

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

In This Issue:

- Covid: Where Are the Courageous Religious Leaders? (p. 5)
- An Instructive Lesson (p. 6)
- Pharisees, Humble Yourselves! (p. 7)
- The Liturgical Structure of Lent (p. 9)
- The Holy Orthodox Fathers on Illness (p. 21)
- The Canaanite Woman & the Mother of God (p. 25)
- On the Beautiful Road of Love (p. 26)
- You Were Sent to Me by Christ (p. 28)
- On Humility (p. 31)



- Ἐπιστροφὴ στὸ Σπίτι τοῦ Πατέρα (σελ. 13)
- Ὁ Ὅρκος στὸν Διάβολο (σελ. 15)
- Οἰκουμενισμός: Ἐχθρὸς τῶν Θείων Ἀρετῶν (σελ. 18)
- Ὅταν Ἐπρεπε Σιωπούσαμε, Τώρα Κλαίμε καὶ Ὀδυρόμαστε (σελ. 19)



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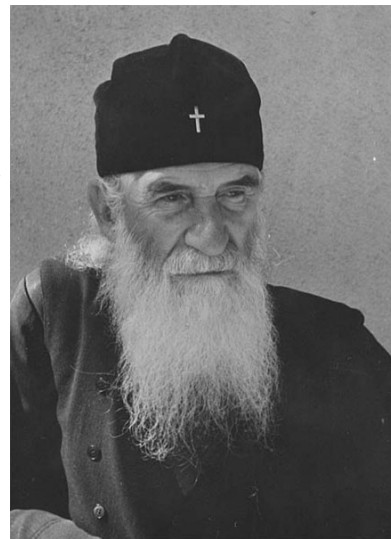
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THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE CHURCH: UNITY, HOLINESS, CATHOLICITY AND APOSTOLICITY

By St. Justin Popovich.

The attributes of the Church are innumerable because her attributes are actually the attributes of the Lord Christ, the God-man, and, through Him, those of the Triune Godhead. However, the holy and divinely wise fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, guided and instructed by the Holy Spirit, reduced them in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith to four—I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. These attributes of the Church—unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity—are derived from the very nature of the Church



and of her purpose. They clearly and accurately define the character of the Orthodox Church of Christ whereby, as a theanthropic institution and community, she is distinguishable from any institution or community of the human sort.

The Unity and Uniqueness of the Church

Just as the Person of Christ the God-man is one and unique, so is the Church founded by Him, in Him, and upon Him. The unity of the Church follows necessarily from the unity of the Person of the Lord Christ, the God-man. Being an organically integral and theanthropic organism unique in all the

worlds, the Church, according to all the laws of Heaven and earth, is indivisible. Any division would signify her death. Immersed in the God-man, she is first and foremost a theanthropic organism, and only then a theanthropic organization. In her, everything is theanthropic: nature, faith, love, baptism, the Eucharist, all the holy mysteries and all the holy virtues, her teaching, her entire life, her immortality, her eternity, and her structure. Yes, yes, yes; in her, everything is theanthropically integral and indivisible christification, sanctification, deification, Trinitarianism, salvation. In her everything is fused organically and by grace into a single theanthropic body, under a single Head—the God-man, the Lord Christ. All her members, though as persons always whole and inviolate, yet united by the same grace of the Holy Spirit through the holy mysteries and

the holy virtues into an organic unity, comprise one body and confess the one faith, which unites them to each other and to the Lord Christ.

The Christ-bearing apostles are divinely inspired as they announce the unity and the uniqueness of the Church, based upon the unity and uniqueness of her Founder—the God-man, the Lord Christ, and His theanthropic personality: *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor 3:11).

Like the holy apostles, the holy fathers and the teachers of the Church confess the unity and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church with the divine wisdom of

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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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the Cherubim and the zeal of the Seraphim. Understandable, therefore, is the fiery zeal which animated the holy fathers of the Church in all cases of division and falling away and the stern attitude toward heresies and schisms. In that regard, the holy ecumenical and holy local councils are preeminently important. According to their spirit and attitude, wise in those things pertaining to Christ, the Church is not only one but also unique. **Just as the Lord Christ cannot have several bodies, so He cannot have several Churches.** According to her theanthropic nature, the Church is one and unique, just as Christ the God-man is one and unique. Hence, a division, a splitting up of the Church is ontologically and essentially impossible. A division within the Church has never occurred, nor indeed can one take place, while apostasy from the Church has and will continue to occur after the manner of those voluntarily fruitless branches which, having withered, fall away from the eternally *living theanthropic Vine*—the Lord Christ (Jn 15:1-6). From time to time, heretics and schismatics have cut themselves off and have fallen away from the one and indivisible Church of Christ, whereby they ceased to be members of the Church and parts of her theanthropic body. The first to fall away thus were the gnostics, then the Arians, then the Macedonians, then the Monophysites, then the Iconoclasts, then the Roman Catholics, then the Protestants, then the Uniates, and so on—all the other members of the legion of heretics and schismatics.

The Holiness of the Church

By her theanthropic nature, the Church is undoubtedly a unique organization in the world. All her holiness resides in her nature. Actually, she is the theanthropic workshop of human sanctification and, through men, of the sanctification of the rest of creation. She is holy as the theanthropic Body of

Christ, whose eternal head is the Lord Christ Himself; and Whose immortal soul is the Holy Spirit. Wherefore everything in her is holy: her teaching, her grace, her mysteries, her virtues, all her powers, and all her instruments have been deposited in her for the sanctification of men and of all created things. Having become the Church by His incarnation out of an unparalleled love for man, our God and Lord Jesus Christ sanctified the Church by His sufferings, Resurrection, Ascension, teaching, wonderworking, prayer, fasting, mysteries, and virtues; in a word, by His entire theanthropic life. Wherefore the divinely inspired pronouncement has been rendered: *...Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.* (Eph 5:25-27).

The flow of history confirms the reality of the Gospel: the Church is filled to overflowing with sinners. Does their presence in the Church reduce, violate, or destroy her sanctity? Not in the least! For her Head—the Lord Christ, and her Soul—the Holy Spirit, and her divine teaching, her mysteries, and her virtues, are indissolubly and immutably holy. The Church tolerates sinners, shelters them, and instructs them, that they may be awakened and roused to repentance and spiritual recovery and transfiguration; but they do not hinder the Church from being holy. Only unrepentant sinners, persistent in evil and godless malice, are cut off from the Church either by the visible action of the theanthropic authority of the Church or by the invisible action of divine judgment, so that thus also the holiness of the Church may be preserved. *Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.* (1 Cor 5:13).

In their writings and at the Councils, the holy fathers confessed the holiness of the church as her essential and immutable quality. The fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council defined it dogmatically in the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith. And the succeeding ecumenical councils confirmed it by the seal of their assent.

The Catholicity of the Church

The theanthropic nature of the Church is inherently and all-encompassingly universal and catholic: it is theanthropically universal and theanthropically catholic. The Lord Christ, the God-man, has by Himself and in Himself most perfectly and integrally united God and Man and, through man, all the worlds and all created things to God. The fate of creation is essentially linked to that of man (cf. Rom 8:19-24). In her theanthropic organism, the Church encompasses: *All things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.* (Col 1:16). Everything is in the God-man; He is the *Head of the Body of the Church.* (Col 1:17-18).

In the theanthropic organism of the Church everyone lives in the fullness of his personality as a living, godlike cell. The law of theanthropic catholicity encompasses all and acts through all. All the while, the theanthropic equilibrium between the divine and the human is always duly preserved. Being members of her body, we in the Church experience the fullness of our being in all its godlike dimensions. Furthermore, in the Church of the God-man, man experiences his own being as all-encompassing, as theanthropically all-encompassing; he experiences himself not only as complete, but also as the totality of creation. In a word: **he experiences himself as a god-man by grace.**

The theanthropic catholicity of the Church is actually an unceasing christification of many by grace and virtue: all is gathered in Christ the God-man, and everything is experienced through Him as one's own, as a single indivisible theanthropic organism. For life in the Church is a theanthropic catholicization, the struggle of acquiring by grace and virtue the likeness of the God-man, christification, theosis, life in the Trinity, sanctification, transfiguration, salvation, immortality, and churchliness. Theanthropic catholicity in the Church is reflected in and achieved by the eternally living Person of Christ, the God-man Who in the most perfect way has united God to man and to all creation, which has been cleansed of sin, evil, and *death by the Savior's precious Blood* (cf. Col 1:19-22). The theanthropic Person of the Lord Christ is the very soul of the Church's catholicity. It is the God-man Who always preserves the theanthropic balance between the divine and the human in the catholic life of the Church. The Church is filled to overflowing with the Lord Christ, for she is *the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.* (Eph. 1:23). Wherefore, she is universal in every person that is found within her, in each of her tiny cells. That uni-

versality, that catholicity resounds like thunder particularly through the holy apostles, through the holy fathers, through the holy ecumenical and local councils.

The Apostolicity of the Church

The holy apostles were the first god-men by grace. Like the Apostle Paul each of them, by his integral life, could have said of himself: *I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.* (Gal 2:20). Each of them is a Christ repeated; or, to be more exact, a continuation of Christ. Everything in them is theanthropic because everything was received from the God-man. Apostolicity is nothing other than the God-manness of the Lord Christ, freely assimilated through the holy struggles of the holy virtues: faith, love, hope, prayer, fasting, etc. This means that everything that is of man lives in them freely through the God-man, thinks through the God-man, feels through the God-man, acts through the God-man and wills through the God-man. For them, the historical God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the supreme value and the supreme criterion. Everything in them is of the God-man, for the sake of the God-man, and in the God-man. And it is always and everywhere thus. That for them is immortality in the time and space of this world. Thereby they are, even on this earth, partakers of the theanthropic eternity of Christ.

This theanthropic apostolicity is integrally continued in the earthly successors of the Christ-bearing apostles: in the holy fathers. Among them, in essence, there is no difference: the same God-man Christ lives, acts, enlivens and makes them all eternal in equal measure, *He Who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* (Heb 13:8). Through the holy fathers, the holy apostles live on with all their theanthropic riches, theanthropic worlds, theanthropic holy things, theanthropic mysteries, and theanthropic virtues. The holy fathers in fact are continuously apostolizing, whether as distinct godlike personalities, or as bishops of the local churches, or as members of the holy ecumenical and holy local councils. For all of them there is but one Truth, one Transcendent Truth: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, the holy ecumenical councils, from the first to the last, confess, defend, believe, announce, and vigilantly preserve but a single supreme value: the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The principal Tradition, the transcendent Tradition, of the Orthodox Church is the living God-man Christ, entire in the theanthropic Body of the Church of which He is the immortal, eternal Head. This is not merely the message, but the transcendent message of the holy apostles and the holy fathers. They know Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended. They all, by their integral lives and teachings, with a single soul and a single voice, confess that Christ the God-man is wholly in His Church, as in His Body. Each of the holy fathers could rightly repeat with St. Maximus the Confessor: *In no wise am I expounding my own opinion, but*

that which I have been taught by the fathers, without changing aught in their teaching.

And from the immortal proclamation of St. John of Damascus there resounds the universal confession of all the holy fathers who were glorified by God: *Whatever has been transmitted to us through the Law, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the evangelists, we receive and know and esteem highly, and beyond that we ask nothing more... Let us be fully satisfied with it, and rest therein, removing not the ancient landmarks (Prov 22:28), nor violating the divine Tradition.* And then, the touching, fatherly admonition of the holy Damascene, directed to all Orthodox Christians: *Wherefore, brethren, let us plant ourselves upon the rock of faith and the Tradition of the Church, removing not the landmarks set by our holy fathers, nor giving room to those who are anxious to introduce novelties and to undermine the structure of God's holy ecumenical and apostolic Church. For if everyone were allowed a free hand, little by little the entire Body of the Church would be destroyed.*

The holy Tradition is wholly of the God-man, wholly of the holy apostles, wholly of the holy fathers, wholly of the Church, in the Church, and by the Church. The holy fathers are nothing other than the *guardians of the apostolic tradition*. All of them, like the holy apostles themselves, are but *witnesses* of a single and unique Truth: the transcendent Truth of Christ, the God-man. They preach and confess it without rest, they, the *golden mouths of the Word*. The God-man, the Lord Christ is one, unique, and indivisible. So also is the Church unique and indivisible, for she is the incarnation of the Theanthropos Christ, continuing through the ages and through all eternity. Being such by her nature and in her earthly history, the Church may not be divided. It is only possible to fall away from her. That unity and uniqueness of the Church is theanthropic from the very beginning and through all the ages and all eternity.

