταν μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια της. Στὸν σκοτεινὸ οὐρανὸ ἔλαμπαν τὰ ἀστέρια καὶ οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου ἀπογοητευμένοι βλέποντάς τα ἔλεγαν: Ἔγιναν τόσα καὶ ὁμοῦ ἐσεῖς

ἀστέρια λάμπετε! Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς χαίρεται γιὰ τὴν ἐπικράτηση τοῦ κακοῦ στὸ καλὸ;

Ἔτσι, πιθανόν, μιλοῦσαν στὰ ἀστέρια μὲ πονεμένη εἰρωνεῖα οἱ μαθητὲς καὶ φίλοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γυρίζοντας ἀπὸ τὸν Γολγοθᾶ. Ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ μιλοῦσαν ἔτσι οὔτε ἡ λύπη θὰ ἔσφιγγε τὴν ψυχὴ τους, ἐὰν ἐκείνη τὴν στιγμὴ μπορούσαν νὰ σηκώσουν τὴν κουρτίνα καὶ νὰ δοῦν πίσω ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὸ μέλλον. Νὰ δοῦν πολλοὺς ναοὺς, χτισμένους στὴν δόξα τοῦ Δασκάλου τους. Οὔτε ἡ πληγωμένη Μάνα θὰ ἔπεφτε ἀπὸ ἐξάντληση περῶντας ἀπὸ τὸν λόφο, ἐὰν τότε ἤξερε πὼς τὸ μαρτύριο τοῦ Γιου της στὸν Γολγοθᾶ δὲν ἦταν οὔτε μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ἡ τελευταία πράξη στὴ ζωὴ του, ὅπως τὸ κακὸ τέλος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἡ τελευταία πράξη σ' ἕνα καλὸ θεατρικὸ ἔργο. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀπλή, ἀπλή ἱστορία, ποὺ ἡ ἐκκλησία σήμερα λέει στοὺς πιστοὺς. Τὸ τέλος αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας εἶναι πὼς ὁ Χριστὸς νίκησε, τὸ καλὸ νίκησε.

Ἔσεῖς, ποὺ εἶστε λυπημένοι, σηκώστε τὸ κεφάλι. Αὐτὴ ἡ παλιὰ ἱστορία μπορεῖ καὶ στὴν δική σας ἐποχὴ νὰ δώσει ξανὰ ζωὴ σὲ πολλὲς μαραμμένες καρδιὲς καὶ νὰ θερμάνει τὴν πίστη πολλῶν ἀπογοητευμένων ἀνθρώπων. Γιατί ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς μαραμμένες καὶ ἀπογοητευμένες καρδιὲς στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι βαριὰ καὶ ψυχρὴ, σὰν τὸ μολύβι. Εἶναι φυσιολογικὸ νὰ ὑπάρχει τόση ἀπογοήτευση κάτω ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ βάρος καὶ ἐξαιτίας αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχρότητας...



Ὁ τυφλοπόντικας ζῆ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν γῆ διαρκῶς. Ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ τρόπου αὐτοῦ τῆς ζωῆς του, κατέστη τυφλὸς καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ δῆ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ἀκόμη.

Κάτι ἀνάλογο συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἐμπιστοσύνην στὸν Θεὸν γιὰ τὴν παροχὴν τῶν προσκαίρων ὑλικῶν πραγμάτων. Αὐτὸς ἀσφαλῶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πιστέψῃ οὔτε περὶ τῶν αἰώνιων ἀγαθῶν, ποὺ ὑπεσχέθη ὁ Θεὸς σὲ ὅσους τὸν ἀγαποῦν. Ἡ πραγματικὴ γνώση εἶναι μιὰ μικρὴ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ προσφέρεται στὸν ἄνθρωπο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν μεγαλειώδη χάριν τῆς αἰωνίου δόξης τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Αὐτὴ ἔχει δωρηθῆ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ διδάξῃ σαφῶς αὐτοὺς, ποὺ τὴν κατέχουν, ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἔχουν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸν Θεὸν γιὰ ὅλα τὰ ζητήματα.

Ἅγιος Ἡσαΐας

WHY WON'T ORTHODOX BISHOPS FIGHT FOR CALIFORNIA?

Source: "Orthodox Reflections" blog, a collaborative effort by converts to the Orthodox Christian faith, August 21, 2020.

From the Editor: This article presents us with the stark reality of horrible dimensions for the Orthodox faithful in California. We are aware that there exist few but nevertheless present resisting parishes to the bishopric directions that led to the interruption of the spiritual life for so many Orthodox faithful. We are also aware that the events described herein extend to other US states as well as some "democratic" western nations. We pray that this travesty, this horrible spiritual crime in the name of a virus (real or otherwise) comes to an end soon. May the new ecclesiastical new year bring these treacherous actions of so many Orthodox hierarchs, worldwide, to an end. As St. John of Krostadt advised his flock, "Attendance at Divine Services and frequent reception of Holy Communion are vital to the development of an Orthodox conscience."

† † †

Father Josiah Trenham (Ph.D. and an immensely gifted pastor of the St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside, CA, *Ed.*) posted a wonderful reflection called "The Mother of God Destroys Secularism and Feminism online on the Eve of the Dormition." At the beginning of the video, Father Josiah gave an update on the status of churches in California. They are closed for in-door worship, but Father Josiah went through a list of Protestant pastors that are defying these orders and who are suing to protect the Constitutional and natural-rights of their parishioners to worship God.

No Orthodox jurisdiction or parish was mentioned by Father Josiah among the churches fighting for the right to worship God as He has commanded. In fact, the Orthodox appear perfectly content to live stream worship services from empty churches. Here is an example announcement from the website of the Greek Archdiocese Annunciation Cathedral in San Francisco: "In light of local authority directives, the Annunciation Cathedral will be closed to all public activities until further notice."

Scanning the rest of the site's front page you can see articles on the need to support families in Beirut, an announcement for the program of a cancelled Greek Festival entitled "Physically Distant; Spiritually Connected," and an article about Hagia Sophia reverting to a mosque.

The church is closed until further notice. As in, they have absolutely **no idea** when will they be open again. If ever. No baptisms. No weddings. No funerals. No Holy Eucharist. Cradle Orthodox children growing up with no Christian services or fellowship. And yet, not even one peep of protest. The most the church can manage is a tepid announcement at the top of the cathedral website:

Churches in California are on **indefinite** lock down to combat a virus with a 99.96% survival rate that has killed, officially, 11,523 people with an average age of almost 82 in a state with an estimated population just shy of 40 million. And that is assuming the number of deaths really reflects deaths "from" Covid, as opposed to "with" Covid, which we all know is an ongoing debate. Ironically, the closure of churches has been ordered by a government that has openly welcomed riotous demonstrations of tens of thousands on the streets.

If you visit the Greek Archdiocese's website, you will find nothing about California's suppression of the right of Christians to gather and worship God. Same on the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, though you will, of course, find articles about the Beirut explosion and Hagia Sophia becoming a mosque. Evidently, nothing of sufficient importance is occurring in the United States to warrant a mention by the successors to the Apostles.

Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Archdiocese even had the chance to pray in front of the entire Democratic Party, including the Governor of California responsible for padlocking his own churches. One would think that it would be a perfect opportunity to pray for a return of religious freedom, or an end to the "epidemic" so that we could get back to normal, or even just a prayer asking God to comfort those whose lives and businesses have been devastated by hysterical government overreaction to the equivalent of a bad flu year.

No such luck. **The Archbishop essentially endorsed Joe Biden** for president and then... prayed, "As we face the future as one American nation, bring us to our best selves, and inspire our better angels in peace, in fairness, and in generosity, that we may fight against injustice, inequality, and hatred, that we may achieve a common good, a greater good, in the name of the Holy Trinity we pray. Amen."

California closing churches? Tens of millions of unemployed? Portland is on fire nightly? Commentators on all sides of the political spectrum are openly discussing the possibility of civil war? Evidently, none of that is important enough to pray about.

The modern Democratic Party is dedicated to destroying the family, killing babies, fostering transgender madness, attacking Syria and other foreign nations with substantial Orthodox populations, defunding our police, erasing American borders, furloughing murderers, and promoting pedophiles and pedophilia along with other aberrant forms of sexuality. (Not a complete list of perversions associated with the modern Democratic Party, by the way.)

The only possible reason to offer a prayer over such a Satanic gathering would be to use the opportunity to speak prophetically. There was no justification for His Eminence to ignore religious suppression by Democratic officials, among

a whole host of other evils, in order to pray that God, “would shine the light of Your countenance upon the delegates of this convention, and upon Vice President Joe Biden for the highest office in the land.”

We fully realize what we just said was harsh. But the world we live in is on the fast track to Hell, and the Orthodox hierarchy, especially the Greeks, are pretending that everything is just politics as usual. Politics as usual does not close churches indefinitely in the largest state in the Union. The Orthodox hierarchy is implicitly accepting that Orthodox Church sacraments and services are non-essential and can be closed on the order of any executive who cares to justify the decision on the basis of “public health.”

The Very Rev. Fr. Tryphon, Abbot of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island in the Puget Sound near Seattle, Washington, recently posted this on Facebook:

Nonessential...

Is the Church truly less essential than a laundromat?

Live streaming the services does not impart God's grace in the same way the Mystical Supper imparts God's grace. Christ's Church is an essential institution far beyond a drug store or gas station, yet we continue to allow the government to tell us this is not so. How can the Church ever reclaim her position as the grace-imparting institution founded by Christ Himself, while allowing the government to declare us a non-essential service?

Is the forced shutdown of our public services really about a virus, or is it something more? Looking at the actual deaths directly related to the coronavirus is not any different than a serious flu epidemic, yet certain elements within our society would have us believe it is indeed a direct threat to the whole of our society, and even the world. Not even the communist revolution was able to declare the Church as a non-essential institution.

With love in Christ,

Abbot Tryphon

Orthodox worship is **less essential** than laundromats. Than casinos. Than liquor stores. Than marijuana dispensaries. Than box stores. Walmart is open. You can buy a TV in California, but you cannot drink from the Fountain of Immortality. According to the Abbot's estimation, America has managed to suppress the Church more effectively than even the Communists.

The Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In Her traditions and dogma (including the Bible she gave the world), she preserves the fullness of the Faith once delivered to the Apostles. The Church is perfect. Part of her perfection is the office of bishop, which is essential to the functioning of the Church.

The problem is not with this God-ordained office. The problem is with the men who are occupying the office. They are actually standing by while petty politicians have declared that the Church is non-essential. We, the concerned faithful Orthodox Christians, are not even asking the bishops to go to jail or be martyred for the faith. At this point, they can take action from the comfort of their own offices.

Among those fighting California's ban on worship is the American Center for Law and Justice, one of the nonprofit law firms representing churches in various lawsuits against the state. Jordan Sekulow is the executive director who said, “**This ban is clearly targeted at religion. It is clearly a violation of the First Amendment and a direct violation of religious liberty.**” There is no reason Orthodox Bishops could not join a lawsuit, start their own, or at least speak out in favor of the ones ongoing.

Instead, apparently, they are doing nothing but bowing down to authority.

Such passivity in the face of gross injustice is not the Orthodox Faith. Many times in history, Orthodox Christians have met, often in secret, to worship God in defiance of government edicts. Even our brethren in Muslim and commu-

nist nations still gathered to worship, despite the dangers they faced. As one priest wrote, “The truth is, however, it has never been safe to be a Christian. In the catacombs around Rome rest the remains of more martyrs for Christ than live in my home city—over half a million martyrs. Being a Christian and going to church was always a risk for them—and so it will be for every generation of Christian, unto ages of ages.”

Unfortunately, it appears in North America our bishops do not understand their own flocks. Even if the threat of Coronavirus were a hundred times what it really is, many of us would rather risk our health at Divine Liturgy than to risk our souls by keeping our churches closed or hampered by severe restrictions. Did not Our Lord and Savior



Church of Panaghia Sarantaskalioitissa,
Island of Samos, Greece

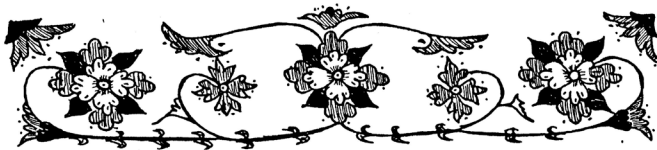
say, *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

We do not want to sacrifice our Orthodoxy for the appearance of safety. We would rather be in Church, in the fullness of the faith, than cowering at home watching live streams and keeping “safe.”

Our bishops have caved to a godless government that says it is perfectly fine to riot and kill, but not to attend Divine Liturgy. The bishops give sermons about the Martyrs of our faith who refused to give even a pinch of incense as offering to pagan emperors. Yet they allow churches to be closed indefinitely without so much as a press release in opposition.

Our bishops need to understand that we have established a precedent now that can be abused more and more going forward. This is not the end, but only the beginning. There will be more “public safety” crises in the future, even if the current “crisis” is allowed to pass. **Churches can now be singled out for closure on essentially any pretext, even if other public gatherings are allowed to proceed. God, you see, is uniquely dangerous to those who wield power.**

A future crisis could very well be much worse. And since the bishops did not rally the Orthodox to stand for the faith now in the face of relatively mild persecution, why have we reason to expect better in the face of real danger? The powers of this world may tire of simple acquiescence from our bishops. The demands can easily escalate. Having taught the faithful to value their own health and safety above the Faith, what will happen if the powers that govern this world demand the bishops’ outright apostasy? Will the faithful, conditioned to obedience of governmental authority above all else, stand with the bishops in face of an actual grave threat? Or will the faithful simply watch the bishops humiliated and, perhaps, even marched to the gallows on live stream from the **comfort and safety** of their homes?



They thought that by closing the churches they would stop the virus... Lord have mercy! Is this the first outbreak of a virus? From what I know, during epidemics the churches are open day and night and the Liturgy is offered nonstop. Some have attempted to create doubt about Holy Communion, that it can impart infection. Do you know what is the Divine Liturgy? The Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. Do you know of a God who defeats death but transmits sicknesses? And there are Hierarchs who tell you to change the *lavida* (Holy Communion spoon) and to dip it in disinfectant... God forbid!

Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou (Cyprus)

A CRY FROM MY HEART:

IS MY DAILY LIFE BASED ON MY FALLEN REASONING, OR MY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE?

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, August 14, 2020.

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, May our Most Beloved Panaghia embrace your precious soul—filling it with healing and renewed hope in Jesus, Who is our Hope!

I am not sure where this heart-centered essay will take me, but I feel compelled to share some things with all of you. If my poor words cause you to leave my list, then I entreat both your forgiveness and your prayers.

On a few occasions in the past, I have shared with you what I believe was given to me, through one of the “time-released blessings” (may it please God that they never stop!) from my Spiritual Father, Geronda Ephraim of Arizona, of blessed memory, in early March of 2019. Our thoughts, words and actions in this temporal life will either reflect that our faith in Jesus Christ and His Church is based on our fallen reason, or that our fallen reason is based on our Faith.

Over the past two generations in the USA, we have seen some of the ungodly “fruits” that are produced when man’s fallen reasoning is in control of his life, rather than God: legalized abortion, resulting in the slaughter of over 60 million innocent babies; the endorsement of same-sex marriages by a 6-3 vote of the US Supreme Court Justices; the promotion (even idolization) in the news media, public schools and universities of the homosexual life-style and transgenderism; the active application of euthanasia in many hospices throughout our Nation; the legalization of marijuana in several states; and one of the more recent actions, taken by several governors, to place having abortions in the necessary activities category but regulating worship in churches to the unnecessary one.

Another victory for the evil one, is the fear that the Covid-19 virus has placed in the hearts of so many people—even those who are regular Church-goers. And this fear, which is NOT a Godly fear, is quite prevalent in every canonical Orthodox jurisdiction in the USA and Canada. I was able to attend the Holy Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Church today for the Feast of St. Panteleimon, the Great-martyr and healer. All but one of the faithful was wearing a mask. I am sure that one can assume that in the overwhelming majority of Orthodox churches in North America, on any given Sunday, at least 90% of these new worship practices will be present: you have to call ahead and reserve one of the limited spaces available, due to government imposed restrictions; your temperature will be taken when you enter the narthex; there is a document which states the Church cannot be held responsible if you contract the Covid-19 virus while in worship; you must wear a mask; you are not

permitted to kiss the holy ikons, a blessing cross or the hand of the priest; a parish council member will usher you to your seat; you must practice “social distancing” (a classic oxymoron) while in church; the priest wears a mask or shield while giving Holy Communion; in many churches, the *antidoron* (blessed bread) is in individual plastic bags and each person takes it out of the bowl; you are not allowed to congregate or touch each other, and are told to head for your cars immediately after church is over.

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, this cannot become the “new normal” for worship in the Orthodox Church. There is already talk that another “lockdown” will take place in the late fall or winter. God forbid! However, if this happens, then it is time for all Orthodox Christians to state a resolute NO to their governments. The elected officials must be told that we will not close our churches, nor will we limit the number of people that can worship, nor will we change the manner in which we have worshipped for the past 1400+ years, or the manner in which Holy Communion has been given for the past 1000 years!

Jesus Christ, the Word of God, our Saviour and Lord, through Whom the entire universe was created out of nothing, took our flesh upon Himself, gave us His Gospel, died upon the Cross, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit upon His disciples to start His Church. And the faith-centered lives of tens of millions of holy martyrs, the dogmas and canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils, and the Spirit-filled writings and teachings of the holy Church Fathers perpetually confirm that *the gates of hell will not prevail against [His Church]!* (Mt 16:18). From this moment forward, until my final day in this temporal life, I will daily beg our most beloved Panaghia to entreat that Jesus grant me His Grace to always struggle to incarnate a life, in which my thoughts, words and actions confirm: that my fallen reasoning will be based on my faith in Jesus Christ and His Bride—my Holy Orthodox Faith!

Will you please consider joining with me in offering a similar prayer for your daily life as well? God gave to every human being an innate desire to worship Him. He has given us the ultimate form of worshipping Him through the Divine Liturgy, during which He sends His Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, so that it becomes His Body, His Blood! That is why the devil hates the Divine Liturgy, because this ineffable, God-established form of worship permits us to become Christ: *the clay is no longer clay, when it becomes the Body of the King!* [St. Nicholas Cabasilas].

As I stated in an earlier teaching, in which I quoted the Fool-for-Christ, Gabriel of Georgia: If we knew how sacred the interior of our church is, with the hundreds – even thousands – of times that the Holy Spirit had descended *upon us and the Gifts set forth*; if we were aware that there are angels and saints worshipping with us in every Holy

Liturgy, we would *wash our faces with the dust on the floor!* Therefore, it is imperative that we do our part—both clergy and laity—to assure that the current “new normal” in worship will never become permanent. Furthermore, if our worship is not restored to its pre-Covid-19 state very soon, then may God raise up bishops to bring about this restoration.

Forgive me, brothers and sisters, please forgive me! But my heart is aching, as I sense a spirit of lethargy, even indifference, around us. Is it possible that “virtual Liturgies” are becoming popular, even among people who regularly attended Liturgy in the past? How many people, who attended Church almost every Sunday, have attended five Liturgies, or less, in the past five months? How many of those, who regularly confess their sins, have not been unable to have the *Epitraheilion* of their priest upon their head? How many of our brethren will choose to never again kiss a holy ikon, blessing Cross, or the hand of a priest? How many will feel it is necessary to continue to wear a mask in Church, even when the pandemic is a thing of the past? How many dear Orthodox faithful will cut back on the times that they prepare to receive Holy Communion, because they fear that the holy spoon, which symbolizes our Panaghia, could pass on a disease to them?

Our Most Sweet Lord Jesus is ready to grant us His Grace to restore proper worship, and to never again permit any virus, plague or government to hinder our worship in any manner. Yes, beloved and dear co-sojourners on the narrow path to Paradise, this will indeed happen! It is up to me and to you: Will we allow anything, or anyone, in this world to convince us that our fallen reason should control the way in which we live each day? May it not be! Instead, let us say to the evil one, *The Lord rebukes you, O devil! With God's Grace, my faith in Him will control my actions and my fallen reasoning. With God's Grace, you will never again be able to close our Churches! With God's Grace, I am ready to suffer and die for Him!*

My Panaghia, please take my poor words to Jesus!

Unworthy priest, +Demetrios



As soon as we cry out to Panaghia, she rushes to our help. You don't even finish saying, *All-holy Theotokos help me*, and at once, like lightning, she shines through the nous and fills the heart with illumination.

St. Joseph the Hesychast

OVER 400 PRO-LIFE LAWS HAVE BEEN PASSED SINCE 2010 AND ABORTIONS HAVE DROPPED 50%!

By Michael New, Ph.D. June 30th, 2020, from LifeNews.com. Michael J. New is an Associate Professor of Economics at Ave Maria University and an Associate Scholar at the Charlotte Lozier Institute. He is a former political science professor at the University of Michigan–Dearborn and holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University. He is a fellow at Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, New Jersey.

Pro-lifers are rightly disappointed by today's Supreme Court ruling in *June Medical Services v. Russo*. The narrow 5-4 decision struck down a set of popular common-sense health and safety regulations of abortion facilities that were enacted by the Louisiana state legislature. This marks the second time in four years that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled against abortion facility health standards that protect women. In 2016 in *Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstedt*, the Court struck down another set of protections that were enacted in Texas. However, since that time, Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh have been confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court. As such, pro-lifers were hoping that their appointments would result in a durable five-vote majority that would uphold incremental pro-life laws. However, today's ruling shows that is not the case.

Indeed, the Court's decision to double down on the status quo of *Hellerstedt* is certainly a setback.

In light of this, it is all the more important for pro-lifers to steel their resolve to do as much as we can to save lives moving forward—and there are still many ways to do that, including by challenging *Roe v. Wade* more directly, which this particular case was not designed to do.

Recent history shows that persistence has paid off for the pro-life movement. In the past, when pro-life laws have been struck down by the courts, pro-lifers have successfully appealed these decisions. In other cases, revised laws have been upheld. For instance, the federal Hyde Amendment was struck down by lower courts before it was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Harris v. McRae* in 1980. On multiple occasions during the 1970s, the Supreme Court struck down pro-life parental involvement laws before upholding such laws in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a state partial-birth abortion ban in *Stenberg v. Carhart* in 2000, before upholding a revised partial-birth abortion ban in *Gonzalez v. Carhart* in 2007. As such, a revised set of standards may well be upheld in the future.

Furthermore, while there is no way to predict which cases the court will hear, the plethora of pro-life state laws enacted

over the past 10 years means other significant cases involving pro-life legislation could reach the Supreme Court in the near future. According to the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, over 400 state-level pro-life laws have been passed since 2010—more than one-third of the total since *Roe v. Wade*—and these laws are increasingly protective. Just last year, Alabama enacted a law protecting all unborn children throughout pregnancy. Twenty-one states have enacted laws limiting late-term abortion after five months of pregnancy when there is clear scientific evidence that unborn children can feel pain. Pro-life legal analysts think laws like these may have the best chance of reaching the court and presenting a challenge to *Roe v. Wade*. This is because evidence of fetal pain might represent another compelling state interest to protect the preborn.

This is all happening in the context of positive pro-life trends in society. For instance, the pro-life movement has made durable, long-term gains in the court of public opinion. Polling by Gallup shows that the percentage of people identifying as pro-life has increased by 16 percentage points since 1995. Additionally, between 1991 and 2019, the number of abortion facilities has fallen by more than two-thirds, while the number of pregnancy help centers has steadily increased. Most importantly, data from both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Guttmacher Institute shows that the U.S. abortion rate has fallen by more than 50 percent since



1980. Additionally, an important reason for this long-term abortion rate decline is because a higher percentage of unintended pregnancies are being carried to term. This shows that pro-life educational, service and legislative activities have all been effective.

Overall, arguably more damaging than the policy implications of the Supreme Court's decision is its potential to demoralize pro-lifers during a key election year. As we approach the election, it is important to remember that a vote for Joe Biden and other Democratic candidates is not a vote for the status quo on abortion. Biden now opposes the Hyde Amendment and therefore supports forcing taxpayers to fund unlimited elective abortions through the Medicaid program. Additionally, Biden has promised to pick judicial nominees who decidedly favor the legality of abortion on demand—potentially rolling back a variety of pro-life precedents and reversing decades of progress. Pro-lifers should resist the temptation to give up on a long-sighted strategy that has resulted in real gains, or to lose sight of the extremely high stakes; rather we must redouble our efforts and continue to build a culture of life.

PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

By Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus. Since March 4, 2020, His Eminence Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol has been conducting weekly conversations with the faithful, interpreting the Scriptures, delving into the needs of the faithful, and answering their questions.



We left off with the seventh chapter of the Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. At the very beginning of the chapter, the apostle says the following: *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Cor 7:1). Then the apostle Paul speaks about the sorrows that the Corinthians had to endure. This is very

useful for us to hear today, because thereby we see that the first Christians also faced life's hardships, temptations, and sins, that their life was not angelic. However, it is important that they perceived them through a spiritual prism: through repentance, through the labor of self-correction.

In the previous chapter, the apostle Paul says that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that God lives in man. As our body is such a sanctuary, we must take care not to pollute the temple of God, as, for example, we treat any church building: We consider it a sacred place, and we do not even think of committing any vile act there. It should be the same with our body, our soul, and our entire existence, which is the temple of God. *For ye are the temple of the living God.* (2 Cor 6:16), says the apostle. The Lord calls us to reject sin, evil, and every temptation, to truly become the people of God, so *the Lord Almighty would become our Father, and we His sons and daughters.* (cf 2 Cor 6:18).

Thus, the beginning of the seventh chapter says: *Having therefore these promises...* He Who promises is the Lord Himself. He promises that He will be our Father, and we His children when we renounce sin and everything that contaminates our existence. And if God promises something, He never lies. The Lord's promises are fulfilled; He is unlike us, who usually promise the moon and then cannot fulfill even half of it. Thus, the spiritual struggle we perform has the prospect of eternal life.

Receiving a promise from the Lord, we cannot always fully comprehend it. Usually we expect something from God that fits into the framework of our perception and understanding. However, everything that we receive from God is in

reality much larger and broader than we can imagine. The promises of God work as a counterbalance. On one side of the scale: the weight of our spiritual labors, patience, expectation—everybody has something; and on the other side: the promises of God. The result is not just a balance, but the promises of God neutralize these hardships of our lives. The Lord is incomprehensible. It is impossible to truly understand and embrace anything that we receive from God. The Lord is rich. He is not like us, who have our own measures, our own limitations. God is generous in mercy; the love of God is boundless, and no single creature can fully contain it. A man who feels the love of God struggles to describe it, because it is indescribable.

I remember how St. Paisios told me about when he saw St. Euphemia. It was in Great Lent, as we are now [at the time of this talk], in about the second week. She appeared to him in the morning, in the Kallyva of the Precious Cross in Kapsala, and stayed with him the entire day. St. Euphemia described her entire life to him, because the Elder did not know her hagiography. He had heard that there was a St. Euphemia but did not know anything about her. She told him that as a young girl in the fourth century in the city of Chalcedon, she had to endure the most terrible sufferings for Christ. As she was telling him, the Elder saw her entire life before him, like a film on TV. Reaching the point of her sufferings, Elder Paisios was afraid of what he saw and asked: "How could you bear all of these sufferings?" After all, she was a young girl, and the sufferings were the most savage imaginable. And the saint answered him: "Geronda, had I known what glory the martyrs receive in Heaven for their sufferings, I would have tried to suffer even more, because it is all temporary, but the glory of God is eternal."

Therefore, the apostles and the holy fathers always tell us that if we endure a certain trial for the sake of the love of Christ, then we should understand that the reward of Christ will be much greater. We should strive to receive this reward from the Lord and have eternal communion with Him. Yes, perhaps it may look self-serving that we are thirsting for a reward, but we are weak people after all, and we simply need to see the prospect of our actions—such is our nature.

The prospect of eternal life is the promise given us by God. Therefore, when difficult times come in our lives, we need to remember the promises of God; we have to reflect upon our ascent to the Heavenly Kingdom, that our life does not end with the passing of these few years that we are allotted to live here on Earth, but our life will continue in the eternal Kingdom. Thus, we will be able to overcome any difficulty we face, whether on a personal level, a social level, or a global level, as, for example, the danger from various viruses or the encroachment of enemies on our

security and peace of mind. Of course, we are people, and it is intrinsic within us to worry for our lives. But who can guarantee our safety? Who can tell us with certainty that we will not catch the coronavirus? Only God can give this world security.

When a man gives his life over to God and says, “God’s will be done in all things,” then he truly begins to feel peace of soul. This is what our ancestors said, and they were peaceful people. They always said: “The Lord’s will be done,” and believed what they said. At the same time, they were ready to endure whatever happened in their lives, having faith that the Lord sees our entire life. And even if death comes, that is, the worst thing that can happen to a person, then it is not so terrible, because Christ has overcome it.

We experience the victory of Christ over death every day in the Church. Death is destroyed through the death of Jesus Christ. And if we have hope in the Resurrected Lord, then we overcome death, corruption, fears, insecurity, etc. Christ promised to ever be with us. He asks but one thing of us—to cleanse ourselves from sin. How can we do this?

Our cleansing, of course, is accomplished through ascetic and spiritual struggles that we all must perform: the struggle of purification from the passions, the struggle of fasting, prayer, spiritual reading, confession, participating in the Church Mysteries, alms, through any spiritual labor within the power of any individual man. By our fallen nature, we all have our own weaknesses, and we cannot overcome all of our sins. Our salvation does not consist in a sinless experience, but in repentance. We must learn to repent of our sins, to ask forgiveness from God, from men, from ourselves for all those sins and weaknesses we have. Thus, through repentance and prayer we receive the grace of God, and repentance becomes the cause of a man’s salvation.

In the end, it is not a sinless life that saves us (none of us lives our entire life without mistakes or without sins). And we will make mistakes and commit sins, all because of our weakness. Engaging in the ascetic struggle of battling with sin, we will realize that we are not able to cope with everything. And it is precisely when we feel our weakness, our inability to cope with sin, that we need to sincerely repent. Repentance is a sign of humility. A humble man is ever repenting, but a proud man—never, because he has a very high idea of himself and does not feel the need to repent before God.

Great Lent, which we are currently going through, is the most beautiful time, filled with repentance and humility. If you listen to the Lenten prayers read daily in Church, then you will see that they are filled with the cry of repentance and humility, which does not lead a man into the darkness of despair and hopelessness, but gives courage,

hope, patience, a way out, a light at the end of the tunnel, which is nothing other than the love of God and His presence in our lives.

Thus, the apostle Paul says: *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.* Here he divides sin into physical and spiritual. In fact, there is no difference between them, because when a man sins, he sins in both soul and body. However, in order to better recognize all the facets of sin, the apostle separates them and calls them filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

There are bodily sins, that is, those committed by the body, which we all know well and with which we fight. But the whole man is saved. For example, we say that we fast, that we abstain from food. Such a bodily fast undoubtedly has a beneficial effect on our soul as well, because man is the unity of soul and body. It is one thing to eat a light soup, and another to eat a shish kebab. There is a difference. In the same way, there is a difference between a man who fasts and a man who does not fast, between a man who is vigilant and prays and a man who sleeps ten hours. Every movement of the soul or body has an effect on the other—for example, remembrance of wrongs, or holding a grudge. It is a spiritual passion, but it also affects our body. Remembrance of wrongs is reflected on the whole body of a man, on his behavior, his appearance. But the appearance of a pure, virtuous person is completely different. His piety is imprinted on his face. Look at the saints, how beautiful their faces are.

I remember when a group of school teachers from Thessaloniki, about seven or eight of them, came to the Holy Mountain. Two of these teachers, who organized the trip, were believers, but the rest, unfortunately, did not believe in God. And looking at the monks the whole time, in the end they said: “The life of a monk deserves respect, of course; but are they really so different from us who do not live a Christian life?” One of the teachers who organized the trip replied: “I do not know if you will be able to understand, but look at your faces and at the faces of the monks—how you look and how they look. Do you really not see the difference? What radiates from us and what radiates from these people is completely different.”

And indeed, then I noticed it myself. If you look at the face of Christians who are spiritually laboring, you will see some special internal peace in them. A proud, cunning, evil, money-loving man has a completely different look. Of course, we should not judge someone by his appearance, but quite often our face broadcasts the whole truth about us.

When man labors spiritually, his whole being is sanctified, both soul and body, because man is a psychosomatic unity. We cannot divide a person and say here is where

his soul ends and his body begins. No, take bread for an example. To make bread, you have to mix water and flour and knead the dough. When we have baked the bread, we cannot distinguish the water and the flour anymore. It is already one whole. The same is true of the human body and soul. As long as a man is alive, he is an inseparable unity of soul and body; therefore death is the enemy of mankind, inasmuch as it destroys this unity. The body dies, and the soul departs for where souls live. But Christ will abolish death and man will rise again. Only the body will resurrect because the soul does not die. Then the soul and body will be united again. The body will become incorrupt, like the body of Christ after His Resurrection. Man will regain his psychosomatic unity.

Thus, the pollution of the soul and body is any sin committed by the body or soul. Therefore, let us labor with fear of God for the sanctification of our souls and bodies. Holiness is a spiritual ascetic struggle. Everything that a man thinks he is doing for God, he is actually doing for himself. For example, we say: "I fast for the love of Christ," "I give alms for the sake of Christ," "I go to church for Christ." In reality, Christ does not need all of this. If we do not fast today, what is that to the Lord? Or, what does the Lord receive when we give alms? In fact, thanks to our spiritual work, it is we who benefit, we receive a blessing, we sanctify ourselves. The Lord gets nothing out of it. We labor in order to be with Christ. We strive to purify ourselves in order to become the very place where the Lord can come and abide. We need only to perform all these spiritual and ascetic struggles with fear of God, in order to have inner purity.

What does *with fear of God* mean? We often say this in church, or we say it about someone, that this or that man has the fear of God. We have to understand that this fear of God has nothing in common with our psychological fear, when, for example, we fear dogs, cats, airplanes, the coronavirus. We do not fear like that. When our Church calls, *in the fear of God, with faith and love draw near...* it does not mean that we should be immediately seized by fear, by worrying, and begin to quake with horror. Instead it means that we feel reverence, holy awe, that is, the feeling that God is Holy, that He is our Father, that He loves us, that He is the most sacred and precious thing in the world. And when a man feels awe, love, and reverence in his heart, all of this together is the fear of God.



Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II

The fear of God is essential to building our relationship with God. This is the most important work of our life. How should we build this relationship? Through keeping the commandments of God, through repentance for our sins and contrition for what we have done, through daily spiritual and ascetic struggle, and through participating in the holy Mysteries of the Church, which are a necessary element of the life in Christ. Of course, all of this should happen with every man to the best of his ability. And so, thus laboring in the fear of God, we acquire Divine grace in our hearts.

I remember when I was the abbot of Machairas Monastery, about thirty years ago, and we went to a conference in Georgia organized by the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Georgian Church was only beginning to revive then after so many years of persecution. Everything was in ruins.

Even when we landed at the airport in Tbilisi, I could not believe it was an airport. It felt like we had just landed in an open field: There was wheat growing and cows walking all around. The airport building was one small room. There was a wooden cupboard with "Duty Free" written on it, where they were selling jars of jam and other canned foods! It was a very difficult situation in Georgia then. The Church

was in decline. Many churches were in ruins. It was very similar to what we see today in the territory of Cyprus occupied by the Turks.

On Sunday, we went to the patriarchal service. The Patriarch of Georgia is a holy man, still alive, but quite elderly. According to tradition, the Patriarch is vested during the service in the middle of the church. Deacons and subdeacons help him. I was standing there, watching this ceremony and thinking: "What is all of this for?" (Who knew that it would wind up happening to me [as a bishop]?). And one hieromonk standing near me heard my thoughts and said to me: "You see how they are vesting the Patriarch?"

"Yes," I said to him.

"Do you know why they dress him like this?"

"No idea. Can he not dress himself?"

"Have you ever seen how an operation goes?"

"I have never been at an operation itself, but I saw one on television when I was little."

"When a doctor is performing a complex operation, where his every move could be fatal, he does not run around the operating room in search of a scalpel, needles, and other in-

struments. He just raises his hand and his assistants should immediately understand what he needs, or in an extreme case he can say the number of the instrument. The doctor should be completely concentrated on the operation. It is the same with a presbyter or bishop when he celebrates the Divine Liturgy—he should not be distracted by what he is going to wear, or anything else. This is why deacons are called deacons (meaning “servant” or “assistant” in Greek—*Ed.*), because they serve and help the bishop, so he can wholly devote himself to prayer and the Divine Liturgy without distraction.

The apostle Paul himself tells us: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* (Phil 2:12). That is, our salvation, our relationship with God, all of our spiritual work must be worked out with fear and trembling. Not hastily or carelessly, not as some side activity, but as the most important thing in our life. For example, when we are driving, our eyes are fixed on the road, but as soon as we begin to look off to the side, then we get in an accident. In much the same way, we should follow the path of God, ascending to holiness with *fear of God*.



Those of us who have passed through pains, either [those of the soul] or physical, know that we never prayed as hard as we did when we were in the bed of pain or when some heavy psychical sadness tested us, while, when we have everything, we forget prayer and fasting, and many things. It is for this reason that God allows pain.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)



Our Orthodox faith should never be associated with politics, because someone who loves his neighbor cares for every human being—no matter who he is, no matter what convictions he might hold. When it comes to questions of ideology, Orthodox Christians are primarily concerned about whether the Church has the freedom to carry out Her work, which is to heal the sick in Her care. The Church must have this freedom.

So if an ideology hinders the Church from carrying out Her work, it is immaterial—as far as the Church is concerned—whether it is called atheistic Marxism or right-wing Masonry. For the Church, they are both the same—hostile forces from whom She is equally obligated to defend Herself...

Fr. John Romanides (+2001)

ON REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH, HELL, AND JUDGMENT

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim, pp. 144-150.



The older I grow, the more I perceive the instability, the vanity of earthly things. Oh, why do we trouble ourselves in vain? Our life is short—dust, ashes, a dream—and in a little while, we shall taste corruption. Today you have your health, and tomorrow you lose it; today you are laughing, and tomorrow you are sullen. Now your eyes are shedding tears from an abundance of joy, and soon they will be shedding tears from pain and grief; today the economy is stable, and tomorrow misfortune strikes; today you receive good news, and in a little while bad news replaces it.

In vain we trouble ourselves; life is a shadow and a dream. Where are our parents, our siblings, our grandparents? The tomb has received them all; they have all decayed and have been eaten by worms. The tomb and decay await us also!

Ah, ah, death—bitter is your remembrance. Our Christ has given us the power to become one with God (cf Jn 1:12) by arming us with so many divine weapons to fight our relentless enemy. But we—and I, above all—become prisoners of our enemy by neglecting the weapons Christ gave us, and as we approach death we tremble in agony and try by every means to prolong our life, because the soul is afraid to leave the body. Why is it afraid? Why does it not take courage as a child of God? Is it going perhaps to a foreign king? But the king is its Maker, its Savior, Who shed His blood in order to redeem our soul from its enemy. Why then does it fear and lack courage?

Death is inherently cold—*my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death,* (Mt 26:38) said our Jesus. Yes, death is cold by nature. But unfortunately, most of the fear comes from the conscience: the conscience does not assure the soul that it has lived properly; it has not put itself in order; it has not washed its wedding garment, and so it is ashamed to present itself to the King, thinking about what the verdict will be: yes or no? Will I be saved or not?

If, however, the soul leaves without having confessed and without having repented completely, then woe—this is the *evil day* which the prophet Jeremiah hints at. (Jer 17:17). Let us pray that our holy God will deliver us from this by giving us complete repentance, worthy works of repentance, works of mercy and love, and a spirit of repentance with true humility, so that the just Judge may be merciful towards us, so that when the fearful hour of death comes, the soul will take

courage in the mercy of God and say, “I trust in God, that He will have mercy on my lowliness.”

The years roll by and pass, and day by day each one of us draws closer and closer to the end of his life. Our precious time rolls by and disappears before our eyes, Without our realizing, of course, what is escaping us unnoticed. For if the little child knew the worth of gold, he would not prefer to have a cheap candy instead. Doesn't this also hold true for people, and above all for me?

When our Lord comes at the appointed time to judge the world: when the heavens are rolled up like a piece of paper, and the earth, which has been thoroughly defiled by those dwelling upon it, is renewed; when the sun, the moon, and the stars fall like autumn leaves; when the trumpet resounds throughout the entire world, and the scattered dry bones are reconstructed and flesh and life come upon them (Ezek 37:1-14); when the ranks of the angels will gather in the vastness of heaven in honor of the fearful Judge Who is to come; when small clouds rise up from the infinite multitude of resurrected people and lift upon themselves the holy and saved people to meet the Lord in the air—then those who have remained below and see all these things will weep most bitterly and beat their breasts in despair, reflecting that they wasted their precious time here in pleasures, in drunkenness, in acquiring wealth, in illicit deeds, in avarice, and in every sin, which now condemn them to this most pitiful and lamentable condition of theirs. Will they not pathetically seek to have a little time to run to the poor, to the sick, and to every destitute person, so that they also might hear the sweet voice of the Lord saying to them, *Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you ... for I was hungry and you gave Me food ... I was naked and you clothed Me, etc.?* (Mt 25:34-36).

At some time in their lives they heard these things. However, in Hades there is no repentance. For this reason, the utmost despair will seize them. They will seek death; they will have a burning desire for it to deliver them from their boundless sufferings, but unfortunately they will not find it, for everything will have already been transformed into immortality! And all this holds true for me...

Man comes into the light of this world crying, he passes his life in weeping and sorrows, and he leaves the world in tears and pain. O vanity of vanities! The dream vanishes, and man awakens into the reality of the true life. No one notices how this vain life flows by—the years pass, the months roll by, the hours disappear, the moments slip by imperceptibly, and then without any warning, the telegram comes: *Put your house in order, for you will die; you will live no longer!* (Isa 38:1).

Then the deception is uncovered, and a person dying realizes what an important role the world played for him. He feels regret and distress; he yearns for the time that is gone; he would give all his wealth to buy one day in order to repent

and receive communion. Unfortunately, though, not one favor is given to him. Previously, time was at his disposal for years; he, however, wasted it in business, in bars, in cinemas, and in every shameful desire.

Wise is the merchant who realized the deceit of this temporal life, became wise, and sent his merchandise to heaven before the fair of life ended, in order to find it there in the treasuries of the heavenly city of God with accrued interest and dividends. Blessed is that wise man, for he will live the painless and blessed life unto the ages of ages, while the unwise, the drunkards, the greedy, the lovers of money, the lewd, the murderers, and the rest of my fellow-sinners—of whom I am the first—will be thrown into the furnace of unquenchable fire!

Now that the sun is shining and the day casts its sweet light upon us, let us walk quickly along the road of our correction, before the night of the future afterlife overtakes us, at which time we shall no longer be able to walk. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor 6:2), cries the Apostle Paul in his immortal words.

Oh, how much the memory of death should flourish in the soul of the Christian! Since he believes in the real truth, it is impossible for him to ignore death.

After my Elder's heart condition had passed, he wept and recited a line from the funeral service: *Alas, what a struggle the soul has as it parts from the body!* Indeed, this is the truth! How beautifully the psalmist expresses what peace a prepared soul has: *I prepared myself and was not troubled.* (Pss 118:60).

At any moment, every soul can expect the telegram from heaven to break off all relations with earthly things, to seal the time of this “fair,” to render an exact account of his spiritual trading, and to seal his eternal fate either in the heights of heaven or the depths of hell.

Ah, When I reflect upon this, what can I say! May the all-compassionate God be merciful to my wretched soul, which has nothing but its indifference and unreadiness. My mind stops when it contemplates this absolute truth about salvation.

Eternity—oh, what a great mystery! The world, the flesh, and the devil lead us astray and throw us into forgetfulness—and suddenly a voice is heard: *Behold, the Bridegroom comes!* When we are breathing our last, what preparation can we make then, when our conscience has already been cauterized and can no longer feel anything or cry out to us? Then the voice of truth is heard: “Only when the sun was setting did you remember God; what were you doing all day long when the sun was shining?”

Watch and be ready, (cf Mt 24:43, 44) cries our Jesus! Blessed are those who have ears to hear, who hear and get ready, for they will be counted worthy of eternal happiness. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord will find ready when He comes, for they will rejoice eternally.

Let us patiently endure the sorrows of life, that we may attain the eternal things full of joy. *In vain does every mortal trouble himself; as soon as we conquer the world, we dwell in the tomb.* As long as there is light, let us walk towards our great destination, for the hour is coming when there will be darkness, and then we shall no longer be able to work for our soul.

Raise your mind to the dread judgment seat of Christ: what defense shall we give on the day of judgment when our deeds are judged? How frightening is the hour in which the soul waits full of fear to hear the decision regarding where it will go to dwell eternally!