Apostolic succession, the apostolic heritage, is theanthropic from first to last. What is it that the holy apostles are transmitting to their successors as their heritage? The Lord Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the imperishable riches of His wondrous theanthropic Personality, Christ—the Head of the Church, her sole Head. If it does not transmit that, apostolic succession ceases to be apostolic, and the apostolic Tradition is lost, for there is no longer an apostolic hierarchy and an apostolic Church.

The holy Tradition is the Gospel of the Lord Christ, and the Lord Christ Himself, Whom the Holy Spirit instills in each and every believing soul, in the entire Church. Whatever is Christ's, by the power of the Holy Spirit becomes ours, human; but only within the body of the Church. The Holy Spirit—the soul of the Church, incorporates each believer, as a tiny cell, into the body of the Church and makes him a “co-heir” of the God-man (Eph 3:6). In real-

ity the Holy Spirit makes every believer into a god-man by grace. For what is life in the Church? Nothing other than the transfiguration of each believer into a god-man by grace through his personal, evangelical virtues; it is his growth in Christ, the putting on of Christ by growing in the Church and being a member of the Church. A Christian's life is a ceaseless, Christ-centered theophany: the Holy Spirit, through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, transmits Christ the Savior to each believer, renders him a living tradition, a living life: *Christ who is our life*. (Col 3:4). Everything Christ's thereby becomes ours, ours for all eternity: His truth, His righteousness, His love, His life, and His entire divine Hypostasis.

Holy Tradition? It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man Himself, with all the riches of his divine Hypostasis and, through Him and for His sake, those of the Holy Trinity. That is most fully given and articulated in the Holy Eucharist, wherein, for our sake and for our salvation, the Savior's entire theanthropic economy of salvation is performed and repeated. Therein wholly resides the God-man with all His wondrous and miraculous gifts; He is there, and in the Church's life of prayer and liturgy. Through all this, the Savior's philanthropic proclamation ceaselessly resounds: *And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. (Mt 28:20): He is with the apostles and, through the apostles, with all the faithful, world without end. This is the whole of the holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church of the apostles: life in Christ = life in the Holy Trinity; growth in Christ = growth in the Trinity (cf. Mt 28: 19-20).

Of extraordinary importance is the following: in Christ's Orthodox Church, the Holy Tradition, ever living and life-giving, comprises: the holy liturgy, all the divine services, all the holy mysteries, all the holy virtues, the totality of eternal truth and eternal righteousness, all love, all eternal life, the whole of the God-man, the Lord Christ, the entire Holy Trinity, and the entire theanthropic life of the Church in its theanthropic fullness, with the All-holy Theotokos and all the saints.

The personality of the Lord Christ the God-man, transfigured within the Church, immersed in the prayerful, liturgical, and boundless sea of grace, wholly contained in the Eucharist, and wholly in the Church—this is holy Tradition. This authentic good news is confessed by the holy fathers and the holy ecumenical councils. By prayer and piety holy Tradition is preserved from all human demonism and devilish humanism, and in it is preserved the entire Lord Christ, He Who is the eternal Tradition of the Church. “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (I Tim. 3 16): He was manifest as a man, as a God-man, as the Church, and by His philanthropic act of salvation and deification of humanity He magnified and exalted man above the holy Cherubim and the most holy Seraphim.

COVID: WHERE ARE THE COURAGEOUS RELIGIOUS LEADERS?

By Jon Rappoport, a freelance investigative reporter, from his blog <https://nomorefakenews.com>.

“The people never give up their liberties but under some delusion.” [Edmund Burke, 1784]

When are religious leaders going to issue demands to their members? Demands to express a duty to God first; above and beyond the restrictions of the State.

These leaders certainly believe God created humans with the quality of freedom. The Bible irrevocably states it. Therefore, under the cover of Covid, the State cannot remove that freedom.

The religious leaders must order their flocks to object and even rebel. Not just in order to attend church services; but to live without fear, out in the open, without hiding behind masks, without keeping their distance, without lockdowns, without sacrificing their right to earn a living.

Several Catholic prelates have declared that Covid is being used as a rationale for creating an anti-spiritual new world order.

The next step is telling their Church members and believers to rebel, to choose The Good and God.

Every early story about every religion shows how the State power of the day had to be overcome. Is it now time to develop terminal amnesia about these origins?

Are those stories buried because they are inconvenient?

Quoting from an anonymously written article, “Ancient Christian Martyrdom: A Brief Overview”:

“By 200 [AD], the [Christian] faith had permeated most regions of the Roman Empire, though Christians were mostly in the larger urban areas (Gaul, Lyons, Carthage, Rome). By 325, an estimated 7 million were Christians with as many as 2 million killed for the faith.”

Among the reasons for this vast persecution: “Christian refusal to worship or honor other gods was a source of great contention.”

“Christians were accused of being atheists because of their denial of the other gods and refusal of emperor worship. Thus, they were accused of treason to the state.”

“For many provincial governors, Christians were considered social radicals, rather than being persecuted specifically for their faith only.”

And now, in 2020, the major religious objection to Covid restrictions concerns the number of worshippers allowed inside a church during services?

Is this the evolution of faith, or its destruction, at the hands of the faithful themselves?

Is conscience “outmoded”?

Is civilization now so “advanced” that suffering and even dying for one’s faith is considered absurd?

Is bargaining with the State over whether 10 or 50 members can enter a house of worship the cutting edge of rebellion?

It seems to me people should renounce their religion, if they are unwilling to go to the wall for it.

Just admit that what true faith requires is too much.

Jesus endured pain and torture, and surrendered his human form, in order to save humanity, but now faithful followers can declare their loyalty during online virtual services. Or from their cars, in a parking lot. Without feeling a tremor of conscience.

Over the years, I have heard many claims that America (and other Western nations) were created on the basis of Christian values. Putting aside counter-arguments, if that is the assertion, then where is the courage to back it up?

What good are these claims, if in a great crisis, there is no mass rebellion, out in the open, against the tyrannical State, on behalf of God?

Again, mass rebellion means the refusal to wear masks, the refusal to maintain distancing, the refusal to obey lockdowns or close businesses. It means reclaiming freedom.

But perhaps some people believe God wants obedience to the State. He wants his loyal followers to submit to the lockdowns. He wants worshippers to surrender to an all-encompassing secular new world order, in which citizens will function as pawns in a Brave New World technocracy. He wants the faithful to be stripped of their humanity.

If so, let’s hear THAT argument.

Months ago, I said pastors and priests and other religious leaders should stand up in their houses of worship and confess their lack of courage and resign their positions. Confess they are unworthy to lead congregations. Ask for the most brave to step forward and take over.

That’s a correct course of action.

Why should these religious leaders make superficial distinctions about the limits of rebellion? In order to maintain their non-profit status with the State? In order to keep their flock comfortable?

Jesus: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

But perhaps, is it possible that in these enlightened times, people are deciding to worship a purported virus, and desert God?



Today, while the overall teaching of the Fathers is under attack and the shipwrecks of Faith are numerous, the mouths of the faithful are silent.

St. Gregory the Theologian

AN INSTRUCTIVE LESSON FOR YOUTH FROM THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

By St. John Maximovitch.

And the younger of them said to his father, Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.

[Luke 15: 32]

† † †

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a most instructive lesson for youth. We see in the prodigal son the true character of flighty youth: light-minded, thoughtless, thirsting for independence; in short, everything that usually distinguishes the majority of youth.

The younger son grew up in his parents' house. On reaching adolescence, he already began to imagine that life at home was too restrictive. It seemed unpleasant to him to live under his father's rule and his mother's watchful eye. He wanted to imitate his comrades, who had given themselves up to the pleasures of the world. "I am the heir of a rich estate. Would it not be better," he reasoned, "if I received my inheritance now? I could manage my wealth differently than my father does." Thus the light-minded youth was carried away by the deceitful glitter of the world's pleasures and decided to throw off the yoke of obedience and to depart from his parents' home.

Are not many inspired by similar impulses today, and, while they may not leave their parents' home, do they not depart from the home of their Heavenly Father, that is, from obedience to the Holy Church?

The yoke of Christ seems difficult for immature minds, and His commandments burdensome. They think that it is not really necessary to keep that which God and His Holy Church command us. To them it seems possible to serve God and the world at the same time. They say, "We are already strong enough to withstand destructive temptations and seductions. We can hold onto the truth and sound teachings by ourselves. Allow us to perfect our minds through acquiring many kinds of knowledge. Let us strengthen our wills ourselves amid temptations and seductions. Through experience our senses will become convinced of the vileness of vice!" Are such desires any better than the ill-considered request of the younger son to his father, *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me?*

And so, a light-minded youth ceases to heed the commandments and admonitions of the Holy Church. He ceases to study the Word of God and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and listens intently to the sophistries of those who are falsely-called teachers, and in these pursuits he kills the best hours of his life. He goes to church less frequently or stands there inattentively, distracted. He does not find the opportunity to devote himself to piety and to exercise himself in the virtues, because he spends so much time attending shows, public entertainments, etc. In a word, with each day he gives himself up more and more to the world, and finally, he goes off to "a far country."

What is the result of such an estrangement from the Holy Church? It is the same as the result of the prodigal son's leaving his parents' house. Light-minded youths very quickly waste their excellent energies and talents of soul and body, ruining for time and eternity all the good they have done. Meanwhile, there appears "a mighty famine in that land:" emptiness and dissatisfaction -- the inevitable result of wild pleasures. A thirst for enjoyments appears,

which intensifies with the gratifying of wanton passions, and finally becomes insatiable. It often happens that the unfortunate lover of the world, in order to gratify his passions, resorts to base and shameful pursuits, which do not bring him to his senses like the prodigal son and do not return him

to the path of salvation, but complete his ruin, both temporal and eternal!



Anyone who is capable of speaking the truth but remains silent, will be heavily judged by God—especially in this case, where the faith and the very foundation of the entire church of the Orthodox is in danger. To remain silent under these circumstances is to betray these, and the appropriate witness belongs to those that reproach [i.e., those who stand up for the faith].

St. Basil the Great

PHARISEES, HUMBLE YOURSELVES!

By Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina, from the weekly bulletin "Kiriaki," February 20, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen].

My dear brethren, if we take a quick look around us and observe nature and all in her, we will notice something astonishing: all of nature and all of God's creatures are in prayer, each of them in their own unique way. The sea thanks God through the roaring of the waves; the small stream of water through its murmuring; the trees through the rustle of their leaves; the birds through their melody; the stars through their twinkling lights. Did you ever pay attention to a chicken drinking water? During every swallow, it raises its head high, as if it is conveying gratitude to its Creator, saying, "God, I thank you!"

Now I ask you: is it possible or remotely likely that man would be absent from this Divine invitation? Of course not. Man prays as well, conveying his gratitude to his Maker. Ever since our childhood, our wonderful mothers have taught us to humbly cross our hands in front of the icons of Christ and Panaghia, and to whisper a simple prayer towards our Heavenly Father. These constitute unforgettable moments for all of us. Later in our lives, we learned, along with many other children, how to say in Church the "Our Father" and the Creed, thus joining the rest of the congregation in our mutual pleas and thanks towards our Lord.

The most noble expression and manifestation of the human heart takes place during the time of prayer. The creation communicates with the Creator. It is the exact moment that compels man to thank Him for the many benefactions he enjoys daily in his life. It is also the moment that man, feeling perhaps great sorrow and hopelessness, turns to His omnipotence and pleads for help and protection.

But what is this that I see? What is this that I observe and hear? Man, in his great sinfulness, somehow manages to profane and commit another great sin during this time of prayer. How does he do that? Our Lord provides us the answer to this question through the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee.

Our Lord through this parable transports us to the temple of Solomon, during the time of prayer for the Jewish congregation. The magnificence of this temple made man "feel" the presence of God, i.e., that God comes down to all those in prayer so that all of them in turn are elevated towards

God. Multitudes of faithful thus approached the Temple of Solomon with great piety to pray within. Their movements, attitudes, and stance were calm and noiseless.

This environment of sanctity and piety is being disturbed by someone. It is the Pharisee. What does he do? He avoids all others and walks alone. His walk is prideful and his appearance and bearing are haughty and arrogant. He considers himself saintly, righteous, and pure. He refuses to associate with others and does not mingle with them in fear that they might "pollute" him. Furthermore, he enters in a boisterous, noisy manner. All others must stop what they are doing and take special notice of him; they must turn their eyes towards him. There is only one prayer that must be heard: his and his alone! He thus directs himself towards the center of the temple and he raises his hands so that he can proceed with

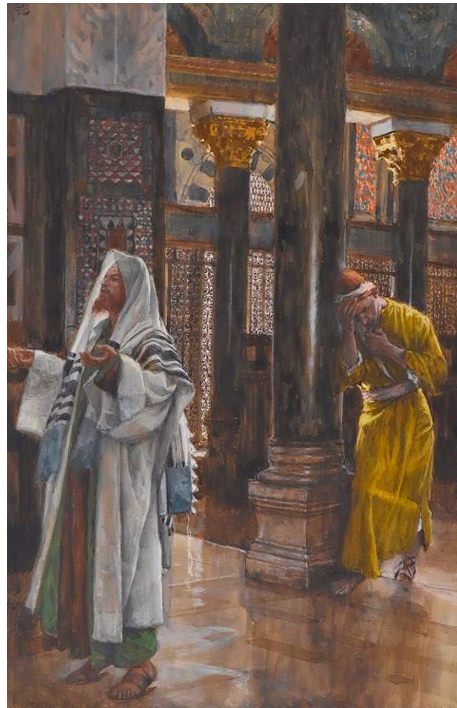
his prayers in an elevated tone...

This however, is not prayer. The prayer of the Pharisee is a mockery of God. He does not take a second to consider that in front of him is not a simple Jew but He Whose presence makes the universe tremble and shiver. The Pharisee, all puffed up with ego, does not consider it proper to kneel or even lower his head and ask for God's mercy. Thus standing, he begins his "prayer."

He begins with, *I thank Thee* (Lk 18:11). I wonder what he is thanking God for. Does he thank Him for his wealthy house, for his excellent health, for his many riches that are spread all over his home, for being protected from committing sins? What is he thanking God for? Let us listen to him: *God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as*

this Publican; I fast twice in a week, I tithe all things that I acquire... Now I ask you: Did he do this "prayer" for God? No. This "prayer" was meant to be heard by the people that were present all around him. He wanted all to know his "virtues" so that they could admire him.

The Pharisee altered the prayer stance into a display of self-idolization, a show. Where is the self-awareness, the feeling of contrition, the pose of humility? Where is the consciousness of the sinful human nature and the plea for God's mercy? He is preoccupied with his ego and self-declared accomplishments. *I am not an extortioner, I am not unjust, and I am not an adulterer.* Yes, Pharisee, you are not all these things, but you are an egomaniac and prideful. And for God, there exists no human passion or evil more disliked than that of pride. Pharisee, it would have been more welcome if you were an extortioner and unjust and an adulterer, as long as you were



not prideful. Why? Because then it is possible for your humility to guide you into repentance and thus attract God's mercy.

O Pharisee, you departed the temple all puffed up since you accomplished your feat and attracted the admiration of people who eulogized you and judged you as good. Did God agree with the opinion of all others in the temple? Did God praise you like they did? Did He even accept your prayer? Let me assure you that prayers of this type cannot and do not reach God's "ears." This is why Christ, having full foreknowledge of such predispositions, explicitly told us how we must all pray.

My fellow man, do you truly wish to communicate with your Creator in Heaven? If so, then ...*enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* (Mt 6:6) Let me also be as emphatic as humanly possible and assure you that pharisaic prayers are a complete waste of time; they are good-for-nothing and lost forever.

Now you see, my dear brethren in Christ, how it is possible and likely, through pride, for many to commit grave and terrible sins, even during this time of prayer.

But why remain with the sad and pitiful image of the Pharisee? In His parable and within the confines of the same temple, our Lord presents us with the ideal image of a praying man. Before, we had the egocentric and prideful Pharisee; now, we have a humble, sensible, and wise person. He is the Publican.

The Publican examines himself as well. There is, however, a difference. The Pharisee saw only virtues, while the Publican can only see sins. From the lips of the Pharisee we hear, *I thank Thee*, full of callousness. From the lips of the Publican, however, we hear, *God be merciful unto me the sinner.* (Lk 18:13). His words come out with immense pain and anguish. The Pharisee boasted, while the Publican *smote upon his breast.* (Lk 18:13). The Pharisee had no knowledge of Who was standing across from him, while the Publican had complete understanding that he was standing in front of God his Creator, the only One Who is without sin, Him Whose virtue covers the heavens. He has complete self-awareness of his misery, wretchedness, and sinfulness. He does not even dare to *lift his eyes unto Heaven.* He knows that as it is not possible for injured eyes to face the sun, it is equally unlikely for a sinful man to face God. He is in immense pain; he weeps; he laments; he stands afar off and smites his chest. He cries out, *God be merciful unto me, a sinner.*

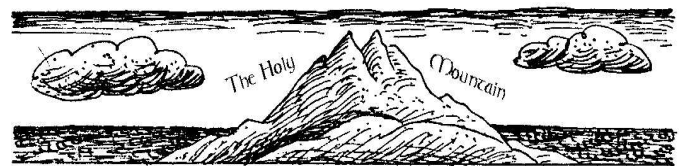
Hail to you O humble heart that is aware of the heights of God and your own wretchedness. You did not arrive to seek the recognition of people or to put on a show of ostentatious behavior. You entered the temple quietly to express your pain and anguish, to confess your sinful state, to beg for God's mercy and love.

This is why the Publican's prayer did not go to waste. It would be natural to rightfully think that the prayers of a

man as sinful as him would be unlikely to receive any type of audience from God, since everybody ignored him, especially the self-proclaimed "virtuous" Pharisee. Do you see how the judgment and discernment of people is wrong more often than not? We never have any true knowledge of what actually transpires within the hearts of people. People's judgment results in the condemnation of the Publican; God's judgment, however, results in his acquittal. People ignored him or looked upon him with contempt. God, however, welcomed and received his prayer. The Publican's humility attracted God's love.

My fellow brethren, even today (or perhaps especially today) our own world is full with Pharisees and Publicans. As during that time, people today also come to church to pray. I wonder how many of those come with a prideful air about them and a boastful attitude, just like the Pharisee. How many men and women make these big crosses and light the candles up front so that they can put on a show? How many come to church not to pray but to instead display their newly tailored suits or dresses, those fur coats or their new expensive jewelry, thus seeking admiration, recognition, or to become the topic of conversation? How many are even "praying" through self-recognition, calling themselves good Orthodox Christians? Thankfully, however, we also have Publicans. Perhaps that older lady in the corner and that weeping mother, who with contrition in their hearts, place their heads down and pray, "O Most Holy Mother of God, please save my family and me, the sinner!" They give us a renewed appearance of the Publican. O holy soul, may His mercy be with you at all times.

I am directing my words now toward the Pharisees of our days. Do not take comfort in the words of other people about you. Examine yourselves; is it possible that the serpent of pride has bit you and his evil poison has made you ill? Examine to see if God is truly with you. And if the answer is no, then weep, bow down, kneel and cry out: "God, have mercy upon us, the sinners!" It is only in this manner that you will find His justice. Do not forget that there exists nobody without sins. No matter what heights or virtues you may reach, there will always be something lacking, something on which you know you have fallen behind. It is for this reason that you must "*humble yourselves in the sight of God, and He shall lift you up.*" (Jas 4:10). We must never forget: *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* (1 Pet 5:5).



Repentance is never-ending. By the grace of God, we can perfect all the virtues. But no-one can perfect repentance, because we need it to our last breath, since we sin "in the blink of an eye." So repentance remains unconquered.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)

THE LITURGICAL STRUCTURE OF LENT

By Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann (+1983), from "The Russian Orthodox Journal," March 1959, pp. 6-8. This article is included in this issue allowing our readers an early preparatory period for the start of the 2021 Holy Great Lent (which starts on March 15th). The preparatory Triodion commences in the middle of February.



To understand the various liturgical particularities of the Lenten period, we must remember that they express and convey to us the spiritual mean-

ing of Lent and are related to the central idea of Lent, to its function in the liturgical life of the Church. It is the idea of *repentance*. In the teaching of the Orthodox Church however, repentance means much more than a mere enumeration of sins and transgressions to the priest. Confession and absolution are but the result, the fruit, the "climax" of true repentance. And, before this result can be reached, become truly valid and meaningful, one must make a spiritual effort, go through a long period of preparation and purification.

Repentance, in the Orthodox acceptance of this word, means a *deep, radical reevaluation of our whole life*, of all our ideas, judgments, worries, mutual relations, etc. It applies not only to some "bad actions," but to the whole of life, and is a Christian judgment passed on it, on its basic presuppositions. At every moment of our life, but especially during Lent, the Church invites us to concentrate our attention on the ultimate values and goals, to measure ourselves by the criteria of Christian teaching, to contemplate our existence in its relation to God. This is repentance and it consists therefore, before everything else, in the acquisition of the *Spirit of repentance*, i.e., of a special state of mind, a special disposition of our conscience and spiritual vision.

The Lenten worship is thus a *school of repentance*. It teaches us *what* is repentance and *how* to acquire the *spirit of repentance*. It prepares us for and leads us to the spiritual regeneration, without which "absolution" remains meaningless. It is, in short, both teaching about repentance and the way of repentance. And, since there can be no real Christian life without repentance, without this constant "reevaluation" of life, the Lenten worship is an essential part of the liturgical tradition of the Church. The neglect of it, its reduction to a few purely formal obligations and customs, the deformation of its basic rules constitute one of the major deficiencies of our Church life today.

The aim of this article is to outline at least the most important structures of Lenten worship, and thus to help Orthodox Christians to recover a more Orthodox idea of Lent.

SUNDAYS OF PREPARATION

Three weeks before Lent proper begins, we enter into a period of *preparation*. It is a constant feature of our tradition of worship that every major liturgical event—Christmas, Easter, Lent, etc., is announced and prepared long in advance. Knowing our lack of concentration, the "worldliness" of our life, the Church calls our attention to the seriousness of the approaching event, invites us to meditate on its various "dimensions"; thus, before we can *practice* Lent, we are given its basic *theology*.

Pre-Lenten preparation includes four consecutive Sundays preceding Lent.

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

On the eve of this day, i.e., at the Saturday Vigil Service, the liturgical book of the Lenten season, the *Triodion* makes its first appearance and texts from it are added to the usual liturgical material of the Resurrection service. They develop the first major theme of the season: that of *humility*; the Gospel lesson of the day (Lk 18:10-14) teaches that humility is the condition of repentance. No one can acquire the spirit of repentance without rejecting the attitude of the Pharisee. Here is a man who is always pleased with himself and thinks that he complies with all the requirements of religion. Yet, he has reduced religion to purely formal rules and measures it by the amount of his financial contribution to the temple. Religion for him is a source of pride and self-satisfaction. The Publican is humble and humility justifies him before God.

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

The Gospel reading of this day (Lk 15:11-32) gives the second theme of Lent: that of a return to God. It is not enough to acknowledge sins and to confess them. Repentance remains fruitless without the desire and the decision to change life, to go back to God. The true repentance has as its source the spiritual beauty and purity which man has lost. *I shall return to the compassionate Father crying with tears, receive me as one of Thy servants*. At Matins of this day to the usual psalms of the Polyeleos *Praise ye the name of the Lord* (Pss 135), the Psalm 137 is added, *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept, when we remembered Zion... If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning...* The Christian *recalls what he lost*: the communion with God, the peace and joy of His Kingdom. He was baptized, introduced into the Body of Christ. Repentance, therefore, is the renewal of baptism, a movement of love, which brings him back to God.

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meat Fare)

On Saturday, preceding this Sunday, the *Typikon* prescribes the universal commemoration of all the departed members

of the Church. In the Church we all depend on each other, we belong to each other, we are united by the love of Christ. (Therefore no service in the Church can be “private”.) Our repentance would not be complete without this act of love towards all those, who have preceded us in death, for what is repentance if not also the recovery of the spirit of love, which is the spirit of the Church. Liturgically this commemoration includes Friday Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy on Saturday.