The word *eternity* is frightful! To understand in part what eternity means, I shall give you an example. Imagine that the whole earth is one big piece of granite, and every thousand years a bird comes to sharpen its beak on this rock. When the entire rock is worn away by the bird sharpening its beak, then we shall have some faint notion of what eternity means—not that we have actually understood eternity, immortality, or life without end! So this life of ours here on earth determines our eternity, like flipping a coin: paradise or hell! Therefore, how much caution must we have!...

You were patient for so many years, and they passed like a dream. But even if we lived a thousand years, they would still pass like a dream. Oh, how vain is everything that belongs to this world here! Every life is followed by death. Death is man's transfer from this world to the other—the one that is immortal and eternal.

It is not important if someone loses this life here. One way or another, we shall all die someday anyway. The important thing is not to lose our immortal life, the life without end. Endless life in hell—oh, what a fearful thing! My God, save us all.

When God brings the new day, let us think that it is our last day and that when the sun sets we shall depart to the judgment seat of Christ. How should we spend our last day? In silence, prayer, obedience, tears, and repentance, begging God to be merciful!

Likewise at night, we should think that it is our last night, and our bed will be our tomb! Each one of us should think, "Ah, how will I pass through the toll-houses? I wonder, will I pass through them? Who knows which one will stop me? How will I look at the fearful face of the just Judge? How will I hear His frightful voice of reproof? What terror will seize me until I hear the eternal decision regarding where I shall be placed! And what if I am sent to hell—and justly so! Woe to my wretched soul! How will I be patient as I am punished with the demons in the darkness, in the filth, with no light, with no consolation at all—only the sight of demon and nothing else!"

We should ponder these and many other things every day and night, living them as if they were our last! For we do not know when the telegram will come from God's headquarters, from the capital, the Jerusalem above.

Be careful, my child; do not let time pass fruitlessly and without improvement in your soul, for death comes like a thief. Woe to us if it finds us in a state of sloth and laziness—then the mountains and hills will need to weep for us; then we shall be found empty of good works, and Hades will shepherd us eternally!

My child, why should we suffer such a lamentable shipwreck when we are able, with God's help, to avoid it and be rescued at the saving harbor of the kingdom of God! I know that we have to wrestle with formidable enemies and that the labor is great. But with God—that is, with the power of God—everything gives way when man's will and strength cooperate with it.

When you are sitting in your cell, keep your mind meditating on death. Don't let your mind wander here and there, but collect your thoughts and reflect: see the mortality of your body; see how the body chills, changes, and the soul departs from it. What a struggle the soul has as it departs from the body! How much it weeps then; how much it sighs; how great is its regret! *It turns its eyes to the angels, but its entreaties are to no avail. It stretches out its hands to men but finds no helper.*

Meditate on the soul's ascent after it departs. When it ascends and encounters the hordes of evil demons, it trembles as they reveal sins it had committed but had completely forgotten, and wonders what will happen. It ascends from one toll-house to the next, and at every toll-house it only gives a defense, until it passes them all. If it passes all of them and is not found guilty at any of the toll-houses, it then ascends to venerate Christ, according to the Fathers. If, however, it is found guilty and accountable for any passion, it is thrown into Hades!

There was one soul that had passed all except one, the last one, which is the toll-house of mercilessness. "Alas, alas!" said a certain saint who was having a vision of that soul. "He passed them all, and only at the last one was he shaken, and the demons flung him into Hades with a crash!"

There was another saved soul being carried up by the angels of God into heaven. Other angels, who had just taken another soul to heaven descended and embraced that soul, and he sensed an ineffable fragrance from the embrace of those angels who had approached the throne of God. And the angels said, "Glory to God, Who helped this soul to be saved!"

We should never lack this contemplation of death or other such meditations. All these contemplations create watchfulness in the soul and purify and cleanse the mind so that it may feel the contemplation better. This contemplation is a barrier for evil thoughts. When this spiritual contemplation is within us, we shut out evil thoughts; there is no room in us for them because that contemplation has occupied the space of the mind. When we do not have godly contemplations, then indeed we are overcome by passionate contemplations.

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FAITH ALONE WILL NOT SAVE US

By Archbishop Nikiforos Theotokis. Greek: Νικηφόρος Θεοτόκης; Russian: Никифор Феотоки or Никифор Феотокис; (1731–1800) was a Greek scholar and theologian, who became an archbishop in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire. A polymath, he is respected by the Greek Orthodox church as one of the “teachers of the nation.”

Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed;

[Jn. 20:29)]

† † †



Indeed, great is the power of faith! Wondrous are the results of faith! Infinite is the profit that ensues from faith! It grants eternal life, and bestows us with the heavenly kingdom! For it is written, *that by believing ye might have life through His name.* (Jn 20:31). And elsewhere it is stated, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou and thy household*

shalt be saved. (Acts 16:31). Therefore, faith does save, and belief in Christ alone is capable of saving man.

But why do the very same Holy Scriptures also state, *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.* (Mt 16:27). Additionally, it says, *Who will render to each [person] according to his works.* (Rom 2:6). Yet elsewhere, “And they who have done good shall proceed unto the resurrection of life; while they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jn. 5:29).

What can we make of this? Why do the Holy Scriptures sometimes state that faith saves man, while other times teach that good works are the cause of salvation? Do the God-given words of the Holy Scriptures contradict each other? Dear reader, do not be fooled! God’s teachings are in complete agreement with each other. Neither faith alone, nor good works alone save man; rather, both faith in conjunction with good works save man.

Faith consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. Theoretical faith exists when we believe with our mind everything that our faith teaches without doing any good works. Such faith is dead, of no benefit, and incapable of saving man. “Faith,” affirms the divine St. James, *on its own is dead if it is not accompanied by works.* (Jas 2:17). *My brethren, what good is it if someone proclaims that he has faith but has no [good] works? Is [such] faith capable of saving him?* (Jas 2:14).

Practical faith exists when we not only believe in everything our faith teaches, but also carry out and abide by all its orders and statutes. This is the faith that the Apostle Paul speaks of when he says, *Faith which worketh by love.* (Gal 5:6). Therefore, when the Holy Scriptures proclaim, *So that believing ye might have life through His name, and everyone who believes and is baptized shall be saved.* (Mk 16:16), and other such similar statements, it is speaking of practical faith that is put into action through love, and which co-exists united with good works. Similarly, when the Scriptures teach, “God will render to each [person] according to his works,” and the like, it is referring to people who believe: it is referring to the works that have been carried out as a result of faith.

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]

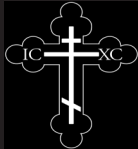
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SPIRITUAL LESSONS FROM COVID-19

By Archpriest Geoffrey Korz; Fr. Geoffrey is a parish priest of the Orthodox Church in America, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

There is no event in living memory that has shaped the life and outlook of people worldwide as much as the coronavirus outbreak of 2020. Some have likened it to the psychological and political impact of a world war. While this may be true, these are still passing considerations: the bigger—and much more important—lessons of the coronavirus for the timeless Orthodox Church and for the world at large are the spiritual lessons. It is the spiritual lessons which, if they are learned, will heal the souls of individuals and nations in a way that will endure into eternity. If they are not learned (as the old adage reminds us), God through history will replay them, again and again if necessary, to awaken the souls of mankind using the most common and effective means God has always used: repentance through suffering.

Here, we will discuss five major lessons of the coronavirus for the spiritual lives of the faithful, and for the life of the Orthodox Church as a whole.

Does My Faith Live at My Home?

Most people lived restricted lives because of the coronavirus. Isolated at home, life laid bare what we had and what we lacked in terms of spiritual roots. While electronic and online resources provided some help, these are not alive: they all depend on real people to put them to use in active ways.

This exposes all sorts of gaps in our Christian life: do we pray as a normal part of our day? Do we even know the prayers? Do I make the effort to con-

tact my priest when I cannot simply drop in to the church? When I cannot hear a Sunday sermon, where am I getting spiritual teaching? Online? Is the source faithful, or even really Orthodox? Is going to church the only time we really pray or even think about God and the real purpose of our life? Do we live as if God and His purpose are real? Does spiritual life and practice permeate our family?

For those who have family responsibilities, if we have not invested the time and effort to shape our home in this way, what is our plan now to change that? **This first critical, personal lesson—does my faith live at my home?—is grossly impeded by the reality that for many people, the period of the coronavirus crisis was spent in a combination of physical inactivity, or in recreation and escapism.** Far from being a time that was ideal for gaining spiritual strength (despite the fact that it occurred in the midst of Great Lent), too often, the period of the virus saw people neglect their spiritual condition, falling victim to the Internet, comfort food, video games, and movies. For all the talk of turning each home into a “little church,” too often this time at home became a lost opportunity—although not a lost lesson, for those who would learn from it.

Do We have Any King but Caesar?

The start of the pandemic saw the Orthodox world divide into two groups: those determined to keep churches open and services functioning as long as possible—even if it meant standing up to the state—and those who anticipated the spirit of the moment, and quickly closed churches and banned services.

In general, a divide might be drawn between countries with an Orthodox

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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majority which had recent experience of totalitarian governments, versus those in the liberal, secular West who cannot envision such a regime ever being possible. Those who come from former or current totalitarian countries—the former Soviet states, the Balkans, Greece, Romania, Georgia, China, and others—seem to have no problem recognizing the great responsibility for and need for leadership from shepherds of the Church in times like these. In general, people born and raised in the West have not learned the same lesson.

While few would argue against the need for health precautions against a worldwide pandemic, the Orthodox Church is left with a critical question which draws on its own recent experience with persecution: at what point would Church leaders (hierarchs and priests) take a position calling repeatedly on a civil government in defense of religious freedom? Would it require a ban on hospital visits for this to happen? Would it require churches to be shut down for three months? For six months? For a year?

And if it would take Church leaders this long to recapture the spirit to stand up to civil authorities, would it even happen at all? Are Orthodox Christians in the West simply too much at ease with any “new normal” that anyone within the Church who took such a stand would not only be unusual, but would in fact be criticized and attacked by those within the Orthodox Church in the West?

It is not the burden of the faithful to show that public Liturgies and the Holy Mysteries are essential: it is the burden of the hierarchs to defend the faithful. This is especially true in cases where the state gradually and increasingly encroaches on that freedom.

All crises are opportunities. There are those in Orthodox circles who invest much energy in dialogues with the het-

erodox at other times. A crisis such as this was and is the perfect opportunity to cooperate on a deep and fundamental question of religious freedom: the opening of churches. Orthodox bishops could have taken (and still should take) the initiative and stood together with the Roman Catholics and others and demand that the same rules that apply to opening liquor stores and lotto services apply to churches. Why do they not do so now?

Our second spiritual lesson from the coronavirus must be this: **is God our King, or is Caesar—our civil government?** And when our civil government opposes the free exercise of the historic Christian faith, will we rally our Christian courage and confront it, or will we simply join the call to be “good citizens”?

Do We Fear Death More than God?

Fear has been the single biggest motivator during the coronavirus crisis: not faith, not politics, and not even science. Yet fear—especially the fear of Death—is the exact opposite of the Lord’s teaching: *And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing further they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who after He kills, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!* (Mt 10:28).

The panic among leaders and decision-makers—including those in the Church—has been embarrassing, but why has it happened? We should expect this from secular-minded people who do not believe in God, or who believe that this life is all that people are given. Yet Christians know this is not true—our whole life and all our decisions are based on hope in eternal life. This is the reason we draw our bishops from among the monastics, and have them advised by a council of other bishops who are also monks—not a staff

of insurance reps, lawyers, administrative assistants, medical experts and lifetime bureaucrats.

At least, that is the way it is supposed to be.

In the midst of the coronavirus, many Church jurisdictions leaned heavily on insurance reps, lawyers, administrative assistants, medical experts and lifetime bureaucrats to make decisions about Church life, without a circle of seasoned spiritual elders in sight. The result? Our council of secular experts advised our authorities—both political and within the Orthodox Church—to fear death more than God, and to plan accordingly.

That is just what they did.

The third lesson we might draw from the coronavirus is this: the council of secular experts will not be of any help before the Throne of Judgement—and they may even be wrong about things in this life. We are all going to die soon, whatever happens. The only question is whether we act like Christians or not while we are here.

Hard Evangelism, Hard Conversion

The virus tested the seriousness of Orthodox Christians. During this time, many faithful strengthened their prayers at home, received the Holy Mysteries as best they could, and sought out ways to serve the Lenten services without interruption. In contrast, there are many stories of those who moved completely to “viewing services online,” becoming spectators of the Great Fast rather than participants. This suggests that, when the time of the virus ends, two groups will emerge in the Church: one that is deeper, stronger, and better rooted in the traditional practice of their Orthodox faith, more prepared to survive the challenges of the years ahead, and a second group who are uncomfortable when Orthodox life does not resemble comfortable, secular life—easily accessible online, in shops, without struggle or endurance, and with the click of a button.

The implications for evangelism to the Orthodox Church are obvious.

The period of the virus has revealed just how few people in Western society are really up for the work it entails to be a Christian. In recent decades, much time and effort has been put into making churches comfortable to those who might be interested in joining: the Protestant “seeker sensitive” movement of the 1990s was based on such an idea. Such sentiment has infected many parts of the Orthodox Church, too, where there is no price that is too high to pay

to avoid giving offense to visitors or inquirers. This stands in sharp contrast to the three-year Catechism period of the early Church, in which those preparing for baptism were not only taught, but trained to have such a deep root of faith in Christ, that they would be prepared to face martyrdom.

Today, we too often live in an environment that hesitates to make visitors find the Church any different than their home family room.

Church life without entertainment is difficult: it demands something of each person. Closed churches during Holy Week meant Orthodox people had to take up the Cross of praying the services themselves: those who did can attest to the great blessings this brought. They also know how few of their friends and family are up for making such a spiritual journey: it is much easier to “sell” people on viewing a link on YouTube. One can already see the emergence of a cheap, substitute pseudo-Orthodoxy, which will be very appealing to people with modern habits and tastes. The virus shutdown made this eminently clear. Sadly, it will be tempting for



Greek Orthodox Pascha services held virtually in empty churches amid Covid-19

clergy and laity alike to try to sell this plastic Orthodoxy to outsiders as an easy and less demanding way to “enter the Church”—thinking they are getting the fullness of the faith of the saints and martyrs, but for a fraction of the personal cost.

The fourth lesson the coronavirus teaches us is, the Church necessarily includes those who are seasoned by struggle—and also necessarily loses those who refuse it. This will mean churches will be smaller, and Her clergy and faithful will have to get used to inquirers who walk away from Orthodox Christianity when they do not get their own, easy way.

Is the Orthodox Church Useless?

A church that is deemed useless in a time of crisis like this is also useless in normal times.

What is the purpose of a church during normal times? There are better places to have a social club, an intellectual chat group, a school, or a centre to alleviate poverty. The distinctive function of the church is the place where the Holy Mysteries are offered, in order to heal souls (prayers go along with this: if churches were for prayers alone, one could pray at home and sell off the church buildings).

Most of modern society already feels the central function of the Church—the Holy Mysteries—has no practical use, and is ineffective for anything but making people feel better, psychologically. For this reason, many Orthodox parishes follow the Protestant model to make themselves

“relevant” to secular people by offering functions (such as rentals, clubs, classes, and charitable works) which secular people would believe makes the Church “useful.” Some Orthodox people (even priests) spend the majority of their energy on activities such as these, leading them to believe that they are very active Orthodox Christians—when in fact, they are not, at least not without the Liturgical life of the Orthodox Church.

Historically, Orthodox Christians did everything they could to assemble to receive the Holy Mysteries. Even in the darkest days of the Soviet Union or the Ottoman Empire, the enemies of the Church allowed at least a few churches to operate. Those too fearful to attend might arrange to have the Holy Mysteries smuggled out to them, receive Holy Baptism in a private home, or meet in a remote forest for Holy Unction. Even during times of plague, Church authorities would not close the churches: on the contrary, they made the Holy Mysteries more accessible—taking certain precautions if lives were at risk—but always using the Heavenly Power of Christ’s Church for its true function.

Authorities—both Church and secular—achieved during the few weeks of the coronavirus what pagan Rome, the Muslim Turks, the Soviets, and the Fascist Ustache could only have dreamed of doing: closing down every single Orthodox church in a matter of days. Orthodox nations refused this; Orthodox in the West generally complied, or even cooperated.

This very foolish (or wicked) compliance will likely have an unanticipated consequence, a message sent to people inside and outside the Church that unlike every single example given by the saints at a time of plague or crisis, there are those in the Orthodox Church today who believe the power of God in the Church is useless against this great evil.

This is of course a lie. Yet it is the implicit message.

What message is sent when Orthodox churches are closed in the midst of a social disaster of any kind? Whether to the faithful or the secular, the message when this is done is clear: **the single unique function of the Church—the Holy Mysteries—is not essential or even useful in the midst of a crisis.**

Orthodox hierarchs, clergy, and faithful in some other countries understand this. **This fifth lesson is perhaps the most fundamental lesson Orthodox Christians in the West—especially in North America—have yet to learn. Until we do, we cannot say we think like or like as Orthodox Christians.**

Whether the coronavirus lock-down will be enough to teach it to the faithful here—or whether God will permit several more rounds of such lessons for us to learn it—remains to be seen.

FROM THE EDITOR...

Another U.S. Presidential election just completed at a time that our Nation is in a chaotic turmoil, more polarized than it has ever been, allegations of election fraud and improper behaviors are abundant, the world is in social and economic upheaval, wars continue to rage, and uncertainty among all is apparent, irrespective of wealth, political persuasion or social status. Concurrently, State-mandated lock-downs are still keeping churches closed in several regions, all over the world.

What was distinct in this last election was the divisiveness on some key moral issues, many of which transcend fundamental dogmatic beliefs of our Orthodox Faith. The continuing degradation of morals, ethics, and values has fully penetrated the campaigns and views of many politicians throughout our Nation. The electorate is no longer surprised by ANY revelation of impropriety and, for the most part, struggles to determine who might be the candidate that will allow our Nation to return back to its glory days in accordance with the Founders’ values. Sadly, citizens have concurrently become numb to the continuing censuring of news by “self-appointed” high tech company CEOs or immensely corrupt media and reporters. As this issue of *Orthodox Heritage* makes it into our readers’ hands, we are quite certain that some, perhaps many are quite disappointed with either specific elected officials or the overall course that the new U.S. Congress shall pursue for this Nation. We shall, once again, reiterate a self-reflective anecdote from our Church’s Holy Tradition, which we uncovered within the Greek periodical *Athonite Witness*, in one of their 1990 issues:

When the Emperor *Phocas the Tyrant* (depicted as a villain by Byzantine and modern historians alike) had taken over the reins of Byzantium (602 AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil *Vonosos the Tormentor*. During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, *Lord, why did You give us such an Emperor?* And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said: ***Because I could find none worse...***

We entreat our readers that, as Orthodox Christians, all of us must take into account politicians’ views and positions on the sacredness of all human life, from conception to natural death; the preservation of the traditional, God-established family unit; and defending our constitutional freedom of worship. We all must communicate to our representatives our personal positions on these issues and insist that they vote any new legislation accordingly. Lastly, all of us must increase our heart centered prayers on behalf of our Nation and its citizenry.

As we all observe newly elected politicians assume their appointed offices, we are reminded by His Divine Word: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* (Rom 13:1).

ON CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

By Fr. John Romanides of blessed memory, from "From Patristic Theology - The University Lectures of Fr. John Romanides," ch. 29, pp. 108-111.

In their mudslinging campaign, the opponents of the hesychast revival have now called the supporters of this tradition 'conservative.' But what does the word 'conservative' mean in the West? In the West, a conservative is someone who still identifies the Bible with God's revelation to mankind and the world, because in the old days Protestants and Roman Catholics believed in the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture. In other words, they believed that Christ dictated the Bible word for word to the prophets and writers of the gospels by means of the Holy Spirit, so that the writers of the Bible were like scribes who wrote down whatever they heard the Holy Spirit say.

But now Biblical criticism has come along and discredited this line of thought, dividing those in the Protestant world into conservative and liberal camps. For example, the Lutherans are divided into conservative and liberal factions. In America, there are separate Lutheran churches—one church for liberals, and the church of the Missouri Synod for conservatives. One faction does not accept the Bible as revelation on absolute terms, while the other faction does. One can also observe the same phenomenon with the Baptists. The liberal Baptists do not accept the Holy Scripture as literally inspired revelation, while the others embrace it as revelation that is inspired word for word. You can also find the same division among the Methodists. In fact, this split between liberals and conservatives over the issue of Holy Scripture can be seen in all the Protestant denominations in America.

Now, ask yourself whether this division can be applied to Orthodox tradition. Are there conservative Fathers and liberal Fathers with respect to the Bible? Is there a single Church Father who teaches the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture? Is there a single Church Father who identifies the Holy Scripture with the experience of theosis itself? No, there is not one, because God's revelation to mankind is the experience of theosis. In fact, since revelation is the experience of theosis, an experience that transcends all expressions and concepts, the identification of Holy Scripture with revelation is, in terms of dogmatic theology, pure heresy.

Can someone who accepts this Patristic teaching on theosis be characterized as conservative, based on the split over Scripture in the Protestant world? When liberal Protestants hear about this Patristic principle, they say, "Oh yes, that's liberalism!" while conservative Protestants say, "No, it's heresy!" In other words, when we follow the Fathers, we Orthodox are heretics as far as conservative Protestants are concerned.

You may well ask, "who are the Orthodox liberals and the Orthodox conservatives?" They are those who do theology in a way that corresponds to the theology of Protestant liberals and conservatives. This is the reason why certain theologians in Greece have been divided into liberal and conservatives camps. The liberals follow liberal Protestants on these subjects while the conservatives follow their conservative counterparts.

But can we classify Patristic tradition using such characterizations and buzzwords? Of course not. Nevertheless, a hesychast theologian of the Eastern Church will be viewed as a liberal in the West, because he refuses to identify the written text of Holy Scripture, including its sayings and concepts, with revelation.

Since revelation is the experience of theosis, it is beyond comprehension, expression, and conceptualization. This means that the labels 'conservative' OR 'liberal' should not be applied to those who adhere to Orthodox tradition. Based on what is meant by revelation, the Fathers are neither liberals nor conservatives. Simply put, there are Church Fathers who are saints of the Church who have only reached illumination and there are saints of the Church who have also reached theosis and are more glorious than the former class of saints.

This is the Patristic tradition—either you attain to illumination or you attain to theosis once you have already passed through illumination. Orthodox tradition is nothing other than this curative course of treatment through which the nous is purified, illumined, and eventually glorified together with the entire man, if God so wills. Therefore, is there such a thing as an illumined liberal or an illumined conservative in this context? Of course not. You are either illumined or you are not. You have either reached theosis or you have not. You have either undergone this treatment, or you have not. Apart from these distinctions, there are no others.



They thought that by closing the churches they would stop the virus...Lord have mercy! Is this the first outbreak of a virus? From what I know, during epidemics the churches are open day and night and the Liturgy is offered nonstop. Some have attempted to create doubt about Holy Communion, that it can impart infection. Do you know what is the Divine Liturgy? The Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. Do you know of a God who defeats death but transmits sicknesses? And there are Hierarchs who tell you to change the *lavida* (Holy Communion spoon) and to dip it in disinfectant... God forbid!

Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou (Cyprus)

CONCERNING CHURCH SCANDALS

Source: "Follow Me," by the late Augustinos N. Kantiotes (+2010), bishop of Florina, Greece. Translated and foreward by Asterios Gerostergios (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1989), pp. 370-378.

One reason young people are not attracted to missionary work is the sad state of the Church today. One has to be blind not to see it. Must we bring to mind all that the *Christianike Spitha* and other Church publications and religious periodicals have written in the past decade?

How can our young people be attracted to serve the Church when they see—unfortunately, holy fathers, they have eyes and do see—devious and vile persons who offer no essential service to the Church or community, who by the most evil means succeed in jumping into the flock and climb to the highest places, pushing aside the faithful and talented? Or when they see that such people, taking the tiller of Church government in their hands in our democratic homeland, exercise almost absolute authority and treat Christians as irrational beasts? Or when they see that faithful men and women are held in ill favor, but flattery and worldly minded relatives surround the bishop and comprise the select staff of his Metropolis? Or when they see that a metropolitan's tour reaps a golden harvest? Or when they see that the ranks of the Church, coming from the poorest of families, are carried around in gleaming limousines, which even statesmen and generals envy? Or when they see that luxury reigns in certain metropolitan palaces in which magnates are welcomed and are amazed at the life of ecclesiastic rulers? Or when they see in the middle of Athens apartments and palaces that are the personal property of bishops and their relatives? Or when they hear that sisters and nieces are given generous dowries taken from despotic treasuries or that elite grooms are bought for them with sacred monies? Or when they hear that metropolitans do not happily stay in small or poor metropolises but, after tasting the demon of greed and vanity, leave no stone unturned in their efforts to be transferred to palaces and richer sees, neither fearing God nor shamed by man? Or when they see that preachers of the Gospel, faithful people, are persecuted to extinction for condemning illegal and uncanonical practices by the leaders of the Church? Or when they see that no war or battle is waged against the powerful of the day, who by anti-Christian word and deed offend the laity? Or when they hear that scandals of a moral nature break out in the halls of archbishops and are circulated throughout the entire region without the official Church becoming alarmed or disturbed? Or when they hear that dying bishops leave enormous amounts in their wills to their blood relatives and other dear persons, and the heirs, like blackbirds, gather round these wretched wills, coming to blows and going to civil court to settle their differences?

My dear Church, how can I express all the sufferings that the Mystical Body of Christ has endured at the hands of the evil shepherds, who have not entered into your holy flock by the gate, but another way?

So, when our youth are witnesses by eye and ear of the reigning disorder and wretchedness within the Church, how do you expect them to be attracted by missionary ideals and make the decision to serve the Church in extreme selflessness? There are no educated young people with high interests in life today because there are no models, no heroic examples among our priests. Youth is attracted by heroes; it worships its heroes from whatever walk of life they come. Through his example, a heroic general inspires the officers and soldiers under him and leads them to victory, glory, and honor. On the other hand, a cowardly general can disappoint even the bravest men, and create a spirit of defeatism, leading to shameful defeat. A lion can lead deer to victory, but a deer commanding lions leads to defeat. So when Christian orders are devoid of leaders who are equal to the task of holy mission, nothing grand or high can be accomplished. The mission will vegetate.

As Church history bears witness, holy bishops and priests have a following of young people with holy desires who are eager to strive for missionary work, but bad bishops do not attract such youth. Wretched people gather around the axle of episcopal authority of bad shepherds, ready to take over wealthy parishes. Their goals are the episcopal thrones, which they strive to attain through vanity and greed, faithful copies of the bishops over them. As they destroy honorable Gospel workers, they load down their favorites with crosses and monastic garb and call them missionaries, into whose hands they place preaching and *catechesis*. Wolves shepherding the laity! No wonder there has been a breakdown of preaching, religious instruction, and confession in Greece. *This is the charge against the leaders of the Jews*, said St. Chrysostom, *that shepherds were truly shown to be wolves. Not only did they not direct the masses, but ruined their ability to do so.* (Homily 32 on Matthew's Gospel, Migne 57:379).

Therefore, the catharsis of metropolitan halls of their vile elements—of God-peddlers and Christ-sellers in the garb of apostolic shepherds—is and must be the most serious duty of every honorable Church worker, every believer who, according to Gregory of Nazianzus, is a follower and imitator of Christ, guiding by all his generation, from manger to Golgotha. He is also called to take the three-pronged lash and chase the money-changers from the Temple. Let everyone understand this. **Without cleansing the Church, without the clean, surging wind of the Holy Spirit, there can be no serious reason for mission, here or abroad.** It is a joke to think that by technical means, by decrees and regulations, we can create a spiritual life and change every bishopric into an upper room at Jerusalem, from which issue fiery men for the spiritual edification of the world.

One final reason why the ranks in all but the fewest missionary centers are not sustained by an influx of new stock is the same one that St. Chrysostom observed in his own time (of all the Church Fathers, he had the most active passion for missions). The reason is this: There are faithful young men and women who could offer much to a missionary movement; however, these people (who are so scant yet so precious) do not stay in the world and struggle under the Cross to help their spiritual fathers and teachers whom they see groaning through lack of help—they leave. Where do they go? They go to the desert or to the mountains and lead a monastic life. The brilliance of Tabor's light draws them. Let us let St. Chrysostom (who himself groaned under his same abandonment) speak to these faithful beings, who could stay and help in missionary work and save souls, yet leave their spiritual fathers and teachers to carry out the difficult struggle in this generation alone:

Paul the Apostle, for one, went from Jerusalem to Illyricum, another Apostle to the land of India, another to the land of the blacks, and others to various parts of the world; yet we do not dare venture out from the borders of our own homeland, but look for luxury, nice homes, and every other abundance. Who of us ever hungered for the word of God? Who has ever undertaken a tiring journey for the Gospel? Who is in the wilderness? Who has gone to a far-off country? Which of our teachers ever worked to help others who were hungry or suffering? Who has died a daily death?... And if one were to be found having traces of that apostolic life and behavior, he leaves the cities, markets, the company of the world and his duty to work the salvation of others, to order their lives through teaching the Gospel, and goes off to the mountains. And if one were to ask him the reason for his departure, he will start giving excuses. But his excuses contain no pardon. For what does he say? "That I, too, not be destroyed, that I not be drawn into the wave of evil, that my spirituality and virtue not be diminished, I therefore abandon the world and flee to the mountains." However, would it not be better to lose something of your spirituality that others may gain some, instead of fleeing and seeing your brothers being lost from afar? So, when some are indifferent to virtue and others who are zealous and concerned for virtue flee far from the crowd, far from the holy war being waged in the world, I ask you how will we conquer the enemies of faith and virtue?

Truly these are golden words that have great significance, for they proceed from an Ecumenical Father of the Church who like few others loved the monastic life!*

O chosen young people, the genuine preaching of the Gospel pulled you from the depths of sin into spiritual life, and loving fathers and teachers for years prepared you for missionary work. They had many golden hopes in you, but now you are leaving for the mountains. You leave with empty excuses. You leave in hard days, when the Anti-Christ is raging in the world; souls are lost every day, and your fathers and teachers

struggle hard for the sacred and holy. You leave them alone. Go then to Mt. Tabor and there rejoice in your spirits. But we ask you, "Is your conscience at rest?" Before you answer, meditate a second and third time on the golden words of St. Chrysostom. They were written for you!***

† † †

[*] In his sixth homily on Ephesians, St. Chrysostom stresses that one cause for falling away from Church life is that pious people, endowed with their gift of working in the world as missionaries, flee to the mountains and stay there forever and thus leave the ecclesiastical stage free to be taken by lazy and insufficient elements. This is what he says in a related passage: *They, who were living virtuously, and who under any circumstance might have confidence, have taken possession of the tops of the mountains, and have escaped out of the world, separating themselves as from an enemy and an alien and not from a body to which they belonged. Plagues too, teeming with untold mischiefs, have lighted upon the Churches.* (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 13, Philip Schaff, ed., Eerdmans Publications, Grand Rapids, p. 78. See also, K. Kontogones, *Ekklesiastike Historia*, Athens: 1876, vol. 1, p. 480).

[**] What we wrote here we do not wish to be misinterpreted. **We are not against monastic life, an ancient order of the Church that has offered resplendent fruit of the Holy Spirit.** We believe that we are not sinning in stressing that monastic life, as it presents itself today, is going through a crisis in Greece and is in need of renewal to re-attain its ancient grandeur (see our book, *National Anniversary*, Athens, 1970, pp. 37-63). Monastic life, renewed according to the ancient prototypes, can offer so much to Church life and community. It is impossible not to well forth from its bowels again missionary men who will continue the work of Cyril and Methodios, Cosmas the Aitolean, and so many other monks known and unknown, who for the sake of saving souls looked beyond their own spiritual interests and threw themselves into the furnace of the world and underwent hardships. And by flaming love for humble humanity everywhere they took up what Paul said, *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh* (Rom 9:3), as elsewhere he says, *Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being* (1 Cor 10:24), a saying which significantly had an influence on the soul of St. Cosmas the Aitolean, who left the monastery to do missionary work, that from the hesychasm which he had practiced for sixty years he went out to missionary activity and the famous monk Christophoros Papoulakos during a dramatic interview with the champion of the Orthodox Faith, Phlamiatos (see K. Bastia, *Ho Papoulakos*, Athens, 1963, ed. 4, pp. 112-20).

St. Chrysostom sighs in lack of missionary zeal for saving souls and cries, *Woe is me, that I have not known how much it takes to gain souls.* (see homily 18 on the Acts of the Apostles, Migne 60, 149).

ORTHODOXY IS NOT A RELIGION

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion," edited for length.

Many people are under the impression that Orthodoxy is one of many religions and that it is primarily concerned with preparing the members of the Church for life after death; that is, with securing a place in Paradise for every Orthodox Christian. Thus, they reckon that Orthodox doctrine offers an additional guaranty (because it is Orthodox), and that if someone does not believe in Orthodox doctrine, this serves as just one more reason for this person to go to Hell—apart, that is, from the fact that his personal sins will, in all probability, send him there. Any Orthodox Christian who believes that such a thing is Orthodoxy has associated Orthodoxy exclusively with the future life. Such people do not do much in this life, but rather wait to die in order to go to Paradise, since in their lifetime they were Orthodox Christians!

Another portion of the Orthodox are active within the domain of the Church, being interested not in the next life, but primarily in the present life. In other words, what interests them is how Orthodoxy will help them to live well in this life. Such Orthodox Christians pray to God, have priests say prayers, bless Holy Water, read supplicatory Canons, and anoint them with Holy Oil, etc., so that God will help them to have a pleasant life, to avoid falling ill, to provide for their children, to secure a good dowry and a good husband for their daughters, to have their sons find nice girls with good dowries to marry, to have their work go well, and even to help them with their stocks or businesses, etc. So we see that these Christians do not differ significantly from the faithful of other religions, who also do pretty much the same things.

In other words, from the foregoing, one sees Orthodoxy as having these two points in common with all of the other faiths: Firstly, it prepares the faithful for life after death so that they might go to Paradise, as each one imagines it; secondly, it ensures that Christians do not pass through sorrows, worries, disasters, illnesses, wars, etc., in this life—that is, God takes care of everything according to their needs or desires. Thus, for the second group of Christians, religion plays a major role in this life, and especially in everyday life.

Deep down, however, who, among all of the aforementioned Christians, is interested in whether God exists or not? Who is seeking Him? For such people, whether or not God exists is not an issue, since it would simply be better if God *did* exist, so that we can call upon Him and ask Him to satisfy our needs, that our jobs might go well, and that we might have some happiness in this life. Thus, we see that man has a very strong proclivity to want God to exist and to believe that God exists, because it is a human need for God to exist,

in order that He might secure for him all of the things we have mentioned. Well then, since it is a human need for God to exist, *ergo*, God exists!

If man had no need of a God and could self-sufficiently secure a livelihood for himself in this life in some other way, then no one knows how many people would believe in God. Such is frequently the case, even in Greece.

We see, then, how many people, though previously indifferent with regard to religion, become religious towards the end of their lives, perhaps after having been frightened by some event. For they can no longer live without calling upon some God to help them—that is, out of superstition. For these reasons, human nature helps man to become religious. This does not apply to Orthodox Christians alone; it applies to the faithful of all religions. Human nature is the same everywhere. Thus it is that man, after his fall—darkened as he is by nature, or, rather, contrary to nature—inclines towards superstition.

How About True Faith?

We now face the question: Where does superstition end and true faith begin?

The Fathers have clear positions and teachings on this subject. A person who follows (or rather believes that he follows) the teaching of Christ and simply goes to Church every Sunday, communes at regular intervals, and makes use of priests for blessings of the waters, anointments, etc., without exploring these things in greater depth, abiding in the *letter of the law* and not the *spirit of the law*—does such a person benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy? Next, another person who prays exclusively for the next life, for himself and for others, while being totally indifferent to this life—does he, again, benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy?

The first tendency is personified by a parish priest and those gathered around him with the aforementioned spirit, while the latter tendency is personified by a monastery Elder (usually an Archimandrite), who is retired and waiting to die, with a few monks around him. To the extent that these two tendencies are not centered around *purification* and *illumination*, from a patristic viewpoint they are at fault as to the thing they are pursuing. On the other hand, to the extent that they are centered around *purification*, *illumination* and the implementation of the Orthodox patristic ascetic regimen for the acquisition of *noetic prayer*, only then are things placed on a proper foundation.

These two tendencies incline towards opposite extremes. They do not have a *common axis*. The common axis that upholds Orthodoxy and holds it together, its one and only *axis*, on all of the questions that concern Orthodoxy, and which puts everything on a correct foundation, when taken into account, is the axis: *purification, illumination, deification*.

The Fathers are not *exclusively* interested in what will happen to a person after his death; what is of primary interest to them is what a person will become in this life. After death,

there is no *treatment of the mind*, so the *treatment* must begin in this life; for “there is no repentance in Hades.” This is why Orthodox theology is not “other-worldly,” futurological, or eschatological, but is purely “this-worldly.” For the solicitude of Orthodoxy is for man in this world, in this life, not after death.

Now, why are *purification* and *illumination* necessary? So that a person will go to Paradise and escape going to Hell? Is that why we need them? What constitutes *purification* and *illumination* and why do the Orthodox seek after them?

In order for one to find the reason and give an answer to this question, he must have the basic key in his possession, which is: All people on earth share the **same end**, from an Orthodox theological viewpoint. Whether a person is Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic or atheist, or whatever he may be (that is, every person on earth), **he is destined to see the Glory of God**. He will see the Glory of God at the **common end** of mankind during the Second Coming of Christ. All people will see the Glory (Uncreated Light) of God, and from this viewpoint they have the **same end**, but with one difference: The saved will see the Glory of God as a most sweet and never-setting **Light**, whereas the damned will see the same Glory of God as a consuming **Fire** that will burn them.

That we will all see the Glory of God is a true and expected fact. Beholding God—that is, His Glory, His Light—is something that will happen whether we want it or not. The experience of this Light, however, will be different from one person to another. Thus, the task of the Church and the clergy is not to help us to see this Glory, because this will come to pass one way or another. The work of the Church is focused on *how* each person will see God, not on *whether* he will see God. In other words, the task of the Church is to proclaim to people that there is a true God, that God is revealed as either **Light** or a consuming **Fire**, and that all people will see God at the Second Coming of Christ, and to prepare its members so that they might see God not as **Fire**, but as **Light**.

The Essence of Orthodoxy

This preparation of the members of the Church, and also of all people who want to see God as Light, is essentially a *therapeutic treatment*, which must begin and end in this life. The *therapy* must take place and be completed *in this life*. For *after death, there is no repentance*. This therapeutic treatment is the essence and primary content of Orthodox Tradition, as well as being the principal concern of the Orthodox Church. It is composed of the following three stages of spiritual ascent: *Purification* from passions, *illumination* by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and *deification*, again by the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is also the case that **if someone does not at least arrive at the state of partial illumination in this life, he is unable to see God as Light either in this life or in the next**. It is, therefore, clear that the Fathers of the Church concern themselves

with man as he is today, *at this moment*. And the one needing *treatment* is each person, who has the responsibility before God to begin this task today, *in this life*, because in this life he is able to do so; not after death. And this person himself will decide if he will follow this *therapeutic* path or not.

Christ said: *I am the way*. The Way towards what? Not only towards the next life. Christ is primarily the *Way* in this life. Christ is the *Way* to His Father and to our Father. Christ is revealed to man first in this life, and He shows him the path to His Father. This path is Christ Himself.

What Is Religion then?

The question, now, is: Is religion equated with a teaching concerning the immortality of the soul, and also with a teaching concerning the existence of God for the future life? Likewise, is it equated with the victory of full justice? That is, do we need religion because there must be a Just God, Who will pronounce the final judgment on all people, so that the unjust might be punished in Hell and the just (*the good children*) be rewarded in Paradise?

If the answer is yes, well then, religion must exist, first of all so that justice might ultimately prevail and, secondly, so that man’s desire for bliss will not remain unfulfilled. Is it possible, in other words, for the *good child* **not** to live a blissful life after death? It is not possible! And let us say he was wronged in this life. In other words, is it possible for all of these wronged people, that is, the *good children*, not to be vindicated in the future life? It is not possible! And should they not lead a pleasant existence there, a life of bliss? Of course! But for this to happen, there has to be life after death, as well as a good and just God, Who must make a good and just distribution! Is it not so? There has to be [such a God], according to the understanding of the Middle Ages, that is, of Western theology.

With regard to all of these things, however, modern psychology comes along and explodes everything. It tells us that these perceptions are *psychological*; for man has inside him a sense of justice, which is what demands that the *bad children* be punished and the *good children* be rewarded! And since the rewarding fails to take place in this life, human imagination puts forth the idea that these things must be fulfilled in another life, for which reason a weak person, as well as one who loves justice and has profound and earnest feelings about justice, becomes religious and believes the doctrines of the religion that he follows. In other words, he believes because the doctrine in which he believes serves his psychological need for justice to be rendered. This reason does not have philosophical—that is, metaphysical—foundations, but only *psychological foundations*.

What is correct, however, about the foregoing line of thought is that if justice and bliss will ever prevail for good people, they will have to prevail in this life. For such people do not know if they will have another life, since the arguments we

mentioned for the existence of another life are purely *psychological arguments* and not *scientific arguments*—that is, arguments founded on *experience* and the *scientific method*. Thus, these people believe in a life after death simply because they want to believe. And this is why the essence of their religion is the existence of another life where injustice is punished and justice rewarded.

For these reasons, then, one sees that sober people today in Europe and America no longer accept these foundations of religion and have been led to agnosticism, while others have been led to atheism. On the other side, there are churchgoers who continue to believe in life after death because, as we explained, they want to believe, without having scientific arguments to support their beliefs. This is the general situation.

Now, what is the Orthodox position on all of these issues?

The Metaphysical Concept of Religion

Orthodoxy is first and foremost concerned with this life, here. The Fathers stress that *there is no repentance after death*. Modern Greek theologians, however, following their teacher, Adamantios Koraes, have a metaphysical understanding of the subject and have copied the methodology of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in the matter of religion.

At the time when these people left to study theology in Europe and Russia, and also in America after the war, the great conflict had already begun years before between the *empiricists*, on the one hand, who are the heirs to the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution of 1789, and the *metaphysicians*, on the other hand. The basic difference between *empiricists* and *metaphysicians* is that the essence of the *empirical* approach is observation, while that of *metaphysics* is *philosophical speculation*.

At that time, all religious people were followers of metaphysics—and have been so even until recently—whereas all empiricists were agnostics, and some of them atheists. Why? Because the essence of the empirical approach is not even philosophy. Certainly, it is presented as empirical philosophy, as the philosophy of empiricists. They prevailed over the metaphysicians in America and accomplished a great deed for Orthodoxy. They were, however, devastating for Modern Greek theology.

Nowadays, in Greece, all Marxists are empiricists, without being aware of it, of course. This is because Greek Marxist ideologists do not know what the family tree of Marxism is, as do their counterparts in Europe and America; for, here, they have merely learned their lessons mechanically, by rote, like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe that it is a great tragedy—not an Aeschylean one, but a shameful one—that there are no powerful intellectual Marxists in Greece. Of course, this is fortunate for the right-wingers, as well as for Modern Greek theologians, but it is unfortunate for the search for truth. For Marxism started out on empirical bases and ended up where it has ended up.

The foundation of Marxism and the foundation of Patristic Theology, from a scientific point of view, are the same; thus, between the two of them, the Marxists and the Patristic theologians could have come to an understanding. Marxism, however, clashed with religion. Yes, but with what religion? Not with Revelation, but rather with the religion that is equated with metaphysics.

Now, as for the atheist, why does he not believe? Because he does not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of *inward faith*. As for those who say that they believe, are they really believers? Not all; for example, the Calvinists, who often say that they believe because they are *predestined* [to believe]. In this way, however, they tread an anti-scientific path; that is, one that is not supported by any empirical reality. Nor do they have any metaphysical support for what they believe. They are, of course, aware of this, because they are intellectuals and know how things are, but they continue to act in this way.

This is why it has been observed that both Calvinists and Lutherans take refuge in existentialism. The same thing occurs with American Protestants, who also add emotionalism to the foregoing. American Protestants are very emotional both in their worship and in their behavior.

Orthodoxy as the Official Religion of the Roman State

Bearing these things in mind now, we see why the Byzantine State sought to have Orthodoxy as its official religion and why it made so many efforts to preserve Orthodox doctrine intact. Why did it do so? Simply to preserve doctrine as doctrine? Or perhaps because Orthodox doctrine in particular was a precondition for the cure of its citizens, which cure would occasion a social restoration to health through the healing of the personality of each and every citizen? More likely the latter.

What was the **national anthem** of the Byzantine Empire? Was it not *Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance; grant victories to the emperors over barbarians, and through Thy Cross preserve Thou Thy commonwealth*? This *hymn* expresses the ideology—if we can call it that—of the implementation of Orthodox teaching, faith, and life within the State; that is, on a nationwide scale.