The Sunday Gospel (Mt 25:31-46) reminds us of the third theme of repentance: preparation for the last judgment. A Christian lives under Christ’s judgment. He will judge us on how seriously we took His presence in the world, His identification with every man, His gift of love. *I was in prison, I was naked...* All our actions, attitudes, judgments and especially relations with other people must be referred to Christ, and to call ourselves “Christians” means that we accept life as *service* and *ministry*. The parable of the Last Judgment gives us “terms of reference” for our self-evaluation.

On the week following this Sunday a *limited fasting* is prescribed. We must prepare and train ourselves for the great effort of Lent. Wednesday and Friday are (usually) *non-liturgical days* with Lenten services. On Saturday of this week (Cheesefare Saturday) the Church commemorates all men and women who were “illuminated through fasting,” i.e., the Holy Ascetics or Fasters. They are the patterns we must follow, our guides in the difficult “art” of fasting and repentance.

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheese Fare)

This is the last day before Lent. Its liturgy develops three themes: (a) the *expulsion of Adam from the Paradise of Bliss*. Man was created for Paradise, i.e., for communion with God, for life with Him. He has lost this life and his existence on earth is an exile. Christ has opened to every one the doors of Paradise and the Church guides us to our heavenly fatherland. (b) Our fast must not be hypocritical, a show off. We must *appear not unto men to fast, but unto our Father who is in secret* (Sunday Gospel, Mt. 6:14-21), and (c) its condition is that we *forgive* each other as God has forgiven us—*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you*.

The evening of that day, at Vespers, Lent is inaugurated by the Great Prokeimenon: *Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant, for I am in trouble; hear me speedily. Attend to my*

soul and deliver it. After this service, the rite of forgiveness takes place and the Church begins its pilgrimage towards the glorious day of Easter.

THE CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

On the first four days of Lent—Monday through Thursday—the Typikon prescribes the reading at Great Compline (i.e., after Vespers) of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, divided in four parts. This canon is entirely devoted to repentance and constitutes, so to say, the “inauguration of Lent.” It is repeated in its complete form at Matins on Thursday of the fifth week of Lent.

LENT WEEKDAYS

Lent consists of six weeks or forty days. It begins on Monday after the Cheese Fare Sunday and ends on Friday evening before Palm Sunday. The Saturday of Lazarus’ resurrection, the Palm Sunday and the Holy Week form a special liturgical cycle not analyzed in this article.

The Lenten weekdays (Monday through Friday) have a liturgical structure very different from that of Saturdays and Sundays. We will deal with these two days in a special paragraph.

The Lenten weekday cycle, although it consists of the same services, as prescribed for the whole year (Vespers, Compline, Midnight, Matins, Hours) has nevertheless some important particularities:

(a) It has its own liturgical book—the *Triodion*.

Throughout the year, the changing elements of the daily services—*troparia, stichira, canons*—are taken from the *Octoechos* (the book of the week) and the *Menaion* (the book of the month, giving the office of the Saint of the day). The basic rule of Lent is that the Octoechos is not used on weekdays but replaced by the Triodion, which supplies us each day with:

- (i) at Vespers, a set of *stichiras* (three for *Lord, I have cried* and three for the *aposticha*) and two readings or *parimias* from the Old Testament;
- (ii) at Matins, two groups of *cathismata* (short hymns sung after the reading of the Psalter), a canon of three odes (or “Triodion” which gave its name to the whole book) and three *stichiras* at the *Praises*, i.e., sung at the end of the regular morning psalms 148, 149, 150—at the Sixth Hour—a *parimia* from the Book of Isaiah;
- (iii) the commemoration of the Saint of the day (*Menaion*) is not omitted, but combined with the texts of the Triodion. The latter are mainly, if not exclu-



sively, penitential in their content. Especially deep and beautiful are the *idiornela stichira* of each day (one at Vespers and one at Matins).

(b) The use of the Psalter is doubled. Normally the Psalter, divided in 20 *cathismata* is read once every week: (one *cathisma* at Vespers, two at Matins). During Lent it is read twice (one at Vespers, three at Matins, one at the third, sixth, and ninth Hours). This is done of course mainly in monasteries, yet to know that the Church considers the psalms to be an essential “spiritual food” for the Lenten season is important.

(c) The Lenten rubrics put an emphasis on prostrations. They are prescribed at the end of each service with the Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, *O Lord and Master of my life*, and also after each of the special Lenten troparia at Vespers. They express the spirit of repentance as *breaking down* our pride and self-satisfaction. They also make our body partake of the effort of prayer.

(d) The Spirit of Lent is also expressed in the liturgical music. Special Lenten “tones” or melodies are used for the responses at litanies and the “Alleluias” which replace at Matins the solemn singing of the *God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us*.

(e) A characteristic feature of Lenten services is the use of the Old Testament, normally absent from the daily cycle. Three books are read daily throughout Lent: Genesis with Parables at Vespers and the Book of Isaiah at the sixth Hour. Genesis tells us the story of Creation, Fall and the beginnings of the history of salvation. Parables is the book of Wisdom, which leads us to God and to His precepts, and Isaiah is the prophet of redemption, salvation and the Messianic Kingdom.

(f) The liturgical vestments to be used on weekdays of Lent are dark, theoretically purple.

The order for the weekday Lenten services is to be found in the Triodion (“Monday of the first week of Lent”). Of special importance are the regulations concerning the singing of the Canon. Lent is the only season of the liturgical year that has preserved the use of the nine biblical odes, which formed the original framework of the Canon.

NON-LITURGICAL DAYS

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

On weekdays (Monday through Friday) the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is strictly forbidden. They are non-

liturgical days, with only one possible exception – the Feast of Annunciation (then the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom is prescribed after Vespers). The reason for this rule is that the Eucharist is by its very nature a festal celebration, the joyful commemoration of Christ’s Resurrection and presence among His disciples. But at least twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays, the Church prescribes the celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. It consists of solemn Great Vespers and communion with the Holy Gifts consecrated on the previous Sunday. These days being days of strict fasting (theoretically complete abstinence) are “crowned” with the partaking of the Bread of Life, the ultimate fulfillment of all our efforts.

One must acknowledge the tragic neglect of these rules in many American parishes. The celebration of the so called “requiem liturgies” on non-liturgical days constitutes a flagrant violation of the universal tradition of Orthodoxy

and cannot be justified from either theological or pastoral points of view. They are remnants of “uniatism” in our Church and are in contradiction with both the Orthodox doctrine of the commemoration of the dead and the Orthodox doctrine of Eucharist and its function in the Church. Everything must be done in order to restore the real liturgical principles of Lent.

SATURDAYS OF LENT

Lenten Saturdays, with the exception of the first—dedicated to the memory of the Holy Martyr Theodore Tyron, and the fifth—the Saturday of the *Acathistos*, are days of commemoration of the departed. And, instead of multiplying the “private requiem liturgies” on days when they are forbidden, it would be good to restore this practice of one weekly universal commemoration of all Orthodox Christians departed this life, of their integration in the Eucharist, which is always offered *on behalf of all and for all*.

The *Acathistos* Saturday is the annual commemoration of the deliverance of Constantinople in 620. The *Acathist*, a beautiful hymn to the Mother of God, is sung usually at Matins.

SUNDAYS OF LENT

Each Sunday in Lent, although it keeps its character of the weekly feast of Resurrection, has its specific theme, and the *Triodion* is combined with the *Octoechos*.

1st Sunday: Triumph of Orthodoxy, commemorates the victory of the Church over the Iconoclasm heresy (842).



2nd Sunday: dedicated to the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, a great Byzantine theologian, canonized in 1366.

3rd Sunday: Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross; at Matins the Cross is brought in a solemn procession from the sanctuary and put in the center of the Church where it will remain for the whole week. This ceremony announces the approaching of the Holy Week and the commemoration of Christ's passion. At the end of each service takes place a special veneration of the Cross.

4th Sunday: St. John the Ladder, one of the greatest Ascetics, who in his "Spiritual Ladder" described the basic principles of Christian spirituality.

5th Sunday: St. Mary of Egypt, the most wonderful example of repentance.

On Saturdays and Sundays, days of Eucharistic celebration, the dark vestments are replaced by light ones, the Lenten melodies are not used, and the prayer of St. Ephraim with prostrations is omitted. The order of the services is not of the Lenten type, yet fasting remains a rule and cannot be broken. Each Sunday night, Great Vespers with a special Great Prokeimenon is prescribed.

At the conclusion of this brief description of the liturgical structure of Lent, let me emphasize once more that Lenten worship constitutes one of the deepest, the most beautiful and the most essential elements of our Orthodox liturgical tradition. Its restoration in the life of the Church, its understanding by Orthodox Christians, constitute one of the urgent tasks of our time.

† † †

From the Editor: In the Greek Orthodox tradition, on the first four Fridays of Lent, the Service of the Salutations to the Theotokos is chanted. In the evening, the Small Compline is read through the Creed, and then the Canon of the *Akathist* is chanted, in each ode, doing six troparia. The entire *Akathist* is chanted in its entirety on the fifth Friday evening.

The four sections into which the *Akathist* is divided correspond to the themes of the Annunciation, Nativity, Christ, and the Theotokos herself. The hymn itself forms an alphabetical acrostic—that is, each *oikos* (house) begins with a letter of the Greek alphabet, in order—and it consists of twelve long and twelve short *oikoi*. Each of the long *oikoi* include a seven-line *stanza* followed by six couplets, employing rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, beginning with the word *Chaire* (translated as either "Hail!" or "Rejoice!") and ending with the refrain, "Hail, Bride without bridegroom!" In the short *oikoi*, the seven-line *stanza* is followed by the refrain, *Alleluia!*

The Salutations to the Theotokos service is most often known by its Greek name *Chairetismoi*, from the *Chaire*, so often used in the hymn. (*Rejoice*, as proclaimed by the Archangel to the Holy Theotokos.)

PERSECUTIONS AGAINST CHRISTIANS WORSEN DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

By Ștefana Totorcea 01/20/2021, from the *Basilica.ro* Newsfeed.

More than 340 million Christians were severely persecuted in 2020 and the phenomenon worsened during the coronavirus pandemic, announced last week Portes Ouvertes, the French partner of Open Doors International.

The numbers have gone up since the 2019 report, which found 260 million Christians persecuted globally.

The organization monitors all the incidents, from daily soft oppression to grave violence.

"Persecuted Christian minorities were confronted with unprecedented violence and a higher level of discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the trends we have monitored for years," estimates Portes Ouvertes, which makes an annual index of the persecution of Christians in 50 high-risk countries.

The most persecuted are Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has 90% of the Christians killed for their faith.

On the other hand, the number of attacked churches was slashed to half the number in the 2019 report (4,488 compared to 9,488).

In 2020 China had by far the highest number of attacked churches, even though the trend was decreasing (3,088 compared to 5,576 in 2019), followed by Nigeria.

In North Korea, faith in God remains a crime against the political regime and it can send a person to a forced labour camp, announced the organization.

Other countries where Christians are oppressed are Afghanistan, Somalia, Libia, Pakistan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, Nigeria, India, Iraq and Syria.

Open Doors International is a global network of Christian NGOs and is active in 60 countries. It offers spiritual and moral support and also humanitarian aid to persecuted Christians.



Whoever restrains sinful thoughts, does not think of his own sins or the sins of others, neither of anything corruptible nor of anything earthly. The mind of such a man is continually in heaven where there is no evil. Thus, in him, sin gradually ceases to be, even in his thoughts.

This is what it means not to judge. Do not have hostile feelings towards anyone and do not let dislike dominate your heart; do not hate him who hates his neighbor.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

Ἐπιστροφή στο Σπίτι τοῦ Πατέρα

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικό «Κυριακή», 28 Φεβρουαρίου 2021, ἀριθμ. φύλλου 2355, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεία Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Ἁγίου Αὐγουστίνου Φλωρίνης. Γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης πρώην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Αὐγουστῖνος Καντιώτης, (+2010).