Since the State foresaw the contribution to society and the benefit that would result from the Orthodox *therapeutic teaching and method*, if it were implemented, it instituted and promoted the Orthodox Faith as the official State religion, such that the State would be filled with parishes in which Priests would practice this *therapeutic regimen*. Thus, the parishes would grow with time into [communities of] healthy citizens, as would the State itself, by extension. The Church naturally did not refuse this, but rather worked in consort with the State.

It so happened, however, that this power given to the Church, together with the requisite ecclesiastical adminis-

trative organization, created a public service problem as a necessary evil. That is, many who coveted public positions pretended to be Orthodox, though they were not, and the Church began to be secularized.

Aside from all of these things, the Church had as its parallel task to protect the State from quack doctors, that is, from heretics. The local and OEcumenical Synods attended to precisely this. In the Acts of the OEcumenical Synods, we find the phrase: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...* Those present at the Synods said this because they possessed *noetic prayer*, by which they were inwardly informed concerning the truth of the Decrees that they formulated.

Today, on the other hand, when the practice of *noetic prayer* has grown rare among Bishops, if a Synod of Bishops were to come together and they were to stand up at the opening and all say together: *O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things...* would the Holy Spirit illumine them without fail? That is, simply because they are canonical Bishops, assemble at a Synod, and say a prayer? The Holy Spirit does not work this way—that is, under these conditions; others are needed. The one praying needs to have *noetic prayer* already working inside him, when he attends a Synod, for the Grace of God to illumine him. Those attending false synods did not have this prayerful state.

The Bishops of old, however, did have such spiritual experience, and when they would come together as a Body, they knew what the Holy Spirit was informing them in their hearts on a particular matter. And, when they issued resolutions, they knew that their resolutions were sound. For they were in a state of *illumination*, and certain of them had even reached *glorification*, that is, *deification*. Thus, we see that in the ancient Church the charismatic element prevailed (that is, its members were governed by gifts of the Holy Spirit), and the institutional elements (that is, formal ecclesiastical and administrative qualifications) followed.

This is very clear in the New Testament, in the ancient Church, and in the great Fathers of the OEcumenical Synods, from the First OEcumenical Synod (fourth century) through the Ninth OEcumenical Synod, which took place under St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century). This kind of testimony of the Holy Spirit within the *heart* is well known only to those who have *noetic prayer* working in their hearts.

Noetic prayer is an empirical verification and assurance that a person's mind has been cured. Such a cure is feasible for all people, as long as the spiritual preconditions of the *therapeutic method are met*. In other words, this method is not destined or designed only for certain monastics—that is, for certain people wearing *rasa*—but for all people. For nowhere in Holy Scripture does any distinction seem to be made between *monastic spirituality* and *lay spirituality*. Holy Scripture speaks of only one spirituality. Have you ever found a passage in Holy

Scripture that speaks separately about the spirituality of lay people and the spirituality of the clergy? There is no such thing in Holy Scripture. **Spirituality in Christ is the same for all of the faithful.**

This Christian spirituality is essentially a *therapeutic regimen*, which is offered by Christ to all people. It is designed for all people. It is not just for monastics, or the clergy, or the educated, or intellectuals, because there is no intellectualism whatsoever contained therein. Nor does it deal with the outer and visible aspects of man, but rather with the inner and hidden aspects.



LIVING THE MONASTIC LIFE IN THE WORLD

From "The Veil," Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer, 2005). The Veil is a publication of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery.

Question: I want to give my life completely to Christ, but do not want to go to a monastery. Is it really necessary to be in a monastery to lead a monastic life? Can't I live as a monastic in the world?

Answer: This is a question that comes up quite often, except that it is usually in the form of a statement. May God bless your humility in asking this instead of informing and declaring that a monastery is not necessary for one who desires a monastic life!

First, you must realize that God's grace is present everywhere, but it is especially felt in a monastery. When people visit a monastery, they feel that it is a holy place where God is present. Paradoxically, the monastics who dwell in that monastery more often feel the intense spiritual warfare that the evil one is waging against them. When visitors came to one monastery and said to one of the nuns, "It is so peaceful here," she replied, "You feel the peace, we see the warfare."

Anyone who strives to fulfill the Gospel commandments, who tries to live truly according to the teachings of the Church, feels both of these aspects to some degree: both the grace of God in their lives, but also the intense battle that the devil and his legions wage against him. The more intensely we strive to serve God, the more the evil one seeks to deter us from our path. This is most true in the life of one who renounces the world and seeks to live completely for Christ.

So, can this be done while living in the world? Yes. And no. One can certainly, with God's help, live according to the Gospel commandments and the teachings of the Church in the world, maintaining a job, being faithful in the Church,

living according to the “little holy trinity” of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, reading the lives of the saints and other soul edifying books, etc. This is all what the Church requires of all her faithful. This is all according to the commandments. Such a person may participate in some “worldly” activities which are not harmful—certain and limited sports, wholesome entertainment, etc., without losing his focus on God.

The monastic life takes in what the fathers refer to as the “Evangelical advice.” Remember the rich young man in the Gospel who asked the Lord, *What must I do to inherit eternal life?* The Lord told him to keep the commandments, which the man stated that he had done since his youth. Then the Lord said, *One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.* (Mk 10:21).

It is not mandatory for salvation to give up everything, only “if we want.” These were the words which St. Anthony heard and which led him to begin his monastic life. We know that his early monastic life was spent at first with an elder on the edge of the town, and that later he went off into the desert.

The world holds many temptations for us. Some of the pleasures of worldly life are not bad: marrying and having children are certainly blessed by Christ who worked His first public miracle at the wedding of Cana in Galilee. Being with other people—even those who are not of our faith—is not bad in itself, but it can lead one down a wrong path if one is not careful. Certain entertainments, as we mentioned above, are not bad in themselves, as long as they do not become passions. But the monastic is the one who chooses the narrower path. In order to follow this path, he must have others who are experienced in the dangers, pitfalls and perils along the way. You can find this only in a monastery with others who are struggling (while falling and getting back up again) on that same path.

If you are trying to walk that narrow path in the world with all its temptations and you fall (and you will fall), who will help to lift you up again? More than likely, those who are falling in the same pits as you will encourage you to remain and wallow in the mire. In the monastery, not only do you have the more experienced who can guide and reprimand you when you stray, but that great grace from God also surrounds you and assists you in these struggles. The very monastic garment itself is holy and guards the monastic.

Let us take an innocent example to illustrate how important the habit is: Let us say you are driving through a rather desolate area and are very thirsty. You come upon a small settlement that has a few houses and a bar, but no gas station or grocery store or other place where you could find a cup of coffee or soft drink or tea. (There are many such towns in the west!) You stop your car and go in the bar to get a non-alcoholic drink. There is nothing wrong with that in itself. Yet when you are saying your prayers, you remember the things you saw in the bar, perhaps lewd jokes, inappropriately dressed people, etc. Even

though you did nothing wrong, still, your prayer is disturbed by these remembrances.

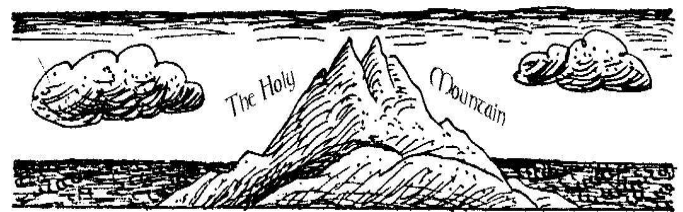
The monk or nun who would be traveling along that same road and who is equally thirsty would not go into such an establishment. The habit itself would be as the walls of the monastery protecting him from doing so, for as innocent as his intention would be in wanting a glass of ice tea, he could not bring scandal upon the Church by going into such a place.

There is another pitfall which catches everyone who tries to live the monastic life in the world. Pride. This is not to say that pride does not assail those in the monastery! It certainly does, however in the monastic setting, when one begins to fall into pride, there are elders who are quick to cut off that sin in the novice. You are not somebody in the monastery because you are fasting and praying—everyone is doing that! You are not considered as “pious” because you struggle to obtain the virtues—that is what is expected. But when you say, “I can lead the monastic life in the world and not bother going into the monastery” you are declaring already quite proudly that you already know it all! Then, instead of all your efforts going toward your salvation, you will have lost everything.

There is no question that there are monastics who live as anchorites. That life cannot be compared to what you are requesting. Those who live such a monastic life do so only after many years in a monastery and only with the blessing of their monastic elder. When a brother would ask Elder Cleopa for a blessing to go off into the forest alone to live, the Elder would tell him, *after you have been in obedience for thirty years, then come back to me and we will think about it!*

Do not dismiss that grace which works invisibly in the monastery. It is very powerful and without it no one in a monastery would be saved. The holy fathers say that when you are saved you are saved in community; but when you fall, you fall alone.

If you want to be saved in the world, follow the commandments; if you want to as a monastic, go to a monastery and submit to the abbot or abbess of that monastery and to its rules.



What does it indicate when we criticize others and consider ourselves flawless? This is why the Lord commands: *Judge not, that you not be judged.* And He adds: *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged.* [Mt 7:1-2]. To criticize others is an extremely serious sin, although we indulge in it like bread and butter, and as a *sin which so easily besets us.* [Heb 12:1]. A besetting sin is one that takes place at every opportunity and all the time.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR!

An extremely timely message from the last saint of our days, Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona (+2019). The content of this message has been confirmed by our Brotherhood directly with the spiritual father of the lady that is referred within this article.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou, who lived as an ascetic and fell asleep in Arizona, appeared to a woman who was with her daughter-in-law, not in the woman's sleep but actually while she was in a state of alertness.

At one point the woman was unresponsive, as if in ecstasy, and this lasted for about 10 minutes, according to her daughter-in-law who was watching her. She herself did not comprehend the time duration, i.e., for how long the vision lasted.

It was something new for her (the content of the conversation because she had already seen the Elder after he fell asleep, both in her sleep as well while she was awake). Due to all this (her awe and shock), she contacted her spiritual father and asked whether this experience was real or a deception by the evil one.

She saw elder Ephraim who was very sad and was trying to change Christ's mind so that the ongoing events be interrupted-stopped (all these of course go hand in hand with what the elder said to many while he was alive). And he told her:

“Repentance, repentance, repentance! Christ is very angry.

We people today should not be in our current spiritual state.

Huge tribulations are coming, you can not imagine how bad these will be. Alas to all of you for what awaits you. Repent while there is time.

You must kneel and cry, you must shed tears of repentance lest Christ soften.

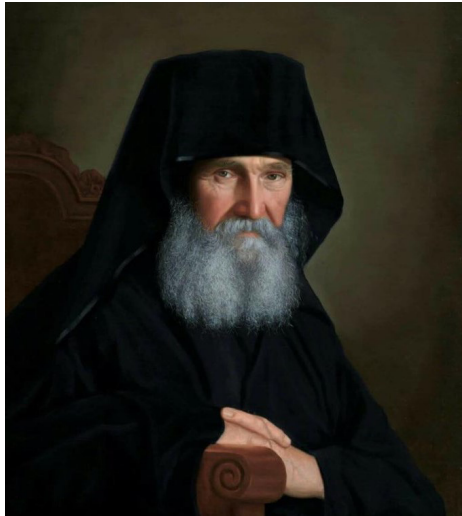
This has to do with what is happening in the United States as well.

Many people will depart through all that is to come, many people will depart (i.e., they will die).

You have no mercy among you. You show no mercy to each other. You are tough towards each other, you stand ready to eat (consume-destroy) each other.

All this you must convey to your spiritual father and to others.”

The pious lady who saw the vision had been a spiritual daughter of Elder Ephraim for many years and she was in close communication with the Elder until his last days.



Ὁ Ἐχων Ὦτα Ἀκούειν Ἀκούετω!

Ἐνα ἔγκαιρο μήνυμα ἀπὸ τὸν τελευταῖο ἅγιο τῶν ἡμερῶν μας, τὸν μακαριστὸ Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ τὸν Φιλοθεῖτη καὶ Ἀριζονίτη (+2019). Τὸ περιεχόμενο τοῦ μηνύματος ἔχει ἐπικυρωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀδελφότητά μας κατευθεῖαν μὲ τὸν πνευματικὸ τῆς κυρίας ποὺ ἀναφέρεται στὸ ἄρθρο.

Ο Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ ὁ Φιλοθεῖτης ποὺ ἀσκήτεψε καὶ ἐκοιμήθη στὴν Ἀριζόνα, ἐφανίστηκε σὲ μία γυναίκα ποὺ βρισκόταν μαζί μὲ τὴν νύμφη της, ὄχι στὸν ὕπνο της γυναίκας ἀλλὰ σὲ κατάσταση ἐγρηγόρσεως.

Κάποια στιγμή ἡ γυναίκα χάθηκε καὶ αὐτὸ διήρκησε 10 λεπτὰ περίπου, ὅπως εἶπε ἡ νύμφη της ποὺ τὴν παρακολουθοῦσε. Γιατὶ ἡ ἴδια δὲν κατάλαβε πόσο χρόνο ἦταν ἡ ὄπτασία.

Ἦταν κάτι πρωτόγνωρο γιὰ τὴν ἴδια (τὸ περιεχόμενο τῆς συνομιλίας γιὰ τὸν Γέροντα τὸν ἔχει ξαναδεῖ μετὰ τὴν κοίμησή του καὶ καθ' ὕπνον καὶ ξύπνια) καὶ γιὰ αὐτὸ φυσικὰ πῆρε τὸν πνευματικὸ της συγκλονισμένη, γιὰ νὰ ρωτήσῃ ἐὰν αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶδε ἦταν πλάνη ἢ ἐὰν ἦταν πραγματικότητα.

Εἶδε τὸν Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν πολὺ λυπημένος καὶ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ μεταπείσῃ τὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ τὰ γενόμενα (αὐτά, βέβαια, συμβαδίζουν καὶ μὲ ὅσα ἔλεγε ὁ Γέροντας ὅσο ἦταν ἐν ζωῇ). Καὶ τῆς εἶπε:

«Μετάνοια, μετάνοια, μετάνοια! Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι πολὺ θυμωμένος.

Δὲν ἔπρεπε οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄνθρωποι νὰ εἴμαστε σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν πνευματικὴν κατάσταση ποὺ βρισκόμαστε.

Ἔρχονται πολὺ μεγάλα κακά, δὲν μπορεῖτε νὰ φανταστεῖτε πόσο... Ἀλλοίμονο τί σᾶς περιμένει! Μετανοεῖστε ὅσο ὑπάρχει καιρὸς.

Νὰ γονατίζετε καὶ νὰ κλαίετε, νὰ ρίξετε δάκρυα μετανοίας μήπως ὁ Χριστὸς μαλακώσει.

Αὐτὸ ἔχει νὰ κάνει καὶ μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ γίνονται στὴν Ἀμερική.

Πολὺς κόσμος θὰ φύγει μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔρχονται, πολὺ κόσμος θὰ φύγει [=θὰ πεθάνει].

Δὲν ἔχετε ἔλεος ἀναμεταξύ σας, δὲν ἔχετε ἔλεος. Εἶστε σκληροί, ὁ ἕνας νὰ φάει τὸν ἄλλον.

Αὐτὰ νὰ τὰ πεῖς καὶ στὸν πνευματικὸ σου, καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους.»

Ἡ κυρία ποὺ εἶδε τὸ ὄραμα ἦταν πνευματικοκόρη τοῦ Γέροντα Ἐφραίμ ἀπὸ παλιά, καὶ εἶχε ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸν Γέροντα μέχρι τῆς τελευτῆς του.

Σημεία Καιρών

Οι Άνθρωποι Καπατήσανε σάν Άδεια Κανάπια, και Προσπαθούν νά Γεμίσουν τόν Ήαυτό τους, Ρίχνοντας Μέσα Ένα Σωρό Σκουπίδια!

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου, «Οἱ Λίγοι Καθυστερημένοι Ανάμεσα στοὺς Σημερινούς Άνθρώπους», συλλογή «Μυστικά Άνθη», ἐκδόσεις Παπαδημητρίου.

Ὅπως ὁ φυλακισμένος ἔχει γυρισμένα τὰ μάτια του κατὰ τὴ στενὴ θυρίδα τῆς φυλακῆς του γιὰ νὰ πάρει λίγη ἐλπίδα ἀπὸ μία μικρὴ ἀχτίνα τοῦ ἡλίου, ἔτσι κι ἐμεῖς φέτος, ὕστερ' ἀπὸ τὴ βαρυχειμωνιά, μὲ τὶς παγωνιές, μὲ τὰ χιόνια, μὲ τὶς βροχές, μὲ τὰ μαῦρα σύννεφα ποὺ καταπλακώνουν ἀκόμα τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα καὶ σφίγγουνε τὴν ψυχὴ μας, περιμένουμε ἀνυπόμονα νὰ δοῦνε τὰ μάτια μας λίγον γαλανὸ οὐρανό, καὶ νὰ χαρεῖ ἡ καρδιά μας τὸ χρυσὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Μὰ ἐκεῖνα τὰ σύννεφα στιβάζονται τόνα ἀπάνω στ' ἄλλο, ἑκατομμύρια σύννεφα, ἴδια μὲ βαρειοὺς βράχους, καὶ μποδίζουνε μὲ πείσμα τὸν ἡλιο νὰ μᾶς δεῖξει τὸ χαροποῖδὸ πρόσωπό του, λες καὶ εἶναι

κακὰ καὶ ζηλόφθονα δαμόνια. Γιὰ μία στιγμή παραμερίζουν κι ἀνοίγει ἓνα μικρὸ παράθυρο σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σκυθρωπὸ καὶ μολυβένιο κάστρο ποὺ κρύβει τὸν οὐρανό, μὰ ὡς νὰ προφτάξει τὸ μάτι νὰ χαρεῖ λίγη γαλανὴ ἐλπίδα, σμίγουνε πάλι σάν μελανὲς κοτρώνες, ποὺ κατρακυλᾶνε καὶ χάνεται μονομιᾶς ἐκεῖνη ἢ μικρὴ γωνιά τοῦ παράδεισου, ποὺ φάνηκε γιὰ μία στιγμή, κι ἀπομένουμε μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα πῶς θὰ τὴν ξαναδοῦμε.

Μὰ περνᾶνε οἱ μέρες καὶ δὲν ἀλλάζει τίποτα. Τὰ ἄσπλαχνα σύννεφα, σκεπάζουνε ἀδιάκοπα τὸν οὐρανό, μέρα - νύχτα, σάν τὰ παπλώματα, ποὺ σκεπάζουνε τὸν ἄρρωστο ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἐλπίδα νὰ δεῖ τὴν ὑγεία του καὶ νὰ τὰ πετάξει ἀπὸ πάνω του.

Αὐτὸ τὸ βορεινὸ θέαμα παρουσιάζει ὁ οὐρανὸς μας τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια καὶ κάθε χρόνο γίνεται χειρότερο. Χάσαμε τὴν παρηγοριὰ ποὺ μᾶς χάριζε ὁ χαρούμενος οὐρανὸς μας. Ἔγινε κι αὐτὸς βαρὺς καὶ καραμουτζωμένος, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι σύμφωνος μὲ ὅλη τὴν κατάσταση τοῦ κόσμου, μὲ τὴν ἄχαρη ζωὴ μας ποὺ τὴ μασᾶνε καὶ τὴν κομματιάζουνε οἱ ἄγριες μασέλες τῆς μηχανῆς, μὲ τὴν σαστιμάρα καὶ μὲ τὴν ταραχὴ ποὺ ἔχει τὸ μυαλό μας, μὲ τὴν ἀγωνία ποὺ ἔχει ἡ καρδιά μας.

Φαγώθηκε ὁ ἄνθρωπος μὲ τὴν καινούργια θρησκεία του, τὴ μηχανικὴ ἐπιστήμη, καὶ τώρα ἀπολαμβάνει τὰ καλὰ τῆς, κι ἀπὸ μέσα του κι ἀπ' ἔξω του. Μὲ τὰ ἀεροπλάνα τὰ λεγόμενα ἀεριωθούμενα, ποὺ κάνουν σάν διαβόλοι, καὶ λιανίζουν τὴν ἀτμόσφαιρα καὶ τὴν κάνουνε κιμά, μὲ τοὺς ἀσύρματους, μὲ τὰ ραντάρ, μὲ τοὺς πύραυλους, καὶ μὲ τ' ἄλλα τὰ διάφορα σατανικὰ ἐφευρήματα, γίνηκε κόλαση ὁ κόσμος, μ' ὄλο ποὺ ἔλεγε ἡ περηφάνειά μας πῶς αὐτὸ θὰ κάνει τὴ γῆ ἓναν παράδεισο. Νά, λοιπόν, ποὺ τὴν ἔκανε παράδεισο, ἀλλὰ ἓναν παράδεισο δίχως φῶς, δίχως χαρὰ, δίχως εἰρήνη, δίχως ἀγάπη, δίχως ἐλπίδα, δίχως ἐμορφιά.

Στὸν φυσικὸ κόσμο ἐξώντωσε τὸν ἡλιο, μὲ τὰ βρωμομανιτάρια ποὺ βγαίνουνε ἀπὸ τὶς ἀτομικὲς μπόμπες καὶ ποὺ ἀνεβαίνουνε στὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ τὸν καπλαντίζουνε μὲ φαρμακεροὺς ἀτμοὺς κι ἀντάρες. Φαρμάκωσε ὅλες τὶς θροφές τ' ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη τοῦ σατανᾶ, τὴ χημεία, φαρμάκωσε τὰ λάχανα, τὰ χόρτα, τὰ δέντρα, τὰ ζῶα, τὰ πουλιά, τὰ ψάρια, ἔτσι ποὺ τὸ κρέας τους νὰ εἶναι ἄρρωστο καὶ νὰ σαπίζει σὲ μία μέρα καὶ νὰ εἶναι ἄνοστο σάν κανένα

λάστιχο. Κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ τρώγει αὐτὰ τὰ κατασκευάσματα, πῶς μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ὑγεία, πῶς νὰ μὴ σαπίσει ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρρώστειες, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἐκφυλιστεῖ; Τ' ἀποτελέσματα αὐτῆς τῆς φοβερῆς παραμόρφωσης ποὺ ἔχει πάθει ὁ φυσικὸς κόσμος, εἶναι ἢ παραμόρφωση ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸ πνεῦμα καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ ποὺ ἀποκορυφώνεται μὲ τὴν τρέλλα ποὺ φανερώνεται

στὶς ἀμέτρητες θεωρίες καὶ στὰ λαμπρὰ ἔργα τῆς τέχνης.

Κυττάξετε γύρω μας, τί κάνουνε οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄνθρωποι στὶς τέχνες, ποὺ ἄλλη φορὰ χαροποιούσανε καὶ ξεκουράζανε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γι' αὐτὸ κι οἱ Ἕλληνες λέγανε «τέχνη ἐστὶ τέρψις» καὶ «ἀτυχήσασι τέχνη παρηγορία». Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χάος τῆς ἀπελπισίας ποὺ κατάφερε νὰ κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν ἀπόμεινε τίποτα ποὺ νὰ μὴν ἔχει ἀπάνω του τὴ φριχτὴ σφραγίδα τῆς τρέλλας καὶ τῆς φρίκης. Ἡ πολιτικὴ κατάσταση εἶναι μαύρη καὶ σκοτεινὴ, ἢ γνώση, ἢ ἐπιστήμη κι οἱ διάφορες θεωρίες τους εἶναι κι αὐτὲς σάν βραχνάδες, τὸ ἴδιο καὶ χειρότερο εἶναι καὶ ἡ τέχνη, ποὺ ἦταν ἢ τελευταῖα ἐλπίδα καὶ παρηγοριὰ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Καμαρώσετε τί «ἔργα» παρουσιάζουν οἱ



«τέχνες» σήμερα. Είναι να φράζει κανένας τὰ μάτια του. Όλα αὐτὰ τὰ πασαλείμματα ἀπάνω στους μουσαμάδες, πὸν λέγονται «ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς», ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια πὸν παρουσιάζονται γιὰ «ἔργα γλυπτικῆς» σὲ κάνουν ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ πὸν φανερώνουν αὐτὰ τὰ τερατουργήματα. Γιατί, ἓνα χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ καιροῦ μας, πὸν ὑπάρχει μέσα σὲ ὅλα, εἶναι ἡ ἀδιαντροπιὰ. Μπορεῖ κανένας πολὺ σωστὰ νὰ πεῖ γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ μας πὸς εἶναι ἡ ἐποχὴ τῆς τρέλλας καὶ τῆς ἀδιαντροπιᾶς. Γιατί, ἂν δὲν εἶναι κανένας ἀδιάντροπος, πὸς θὰ κάνει τέτοια «ἔργα», σὰν κι αὐτὰ πὸν εἶπαμε παραπάνω;

Ἄλλὰ καὶ τί ἄλλο ἀπὸ ἀδιαντροπιὰ φανερώνουν καὶ τὰ μᾶτς μὲ τὴ θεὰ μπάλλα, πὸν τὴν κλωτσᾶνε ἓνα σωρὸ χασομέρηδες, γιὰ νὰ διασκεδάσουνε τὶς μυριάδες «φίλαθλους», πὸν δὲν εὐρήκαν ἄλλο τίποτα γιὰ νὰ νιώσουν ἀγωνία καὶ χτυποκάρδι, ἀλλὰ μόνο τὴ «μπάλλα»; Καὶ γίνονται σοβαρὰ συνέδρια γιὰ τὴ μπαλλα, μὲ ἀντιπροσωπεῖες, μὲ συζητήσεις, μὲ ἀνακοινωθέντα, μὲ δημοσιογράφους. Σὲ τέτοιο δυσθεώρητο ὕψος δὲν ἔφταξε ποτὲ ἡ ἀνοησία.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι καταντήσανε σὰν ἄδεια κανάτια, καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ γεμίσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ρίχνοντας μέσα ἓνα σωρὸ σκουπίδια, μπάλλες, ἐκθέσεις μὲ τερατουργήματα, ὀμιλίες καὶ ἀερολογίες, καλλιστεῖα, πὸν μετριεῖται ἡ ἔμορφιὰ μὲ τὴ μεζούρα, καρνάβαλους ἠλίθιους, συλλόγους λογιῆς-λογῆς μὲ γεῦματα καὶ μὲ σοβαρὲς συζητήσεις γιὰ τὸν ἴσκιο τοῦ γαϊδάρου, συνδέσμους ἀφιερωμένους στοὺς ἀποθεωμένους ἄνδρας τῆς Εὐρώπης κι ἓνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια.

Αὐτὴ, μὲ μιὰ ματιὰ, εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος σήμερα, πὸν νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθεῖ! Ποῦ νὰ βρεῖ κανένας καταφύγιο;

Ἐκείνους τοὺς λίγους πὸν δὲν εἶναι ἐνθουσιασμένοι ἀπὸ «τὰ θαύματα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας», οἱ ἄλλοι (αὐτὴ ἡ μερμηγκιά πὸν ἔκανε αὐτὸν τὸν παράδεισο καὶ πὸν τὸν χαίρεται), τοὺς λέγει τρελλοὺς, ὅπως θὰ λέγανε παλαβοὺς κάποιους ἀνθρώπους μὲ σωστὰ μυαλὰ οἱ ἄρρωστοι τοῦ φρενοκομείου, βλέποντάς τους ἀνάμεσα τους.

Δόξα στὸν Θεό, πὸν ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα κάποιον καταφύγιο γιὰ μᾶς πὸν δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε «τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας». Δόξα στὸν Θεὸ πὸν ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμα βουνά, χωράφια καὶ κάποιον τόποι πὸν δὲν τοὺς ἐξήρανε αὐτὴ ἡ φυλλοξήρα πὸν λέγεται πολιτισμός.

Τράβα, λοιπόν, μακρὰ ἀπὸ τὶς σφηγγοφωλιές πὸν τὶς λένε πολιτεῖες, γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσεις ἀπὸ τὸ μαράζι, γιὰ νὰ νοιώσεις ἀπάνω σου τὴ ζωογόνα πνοὴ τοῦ θεοῦ. Ἄλλὰ, αὐτὸ δὲν φτάνει. Πρέπει νὰ ἔχεις μάτια ἀγνὰ γιὰ νὰ

βλέπεις, αὐτὰ ἀγνὰ γιὰ ν' ἀκοῦς, καρδιὰ ἀγνὴ γιὰ νὰ αἰσθάνεσαι, κι ὄχι χαλασμένη. Γιατί ἀπὸ τὶς πολιτεῖες τρέχουνε γιὰ νὰ φύγουνε, ὅποτε μπορέσουνε, κι ἐκεῖνοι πὸν κανχιοῦνται πὸς ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι θαυμάσια, μὰ, φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τὶς σφηγγοφωλιές, κουβαλᾶνε μαζί τους καὶ τὴν παραμορφωμένη ψυχὴ τους. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώθουνε τὴν ἔμορφιὰ ἐνὸς βουνοῦ, παρὰ μόνο σὰν ὄρειβάτες, μ' ἄλλα λόγια δὲν νοιώθουνε τίποτα, μῆτε ἓνα δέντρο εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ χαροῦνε, μῆτε τὸ μυστήριον πὸν ἔχει τὸ κύμα, μῆτε τὸ θρησκευτικὸ πανηγύρι τῶν λουλουδιῶν. Κι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ αἰτία πὸν τρέχουνε σὰν τρελλοὶ μὲ τ' αὐτοκίνητα γιὰ νὰ μὴ δοῦνε τίποτα, νὰ μὴν αἰσθανθοῦνε τίποτα, νὰ μὴν ἀγαπήσουνε τίποτα. Αὐτὸ τὸ λένε «φυσιολατρία!» Ὅπως καταντήσανε τὰ πάντα, οἱ ιδέες, οἱ τέχνες, οἱ θρησκείες, ἔτσι κατάντησε κι ἡ φυσιολατρία.

Ἐμεῖς ὅμως «οἱ καθυστερημένοι», περπατᾶμε καὶ χαιρόμαστε σὰν βλέπομε ἓνα κομμάτι γαλανὸν οὐρανὸ, ἀνάμεσα στὰ σύννεφα, καὶ κανένα χελιδόνι πὸν πετᾶ ἀπὸ πάνω μας καὶ πὸν θαρρεῖς πὸς θὰ τρυπώσει μέσα στὸ γαλάζιο ἐκεῖνο παραθύρι. Νοιώθουμε τὴ μυρουδιά πὸν βγάζουνε τ' ἀγριολούλουδα καὶ τ' ἀγιασμένα χορτάρια, καθὼς καὶ τὸ χῶμα τῆς βλογημένης γῆς μας. Ἀναστηνόμαστε ἀπὸ τ' ἀγεράκι πὸν φυσᾶ, σὰν νᾶμαστε βαρυποινίτες πὸν δραπετέψαμε ἀπὸ τὴ φυλακὴ, καὶ δοξάζουμε τὸν Κύριον πὸν δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε τὴν ἐξαίσια ἐποχὴ μας καὶ τὰ καλὰ τῆς...



Ἀδύνατο νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὶς εἰς βάρος μας διαβολές.
Τὶς διαβολές καὶ τὶς κατηγορίες κανένας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποφύγει. Εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ζεῖς στὴν κοινωνία, νὰ δραστηριοποιεῖσαι καὶ νὰ μὴ βρεθοῦν κακοπροαίρετοι καὶ κακόψυχοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ σὲ βυθίσουν στὴ θλίψη.

Ἡ κατάσταση ἀντιμετωπίζεται δύσκολα καὶ ἡ ἀντιπαράθεση μὲ τοὺς συκοφάντες εἶναι ἄκαρπη. Εὐκολότερα γίνονται τὰ πράγματα, ὅταν κάποιος εἶναι ἀθῶος καὶ δὲν δίνει ἀφορμές. Μένει ἀπαθής, ἀφοῦ ἔχει τὴ συν εἶδησή του ἡσυχῆ, καὶ δὲν λαμβάνει ὑπόψη του τί λένε οἱ κατήγοροί του, ἀλλὰ τί λέει ὁ Θεὸς γι' αὐτόν. Σχετικὰ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος τόνιζε: «Εἶμαι πεπεισμένος ὅτι εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πῶ ἀδύνατο, νὰ ἀποφύγει κανεὶς τὶς διαβολές. Τὸ νὰ μὴ παρέχουμε ὅμως ἐμεῖς οἱ ἴδιοι καμιά λαβὴ οὔτε σὲ ἐκεῖνους, πὸν ψιλοκοσκινίζουν τὰ πράγματα οὔτε σὲ ἐκεῖνους, πὸν παραμονεύουν γιὰ τὰ ὀλισθήματά μας καὶ δυνατὸ εἶναι καὶ γνώρισμα ἀποτελεῖ ἐκεῖνων, πὸν περνοῦν τὴ ζωὴ τους μὲ σύνεση, ἔχοντας ὡς σκοπὸ τὴν εὐσέβεια».

Μεγάλου Βασιλείου

Λεπροὶ καὶ Θεία Κοινωνία

«Παπά, στὸ τέλος θὰ μὲ κοινωνήσεις καὶ ἐσὺ μετὰ θὰ κάμεις τὴν κατάλυση καὶ δὲν θὰ φοβηθεῖς τὴ λέπρα μου!»

Ἀπὸ τὶς ιστοσελίδες «Ρωμαίικο Ὀδοιπορικό», <http://www.orthodoxia-ellhnismos.gr/>.



Ἔγινε πάρα πολλὸς λόγος γιὰ τὸ νησί τῆς Σπιναλόγκα.

Ἔνα ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα ἱστορικά στοιχεία τὰ ὁποῖα καὶ πληροφοροῦμαστε εἶναι

ὅτι οἱ χανσενικοὶ ποὺ κατοικοῦσαν στὴ Σπιναλόγκα ἦταν ὀργισμένοι μὲ τὸν Θεό, γιὰ τὸ λόγο ὅτι ἡ ἀσθένειά τους ἦταν μία μεγάλη καὶ ἀφόρητη δοκιμασία. Ἔνας Γεραπετρίτης παπᾶς τόλμησε νὰ τοὺς ἐπισκεφθεῖ κάποτε καὶ νὰ λειτουργήσει στὸν Ἅγιο Παντελεήμονα, ποὺ ὑπῆρχε καὶ ρήμαζε στὸ νησί, συντροφιά μὲ τοὺς νέους τοῦ κατοίκους. Λένε πὼς στὴν πρώτη λειτουργία δὲν πάτησε ψυχή.

Οἱ λεπροὶ ἄκουγαν πεισιμωμένοι ἀπὸ τὰ κελιά τους τὴν ψαλμωδία, κι ἄλλοτε τὴν σκέπαζαν μὲ τὰ βογκητὰ τους κι ἄλλοτε μὲ τὶς κατάρες τους.

Ὁ ἱερέας ὅμως ξαναπῆγε. Στὴν δευτέρη τούτη ἐπίσκεψη ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς πρόβαλε θαρρετὰ στὸ κατῶφλι τοῦ ναοῦ.

Παπά, θὰ κάτσω στὴν λειτουργία σου μ' ἕναν ὄρο ὅμως. Στὸ τέλος θὰ μὲ κοινωνήσεις. Κι ἂν ὁ Θεός σου εἶναι τόσο Παντοδύναμος, ἐσὺ μετὰ θὰ κάμεις τὴν κατάλυση καὶ δὲν θὰ φοβηθεῖς τὴ λέπρα μου.

Ὁ ἱερέας ἔγνευσε συγκαταβατικά. Στὰ κοντινὰ κελιά ἀκούστηκε ἡ κουβέντα κι ἄρχισαν νὰ μαζεύονται διάφοροι στὸ πλάι τοῦ ναοῦ, ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἦταν ἕνα μικρὸ χάλασμα, μὲ λιγοστὴ θέα στὸ ἱερό. Παραμόνευσαν οἱ χανσενικοὶ στὸ τέλος τῆς λειτουργίας κι εἶδαν τὸν παπὰ δακρυσμένο καὶ γονατιστὸ στὴν Ἱερὴ Πρόθεση νὰ κάνει τὴν κατάλυση.

Πέρασε μῆνας. Οἱ χανσενικοὶ τὸν περιέμεναν. Πίστευαν πὼς θὰ ῥθει τούτη τὴ φορὰ ὡς ἀσθενὴς κι ὄχι ὡς ἱερέας. Ὅμως ὁ παπᾶς ἐπέστρεψε ὑγιὴς καὶ ροδαλὸς κι ἄρχισε μὲ ἠθικὸ ἀναπτρωμένο νὰ χτυπᾶ τὴν καμπάνα τοῦ παλιοῦ ναΐσκου. Ἐκτοτε καὶ γιὰ δέκα τουλάχιστον χρόνια ἡ Σπιναλόγκα εἶχε τὸν ἱερέα της. Οἱ χανσενικοὶ ἀναστύλωσαν μόνοι τους τὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ συνάμα ἀναστύλωσαν καὶ τὴν πίστη τους. Κοινωνοῦσαν τακτικά καὶ πάντα κρυφοκοίταζαν τὸν παπὰ τους τὴν ὥρα τῆς κατάλυσης, γιὰ νὰ βεβαιωθοῦν πὼς τὸ «θαῦμα τῆς Σπιναλόγκα» συνέβαινε ξανὰ καὶ ξανά.

Τὸ 1957, μὲ τὴν ἀνακάλυψη τῶν ἀντιβιοτικῶν καὶ τὴν ἴαση τῶν λεπρῶν, τὸ λεπροκομεῖο ἔκλεισε καὶ τὸ

νησί ἐρημώθηκε. Μόνο ὁ ἱερέας ἔμεινε στὸ νησί ὡς τὸ 1962, γιὰ νὰ μνημονεύει τοὺς λεπροὺς μέχρι 5 χρόνια μετὰ τὸ θάνατό τους. Ἰδοῦ, λοιπόν, ἕνας σύγχρονος ἀθόρυβος ἥρωας, ποὺ δὲν τιμήθηκε γιὰ τὸ ἔργο του ἀπὸ κανέναν, καὶ ποὺ—ἂν προσέξατε—δὲν παραθέσαμε τὸ ὄνομά του γιὰτὶ ἀπλὰ δὲν τὸ γνωρίζουμε! Τὸ γνωρίζει ὅμως—σίγουρα—ὁ Θεός! Κι αὐτὸ μᾶς ἀρκεῖ!



Πόδια, χέρια στὴν δουλειά νὰ δίνετε, καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε. Ἐννοῶ νὰ μὴ δίνετε καρδιά στὰ ὑλικά πράγματα.

Εἶναι μερικοί, πού δίνονται ὀλόκληροι στὰ ὑλικά. Περνοῦν ὅλη τὴν ἡμέρα μὲ τὸ νὰ ἀσχολοῦνται πὼς θὰ κάνουν καλά μιὰ δουλειά καὶ δὲν σκέφτονται καθόλου τὸν Θεό. Νὰ μὴ φθάνουμε ἐκεῖ. Νὰ χρησιμοποιῆται τὰ χέρια καὶ τὰ πόδια στὴ δουλειά, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴ ἀφήνετε τὸν νοῦ σας νὰ ξεφύγει ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Νὰ μὴ δίνεται ὅλο τὸ εἶναι σας, ὅλο τὸν δυναμισμό μαζί μὲ τὴν καρδιά σας, στὰ ὑλικά. Ἔτσι γίνεται κανεὶς εἰδωλολάτρης. Ὅσο μπορεῖτε στὶς δουλειές καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε χέρια, μυαλό νὰ δίνετε. Καρδιά νὰ μὴ δίνετε σέ χαμένα, ἄχρηστα πράγματα. Γιατί μετὰ πὼς θὰ σκιρτήση ἡ καρδιά γιὰ τὸν Χριστό; Νὰ ἀξιοποιήτε τὴν καρδιά σας νὰ μὴ τὴν σπαταλᾶτε.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

Πὼς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπομακρύνουμε τοὺς ἄλλους ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδωλολατρία, χωρὶς νὰ ἀπομακρύνουμε τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας ἀπὸ αὐτῆ; Ὅταν δὲν πείθομε τὸν ἑαυτό μας, πὼς θὰ πείσομε τοὺς ἄλλους; Πὼς θὰ μπορέσει νὰ διορθώσει ἄλλους ἐκεῖνος, πού δὲν φροντίζει οὔτε γιὰ τὴν δική του ψυχή;

Γιατί μὴ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν προσκυνεῖς χρυσὸ εἶδωλο, μὴ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν κάνεις αὐτὰ πού προστάζει ὁ χρυσός; Γιατί πραγματικά ὑπάρχουν διάφοροι τρόποι εἰδωλολατρίας ἄλλος θεωρεῖ κύριο τὸν πλοῦτο, ἄλλος θεωρεῖ θεὸ τὴν κοιλιά, ἐνῶ ἄλλος κάποια ἄλλη ἐπιθυμία πῶς φοβερή. Θὰ μοῦ πεῖς ὅτι δὲν θυσιάζεις σέ βόδια, ὅπως οἱ Ἕλληνες; Κατασφάζεις ὅμως τὴν δική σου ψυχή, πού εἶναι πρᾶγμα πολὺ πῶς φοβερό. Ἀλλὰ δὲν γονατίζεις καὶ δὲν προσκυνεῖς; Μὲ μεγαλύτερη ὅμως ὑπακοή κάνεις ὅλα, πού θὰ προστάξουν καὶ ἡ κοιλιά σου καὶ ὁ πλοῦτος καὶ ἡ τυραννία τῆς ἐπιθυμίας. Ἀλλὰ, ἐάν δὲν κατασκευάζεις εἶδωλα ἐσὺ, ὅπως οἱ Ἕλληνες, ὑποκύπτεις ὅμως μὲ πολλή προθυμία στὰ ἴδια πάθη, κάνοντας τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ μέλη πόρνης καὶ βυθίζοντας τὸν ἑαυτό σου στὶς ἄλλες παρανομίες.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος

Ὁρθόδοξα Μαργαριτάρια

Παραθέτουμε μερικά πολύτιμα κείμενα για τις δύσκολες μέρες που ὄλοι μας διανύουμε.

Τέσσερα Πράγματα Δημιουργούν Ἀμαρτωλούς Ἐρεθισμούς στο σῶμα. Ποιά Εἶναι Αὐτά;

Σιμωνοπετρίτης Ἀρχ. Αἰμιλιανός, Λόγοι Ἀσκητικοί», Ἐρμηνεία στὸν Ἀββᾶ Ἡσαΐα.

Τὸ κοιμηθῆναι εἰς κόρον, ὅταν κοιμᾶται κανεὶς πολὺ.

Πράγματι, μὲ τὸν πολὺ ὕπνο θρέφεται ἡ σάρκα καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ζήσει καθαρὴ ζωὴ. Ἀποκτᾶ τότε μία νωθρότητα ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ χάνει τὸ ἄοκνο, χάνει τὴν ἀγρυπνία, χάνει τὴν μελέτη. Ὁ πολὺς ὕπνος βλάπτει κάθε ἄνθρωπο ποὺ θέλει νὰ ἐπιτύχει κάτι στὴν ζωὴ του.

Καὶ φαγεῖν εἰς πλησμονήν, καὶ τὸ νὰ τρώγει τόσο, ὥστε νὰ χορταίνει.

Ἡ ἐντολὴ τῶν Πατέρων εἶναι νὰ τρώγει κανεὶς τόσο μόνον, ὅσο χρειάζεται για νὰ συνεχίσει τὴν ζωὴ του, καὶ πάντοτε νὰ πεινᾷ. Ἡ πείνα εἶναι στοχεῖο μνήμης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀντιθέτως, ἡ πλησμονὴ τῆς γαστρὸς εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὁποῖος ζεῖ χωρὶς Θεόν, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι νωθρὸς στὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ του καὶ δὲν ἔχει πνευματικὴ ἢ ἄλλη δημιουργία. Δὲν ζεῖ φυσικὰ καὶ ὀμαλά, γι' αὐτὸ προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἀναπληρώσει τὴν φυσικότητα τῆς ζωῆς του μὲ τὸ πολὺ φαγητό. Ἰδιαιτέρα, ἂν τὸ φαγητὸ μᾶς ἀρέσει, τότε ἐκεῖ ὑπάρχει τέλεια ἁμαρτία.

Καὶ ἀπὸ εὐτραπείας.