«**Πάτερ, ἡμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιόν σου...**» [Λουκ. 15, 18, 21]

† † †



Ἀκούσατε, ἀγαπητοί μου, τὸ ἱερὸ καὶ ἅγιο εὐαγγέλιο. Εἶνε μία παραβολή, ἡ ὠραιότερη ἀπὸ ὅσες εἶπε ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Εἶνε ἡ ἱστορία ἐνὸς φαινομενικὰ ἀγνώστου νέου, ποῦ ἔφυγε ἀπ' τὸν πατέρα του καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ καιρὸ γύρισε κοντά του· ἀλλὰ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία του εἶνε κρυμμένη ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου· **ἡ παραβολὴ**

αὐτὴ εἶνε ἡ φωτογραφία μας. Σήμερα **ἐορτάζουμε ὅλου**· γιατί λίγο ἢ πολὺ ὅλοι μοιάζουμε με τὸν ἄσωτο υἱό. Ἄς δοῦμε τώρα τὴν παραβολή.

Ὁ νέος αὐτὸς ἦταν παιδί ἐνὸς καλοῦ πατέρα. Μέσα στὸ σπίτι του τὰ εἶχε ὅλα, τίποτε δὲν τοῦ ἔλειπε. Κι ὅμως αὐτὸς δὲν ἔμενε εὐχαριστημένος. Ἐνιωθε τὸ σπίτι σὰν φυλακή, κλουβὶ ἀπ' τὸ ὁποῖο ἤθελε νὰ βγῆ ἔξω, νὰ πετάξῃ. Καὶ μιὰ μέρα, χωρὶς εὐχὴ τοῦ πατέρα, **ἔφυγε.**

Μεγάλο πρᾶγμα ἡ **πατρικὴ εὐλογία**: ὅποιος τὴν ἔχει, «χῶμα πιάνει – μάλαμα γίνεται»· διαφορετικά, μάλαμα θὰ πιάνη – φίδια καὶ σκορπιοὶ θὰ γίνονται. Μύρια παραδείγματα δείχνουν ὅτι «**Εὐλογία πατρὸς στηρίζει οἴκους τέκνων, κατάρα δὲ μητρὸς ἐκτριζοῖ θεμέλια**». (Σοφ. Σειρ. 3:9).

Ἐφυγε ὁ νέος ἀπὸ τὸ πατρικόν. Καὶ ποῦ πῆγε; Στὰ ξένα! Κ' ἐκεῖ τί ἔκανε; Ἐμπλεξε. **Ἄχ αὐτὴ ἡ ξενιτεία!** Εἶνε ἐπικίνδυνη. Γι' αὐτὸ συμβουλεύω, μείνετε στὸν τόπο σας· τὸ ψωμάκι ποῦ τρῶτε ἐδῶ με κρεμμύδι, εἶνε εὐλογημένο· τὸ ψωμί στὰ ξένα, κι ἂν εἶνε με βούτυρο, εἶνε φαρμάκι. Πολλοὶ ποῦ ξενιτεύονται, συχνὰ ἔχουν τὴν ἐξέλιξι ποῦ εἶχε ὁ νέος αὐτός.

Στὰ ξένα, δηλαδή, ἔμπλεξε με γυναῖκες τῆς νύχτας καὶ φίλους τῆς κακιᾶς ὥρας. Γλέντια, ξενύχτια, μεθύσια, χοροί. Στὸ τέλος ἔφαγε ὅλη τὴν περιουσία του, δὲν τοῦ ἔμεινε δραχμὴ. Τὸν ἔπιασε πείνα μεγάλη. Ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ γίνῃ βοσκός· ἔβοσκε ὄχι πρόβατα καὶ γίδια ἀλλὰ γουρούνια. Καὶ τ' ἀφεντικό του ἦταν τόσο σκληρό, ποῦ δὲν τοῦ ἔδινε οὔτ' ἓνα κομμάτι ψωμί, κι αὐτὸς περιέμενε χορτάση ἀπὸ τὰ ξυλοκέρατα τῶν χοίρων, τὰ χαρούπια—ποῦ φάγαμε κ' ἐμεῖς στὰ χρόνια τῆς

κατοχῆς.

Τότε πιά θυμῆθηκε τὸ πατρικόν του, καὶ εἶπευ: Τί ἔκανα; **Πρέπει νὰ γυρίσω στὸν πατέρα μου.** Καὶ ξεκινάει. Ἐφυγε ντυμένος στὰ χρυσαφικά· τώρα γυρίζει μ' ἓνα ῥαβδί ζητιάνος, κουρελῆς, ἀδύνατος, σκελετός, ξυπόλητος, ψειριασμένος, ἐλεεινός—τρισάθλιος, ἀγνώριστος.

Ὁ **πατέρας** ποῦ πάντα τὸν περιέμενε, τὸν εἶδε ἀπὸ μακριά. Τὸν γνώρισε καὶ **τρέχει νὰ τὸν προῦπαντήσῃ.** Ὁ νέος πέφτει στὰ πόδια τοῦ καὶ λέει: Πατέρα, δὲν εἶμαι ἄξιος νὰ λέγωμαι παιδί σου· σὲ λύπησα, σὲ πίκρανα... Κλαῖνε κ' οἱ δυό. Ὁ πατέρας τὸν ἀγκαλιάζει, τὸν φιλεῖ καὶ τὸν φέρνει στὸ ἀρχοντικό. Τὸν πλένει, τὸν καθαρίζει, τὸν ντύνει λαμπρὴ στολή, τοῦ φορᾶει δαχτυλίδι στὸ χέρι καὶ παπούτσια στὰ πόδια. Ἐτοιμάζει τραπέζι πλούσιο σφάζοντας τὸ καλύτερο μοσχάρι. Ἀνάβει φῶτα, καλεῖ τὰ ὄργανα· καὶ τὴ νύχτα **τὸ σπίτι του εἶχε χαρά,** γιατί βρῆκε τὸ πρόβατο ποῦ εἶχε χάσει.

Αὐτὸ εἶνε τὸ σημερινὸ εὐαγγέλιο. Ἀλλά, ὅπως εἶπα, πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν ἄσωτο υἱὸ εἶνε κρυμμένη ἡ ἱστορία κάθε ἀνθρώπου. Μόνον ὅποιος νομίζει πὼς εἶνε ἀναμάρτητος, αὐτὸς δὲν μοιάζει με τὸν ἄσωτο, ἀλλὰ μοιάζει με τὸν πρεσβύτερο υἱό, ποῦ καυχόταν πὼς εἶνε ἐν τάξει.

† † †

Ἀλλὰ ποιός, ἀγαπητοί μου, μπορεῖ νὰ καυχῆθῃ, ὅτι δὲν εἶνε ἁμαρτωλός, δηλαδή ἄσωτος υἱός; **Ἡ ἁμαρτία** εἶνε σὰν τὸ μικρόβιο, ποῦ μπαίνει στὸν ὄργανισμό τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἄμαρτάνουμε με τὸ σῶμα, με κάθε μέλος.

Μὲ τὰ χέρια· ποῦ μᾶς τὰ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ νὰ κάνουμε ὄχι τὸ κακό (ὄρκους, κλοπές, φόνους...), ἀλλὰ ἔργα πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης.

Μὲ τὰ πόδια· ποῦ μᾶς τὰ ἔδωσε γιὰ νὰ τρέχουμε ὄχι στὴ φθορὰ ἀλλὰ στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ κι ὅπου ἀλλοῦ καλεῖ ἡ ἀνάγκη τοῦ πλησίον.

Μὲ τὰ μάτια· μᾶς τὰ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεός, γιὰ νὰ θαυμάζουμε τὸ πανόραμα τῆς δημιουργίας του καὶ νὰ τὸν δοξάζουμε, κ' ἐμεῖς κλεισμένοι στὰ σκοτεινά, με μάτια πεταγμένα ἔξω ἀπ' τὶς κόγχες, χάφτουμε ἀπ' τὶς ὀθόνες αἴσθη καὶ αἵματα, ποῦ ἀνάβουν τὸ πῦρ τῆς κολάσεως.

Μὲ τὰ αὐτιά· ποῦ τὰ βουλώσαμε νὰ μὴν ἀκοῦνε Εὐαγγέλιο, φωνὴ τῆς μάνας, τοῦ πατέρα, τοῦ δασκάλου, τοῦ παπᾶ, τῆς πατρίδος, ἀλλὰ τὰ τεντώνουμε στὰ σατανικά μηνύματα.

Μὲ τὸ μυαλό. Πές μου τί σκέπτεσαι, νὰ σοῦ πῶ τί εἶσαι. Σκέπτεσαι τὸ Θεό, τὸν οὐρανόν, τὴν Παναγία, τοὺς ἁγίους, τὸ φτωχόν; τότε εἶσαι ἅγιος. Σκέπτεσαι τὴν ἁμαρτία, τὸ βόρβορο, τὴ λάσπη, τὴν ἀτιμία; τότε εἶσαι ἄσωτος.

Ἄμαρτάνουμε ὅμως ὄχι μόνον με τὸ σῶμα ἀλλὰ **καὶ με τὸ πνεῦμα (καρδιά, νοῦ, φαντασία).** Ἄντι ν' ἀγαποῦμε ὄ,τι ἀγαθόν, ἀγαποῦμε ὄ,τι φαῦλο. Ἄμαρτάνουμε κάθε

στιγμή, μέρα - νύχτα, και σε κάθε τόπο· στο δρόμο και στο δωμάτιο, σε πόλι και σε ύπαιθρο, στα έμπορικά και στο χρηματιστήριο, σε λέσχες και σε καζίνα, σε ιατρεία και σε δικαστήρια, σε σχολές και σε γήπεδα, στο στρατό και στα νυχτερινά κέντρα, σε άλση και σε δάση, σε αυτοκίνητα και τραίνα, σε πλοία κι άεροπλάνα... Άμαρτάνουμε ακόμα—ώ Θεέ μου—και μέσα στην έκκλησία!

Ποιός μπορεί να μετρήσει τ' άμαρτήματά μας; Γι' αυτό στο τροπάριο της Κασσιανής άκούμε: «*Άμαρτιών μου τὰ πλήθη ... τίς έξιχνιάσει, ψυχοσωστα Σωτήρ μου*» Όποιος λέει πως δεν είναι άμαρτωλός, άγνοεί τον έαυτό του, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Όλες οί γενεές στην άνθρωπότητα έχουν άμαρτήσει· αλλά εγώ πιστεύω ότι ποτέ άλλοτε ὁ κόσμος δεν άμάρτησε τόσο ὅσο σήμερα. **Άμαρτάνουμε πολύ.** Αυτό φαίνεται ιδίως από ὠρισμένες φρικτές πληγές τῆς ζωῆς μας.

Βλασφημία. Παλιότερα στον τόπο μας οὔτε ένας δεν βλαστημοῦσε τὸ Θεό. Τώρα; Άκόμα και τὰ βυζανιάρικα στις άγκαλιές, μαζί με τὸ γάλα πὸν πίνουν, έμαθαν τὴν βλασφημία.

Διαζύγιο. Παλαιότερα στην χώρα μας τὸ διαζύγιο ἦταν άγνωστο. Ξεψάξα στα άρχεία τῆς μητροπόλεως, διαζύγιο δεν ὑπῆρχε. Μόνο τὸ φτυάρι τοῦ νεκροθάφτη χῳρίζε τὸ άντρώγυνο. Τώρα; Ντρέπομαι πὸν ἴμαι έπίσκοπος. Τετρακόσες αίτήσεις διαζυγίου! Έρχονται κάθε μέρα δικηγόροι. Φάμπρικα τοῦ σατανά. Τὸ δήλωσα· ὅσο εἶμαι έπίσκοπος, διαζύγιο δεν δίνω!

Άποφυγή τεκνογονίας και έκτρώσεις. Παλαιά έρχόσουν στη Μακεδονία κ' έβλεπες οίκογένειες πατριαρχικές. Τώρα δεν ὑπάρχουν. Ποιά εἶνε ἡ πατριαρχική οίκογένεια; Τὸ άντρώγυνο μετὰ τὰ στέφανα τεκνογονοῦσε φυσιολογικά, δεν ὑπῆρχε ἡ μόδα τοῦ διαβόλου ν' άποφεύγουν τὴ γέννησι· έκαναν 5, 6, 7 κι 8 παιδιά. Τὰ παιδιά αὐτὰ ζοῦσαν άγαπημένα. Παντρεύονταν, και οί νύφες άγαπιόνταν σαν άδερφές. Έμεναν μαζί πεθερός, πεθερά, παιδιά, νύφες κ' έγγόνια. Βρῆκα κάποτε στα μέρη τοῦ Κιλίς και στη Νάουσα τέτοιες οίκογένειες και δάκρυσα. Στο τραπέζι κάθονταν 55 άτομα· ὁ άσπρομάλλης παπποῦς, δίπλα του ἡ Μακεδόνισσα γιαγιά σαν τὴν Παναγιά, γύρω τὰ παιδιά του 10 λεβέντες και 10 νυφάδες, κι ὅλα τὰ έγγόνια· οί μανάδες κρατοῦσαν τὰ μικρά τους κ' ἦταν ὅλοι μιὰ χαρὰ Χριστοῦ. Σήμερα; Ἡ οίκογένεια διαλύθηκε· έκτρώσεις, πορνεία, μοιχεία, διαζύγια και λοιπὴ άκαθαρότητα σείει τὸ έθνος μας.

Έγκληματικότητα. Πρῶτα δίσταζαν νὰ πιάσουν μαχαίρι νὰ σφάξουν κόκορα· σήμερα κόβει ὁ άλλος τὸ συνάνθρωπο σαν νὰ 'νε πράσο. Χάθηκε ὅχι ἡ άγάπη μὰ κι αὐτὴ ἡ άνθρωπιά. Γι' αὐτὸ εἶπα, ὅτι καμμία άλλη έποχὴ δεν άμάρτησε τόσο πολὺ ὅσο ἡ δικὴ μας.

Και τί έπρεπε νὰ γίνη; Νὰ μᾶς τιμωρήσει ὁ Θεός. Κ' έχει πολλοὺς τρόπους τὸ δακτυλάκι του νὰ κουνήσει ὁ Χριστός, γίναμε κάρβουνο. **Και ὅμως** δεν μᾶς καιει με φωτιά, δεν μᾶς πνίγει με νερό, δεν μᾶς καταστρέφει με σεισμό, αλλά—δόξα τῆ μακροθυμία Του—περιμένει. **Τί περιμένει;** Κι από τοὺς δεσποτάδες, κι από τοὺς παπᾶδες, κι από τὰ μοναστήρια, κι από τοὺς βασιλιάδες και μεγάλους, κι από τοὺς μικροὺς και φτωχοὺς, κι από τὶς γυναῖκες κι από τὰ παιδιά, περιμένει—τί; Αὐτὸ πὸν εἶπε ὁ άσωτος· **νὰ ποῦμε τὸ «Ἡμαρτον».** Δυστυχῶς δεν τὸ λέμε, δεν αλλάζουμε. Και δεν θὰ μᾶς δικάσει ὁ Θεός γιατί άμαρτάνουμε, ὅχι· θὰ μᾶς δικάσει γιατί δεν μετανοοῦμε. Τὸ άμαρτάνειν εἶνε άνθρωπino, τὸ έμμένειν ἐν τῆ πλάνῃ και τῆ άμαρτία εἶνε σατανικό.

Περιμένει ὁ Θεός από μᾶς τὸ «Ἡμαρτον» κι ὅχι μόνο δεν τὸ λέμε και δεν κλαῖμε, αλλά τέτοια άγια μέρα, πὸν ἡ Έκκλησία μας φωνάζει και καλεῖ νὰ μετανοήσουμε και νὰ κλάψουμε, **νὰ έπιστρέψουμε στο σπίτι τοῦ Πατέρα μας**· ν' άνοιξομε τὴ Γραφή νὰ τὴ μελετήσουμε, νὰ νηστεύσουμε, νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε, νὰ κάνουμε ὁμολογία και έλεημοσύνη, νὰ αφήσουμε τὴν κραιπάλη τῆς διεφθαρμένης Δύσεως.

Όχι καμπαρὲ κ' έκφυλισμός. Δεν εἶμαστε οὔτε Λονδίνο, οὔτε Μόσχα, οὔτε Νέα Ὑόρκη· εἶμαστε Μακεδονία, Ελλάδα, και θέλουμε νὰ ζήσουμε σαν Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί!



Όσοι κοσμικές σκέψεις, ὡ μέρμινες τοῦ βίου, πῳς δεν μᾶς αφήνετε οὔτε τὴν ὠρα τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας, αλλά έξακολουθεῖτε και τότε νὰ μᾶς ένοχλήτε!. Σαν τὶς σφήγκες μᾶς περικυκλώνετε, μᾶς κεντᾶτε, μᾶς ένοχλεῖτε. Αλλά ὅπως μιὰ σφηγκοφωλιά πὸν ένοχλεῖ τοὺς διαβάτες βάζουν φωτιά και τὴν καινε και άπαλλάσσονται οί διαβάτες από τὴν ένοχλητική παρουσία της, έτσι και τὶς πονηρὲς αὐτὲς σκέψεις, πὸν μᾶς ένοχλοῦναι και δεν μᾶς αφήνουν άνεπηρέαστους νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε τὴ Θείας Λειτουργία, πρέπει νὰ βροῦμε τρόπο νὰ τὶς έξοντώσουμε, νὰ τὶς άπομακρύνουμε από τὴ συνείδησή μας και νὰ κάψουμε τὴ φωλιά τους.

Ἡ αίθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας δεν εἶναι αίθουσα κάποιας μασονικῆς στοᾶς, ὅπου ὠρισμένα μόνο άτομα συνεδριάζουν και λαμβάνουν μυστικὰς αποφάσεις. Όχι! Ἡ αίθουσα τῆς Ἱεραρχίας πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ὡς τὸ ὑπερῶον τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, ὅπου έπνεε ἡ ὕρα τοῦ Παναγίου Πνευματος: «*Οὐδὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ έλευθερία*» (Β' Κορ. 3:17).

Θεολογικός Γέρον Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (2010)

Ὁ Ὀρκος στὸν Διάβολο

Πρωτ. Γεωργίου Δορμπαράκη.

Γονατιστὸς ὁ Γέροντας καὶ μὲ τὸ κεφάλι τελείως γεμμένο ὥστε νὰ ἀκουμπᾶ στὸ ἔδαφος τρανταζόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς λυγμούς. Πύρινα τὰ δάκρυά του χύνονταν στὸ χῶμα τοῦ κελιοῦ του ἔχοντας σχηματίσει ἤδη μιὰ μικρὴ λίμνη ἀπὸ λάσπη. Μὰ δὲν τολμοῦσε νὰ ὑψώσει τὸ κεφάλι καὶ νὰ ἀντικρούσει τὴν γλυκιὰ μορφὴ τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου ποὺ δέσποζε στὸ εἰκονοστάσι του κρατώντας τὸν μικρὸ Χριστό.

—Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με. Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκε, σῶσον με, ψέλλιζαν διαρκῶς τὰ χεῖλῃ του. Βοήθη με, Παναγία μου. Δὲν ἀντέχω ἄλλο τὸν πειρασμό. Νιώθω τόσο βρωμερὸς ἐνώπιόν σου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ μου.

Σταμάτησαν κάποτε οἱ λυγμοὶ καὶ τὰ δάκρυα. Ὁ Γέροντας σηκώθηκε ἀργά, μὰ δὲν τόλμησε γιὰ μιὰ ἀκόμη φορὰ νὰ κοιτάξει πρὸς τὴν Παναγία Μητέρα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τὸν Ἰδιο. Τοῦ φαινόταν ὅτι ὁ Οὐρανὸς ἦταν κλειστὸς ἀπέναντί του. Ἀμέτοχος σὲ ὅ,τι διαδραματιζόταν στὴν ψυχὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ σῶμα του. Ἡ ἐνίσχυση ποὺ περιέμενε δὲν ἐρχόταν.

Ἔσυρε τὰ βήματά του καὶ σκέφτηκε νὰ πάρει καὶ πάλι ἓνα ξύλο ποὺ ἔχε μαζέψει στὸ φτωχικὸ κελί του καὶ νὰ κτυπήσει τὸ σῶμα του. Ἡ πύρωση τῆς σάρκας ποὺ εἶχε ξεκινήσει ἐδῶ καὶ κάποιον καιρὸ τὸν εἶχε τρομοκρατήσει καὶ βλέποντας τὴν διάρκειά της τὸν εἶχε σχεδὸν καταβάλει.

«Μὰ δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν στὴν ἡλικία μου νὰ ἔχω τέτοιους λογισμοὺς γιὰ γυναίκα καὶ νὰ εἶμαι τόσο ξαναμμένος στὴν σάρκα, σκεφτόταν καὶ ξανασκεφτόταν διαρκῶς. Ἀσφαλῶς πρόκειται γιὰ δαιμονικὴ ἐπίθεση. Γιὰ πειρασμὸ τοῦ διαβόλου».

Αὔξησε ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ξεκίνησε ἡ σαρκικὴ πύρωση τοὺς ἀσκητικούς του ἀγῶνες. Ἦδη βεβαίως ἔτρωγε ἐλάχιστα, ἀφότου ἐδῶ καὶ πολλὰ χρόνια εἶχε ἀποσυρθεῖ σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ ποὺ ἔκανε κελί του στὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν. Τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι βρισκόταν σὲ μιὰ περιοχὴ ποὺ εἶχαν ἀγιάσει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριος καὶ ἡ Παναγία Μητέρα Του τὸν ἔκανε κάθε φορὰ νὰ νιώθει ἰδιαίτερα εὐλογημένος καὶ τὰ κατανυκτικὰ δάκρυα νὰ μὴν τὸν ἐγκαταλείπουν σχεδὸν καθόλου. Εἶχε ἀποφασίσει νὰ μείνει ἐκεῖ μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του καὶ μάλιστα χωρὶς ποτὲ νὰ βγεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν σπηλιὰ.

Ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ ἐγκλειστοῦ ἀσκητῆ ἦταν ἐκείνη ποὺ τὸν εἶχε θέλξει καὶ λειτουργοῦσε ὡς ὄραμα καὶ στὴν δική του ζωὴ. καὶ πράγματι γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια βρισκόταν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ φήμη του ὡς ἐγκλειστοῦ ἄρχισε νὰ ἀπλώνει. Πολλοὶ ἀνέβαιναν στὸν τόπο ποὺ ἀσκεῖτο, φέρνοντάς του μερικὰ παξιμάδια καὶ χόρτα ὡς φαγητό, ἐπικαλούμενοι ἐπιπλέον νοερὰ τίς εὐχές

του. «Ἐνας τέτοιος ἄνθρωπος ἀφιερωμένος στὸν Θεὸ ἀσφαλῶς θὰ ἔχει μεγάλη παρρησία σ' Αὐτόν» ἦταν ἡ λογικὴ σκέψη τῶν καλῶν ἀνθρώπων. Κι ἔβλεπαν τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἅμεσα στὴν ζωὴ τους. Πολλὰ ἀπὸ τὰ προβλήματά τους ἐπιλύονταν μὲ τὴν ἐπίκληση τῶν εὐχῶν τοῦ Γέροντα.

Ὁ Γέροντας περιορίσε ἀκόμη περισσότερο τὸ λιτότατο φαγητὸ του. Ἐτρωγε πιά μιὰ φορὰ τὴν ἑβδομάδα λίγα παξιμάδια καὶ χόρτα, ἐνῶ οἱ γονυκλισίες καὶ οἱ ἀγρυπνίες του πολλαπλασιάστηκαν. Κάποιες φορὲς κτύπησε καὶ τὸ σῶμα του. Ἦλπιζε ὅτι μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸν ὁ σαρκικὸς πειρασμὸς θὰ ἔφευγε. Μάταια ὅμως. Ἡ πύρωση στὴν σάρκα του ὄχι μόνον δὲν ἔφευγε, ἀλλ' αὐξανόταν ὀλοένα καὶ περισσότερο. Ὁ δαίμονας τῆς πορνείας ἔκανε καλὰ τὴν δουλειά του. Ποιὸς ξέρει ποιά δίοδο κενοδοξίας βρῆκε στὸν μεγάλο ἀγωνιστὴ καὶ ἀσκητὴ καὶ τοῦ ἔδωσε τὸ δικαίωμα τέτοιου πειρασμοῦ του!