Εὐτραπελία εἶναι ὄχι ἀπλῶς νὰ λέγει κανεὶς ἀνάρμοστους λόγους, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἶναι καὶ εὐκόλος στὸ νὰ τρέπεται σὲ λόγους. Ἄνθρωπος ἐπιρροεπὴς στοὺς λόγους, καὶ ἂν δὲν εἶναι ἐν πορνικαῖς διαθέσεσι, ἔστω καὶ καλυμμένες κάτω ἀπὸ μύρια καλύμματα, θὰ περιπέσει ὀπωσδήποτε. Διότι τὸ ἐπιρροεπὴς στοὺς λόγους εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ βασανιστικὰ στοιχεῖα για τὴν ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ θέλουν νὰ ἀφιερωθοῦν στὸν Θεὸν καὶ ἀποκαλύπτει τὴν σκληρότητα τῆς καρδιάς καὶ τὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅταν ἔχεις ἐνώπιόν σου τὴν αἴσθησι κάποιου μεγάλου, δὲν μιᾶς, μόνον τὸν βλέπεις καὶ ἀκοῦς ἢ ἀπαντᾷς σὲ ὅ,τι σὲ ρωτᾷ. Τὸ ὅτι ὀμιλῶ, φανερῶνει ὅτι δὲν ἔχω μπροστά μου τὸ ὄραμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, δὲν ἔχω προοπτικὴ ποὺ μὲ ὀδηγεῖ στὸν οὐρανό. Τὰ λόγια εἶναι σημάδια ποὺ κρύβουν ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες, ἐσωτερικὲς καὶ ἐξωτερικὲς, διότι καὶ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ καρδιά καὶ ἡ κρίσι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου συγχύζονται. Μιλώντας ἢ ἀκούγοντας ἄλλους νὰ μιλοῦν, συμφύρεσαι μὲ ὄλον τὸν κόσμον, τὸν ὁποῖον φέρνεις μπροστά σου ἢ σοῦ τὸν φέρνουν. Ἐρημώνει τότε ἡ ψυχὴ σου, ξεγυμνώνεται

τὸ πνεῦμα σου, καὶ μένει πλέον ἢ σάρκα ἀνίκανη, νὰ ἀντισταθμίσει τὸ καλὸ, ὅποτε τί θὰ κάνει; Θὰ πέσει σὲ ὅλες τὶς δυσωδίες.

Καὶ ἀπὸ κοσμήσεως.

Κόσμησις εἶναι ἡ φροντίδα καὶ ἡ περιποίηση τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας, τοῦ περιβάλλοντός μας, οἰουδήποτε πράγματός μας, τὸ νὰ θέλωμε νὰ γίνονται ὅλα ὁμορφα. Ἰδιαιτέρα ἡ κόσμησις τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας—τὸ πλύσιμο, τὸ χτένισμα, τὸ περιποιημένο ροῦχο—, ὅσο καὶ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι μᾶς τὴν ἐπιβάλλει ὁ χρόνος ἢ ὁ χῶρος, στὴν πραγματικότητα δείχνει ἐσωτερικὴ κοσμικότητα.

Τὸ ὑπερβολικὸ λοιπὸν φαγητό, ὁ ὑπερβολικὸς ὕπνος, ἡ εὐτραπελία καὶ ἡ κόσμησις πληθύνουν τὴν πορνεία ἐν τῷ σῶματι.

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Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὡς Διάδοχος καὶ Εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, Πρέπει νὰ Ζῆ ὡς Μάρτυς καὶ Ὁμολογητής!

Γερομονάχου Γρηγορίου. Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἡ Ἱερωσύνη» Ἱερὸν Κουτλουμουσιανὸν Κελλίον Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου, Ἁγιον Ὀρος.

Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὡς διάδοχος καὶ εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πρέπει νὰ ζῆ ὡς μάρτυς καὶ ὁμολογητής, καὶ νὰ εἶναι για τοὺς πιστοὺς κανὼν πίστεως, δηλαδὴ ἀφ' ἑνὸς νὰ γνωρίζη καὶ νὰ ἀποδέχεται τὴν πίστι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἀφ' ἑτέρου νὰ τὴν ὁμολογῇ καὶ νὰ τὴν διδάσκῃ μὲ ἔργο καὶ λόγο στὸ ποίμνιό του. Αὐτὴ τὴν πίστι ἀναλαμβάνει νὰ διαφυλάξῃ ὁ χειροτονοῦμενος ὡς κόρη ὀφθαλμοῦ, καὶ αὐτὸ ὁμολογεῖ ἐνώπιον τῆς εὐχαριστιακῆς συνάξεως.

Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος Μάρτυς καὶ Ὁμολογητής, ὁ μαρτυρήσας ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου τὴν καλὴν ὁμολογίαν. Μὲ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος φέρει στὸν μαθητὴ του Τιμόθεο ὡς παράδειγμα τὸν Χριστό, καὶ τὸν παρακινεῖ σὲ ἀγῶνες: «*Μαρτύρησε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ἔγινε πρωτομάρτυς. Χρωστοῦμε λοιπὸν κι ἐμεῖς, οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Ἀπόστολοι, νὰ Τὸν μιμούμαστε καὶ νὰ μαρτυροῦμε τὴν θεότητα Του*».

Ἡ ὁμολογία ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ μένη ὁ Θεὸς στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ὁμολογοῦντος, καὶ ἀντιστρόφως νὰ μένη αὐτὸς στὸν Θεό, κατὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου: «*Ὅς ἂν ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Θεὸς ἐν αὐτῷ μένει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ Θεῷ*». Συμπεραίνεται λοιπὸν ὅτι τὸ νὰ ὁμολογῇ κάποιος μὲ τὸ στόμα για νὰ πιστεῦῃ μὲ τὴν καρδιά ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι ἀληθινὰ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἢ πίστι καὶ ἡ ὁμολογία αὐτὴ τοῦ προξενεῖ ὀπωσδήποτε ἓνα πολὺ μεγάλο στεφάνι καὶ ἓναν ὑπερφυσικὸ μισθό: τὴν

ενοίκηση, δηλαδή, και διαμονή του Θεού στην καρδιά του πιστεύοντος και όμολογούντος, και αντιστρόφως τὸ νὰ μένη αὐτὸς στὸν Θεό».

Σε παλαιότερους χρόνους, τὴν στιγμή αὐτὴ γινόταν ἡ ἐξέταση τοῦ ὑποψηφίου γιὰ τὸ ὑγιὲς τῆς πίστεως ἀπὸ τρεῖς Ἀρχιερεῖς ξεχωριστά, πρὶν τὴν ἐπικύρωση τῆς ἐκλογῆς. Ὅταν κάθε Ἀρχιερεὺς λάμβανε ἱκανοποιητικὴ ἀπάντηση, εὐλογοῦσε τὸν ὑποψήφιο λέγοντας: «*Ἡ χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος εἶη μετὰ σου.*» Ἡ ἐπικύρωση τῆς ἐκλογῆς γίνεται μετὰ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀφοῦ καὶ ἡ πίστις τοῦ ὁμολογεῖ ὁ ὑποψήφιος εἶναι καρπὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Διότι «*χρηιάζεται ἡ χορήγηση τοῦ Ἁγίου πνεύματος, γιὰ νὰ ἀνεβῆ κάνεις στὸ ὕψος τῆς πίστεως*».

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος συμβούλευε τὸν ἐπίσκοπο Τιμόθεο νὰ ἔχη πίστιν καὶ ἀγαθὴν συνείδησιν, «*ἦν τινες ἀπωσάμενοι περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἐνανάγησαν.*» Δηλαδή: Νὰ ἔχῃς πίστις, ὥστε νὰ ὀρθοτομῆς τὸν λόγο τῆς ἀληθείας. Νὰ ἔχῃς καὶ ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις, δηλαδή νὰ ἀποκτήσῃς ἀκατηγόρητη ζωὴ. Ἐπειδὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀκατηγόρητη ζωὴ γεννιέται καὶ ἡ ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις. Αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγαθὴ συνείδησις ἔχασαν μερικοὶ, καὶ ἐν συνέχειᾳ ἔχασαν καὶ τὴν πίστιν... Διότι **ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ζοῦν ζωὴ ἀκάθαρτη καὶ ἀμαρτωλὴ, γιὰ νὰ μὴν βασανίζονται ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο τῆς μελλούσης κολάσεως, πείθουν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους ὅτι ὅλες οἱ διδασκαλίαι τῶν Χριστιανῶν εἶναι ψέμματα καὶ ἔτσι ναυαγοῦν.**

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**Ἀπὸ Ἐναν Ἁγιον Κληρικὸ, Χιλιάδες Ἦμποροῦν
νὰ Ὁφεληθοῦν καὶ νὰ Σωθοῦν, Ὅπως καὶ
ἀπὸ Ἐναν πού δὲν Ἀγωνίζεται, Χιλιάδες νὰ
Ζημιωθοῦν καὶ νὰ Ἀφανισθοῦν**

Ὁσίου Γέροντος Γερωνίου Αἰγίνης.

Εἰς Διάκονο: Πρόσεχε! Εἶσαι καλὸς τώρα, ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἄγγελοι πέφτουν. Νὰ κλείνεσαι στὸ δωμάτιό σου, νὰ μελετᾷς, νὰ προσεύχεσαι. Ἄν δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη, νὰ μὴ βγαίνεις ἔξω. «*Κάθου εἰς τὸ κελλίον σου*», λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ «*καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ σὲ διδάξῃ τὰ πάντα*». Ἡ Ὅσια Μαρία ἡ Αἰγύπτια, τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη, ἔζησε εἰς τὴν ἔρημον καὶ πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπου δὲν εἶδε. Ξέρεις τί ἔπαθε; Ἀγίασε!

Εἶσαι Ἱερεὺς; Νὰ προσέχῃς, δὲν ἀνήκεις εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου. Εἶσαι σὰν μία βελόνα στὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νᾶσαι καλὸς, νὰ μὴν εἶσαι σὰ τὴ σκουριασμένη βελόνα πού δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τὴ δουλειά της. Διὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου, δηλ. ἀδυναμίες, πάθη κλπ. νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχεις. Τὸ ρᾶσον, ἡ συνθήκη σου εἶναι μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, νὰ σὲ συγκλονίζει καὶ νὰ λές, τί θέλει τοῦτο, τί μοῦ λέγει τοῦτο; Ναὶ ν' ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ νὰ ἐργάζομαι εἰς ὅτι με ἔταξε.

Εἰς Κληρικὸ: Ὅσο μπορεῖς ἀπόφευγε τὰ ἔξω. Κλείσου στὸ δωμάτιό σου. Σφίξε τὸν νοῦν σου ν' ἀνοίξει νὰ δεῖς πνευματικὸν φῶς. Νὰ λέγεις πότε νὰ φθάσεις στὸ δωμάτιό σου καὶ νὰ κλειστῆς. Μελέτησε, προσευχήσου. Ἄν δὲν θὰ εἶσαι ἐνισχυμένος, πῶς θὰ ἐνισχύσεις ἄλλους; Καὶ ὁ κόσμος τρέχει, ζητᾷ τὴν δίψα τῆς ψυχῆς νὰ ἱκανοποιήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀπὸ τὰ ὄργανά της, ἀπὸ τὸ ρᾶσο. Τί θὰ δώσεις ἂν δὲν ἔχεις καὶ πῶς θὰ ἔχεις ἂν δὲν ζητήσεις ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν; Νὰ κοπιᾷς στὴν προσευχὴ καὶ μελέτῃ καὶ θὰ ἐνισχύεσαι.

Ὁ κληρικὸς πρέπει σὰν τὰ πολυόμματα νὰ εἶναι, δηλ. ἀπὸ παντοῦ μάτια νὰ ἔχει, νὰ εἶναι ἀκέραιος, δυνατὸς στὸν νοῦν, σοφός, ἅγιος.

Ἐνας εὐλογημένος (ιερέας) ἄρχιζε τὸ βράδυ προσευχὴ καὶ μέχρι τὸ πρωὶ δὲν χόρταινε. Στὴν ἔκκλησία, στὰ «*Τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν Σῶν*» ἔκλαιγε τόσο πολὺ, πού δὲν συνέχιζε γιὰ ὥρα καὶ ὅταν τὸν ρωτούσαμε, μᾶς ἔλεγε: «*Πῶς νὰ συνεχίσω πού βλέπω τόσους ἀγγέλους γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θυσιαστήριο καὶ μέσα στὸ Ποτήριο τὸν Κύριό μας νὰ λάμπει.*»

Ὁ Γέροντάς μου, ὁ Μισαήλ, πρὶν νὰ ἀνατεῖλει ὁ ἥλιος, ἀνέβαινε στὸ βουνό. Μετὰ τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ ἡλίου σήκωνε τὰ χέρια του καὶ ἔτσι ἔμενε μέχρι πού βασίλευε. Οὔτε ἐκάθητο, οὔτε τὸ ἕνα, οὔτε τὸ ἄλλο. Καὶ τὸ βράδυ τὰ ροῦχα του ἔσταζαν ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ δάκρυα. Εἶχε ζῆλο καὶ ἐπιμέλεια.

Ποτὲ μὴ κοινωνήσεις ἄνθρωπον, ἂν δὲν ἀκούσης τὸ ὄνομά του. Ἐπίσης νὰ προσέχεις νὰ παίρνεις ὀλίγον Μαργαρίτη, ὄχι μεγάλον τεμάχιο.

Τὸν Ἱεροκήρυκα νὰ τὸν ἀκοῦτε, ἀλλὰ μὴ ζυγώνετε πολὺ. Ὅλοι ἄνθρωποι εἴμεθα. Πιθανὸν νὰ διαπιστώσετε ἀδυναμίες καὶ νὰ πεῖτε ἄλλα λείει καὶ ἄλλα πρᾶττει.

Ἡ ἐλεεινὴ ἀσθένεια τῶν ἱερέων εἶναι ἡ φιλαργυρία. Ἀλλοίμονον! Ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς εἶναι φιλάργυρος, τότε θὰ πέσει καὶ σὲ πολλὰ ἄλλα.

Ὁ διάβολος παντοῖους τρόπους μεταχειρίζεται γιὰ νὰ βλάψῃ τὸν κληρικὸ, διότι ἀπὸ ἕναν ἅγιον κληρικὸ, χιλιάδες Ἦμποροῦν νὰ ὠφεληθοῦν καὶ νὰ σωθοῦν, ὅπως καὶ ἀπὸ ἕναν πού δὲν ἀγωνίζεται, χιλιάδες νὰ ζημιωθοῦν καὶ ἀφανισθοῦν.



Εἰς περιστάσεις κατὰ τὰς ὁποίας περιφρονεῖται καὶ ὑβρίζεται ἡ Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξος Πίστις ἡμῶν ἐπιτρέπεται ἔλεγχος ἀκόμη καὶ θυμὸς δίκαιος δικαιοῦτος, ἀπαγορεύεται δὲ ἡ σιωπὴ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἔλεγχος νὰ γίνεται μετὰ διάκρισιν καὶ σύνεσιν ὄχι μετὰ ταραχὴν καὶ θυμὸν ὑπερβολικόν, νὰ γίνεται μετὰ θυμὸν Θεϊκόν!

Γέρον Φιλόθεος Ζερβακος

Ὁ Πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Πλάνης κατὰ τὸν Ὅσιο Σιλουανὸ τὸν Ἀθωνίτη

Αρχιμ. Χρυσοστόμου Μαϊδώνη.

Στὴν πλάνη πέφτει κάποιος εἴτε ἀπὸ ἀπειρία εἴτε ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια. Καὶ ἂν εἶναι ἀπὸ ἀπειρία, ὁ Κύριος θεραπεύει γρήγορα αὐτὸν ποὺ πλανήθηκε, ἂν ὅμως εἶναι ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια, τότε θὰ πάσχει γιὰ πολὺν καιρὸ ἢ ψυχῇ, ὥσπου μάθει τὴν ταπείνωση, καὶ τότε θὰ θεραπευθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο.

Οἱ Κίνδυνοι

α. Οἱ Λογισμοὶ καὶ τὰ Δαιμόνια

Ὅπως οἱ ἄνθρωποι μπαίνουν στὸ σπίτι καὶ βγαίνουν, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ λογισμοὶ ἔρχονται ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ πάλι μπορεῖ νὰ φύγουν, ἂν δὲν τοὺς δεχόμαστε.

Ἄν ὁ λογισμὸς σου σὲ λέει κλέψε, καὶ σὺ ὑπακούσεις, δίνεις μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο στὸ δαιμόνιο ἐξουσία ἐπάνω σου. Ἄν ὁ λογισμὸς σου λέει φάγε πολὺ, ὥσπου νὰ χορτάσεις, καὶ σὺ φᾶς πολὺ, τότε πάλι σὲ ἐξουσιάζει τὸ δαιμόνιο. Κι ἔτσι, ἂν ὁ λογισμὸς κάθε πάθους σὲ νικᾷ, θὰ καταστήσεις κατοικία δαιμόνων.

β. Τὸ Ἐπικίνδυνο Φῶς

Ἄν δεῖς φῶς μέσα σου ἢ γύρω σου, μὴν πιστέψεις σ' αὐτὸ ἂν δὲν ἔχεις συγχρόνως κατάνυξη γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀγάπη καὶ γιὰ τὸν πλησίον. Μὴν φοβηθεῖς ὅμως ἀλλὰ ταπεινώσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο θὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ.

Ἄν δεῖς κάποιο ὄραμα ἢ εἰκόνα ἢ ὄνειρο, μὴν τὸ ἐμπιστεύεσαι, γιατί ἂν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, θὰ σὲ φωτίσει γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Κύριος. Ψυχῇ, ποὺ δὲν γεύθηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔρχεται τὸ ὄραμα. Ὁ ἐχθρὸς δίνει στὴν ψυχῇ μία «γλυκεῖα αἴσθηση» ἀνακατεμένη με κενοδοξία, καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ γίνεται φανερὴ ἢ πλάνη.

Οἱ Πατέρες λένε ὅτι, ὅταν ἡ ὄραση εἶναι ἐχθρική, ἢ ψυχῇ αἰσθάνεται σύγχυση ἢ φόβο. Αὐτό, ὅμως, συμβαίνει μόνο στὴν ταπεινὴ ψυχῇ ποὺ θεωρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτὸ της ἀνάξιο γιὰ δράση. Ο κενοδόξος, ὅμως, μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν αἰσθανθεῖ οὔτε φόβο οὔτε σύγχυση, γιατί ἐπιθυμεῖ τίς ὁράσεις καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἄξιο, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸν ἐξαπατᾷ εὐκόλα ὁ ἐχθρὸς. Τὰ οὐράνια γνωρίζονται μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ τὰ ἐπίγεια μὲ τὴ φυσικὴ διάνοια. Πλανᾶται ὅποιος ἐπιχειρήσει νὰ γνωρίσει τὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὸν φυσικὸ νοῦ, μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζεται μόνο μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα.

Ἡ Ἀντιμετώπιση

Ὁ Ἅγιος Σιλουανὸς ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν στάση τῶν Πατέρων στὴν θεραπεία τῆς ἀσθένειας τῆς πλάνης. Μιλᾷ ὅμως καὶ ἀπὸ προσωπικὴ πείρα. Μετάνοια, ταπείνωση, ἐξομολόγηση στὸν πνευματικὸ πατέρα

εἶναι τὰ ἀποτελεσματικὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ τῶν πειρασμῶν, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ παρασύρουν σὲ πλάνη.

Λέει γιὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς πλάνης:

α. Ἡ Μετάνοια

Ἄν ἀρχίσεις μὲ τὴν πρέπουσα μετάνοια, τότε οἱ δαίμονες θὰ ἀρχίσουν νὰ τρέμουν καὶ θ' ἀναγκαστοῦν νὰ φύγουν.

β. Ἡ Ταπείνωση

Νὰ πολεμᾷς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς μὲ τὴν ταπείνωση.

Ὅταν δεῖς, ὅτι κάποιος ἄλλος νοῦς παλεύει μὲ τὸ νοῦ σου, ταπεινώσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου καὶ θὰ πάψει ὁ πόλεμος.

Ἄν σοῦ συμβεῖ νὰ δεῖς δαιμόνια, μὴ φοβηθεῖς, ἀλλὰ ταπεινώσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου, καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια θὰ ἐξαφανιστοῦν. Ἄν ὅμως σὲ πιάσει ὁ φόβος, δὲν θὰ ἀποφύγεις κάποια βλάβη. Νὰ εἶσαι ἀνδρείος. Νὰ θυμᾶσαι ὅτι ὁ Κύριος σὲ βλέπει, ἂν στηρίζεις τὴν ἐλπίδα σου σὲ Αὐτόν.

Γιὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσει, ὅμως, ἢ ψυχῇ ἀνάπαυση ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια, πρέπει νὰ ταπεινώνεται καὶ νὰ λέει: Εἶμαι χειρότερη ἀπ' ὅλους, εἶμαι πιὸ ἄθλια ἀπὸ κάθε κτῆνος καὶ ἀπὸ κάθε θηρίο.

γ. Ὁ Πνευματικὸς

Ἄν βλέπεις μὲ τὸ νοῦ σου δαιμόνια, ταπεινώσου καὶ προσπάθησε νὰ μὴ βλέπεις καὶ τρέξε ὅσο πιὸ γρήγορα γίνεται στὸν πνευματικὸ σου γέροντα, στὸν ὁποῖο παραδόθηκες. Πές του τα ὅλα, καὶ τότε ὁ Κύριος θὰ σὲ ἐλεήσει καὶ θὰ σωθεῖς ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη. Ἄν, ὅμως, νομίζεις ὅτι ἐσὺ γνωρίζεις περισσότερα γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ καὶ πάψεις νὰ τοῦ λὲς τί σοῦ συμβαίνει, ἐξαιτίας αὐτῆς τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας, θὰ παραχωρηθεῖ ἀναπόφευκτα κάποιος πειρασμὸς, γιὰ νὰ σὲ συνετίσει.

Πέφτουμε στὴν πλάνη, ὅταν νομίζουμε ὅτι εἴμαστε πιὸ φρόνιμοι καὶ ἔμπειροι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ μας πατέρα. Ἔτσι σκέφτηκα κι ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν ἀπειρία μου καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὑπέφερα. Κι εὐχαριστῶ ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά μου τὸν Θεό, γιατί μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ μὲ ταπεινώσε καὶ μὲ νουθέτησε καὶ δὲν ἀπέσυρε τὸ ἔλεός Του ἀπὸ μένα.

Καὶ τώρα σκέφτομαι ὅτι, χωρὶς ἐξομολόγηση στὸν πνευματικὸ δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη, γιατί στὸν πνευματικὸ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεὸς τὴ χάρη τοῦ δεσμεῖν καὶ λύειν.

Ἡ παρουσίαση τῆς πλάνης ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅσιο Σιλουανὸ εἶναι μία ἀκριβὴς ἀκτινογραφία τοῦ πλανημένου, τῆς ἀρρώστιας τῆς πλάνης καὶ τῆς θεραπείας της, ὠφέλιμη γιὰ ὅσους ἀγωνίζονται νὰ ἀπελευθερώσουν ἐξαρτημένους ἀπὸ τὸ «πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης» (Α' Ἰωάν. 4:6) καὶ ἐνεργοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν «ἐνέργεια τῆς πλάνης» (Β' Θεσσ. 2:11).

Ὁ Δρόμος τῆς Ἀνεξικακίας

Πρεσβ. Διονύσιος Τάτσης.

Ἡ ἄρετὴ τῆς ἀνεξικακίας ἀπελευθερώνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ξεριζώνει ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ του τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς ἐκδίκησης ἐκείνων, ποὺ μὲ τὸν ἓνα ἢ τὸν ἄλλο τρόπο τὸν ἔχουν βλάψει. Παρόλο ποὺ ἡ μνήμη του τὸν παρακινεῖ σὲ ἀντεπίθεση, πολλὲς φορὲς καὶ μὲ καθυστέρηση ἐτῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀνεξικακία ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς ὑπέρβασης καὶ τῆς θεοφιλοῦς ἀντιμετώπισης τῶν ἐχθρῶν του. Ἡ ἀνεξικακία πρωτίστως εἶναι μίμηση Θεοῦ. Ὅπως ὁ Θεὸς ἀνατέλλει τὸν ἥλιο ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους, ἔτσι καὶ αὐτὸς ὅλους τοὺς βλέπει μὲ τὸ ἴδιο μάτι. Καὶ τοὺς φίλους καὶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς.

Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς δὲν λησμονεῖ μόνο τὶς εἰς βάρος του πράξεις τῶν ἐχθρῶν του, ἀλλὰ μένει ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀπέναντι σὲ ἐκείνους, ποὺ ὄφειλαν νὰ τοῦ κάνουν τὸ καλὸ, ἀλλὰ ἀδιαφόρησαν. Τὸ δεῦτερο εἶναι ἐπίσης δύσκολο. Ἡ ἀπουσία τοῦ καλοῦ ἐκ μέρους τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ ἰσοδυναμεῖ μὲ ἐχθρικὴ πρᾶξη. Αὐτὸ πολλὲς φορὲς δὲν τὸ προσέχουμε ἢ δὲν τὸ θεωροῦμε ἁμαρτία. Καὶ ὁμως ἡ ἀπουσία τοῦ καλοῦ πληγώνει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ κακοῦ.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι συνήθως ἀποκοιμίζονται μὲ τὴν ἰδέα ὅτι δὲν ἔχουν κάτι κακό, ἐνῶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶχαν κάνει πολλὰ καλὰ καὶ νὰ στέκονται στὸ πλευρὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν. Ἡ ἀνεξικακία πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἐξ ἀμελείας εἶναι δυσκολότερη ἀπ' ὅ,τι πρὸς τοὺς φανεροὺς ἐχθροὺς καὶ τοῦτο γιατί ἐκεῖνοι γνωρίζουν τὰ χριστιανικά τους καθήκοντα, ἔχουν χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ, βλέπουν τὸν πόνο τῶν ἀδελφῶν τους, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐκδηλώνουν τὴν ἐμπρακτὴ ἀγάπη τους. Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι πολὺ ἐνοχλητικό.

Τὸ μεγαλύτερο παράδειγμα ἀνεξικακίας μᾶς τὸ ἔδωσε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ τῆς σταύρωσής Του ἔλεγε «Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσι». Ζητοῦσε ἀπὸ τὸν οὐράνιο Πατέρα Του νὰ συγχωρήσει τοὺς σκληροὺς καὶ ἀμετανόητους σταυρωτῆς Του. Κάτι παρόμοιο ἔκανε καὶ ὁ Πρωτομάρτυς Στέφανος ἀκολουθώντας τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Κυρίου. Ὅταν οἱ Μάρτυρες κατηγορίας ἐξαγριωμένοι καὶ τρίζοντας τὰ δόντια τους τὸν λιθοβολοῦσαν, αὐτὸς γονατιστὸς προσευχόταν μὲ δυνατὴ φωνὴ καὶ ἔλεγε «Κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ταύτην».

Τὴν ἀνεξικακία δίδαξε ὁ Χριστὸς καταργώντας τὴν παλιὰ ἐντολὴ «ὄφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὄφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος»: «Ἐγὼ σᾶς λέω νὰ μὴ ἀντιστέκεστε στὸν κακὸ ἄνθρωπο· ἀλλὰ ἂν κάποιος σὲ χτυπήσει στὸ δεξιὸ μάγουλο, γύρισέ του καὶ τὸ ἄλλο». Καὶ συμπλήρωσε: «Ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθρούς σας, εὐεργετεῖτε ὅσους σᾶς μισοῦν· δίνετε εὐχὲς σ' ὅσους σᾶς δίνουν κατάρες,

προσεύχεστε γι' αὐτούς, ποὺ σᾶς κακομεταχειρίζονται». Ἡγάπη καὶ

ἡ εὐεργεσία πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθροὺς καταπολεμεῖ τὴν μνησικακία καὶ ἐνισχύει τὴν ἀνεξικακία. Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ δυναμικὸ θὰ ἔλεγα τρόπο πρέπει νὰ

ἀντιμετωπίζονται ὅλοι ὅσοι μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν, μᾶς βλάπτουν καὶ μᾶς διώκουν. Αὐτὸ ἀναφέρει καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στοὺς Ρωμαίους: «*Νὰ προσεύχεστε γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῶν διωκτῶν σας, νὰ ζητᾶτε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ γι' αὐτούς καὶ ὄχι νὰ τοὺς καταριέστε*». Ὁ Χριστιανὸς τὸ κακὸ πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἀντιμετωπίζει μὲ πνευματικὸ τρόπο, χωρὶς πνεῦμα ἐκδίκησης: Νὰ λησμονεῖ, νὰ ἀγαπᾶ καὶ νὰ εὐεργετῆ γενικὰ ὅλους τοὺς συνανθρώπους του.

Ἰδιαίτερα μᾶς ἐντυπωσιάζει ἡ ἀνεξικακία τῶν Ἀποστόλων, οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸ ἔργο τους συνάντησαν τὶς ἀντιδράσεις σκληρῶν καὶ κακοπροαίρετων ἀνθρώπων. Ἡ στάση τους ἦταν ἀξιοθαύμαστη. «Μέχρι αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα πεινάμε, διψᾶμε, γυρνᾶμε μὲ κουρέλια, ξυλοδαρμένοι, ἀπὸ τόπο σὲ τόπο χωρὶς σπίτι καὶ μοχθοῦμε νὰ ζήσουμε δουλεύοντας μὲ τὰ ἴδια μας τὰ χέρια».

Στοὺς ἐμπαιγμοὺς ἀπαντᾶμε μὲ καλὰ λόγια, στοὺς διωγμοὺς μὲ ὑπομονή, στὶς συκοφαντίες μὲ λόγια φιλικὰ. Καταντήσαμε σὰν τὰ σκουπίδια ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, μέχρι αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα θεωροῦμαστε τὰ ἀποβράσματα τῆς κοινωνίας».

Ὁ Ἰερὸς Χρυσόστομος χαρακτηρίζει τὴν ἀνεξικακία ὡς μητέρα ὅλων τῶν ἀγαθῶν. Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς εἶναι ἀνώτερος ἄνθρωπος. Ἡ συμπεριφορὰ του δὲν ἔχει καμιά σχέση μὲ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ καὶ νοοτροπία τῶν κοσμικῶν. Ὁ Ἅγιος ἀπευθυνόμενος στὸν Χριστιανὸ ἀναφέρει: «*Κι ἂν λοιπὸν κάποιος σὲ βρῖσει, ὑπόφερε μὲ γενναιοῦτητα γιατί ἔβρισε τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ ὄχι ἐσένα. Κι ἂν σὲ χτυπήσει ἀκόμα, μὴ ἀπλώσεις τὸ χέρι, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ ἀνταποδώσεις γιατί αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ δέχεται τὸ χτύπημα χτυπώντας ἐσένα μὲ τὸ χέρι, χτυπάει τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ τὸ θυμὸ καὶ ἀποκτάει ἀπὸ ὅλους πολὺ κακὴ φήμη*».

Στὴν ἄγρια συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ ἄλλου ὁ ἀληθινὸς χριστιανὸς μένει ψύχραιμος καὶ πράος. Τοῦ εἶναι ἀδιανόητο νὰ ἀντιδράσει μὲ θυμὸ.

Τὴν ἐπιθετικὴ συμπεριφορὰ του τὴ βλέπει ὡς ναυάγιο, στὸ ὁποῖο ὁ ἴδιος δὲν θέλει νὰ ὀδηγηθεῖ. Προτιμᾷ νὰ μένει στὴν ξηρὰ, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸ θυμὸ καὶ τὴν ἐκδίκηση.

Ὁ ἀνεξικακὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι πάντα ἐπιεικὴς, ἥπιος, ὑπομονετικὸς καὶ συγκρατημένος. Δὲν θέλει νὰ ἐπιδεινώνει δυσάρεστες καταστάσεις οὔτε καὶ ἐπιδιώκει τὴν κοσμικὴ δικαιοσύνη. Ἡ ὅποια ἀνταπόδοση εἶναι μελλοντικὴ ὑπόθεση τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄχι δική του.

ARE GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN CANADA FANATICS?

By "Orthodox Reflections" (<https://orthodoxreflections.com/>), a collaborative effort by converts to the Orthodox Christian faith.

Indeed, why won't Orthodox Bishops, not just in California, but in all of North America, fight for the Church, for Truth, for Christ? After all, did they not commit their whole lives to the Church, to Truth and to Christ?

Not only are they not fighting, but some of them, to justify their passivity, such as Archbishop Sotirios of Canada, even attack the faithful who are fighting by labeling them as "fanatics". During his Greek sermon on August 24th at the Divine Liturgy that celebrated the feast day of St. Kosmas Aitolos at the Canadian Monastery in King City that bears the saint's name, Archbishop Sotirios came down hard on the modern day "fanatics" in the Greek Orthodox Church by stating that St. Kosmas, despite his fiery faith, was never a fanatic. He goes on to say that fanaticism stems from arrogance and pride; and pride is the well-spring of every type of sin.

According to the dictionary, fanaticism is extreme devotion or zeal. Fanaticism often begins with a sudden, dramatic shift in world-view, often due to an overwhelmingly disturbing experience that is not readily explainable using "ordinary" or familiar frameworks. This sounds very much like St. Paul's Damascus experience which certainly changed his world view. Afterwards, St. Paul certainly displayed extreme devotion and zeal in serving Christ by almost single-handedly Christianizing the entire Greco-Roman Gentile world. Was St. Paul a fanatic?

In Revelations 3:15-16, Christ says to the Church in Laodicea, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." "Hot" and "cold" are metaphors for a passionate commitment to or against Christ. Obviously, Christ wants us to be passionately committed to Him. Isn't passionate commitment the same thing as extreme devotion or zeal? Is someone who is passionately committed to Christ a fanatic?

When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, He said, "You must love the Lord your God

with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." Then he added, "The second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus made it simple by breaking down the whole law into two to-dos, but just because something is simple doesn't mean it's easy. Jesus showed us how difficult it was to live these laws when He, Himself, loved His Father with all His heart, soul, mind and strength and when He loved us, not as Himself, but more than Himself, by dying a most violent and shameful death on the cross. This act of love was pretty extreme. In fact, nothing is more extreme than the Creator dying for His creation. So, when Jesus did that, was He a fanatic?

Furthermore, Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow Him. Is He inviting us to be fanatics too? Well, if a

fanatic, according to the definition, is someone with extreme devotion or zeal, then the answer must be yes, He is inviting us to be that way and He actually prefers us that way. Those of us who do love Christ with all our heart, soul and mind, or at least try to, have no problem being fanatics for Him; but Archbishop Sotirios has a big problem with it. His problem with it is big enough to arbitrarily redefine a fanatic as someone with extreme arrogance or pride, even though there is no such description in the definition of the word.

Of course, someone who has extreme devotion or zeal can be a fanatic for good, or a fanatic for evil. I can certainly understand

how a fanatic for evil can have arrogance or pride, but if St. Paul and Christ, Himself, were fanatics for good (by definition of the word), is Archbishop Sotirios characterizing St. Paul and Christ (just to name a few Christians who gave their lives for us and for the faith) as arrogant and proud?

In his sermon on August 24th, Archbishop Sotirios, praises those Greeks who gave their lives to end the tyranny of the Turks in order to support freedom, Hellenism and the Orthodox Church; but interestingly, he does not label them as fanatics. Did these people who willingly died not have extreme devotion and zeal for what they were fighting for? Of course they did! But if they were not fanatics, what were they?

Very simply, when someone has extreme devotion or zeal which is to our benefit, we call them a hero. However, if their extreme devotion or zeal is not to our advantage, we call



them a fanatic! “Fanatic” is a dirty modern-day word that implies disruptive, destructive, unreasonable, and extreme; but that is not what the word actually means.

Because our extreme devotion and zeal to Christ is preventing us from doing the bidding of Archbishop Sotirios and taking Holy Communion with multiple spoons; because we are not obedient to this heresy, and instead, we are obedient to Christ, it suits his Eminence to bully us into obedience by brandishing his multiple spoons while calling us fanatics; or to shame us into obedience by calling us arrogant.

He then continues his masterful mind game by chastising our so-called arrogance. He refers to the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee, and compares us to the Pharisee who puts himself and his self-righteousness above everyone else, to the point that God should be obligated to him for being so good, rather than the Pharisee being obligated to God. These are his words.

It is sad beyond any words that his Eminence, has arbitrarily imposed multiple communion spoons so easily without any attempt to clarify any laws against Holy Communion, (which do not exist), or to pacify any local public health authorities. It is horrifying to hear him preach that St. Kosmas would partake of the multiple spoons if he were alive today. It is disappointing that he persists in misinterpreting the canon regarding the vessels people would bring to the church to receive the Body of Christ, by which manner he continues to deliberately confuse the faithful. It is frightening that he has dared to elevate himself above the synod of our Patriarch; above the instructions of the Patriarch, himself, not to deviate from the single spoon; above the Canadian national and state laws which do not interfere with our communion methods, thereby creating his own communion laws; above past Holy Ecumenical Synods; above Holy Tradition; above the words of St. Paul who said, “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thessalonians 2:15); and even above Christ Himself, by trying to convince us that although the Body and Blood of our Lord cannot transmit disease, the Holy Lavida and the Holy Chalice can contaminate us even while coated by the Holy Eucharist – something which has not happened during any plague in 2000 years!

Who, then, is the arrogant Pharisee? Who is the disruptive, destructive, unreasonable and extreme fanatic who has more confidence in his own misplaced judgement, rather than the power of God in the Holy Eucharist? If, rather than imposing the multiple spoons, Archbishop Sotirios had spent half as much of his time and energy emulating the Greek freedom fighters whom he admires so much, by fighting for the Orthodox Church, for Truth and for Christ, then everyone would be united as one family, no one would call him ANAXIOS and everyone would call him “father,”

as he says he wishes to be called in his sermon. I feel certain that he would like very much to be called an AXIOS father, but one must first be AXIOS and behave as a father to be called as such.

Someone should tell Archbishop Sotirios that an AXIOS father fights for the Church and not against the Church. Someone should remind him that the Church is the Body of Christ and the Body of Christ is US, the laity. He should therefore, fight for US. An AXIOS Orthodox father becomes the ultimate example of obedience and humility and does not try to impose these virtues on others in order to control and manipulate them, because these are demonic methods that do not work on those who have put on Christ. Those who have put on Christ know right from wrong and cannot be fooled by Machiavellian manipulations and lies. A true Bishop teaches by example and not by force. He teaches with love and not with insults.

It seems that his Eminence and his Bishop peers who will not fight for the Church, all need a refreshing example of a Bishop who does fight. This example will be provided very soon. I hope to God it makes a difference and brings them back from their indifference and their apostasy.

May the prayers of our most Holy Theotokos save us.



Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Mt 5:6). It is nothing bodily, nothing earthly, that this hunger, this thirst seeks for; but it desires to be satiated with the good food of righteousness, and wants to be admitted to all the deepest mysteries, and be filled with the Lord Himself.

Happy the mind that craves this food and is eager for such drink; which it certainly would not seek for if it had never tasted of its sweetness. But hearing the Prophet’s spirit saying to him: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.* (Pss 34:8); it has received some portion of sweetness from on high, and blazed out into love of the purest pleasure, so that spurning all things temporal, it is seized with the utmost eagerness for eating and drinking righteousness, and grasps the truth of that first commandment which says: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.* (Mk 12:30); since to love God is nothing else but to love righteousness.

St. Leo the Great

ON YOGA

Based on some recent inquiries we have received on the practice of "Yoga," we are including two pertinent articles that can answer questions which our readers may have. An additional article was published in the Jan-Feb 2020 issue of "Orthodox Heritage."



IS YOGA EXERCISE?

An encyclical (no. 14) issued on June 4, 2013 by Metropolitan Markos of Chios on Christians who practice Yoga and whether or not it is merely a physical exercise. He basically explains that the Hindu religious practice of yoga was established for the sole purpose of entering into a spiritual state, and never had anything to do with exercise until a few decades ago when Hindu yogis explained it this way when they were trying to win converts in the West.

To the sacred clergy and pious people of our sacred Metropolis.

My brethren,

A key feature of our time is the confusion observed in various aspects of human life. A characteristic example of this spiritual and existential confusion is the fact that yoga is fundamentally a religious technique of Hinduism, advertised in our country, in Europe and in the United States as an exercise-fitness solution which is offered to release us from the numerous problems stemming from a stressful lifestyle.

But what is yoga? The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit word *yuj* which means "to unite," meaning the union of the individual soul with the impersonal Absolute One of Hinduism (see P. Schreiner, *Yoga: Wörterbuch des Christentums*, 1995, p. 1376). This union is considered a liberation and redemption of mankind from karma, that is, from the consequences that result from our choices and actions in supposedly previous lives. Moreover, concerning the term yoga, we must stress that it is used as a qualifying term of one of the six classical orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy (see H. Baer, "Yoga," in the *Lexikon der Sekten, Sohdergruppen und Weltanschauungen*, 7th Ed, 2001, pp. 1166-1174).

But is yoga exercise? Can one isolate the practical exercise from its religious content and background? Can one ignore the purpose for which it is used? Unquestionably no. And what about the claim of various centers, institutes, schools, groups, journals and gyms, that present it as lacking a religious nature, alleging it to be a "scientific" psychosomatic practice, or a practice for a simple existence and spiritual

self-knowledge? Without doubt these assertions are inaccurate. They oftentimes misinform and confuse using an extremely attractive vocabulary (see R. Hauth, (Hrsg), *Kompaktlexikon Religionen*, 1998, p. 366).

On the contrary, yoga is a religious systematic theory, technique and method that evolves in stages and practices, one of which is meditation, which leads those who use it, with the guidance of a teacher (guru), to a singular life joined to the impersonal Absolute of Hinduism. In this way a person is redeemed and atones for the errors and mistakes made during the source of all supposedly previous incarnations.

From the above, therefore, we observe that the view of yoga simply as an exercise is incorrect. And this 1) because it is a fundamental feature of the Hindu system, 2) it cannot be stripped of its religious character according to the conditions of the content and purpose of exercise, 3) it is intrinsically linked to the anti-Christian concept of reincarnation, and 4) because it constitutes a humanistic effort towards redemption through techniques and exercises.

Why are the various techniques of yoga dangerous? The answer is given to us in an article on yoga from an authoritative encyclopedia Δομή. It says there: "It is known that the practice of yoga creates for the individual not entirely physiological properties—and parapsychological—because it reverses certain physical and mental functioning." (Δομή, vol. 4, p. 199).

To conclude this brief offering of ours on whether or not yoga is exercise, we must again remind all of the obvious. The value of our identity as Orthodox Christians is incompatible with the use of Hindu religious practices in any aspect of our lives.

The salvation of man which is freely housed within the Church, is the work and offering of the love and grace of our Christ. For us does Paul say with all gravity: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (Gal 3:26-27), and: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor 6:14-15).

With warm fatherly prayers,

+Bp. Markos

The Metropolitan of Chios, Psara and Oinousses



PRACTICING YOGA CONSTITUTES BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

By the Orthodox-minded and courageous Metropolitan Seraphim, of Piraeus (Greece), an encyclical to all of his priests, with the instruction that it is to be read from the pulpit. This was issued in response to the United Nations declaring June 21st to be International Yoga Day. [NOTE: This U. N. proclamation took place in 2014. In specific, "... recognizing its universal appeal, on 11 December 2014, the United Nations proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga by resolution 69/131," Ed.]

Within the framework of respect for religious freedom, (which is constitutionally established in Greece) and of pastoral responsibility towards avoidance of religious syncretism, on the occasion of the recent establishment of June 21st as "international yoga day" by the UN and the related announcement of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece which reminds the Christian laity that: "Yoga constitutes a fundamental chapter of the Hindu religion, it has a multitude of schools, branches, practices, and trends, and it DOES NOT CONSTITUTE some kind of gymnastics and therefore yoga is completely incompatible with our Orthodox Christian faith and it does not have any place in the life of Christians."

The Holy Metropolis of Piraeus, due to the existence of yoga centers within its geographical boundaries, additionally states that:

1. Etymologically, yoga comes from the Sanskrit "yuj" which means "union" of man with the impersonal Absolute One of Hinduism and other eastern religions. Therefore, yoga is not a simple and innocent method of relaxation, it is not a method of stress relief, it is not a method of bodily well being, as advertised, but a level of Hinduistic contemplation which is connected with the anti-Christian theory of reincarnation and the demonic deities Visnu, Krishna and Shiva. The world recently learned, from international news agencies, that in India there was a human sacrifice by decapitation of a five year old child to the demonic pseudo goddess Kali of the Hinduistic pantheon. In Hinduistic Nepal, a few days prior to the devastating earthquake of 7.8 Richter, there was religious crime of sacrificing 250,000 animals to the Hindu pseudo-gods, which are really demons.

In the various yoga schools, we notice the direct dependence of the practicing people to the Hindu teacher (guru or yogi) who guides them and changes their Orthodox name. The various yoga techniques have no relation with science, on the contrary they have characteristics of magic. The practice of yoga is dangerous for soul and body.

2. The "new age of Aquarius" which wages war on our One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, our Orthodoxy, is flooding our country with the promotion of yoga to deceive,

with their demonic dogma, that all religions are similar paths that lead to the same purpose.

3. In the various stages of yoga, the practicing one abandons every action, will and motion with specific demonic techniques. That way he/she is isolated from the external world, and thinks that he/she turns towards his/her internal world, and tries to cut off any other sensation.