Ὁ πειρασμὸς τοῦ Γέροντα δυστυχῶς μὲ τὸν καιρὸ γινόταν ἐπικίνδυνος. Ὅχι γιατί ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ ὑφίσταται, ἀλλὰ γιατί ὁ Γέροντας ἄρχισε νὰ παρουσιάζει σημάδια παραίτησης καὶ ἀπελπισίας. μιὰ μέρα μάλιστα ποὺ ἡ ἐπίθεση τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐγίνε πολὺ σφοδρὴ, ποὺ ὁ Γέροντας ὀρθίος πηγαινοερχόταν μέσα στὸ μικρὸ κελί του χωρὶς νὰ ξέρει τί νὰ κάνει γιὰ νὰ κατευνάσει τὸ ξάναμμα τῆς σάρκας του, ἄρχισε νὰ χάνει τὸ κουράγιο του.

Ξέσπασε. «Ὡς πότε, πονηρὲ καὶ ἀρχέκακε, θὰ μὲ πολεμᾷς; Ποτὲ δὲν θὰ ὑποχωρήσεις; Γέρασα πιά, μαράθηκε τὸ σῶμα μου, γι' αὐτὸ σοῦ δίνω κι ἐγὼ ἐντολὴ νὰ γεράσεις κι ἐσὺ μαζί μου. Φύγε, σατανᾶ. Ἔπαγε ὀπίσω μου».

Σάν νὰ ἔκουσε ἓνα μικρὸ γέλιο πίσω του ὁ Γέροντας. Ξαφνιάστηκε καὶ ἔστρεψε τὸ κεφάλι του ἀπὸ τὴν μεριὰ ποὺ ἀκούστηκε. Πάγωσε τὸ αἷμα στίς φλέβες του. Μπροστά του ὀφθαλμοφανῶς στεκόταν τὸ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα, μαῦρο στὴν ὄψη καὶ μάτια κόκκινα γεμάτα ἀπὸ ταραχὴ.

«Γέρο», ἄκουσε νὰ τοῦ λέει. «Δὲν ξέρεις ὅτι ἐμεῖς δὲν γερνᾶμε; Ποτὲ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ σταματήσω ἀπέναντί σου τὸν πόλεμο. Μέχρι νὰ πεθάνεις, δὲν θὰ σὲ ἀφήσω σὲ ἡσυχία. Εἶσαι τὸ θήραμά μου καὶ θὰ σὲ καταπίνω σιγὰ σιγὰ, θὰ σὲ ταλαιπωρῶ συνέχεια. Εἶμαι πολὺ πιὸ ἰσχυρὸς ἀπὸ σένα. Κι ἀπ' ὅ,τι βλέπεις...», ἄφησε ὁ πονηρὸς νὰ σερνεταὶ ἡ φράση του, «ἀπ' ὅ,τι βλέπεις, δὲν ἔχεις κανένα σύμμαχο. Ἐγὼ κι ἐσὺ εἶμαστε».

Ὁ τρόμος καὶ ὁ πανικὸς ἄρχισαν νὰ καταβάλλουν τὸν ἀσκητὴ. Τὸ δόλωμα τῶν λόγων τοῦ πονηροῦ πνεύματος σάν νὰ ἔπιαναν τόπο στὴν κουρασμένη ψυχὴ του.

«Ὅμως», ἀκούστηκε καὶ πάλι ἡ συριχτὴ φωνὴ τοῦ δαίμονα, «ἐπειδὴ σὲ λυπᾶμαι, ὑπάρχει τρόπος νὰ

ἀπαλλαγείς ἀπὸ ἐμένα. Στὸ χέρι σου εἶναι». Εἶπε καὶ περίμενε.

«Τί ἔναι αὐτό;» εἶπε ἐντελῶς ξέψυχα ὁ Γέροντας. «Μὲ ποιὸν τρόπο θὰ μὲ ἀφήσεις ἐπιτέλους ἡσυχος;» Φαινόταν παραδομένος.

«Θέλω νὰ μοῦ ὀρκιστεῖς βέβαια ὅτι αὐτὸ ποὺ θὰ σοῦ πῶ δὲν θὰ τὸ πείς σὲ κανέναν ἀπολύτως. καὶ σοῦ ὑπόσχομαι ὅτι δὲν θὰ σὲ ξαναπολεμήσω ἄλλο».

Χωρὶς νὰ πολυσκεφετῆ ὁ ἐγκλειστος ἀσκητής, μπροστὰ στὴν ἀπαλλαγὴ τοῦ ἐξουθενωτικοῦ πολέμου του, ἔσπευσε νὰ συμφωνήσῃ. Ὁ ὄρκος του ἀκούστηκε φρικτός.

«Μὰ Αὐτὸν ποὺ κατοικεῖ στοὺς οὐρανοὺς δὲν θὰ πῶ σὲ κανέναν ὅσα μοῦ πείς».

Σάν νὰ τοῦ φάνηκε ὅτι τρεμπόπαιξε τὰ σκοτεινὰ μάτια του ὁ πονηρὸς στὸ ἡμίφως τοῦ κελιοῦ, ποὺ φωτιζόταν γλυκὰ ἀπὸ τὸ καντήλι ποὺ ἔκαιγε μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Γλυκοφιλούσας· δὲν γύρισε ὅμως νὰ δεῖ τὸ δάκρυ ποὺ κύλισε ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια Της. Ἡ ὑπαρξή του ἦταν κυριευμένη τὴν ὥρα ἐκείνη ἀπὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ποὺ ὑπουλα τοῦ μιλοῦσε καὶ τὸν καθοδηγοῦσε στὴν καταστροφή.

Ξανάρχισε πάλι ὁ δαίμονας: «Θέλω...», εἶπε καὶ κοντοστάθηκε, «θέλω... νὰ μὴν ξαναπροσκυνήσεις τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτὴ ποὺ ἔχεις στὸ κελί σου». Δὲν τόλμησε νὰ ὀνοματίσῃ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου κι οὔτε κἂν νὰ στραφεῖ νὰ τὴν δεῖ. Γιατὶ ὅσες φορὲς τὸ εἶχε ἐπιχειρήσει εἶχε νιώσει νὰ καίγεται. Καὶ μόνο ἡ ἀναφορὰ στὸ ὄνομά Της καὶ μόνο ἡ θέα τοῦ προσώπου Της τὸν ἔκαναν νὰ ἐξαφανίζεται μέσα σὲ μιὰ φωτιά τυραννική.

Σάν νὰ συνήλθε λίγο ὁ ἀσκητής ἀπὸ τὴν χάνωση ποὺ βρισκόταν. «Νὰ μὴν ξαναπροσκυνήσω τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας;» Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη σκεφτόταν τὴν ἀλάφρωσή του ἀπὸ τὸν πόλεμο τοῦ πονηροῦ.

«Ἄφησέ με νὰ τὸ σκεφτῶ λίγο», εἶπε κι εἶδε ὅτι ὁ δαίμονας ἐξαφανίστηκε.

Πάλευσε πολὺ μὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς του ἐκείνο τὸ βράδυ ὁ Γέροντας ἀσκητής. Θολωμένος ἀπὸ τὴν ταραχὴ του ἄκρη δὲν ἔβγαζε. «Μπρὸς γκρεμὸς καὶ πίσω ρέμα» μονολογοῦσε διαρκῶς. Ἡ καταφυγὴ στὸν Κύριο καὶ τὴν Παναγία Δέσποινα ὅμως δὲν γινόταν ἡ προτεραιότητά του. Ἡ ἀπελπισία συνέχιζε νὰ τὸν κρατᾶ συντετριμμένο κάτω.

Ξαφνικὰ φωτίστηκε ὁ νοῦς του. Ἐπερώτησον τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ σοι, θυμήθηκε τὸν λόγο

τῆς Γραφῆς. «Αὔριο θὰ περάσει κατὰ τὴν συνήθειά του ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ὁ ἀββᾶς Θεόδωρος ὁ Ἠλιώτης ἀπὸ τὴν λαύρα τῆς Φαράν. δὲν μὲ ξεχνᾶ ποτὲ καὶ αὔριο εἶναι ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ἐπίσκεψής του. Αὐτὸν θὰ ρωτήσω γιὰ νὰ μοῦ πεῖ». Ἐνίωσε μιὰ βαθιὰ ἀνακούφιση. Οἱ λογισμοὶ του πήραν νὰ ἡρεμοῦν. Στράφηκε καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας. «Μὲ ξεγελοῦν τὰ μάτια μου», ψιθύρισε. Τοῦ φάνηκε σάν νὰ χαμογελᾷ ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Κυρίου. «Παναγία μου, βοήθησέ με. Κύριε, σῶσε με», εἶπε κι ἐνίωσε πολὺ βαριά καὶ κουρασμένη τὴν ψυχὴ του.

Ἦλθε ὁ ἀββᾶς Θεόδωρος τὴν ἐπομένη. Συντετριμμένος ὁ Γέροντας καὶ μὲ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια τοῦ ἐξομολογήθηκε τὸν ὅλο πόλεμό του, τὴν πύρωση τῆς σάρκας του ποὺ τὴν ἀπέκρυβε τόσο καιρὸ, γιατί ἐνίωθε βαθιὰ ντροπὴ ποὺ ἔχε συμβεῖ στὴν ἡλικία του, τὴν ἀπελπισία ποὺ τὸν εἶχε καταλάβει, τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ τὸν ὄρκο ποὺ τοῦ ἔχε δώσει. «Ἀββᾶ, ἔδωσα ὄρκο στὸν διάβολο ὅτι δὲν θὰ πῶ τίποτε ἀπὸ τὴν πρότασή του. Κι ἡ πρότασή του ἦταν νὰ μὴν ξαναπροσκυνήσω τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας μας». Ξέσπασε σὲ ἀναφίλητὰ ὁ Γέροντας, κατανοώντας προφανῶς τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ σφάλματός του καὶ τὸν ἐμπαιγμὸ ποὺ εἶχε ὑποστῆ ἀπὸ τὸν πονηρὸ.

Ὁ ἀββᾶς Θεόδωρος τὸν παρηγόρησε καὶ τὸν νουθέτησε. Ἐκλαψε κι αὐτός, κατανοώντας καὶ συγκαταβαίνοντας στὸν πειρασμὸ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγωνιστῆ ἀδελφοῦ του. Τρόμαξε μὲ τὴν πονηριὰ τοῦ δαίμονα ἀλλὰ ἐλεεινολόγησε καὶ τὴν ἀνημπορία του μπροστὰ στὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Θεοτόκο Μητέρα Του.

«Μὴ στενοχωριέσαι, ἀδελφέ μου», τοῦ εἶπε ταπεινὰ καὶ μὲ ἀγάπη. «Ὁ Κύριος δὲν σὲ ἄφησε. Ἐκεῖνος σὲ ἐνίσχυσε νὰ ἀποκαλύψεις αὐτὸ ποὺ σοῦ συνέβη μὲ τὸν δαίμονα, γιατί ἡ ἀποκάλυψη τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ τῆς ὅλης ζωῆς μας στὸν πνευματικὸ καὶ σὲ ἄλλους ἐμπείρους τῆς χριστιανικῆς ζωῆς ἀδελφούς καίει τὸν τρισκατάρατο, τοῦ τυφλώνει τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς γιὰ νὰ μὴ βλέπει τίς πτώσεις μας καὶ τὸν ἀποδυναμώνει πλήρως. Οὐαὶ σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὰ κρατᾶνε μέσα τους. Αὐτοὶ γίνονται τὰ παιχνίδια κυριολεκτικὰ τοῦ σατανᾶ. Ἀκόμη καὶ τὸ παραμικρὸ ἀμάρτημα ἂν τὸ θεωρήσουν περιττὸ πρὸς ἐξομολόγηση, θὰ θεριέψῃ μέσα τους καὶ μέσω αὐτοῦ θὰ ἀλώσει ἐντελῶς τὴν ψυχὴ τους ὁ πονηρὸς. Ἐκανες λοιπὸν τὴν καλύτερη δουλειὰ ποὺ ἀποκάλυψες τὴν ψυχὴ σου.