While in the first stages, the one practicing demonic yoga sustains some elements of consciousness. He/she loses consciousness in the later stages, does not sense color, smell, sound, touch, himself or any other person. This is what yoga considers "liberation."

During yoga exercises, the practicing person may experience paranormal phenomena of demonic origin such as telepathy, meteorism, communication with evil spirits, etc. All this confirms that the areas of parapsychology, yoga, and—in general—the various forms of contemplation that support each other, are based on occultism or demonic possession.

We call all Orthodox Christians, and especially the youth, to resist the ideological callings of the New World Order, to connect with their parish and their priests so that they can learn Orthodox asceticism and spirituality.

The practice of yoga for Orthodox Christians is incompatible with the teachings and dogmas of our Faith, as it constitutes: denial of the Orthodox Faith, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and it leads to demonic possession.

With warm paternal wishes,

The Metropolitan

O Peiraios Seraphim



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 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 the 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 theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble; and God fills it with divine consolation.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON REPENTANCE

From: "Repentance and Confession," by Hieromonk Gregorios, translated by Stelios Zarganes.

Repentance is man's return to God. It is a change-of-heart in the *nous* from the darkness of sin to the light of Christ. The beginning of this journey is "the awareness of our errors, which is a great opportunity for us to attract divine mercy. This is why the Prophet David says to God: *Have mercy upon me... For I am conscious of my iniquity.* (Pss 50:1:3)." (St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily for the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul* 28:12). We acknowledge that we are responsible for our condition, and we humbly seek God's mercy.

The repentant soul sheds heartfelt tears and offers fervent supplication to the benevolent Christ: *Bow yourself down to the groanings of my heart.* (Orthros of Holy Wednesday, *Doxastikon of the Aposticha*, trans. by Arch. Ephrem Lash). Subsequently, man experiences the magnitude of divine forbearance and, justifiably, wonder and awe arise in his soul: *Who can search out the multitude of my sins and the depths of your judgments, my Savior, savior of souls?* (Orthros of Holy Wednesday, *Doxastikon of the Aposticha*, trans. by Arch. Ephrem Lash).

This article speaks about repentance, the healing of the wounds of sin, and about holy Confession, the Sacrament through which man's repentance is accomplished. Particular emphasis is placed on preparation for the Sacrament, as well as on the fruits of repentance that accompany it.

It is the author's humble prayer that the words of the God-bearing Fathers will help us all experience the miracle of repentance so that we may savor, from this day forward, the resurrection of our soul and the new life in Christ.

Repentance is Medicine

Holy Baptism is man's rebirth into Christ. However, since we are wounded by sin after our Baptism, the Lord offers us the medicine of repentance. "Sin is the wound and repentance the medicine. As wounds and medicine are to the body, so sins and repentance are to the soul." (St. John Chrysostom, *On Repentance*, 8:2). All of us, without exception, need the healing effect of repentance: "The medicine of repentance is beneficial for all. Since nobody

is free of sin, it is clear that everyone is in need of repentance." (Ibid., *On the Repentance of the Ninevites*).

The medicine of repentance is available to all of us, we only have to ask for it. It cures every spiritual illness, no matter how grave: "Let no one despair, because the medicine of repentance is potent." Because this treatment is effected by the benevolent Lord "there is no sin that does not surrender and retreat in the face of the strength of repentance or, rather, before the power of the power of Jesus."

The painless treatment applied by Christ is a gift that restores health quickly. The Lord grants medicine for wounds according to the zeal and disposition of the penitent. The soul that is heavily wounded by sin, begs the Lord: *Heal the wound of my soul, Lord!* (*Service of Preparation for Holy Communion, Ode. 4*, trans. Arch. Ephrem

Lash). And the Lord, seeing its repentance, heals it immediately saying: *Behold, you have become well. Sin no more...* (Jn 5:14).

The Beginning of Repentance

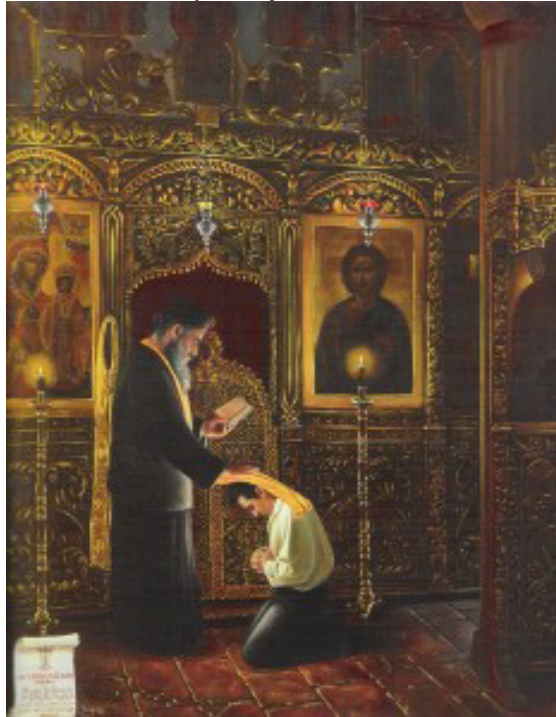
When a man lives in sin he is not in his right mind. In order to repent, he must first come to his senses. Consciousness of one's sins is the starting point for the return to the benevolent Father.

In our lives we often see how our loving God, in His prescient wisdom, leads us to consciousness of sin and to repentance. There are countless ways used by God to bring us to this awareness: some misfortune with our health, an accident, an encounter with a man of God, or a book that we happen upon.

One of the dangers we face after becoming aware of our spiritual condition is **despair**, however, our unshakable hope in God's mercy protects us. No matter the number, or the severity of our sins, they cannot prevail over God's compassion. "Even if someone falls into mortal sin, as long as he turns away from it wholeheartedly, abstains from it, and returns to the Lord in deed and truth, he may have courage and great hope that he shall not fail to obtain eternal life and salvation." (St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily on the Sunday of the Forefathers*, 57:11).

The decision to repent follows an awareness of one's sin. This is the critical point in man's journey: now he decides if he will remain in the darkness of sin or return to God.

God, through the mouths of the prophets, calls all men to return to His love, not superficially, but with heartfelt



repentance: *Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.* (Joel 2:12-13).

God desires man's return and salvation, but not under duress because He respects his freedom.

How does the Benevolent Father Receive us?

The Parable of the Prodigal Son describes how God's love works to draw all those who have sinned near to Him again.

The prodigal son left the compassionate Father and traveled to a far country. The Father's love, however, reaches as "far" as his beloved child had gone: *But while he was still at a distance, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. He ran, and embraced his son, and kissed him.* (Lk 15:13, 20) The charitable Father does not wait for the arrival of His child, but while he is still at a distance, He runs to receive him.

The compassionate Father received the prodigal "with open arms...because he was a father and not a judge. Dancing and banquets and feasts were arranged and the whole household was merry and joyful...The elder son was angered with these things, but the Father cajoled him gently, saying: 'When you must save the one who is lost, it is not the time for judging, but rather for loving-kindness and pardon...And even if he should have been punished, he was sufficiently punished while living in that foreign country...You are looking at a brother, not a stranger. He has returned to his father, and his father cannot remember anything of the past. Better yet, he remembers only the things that arouse in him sympathy, mercy, affection and fatherly compassion.' This is why the Father did not allude to what the prodigal had done, but what he had suffered. He did not remember that he had squandered His wealth, but instead that he had fallen victim to countless misfortunes." (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Repentance*). The older brother was thinking in accordance with the laws of human justice, but the benevolent Father was acting according to His compassionate fatherly heart.

The holy Fathers emphasize that "God in His loving goodness receives and loves those who repent." (St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourses*, 10:10-11). St. Basil the Great says: "The Father stands and waits for your return from delusion. You only have to come back, and while you are yet far off, He will run to you, fall on your neck and embrace and kiss you lovingly, now that your soul is already cleansed by repentance. And He shall clothe the soul, which has stripped off the former man and his acts, with the first robe... He shall place a ring on his hands... and shoes on the feet that have returned

from the evil road to the way of the Gospel of peace. He shall announce a day of delight and joy to those who are His own, Angels and men, and will celebrate your salvation in every possible way." (St. Basil the Great, *Letter to a Fallen Virgin*, 46:6).

This heavenly joy for the penitent's return is the dominant element in the parables of the lost sheep, of the lost drachma and of the prodigal son. The good Shepherd carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing! *Coming home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'* (Lk. 15:5-6) In all three parables the Lord assures us *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* (Lk 15:10)



There was a devout scholar from Antioch who pestered a hermit, urging him to receive him and make him a monk. The old man said to him, "If you want me to receive you, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor according to the Lord's commandment, and then I shall receive you." Therefore, he went away and acted accordingly. After this the hermit said to him, "You have another precept to keep, that you not speak." He took heed and for five years did not speak. Some people began to praise him, and his Abba said to him, "It is not good for you to be here, so I will send you to a coenobium in Egypt," and he sent him off. When he sent him, the hermit failed to say whether he was to speak or not to speak, so he continued to obey the command and did not speak.

The abbot who received him, seeking a test to determine whether or not he was mute, sent him on an errand while the river was in flood, so that he would be forced to say, "I cannot cross it." The abbot sent a brother after him see what he did. As he approached the river, he knelt down, being unable to cross, and behold, a crocodile came and took him up and bore him across to the other side. When he had performed the errand and returned to the river, the crocodile again bore him across. The brother who had been sent after him, having come along and seen this, told the abbot and the brothers and they were astonished.

It happened that some time later he died, and the abbot sent a message to the old man who had sent him, saying, "That man you sent to me may not have been able to speak, but he was like an angel of God."

The hermit then replied, saying, "It is not that he was unable to speak, but obeying the command which I gave him at the outset, he remained silent." And they all marveled and gave glory to God.

From *Leimonarion* (The Spiritual Meadow)

THE MYSTERY OF INTEGRITY

By Fr. Nectarios Trevino, an archpriest at Fr. Nectarios formerly served at the Nativity of Our Lord Church, located in Manassas, VA, but after 16 years, he left this parish (that is under the Ecumenical Patriarchate and because of its illegal actions in the Ukraine), and was officially accepted into ROCOR by its ruling bishop, His Eminence, Metropolitan Hilarion, and initially attached to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Washington, D.C. A former Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Air Force, Fr. Nectarios is a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center (Juris Doctor) and has honorably served his country's military. He is currently serving the Holy Innocents & St. Nina ROCOR parish in Bristow, VA.



Humanity has grappled with the mystery of integrity for ages. The question begged by the preceding statement is, “Integrity to what?” The historical integrity of man is fluid. All too often, integrity depended on an individual or a mob’s passions and whims.

As an example, history tells us that Rutilius Rufus (a Roman statesman, soldier, orator and historian) was charged with crimes which he did not commit, yet he was convicted and exiled. Despite his singular attempt to maintain a life of truth, he was falsely accused and cast into oblivion. He incurred the hatred of powerful enemies within the Roman Empire. There are a multitude of similar examples of innocent men being devoured by evil.

By the time of Jesus, the power of a mob was evident.

Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted out, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will, therefore, chastise him and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. (Lk 23:20-24)

Pilate acceded to the mob.

History is replete with the martyrdom of Christians.

During the French Revolution, which so many still hail, the mob further increased in power, killing innocent religious such as the Martyrs of Compiègne. A similar type of mob pursued Orthodox clergymen during the Soviet Communist regime when more than a hundred and seventy thousand were arrested in 1917–1943; a hundred and fifteen thousand were shot.

Each mob throughout history was led by men of power, pursuing vain and perfidious self-interested acts.

True leaders have no need or want of mobs because they know that crowds cannot be controlled. If anyone doubts

the preceding he should read of Maximilien Robespierre. (Robespierre was an extremely radical Jacobin leader, the most famous political group of the French Revolution, and one of its principal figures. In the latter months of 1793 he came to dominate the Committee of Public Safety, the principal organ of the Revolutionary government during the Reign of Terror, but in 1794 he was overthrown and executed. *Ed.*)

Mobs need not be large, only a few are necessary to be aroused to act by a person of perceived stature who dominates his crowd. I know because I was the subject of such a mentality wherein a villain said that I “should be shot for abandoning my post” and departing for the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Such acclamations are absent civility and context and reflect a greater evil in our world. Such acts are reflective of the *secularization of Christianity* and devoid of truth. Truth in today’s society means little. And when it creeps into Orthodox Christianity, irrespective of the level, its corroding effect is eternal lest it is expelled.

The broad spectrum of Christianity is today divided into three camps, as depicted and expressed by Ross Douthat at the Touchstone Conference of October 2019:

(1) *the secular*—evident by a lack of religious basis or institutions, albeit the moral foundations of secularism may have Christian roots;

(2) *the fragmented individualization of society* wherein one relies on self-interest, perhaps best captured in the book, *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert; (this extremely secular book chronicles the author’s trip around the world after her divorce and what she discovered during her travels, *Ed.*), and

(3) *the tradition of traditions*, a biblical basis in which people conform to long-held traditions as opposed to traditions submitting to the individual.

It is the latter category, *the tradition of traditions*, to which I belong because I have seen the other two groups crucify men and women to serve the needs of the mob’s and individual’s vainglorious want. And, if I am to be crucified, I want it to be for my beliefs *in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* and not in ostentatious contemptible behavior wherein boundaries of a legitimate alliance with God and the illegitimate became impossible to separate—creating a spiritual *mauvais pas* (an area that is dangerous or difficult to negotiate.).

The latter category, *the tradition of traditions*, is wherein Orthodox Christianity resides, alone and besieged, and now, apparently, malleable in the Hellenic world.

Orthodox Christianity is besieged by the former two categories to varying degrees, more by the secular than by the anarchic fragmented individualization of society. In the latter—the anarchic, we find the heresies of Joel Osteen and Oprah Winfrey, both richly indulgent and accountable to no one. The movement they represent is broad and variable

in beliefs, allowing for great apostasies and New Age movements. The meaning of life is embedded in today and not eternity. Experience is fluid and absent coherency.

The secular movement that is grounded in laws—moral and state—both of which have Christian institutional roots. However, institutional Christianity is generally absent if not avoided, perhaps except for baptisms, marriages, and funerals. The Christian norms may be given a head-nod in many areas, except sex. Nothing is permitted to place boundaries on sexual behavior, which is self-defined as nothing more than a transaction—the transaction replaced the spiritual relationship. And sexual behavior is, today, defined as including the right to commit infanticide.

The danger of the preceding two ways of life—the secular and anarchic—is its permitting of darkness to abound. Obedience is to self. The very definition of integrity is to self, not to the Risen Christ.

The preceding two groups raise the question, “What is real?”

A profound danger exists when the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* begins to assimilate the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors of either the secular and anarchic individualization of society. When men can lie and be supported in their lies by other men expecting earthly impunity, eschewing accountability to God, then a mob has been created. Delusions abound.

This deliberate syncretism undermines the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. It undermines its credibility and integrity to the outside observer as well as those within the apostolic Church. As one individual so aptly stated, “I believe everything my Church teaches. I’m not certain my Church believes in the Church.” (Paraphrase of Pastor Russell Moore, President of Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.) A significant reason for the preceding statement is the toleration of ambiguity. Ambiguity, which the Roman Catholic Church is presently experiencing, will nullify its apostolicity and possibly pillars of our Orthodox Christian faith.

Conflicts of power based on hypocrisy and self-promotion are antithetical to the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*. Orthodox Christianity must be courageous in a cosmic sense, beyond this life, to have real meaning.

It takes courage for the Church to be the Church in the face of militant individuals and mobs (for example, the French Revolution), atheistic (for example, Communism, Marxism, liberation theology and its new incarnation of “liberation ecology”), and secular powers. It is cowardice that succumbs to the powers of this world and the night it offers.

International politics or powers cannot solve the challenges facing us. Political forces can give you many things—as it has done for one local Orthodox Christian Church, but they

cannot provide that specific local Church or its adherents meaning. The secular and anarchic individualization of society by their very nature deny meaning. The Church will lose sight of its *raison d’être*—the *only* Truth.

Knowledge of truth is thin. No one—not the hierarch who deemed I should be shot—nor a single local church has a singular claim on reality. That is why the local churches must operate in unison.

The adherents to the *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church* must educate its members, be a vibrant witness to the world, have healthy and vibrant families of apostolic integrity, and welcome others into God’s true fold. Our apostolic Church must eschew endless wars between the local churches, but always remember that *the obligation of self-defense is permanent against the assaults of evil*.



There was a Greek, Photios Kontoglou, a good writer from Asia Minor who became a refugee in Greece and a fine iconographer, who wrote an article in which he said: “Why did the Pope choose the Apostle Peter as the patron for his infallibility? If he had spoken of some Apostle who might not have sinned, then this might still have made some sense. But Peter made 300 mistakes.” Of course, the Lord chose Peter as His foremost disciple, but always as equal to the others, since Peter was a human being, understood human weaknesses, and indulgent to others. If He had chosen an angel, St. John Chrysostom says, the angel would not have understood someone who sinned, twice, three times, seven times, seventy-seven times. The angel would have had enough!

It is recorded that the following marvelous event took place on the Holy Mountain of Athos in the sixteenth century. There was a sinful man, a poor thing, who had a weakness of the body; he renounced it many times, beseeching God that he would not sin. He went to church, wept, made promises to the Savior, and then left—and once again sinned, and once again returned. This went on for a long time. Once many years later, he came and wept before the Lord, repenting: “O Lord, help me; I will stop!” Suddenly the devil could stand it no longer, and said to Christ from the porch of the church; “That’s how you are; You don’t understand a thing! This one swears and weeps to You while he’s here, but as soon as he leaves he’s mine and will do whatever I want. Why do you put up with him?” Then the Lord answered from the icon: *Why do you come to him when he is Mine? I do not bother you when he is yours. I accept a man in the condition in which I find him.* And at that very moment this man died.

This is how the Lord took him. Such is the Lord’s patience!
Bishop Atanasije (Jevtic)

From a talk on *The Heart is Deep: St. Gregory Palamas and the Essence of Hesychasm*

IN THE CULTURE OF DEATH, ABORTION IS A SACRAMENT

Sean Fitzpatrick is a senior contributor to the "Crisis" magazine and headmaster of Gregory the Great Academy, at Elmhurst Twp, PA.

From the Editor: We continue to be scandalized by the lack of any voice of significance by most of the Orthodox hierarchy against the despicable crime of abortion, the greatest genocide being committed of modern man. It is even more scandalous when one hears of Orthodox hierarchs and clergy in support of pro-death political platforms and especially the presence of a GOA hierarch in the 2020 Democratic convention, wherein the pro-death party took the strongest ever position in favor of abortions. We find it astonishing and immensely audacious how such clergy dares approach the Divine mysteries while concurrently supporting (directly or indirectly) the death of His Innocents. May our Lord work on all of us to become the loudest ever proponents in the pro-life movement, both in words as well as in deeds.

† † †

The feminist writer Florynce Kennedy once said, "If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament." She didn't give the left enough credit. Abortion *has become* a kind of "sacrament" because women *can* get pregnant. Abortion has morphed from a taboo tragedy to a constitutional right: a *sine qua non* of the Democratic Party, who fight for it religiously. Abortion is a deathly lifeline for progressives, a central column supporting the political platform of narcissistic relativism. It is the unholy sacrament.

Liberals assign a pseudo-sacramental significance inherent in the "right" to kill an unwanted child which causes, like a sacrament, an existential attitude through its symbolic reality. A sacrament is not just a religious idea or holy practice; it is something far more than its external nature suggests. The Sacraments of the Church are institutions of Jesus Christ to give mystical gifts to those of proper disposition. They are efficacious signs of grace, which contain, cause, and confer the thing signified. The word "sacrament" might be applied analogously to those things that both characterize and cause a human condition, and abortion is a dark participant in that analogy.

When *Roe v. Wade* gripped the nation in 1973, current presidential-hopeful Joe Biden protested that the law went too far. "I don't think that a woman has the sole right to say what should happen to her body," Biden said in a 1974 interview. But being a bad politician and a good Democrat, he soon fell in lockstep with his party's iron-fisted position that sanctified abortion rights in the leftist canon. Earlier this year, Biden finally relinquished his support for the Hyde Amendment (the legislative provision that prevents the application of federal funds for abortions, except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the

life of the mother). In the words of Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia:

The unborn child means exactly zero in the calculus of power for Democratic Party leaders, and the right to an abortion, once described as a tragic necessity, is now a perverse kind of "sacrament most holy." It will have a candidate's allegiance and full-throated reverence... or else.

Joe Biden has evolved in his stance just as abortion acceptance has evolved, for abortion bolsters a cultural concept of egotistical control and license that is essential for life as the left would have it. In this way, abortion bears a sacred importance that parodies the sacramental. While a sacrament relieves people from the burden of death through Life, abortion relieves people from the so-called burden of life through death, and, as such, it is the very antithesis of a sacrament. But it is revered as one, and we may take heart at hearing of priests who will withhold the Blessed Sacrament from those who publicly venerate abortion—as happened to Joe Biden on the campaign trail in South Carolina.

The modern determination to dictate moral consequences with dogmatic force is a slippery slope that grows more cliff-like with every year. "Safe and legal" abortions led to Kermit Gosnell's Philadelphia house-of-horrors clinic, where fetal suction tubing did double-time as oral-airway assistance and tiny, mangled corpses were stuffed in plastic bags, milk jugs, juice cartons, and cat food containers. The abortion trade is not known to attract the best physicians, nor to operate under much regulatory oversight. It does not take much for this "sacrament" of self-centered, self-empowering society to proclaim its sacrilege even as it is proclaimed sacrosanct. Despite the lies, euphemisms, posturing, and sophistry in our culture, abortion is never safe and always harmful to women. As Ben Shapiro put it:

The Democratic "safe, legal and rare" formulation regarding abortion was logically and morally untenable: If Democrats wanted abortion to be rare thanks to its inherent immorality, there was no reason for it to be legal. Democrats have finally come around: They're now "shouting" their abortions, proclaiming them from the rooftops, suggesting that there is a moral good achieved by abortion.

Abortion is for both sides of the aisle a matter of life and death, hence the divisive and vitriolic nature of the debate. Hearings late last month involving Planned Parenthood representatives and Missouri officials will soon determine whether that state will withhold licensing and close its one and only abortuary. Such a ruling would make Missouri the only state without a single legal abortion option—and the only state where the all-holy "right to choose" is overruled. This last-standing abortion mill in Missouri was found to have "deficient practices" in safety standards, causing the state to

deny its license renewal. Missouri's assistant attorney general described several "failed" abortions, botched jobs where a half-dozen procedures were necessary to complete a single murder, or where twins were not initially detected, requiring a second impromptu procedure.

Planned Parenthood is fighting these concerns for human health in the name of "women's health," questioning whether abortion clinics should meet the legal standards of health and safety as required in outpatient clinics. If the ruling in Missouri goes against Planned Parenthood, it might uphold, albeit incrementally, the right to life in a way that may eventually challenge the right to choose. A similar struggle is underway over the only abortion clinic in the Dayton, Ohio area because of failure to secure a written patient-transfer agreement from local hospitals, as the law requires. Alabama's bill is another dramatic resistance, legislating that a doctor who performs an abortion is punishable with life in prison. Even though this bill and others like it are essentially unenforceable as long as *Roe v. Wade* is the law of the land, such efforts could serve as pathfinding precedents back to the Supreme Court and stop the slaughter of innocent children behind a sanctimoniously silvered façade of civil rights.

One way that abortion *is* something of a sacramental avenue is in the baptism of blood: the droves of dead are martyrs for truth and justice. They are the new Holy Innocents, silently slaughtered in the name of self-interest and the false repose that dismisses the challenge of charity. The only thing sacred is that nothing is sacred.

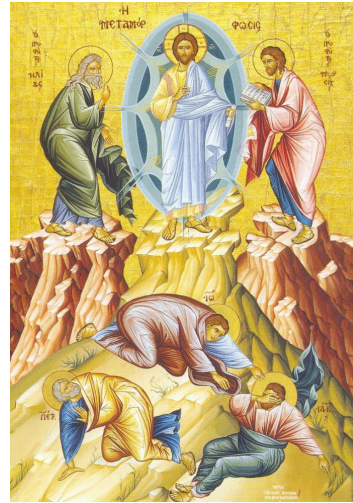


Today's shepherds should listen and imitate St. Symeon the New Theologian's virtue so that they too may share in and partake of the grace which he received from above. Unlike shepherds and teachers nowadays, the whole object of that blessed man's attention was not to fulfill his every wish for bodily pleasures in this life. Rather it was to suppress the things that kindle desire and not give in to the soul's propensity for the worse, but only to assent to the better and follow the divine will. Accordingly he fled men's praise as something that leads to punishment. Nor did he soften from the fault of so many people who, because they are unable to appear worthy of the respect of others by the loftiness of their virtue, pretend to be formidable to their subordinates by their haughty attitude and demeanor. Instead he would imitate his God and Master by observing the same moderation in all things with his disciples, and thus he embraced blessed poverty and the lack of possessions as secure wealth. For this reason he was also properly humble minded and always contrite in spirit.

St. Nikitas Stethatos

AND HIS REIGN SHALL HAVE NO END

By Hieromonk Alexios of Mount Athos.



In a previous article concerning the importance of precise terminology, I noted the value of communicating with clarity especially on spiritual matters. This is manifestly evident in today's article concerning the creedal statement: *His Reign shall have no end*, which is often poorly translated into English as *His Kingdom shall have no end*.

Although the term for kingdom (βασιλεία) appears in the Greek Old Testament that relates the vicissitudes of the Jewish nation, it does not appear even once in the original Greek of the New Testament. Instead, another related Greek word meaning reign or sovereign rule (βασιλεία) is employed 162 times in such passages as the Lord's Prayer, *Thy Reign come*, or the familiar *Repent, for the Reign of God is at hand*. Since it is also the word used at this point in the Creed, we need to properly understand it if we are to grasp what this article of Faith seeks to convey.

Even on a linguistic level, the connotations of kingdom and reign differ in significant ways. On the one hand, the English term "kingdom" is a substantive word connoting a geographical locus or place. It may also be understood as a nation, a place of political authority or power. On the other hand, the term "rule" or "reign" describes an activity conveying a sense of dominion or sovereignty over a people or a nation.

Father John Romanides correctly notes that translating *basileia* as kingdom, instead of rule, makes the text of Scriptures opaque and along side the Scriptures, this article of the Creed as well. He writes, "Another example is the phrase 'kingdom of God' which makes it a creation of God instead of the uncreated ruling power of God. What is amazing is that the term 'kingdom of God' appears not once in the original Greek of the New Testament. Not knowing that the 'rule' or 'reign of God' is the correct translation of the Greek *Basileia tou Theou*,... even many Orthodox today do not see that the promise of Christ to his apostles in Matthew 16:28, Luke 9:27 and Mark 9:1, i.e. that they will see God's ruling power, was fulfilled during the Transfiguration which immediately follows in the above three gospels.

“During the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John see Christ as the Lord of Glory, i.e. as the source of God’s uncreated ‘glory’ and ‘*basileia*’ (i.e. uncreated ruling power), denoted by the uncreated cloud or glory which appeared and covered the three of them during the Lord of Glory’s Transfiguration. It was by means of His power or Glory that Christ as the pre-incarnate Lord (Yahweh) of Glory had delivered Israel from its Egyptian slavery and lead it to freedom and the land of promise. The Greek text does not speak about the ‘*basileion (kingdom) of God,*’ but about the ‘*Basileia (rule or reign) of God,*’ by means of His uncreated glory and power.

“At His Transfiguration Christ clearly revealed Himself to be the source of the uncreated Glory seen by Moses and Elijah during Old Testament times and who both are now present at the Transfiguration in order to testify to the three apostles that Christ is indeed the same Yahweh of Glory, now incarnate, Whom the two had seen in the historical past and had acted on behalf of Him.”

This linguistic clarification is not a merely academic distinction. It has salvific import for each and every Christian who confesses Christ as Lord and Savior. Christianity is not about us creating a utopia or holy kingdom in Christ’s name. It is not even about God creating one. Isn’t that the meaning of *Neither shall they say, ‘Lo here! or, lo there!’ for, behold, the ruling power of God is within you* (Lk 17:21)? No, the reign of God is about the Uncreated God ruling the hearts of the faithful, filling them with His Uncreated Light, and transfiguring them into His very likeness and image. God’s sovereign rule or reign is His uncreated divine grace and glory that Christ spoke of as *the glory I had with Thee before the world was.* (Jn 17:5). The sovereign rule of God is what the Apostles experienced on Mount Tabor and caused the Apostle Peter to say “it is good to be here.” The sovereign rule of God is what the Apostles experienced at Pentecost that led to the baptism of three thousand souls after Saint Peter spoke to the multitudes. And this sovereign rule that transfigures, that glorifies, and that shapes anew will have no end.

When we hear or say the article of faith, *His reign will have no end*, all the references to this reign should come to mind. That the *reign of God is within you* means we need to look to our souls and inner life if we hope to experience God guiding us and ruling us. Seeking *first the reign of God and His righteousness* means that God respects our freedom and will not rule over our souls unless we seek it. The likening of *the reign of God* to a treasure hid in a field and to a pearl of great price indicates not only that there is nothing more precious than for God to rule our hearts, but also that we must give everything we have and offer up everything we are in order for our hearts to be open and prepared for the God of all to bestow on us and in us that rule, that glory, that

divine life in God. And that the Gospel begins with *Repent, for the reign of heaven is at hand* shows us that repentance is the door that leads to God ruling our hearts. For God’s rule to come, we need to be purified of the passions, illumined by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and deified in Christ.

This *reign* or *rule* of God is creative, redeeming, and sanctifying. It is also eternal, unchanging, and never ending. It is more than a gift that is offered, for the gift is the Giver Himself. It is “*the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit* (2 Cor 3:14) abiding in the heart. Being uncreated, being divine, the rule of God in the heart of man is ultimately beyond any description: “*As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (1 Cor 2:9). It is the purpose, the goal, and the final destination of the entire Christian way of life and faith that begins with repentance and culminates in the revelation of God’s glory, God’s rule, and God’s love upon the Tabor of the human heart and in the upper room of the human soul.

If *His Reign will have no end* becomes a core belief, keeping God’s commandments, repenting for our sins, and seeking to be united with Him in prayer will be the endless pursuit of our lives. It begins now and it has no end. Thanks be to God.



Beware of Lukewarm Clergy. A lukewarm clergy lulls the people to sleep, leaves them in their former condition so they won’t be upset. “Look”, they say. “By all means don’t say that there will be a war, or the Second Coming, that one must prepare oneself for death. We must not make people alarmed!”

And others speak with a false kindness, saying: “We mustn’t expose heretics and their delusions, so as to show our love for them.” Today’s people are water-soluble. There’s no leaven in them.

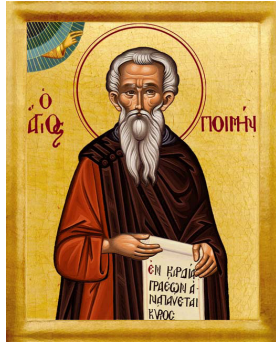
Spiritual meekness is one thing, and softness and indifference are quite another.

If I avoid upsetting myself to protect my fleshly comfort then I’m indifferent to holiness! Spiritual meekness is one thing, and softness and indifference are quite another. Some say: “I’m a Christian and therefore I have to be joyful and calm.” But they’re not Christian. They’re simply indifferent. And their joy is only a worldly joy.

He in whom these worldly seeds are present is no spiritual person. A spiritual person consists of nothing but pain. In other words, he’s in pain at what’s going on, he’s in pain for people’s condition. And divine comfort is bestowed upon him for his pain.

St. Paisios the Athonite

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STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER STAND UP TO THE MARXIST EVIL ATHEISM THREATENING AMERICA

By the Very. Rev. Abbot Tryphon, an Orthodox Christian priest at All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island, Washington. The Monastery is under the omophore of Archbishop Kyrill of San Francisco and Western America, of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia. July 4, 2020.

Stand up to those who would destroy our nation's heritage. Earlier today it was announced that the statue of Christopher Columbus that has long stood before the state capital in Columbus, Ohio, has been removed. But what really shocked me was hearing that they are now considering changing the name of their city, seeing Christopher Columbus as responsible for the genocide of indigenous peoples.

That we Americans are allowing ANTIFA Marxists to dictate the destruction of national symbols of our history is unbelievable. That there are leftists demanding the removal of the presidential images on Mt. Rushmore, the toppling of statues, not only of Confederacy, but even of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, all in the name of social justice, is appalling to me. The fact that some of these Marxists have even gone so far as to demand all images of Jesus Christ, and His Holy Mother, be destroyed as symbols of white supremacy, is beyond belief.

All this while the world is witnessing the triumphal rise of Orthodox Christianity in the country of Russia, with over one

hundred Orthodox churches built this year alone, in Moscow. While Columbus, Ohio considers changing the name of their city, the Russians long ago returned the name of Saint Petersburg to their historic city, while dumping the communist inspired Leningrad.

As we celebrate our nation's founding on this 4th of July, the State of California has just announced that churches are forbidden to allow singing, all the while allowing for protestors in the streets to continue shouting their hate filled protests throughout the state, "not wanting to interfere with the 1st Amendment rights of her citizens".

Added to the madness, we are witnessing the leftist demand that our nation's police departments be defunded, or even completely disbanded. That these fine men and women, who on a daily basis put their lives on the line that all of us remain safe from violent intruders, thugs, and murderous individuals who care nothing about us average citizens, be free to continue their evil lawlessness.

All this smacks of a **Marxist plot to destroy the very Christian foundations of this country**, while breaking down the economy, displacing every trace of our nation's history, all the while providing thousands of disgruntled young people, having lost all hope for their future, to angrily take to the streets, demanding a bland One World government devoid of every trace of our true heritage.

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon

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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OUR NEW LIFE: THE NATIVITY OF OUR SAVIOR

By Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky, +1936), first Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. This was his 1906 Nativity homily to his flock.

This new life is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is now born in Bethlehem, as He Himself said during the last days of His earthly life: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* (Jn 14:6).

What is this new life, brothers, and why do people long for it? Because before Christ, people were dissatisfied with their former life, and even now all those who separate themselves from Christ are dissatisfied; they are dissatisfied because earthly life does not correspond to their desires. They want to be healthy and full, but life burdens them with sicknesses and hunger; they want riches and high ranks, but poverty and dishonor goad them, and if they do not fall into these disasters, they still remain dissatisfied with what they have, and desire more good things.

Still, people have not all sought outward prosperity; there have always been those who were burdened by their own lawless life—both by their

own and that of the whole world; the same people who were burdened by not knowing what would happen to them after death; who lamented the defeat or destruction of their fatherland; complained that there was no righteousness on earth, but rather deception and violence. For such people life was yet more burdensome than for lovers of self; the latter sought a consolation for their woes, albeit temporary, in drunkenness, debauchery, fighting and robbery, but the better people did not

see a ray of light anywhere; their soul was burdened by their own and others' sins and then, after repentance, their evil will drew them again into sin.

Little by little sacred hope and good desires were eaten away from

their souls, and at last sinful passions gradually enslaved them, but they still did not give them full satisfaction, because all the admonitions cannot rejoice an elevated soul, but only increase its inner torment. These people were filled with a grief of a similar kind when they studied the people's way of life; they saw that there is never any human justice on earth, as the wise Solomon said: *I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men*



The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2019. We completed our sixteenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2019 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (Eccl 9:11). And it is usually the sly, flatterers, cheats and robbers who take advantage of this chance.

One could bring forward many more pictures from life in order to show how little life without Christ corresponds to our desires, be they good or bad. Because of this you find ordinary life burdensome, especially when you know human malice and have understood how impossible it is for people to hope for a more reasonable, just life. Laws against evildoers have been thought up to punish them, and they have contrived to have the innocent punished, deceiving the judges or else buying them with bribes or threats. People were punished for theft, so instead of theft they have started making each other drunk, so that the victim of their malice would make himself surrender his good to them, and his soul should also perish in wine; people tried to teach each other reason through philosophy, but the subtle malice of deceivers penetrated even here, and, under the name of philosophy, has taught youths the foulest concepts, convincing them that there is no good or evil on the earth, but only advantage and disadvantage. This is how people were languishing, like a bird with his leg tied: he flaps his wings, wants to fly, but falls down again because of the string.

Now you will understand why the Holy Apostle John hastens to rejoice those who listen to and read his epistle, assuring them that a new life has appeared in the Savior Who has been born. All the believing Jews had long been awaiting such an Envoy, or Messiah, and the wisest of the pagans had been waiting also. They hoped that the Messiah would both make the path of virtuous life easier for each person, and also establish righteousness on the earth, so that the sinners would no longer dominate over the righteous,

nor the pagans over the rightly believing Jews; they hoped, on the contrary, that the manifested Son of God would Himself become a righteous king-conqueror, subdue the pagans and establish righteousness and general happiness on earth, and, in general, bring a new, blessed life to the earth.

And really, He both brought new life and called Himself the life of all. And those who have accepted His life, followed in His footsteps and united themselves with Him, have really ceased to experience that satisfaction with life which oppressed and still oppresses people who have not come to know Christ.

What? Did they immediately become rich, famous, healthy, free from sinful passions? No, brothers, they became poorer and more inglorious than all; remaining in labor and fasting, they did not know the pleasure of bodily health, and increased the warfare with passions yet more, because they were now also struggling with such desires and thoughts as they had formerly not even counted as sins—self-love, anger and lustful desire, for example.

In what way did they become blessed? From what afflictions did the grace of Christ deliver them, and what condition of happiness did it bring them?

One condition for happiness, brothers: willingly to refuse happiness, riches, glory, the desire for health, rest. They turned their hearts away from everything towards which people had formerly striven, except for virtue, and came to love everything; they were reconciled with everything that people had formerly considered to be their greatest sorrow, except sin and vice. And when they disposed their hearts like this, sin ceased to be so alluring, virtue ceased to be burdensome. On the contrary, they began gradually to find in it that source of joy which the pagans had found only in earthly pleasures.

This is the meaning of the Lord's words: *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek ... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.* (Mt. 6:31-33).

It is not said in vain, brothers, that Christ brought new life to the earth. We see that he turned the human soul around completely; changed its nature, as it were. Formerly people accumulated wealth, now they have started to give it away; formerly they feared prisons and torments, now the Apostles exultantly thank God for them; formerly they feared afflictions, now St. James writes to the Christians: *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.* (1:2). On earth, as before, there is injustice, and sickness, and poverty, and all kinds of offences, and the more time passes, the more of this there will be, as the Lord predicted, as well as the Holy Apostles Peter, Jude, Paul and John. But the souls of Christians were not overwhelmed or crushed by all these afflictions. They came to know another blessedness—inner and spiritual—and if they grieved about anything, then it was only about their falls into sin and the sins of their neighbors.

How, through what acts of His life, did our Savior change the whole essence of our souls, or our lives?

First of all, by His very Nativity. That transformation of the human soul and life, which He accomplished in Himself, was reflected in all its clarity in the town of Bethlehem. This little town in those days reflected the entire life of the whole human race.

The life of man is a universal struggle for comfort and earthly advantages. The multitude of people who had gathered in Bethlehem was crowded into various dwellings on a cold night; probably the poor envied the rich in their comfort, the rich harshly drove unwanted lodgers out of their homes, and became angry when the overcrowding forced them unwillingly to share their accommodation with others. At least, that is how it always is when a lot of people are crowded together.

Look what happens according to the customs of the new life. He to Whom all the houses, all the towns, and the whole universe belong, deprives Himself of the last human dwellings and takes up His abode together with beasts, committing

Himself to an irrational manger instead of the throne of Cherubim. O people! Is it for you to struggle and torment each other for preference in honor, cleanliness and comfort, when God does not spurn not being allowed in to where people are and is satisfied with an animal shed!

Man! You murmured about your poverty, you looked with an envious eye on the rich and famous, you lamented the poverty of your own hut, you grieved that you are accounted as one of the simple folk. Go down yet lower in your station in life, and you will be accounted to be with God! You considered it a great honor to approach the doorstep of a lord, but look how easily you can obtain a dwelling equal to God's house. You look at palaces with desire, because kings live in them or have lived in them; look rather at the stall where the incarnate Son of God dwelt. You can see the be-

ginning of the new teaching, of the new life, of the new customs. If you follow after Christ in this way, no place will be crowded for you. If everyone takes to heart the image of Christ's life, then there will be plenty of room and no offence for anyone.

But you may say: I would not grieve about poverty, but I am crushed by my heavy daily labor. I sow and reap bread, but other people eat it, I herd the flock, but the landlords drink the milk, I tailor the cloth, but others wear it.

Perhaps the enemy also tempted the Bethlehem shepherds with just such thoughts, when they were keeping watch by night outside the town which was plunged in sleep, and herded the townspeople's flocks; but if they had accepted such thoughts, they would not have become the most blessed of people. There were then many people in the town who were rich, famous and not occupied with anything, but it was not to them that the angel appeared, announcing the birth of the pre-eternal One; it was not they, but these paupers deprived of their night's sleep who were granted the heavenly vision. They taught the whole world to sing those blessed words which resounded in the heavens: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). They were the first people, after Her Who had given birth to the super-essential One, who were granted to behold Him and worship Him and glorify the Most Pure Mother of the Lamb and the Shepherd.



And further, Christian, go over in your mind everything that the Gospel reading about the Nativity of Christ has proclaimed to us. All our customs, all concepts changed into the new life of the whole of human nature.

Are you grieving over the fact that you have been subject to unjust persecution? But surely you are not more righteous than Christ, Who was pursued by the impious Herod. Are you grieving over exile or banishment? Remember the flight into Egypt. Do you find the yoke of the law burdensome? Gaze on the circumcision of the Lord and His presentation in the Temple on the 40th day. Or are you distressed at having to submit to one who is worse than you, while you yourself are more enlightened and better than others? But Jesus was far more superior than you to the elder Joseph and, however, He submitted to him. Do you consider your advisor or superior has acquired his authority unworthily and by chance? But the Lord Jesus revered His imagined father as a real one.

And so understand that the burden of life is not in the labor, not in the poverty, not in obedience, not in bearing offences or even persecution—no, but it is in considering that one has need of idleness and riches, self-will and constant pleasure. All this takes the joy of existence away from man, all this is also what causes evil passions and vices in him and nourishes them, and the Lord has delivered us from all these errors, enlightening both poverty and bearing offences, and heavy labour and abasement by His Nativity. This is why the whole world is now chanting: “*Thy Nativity, O Christ Our God, has shone upon the world with the light of knowledge.*”

Those who consider that in envy, they just cannot understand this; nor can those understand it who have received sufficiency and honour in this world, but do not want to give up even a small part of it to others of their own free will; they instead oppress the poor, degrade their subordinates, afflict strangers and make fun of simple folk. Miserable people! You are more unfortunate than those whom you are mocking: they are purified by their afflictions and come close to the Savior Who has been born, but you are removing yourselves from His new life and remain in your former death, as it is said: *He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* (1 Jn 3:14).

And so, the new life in Christ consists in willingly renouncing worldly goods and not grieving when they are taken away by force. Perhaps you cannot direct your mind this way at once. But to the extent that you willingly deprive yourself of earthly enjoyments, however reluctantly, fast; offend yourself by giving to the poor or giving way to others; do not become angry or take revenge for oppression. Instead, bear offenses in silence. To the extent that you crucify the old man in yourself, to this extent will a new fount of grace-filled life flower out of your heart. *He that*

believeth on Me, says the Lord, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (Jn 7:38).

It is no longer either riches, or health, or glory, or the destruction of enemies that will make you rejoice, but, just as a farmer rejoices over a ripening field, or a hunter over a lot of wild fowl fluttering about, or an artist over the beauty of a sunset—so you will rejoice over prayer, spiritual reading and the opportunity to be kind to your neighbor, either by giving, or consoling one who is grieving, calming one who is angry, or bringing a villain to his senses.

The impious Jews did not want to accept this new life: they wanted earthly happiness, and the destruction of enemies, and human glory, and vain riches. It is the same thing which their foolish pupils want even now, Europeans of various nationalities. They have forgotten Christ, have come to hate Christ’s abasement and love the treasures of the land of Egypt, not like the great Moses (Heb 11:26), but *like the ancient foolish people in the wilderness.*

Such people are not only returning themselves to the former pagan madness, but they are also trying to turn ardent youths and our people from the path of the Gospel, and in their blindness they promise them universal riches and happiness through confiscating property from the rich for common use. (The author is referring to communism, *Ed.*) If this division of riches were even possible, even then, what peace, what happiness are possible among the envious? And if people saw their happiness in sufficiency of this kind, then they would not be people, but beasts, who need nothing except satiety and rest.

These people know that they have gone against the Gospel, although they even deny it hypocritically; they deny it, but they feel that for them there is no teaching more hostile than the teaching of Christ. This is just like the Jewish scribes who roused the people against the Romans in quest of their own power, riches and honor. It is not justice, but envious malice that they are sowing on the earth, and, striving for rights, they multiply unrighteousness.

Christ God taught us, brothers, to teach others not to seek for rights, but to renounce them, not to demand equality with the gentry, but self-abasement, not to fight, but to give way, not to commit crimes, but to bear offences. This is how the manifest Sun of Righteousness *hath given us light and understanding* (1 Jn 5:20), has opened for us the path to eternal and blessed life; this is what all righteousness in human society is based on. Then let us, brothers, glorify the Lord Who has appeared, rejoice in His Nativity! Nothing will take this joy away from us—neither poverty, nor offences, nor labour day and night. He has blessed all this, and magnified it, and sanctified it with Himself in the town of Bethlehem. Let us draw instruction from here, and to Him, Who has loved us, glory and honour, power and worship, with the Father and the Spirit for ever. Amen.

THE DEMOCRACY OF HELL

By Fr. Zechariah Lynch, Archangel Michael Orthodox Church, Pueblo, CO.

Hell is a democracy, the Heaven is a Kingdom

[St. John of Kronstadt]

† † †

There is no area of human life which is outside of the governing principles of Truth revealed by God. Humanity may reject Truth but this does not nullify its potency. Truth remains, believed in or not.

When men attempt to construct a mode of existence outside of God they simply begin to participate in hell. Lucifer was the first to cast a vote against God. He refused, of his own will, the Kingdom freely offered by God. He voted no.

When Christians concede that there is some “mythical” realm of the “secular” world which is somehow “independent” from the Truth of Christ, then they are on the way to becoming savorless salt. Secular government then becomes the government of hell. For it is a principle of hell to be insisting on one’s “freedom” from God. Hell is the place that desires to operate without God.

True Christianity has always viewed every aspect and facet of human existence as under the divine guidance of God. There is no area of human life that is outside of the governance of God.

St. John of Damascus says, *Practical philosophy ... is concerned with the virtues. It governs manners and shows how one must behave in society. If it lays down laws for the individual man, it is called ethics; but, if for the entire household, then it is called domestic economy; while, if for cities and countries then it is called politics.*

In Orthodox Christian thought the totality of human existence must be harmonious. Ultimately there can be no true politics without proper and true ethics. As St. John indicates they are inseparably bound together. Truth and proper social order and government are inseparable. Thus, there is no supposedly “secular” area of life that is unaffected by Truth. The only place demanding autonomy from Truth is hell.

And there can be no true ethics without God. For without God there are no ethics at all. There can be no standards of “right and wrong.” For a denial of God is a

denial of ethics and morals. One cannot even speak of them without God.

True governance comes only from God. Humans do not make the rules according to majority vote. Truth is immutable and transcends the limits of fallen humanity. Thus, humanity is not the “master” of its destiny and the maker of its own rules, as vainly as it attempts to be.

The unquenchable flames of the passions become the driving force of freedom from God. They burn all the more and drive humanity deeper and deeper into the pit of anti-reason. The more humanity attempts to vote God out, the more it simply forges the chains of its own servitude. For freedom from God means slavery to hell.

For the True Christian, Truth is the only guiding principle. Truth is revealed by Jesus Christ – The Way, the Truth, and the Life. Without this foundation human society is doomed to hell. For without God one only has hell.

Yet, we are generally arrogant and have vainly believed that we will build a world of equality, freedom, peace, brotherhood, and so forth without Truth, without God. In mass, the modern world is a rejection of the Kingdom of Heaven and a vote for the democracy of hell. We have no king but Caesar! We have no guiding principles but our wandering lusts and passions!

Sadly, even many in the Church (not the Church

Herself in Her essential reality) have swallowed the lie that faith is but a “personal/individual” matter. Many have been more than willing to allow the “secular” powers to lead in matters that even touch on the holy things of God. Such is a great tragedy. For such we must repent.

Thus a false reality is presented, “that is fine in the civil sphere but we don’t do that in the church ...” “We can’t demand that everyone live by our standards ...” “We just need to follow government guidelines ...” Thus, self-proclaimed members of the Church Herself philosophically deny Her potency to the world. The Church, in such a thought, only has relevance for Herself and Her “own” and is therefore irrelevant to the world. And we wonder why the “world” is rejecting it

The Church has much more to offer, indeed, She is the only one who is able to, in Christ Her Lord, speak the Truth. When we fail to uphold the Truth as the only guiding factor to any crisis or social issue then we reveal our disconnect with the essential reality of the Body of Christ.



In fact, we do great harm to the world around us, for only the Truth of Christ is capable of healing and saving humanity.

The Church is the Body of Christ Himself, the Logos, the Governing Principle and Reason of everything. She is in truth an eternal reality and She transcends every earthly authority, indeed it is by this standard of Truth that humanity will thrive in the truest sense. Although She works with earthly authority She is superior to it. Her laws are eternal and true ones, they are supreme and immutable. Only through this revealed standard may earthly edicts be weighed as “good” or “evil,” “just” or “unjust.” Outside of Truth one cannot even speak of these things.

The Church is an eternal Kingdom, in Her God reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Wherever we may find ourselves, the most profitable thing we can offer to our countries is to hold unabashedly to the Truth of the Gospel. In doing so, you will be the most loyal and faithful citizen. A Christian who sacrifices the Truth of the Gospel to appease the wanderings of civil authority is indeed one who betrays his earthly nation together with the Heavenly Kingdom, which he claims to proclaim.

For all those who choose with Lucifer the rejection of the Kingdom of God, the only place left is hell. It will be freely and self-chosen by all who are there, it will be most democratic.

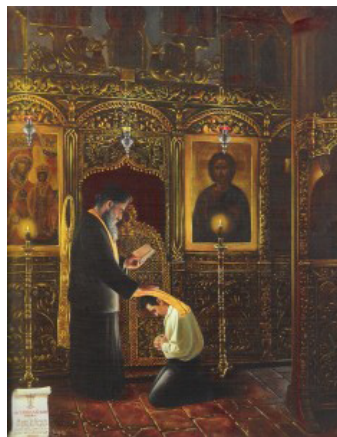


St. Anthony the Great affirms: *If a person places the burden on himself, he finds rest. The moment he casts it on someone else, he will feel troubled internally.* Try it when the opportunity arises. If, during a temptation, you blame the other person, internally you will feel troubled, distressed—a mess! On the other hand, as soon as you think: “The other person is not at fault, I am to blame. Why am I speaking about another person? Have I forgotten who I am? I have made so many mistakes and sins ... hence, I should not be speaking at all,” you will feel as if you are landing on solid ground and are no longer in danger of falling. Whereas previously, when you were soaring high, you were fearful and uneasy: “I am about to fall at any moment.” Once you descend low, and set foot on solid ground, you no longer have anything to fear.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)

A LAMENT FOR SIN

By St. Basil the Great.



Weep over your sin: it is a spiritual ailment; it is death to your immortal soul; it deserves ceaseless, unending weeping and crying; let all tears flow for it, and sighing come forth without ceasing from the depths of your heart.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert

and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing;

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor;

I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth;

I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty;

I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts;

I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill fated life; for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin? When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fruit?

Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; my soul will be painfully sundered from my sinful and vile body; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! I have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain!

How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them!

How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done!

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and mean!

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words!

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh!

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention!

How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little,

lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them; how many hours have I spent in time-wasting and emptiness! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? In truth, I have wasted my entire life in laziness.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, shamelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this fashion trampled the blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself!

How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears?.. If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!



Thou art ashamed and blushest when it is necessary to tell thy sins. It is better to be ashamed to sin than to confess. Consider: If confession is not offered here, then everything will be confessed there before the whole world. Where is there more torment? Where is there more shame? In doing the deed, we are bold and shameless, but when we ought to confess, then we are ashamed and slow.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

ON THE CAUSES OF THE RUSSIAN CATASTROPHE OF 1917: THE REAL REASONS THE COMMUNISTS WON

By Archbishop Averky of blessed memory (+1976).



A great many different, more or less weighty and plausible, ideas have been and continue to be expressed on the causes of the terrible, bloody catastrophe which befell our motherland Russia in 1917. Usually and most frequently causes of an economic and political nature are presented for consideration, and people think, that it all is satisfactorily and completely explained by them. But for us,

Russian believers, there cannot be the slightest doubt that these causes, if they in fact existed, were only secondary, derivative, attendant causes, but certainly not the chief, the fundamental, or the basic ones.

The chief cause of all the woes which befall a man and deprive him of peace and prosperity is his departure from the Single Source of life and well-being, our Creator, Provider, and Savior, God, and his flouting of the Divine laws and rules which are man's only salvation.

This is what was written by the great teacher of all Christian Russia, Bishop Theophan, in the 60's of the last century (i.e., 1860s, *Ed.*):

"Do you know how gloomy my thoughts are? And not without good reason. I meet people who call themselves Orthodox, but who in spirit are followers of Voltaire, naturalists, Lutherans, and all sorts of freethinkers. They are neither stupid nor evil, but in regard to the Faith and the Church they are worthless. Their fathers and mothers were pious; the damage was done during the time of their education outside their parents' homes. The memory of their childhood and of the spirit of their parents still keeps them within certain bounds. What will their children be like? And what will keep them within the proper bounds? I conclude from this that in one, at the most two, generations our Orthodoxy will wither." ("Letters on the Christian Life," p. 78).

"We must be punished," he wrote in another letter, "God and His manifest works have been blasphemed. Someone wrote me that in some newspaper named "Light," No. 88, blasphemies against the Mother of God were printed. The

Mother of God has turned away from us; because of Her, so has the son of God; and because of Him, so have God the Father and the Spirit of God. Who is for us when God is against us?! Alas!" ("Collected Letters," vol. 7, p. 206).

We can only dare to think completely seriously about the salvation of Russia when we have become different. We must force ourselves to change in the most fundamental way to cease being what we were when we, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or in ignorance, by our own hands or just by indifference, cast Russia into that terrifying, bloody abyss in which it remains even until now. (This was written while the Soviets were still in charge, i.e., prior to the Fall of the Soviet Union, *Ed.*)

Constantly forming new political parties and organizations with platforms full of high-sounding promises and with constant quarrels and mutual attacks on each other unworthy of the name of Russian; organizing "days" and "evenings of Russian culture"; "charity" balls, theatrical performances and concerts, especially on the eves of Sundays and feasts; anniversary celebrations, especially in the spirit of the one now being prepared to honor Leo Tolstoy, who was excommunicated from the Church for his unbelievably blasphemous and vicious outbursts; banquets with very patriotic speeches; assemblies for "days of irreconcilability" with fierce anti-Communist statements; even formal attendance at official prayer and requiem services on days of special commemoration—none of this will ever be able to save Russia.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then everything else shall be added unto you. (Mt 6:33). It was precisely this course of seeking above all the Kingdom of God and His righteousness that our Orthodox Russian nation followed throughout the whole course of its history. It was precisely in this way that Great Russia was built in which the Faith and the Church were always in the first place.

But when the Russian nation, under the influence of atheistic agitators who came to us from the apostate West, began to turn away from this, its true historical course, then that terrible, bloody catastrophe broke over us; as a result of it we ended up in exile, and the rest of the Russian nation is under the yoke of a horrible, unparalleled slavery.

For this reason it is so sad to see how Russian Orthodox people who have endured so much and even lost their homeland and who now are themselves here in exile do not give any thought at all to their spiritual renewal, but rather continue to live with the same godless and anti-Church views, interests and attitudes that led to such terrible misfortunes for our unfortunate homeland Russia.

They naively think that Russia can be saved without their full and total return to God, without their bringing their lives under the genuine spirit of the Church, but that it can be done by means of nothing but political activity. And they

even want to subjugate our Church itself to their politics and make it a tool of their political intrigues, a toy of their political passions.

They want to subject the eternal to the temporal, the heavenly to the earthly, the holy to the sinful...

What could be more awful, more hopeless, more criminal than such spiritual blindness, such extreme lack of understanding, which is only one step removed from the very depths of hell?

How many times did the Most Holy Theotokos save Her faithful Byzantium with its imperial city of Constantinople by Her all-powerful protection until it was overcome by the spirit of materialism and apostasy from the Faith which appeared so clearly at the Council of Florence in 1439? And then Byzantium, which had betrayed the true Faith, was handed over to its downfall, falling finally under the blows of the Mohammedan Turks in 1453.

Like Byzantium the New Rome, our homeland Moscow, the Third Rome, experienced the miraculous protection of the Fervent Intercessor for the Christian race an uncounted number of times. But our unfortunate Russian nation also did not remain firm on the heights of its calling, and the same spirit of materialism and apostasy led it to its terrible, bloody downfall.

And now the whole world is gripped not just by the spirit of materialism and apostasy, but of cruel enmity to God, a terrible and rash challenge to God; and it is on the edge of destruction in its senseless blindness, a destruction prepared by its own hands.

This destructive spirit of Apostasy has already penetrated even our Orthodox Church, extremely prominent hierarchs of which openly are proclaiming the approach of some sort of "new era" and cynically are proposing being done with all the past as they assemble to create some kind of completely "new Church" in close "ecumenical" contact and unanimity with all apostates from the true Faith and Church.



Deliver me O Lord, from the deceptions of the God-hating and evil antichrist, whose coming is at hand, and shelter me from his snares in the secret desert of Thy salvation. Grant me, O Lord, strength and courage to firmly confess Thy Most Holy Name, that I may not abandon You because of the devil's fear and that I may not deny Thee my Saviour and Redeemer, nor Thy Holy Church. But grant me O Lord, cries and tears for my sins, and spare me O Lord, in the hour of Thy dread judgement.

St. Anatoly (Younger) of Optina
Prayer of the Christians of Latter Days

DEFENDING THE DE-CHRISTIANIZATION OF CHRISTMAS: WAS CHRIST BORN ON DECEMBER 25TH

By John Eidsmoe and Ben DuPre, from WorldNetDaily, 12/24/2009.

The secularizers commonly defend the de-Christianization of Christmas by noting that America is a much more diverse nation than we used to be, that we shouldn't offend others, that saying "Merry Christmas" might be bad for business and that public Christmas observances might even violate the First Amendment. Then they deliver their crowning blow: "Besides, everybody knows Jesus wasn't born in December."

But saying "everybody knows" begs the question, as saying "all scholars agree" defines anyone who does not agree as a non-scholar. At the risk of flying in the face of this collective modern wisdom, we suggest that there is substantial, though not conclusive, evidence that Jesus was born in December.

The Biblical Evidence

What does the Bible say about the date of Jesus' birth? Luke 2:6 tells us that *the days were accomplished that she should be delivered* so we assume Jesus was a full-term baby, born nine months after His conception. Luke 1:26 says the angel Gabriel announced the conception of Jesus to Mary in the sixth month of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. So Jesus was conceived about six months after John the Baptist was conceived.

So when was John the Baptist conceived? That is more difficult, but the Scriptures suggest some answers. John's father was Zacharias, a Levite priest of *the course of Abia [Abijah]* (Lk 1:5). According to I Chronicles 24:7-19, King David had divided the priests into 24 orders, and these orders took turns serving in the temple for a period of eight days twice a year, separated from their wives and children. During their time Zacharias and the other priests of the course of Abia served during the 10th and 24th weeks of the Jewish year.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Zacharias *while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course* (Lk 1:8), that is, while he was performing his service in the temple. After his course was finished he left the temple, returned to his wife, Elizabeth, and John was conceived (Lk 1:23-24). If this was after the second course, that is, the 24th week of the year, John would have been conceived around September or October and born around June or July. Jesus' conception six months later would have occurred around March or April and His birth around December or January.

There is no certainty to this theory, especially given that the Jewish calendar (of only 360 days) may have been different from King David's time to Jesus' time. But based on the scriptural account of Zacharias' service in the temple, it is well within the realm of possibility that Jesus was born in December.

The Extra-Biblical Evidence

St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), argued strongly for a December 25th birthdate because of the course of Zacharias' priestly service. But he also based his conclusion on the findings of Pope Julius. Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386 A.D.) had asked Pope Julius to ascertain the date of Christ's birth *from the census documents brought by Titus to Rome* after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Julius then determined the date of Christ's birth to be December 25th.

Julius, Cyril and Chrysostom were not alone in their reliance upon the census documents. St. Justin the Martyr (100-165 A.D.), in a detailed statement of the Christian faith addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, stated that Jesus was born in Bethlehem *as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing*. (Apology, I, 34). Likewise, Tertullian (160-250 A.D.) wrote *of the census of Augustus—that most faithful witness of the Lords nativity, kept in the archives of Rome*. (Contra Marcion, Bk 4, 7).

Unfortunately, we do not have access to these census records today. But perhaps the better part of wisdom bids us to assume that these Church Fathers had access to information that we do not possess, and that they knew quite well what they were talking about.

Some have said that Jesus could not have been born in December because shepherds did not keep their sheep in the fields past late autumn. But Alfred Edersheim, in his classic work "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" (1883), cites ancient Jewish sources to the effect that flocks of sheep "remain in the open alike in the hottest days and in the rainy season, i.e., all the year round." (Book 2, p. 186). There was also a special class of Levitical shepherds who kept sacrificial lambs in the field all year round because they were used for sacrifice every month of the year.

Winters can be cold in Palestine, but they vary greatly, and some Decembers are rather mild. A recent study of stalagmites and stalactites in caves near Jerusalem strongly suggests that the average annual rainfall dropped nearly 50 percent from about 3 feet in 100 A.D. to about 1.6 feet in 700 A.D. Average winter temperatures may have varied as well. If Mary could have given birth to a baby in a Bethlehem stable, then hardy shepherds could have watched their flocks in the fields at the same time.

Edersheim thus concludes, "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date (December 25th). The objections generally made rest on grounds which seem to me historically untenable."

How about the "Old" Calendar?"

It also seems that Christmas is only truly celebrated on December 25th according to the Julian reckoning.

We must, at this point, acknowledge, the unilateral bond of the lunar calendar with the Julian in the Orthodox Christian *Paschalion*.

Having studied our *Paschalion*, we are irresistibly penetrated with awe at the ingenious work of the Alexandrian scientists who attained, in the *Paschalion*, an unalterable bond of the lunar with the solar Julian calendar. Alexandrian astronomers of the third century well knew the retardation of the Julian calendar from the sun. Nevertheless, they did not reject the Julian calendar, but wisely made use of its errors for a stable concordance with the lunar year, which lies at the basis of our *Paschalion*. The Julian calendar remains behind the true solar time, and the lunar one also remains behind together with the Julian calendar. "The lunar year is found to be eternally tied to the Julian one and a perpetual retardation of the former from the latter is not possible. The lag of the Julian year is equal to the lag of the lunar one. The equinox retards equally in both chronologies."

The difference between the lunar and our Julian calendar does not exceed an hour and a half in the lapse of a thousand years. We can see for ourselves how all the Paschal full-moons calculated for thousands of years ahead in our *Paschalion* fall precisely on all the indicated dates of the Julian calendar, but do not at all coincide with the Gregorian calendar.

The unalterable tie of the lunar calendar with the Julian is made especially vivid by the following constant, periodical phenomena: we know that the lunar cycle equals 19 years while the solar cycle equals 28 years. Let us analyze these numbers by primary multipliers: $19=1 \times 19$; $28=4 \times 7$. What happens when we cross-multiply them? $19 \times 4=76$, i.e., that period of 76 years upon whose lapse the beginning of the lunar year coincides in precision with the beginning of the Julian one (as shown in chapter three).

Now, if we multiply 76 by 7, we arrive at 532, i.e., that period upon whose lapse, Pascha again occurs on the same days and months on which it was celebrated from the very beginning and during the whole length of the indiction.

In view of such a stable bond of the lunar year with the Julian, there can be no talk of any change from the Julian calendar, for otherwise there would unavoidably occur a violation of the entire well-formed and harmonious system of our *Paschalion* and the introduction of a great confusion in all Paschal calculations.

Sorrowfully, the light-minded experiment of changing the Julian calendar was made in Rome and now one can see its pitiful consequences. (It has made obedience to the holy canons, given to the Holy Church by the Holy Spirit, impossible for Rome which was forced, by the new calendar to abandon the canonical *Paschalion*).

In the end, no one's Christian faith should depend upon whether December 25th is the date of Jesus' birth, nor do such questions give us any reason to take Christ out of Christmas.

And Merry Christmas, one and all—on December 25th, of either calendar!

ARE WE CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CHRIST?

By Photios Kontoglou.

When one holds a discussion with pseudo-Christians about hard asceticism of the body and spirit for the love of Christ, they become angered, calling you a hoaxter, a pagan or a barbarian.

If you want to test the faith of a Christian, talk to them about asceticism. The faithful will feel compunction, while the lukewarm, those who are fake and faithless, will protest.

What is then one to make of the following proclamations by Christ? *Blessed are they who have left all and followed Me*, or *The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*, or *In the world you will have sorrow*, or *Tight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life*.

We want to be Christians without Christ, without spiritual sorrow, without lifting the difficult cross, and would rather to walk along the wide road. Such false Christians, when you speak to them about a hard and impoverished life, about sacrifice, about asceticism, reply that Christ does not want such things, and that such things are antics.

But, O foolish man, in Christianity nothing can be overdone. For all human things one could say they are antics, but it is only within Christianity that antics do not exist. What antic is there in loving the one who killed your father? What antic is there in turning the other cheek? What antic is there in hungering and thirsting contempt, in doing what God asks of you, such as loving your neighbor, talking sweetly to one swearing at you, not judging the one who judges you, to be humble before the most destitute people, and while doing all these things you say that you are a *worthless slave*?

What antic is there in believing that our bodies will be raised as immortal at the blink of an eye, and how the whole world will change at once, and that a new world without corruption will come about? So is there anything in Christianity that is an antic?

Christianity is the most implausible of all that is outrageous, the most unbelievable of all things unbelievable.

This is why the door by which one enters the exotic country of Christ is only one—Faith. And in Faith there are no antics; unbelief, on the other hand, has sly prudence, moderation and compromise. This is why such pseudo-Christians cannot withstand the fire of Faith and have turned Christianity into a moral system, beneficial for worldly life, which is why it does not entirely need Christ. Because the unbeliever is scared, but whoever believes is *bold as a lion*, according to the Prophet.

Whoever loves God, is ablaze without showing it, rejoices without laughing, is crushed in the depths of their selves. The love taught to us by Christ is something else besides so-called philanthropy. This is why philanthropists do not taste of this

love of Christ, which is *water that wells with eternal life*. The philanthropy people make today is a social debt. These philanthropists, and whoever is a practical person, are not Christians.

Whoever loves Christ and His Gospel, loves that which is worth loving above everything else. In Christ they can find all worthwhile things: love, humility, pain, gentleness, spiritual sorrow and spiritual joy—which are both sweet when done in the name of Christ.

Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Give us rest? We do not want to even hear it. We want to be saddled with our passions, with our enemies, with our wars, with our cares for ambition, for the flesh, with contaminated blood, with pistols, with cannons, with bombs. What will we do without these things, Mr. Peacemaker? How can we live in rest? With what will we fill our emptiness, since for us life is only these things?

You give us peace, but peace is our death, because it is the death of our beloved passions! If You said “I will load you with other such burdens, that you do not recognize; I will enrich your souls with other such riches, that you may have no peace,” then we would come near You, and receive You as our God.

People nowadays want gods that will load us, vindictive ones, like Aries, Zeus, Cronos and deceivers like Hermes, and others. They want to live in wickedness, for it is alive and strong.

Yes, come Lord! cries out John with joy to Him who comes on the clouds at the Second Coming. You must be a saint, righteous and perhaps like John in order to rejoice at the coming of Christ and wait for Him. We, on the other hand, cry out “do not come Lord.” Because we are sinners, and the wrath of the Lord is coming upon us.

With the prevalence of the “atom bomb” we are now forced to consider such things. Once learned, fear comes upon every heart. Blessed are those who are ready at all times! But alas! Who is ready like John, the holiest of the saints?

All of us fear that You will come *as a thief in the night*. If you curse or slander people, or if you write something bad to them, there will come a time when they will forgive you. (Will they? Unlikely, brother, forget it!). One who does not forgive you for such a deed will hate you, and they live in such a way that they are embarrassed about their own life; may the voyage of your life be a rebuke of their own. Whoever has wholeheartedly tasted Christ’s peace does not torture himself for being poor, since they willfully desire and accept poverty; such a person loses his joy when he acquires something beyond what is needed, even if it is the most worthless thing. And whatever is humble and poor and prudent, they love it secretly within their heart without saying anything to anyone, because **the humble people always love silence and obscurity**.

The Lord is near those who sorrow in their hearts. When temptations are scattered and the door to false joy and rest is opened, the door to true joy closes. True Christians feel this clearly.

WITH MY OWN EYES

By Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand

Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand is an evangelical minister who spent fourteen years in Communist imprisonment and torture in his homeland of Romania. In 1945, when the Communists seized Romania and attempted to control the churches for their purposes, Richard Wurmbbrand immediately began an effective "underground" ministry to his enslaved people and the invading Russian soldiers. He was eventually arrested in 1948. Richard spent three years in solitary confinement, seeing no one but his Communist torturers. Pastor Wurmbbrand was released in a general amnesty in 1964. What follows is a small part of the many experiences he had with Orthodox clergy while he was imprisoned.

† † †

My former fellow-prisoner the Romanian-Orthodox Deacon John Stanescu, suffered in jail for his faith.

Colonel Albon, director of the slave labor camp, was informed that someone had dared to preach in a cell. He entered the cell carrying a cane and demanded to know the culprit. When no one responded, he said, "Well, then all will be flogged."

He commenced at one end of the cell, and there was the usual yelling and rising in tears. When he came to Stanescu, he said, "Not ready yet? Strip this minute!"

Stanescu replied, "There is a God in heaven, and He will judge you."

With this, his fate was sealed. He would surely be beaten to death. But just at that moment, a guard entered the cell and said, "Colonel, you are called urgently to the office. Some generals have come from the Ministry."

Albon left, saying to Stanescu, "We will see each other again soon." However, the generals arrested the colonel (Communists hate and jail each other for no reason), and after an hour Albon was back in the cell, this time as a prisoner.

Many inmates jumped to lynch him. Now Stanescu defended the defeated enemy with his own body, receiving many blows himself as he protected the torturer from the flogged prisoners. Stanescu was a real priest.

Later I asked him, "Where did you get the power to do this?" And he replied, "I live Jesus ardently. I always have Him before my eyes. I also see Him in my enemy. It is Jesus who keeps him from doing even worse things." Beware of a faith without a cross!

When I was in jail I fell very, very sick. I had tuberculosis of the whole surface of both lungs and four vertebra were attacked by tuberculosis. I also had intestinal tuberculosis, diabetes, heart failure, jaundice, and other sicknesses I can't even remember. I was near to death.

At my right hand was an Orthodox priest by the name of Iscu. He was Abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his 40's, had been so tortured he was near to death. But his face

was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades.

And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony.

During the night he would awaken me saying, "Father, please pray for me. I can't die, I have committed such terrible crimes."

Then I saw a miracle. I saw the agonizing priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of his murderer, and caressed his head – I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love – he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, "You are young; you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart." But he did not just say the words. You can say "love," and it's just a word of four letters. But he really loved. "I love you with all my heart."

Then he went on, "If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, Who is Love incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be with Him in heaven. He is Love. You only need to turn to Him and repent."

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel – no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered – near to death – received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolute to this murderer.

They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest went back to his bed. Both men died that same night. It was Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that 2000 years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.

These are the things I have seen with my own eyes...

† † †

Christ is born; glorify Him!
 Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!
 Christ is on earth; be exalted!
 Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
 And praise Him in gladness, O people;
 for He has been glorified!

Χριστός Γεννᾶται

Άγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, ἀποσπάσματα ἐκ τῆς Ὀμιλίας ΛΗ΄.

**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ,
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί·
ὅτι δεδόξασται!**

† † †

Ὁ Χριστὸς γεννιέται, δοξάσατε. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ συναντήσατε (τον). Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπάνω στὴν γῆ ὑψωθείτε. Τραγουδήσατε γιὰ τὸν Κύριο ὅλη ἡ γῆ καὶ νὰ γιὰ νὰ πῶ καὶ τὰ δυὸ μαζί: Νὰ εὐφρανθοῦν οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ νὰ ἀγαλλιᾶσαι ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιο, ἐπειτα ἐπίγειο.

Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη (σημασία) τῆς ἡμέρας: Ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκώνεται. Ὁ Λόγος γίνεται ὑλικός. Ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται. Ὁ ἀναφῆς ψηλαφιέται. Ὁ ἄχρονος ἀρχίζει, «*Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς χθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ ἴδιος καὶ στοὺς αἰῶνες*».

Ἐνα (πρόσωπο) ἀπὸ δυὸ ἀντίθετα (φύσεις), σάρκα (ἀνθρώπινη φύση) καὶ Πνεῦμα (Θεῖα φύση). Ἀπὸ τίς ὁποῖες ἡ μιὰ (ἢ Θεῖα) ἐθέωσε, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη (ἢ ἀνθρώπινη) ἐθεώθηκε. Ὡ τῆς καινούριας μίξεως! Ὡ τῆς παραδόξου συνθέσεως! Ὁ Ὄν δημιουργεῖται καὶ ὁ ἀχώρητος χωρεῖται διὰ μέσου νοερῆς ψυχῆς ποὺ μεσιτεύει στὴν Θεότητα καὶ (διὰ μέσου) τῆς ὑλικότητας τῆς σάρκα. Καὶ ὁ πλουτίζων πτωχεύει. Ἐπειδὴ πτωχεύει (λαμβάνοντας) τὴν δική μου σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν δική του Θεότητα...

Καὶ ὁ πλήρης ἀδειάζει, ἐπειδὴ ἀδειάζει ἀπὸ τὴν δόξα του γιὰ λίγο, γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν πληρότητά του. Ποιὸς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητας; Τί εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον (ποὺ ἔγινε) γιὰ μένα; Μετάλαβα τὴν εἰκόνα (του) καὶ δὲν τὴν ἐφύλαξα. Μεταλαμβάνει τὴν δική μου σάρκα, καὶ γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀθανατήσει τὴν σάρκα. Δεύτερη πραγματοποιεῖ κοινωνία, πολὺ παραδοξότερη τῆς πρώτης (τῆς δημιουργίας). Τότε μετέδωσε τὸ καλύτερο (τὴν εἰκόνα του), ἐνῶ τώρα μεταλαμβάνει τὸ χειρότερο (τὴν σάρκα μου). Αὐτὸ

εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ προηγούμενο θεοπρεπέστερο. Αὐτὸ εἶναι σὲ ὅσους ἔχουν νοῦ ὑψηλότερο.

«*Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε, Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε, Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθηκε. Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ...*» Μ' ἓνα λόγο: Ἄς εὐφραίνωνται οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἄς ἀγάλλεται ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιο, ποὺ κατόπιν ἔγινε ἐπίγειος. Ὁ Χριστὸς παρουσιάζεται μὲ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε μὲ τρόπο καὶ χαρὰ. Μὲ τρόπο γιὰ τὴν ἐνοχὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ μὲ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας...

Πάλι διαλύεται τὸ σκοτάδι, πάλι ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς. Πάλι τιμωρεῖται μὲ σκοτάδι ἡ Αἴγυπτος καὶ πάλι ὁ Ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαὸς φωτίζεται μὲ τὸν πύρινο στύλο. Ὁ λαὸς ποὺ καθόταν στὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἄς δῆ τὸ μεγάλο φῶς τῆς θεογνωσίας. «*Τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονε τὰ πάντα καινά*».

Τὸ νεκρὸ γράμμα ὑποχωρεῖ. Τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπικρατεῖ. Οἱ σκιῆς τοῦ νόμου περνοῦν. Ἡ ἀλήθεια θριαμβεύει. Ὁ Μελχισεδέκ, ποὺ ἦταν ἓνας τύπος, τώρα δείχνει ποιὸν προεσήμαινε, δηλαδὴ τὸν Χριστό. Αὐτὸς, ποὺ ὡς Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει μητέρα, γεννιέται χωρὶς πατέρα. Γιατί στὸν Δημιουργὸ τῆς φύσεως δὲν ἰσχύουν οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη χειροκροτήσατε, γιατί «*παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν, υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν, οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄμοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μεγάλης βουλῆς ἄγγελος*». Ἄς φωνάξῃ δυνατὰ ὁ Ἰωάννης Βαπτιστής: «*Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου*». Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴ σημασία τῆς μεγάλης αὐτῆς ἡμέρας (τῶν Χριστουγέννων).

Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἀναρχος καὶ αἰώνιος, τώρα λαμβάνει ἀρχή. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἀθύπαρκτος, δημιουργεῖται. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἄπειρος, χωρεῖται στὴν περιορισμένη ἀνθρώπινη φύση. Αὐτὸς ποὺ πλουτίζει μὲ τὰ ἀγαθὰ Του τὸν κόσμον, γίνεται φτωχὸς, παίρνοντας ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν θεότητά Του. Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ παραστήσει πόσος εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητός Του; Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ σὺ μαζί μὲ τὸν Ἀστέρα τρέξε καὶ μαζί μὲ τοὺς Μάγους φέρε Του γιὰ δῶρα, χρυσὸ καὶ λιβάνι καὶ σμύρνα. Τίμησέ Τον ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Θεὸ καὶ ὡς Λυτρωτή, ποὺ νεκρώθηκε γιὰ σένα. Μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ποιμένες δόξασέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ἕμνησέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους σκίρτησε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἄς εἶναι κοινὴ ἡ πανήγυρις τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων δυνάμεων.



Τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς... Νέας Κατοχῆς

Ένα ἄρθρο ἀπὸ τὴν «Χριστιανικὴ Ἑστία Λαμίας», Δεκέμβριος 2011. Ἄν καὶ τὸ ἄρθρο ἐγράφη λόγῳ τῆς «οἰκονομικῆς κατοχῆς τοῦ 2011» τὸ περιεχόμενό του ἰσχύει ἀκόμα περισσότερο στὶς μέρες τῆς «κατοχῆς τοῦ κορονοϊοῦ».

Ὅτὰ ἠγήσουν καὶ πάλι οἱ γλυκόλαλες καμπάνες τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ὁ κόσμος θὰ τρέξει στὶς ὀλοφώτιστες Ἐκκλησιές, γιὰ νὰ γιορτάσει τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Θεανθρώπου. Μία ἀπὸ τὶς μεγαλύτερες γιορτὲς τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, τὰ Χριστούγεννα, θὰ συνάξει γύρω της τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μεταγγίσει στὶς καρδιές τὴν εὐλογία καὶ τὴν εἰρήνη. Μικροὶ καὶ μεγάλοι θὰ ψάλουν καὶ θὰ κοινωνήσουν. Γιορτὴ τῆς Οἰκογένειας καὶ τῶν παιδικῶν χρόνων, χαρακτηρίστηκαν τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Γιορτὴ τῶν παιδιῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν παιδιῶν ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου. Εὐλογημένη ἀτμόσφαιρα, χαριτωμένες ψυχές, ζεστὸ περιβάλλον, ζωηρὰ γέλια, πλούσια δῶρα, γεμάτα τραπέζια, καρδιές ἐνωμένες στὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα. Ἔτσι ἦταν πάντοτε τὰ Χριστούγεννα...

Πάντοτε; Μακάρι νὰ ἦταν πάντοτε ἔτσι! Ὑπῆρξαν ὁμως καὶ δύσκολα Χριστούγεννα. Τὰ Χριστούγεννα στὶς Κατακόμβες, στοὺς διωγμούς. Βγαίνοντας οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοὶ τότε ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπόγεια λατρεία τῶν Χριστουγέννων δὲν ἤξεραν ἂν θὰ συναντήσουν τὴ ζωὴ ἢ τὸν θάνατο! Τὰ Χριστούγεννα στὸ ἔξομο τὸ Μεσολόγγι! «Βάστα καϋμένο Μεσολόγγι!» Χριστούγεννα στὶς τάπιες καὶ τὶς πολεμίστρες περιμένοντας τὴ βραδινὴ χριστουγεννιάτικη ἐπίθεση τῶν φανατικῶν καὶ ἀσεβῶν μουσουλμάνων. Νηστικοὶ καὶ ξεθεωμένοι περιέμεναν οἱ ὑπερασπιστὲς τῆς Ἱερῆς πόλης τοῦ Μεσολογγίου νὰ σώσουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Χριστούγεννα στὴν Τουρκοκρατία! Οἱ ραγιάδες γρήγορα καὶ σιωπηλά, χωρὶς πανηγυρικὲς κωδωνοκρουσίες, σκυφοὶ ἔμπαιναν στὶς χαμηλοτάβανες πετροχτιστὲς ἐκκλησιές γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτελέσουν τὰ θρησκευτικὰ τους καθήκοντα καὶ κράταγαν ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι σφιχτὰ τὰ παιδιά τους μὲ τὸ φόβο μήπως τὰ ἐπόμενα Χριστούγεννα δὲ θὰ τὰ εἶχαν γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Ποτήριο.

Χριστούγεννα στὰ βουνὰ τῆς Β. Ἠπείρου, πολεμώντας τοὺς Ἰταλούς. Μὲ λίγο χαλβὰ καὶ λίγο ξερὸ ψωμί. Μὲ νερὸ γιὰ χιόνι. Γιὰ Ἐκκλησία, τὸ χαράκωμα, καὶ γιὰ προσκυνητάρη, ἓνα κονσερβοκούτι γιὰ καντήλι καὶ μία χάρτινη εἰκόνα γιὰ νὰ ἀσπασθοῦν οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι μαχητὲς τῶν ἐλληνικῶν συνόρων. Χριστούγεννα τῆς... Γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς στὴν Ἀθήνα! Τὰ φοβερότερα Χριστούγεννα! Ὁ νέος Ἡρώδης, ὁ Χίτλερ, εἶχε σκορπίσει τὸ θάνατο στὰ παιδιά τῆς Ἀθήνας. Ζωντανὸ νεκροί! Μία λέξη ἄκουγες σπαραχτικὰ νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὰ ἀδύνατα καὶ ἀρρωστημένα πνευμόνια μικρῶν καὶ μεγάλων: «πεινάωωω...».

Χριστούγεννα φριχτά! Καμμιά ὀργανικὴ οὐσία δὲν ὑπῆρχε μέσα στὸ ἀθηναϊκὸ σπίτι! Μόνο τὸ νερὸ τῆς βρύσης! Γιόρταζαν τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ Βρέφους καὶ ἔκλαιγε ὁ κόσμος τὸ θάνατο τῶν βρεφῶν καὶ νηπίων. Ποτὲ πιά τέτοια Χριστούγεννα! εἶπαν οἱ λαοί. Ποτὲ πιά πόλεμο! εἶπε ὁ κόσμος. Ποτὲ πιά Κατοχή! εἶπαν οἱ Ἕλληνες...

Ἀπὸ τότε πέρασαν πολλὰ Χριστούγεννα. ἤρθαν βεβαίως καὶ Χριστούγεννα μοναχικά, φυλακισμένα, νοσοκομειακά, φτωχικά καὶ λιτά, πένθιμα, ξενιτεμένα. Δηλαδή, πέρασαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες, κάποιοι Ἕλληνες, κάποια Χριστούγεννα, μὲ φτώχεια, μὲ ἀρρώστεια, στὴ φυλακὴ ἢ στὸ νοσοκομεῖο, μὲ πένθος καὶ ἀδικία, μὲ στενοχώρια καὶ μοναξιά, στὴν ξενιτεὶα καὶ στὸν κίνδυνο. Δύσκολα Χριστούγεννα, χωρὶς πολλὰ πράγματα καὶ πολὺ κόσμο. Ναί, ἀλλὰ ἦταν κάτι τὸ περιορισμένο καὶ προσωρινό, τὸ ἀτομικὸ καὶ μεμονωμένο. Κάποιοι δὲν εἶχαν, ἄλλοι ὁμως, οἱ περισσότεροι, βοηθοῦσαν καὶ κάπως περνοῦσε ἡ μεγάλη μέρα. Ἀκόμη καὶ στὴ γερμανικὴ κατοχὴ, ἡ ἐπαρχία δὲν πείνασε τόσο!

Δύο ὁμως Χριστούγεννα βρίσκονται στὴν κορυφὴ τῆς ἀνάγκης καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ ὄριο τῆς φτώχειας, τηρουμένων ἀσφαλῶς τῶν ἀναλογιῶν. Τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας στὴ Βηθλεὲμ πρὶν 2011 χρόνια καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῶν Ἑλλήνων τὸ 2011! Τὰ Χριστούγεννα δὴλ. τῆς ἀπογραφῆς τοῦ Καίσαρα καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς νέας γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς φέτος. Ἐκεῖνα, τότε, ἔστειλαν τὴν ἀγία «οἰκογένεια» στὸ σπήλαιο τῆς Βηθλεὲμ! Σὲ συνθήκες ἀπερίγραπτα φτωχῆς! Τὰ τωρινὰ ὁμως στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἔστειλαν τὴν ἐλληνικὴ οἰκογένεια στὴν ἀπόγνωση καὶ τὴ θλίψη. Μπορεῖ ἴσως νὰ φταῖμε καὶ μεῖς, οἱ πολῖτες, ποὺ εἶχαμε μάθει νὰ ταυτίζουμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα μὲ τὸ πλούσιο μεσημεριανὸ τραπέζι καὶ τὸ Πάσχα μὲ τὸν ὄβελια. Ἀλλὰ τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα δὲν συγκρίνονται μὲ κανένα ἀπὸ τὰ προηγούμενα. Εἶναι τὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς σκληρῆς, ἀπάνθρωπης, προκλητικῆς καὶ γενικῆς Νέας Κατοχῆς.

Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πλέον δάκρυα, γιὰ νὰ κλάψει κάποιος πονόψυχος τὶς περιπτώσεις. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πονόψυχοι πλέον, ἀλλὰ πονεμένοι. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν πλούσιοι νὰ βοηθήσουν. Ἐλάχιστοι ἀπέμειναν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ δὲν προσβλήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν ἰδὸ τῆς μεθοδευμένα ἐπιβληθείσης φτώχειας. Οἱ γνωστοὶ ἄγνωστοι τῶν προαστείων καὶ τῆς Βουλῆς. Οἱ ἄλλοι βρίσκονται σὲ ἀνάγκη καὶ παρακάλεση σὲ Θεὸ καὶ ἀνθρώπους. Δὲν ὑπάρχει πρωτεύουσα πιά ποὺ νὰ πεινᾷ καὶ ἐπαρχία, ποὺ τὰ βγάξει πέρα. Ὅλη ἡ Ἑλλάδα ἔγινε μία φτωχοεπαρχία τῆς Εὐρώπης.

Τί νὰ ποῦμε γιὰ τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα τῆς ὀρφανῆς Ἑλλάδας! Σχολεῖα χωρὶς πετρέλαιο, παιδιά

πού λιποθυμοῦν στὰ ἔδρανα χωρὶς πρωϊνό, μαθητὲς πού διαβάζουν σκεπασμένοι μὲ κουβέρτες, σπίτια ὅπου τρῶνε μία φορὰ τὴ μέρα, οἰκογένειες πού δὲ δουλεύει κανένας ἀπὸ τὰ μέλη τους, συντετριμμένοι ἄποροι γονεῖς, αὐτοκίνητα ἀκίνητα, χωρὶς πινακίδες, ἀπλήρωτοι καθυστερημένοι λογαριασμοί, ἀκατάβλητες τραπεζικὲς δόσεις, ληγμένα γραμμᾶτια, πληρωμένα φάρμακα, ζυμαρικὰ καὶ ὄσπρια στὸ τραπέζι καθημερινά, κοιμμένα ρεύματα καὶ νερά, σταματημένα φροντιστήρια τῶν παιδιῶν, χρῆ πού τρέχουν καὶ ἐνοίκια πού περιμένουν, δῆμοι καὶ περιφέρειες χωρὶς πόρους, ναοὶ πού μετρᾶνε πλέον τὰ χάλκινα κέρματα τοῦ παγκαρίου γιὰ νὰ καλύψουν τρύπες καὶ γύμνιες καὶ νὰ χορτάσουν ἄδειες κοιλιές. Ἄνεργοι νέοι, κλειστὰ μαγαζιά, ἀκινήσια στὴν ἀγορά, μελλοντοφροῖ στὴν ἀναμονή, μαραζωμένοι συνταξιούχοι, ἀδιαθεσία παντοῦ, αὐτοκτονίες συχνές, «ὁ πλοῦς ἐν νυκτί, φῶς οὐδαμοῦ», ἀπολυμένοι καὶ ἀνασφάλιστοι, ἀγανακτισμένοι καὶ διαμαρτυρόμενοι. Ἀγρίεψε τὸ μάτι τοῦ λαοῦ. Μία πατρίδα στὰ ὄρια τῆς ἀπόγνωσης καὶ τῆς γενικῆς ἀνάφλεξης.

Χριστούγεννα 2011. Κι ὅμως «οὐδὲν κακὸν ἀμιγὲς καλοῦ». Αὐξήθηκαν φέτος οἱ προχριστουγεννιάτικες φιλανθρωπικὲς προσπάθειες. Κάποιοι δῆμοι ὀργάνωσαν κάτι γιὰ τὰ παιδιά. Δόθηκαν περισσότερα δέματα ἀγάπης σὲ φτωχοὺς. Ἔγιναν πῶς πολλές ἐπισκέψεις συμπαράστασης. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ μεγάλη μάννα τῶν ὀρθοδόξων, μαζεύει καὶ πάλι τὰ παιδιά τῆς κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ προστατευτικὰ φτερά της. Αὐξήθηκαν τὰ συσσίτια καὶ τὰ ἐπιδόματα. Κάτι ἔγινε καὶ μὲ τὸν Ἔρανο τῆς Ἀγάπης. Λίγα πράγματα βέβαια. Εἶναι πλέον ὁ ἴδιος ὁ λαὸς πού δίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ὑστέρημά του.

Στὴ Γερμανικὴ Κατοχὴ τοῦ 1941 ἔβγαινε ἡ μερίδα τοῦ φτωχοῦ, μία κουταλιά ἀπὸ κάθε πιάτο, κι ἔβγαινε ἕνα ἀκόμη πιάτο. Ἐβδομήντα χρόνια μετὰ, τὸ 2011, ὁ φιλότιμος λαός μας, ὁ καταδικασμένος στὸν ἐξευτελισμὸ τῶν τραπεζικῶν μεθοδεύσεων, τῆς πολιτικῆς ἀβουλίας τῶν βουλευτῶν του καὶ τῆς κυβερνητικῆς ἀναξιότητος τῶν ἐκλεγμένων ἀρχόντων του, βγάζει κι ἕνα πιάτο γιὰ τὰ παιδιά τῶν ὀρφανοτροφείων, γιὰ τοὺς γέροντες τῶν γηροκομείων, γιὰ τὶς στρατιῆς τῶν ἀνέργων καὶ ἀστέγων, γιὰ τὶς ὀρδὲς τῶν ἀπατημένων λαθροφερμένων μεταναστῶν, γιὰ τοὺς τροφίμους τῶν φυλακῶν, γιὰ τοὺς ξεχασμένους τῶν ἀσύλων. «Ἄχ, Ἑλλάδα, πόσο σ' ἀγαπῶ!» «Προώριστα νὰ ζήσης καὶ θὰ ζήσης διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς φιλανθρωπίας», γλυκεῖά μας Πατρίδα.

Χριστούγεννα ἀπελπισίας τὰ φετινά! «Οὐδεὶς οἶδε τί τέξεται ἢ ἐπιούσα». Πολλοὶ ξαναφέρνουν στὴν ἐπικαιρότητα θρούλους καὶ προφητείες. Τί θὰ γίνεῖ ἄραγε; Ἕνας χειμῶνας δύσκολος. Βαριά μελανιασμένα σύννεφα στὸν ὀρίζοντα. «Ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς

τῶν Ἰουδαίων;» Ψάχνουμε καὶ μεῖς χωρὶς ἀστέρι καὶ φῶς ἐλπίδας στὴν ἀφιλόξενη πλέον Ἑλλάδα. Γιατί συμβαίνουν ὅλα αὐτά; Τί κάνει ὁ Θεός; ρωτοῦν πολλοί. Ἦ εἴμαστε πολὺ ἁμαρτωλοὶ καὶ μᾶς τιμωρεῖ, ἢ εἴμαστε ἀκαλλιέργητοι καὶ μᾶς παιδαγωγεῖ ἢ εἴμαστε πολὺ ἅγιοι καὶ μᾶς δοκιμάζει ἢ πολὺ ὑπομονητικοὶ καὶ κάτι μᾶς ἐτοιμάζει! Δὲν ἐξηγεῖται ἄλλοιῶς. Ὅ,τι καὶ νάμαστε μὴ χάσουμε τὴν προσδοκία μας, τὴν ἐλπίδα μας καὶ τὴ χαρὰ μας.

Χριστούγεννα τῆς Νέας Κατοχῆς τοῦ 2011. «Σώπα, ὅπου νάναι θὰ χτυπήσουν οἱ καμπάνες». Δὲ χάθηκε ἡ ἐλπίδα. Γεννιέται ἕνα Παιδί. Κι αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί εἶναι ὁ Χριστός! Ὁ Ἐμμανουήλ, ὁ Θεὸς μαζί μας! «Ἀνατολὴ ὄνομα Αὐτῶ». Κάτι καινούριο ξεπροβάλλει! Ἄν κάποιος, λοιπόν, λαοὶ καὶ ἄρχοντες, ἀρέσκονται στὴν ἀπάτη, ἐμεῖς ἄς ὑπηρετήσουμε τὴν Ἀγάπη. Ἄν κάποιος προωθοῦν τὴ διαπλοκή, ἐμεῖς ἄς ἐπιμείνουμε στὴν Προσευχή. Ἄν ἄλλοι μεθοδεύουν τὴν ἐκμετάλλευση, ἐμεῖς αὐξήσουμε τὴν ἀλληλεγγύη. Ἄν κάποιος ἀνέχεται καὶ μεθοῦν, «ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρεπόμενοι καὶ Θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενοι», ἐμεῖς ἄς ἀγρυπνοῦμε κοντὰ στοὺς ἀναγκασμένους. Ἄν κάποιος σχεδιάζουν στὰ σκοτεινὰ γραφεῖα τοὺς τὸν φόνο «ἀπὸ διетуὺς καὶ κατωτέρω» τῶν παιδιῶν τῶν Ἑλλήνων, ἐμεῖς ἄς μείνουμε πιστοὶ στὴ Ζωὴ πού γεννιέται. Ἄν, τέλος, δικοὶ μας καὶ ξένοι ψεύδονται καὶ μᾶς ἐμπαίζουν, ἐμεῖς ἄς προσκυνήσουμε ταπεινὰ τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ ὁ Καλὸς Θεὸς θὰ μᾶς βγάλει ἀπὸ ἄλλο δρόμο, γιὰ νὰ ξαναβροῦμε τὴ χαμένη Πατρίδα μας καὶ τὴν ἀποσταμένη ἐλπίδα μας. Ἕνα εἶναι σίγουρο: δὲ θὰ πεθάνουμε, δὲ θὰ χαθοῦμε! «Ζεῖ Κύριος» καὶ μεῖς ζοῦμε!



Δὲν ξέρω ἐσεῖς πῶς ἐτοιμάξετε γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἄν ἐτοιμάξετε μόνο ὑλικῶς, μὲ ὄλο τὸ φορτίο τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σας δηλ. ἀνεξομολόγητοι, κάνετε πολὺ λάθος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ προετοιμάζεται γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα καὶ πνευματικῶς, νὰ ἐξομολογεῖται δηλ. καὶ νὰ βρίσκεται ἐν μετανοίᾳ. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον, νὰ «μαζέψει» τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ νὰ καταργήσῃ τὸν θάνατον, πού προκαλεῖ ἡ ἁμαρτία.

Ἐὰν λοιπὸν θέλουμε, τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα νὰ εἶναι Χριστούγεννα Θεοῦ, φροντίστε νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖτε τὶς ἁμαρτίες σας, εἰρηνεύσετε μὲ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἀγαπήστε - συγχωρέστε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, πεῖτε τὴν «καλημέρα» τοῦ Θεοῦ, γράψτε, τηλεφωνεῖστε καὶ μετὰ πάτε στὴν Βηθλεὲμ, γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσετε τὸ «ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία» ἀπὸ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον γιὰ τὸν ἄλλον.

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος, Ἱεροκήρυκας

Τὸ Κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν

Ἡ Ζ΄ Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος ἀπαγορεύει στοὺς Ἐπισκόπους νὰ δέχονται τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν ὅποιαδήποτε αἰτία κι ἂν ὑφίσταται!

Γράφει ὁ Ἰωάννης Χατζηδιγενῆς, θεολόγος.

**«Οἱ τὰ πάντα καλῶς διαταξάμενοι θεοὶ Πατέρες»
ἀπαντοῦν στὰ περὶ κλεισίματος τῶν Ἱερῶν Ναῶν!**

† † †

Αγιοὶ ἱεράρχες, γνωρίζετε καλῶς πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐνεργοῦσα ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι «ἐκλείσει καλῶς καὶ ἀπολύτως» ὅλες τὶς ὁπὲς διαρροῆς καὶ ὑπεκφυγῆς ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς Παραδόσεως, στὴν ὁποία περιέχεται καὶ ἡ κοινὴ Θεία Λατρεία. Ἐνα εἶναι τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ποῦ φωτίζει τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτουν ἅπασαν τὴν Ἀλήθειαν. Συνεπῶς δὲν ὑπάρχει περιπτώση ὑπεκφυγῆς ἀπὸ αὐτὴν, διότι εἶναι καὶ βεβιωμένη καὶ καταγεγραμμένη. Ἐν τοιαύτῃ περιπτώσει, μὲ τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν ναῶν, καταφεύγουμε καὶ σήμερα στὴν ἀσφαλὴ πηγή, γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ ἡ παρανομία ἢ ὁποία ἐπιτελεῖται, καὶ ἐσεῖς ὡς σῶμα ἱεραρχικὸ τὴν ἀποδέχεσθε!

Οἱ «λόγοι προστασίας τῆς υἰετίας» εἶναι ἡ δικαιολογία τῶν πολιτικῶν γιὰ νὰ λαμβάνουν ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ μέτρα. Προφανῶς καὶ οἱ περισσότεροι ἐπίσκοποι υἰοθέτησαν τὴν λογικὴ τῆς σωματικῆς υἰετίας ὡς ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ συμφωνοῦν μὲ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς σὲ ὅλα. Εἶναι ὅμως ἡ σωματικὴ υἰετία ὑπέρτατο ἀγαθὸ, κρίνοντας τὰ πράγματα ἀγιοπατερικά; Βέβαια τὸ σῶμα ὀφείλουμε νὰ μὴν τὸ καταστρέφουμε ἀλλὰ ἕως ποιοῦ σημείου; Ὅταν ἡ προστασία τοῦ βλάπτει τὴν ψυχὴ;

Ἡ Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἀποκλειστικὸ Πηδάλιο, Πυξίδα καὶ Ὁδηγὸς, εἶχε καὶ θὰ ἔχει τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση. Τὴν Διδασκαλία δηλαδὴ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν βιωμένη ἐμπειρία τῆς Διδασκαλίας αὐτῆς ἀπὸ τὸ Κυριακὸ Σῶμα, τοὺς Πιστοῦς. Κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν κατηύθυνε, οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ κατευθύνει τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Συνεπῶς δὲν γίνεται νὰ τῆς ἐπιβληθοῦν πρακτικὲς ποῦ βρίσκονται ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ τὴν Πατερικὴ Διδασκαλία, δηλαδὴ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση. Στὸ «Πηδάλιο» ποῦ ἔχει συντάξει ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, περιέχεται ὁ τέταρτος Κανὼνας τῆς ἐβδόμης Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι ξεκάθαρος σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν



Ἱερῶν Ναῶν. Ἀπαγορεύει ρητῶς στοὺς Ἐπισκόπους νὰ ἐπιτρέπουν τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν Ναῶν, ὅποιαδήποτε αἰτία κι ἂν ὑφίσταται!

Διαβάστε προσεκτικὰ τὸν κανόνα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὶς ἐπεξηγήσεις τῶν ἐρμηνευτῶν:

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ «Σύνταγμα Θεῶν καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων», τῶν Ράλλη - Ποτλή, τόμος Β΄, ἐκδόσεις «Γρηγόρη» Κανὼν Δ΄ τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Οἰκουμενικῆς Ἐβδόμης (Ζ΄) Συνόδου τῆς ἐν Νικαίᾳ: «*Εἴ τις οὖν δι' ἀπαίτησιν χρυσοῦ, ἢ ἑτέρου τινός εἶδους, εἴτε διὰ τινα ἰδίαν ἐμπάθειαν, εὐρεθείη ἀπειρῶν τῆς λειτουργίας, καὶ ἀφορίζων τινὰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν κληρικῶν, ἢ σεπτὸν ναὸν κλείων, ὡς μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ λειτουργίας, καὶ εἰς ἀναίσθητον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ μανίαν ἐπιπέμπων, ἀναίσθητος ὄντως ἐστί, καὶ τῆ ταυτοπαθείᾳ ὑποκείσεται, καὶ ἐπιστρέψει ὁ πόνος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, ὡς παραβάτης ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...*».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ κανόνου στὴν νεοελληνικὴ: «*Εἴαν λοιπὸν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ εἶχε βρεθεῖ κάποιος ἐπίσκοπος, ποῦ νὰ ἀπαγορεύσει τὴν τέλεση τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας, ἀπαιτώντας χρυσὸ ἢ κάποιον ἄλλο εἶδος ἢ ἀκόμη γιὰ λόγους κάποιου προσωπικοῦ πάθους καὶ μάλιστα νὰ ἀφορίσει κάποιον ἀπὸ τοὺς κληρικούς, ποῦ ὑπάγονται στὴν δικὴ του ἐκκλησιαστικὴ δικαιοδοσία ἢ ἂν κλείσει κάποιον ἱερὸ ναό, ὥστε νὰ*

μὴν γίνονται σ' αὐτὸν οἱ Θεεῖς Λειτουργίαι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μὲ ἀναίσθησίᾳ ἐπιρρίψει τὴν μανία του μὲ τιμωρίες, εἶναι ὄντως ἀναίσθητος καὶ θὰ ὑποστεῖ καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ ἴδια ποῦ ἔχει κάνει. Ὁ πόνος ποῦ ἔδωσε, θὰ ἐπιστρέψει στὸ δικό του κεφάλι, διότι ὑπῆρξε παραβάτης τῆς ἐντολῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...».

Ἐρμηνεία Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου Ἁγιορείτου, Ἱερὸν «Πηδάλιον», σελίδα 266: «*Ὅποιος λοιπὸν Ἀρχιερεὺς εὐρεθῆ νὰ ἀργίξῃ ἢ νὰ ἀφορίξῃ τινὰ ἱερέα, ἢ Κληρικόν, ἢ νὰ κλείῃ Ἐκκλησίας διὰ νὰ πάρῃ ἄσπρα ἢ διὰ καμμίαν του ἄλλην ἐμπάθειαν, οὗτος ἄς παθαίνη ἐκεῖνο ὁποῦ κάμνει, ἢτοι ἄς ἀργίξεται, καὶ ἄς ἀφορίζεται, Ἐπίσκοπος μὲν ὢν ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτην του, Μητροπολίτης δὲ ὢν ἀπὸ τὸν Πατριάρχην του.*».

Ἐρμηνεία Ζωναρά: «*Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπος κλείσει ναόν, ὥστε μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς λειτουργίας, εἰς ἀναίσθητον, τὸν ναόν, δηλαδὴ τὴν ὄργην αὐτοῦ, ἢν μανίαν, διὰ τὸ πάνυ σφοδρὸν καὶ παράλογον ὠνόμασεν, ἐπιπέμπων, ἀναίσθητός ἐστί, φησί, καὶ τῆ ταυτοπαθείᾳ*

ὑποκείται, ἡγουν ἀφορισθήσεται, καὶ ὁ ἐποίησε πάθη, ὁ μὲν ἐπίσκοπος παρὰ τοῦ μητροπολίτου αὐτοῦ, ὁ δὲ μητροπολίτης παρὰ τοῦ πατριάρχου, οἷς ὑπόκεινται καὶ ἐπιστρέφει ὁ πόνος αὐτοῦ εἰς κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ, ὡς παραβάτου ἐντολῆς Θεοῦ, καὶ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν διατάξεων...».

Ἐρμηνεία Βαλσάμωνος: «Ὁ γὰρ κλείων ναοὺς Ἐπίσκοπος ἐξ οἰουδήποτε εὐλόγου, ἢ παραλόγου τρόπου, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, κολασθήσεται».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ Βαλσάμωνος στὴν νεοελληνική: «Ὁ ἐπίσκοπος ποὺ κλείνει ναοὺς μὲ ὁποιαδήποτε λογικὴ ἢ παράλογη ἀφορμὴ, ἔχω τὴν γνώμη πὼς θὰ κολασθεῖ».

Ἐρμηνεία Ἀριστήνου: «Εἰ τις οὖν Ἐπίσκοπος... διὰ τινα ἰδιοπάθειαν, εὐρεθεὶ ἀπειργων τῆς λειτουργίας, ἢ ἀφορίζων τινὰ τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν κληρικῶν, ἢ σεπτὸν ναὸν κλείων, μὴ γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὰς ἱερὰς τοῦ Θεοῦ λειτουργίας, τῇ ταυτοπαθείᾳ ὑποκείται...».

Ἀπόδοση τοῦ Ἀριστήνου στὴν νεοελληνική: «Εἴαν θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βρεθεῖ κάποιος ἐπίσκοπος νὰ ἀπαγορεύσει τὴν Λειτουργία... ἐξαιτίας ἰδίου πάθους ἢ ἂν ἀφορίσει κάποιον κληρικὸ τῆς δικαιοδοσίας του (ἐν. γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτό) ἢ κλείσει ἱερὸ ναό, ὥστε νὰ μὴν γίνονται μέσα οἱ ἱερὰς Λειτουργίες τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ ὑποστῆ τις ἀνάλογες βαριεὲς τιμωρίες».

Ὅσο γιὰ τὴν θεληματικὴ ἢ ὄχι συναίνεση τῶν Ἐπισκόπων, δὲν τὸ λέμε ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι ὅτι θέλουν τὰ μέτρα περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη γιὰ τὸ φοβοῦνται μὴν κολλήσουν καί, Θεὸς φυλάξοι, πεθάνουν!

Πὼς λοιπὸν μπορούμε μὲ διάφορες προφάσεις, νὰ ἀποκόπτουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας ἀπὸ τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἀκρωτηριάσουμε τὴν ἐκκλησία; Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ κανόνες τῆς ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα αὐστηροί. **«Πάντας τοὺς εἰσιόντας πιστοὺς καὶ τῶν γραφῶν ἀκούοντας, μὴ παραμένοντας δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ ἀγίᾳ μεταλήψει, ὡς ἀταξίαν ἐμποιοῦντας τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἀφορίζεσθαι χρὴ».** (9^{ος} Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν).



Ἀπόψε εὐχομαι νὰ Τὸν δοῦμε τὸν Χριστὸ μέσα μας νὰ γεννιέται, καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ὁδηγὸς μας μέχρι τῆς ἐσχάτης μας ἀναπνοῆς. Καλὴ ἀγρυπνία: δύναμι νὰ μᾶς δώσῃ ἢ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄγγελοι καὶ Ἀρχάγγελοι καὶ Ἐξουσαίαι θὰ χοροστατοῦν ἀπόψε. Νοερῶς νὰ εἴμαστε γονατισμένες στὴ Βηθλεέμ, στὴ Φάτνη, στὸν Ἀστέρα, ἐκεῖ ὅπου μὲ δόξα θὰ γίνεταί ἀγρυπνία ὁλονύχτια. Νὰ Τὸν ἀγκαλιάσουμε, τὸν Τὸν χαϊδέσουμε τὸν Χριστοῦλη, ὅπως ἡ Παναγία. Νὰ σκιρτήσῃ σὰν βρέφος στὴς ψυχές μας. Νὰ Τοῦ δεῖξομε τὴν ἀγάπη μας καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ψυχικὴ καὶ σωματικὴ ἀναγέννησι. Χρόνια πολλὰ σὰς εὐχομαι, εὐλογημένα παρὰ Κυρίου.

Γερόντισσα Μακρίνα (+1995)

Περὶ Ὑποκρισίας

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πληγὴ στὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ αἰτία πολλῶν δεινῶν εἶναι ἡ ὑποκρισία, ποὺ διακρίνει πολλοὺς κληρικούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὺς Χριστιανούς. Μιὰ κατάσταση, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτη, ἀφοῦ ἐμφανίζεως θεοφιλὲς ἐκείνο, ποὺ εἶναι ἀμαρτωλὸ καὶ κατακριτέο.

Ἡ ὑποκρισία προϋποθέτει ἀσεβεία πρὸς κάθε τί ἱερὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ θρασύτητα. Ὁ ὑποκριτὴς εἶναι ἐρείπιο πνευματικὰ, θέλει ὅμως νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τὶς τιμὲς καὶ τὰ ἐγκώμια τῶν ἄλλων γιὰ «ἀρετές», ποὺ ὑποκριτικὰ ἐμφανίζει. Ἡ παρουσία του ἀνάμεσα σὲ γνωστοὺς εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα ἐνοχλητικὴ. Οἱ περισσότεροι τὸν ἀνέχονται μὲ ἐπικριτικούς ψιθύρους καὶ δὲν νιώθουν κοντὰ του εὐχάριστα.

Ἡ στάση αὐτὴ βέβαια ἀπέναντι στὸν ὑποκριτὴ δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἐνδεδειγμένη. Χρειάζεται δυναμικὴ ἀντίδραση. Πρέπει νὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ ἡ ὑποκρισία, γιὰ νὰ κλονιστεῖ ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη ἐκείνων, ποὺ ἔχουν ἐξαπατηθεῖ καὶ νὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τοὺς ἀληθινὰ ἐναρέτους ἀνθρώπους προκειμένου νὰ ὠφεληθοῦν πνευματικὰ.

Ὁ ὑποκριτὴς δὲν γίνεται γνωστὸς γρήγορα καὶ εὐκόλα. Συνήθως περνάει χρόνος καὶ μόνο ὅταν χρειαστεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει κάποια σοβαρὴ κατάσταση ἢ κάποιο πρόβλημα, ἀρχίζει νὰ καταστρέφεται τὸ προσωπεῖο του καὶ νὰ φαίνεται τὸ πραγματικὸ του πρόσωπο. Ἡ εὐλάβεια, ἡ πραότητα, ἡ ταπείνωση, ἡ ἀνεξικακία, ποὺ τὸν «κοσμοῦσαν», χάνονται καὶ φαίνεται ὁ ἀσεβής, ὁ ὀργίλος, ὁ ὑπερήφανος καὶ ἐμπαθής, ποὺ δηλητηρίαζε τὸν περίγυρό του, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν ὑποψιάζονταν πολλοὶ καλοπροαίρετοι, μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους ἐρχόταν σὲ ἐπαφὴ καὶ εἶχε συνεργασία.

Εἶναι γνωστὴ ἡ στάση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπέναντι στοὺς ὑποκριτὲς τῆς ἐποχῆς του, δηλαδὴ στοὺς Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους. Χρησιμοποίησε ἀποκαλυπτικὴ γλῶσσα, γιὰ νὰ προφυλάξῃ τὸ λαό, ὁ ὁποῖος παρασυρόταν ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦσε.

Οἱ ὑποκριτὲς εἶναι ἐπικίνδυνοι, ἰδίως ὅταν δραστηριοποιοῦνται στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, γιὰ τὴν δημιουργοῦν ψεύτικες ἐντυπώσεις καὶ προκαλοῦν σκανδαλισμὸ καὶ ἀπογοήτευση. Συνηθισμένη περίπτωση εἶναι μερικοὶ ὑποψήφιοι ἱερεῖς, ποὺ ἐμφανίζονται ὡς εὐλαβέστατοι, μὲ ἱερατικὴ κλίση καὶ ἱερὸ ζήλο καὶ μετὰ τὴ χειροτονία τοὺς ἀποβάλλουν τὸ προσωπεῖο τῆς εὐλάβειας καὶ ἀπογοητεύουν τοὺς ἐνοριτεῖς τοὺς.

Μακάρι κάποτε νὰ ἐκλείψει ἡ ὑποκρισία ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ οἱ ἐκδηλώσεις τοὺς νὰ εἶναι ἀληθινές. Νὰ ξέρεις ποιοὺς ἔχεις μπροστά σου, νὰ βλέπεις τὶς ἀρετὲς τοὺς καὶ νὰ χαίρεσαι ἢ νὰ βλέπεις τὶς ἀδυναμίες τοὺς καὶ νὰ τοὺς βοηθᾷς ἀνάλογα.

Οἱ Προφητεῖες Ἐγίναν Εἰδήσεις!

Γράφει ὁ Ἡλίας Δ. Καλλιώρας, καθηγητῆς Διεθνολόγος, συγγραφέας, πρώην βουλευτῆς. Ἀπὸ τὸ «Στύλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», Νοέμβριος 2020, Ἀριθμὸς Φύλλον 226.

Αρχὲς Αὐγούστου ἔγραφα στὸν Στύλο Ὁρθοδοξίας: «Φωτισμένος γέροντας μᾶς τόνισε ὅτι ἡ Ἑλλάδα καὶ οἱ Ἕλληνες θὰ δεχθοῦν καὶ νέα ραπίσματα οὐράνιας διαπαιδαγώγησης ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο. Διότι, ὅπως εἶπε ὁ γέροντας, «οἱ Ἕλληνες ξέχασαν τὸν Τριαδικὸ Θεὸ καὶ ἀποστάτησαν μαζικά. Πολλοὶ Ἕλληνες, μαζὶ μὲ τὶς ἑλληνικὲς κυβερνήσεις, φτάνουν στὸ φοβερὸ ἐκεῖνο σημεῖο νὰ πολεμοῦν εὐθέως τὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Βασίλειό Του.

Γράφουν νόμους ποὺ εἶναι Χριστομάχοι. Χριστοπόλεμοι. Ἀντίθεοι. Βέβηλοι. Θυμίζουν ἀρχαία Βαβυλώνα. Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀμαρτάνουν ὑπέροτρα σὲ τέσσερις κυρίως τομεῖς ἢ πνευματικὰ πεδία: Ἐκτρώσεις, παρὰ φύση ἀμαρτήματα, μαγεῖες καὶ βλασφημίες κατὰ τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος».

Ἐπίσης, ἔγραφα τότε: «Σὲ ἄλλη ἐρώτηση πρὸς τὸν γέροντα, γιὰ τὸ τί πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε ὅταν ἴσως ἔρθει ἓνα δευτέρου κύμα ἢ β' φάση τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ καὶ κλείσουν ἴσως καὶ πάλι οἱ Ἐκκλησίες ἢ ἀρχίσουν παρόμοιοι ἢ καὶ ἀκόμα χειρότεροι διωγμοὶ κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς Θείας Μετάληψης, τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τῶν πιστῶν, ὁ ἴδιος μᾶς ὑπογράμμισε μὲ ἰδιαίτερο νόημα:

«Νὰ διαβάσετε πολὺ προσεκτικὰ τὸ βιβλίον «Τὸ Ὀδοιπορικὸ Ραβδί» τοῦ Νιχηφόρφ-Βόλγιν. Νὰ τὸ διαβάσετε καὶ νὰ τὸ προτείνετε ἐπίσης καὶ σὲ ἱερεῖς τοῦ Ὑψίστου: Διότι, οἱ παραδοσιακοὶ παπάδες θὰ ἔχουν τὸ μεγαλύτερο βᾶρος, ρόλο καὶ πρόβλημα καὶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ βροῦν τρόπους καὶ μεθόδους «πνευματικῆς ἐπιβίωσης» ὁ καθένας γιὰ τὸ δικό του ποίμνιο. Ἴσως πᾶμε σὲ ..κατακόμβες γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορὰ. Γιὰ 6 μὲ 7 μῆνες. Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε τοὺς πρωτοχριστιανικοὺς χρόνους, ὅπου οἱ ἱερεῖς τοῦ Κυρίου μας ἔβαζαν τὸ ἀντιμῆνσιο στὸν ντορβά τους καὶ ἔτρεχαν πόρτα-πόρτα, στὰ σκοτάδια, μέρα-νύχτα, κρυφίως καὶ μὲ τὸν «φόβο τῶν Ἰουδαίων» σὲ ἓνα πρὸς ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ πρόβατά τους. Σπίτι-σπίτι. Ἀχυρώνα-ἀχυρώνα. Γιὰ νὰ παντρέψουν, βαπτίσουν, κηδέψουν, κλπ».

Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Μόρφου Νεόφυτος εἶπε τὸν Μάιο τοῦ 2019: «Οἱ προφητεῖες τελειώσαν, θὰ τὰ βλέπουμε ὅλα στὶς εἰδήσεις».

Ἐλεγε ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Σήμερα τὸ νὰ διαβάξει κανεὶς τοὺς προφήτες εἶναι σὰν νὰ διαβάξει ἐφημερίδα». Τόνιζε, ἐπίσης, ὁ ἴδιος ἀγιορεῖτης ἅγιος: «Τὸ καλύτερο

πρακτορεῖο εἰδήσεων εἶναι οἱ προφητεῖες τῶν ἁγίων». Μᾶς προειδοποιοῦσε: «Τόσα σᾶς λέω, τόσο σκληρὰ ἔχω μιλήσει! Ἄν δὲν ἔβλεπα τὰ δύσκολα χρόνια ποὺ ἔρχονται, δὲν θὰ ἀνησχοῦσα τόσο. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ποὺ βλέπω εἶναι ὅτι ἀργότερα θὰ δυσκολευτεῖτε πολὺ. Δὲν μὲ καταλαβαίνετε. Τότε θὰ μὲ καταλάβετε».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Εἶθε νὰ μὴν ἐπιτρέψη ὁ Θεὸς νὰ ἔρθουν δύσκολες μέρες, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἔρθουν, μὲ ἓνα μικρὸ σεισμό, μὲ ἓνα τράνταγμα, θὰ σωριάσουν ὀλόκληρες ἀδελφότητες, ὀλόκληρα μοναστήρια, γιὰτὶ ὁ καθένας θὰ πάη νὰ σώση τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ θὰ τραβήξῃ τὴν πορεία του. Χρειάζεται πολλὴ προσοχή, γιὰ νὰ μὴ μᾶς ἐγκατάλειψη ὁ Θεός... Ὅθι γίνῃ μεγάλο τράνταγμα».

Κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Παῖσιο: «Μεγαλύτεροι Μάρτυρες ἦταν οἱ Προφῆτες! Πιὸ μεγάλοι Μάρτυρες ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς Μάρτυρες, παρ' ὅλου ποὺ δὲν πέθαναν ὅλοι μὲ μαρτυρικὸ θάνατο. Γιατὶ οἱ Μάρτυρες γιὰ λίγο ὑπέφεραν, ἐνῶ οἱ Προφῆτες ἔβλεπαν μία κατάσταση καὶ ὑπέφεραν συνέχεια. Φώναζαν-φώναζαν, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τὸν χαβά τους. Καὶ ὅταν ἔφθανε ἡ ὥρα καὶ ἔρχόταν ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐξ αἰτίας τους, βασανίζονταν καὶ ἐκεῖνοι μαζί τους. Δὲν ἔχουμε συνειδητοποιήσει ὅτι ὁ διάβολος βάλθηκε νὰ καταστρέψῃ τὰ πλάσματα τοῦ Θεοῦ».

Ὁ ἴδιος ἀγιορεῖτης ἅγιος ὑπογράμμισε ἀκόμη: «Ὁ κόσμος καίγεται! Τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Ἐπесе πολὺς πειρασμός. Τέτοια πυρκαγιὰ ἔχει βάλει ὁ διάβολος, ποὺ οὔτε ὅλοι οἱ πυροσβέστες ἂν μαζεθοῦν, δὲν μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν τίποτε, ἀναγκάζονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ Τὸν παρακαλέσουν νὰ ρίξῃ μία βροχὴ γερῆ, γιὰ νὰ σβῆσῃ. Ἔτσι καὶ γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ πυρκαγιὰ ποὺ ἄναψε ὁ διάβολος, μόνον προσευχὴ χρειάζεται, γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός. Ὁλος ὁ κόσμος πάει νὰ γίνῃ μία περίπτωση. Γενικὸ ξεχαρβάλωμα! Δὲν εἶναι νὰ πῆς: «Σ' ἓνα σπῆτι χάλασε λίγο τὸ παράθυρο ἢ κάτι ἄλλο, ἄς τὸ διορθώσω.» Ὅλο τὸ σπῆτι εἶναι ξεχαρβαλωμένο. Ἔχει γίνῃ χαλασμένο χωριό».

Ναί, ἔτσι ἔχουν τὰ πράγματα στὶς μέρες μας. Ὁ κόσμος ξεχαρβαλώθηκε. Ξέφυγε. Ξέχασε τὸν Κύριο. Δὲν τὸν ἔχει ἀνάγκη πιά. Ἐγινε ὁ ἄνθρωπος ... θεός! Πῆρε ἢ μπῆκε στὴ θέση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Βλέπετε πὼς λόγω ἡδονῶν, σαρκικῶν παθῶν, καλοπέρασης, κλπ, δὲν τὸν «συμφέρει» πλέον νὰ δεῖ, νὰ ἀκούσει καὶ νὰ ἐπικοινωνήσῃ μὲ τὸν Τριαδικὸ Θεό. Δὲν ἔχει πλέον καμμία ἀνάγκη τὸν Κύριο. Ὅλα τὰ κάνει μόνος του. Δὲν χρειάζεται κανέναν. Οὔτε κἂν τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Δημιουργό του. Ἀποστάτησε. Ὁ ἐγωϊσμός τὸν κάνει νὰ νιώθει

Ἐπενθυμίζουμε τὶς προφητεῖες παλαιῶν καὶ συγχρόνων ἁγίων προκειμένου νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουμε ὅλοι τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν!

γίγαντας! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὑπάρχει γενικὸς συσκοτισμὸς μέσα στὶς καρδιές τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Γιὰ τὴ Δύση, εἰδικότερα, ὅπως εἶπε καὶ ὁ μέγας παγανιστὴς Φ. Νίτσε: «Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι νεκρός».

Μπροστὰ σὲ ἐμᾶς καὶ σὲ ὅσα κάνουμε ἢ βιώνουμε στὶς μέρες μας, τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορρα φαντάζου, πνευματικὰ καὶ ἱστορικὰ, μικρὰ πταισίματα καὶ ἀσήμαντες καταστάσεις ἢ γεγονότα μίας ἄλλης ἐποχῆς. Διότι τότε οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶχαν πέσει μὲν στὴν ἀσωτία, στὸν ἠδονισμό, στὰ σαρκικὰ πάθη καὶ στὶς παρὰ φύσει ἀνωμαλίες καὶ βιωτὴ, χωρὶς, ἐν τούτοις, νὰ ὑπάρχουν σχετικοὶ νόμοι καὶ διατάξεις ποὺ νὰ ἐπιτρέπουν, καλλιεργοῦν, νομιμοποιοῦν καὶ νὰ ἐνθαρρύνουν τὸν σοδομισμὸ, τὴν ἀνωμαλία καὶ τὴν ἀποστασία μας ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο, ὅπως συμβαίνει στὰ δικὰ μας χρόνια.

Αὐτὴ τὴ γενικὴ μας ἀποστασία εἶναι ποὺ θέλει ὁ Κύριος νὰ τὴν ἀλλάξει μὲ τὸν τρόπο Του καὶ νὰ τὴν διορθώσει μὲ τίς δικές Του εὐλογίες-παραχωρήσεις ὁ Κύριος. Καὶ ὄχι, ὅπως θὰ ἤθελε ὁ Ἰδιος μὲ δικές Του εὐλογίες-εὐδοκίες. Ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Ὅσιος Μάρκος ὁ Ἀσκητῆς: «Τὰ ὀδυνηρὰ γεγονότα χαρίζουν μνήμη Θεοῦ στὸν συντετὸ ἄνθρωπο καὶ προκαλοῦν ἀντιστοίχως θλίψη σ' ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔχει ξεχάσει τὸν Θεό». Βλέπετε, ὁ Σωτῆρας μας δὲν θέλει νὰ μᾶς ἀφαιρέσει τὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ αὐτεξοφύτου ποὺ μᾶς δώρισε ἀπὸ ἀγάπη καὶ πατρικὴ φροντίδα. Θέλει ὁ Ἰδιος ἐμεῖς νὰ Τὸν ἐπιλέξουμε, ἐλεύθερα, μὲ ἐπίγνωση καὶ ἀπὸ καρδιάς γιὰ Πατέρα καὶ Θεό μας.

Καὶ ἐδῶ εἶναι ποὺ ὑπαισέχεται ἡ δική μας ἔμμεση πρόσκληση τῶν ἐπερχόμενων, ἀσύλληπτων καὶ φρικτῶν γεγονότων: Τοῦ προ τῶν θυρῶν Γ' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου. Μὲ τὴ γενικὴ μας ἀποστασία, οἱ ἴδιοι ἐμεῖς καλοῦμε, ζητοῦμε καὶ προκαλοῦμε τὴν παρέμβαση τοῦ Κυρίου. Γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῶν ψυχῶν μας, ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς οἰκουμένης δὲν ἀφήσαμε κανένα ἄλλο περιθώριο ἢ ἐπιλογή στὸν Κύριο παρὰ μόνον τὸν ἐπίγειο ἄρμαγεδδώνα. Τὸν Γ' Γενικὸ Πόλεμο. Τὸν πυρηνικὸ ὄλεθρο. Αὐτὸν τὸν παγκόσμιο πόλεμο ποὺ ἤδη ἄρχισε στὴ Συρία στὶς 15 Μαρτίου τοῦ 2011.

Βεβαίως, ἡ μετάνοια, οἱ δεήσεις, οἱ παρακλήσεις καὶ οἱ προσευχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ εἰδικὰ τῶν ἀγίων, κάνουν τὸν Κύριο νὰ σταματᾷ ἐντελῶς κάποια γεγονότα, ὅπως ἐγινε λχ στὴ Νινευί, ἢ νὰ ἀλλάξει τόσο τὴν ἔνταση ὅσο καὶ τὸν χρόνο διάρκειας κάποιων γεγονότων, καταστάσεων καὶ συμβάντων. Σᾶς θυμίζω, γιὰ παράδειγμα, τὸν σεισμὸ τοῦ Ἰουλίου 2019 στὴν Ἀθήνα.

Ὅπως εἶδαν πνευματικῶς, μὲ τὰ μάτια τῆς ψυχῆς τους, κάποιες θεοφόρες καὶ χαρισματικὲς ψυχές, ὁ ἐν λόγω σεισμὸς ἦταν ἀρχικὰ νὰ ἔχει ἔνταση πάνω ἀπὸ 8 Ρίχτερ, ἀλλά, ὁ Κύριος ἐπέτρεψε μόνον τὸ τελικὸ 5,1 Ρίχτερ. Νὰ πῶς οἱ καρδιακὲς προσευχὲς, καὶ πρωτίστως

τῶν ἀγίων, μποροῦν νὰ σταματήσουν, νὰ ἀλλάξουν, νὰ τροποποιήσουν καὶ νὰ μεταθέσουν χρονικὰ γεγονότα καὶ καταστάσεις.

Λόγου χάρι, ρώτησαν τὸν Ἅγιο Παῖσιο: «- Γέροντα, θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος; - Ἔσεῖς κάνετε προσευχή; Ἐγὼ ἔχω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοιξημέχρι τὸ φθινόπωρο ποὺ κάνω ἐπιστράτευση προσευχῆς, ἀθόρυβα, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθῇ ὁ Θεός, νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὴν ἐπιστράτευση καὶ τὸν πόλεμο. Εἶχα πληροφορία. (Εἰπώθηκε τὸν Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1983. Ἡ πληροφορία δὲν ἦταν ἀνθρώπινη ἀλλὰ Θεϊκὴ): «Κάνετε πολλὴ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐμποδιστοῦν οἱ Τοῦρκοι, διότι ἔχουν σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν.»»

Σεμῖα ἄλλη περίσταση, ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος εἶχε ἀναφέρει: «Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ κάνουν μόνο μία πρόκληση στὴν Ἑλλάδα, ποὺ θὰ ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὴν αἰγιαλίτιδα ζώνη. Καὶ ἐμᾶς θὰ μᾶς πιάσει πείνα. Θὰ πεινάσει ἡ Ἑλλάδα. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ θὰ κρατήσει αὐτὴ ἡ μπόρα κάποιο διάστημα, μῆνες θὰ εἶναι, «θὰ ποῦμε τὸ ψωμὶ ψωμάκι.»»

«- Γέροντα, πῶς θὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι θὰ εἴμαστε κοντὰ στὸν πόλεμο; - Ὅταν θὰ ἀκούσεις στὴν τηλεόραση νὰ γίνεταί θέμα γιὰ τὰ μίλια, γιὰ τὴν ἐπέκταση τῶν μιλίων (τῆς αἰγιαλίτιδας ζώνης) ἀπὸ 6 σὲ 12 μίλια, τότε ἀπὸ πίσω ἔρχεται ὁ πόλεμος. Κοίταξε, μετὰ τὴν πρόκληση τῶν Τοῦρκων, θὰ κατεβοῦν οἱ Ρῶσοι στὰ Στενά. Ὅχι γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσουν ἐμᾶς. Αὐτοὶ θὰ ἔχουν ἄλλα συμφέροντα. Ἀλλὰ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλουν, θὰ βοηθᾶνε ἐμᾶς. Τότε, οἱ Τοῦρκοι γιὰ νὰ ὑπερασπισθοῦν τὰ Στενά, ποὺ εἶναι στρατηγικῆς σημασίας θὰ συγκεντρώσουν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἄλλα στρατεύματα. Παράλληλα δέ, θὰ ἀποσύρουν δυνάμεις ἀπὸ δικὰ μας καταληφθέντα ἐδάφη... Ἐπειδὴ στὴν Ἑλλάδα ὁ κόσμος θὰ φοβηθεῖ, πολλοὶ θὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησία, Θεό, καὶ θὰ μετανοήσουν.» (Γέροντας Παῖσιος, Μαρτυρίες Προσκυνητῶν, Νίκ. Ζουρνατζόγλου).

Πέραν αὐτῶν, τόσο ὁ Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὅσο καὶ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔχουν προφητεύσει ὅτι «θὰ ξεσηκωθεῖ τὸ ρέμπελο (λαθρο-μετανάστες) καὶ μετὰ οἱ πολίτες». «Τότε», ἀναφέρει ὁ ἅγιος Πατροκοσμᾶς, «θὰ ὑπάρχει κυβερνήση καὶ θὰ εἶναι σὰν νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει». Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔχει πεῖ ἀκόμη ὅτι, πρὶν φθάσει ἡ σύγκρουση μὲ τοὺς Τοῦρκους: «Ἐνας μεγάλος σεισμὸς θὰ κάνει πολὺ κακὸ καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν θὰ ἐπιτεθεῖ ὁ Τοῦρκος καὶ θὰ φθάσει μέχρι τὰ ἑξαμίλια».

Ἐξήγησε ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος: «Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς εἶχε δίκιο ποὺ εἶπε γιὰ τὰ «ἑξαμίλια», διότι τὰ «ἑξαμίλια» δὲν εἶναι οὔτε χωριά, οὔτε πόλεις, ἀλλὰ εἶναι τὰ ἑξὶ ναυτικὰ μίλια, ἢ ζώνη τῶν ἑξὶ μιλίων ποὺ περιβάλλει τὰ παράλια τῆς Ἑλλάδας καὶ κάθε νησί μας. «ἑξαμίλι» εἶναι κάθε σημεῖο ποὺ ἀπέχει ἑξὶ μίλια ἀπὸ τίς ἀκτὲς τῆς Ἑλλάδας, χερσαῖες ἢ νησιωτικὲς. Ἐκεῖ, λοιπόν, θὰ γίνετ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ὁ ἁγιορείτης ἅγιος Παΐσιος: «Ὅταν ὁ τουρκικὸς στόλος ξεκινήσει νὰ κατευθύνεται κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ φθάσει στὰ ἔξι μίλια, πράγματι θὰ καταστραφεῖ. Θὰ εἶναι ἡ ὥρα πού θὰ ἔχουν τὰ κόλλυβα στὸ ζωνάρι τους. Ἀλλά, αὐτὸ δὲ θὰ γίνῃ ἀπὸ ἡμᾶς. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸ “Ἐξαμίλι” θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ τέλους... Μετὰ θὰ ἀρχίσουν ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα, πού θὰ καταλήξουν στὸ νὰ πάρουμε τὴν Πόλη.»

Ὁ ἴδιος ἅγιος μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ: «Τὴν Πόλη θὰ μᾶς τὴ δώσουν... Θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος μεταξὺ Ρωσίας καὶ Τουρκίας. Στὴν ἀρχή, οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ νομίσουν ὅτι νικᾶνε, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι ἡ καταστροφὴ τους. Οἱ Ρῶσοι, τελικά, θὰ νικήσουν καὶ θὰ πέσει ἡ Πόλη στὰ χέρια τους. Μετὰ θὰ τὴν πάρουμε ἡμεῖς. Θὰ ἀναγκασθοῦν νὰ μᾶς τὴ δώσουν. Δὲν ἤθελα τίποτα ἄλλο. Νὰ μὲ κρατοῦσε ὁ Θεὸς ἀκόμη λίγα χρόνια στὴ ζωὴ, γιὰ νὰ ἔβλεπα τὴν πατρίδα μου μεγαλωμένη. Θὰ μεγαλώσει.

Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ καταστραφούν. Θὰ σβήσουν ἀπὸ τὸ χάρτη, διότι εἶναι ἓνα ἔθνος, τὸ ὁποῖο δὲν προέκυψε ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους τὸ 1/3 θὰ πάει ἀπὸ ὅπου ξεκίνησαν, στὰ βᾶθη τῆς Τουρκίας, τὸ 1/3 θὰ σωθεῖ, διότι θὰ ἔχει ἐκχριστιανισθεῖ καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο 1/3 θὰ σκοτωθεῖ στὸν πόλεμο αὐτόν». Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαλυθεῖ καί, μάλιστα, θὰ τὴ διαλύσουν οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ σύμμαχοι. Τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη οἱ Ἕλληνες πρέπει νὰ τὴ φυλάξουν. Καί, ἔτσι, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τὴ χαρίσει σέ μᾶς. Θὰ μᾶς βοηθήσει ὁ Θεός, γιατί εἴμαστε Ὁρθόδοξοι».

Γιὰ νὰ προσθέσει ἀκόμη ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος: «Ἄντε, ἄντε, δὲ θὰ εἶμαι νὰ σὲ καμαρώσω στὴν προέλαση, ὅταν θὰ προελαύνει ὁ ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς γιὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαμελισθεῖ. Ὁ διαμελισμὸς αὐτὸς σίγουρα μᾶς ἱκανοποιεῖ καὶ μᾶς συμφέρει ὡς κράτος. Ἔτσι θ' ἀπελευθερωθοῦν τὰ χωριά μας, οἱ ἀλύτρωτες πατρίδες. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη θὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ, θὰ ξαναγίνει ἑλληνική. Θὰ ξαναλειτουργήσει ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία.

Ἡ Τουρκία θὰ διαμελισθεῖ σὲ 3-4 κομμάτια. Ἦδη ἔχει ἀρχίσει ἡ ἀντίστροφη μέτρηση. Ἡμεῖς θὰ πάρουμε τὰ δικά μας ἐδάφη, οἱ Ἀρμένιοι τὰ δικά τους καὶ οἱ Κοῦρδοι τὰ δικά τους. Τὸ κουρδικὸ θέμα ἔχει ἤδη δρομολογηθεῖ. Θὰ μᾶς παραχωρήσουν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὄχι γιατί μᾶς ἀγαπᾶνε, ἀλλὰ γιατί αὐτὸ θὰ συμπλέει μὲ τὰ συμφέροντά τους.

Αὐτὰ θὰ γίνουν, ὄχι τώρα, ἀλλὰ σύντομα, ὅταν θὰ πάψει αὐτὴ γενιὰ πού κυβερνάει τὴν Τουρκία καὶ θὰ ἀναλάβει νέα γενιὰ πολιτικῶν. Τότε θὰ γίνῃ

ὁ διαμελισμὸς τῆς Τουρκίας. Πολὺ σύντομα οἱ προσευχὲς πού γίνονται κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῆς γῆς, θὰ γίνονται ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ καὶ τὰ κεράκια πού ἀνάβονται κάτω, θὰ ἀνάβονται ἐπάνω (ἐννοοῦσε τοὺς Κρυπτοχριστιανούς). Πίστη καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸ Θεὸ νὰ ὑπάρχει καὶ θὰ χαροῦν πολλοί. Ὅλα αὐτὰ θὰ γίνουν μέσα στὰ χρόνια αὐτά. Ἔφτασε ὁ καιρὸς».

Γι' αὐτὸ συμβούλευε: «Νὰ ἔχετε ἓνα κτηματάκι καὶ λίγο νὰ τὸ καλλιεργήτε. Κοντὰ σὲ σᾶς, θὰ βοηθήσετε καὶ κάποιον πού δὲ θὰ ἔχει.. Οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν, ἀλλὰ ἡ Ἑλλάδα δὲ θὰ πάθει μεγάλη ζημιὰ. Δὲ θὰ περάσει πολὺς καιρὸς μετὰ τὴν ἐπίθεση τῶν Τούρκων στὴ χώρα μας καὶ τότε οἱ Ρῶσοι θὰ χτυπήσουν τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ θὰ τοὺς διαλύσουν. Ὅπως ἓνα φύλλο χαρτί πού τὸ χτυπᾶς καὶ διαλύεται, ἔτσι καὶ οἱ Τοῦρκοι θὰ διαλυθοῦν.

Μετὰ τὴ διάλυση τῆς Τουρκίας, ἡ Ρωσία θὰ συνεχίσει τὸν πόλεμο μέχρι τὸν Περσικὸ Κόλπο καὶ θὰ σταματήσουν τὰ στρατεύματά της ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν

Ἱερουσαλήμ. Τότε οἱ δυτικὲς δυνάμεις θὰ δώσουν προθεσμία στοὺς Ρώσους γιὰ νὰ ἀποσύρουν ἀπὸ τὰ μέρη αὐτὰ τὰ στρατεύματά τους, τόσο χρόνο ὅσο χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ γίνουν τὰ λάχανα, δηλαδὴ ἔξι μῆνες.

Ἡ Ρωσία, ὅμως, δὲ θὰ ἀποσύρει τίς δυνάμεις της. Καὶ τότε οἱ δυτικὲς δυνάμεις θὰ ἀρχίσουν νὰ συγκεντρώνουν στρατεύματα, γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτεθοῦν στοὺς Ρώσους. Ὁ Πόλεμος πού θὰ ξεσπάσει θὰ εἶναι Παγκόσμιος καὶ θὰ ἔχει ὡς συνέπεια νὰ χάσουν οἱ Ρῶσοι. Θὰ ἀκολουθήσει μεγάλη σφαγή. Ὅμως, θὰ δοῦν τότε τὰ ἄλλα κράτη τῆς Εὐρώπης, συγκεκριμένα ἡ Ἀγγλία, ἡ Γαλλία, ἡ Ἰταλία καὶ ἄλλα ἔξι-ἑφτά κράτη τῆς Ε.Ο.Κ., ὅτι ἡ Ρωσία θὰ ἀρπάξει μέρη, ὅποτε θὰ ποῦν: “Δὲν πᾶμε κι ἡμεῖς ἐκεῖ πέρα, μήπως πάρουμε κανένα κομμάτι;” Ὅλοι, ὅμως θὰ κυνηγοῦν τὴ μερίδα τοῦ λέοντος. Ἔτσι θὰ μποῦν καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι στὸν πόλεμο.

Οἱ μεγαλοπόλεις θὰ γίνουν παραγκουπόλεις. Ἡμεῖς, οἱ Ἕλληνες, δὲν θὰ συμμετάσχουμε στὸν παγκόσμιον πόλεμο. Ἡ διοίκηση τῆς Πόλης, ἀπὸ μᾶς, θὰ εἶναι καὶ στρατιωτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ. Ἐσὺ (εἶπε σὲ νεαρὸ φοιτητὴ τοῦ Πολυτεχνείου Ξάνθης), ὡς πολιτικὸς μηχανικός, θὰ συμβάλεις στὴν ἀνοικοδόμηση τῆς Πόλης, γιατί ἡ Πόλη θὰ ἀνοικοδομηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχή» (Νικολάου Ζουρνατζόγλου «Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, 1924-1994», ἐκδόσεις Ἁγιοτόκος Καππαδοκία).



THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

By Saint Porphyrios. This is Part 1 of 2 of this article; the second part will be included within our next issue.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception

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A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother's womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother's eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother's face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences—sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc.—is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother does not want the child, if she does not love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother's holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. She thus makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations. Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honor!

I will tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms, which were kept at exactly the same temperature, flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colors were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves

to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children.

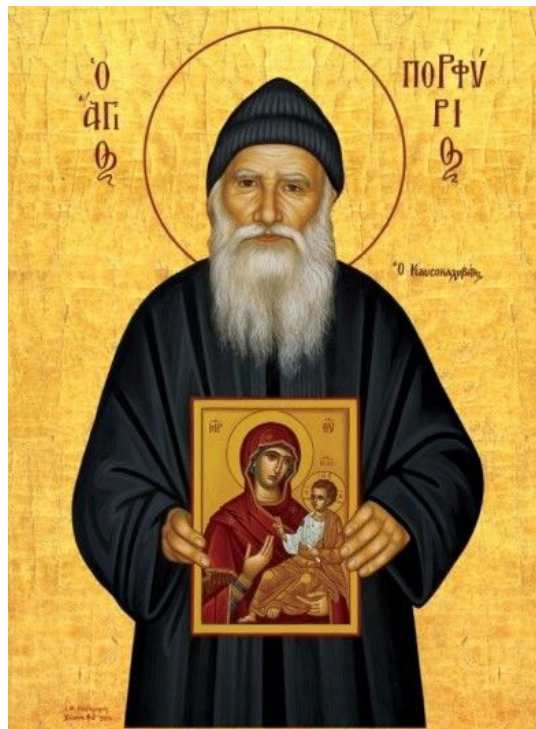
Generally, parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they do not engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and

understanding between the parents is necessary for the upbringing of children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

The behavior of the children is directly related to the state of the parents. When the children are hurt by the bad behavior of the parents towards each other, they lose the strength and desire to progress in their lives. Their lives are constructed shoddily and the edifice of their soul is in constant danger of collapsing. A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but in reality, he or she does not change.

This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you do not eat you will feel faint and you will start to tremble. You are afraid you will lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. For children to be released from their various inner problems, it is not enough for them to receive good advice, or to be compelled by force; nor do logical arguments or threats do any good. These things rather make matters worse. The solution is to be found through



the sanctification of the parents. Become saints and you will have no problems with your children. The sanctity of their parents releases the children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people at their side, people with lots of love who will neither intimidate them nor lecture them, but who will provide a saintly example and pray for them. You parents should pray silently to Christ with upraised arms and embrace your children mystically. When they misbehave you will take some disciplinary measures, but you will not coerce them. Above all you need to pray.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you do not scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother does not love it and asks, "Do you love me, mommy?" The mother answers, "Yes, dear," but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she will caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Over-Protectiveness Leaves Children Immature

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

A mother used to complain to me that her five-year-old child was disobedient. "It is your fault," I told her, but she did not understand. Once I went for a walk by the seaside with this mother along with the child. The little boy let go of his mother's hand and ran towards the sea. There was a sand dune there and the sea came in directly behind it. The mother immediately reacted with anxiety and was about to rush towards the boy who was standing on top of the dune with outstretched arms trying to keep his balance. I calmed her down and told to her to turn her back on the boy while I kept an eye on him askance. When the boy despaired of provoking his mother's attention and causing her to panic and scream as usual, he calmly climbed down and walked towards us. That was the end of it. Then the mother understood what I meant.

Another mother used to complain that her little boy would not eat all his food, especially his yoghurt. The little one was about three years old and tormented his mother every day. I said to her:

"What you should do is this. Empty the refrigerator completely and then fill it with some yoghurt. When lunchtime comes you will give Peter his yoghurt. He will refuse to eat it. In the evening you will give him it again and the same the next day. In the end he will get hungry and will try some. He will throw a tantrum, but you will just put up with it. Thereafter he will eat it quite happily."

That is just what happened and yoghurt became Peter's favorite food.

These things are not difficult, but many mothers are unable to do them and the result is that they give their children a very bad upbringing. Mothers who are always standing over their children and pressurizing them, that is, over-protecting them, have failed in their task. You need to leave the child alone to take an interest in its own progress. Then you will succeed. When you are always standing over them, the children react. They become lethargic and weak-willed and generally are unsuccessful in life. This is a kind of over-protectiveness that leaves the children immature.

A few days ago a mother came here in a state of despair because of her son's repeated failures in the university entrance exams. He had been an excellent pupil in elementary school and all the way through high school. But in the end he failed repeatedly and showed indifference and had strange reactions.

"It is your fault," I said to the mother, "educated woman though you are! How else did you expect the boy to react? Pressure, pressure, pressure all these years, 'Make sure you are top of the class, do not let us down, get yourself an important position in society...'" Now he has thrown in the towel; he does not want anything. Stop this pressure and over-protection and you will see that the boy will regain his equilibrium. He will make progress once you let him be."

A Child Needs to Be Surrounded by People Who Pray and Pray Ardently

A child needs to be surrounded by people who pray and pray ardently. A mother should not be satisfied by giving her child a physical caress, but should also coddle it with the caress of prayer. In the depths of its soul the child senses the spiritual caress that its mother conveys to it and is drawn to her. It feels security and certainty when its mother mystically embraces it with constant, intense and fervent prayer and releases it from whatever is oppressing it.

Mothers know how to express anxiety, offer advice and talk incessantly, but they have not learned to pray. Most advice and criticism does a great deal of harm. You do not need to say a lot to children. Words hammer at the ears, but prayer goes to the heart. Prayer is required, with faith and without anxiety, along with a good example.

One day a mother came here distraught about her son, George. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress.

I said to her:

"Do not say a word. Just pray."

We agreed that between ten and ten fifteen every evening we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without

asking him, “What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?”, or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as possible, “Come and eat, George, there is food in the fridge.” Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

The mother began to apply this tactic, and after about twenty days had passed the boy asked her:

“Mother, why do not you speak to me?”

“What do you mean, George, that I do not speak to you?”

“You have got something against me, Mother, and you are not speaking to me.”

“What strange idea is this that you have got into your head, George? Of course I speak to you. Am I not speaking to you now? What do you want me to say to you?”

George gave no reply.

The mother then came to the monastery and asked me:

“Elder, what was the meaning of this that the boy said to me?”

“Our tactic has worked!”

“What tactic?”

“The tactic I told you—of not speaking and simply praying secretly and that the boy would come to his senses,”

“Do you think that is it?”

“That is it,” I told her. “He wants you to ask him ‘where were you? What were you doing?’ so that he can shout and react and come home even later the next night.”

“Is that so?” she asked. “What strange mysteries are hidden!”

“Do you understand now? He was tormenting you because he wanted you to react to his behavior so that he could stage his little act. Now that you are not shouting at him he is upset. Instead of you being upset when he does what he wants, now he is upset because you do not appear distressed and you display indifference.”

One day George announced that he was giving up his job and going to Canada. He had told his boss to find a replacement because he was leaving. In the meantime I said to his parents:

“We will pray.”

“But he is ready to leave... I will grab him by the scruff of the neck!” said his father.

“No,” I told him, “do not do anything.”

“But the boy is leaving, Elder!”

I said: “Let him leave. You just devote yourselves to prayer and I will be with you.”

Two or three days later early one Sunday morning George announced to his parents:

“I am going off today with my friends.”

“Fine,” they replied, “do as you want.”

He left, and along with his friends, two girls and two boys, he hired a car and set off for Chalkida. They drove around aimlessly here and there. Then they went past the church of

Saint John the Russian and from there to Mantoudi, Aghia Anna and beyond to Vasilika, They had a swim in the Aegean Sea, they ate, drank and had a fine time. At the end of it all they set off on the road home. It was already dark. George was driving. As they were passing through Aghia Anna the car hit the corner of a house and was badly damaged. What could they do now? They managed to bring the car back to Athens at a crawling pace.

George arrived back home in the early hours of the morning. His parents said nothing to him and he went off to sleep. When he woke up he came and said to his father:

“Do you know what happened?... Now we will have to repair the car and it will cost a lot of money.”

His father said:

“Well, George, you will have to find a solution to this yourself. You know I have got debts to pay and your sisters to look after...”

“What can I do, father?”

“Do whatever you like. You are grown-up and you have got a brain of your own. Go off to Canada and make some money...”

“I cannot do that. We have to repair the car now.”

“I have no idea what you should do,” said his father. “Sort it out yourself.”

So, seeing that further dialogue with his father was pointless, he said no more and left. He went to his boss and said:

“I had an accident with a car. I do not want to leave now, so do not hire anyone else.”

His boss said:

“That is all right by me, lad.”

“Yes, but I would like you to give me some money in advance.”

“That is fine, but you were wanting to leave. If you want money, your father will have to sign for it.”

“I will sign for it myself. My father does not want to get involved. He told me so. I will work and I will repay it.”

Now is not that a miracle?

When the boy’s mother came again to see me I said to her:

“The method we employed worked and God heard our prayer. The accident was from God and now the boy will stay at home and will come to his senses.”

That is what happened through our prayer. It was a miracle. The parents fasted, prayed and kept silent and they were successful. Some time later the boy himself came and found me—without any of his family having said anything to him about me. George became a very fine man and now works in the air force and is married and with a lovely family.

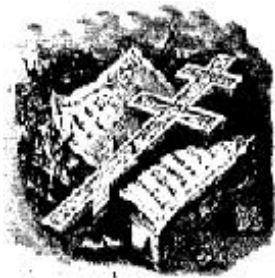
With children what is required is a lot of prayer and few words. All things are achieved through prayer, silence and love. Have you understood the effects of prayer? Love in prayer, love in Christ. That is what is truly beneficial. As long as you love your children with human love—which is

often pathological—the more they will be mixed-up, and the more their behavior will be negative. But when the love between you and towards your children is holy and Christian love, then you will have no problem.

The sanctity of the parents saves the children. For this to come about, divine grace must act on the souls of the parents. No one can be sanctified on his own. The same divine grace will then illuminate, warm and animate the souls of the children. People often telephone me from abroad and ask me about their children and about other matters. Today a mother phoned me from Milan and asked me how she should behave towards her children. What I said to her was this:

“Pray, and when you have to, speak to your children with love. Lots of prayer and few words. Lots of prayer and few words for everyone. We must not become an annoyance, but rather pray secretly and then speak, and God will let us know in our hearts whether the others have accepted what we have said. If not, we will not speak. We will simply pray mystically. Because if we speak we become an annoyance and make others react or even infuriate them. That is why it is better to speak mystically to the heart of others through secret prayer rather than to their ears.”

When the children are traumatized and hurt on account of some serious situation, do not let it affect you when they react negatively and speak rudely. In reality they do not want to, but cannot help themselves at difficult times. They are remorseful afterwards. But if you become irritated and enraged, you become one with the evil spirit and it makes a mockery of you all.



Meekness means having a heart that is humbled and peaceful. Children are meek. This is why the Lord says, *Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 18:3). A proud person is never satisfied. Everything bothers him, and he follows his own will. We must be obedient to the will of God, in order to learn humility and meekness while we are still in this life—while there is still time.

The Holy Fathers say that he who is born meek has already received his reward; but his reward will not be as great as that of the man who was born with a quick temper, and who has learned meekness through humility. Such a person will receive a great reward indeed.

Blessed Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR A SAVING CONFESSION?

By Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow, from Orthodox Life, vol. 38, no. 4 (July-August, 1988), pp. 20-22.

What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance.

But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Is that not so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us.

To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins, which have stolen into your heart.

To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession.

But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or

recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of?

When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance: Before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return.

Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: *As I live, saith the Lord*, i. e., I assure and “swear” by My life, *in desiring I do not desire*, i.e., I do not at all desire, *the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion*. (Ezek 18:32).

It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? And who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him.

And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really acceptable? A broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive.

And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before

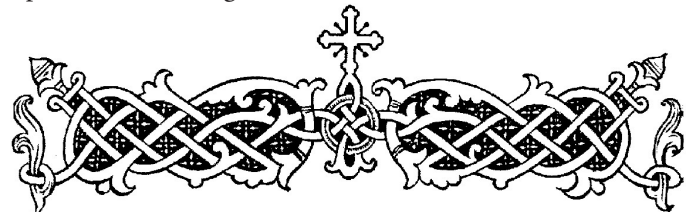
man. Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you yours*. (Mt 6:14-15).

On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned, if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain; for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you; in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, “Forgive me.” Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, “For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?” Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, *I forgive and absolve*, the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!



During the time of one's confession not only the person who makes his confession is judged, but the confessor as well. In the past, confessors were practical. They did not judge on the basis of the seriousness of a transgression, but rather on the intent. They did not concentrate so much on the sins being confessed as on thinking of how to treat the repentant person's soul.

**An Athonite Gerontikon
by Archimandrite Ioannikios (Kotsonis)**

AN ORTHODOX MOTHER'S VOICE

A spirit-filled letter by an Orthodox mother in light of the various "bishopric innovations" among practically all of the US Orthodox jurisdictions that faithful are confronting as they attempt to maintain any liturgical life in the midst of the Covid-19 "phenomenon." This letter was written in May 2020 and somehow escaped our attentiveness. It is as valid today as it was back in May.

I am an Orthodox mother. I have been Orthodox for the last thirty years and my husband is cradle Orthodox, born and raised in the OCA. We have four children here, and one in Heaven. In the last three months, I have not heard one bishop, or directive from a bishop, speak about our children. Not one. The ONLY reference to children has been that if they cannot distance themselves properly, they will need to remain home.

I am deeply grieved by this and, quite frankly, angry and I believe rightly so. My husband and I, like many other Orthodox parents, have struggled and done the hard work, week after week, year after year, for twelve years now, to take our children to church and teach them our Faith.

And with one virus, that we are learning is not nearly as deadly as it was reported to be, they have pulled the thread out of not only our twelve years of work but thousands of years of work combined, by all Orthodox parents, all diligently working to pass on our precious and unique faith to our children, as our parents and grandparents did to us. This is all wrong.

I took my children with me to Church throughout the nine months before they were born. I crossed my belly with the sign of the cross because they could not do it for themselves. They were with me as I stood in the choir while I sang. Through me, they *heard* the prayers and they *partook* of communion until they were born and then baptized in a Church full of the faithful, surrounded by love.

After they were born, I stopped singing in the choir to tend to them. When they were antsy or tired, I walked with them around the church as they kissed icons on the walls. The ones they could not reach, I had them kiss their hand and reach up high to put their kisses on the icons above. When they were old enough, they would toddle up to the tall icon stands, and although they could not reach the icons above, they kissed the wooden cross, at their level, the one their father built with his own hands before they were even born.

I still watch children do this because they instinctively recognize the things which represent God and they recognize them devoid of fear.

In the years that followed, week after week, our family would stop what we were doing on Saturday's to prepare for Vespers. We took them to venerate the icons **every single time**. We took them to communion **every single time**.

We got up early on Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, with not one, not two, not three, but *four* children. We got them dressed in their church clothes, drove them to Church and persevered through the services, walking in and out of the church with them, lunging at them to stop them from running into the Altar, taking them to the potty, shushing them during the gospel, and teaching them they are not to speak when Father is speaking. Godparents held them, without fear, also taking them around to kiss the icons to give me a break. I missed hundreds of sermons walking outside with a tired toddler and I did this week after week after week.

We also took them to communion week after week, year after

year. **Patiently, consistently, faithfully, because that is how you pass our Faith onto our next generation. They are learning from us!** They are learning from all that they see and all that they do, more than what they hear, for years.

Parents do not do this because it is easy. No parent does this for "fun" or for show. It's too much work. It's hard, relentless, diligent work.

So, to have our bishops and priests, across so many jurisdictions, establish every contradictory protocol we can imagine is **catastrophic**.

They now want me to **sign up** to bring my children to church, where all the adults are now wearing masks, which to a child is very scary. They are required to sanitize their hands upon arrival because they are looked upon as walking germ factories where, God forbid, they should cough or sneeze. Two of my children wear masks and two do not due to their ages. None of them are permitted to kiss the icons or get a hug from their godparents or grandparents or friends, who perhaps are so scared by all this, might even retreat if my children were to approach them.

Then, I take them to communion where the priest changes spoons after they consume it, **after dipping it into the Body and Blood of Christ**, which is the most purifying thing we have access to in this world. As we leave the Church, speaking to no one, I am left wondering if this is what I have to show my children after twelve years of diligent work and teaching.



May God have mercy on all those making these devastating decisions. The damage they are doing to the faith of our children is unmeasurable.

If I have “unreasonable faith” as one bishop described it to me back in March, perhaps his grandparents and parents had “unreasonable faith,” too, and perhaps *that* is what lead him to the priesthood and years of service in our church.

Why is having FAITH suddenly becoming so unreasonable? And why are they scolding devout Orthodox, calling us overly pious in a derogatory way, implying we have no care for our fellow parishioners if we do not embrace their new directives? If they believe this is the case, it is a flat out lie.

Over the years, as a mother, I have missed countless liturgical services because my children were sick and had to remain home. Now, we who are healthy and not afraid, are being told we must forgo our practice of Faith to accommodate people who **are afraid**. We are to alter our faith so **they** can feel “safe.” My own faith, and the faith of my children, is negotiable and dismissible. Yet I am the one scolded for being unloving.

If those that fear the practice of our Faith want to partake, our parishes should make accommodations for them so our priests can minister to them where they are comfortable. But they should not rewrite the Faith due to a passing virus. This is not love. I do not know what this is, but it is not love.

It is wrong and I hope more parents and good priests and faithful will speak up and stand up for our Orthodox children and our Faith and fight for what we know to be pure and true and right.

We will not take our children to any church where they see adults in face masks, are not allowed to kiss icons, or see different spoons used for communion. I have no explanation for this to my children. None. **This is not Orthodoxy. It is not our Faith.**

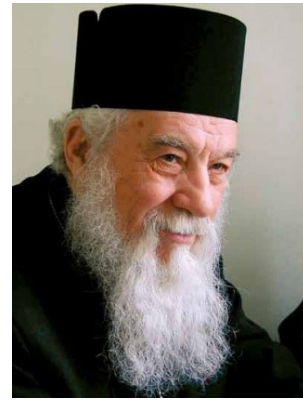


If we want to be totally released and freed from our passions, we have to learn to cut off our will; and so, with God’s help, we gradually progress until we reach freedom from desire. For nothing does men so much good as to cut off their own will. Indeed, man progresses from that more than by exercising any other virtue. And as it is with a person who—following a road—gains time by taking a shorter route when he finds it, so it is with the person that follows the road of cutting out his will; since, with the cutting of one’s own will, one reaches freedom from desires, and—having attained this—he comes close to God in perfect dispassion.

St. Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

“WITHOUT THIS SUFFERING I AM NOTHING”

Fr. George Calciu (+2006), from “Familia Ortodoxă” no. 11(70) / 2014, translated by NS.



My life here in Romania has been full of events, some better and some worse. I do not accuse anyone; I blame absolutely nobody because all of these things were sent by God to benefit my soul. Somebody once asked me if my sufferings in prison helped me in any way. I answered, “It is not that they helped me in some way, but I am the product of these sufferings.”

If I do something, if I am something, if somebody sees anything in me, know that it is due to suffering. Without this suffering I am nothing! It is possible that, of all the difficult questions any human may be asked, the one on suffering is the most inexplicable. Why is suffering necessary? I lived an experience of suffering which enriched my soul, and I believe that suffering was and is necessary for me. But it is very difficult to accept it.

When I was in prison, we were asking each other, all of us brothers, “Why are we suffering? Why us? Out of all the millions of Romanians, why were we chosen to suffer? Where is the sense in it all?” And God did not reveal any of His intentions to us. We cried out to Him every day to decrease our sufferings, but it seemed that He loaded us with more instead. Ever since I was released from prison I have carried with me this sign of pain which seems to have marked my entire life.

After my second imprisonment, I left for the West, I traveled throughout all the countries of Europe, and I went to America to speak about what happened in Romania. My intention was this: I cannot keep silent for as long as there exists in Romania suffering, injustice, communism, and the destruction of churches and of the human personality. During my pilgrimage I arrived at a Catholic monastery and slept in the monastery library. There I found, among so many books, a small booklet containing Christian maxims. I opened it by chance to a page where I saw words of Paul Claudel, a famous French writer. He said this: “God did not come into the world to eradicate suffering; He did not come even to explain it. God came into the world to fill human suffering with His presence.” Did you hear that? To fill human suffering with His presence! Then I understood that during the moments in which we were crying, or when we were revolting, or when we were shouting, “Lord, what are You doing with us?!” He was in us more than in all the

others, even with all of our sins and weaknesses. He filled our suffering with His presence. Then I understood exactly the deep meaning of this suffering: God is present in us!

“Thus God Dwells In Us”

Your relationship with God—if you feel that God has answered you—is a special bond which cannot be explained. However if I tried to define faith, prayer, and the mercy of God, I would be using words of human reasoning which have nothing to do with God Who is above all reasoning. God is outside of the world—He is only found in love. I cannot explain all of these things to you because they cannot be explained. They form part of a mystical relationship of man with God, which someone may feel or may not feel, may practice or may not practice. There is no middle way.

It is not possible to speak today with God, tomorrow to curse Him, the next day to praise Him, and so on. You need to have a direct line in your relationship with God: a line of faith, of your nothingness before God, and of understanding that you are nothing before God because of your sinfulness, not because God did not create you pure. God created you pure, but you have defiled yourself with sins, you have wallowed in all sorts of filth, and you have damaged your heart, soul, and mind. Your mind works against the good, your heart has grown cold towards God, and it no longer loves anyone—you are hardened. All of these things change your relationship with God; they wear it out and break it.

We need to repair this bond through love, striving, and prayer. Let us have love for God and for our neighbor because it is not possible for someone to say that he loves God, Whom he has not seen, and not to love his neighbor whom he has seen (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). It is impossible to love God and not our neighbor. Our relationship with God has one end in our heart and one end in His hand. Through this relationship of faith, love, and good works, we enter into the will of God, and God abides in us. It is, as I have said, difficult to explain. Only those who have faith, who have striven on the road of life to at least do some good, little-by-little, and to strengthen themselves in faith, they are the one who have established this relationship. However, such a relationship is not permanent. It may be broken through our sins; nevertheless, a spiritual channel always remains through which we can speak with God.

I remember when I was little: there were eleven of us children and times were difficult. My mother would pray to God just as I am speaking with you. She would complain that one of the children became sick, the cow did not produce any milk or it did not have babies, the chicken did not lay eggs . . . She would tell everything to God as if she was in a direct relationship with Him. And know that God answered her. Mama knew that God is with us, and she spoke to Him as we speak to each other, as friends. You tell your pain to your brother or friend, even to the finest detail. God knows about it, but we are still

obligated to tell it to Him and to give Him praise. I want you to understand that it is possible to have a familiar relationship with God, as between son and father or as between friends, more or less. This type of relationship is what God requests of us. In silence, in simplicity, and in humility we can establish this relationship with God, so that we will have somewhere to turn to when we are in trouble and when no one else receives us. When everybody abandons us, when our life seems to be lost, God remains there and still opens His arms and receives us. This is an extraordinary mystery.

This I say to you: try to pray! Try to speak with God unceasingly!



St. John Chrysostom writes thusly against those who, in church create a disturbance in church and who depart from church before the completion of the Divine Liturgical Service of God. *“Some do not approach Holy Communion with trembling but with commotion, shoving one another, burning with anger, hollering, scolding, pushing their neighbor, full of disturbance. About this, I have often spoken and will not cease to speak about this. Do you not see the order of behavior at the pagan Olympic games when the Arranger passes through the arena with a wreath on his head, dressed in a lengthy garment, holding a staff in his hand and the Crier declares that there be silence and order? Is it not obscene that there, where the devil reigns there is such silence, and here where Christ invites us to Himself there is such an uproar? At the arena, silence: and in church, uproar! On the sea, calm and in the harbor, tempest! When you are invited to a meal, you must not leave before the others, even though you are satisfied before the others, and here while the awesome mystery of Christ is being celebrated, while the priestly functions are still continuing, you leave in the middle of it and exit? How can this be forgiven? How can this be justified? Judas, after receiving Communion at the Mystical Supper that final night, departed quickly while the others remained at the table. Behold, whose example do they follow who hurry to depart before the final thanksgiving?”*

**By St. Bishop Nikolai of Zhicha
Homily on the Feast of the Theophany**



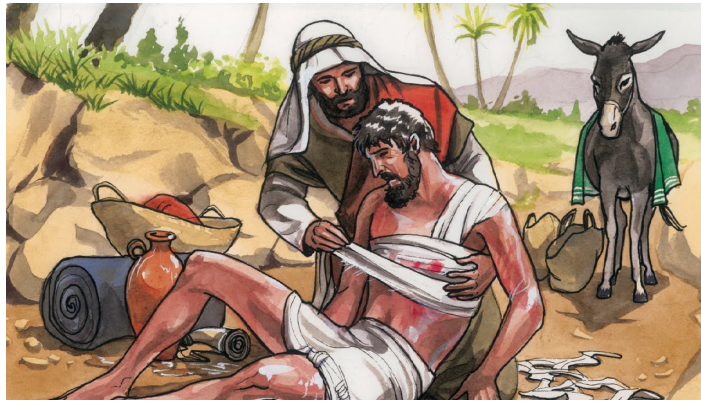
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THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NOUS AND THE INTELLECT

By Hieromonk Alexios (Trader) of Karakallou Monastery, Mount Athos.

If we reflect upon the Parable of the Good Samaritan carefully, we will find that it has much more to offer us than merely an admonition to help our neighbors, whoever they may be. Among the myriad of theological and spiritual truths contained in this gem of the Gospel and summary of the divine economy, we see an example of two approaches to life and two sources for thoughts represented by the two figures who stand in such stark contrast to one another: the lawyer and the good Samaritan. Let us posit for purposes of this article that the lawyer represents those who approach religious issues from a merely rational, intellectual perspective, while the Good Samaritan represents those who approach faith and the spiritual life through that highest part of the soul that is in touch with God, the noetic faculty or the spiritual heart. Let us look at the Gospel for a moment and see where each approach leads.

The Gospel tells us that *a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* It is interesting that the Gospel relates that the lawyer posed the question in order to tempt Jesus—implying the lawyer knew full well the answer to the question. He posed the question in order to demonstrate his education, his erudition, and his knowledge of the law. In the safe world of his own abstractions, the lawyer always won. And yet Christ did not allow the lawyer to remain with a hollow, easy victory by his smug recitation of the law to *love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.* Jesus called him out of the ivory tower of his mind and into life, telling him, *this do and live.* Out of his comfort zone and desiring to protect himself, the lawyer then asks *who is my neighbor?* The Lord then poses a parable to the lawyer in which he introduces the Samaritan, an outcast, to the lawyer and relates to him that everyone is his neighbor. And among the many things, Christ taught the lawyer in the teaching that the way to spiritual perfection is not by memorization, careful reasoning, or a quick wit, but by another kind of sensitivity within the human soul.



How different was the Samaritan! He neither spent time reasoning, nor questioning, but acted without hesitation. The Gospel relates, *and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.* He did not think, he did not calculate, but instead he saw, he sensed, and he knew. It was not a matter of conception, but perception. There were no aligning of syllogisms and arguments. There were no speculations about religious issues, selfish concerns, or even human rights. Rather, from an awareness of God's presence in his own heart, the Samaritan was aware of the divine presence in another wounded human being. There was no need for him to refer to the Law or the Prophets, for the Spirit of God that inspired the Law and the Prophets inspired the Samaritan, so that he noetically grasped what was presented to him and acted. In the Gospel, it is quite clear that this Samaritan chose the better part.

There is a place for reasoning and careful thought in human life and human endeavors, but in the spiritual life, there is a time when such reasoning needs to be left behind, for the sake of something higher that can give sure direction, unflinching hope, and love unashamed. All too often our Western culture bids us for rational proofs for the existence of God or the basis for prayer and the spiritual life. Yet, this web of rationalizations causes us to be trapped by our own automatic thoughts, our passions, and our desires to control and manipulate our lives and the lives of others. The nous or spiritual heart has no such pre-occupations, for it is only concerned with being in contact with God in the present moment through the stillness in which God abides if we are humble and repentant. The Samaritan, just because he was a Samaritan, had no social, political or economic status, yet he recognized an opportunity to encounter God in helping a fellow human being. His movements were simple without any unnecessary calculations or deliberations. These are characteristics of someone whose nous or spiritual heart is in control of life. As Elder Sophrony would point out, *his head was deeply rooted in his heart*, where it should be.



If we wish our salvation, we will find it only in repentance and in our return to God, from whom we departed. If we truly repent, like the Ninevites, we will also be saved, if we do not repent, we will be sent to perdition.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

TIMELY REFLECTIONS

From "Against False Union," by Dr. Alexander Kalomiros (Seattle, WA: St. Nectarios Press, 1990 [1967]), pp. 53-56. Translated from the Greek by Mr. George Gabriel.

Pseudo-Bishops

It is imperative that Christians realize that the Church has sacramental and not administrative foundations; then they will not suffer that which has happened to the westerners who followed the pope in his errors because they thought that if they did not follow him, they would automatically be outside the Church.

Today the various patriarchates and archdioceses undergo great pressures from political powers which seek to direct the Orthodox according to their own interests. It is known that the Patriarchate of Moscow accepts the influence of Soviet politics. But the Patriarchate of Constantinople also accepts the influence of American politics. It was under this influence that the contact of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the similarly American-influenced, Protestant, World Council of Churches was brought about, and its servile disposition toward the pope started to take on dangerous dimensions and even to exert over-bearing pressure upon the other Orthodox churches.

America thinks that it will strengthen the western faction against communism if, with these artificial conciliations, it unifies its spiritual forces. But in this way the Church becomes a toy of the political powers of the world, with unforeseeable consequences for Orthodoxy.

Are the Orthodox people obliged to follow such a servile patriarchate forever? The fact that this patriarchate for centuries held the primacy of importance and honor in the Christian world cannot justify those who will follow it to a unifying capitulation with heresy. Rome also once had the primacy of importance and honor in the Christian world, but that did not oblige Christians to follow it on the road of heresy. The communion with and respect for one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that church remains in the Church, that is, as long as it lives and proceeds in spirit and truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms." On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical

or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

Here is what the canons of the Church say on this: *So that if any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proven to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox. For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.* (Canon XV of the so-called First and Second Council).

At the End of Time

The world and the devil are leading the Church to such frightening trials that the day might come when all the bishops of the land will enter into communion with the heretics. What will the faithful do then? What will the few do who have the heroism not to follow the masses, not to follow their kin, their neighbors, and their fellow citizens?

All the faithful will have to understand that the Church is not there where it appears to be. Liturgies will continue to be performed and the churches will be filled with people, but the Church will have no relation with those churches or those clergy and those faithful. The Church is where the truth is. The faithful are those who continue Orthodoxy, that work of the Holy Spirit. The real priests are those who think, live, and teach as the Fathers and the Saints of the Church did, or at least do not reject them in their teaching. Where that continuity of thought and life does not exist, it is a deception to speak of the Church, even if all the outward marks speak of it.

There will always be found a canonical priest, ordained by a canonical bishop, who will follow the Tradition. Around such priests will gather the small groups of the faithful who will remain until the last days. Each one of these small groups will be a local catholic Church of God. The faithful will find in them the entire fullness of the grace of God. They will

have no need of administrative or other ties, for the communion that will exist among them will be the most perfect there can be. It will be communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, communion in the Holy Spirit. The golden links of the unalterable Orthodox Tradition will connect those churches among themselves as well as with the churches of the past, with the Church triumphant of heaven. In these small groups the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church will be preserved intact.

Of course, it is wonderful that order and coordination should exist in the outward functionings of the various churches, and that the less important churches should receive their direction and guidance from the more important churches, the way it is now between dioceses, metropolises, archdioceses, and patriarchates. But in the last days, such outward relations and contacts will be impossible most of the time. There will be such confusion in the world that one church will not be able to be certain of the orthodoxy of another because of the multitude of false prophets who will fill the world and who will be saying, *Here is Christ*, and *There is Christ*. There might even be misunderstandings among the really Orthodox churches because of the confusion of tongues which exists in the contemporary Babel. But none of that will sever the essential unity of the Church.

A contemporary example of that condition is presented by the Russians of the dispersion who have been divided into three opposing factions. One group wishes to belong to the Patriarchate of Moscow. Another, in order to be free from Soviet political influence, belongs to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and is influenced by pro-Papal politics. The third and most down-to-earth group, the Russian Synod Abroad, remains independent. And the three groups, at least up to the present, are Orthodox with full essential communion among them. Formal intercommunion and external contacts, however, they do not have, and this because they have been lost in the web of legalistic concepts and debates about which patriarchate should govern them.

Such a mentality is wrong in its very basis since there is no essential need for dependence on a patriarchate, particularly at a time when immense distance and frontiers of nations separate them from these patriarchates. Nothing impedes an Orthodox church in Paris, for example, from being in essential communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow or with the Church of Constantinople, even though it has no jurisdictional dependence upon them. The notion that the interruption of jurisdictional dependence of a local church from a patriarchate cuts this church off from the Orthodox Church is not Orthodox but papal. Besides, even the existence of jurisdictional dependence of churches upon one patriarch is of papal inspiration.

An Orthodox patriarch is a president, a coordinator of efforts, an adviser of great importance, but he is not a despot,

not a sovereign. He can do nothing beyond the bounds of his diocese without the agreement of all the other bishops (Apostolic Canons).

It is possible, then, in the last days when the various churches and religions will have been united and will appear as a single whole, that the genuine Orthodox Church will appear disintegrated, fragmented into small, scattered, sparse parishes, so that it is even possible that one will suspect the other from lack of confidence, just as soldiers suspect each other when it is learned that the enemy is wearing the same uniform.

In the last days all will claim to be Orthodox Christians, and that Orthodoxy is as they understand it to be. But in spite of all this, those who have a pure heart and a mind enlightened by divine grace will recognize the Orthodox Church despite the apparent divisions and utter lack of external splendor. They will gather around the true priests, and they will become the pillars of the Church. Let the people of the world do whatever they will. Let there be ecumenical conferences; let the churches be united; let Christianity be adulterated; let the Tradition and life be changed; let the religions be united. The Church of Christ will remain unaltered, as Chrysostom says, because if even one of her pillars remains standing, the Church will not fall. *Nothing is stronger than the Church. She is higher than the heavens and broader than the earth. She never grows old; she always flourishes.*

A pillar of the Church is every true believer who adheres to the Tradition of the Fathers in spite of all the frightful currents of the world which attempt to pull him away. Such pillars will exist until the end of the world, whatever might happen. Besides, when these things come to pass, the coming of the Lord will not be far off. That state of affairs will be the most fearful sign that His coming is approaching. Precisely then will the end come.



The state of our Church here (i.e., in the U.S.) is almost that of a dead man's last breath... A good and austere monastic life is the only thing that can show us the way out of this miserable state of Orthodoxy in America. If it is undertaken by monks of the Holy Mountain, we shall have the *typikon* of the Holy Mountain—with vigil services and so on. And they will be a strong missionary center, which will invade Satan's kingdom, and cleanse the atmosphere of the demons with incense and spiritual vigilance... So here, where for so many years Satan has ruled unopposed, he must be fought.

Fr. John Romanides of blessed memory

[He wrote this over 50 years ago! This entire quote is from over 50 years ago]

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CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

ON VENERATION OF ICONS AND SANTA CLAUS

By Hierodeacon Makarios.

It's been snowing heavily since noon in Gardner; the roads were in terrible condition. Tired, physically and mentally (8 hours of teaching), I hardly could see the man at the roadside behind the pile of snow. I stopped; he was going to Heywood Hospital. Not far, but at such speed would take a while.

I turned the heat on full blast, and the man leaned forward, towards the flow of hot air. He looked neither young nor healthy. I wonder how long he'd been waiting for a ride.

"Are you Catholic?" he asked as he was looking at a tiny icon on the dashboard.

I was totally disinclined to a serious road conversation.

"No," I said simply, "I am Orthodox," although many Orthodox would say "Yes, Catholic, but not Roman-Catholic," which is quite accurate.

Then he started his story. It was a long and complicated one, about his relatives of different persuasion, what they would say, and how they would do something totally different, and how it all ended in nothing. I nodded and said "Yea," "Sure," "Unbelievable" at the right moments, but then the story came to the end, and it was clearly my turn to speak. I had no clue what to say, pretending to be fully involved in pushing through the piles of snow around the hospitals' entrance.

Finally I turned off the ignition. He was silent. I looked at the icon.

"Do you know Santa Claus?" I asked.

"Sure," he replied.

"No, not that clown who works for retail sales; the real one!"

"What do you mean, 'real'?"

"Yes, the real one. The one on this icon."

"Is this Santa Claus???"

"Yes. St. Nicholas, Sanctus Nicolaus, became Santa Claus. He was a bishop in a small town, in what is now land that is occupied by Turkey; he lived over fifteen hundred years ago. Never made a big deal of himself. But his secret kindness and generosity made him famous all over Christian Europe, and his name became linked with the charity to the poor and gift giving. However, when it was about the defense of the Christian faith against imposters and 'reformers' of all sorts, he was totally different. Through the efforts and struggle of people like him, today we have the true, in-corrupt faith of Christ. That's why we remember them and stay in communion with them, like a good family does."

The man was looking at the icon. I turned the dome light on.

"May I look at it?" he asked hesitantly.

I took the icon off the dashboard.

"Take it," I said, "It's your gift, for Christmas."

He nodded thankfully, said good-bye and opened the door. It was dark outside, but I noticed him touching the icon with his lips before hiding it in the pocket.