«Βεβαίως, πρέπει να παραδεχτείς ότι κάποια δίοδο βρήκε ο πλάνος μέσα σου για να προκαλέσει τον πειρασμό αυτόν. Ίσως κάποια αδιόρατη κενοδοξία και ύπερηφάνεια. Και σὺ μὲ τόσα χρόνια πνευματικῆς ἀσκητικῆς ζωῆς δὲν θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ τοῦ δώσεις αὐτὸ τὸ δικαίωμα. Γιατὶ ὁ διάβολος ὅ,τι λέει εἶναι ψέμα. Ὁ Κύριος δὲν μᾶς λέει ὅτι εἶναι ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ ψεύδους; Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ ἀλήθειες του στὸ βάθος λειτουργοῦν γιὰ τὸ ψέμα, μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν ὑποταγὴ τοῦ ταλαίπωρου ἀνθρώπου. Καλὰ λοιπὸν ἔκανες καὶ πάτησες τὸν ὄρκο σου στὸν ψεύτη αὐτόν. Τώρα χαίρεται μαζί σου ὁλος ὁ οὐρανός, γιατί βλέπει τὴν μετάνοιά σου, καὶ νὰ ξέρεις, Γέροντα, τώρα θὰ δεῖς τὴν δύναμη τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῆς Παναγίας μας γιὰ τὸ ξεπέρασμα τοῦ πειρασμοῦ σου. Γιατὶ ἔδειξες ταπεινώση. Κι ὅπου ὑπάρχει ἡ ταπεινώση ὑπάρχει ἡ χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ».

Σταμάτησε ὁ ἄββας Θεόδωρος. Κοίταξε τὸ γαλινημένο τώρα πρόσωπο τοῦ Γέροντα καὶ χάρηκε γιατί εἶδε τὴν χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ. «Κύριε, ἐνίσχυσέ τον» ἔστρεψε τὸ βλέμμα του πρὸς τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Θεοτόκου. Σάν νὰ 'δε πιὸ φωτεινὸ τὸ καντήλι τῆς πὸν κουνιόταν πέρα δῶθε, χωρὶς ἰδιαίτερο φυσικὸ λόγο. τὰ μάτια του γέμισαν δάκρυα. Ἡ Παναγία συγκατένευε στὴν μετάνοια πὸν ἐξελισσόταν ἐνώπιόν τῆς καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ τῆς.

«Καὶ θὰ σοῦ πῶ καὶ κάτι ἀκόμη, Γέροντα», εἶπε ἄργα καὶ μὲ ἐπίγνωση τοῦ βάρους τοῦ λόγου του ὁ ἄββας Θεόδωρος τῆς λαύρας τῆς Φαράν, ὁ ἔμπειρος πνευματικὸς, ὁ σοφὸς καὶ διακριτικὸς ἀσκητῆς, στρέφοντας τὸ βλέμμα του καὶ πάλι πρὸς τὸν γερμένον στὸ ἔδαφος ἐγκλειστο ἐρημίτη.

Ἀνασήκωσε τὸ πρόσωπό του ὁ Γέροντας, γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσει αὐτὸ πὸν φαινόταν ξεχωριστὰ βαρυσήμαντο.

«Λοιπὸν, νὰ ξέρεις μιὰ γιὰ πάντα στὸν πειρασμὸ πὸν περνᾶς. σὲ συμφέρει—ναί, μάρτυς μου ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ λόγου μου—σὲ συμφέρει πολὺ περισσότερο νὰ μὴν ἀφήσεις πορνεῖο γιὰ πορνεῖο σὲ ὅλην τὴν χώρα στὸ ὁποῖο δὲν θὰ μπεῖς μέσα, ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἀρνηθεῖς νὰ προσκυνᾶς τὸν Κύριό μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ μαζί μὲ τὴν Ὑπεραγία Μητέρα Του! Γιατὶ στὴν πρώτη περίπτωση ὑπάρχει τίς περισσότερες φορές ἡ ἐπίγνωση τῆς ἁμαρτίας πὸν φέρνει τὴν μετάνοια. στὴν δευτέρῃ ὅμως; Ποῦ θὰ στραφεῖ κανεὶς γιὰ μετάνοια, ἂν ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ λατρευτὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῆς Παναγίας Μητέρας Του; Ἡ ἄρνηση αὐτὴ σημαίνει τὴν πλήρη ἀπώλεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου».

Τοῦ 'πε κι ἄλλα ὁ ἄββας, στήριξε καὶ παρηγόρησε τὸν Γέροντα, τοῦ διάβασε τὴν εὐχή. τὸν ἀγκάλιασε καὶ ἔφυγε, ἀφήνοντάς τον μὲ εἰρήνη ψυχῆς, κυρίως ὅμως γιγαντωμένο τόσο, ὥστε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει εὐκόλα τὸν δαίμονα, ὁ ὁποῖος πράγματι δὲν ἄργησε νὰ ξαναφανεῖ. Αὐτὴν τὴν φορὰ ὅμως εἶχε φύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ταραγμένο καὶ

μαῦρο πρόσωπό του ἡ μάσκα τῆς ὑποκρισίας.

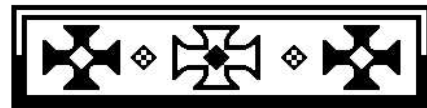
«Τὶ συμβαίνει, κακόγερε;» τοῦ εἶπε τώρα ἐντελῶς ἐπιθετικά. «Δὲν ὀρκίστηκες ὅτι δὲν θὰ πεις τίποτε σὲ κανένα; καὶ πῶς τόλμησες νὰ τὰ πεις σ' ἐκείνον πὸν ἦρθε σὲ σὲ να;» Καὶ πάλι δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ ὀνοματίσει τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἄββα, τοῦ ἐκλεκτοῦ σκεύους τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ πονηρός. «Σοῦ λέω λοιπὸν, κακόγερε, πῶς θὰ κριθεῖς σάν ἐπίορκος τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς κρίσεως, γιατί παρεβῆς τοὺς ὄρκους πὸν μοῦ 'δωσες».

Ἦταν ἡ σειρὰ τοῦ Γέροντα νὰ γελάσει μὲ τὰ λόγια τοῦ δαίμονα. «Ἦξερα πάντα βέβαια» τοῦ εἶπε, «ὅτι εἶσαι πονηρός, ἔστω κι ἂν προσωρινὰ φάνηκες νὰ μὲ γελάς. Ἀλλὰ ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ πονηρὸς φαίνεται ὅτι εἶσαι καὶ ἀνόητος. Μοῦ λές ὅτι ὀρκίστηκες καὶ παραβίασες τὸν ὄρκο μου. Τὸ ξέρω. Ἀλλὰ γιατί; Γιὰ νὰ μείνω πιστὸς στὸν δικό μου Δεσπότη καὶ Ποιητή. Μακάρι ὅλοι νὰ παραβιάζουν τὸν λόγο τους καὶ τοὺς ὄρκους τους σ' ἐσένα, γιατί ἡ ὑπακοὴ σ' ἐσένα εἶναι ἡ τέλεια καταστροφή τους. Κι ἄκου κι αὐτό, τρισκατάρατε πὸν νὰ 'σαι πάντα ἔξω ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Ἄκου κι αὐτὸ ἀπὸ ἐμένα, ἓνα ταπεινὸ πλάσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ πὸν μὲ δυνάμωσε ὅμως ὁ Κύριος μὲ τὸν ἀπεσταλμένο δοῦλο του: θὰ τιμωρηθεῖς ἀπὸ Ἐκείνον πολὺ περισσότερο μ' αὐτὸ πὸν μοῦ ζήτησες, γιατί ἐσὺ ἦσουν ὁ αἴτιος καὶ τῆς κακῆς συμβουλῆς καὶ τῆς ἐπιιορκίας».

Μ' ἓναν ἰσχυρὸ κρότο κι ἀφήνοντας πίσω του μιὰ μεγάλη βροῦμα ἐξαφανίστηκε τὸ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα, μὴ ἀντέχοντας τὴν δύναμη ψυχῆς τοῦ πλάσματος τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Γέροντας στράφηκε μὲ δάκρυα στὸν Κύριο καὶ τὴν Παναγία Μητέρα Του, προσκύνησε βαθιὰ κι ἔμεινε ἐκεῖ γιὰ πολλές ὥρες δοξολογώντας τὸ ἅγιο ὄνομά Του.

Μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του ἡ ταπεινώσή του ἦταν μεγάλη κι ἔκτοτε οὐδέποτε προσβλήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν πειρασμὸ τῆς σάρκας.



Ἐσὺ λοιπὸν δὲν εἶσαι πλεονέκτης; Ἐσὺ δὲν εἶσαι ἄρπαγας, ἀφοῦ οἰκαιοποιεῖσαι, ὡσὰν δικά σου, ἐκείνα, πὸν δέχτηκες ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν, γιὰ νὰ τὰ διαχειρισθῆς ὡς οἰκονόμος;... Τὸ ψωμί, πὸν ἐσὺ παρακρατεῖς, ἀνήκει στὸν πεινασμένον, τὸ ἔνδυμα, πὸν ἐσὺ κρατᾶς σὲ ἀποθήκες ἀνήκει στὸν γυμνόν. Τὸ παποῦτσι, πὸν σαπίζει στὸ σπίτι σου ἀνήκει στὸν ξυπόλυτον, τὸ χρῆμα, πὸν τὸ κατακρατεῖς καὶ τὸ κρύβεις, ἀνήκει σ' ἐκείνον, πὸν τὸ ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Ὡστε τόσους ἀνθρώπους ἀδικεῖς, ἐνῶ θὰ μπορούσες νὰ τοὺς εὐεργετήσῃς μὲ τίς δωρεές σου.

Μέγας Βασίλειος

Οικουμενισμός, ὁ Ἐχθρὸς τῶν Θεῶν Ἀρετῶν

Γράφει ὁ Σάββας Ἡλιάδης, δάσκαλος.

Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμός, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὸ ὄργανο τῆς Νέας Τάξης Πραγμάτων στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, μεταξὺ τῶν ἄλλων κακῶν, ἐργάζεται μεθοδικὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀλλοίωση, κατάργηση καὶ ἀντικατάσταση τῶν ἁγίων ἀρετῶν στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, καὶ μάλιστα ἐκ τῶν ἔσω. Ἀγωνίζεται, ἐπὶ παραδείγματι, γιὰ τὴν ἀνάδειξη τῆς ἀγάπης ὡς κορυφαίας ἀρετῆς καὶ παράλληλα ἀπαξιώνει καὶ σχετικοποιεῖ τὴν πίστη στὴν Ἀλήθεια. Ἀγάπη ὅμως δίχως πίστη στὴν Ἀλήθεια εἶναι ψέμα καὶ ἀπάτη. Ἐνεργεῖ καταχρηστικῶς, ἀφοῦ καπηλεύεται μὲ περισσὸ θράσος αὐτὲς τίς θεόσδοτες, ζωογόνες καὶ ἀληθεῖς ἀρετές, ὅπως ἐξαρχῆς καὶ διὰ παντὸς φανερώνονται καὶ ἐνεργοῦν μέσα στὴν Παράδοση, μὲ τὴν πλήρη καὶ καθαρὴ μορφή, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴν οὐσιώδη καὶ σωστικὴ δύναμή τους.

Οἱ ἐργάτες του τίς ἰδιοποιοῦνται καὶ τίς διδάσκουν αὐθαίρετα, χωρὶς νὰ ἔχουν ζήσει τὴν ἐμπειρία τους. Καὶ ἐπιπλέον, ἐνῶ ἀποσιωποῦν καὶ βάζουν στὸ περιθώριο βασικὲς εὐαγγελικὲς ἀρετές, ἀνακαλύπτουν καὶ «κατασκευάζουν» νέες, ἐπίπλαστες, ἀνάρετες



ἀρετές, τίς ὁποῖες προωθοῦν, διδάσκοντας τες στὸ λαό. Προσπαθοῦν νὰ τίς θεμελιώσουν ἀναιδῶς καὶ ἀνενοδιάστως πάνω σὲ μεταπατερικὲς, καὶ νεοπατερικὲς θεολογίες καὶ σὲ ἀντιπατερικὲς θεωρίες, ἀλλοιώνοντας τὴν Ἀλήθεια, τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη. Μιλᾶνε, δηλαδή, γιὰ τὰ ἴδια θέματα ποὺ μίλησαν οἱ ἅγιοι, ἀλλὰ, ὡς ἀμέτοχοι τῆς Θεῆς Χάριτος, προσπαθοῦν νὰ περάσουν τὴν πάσχουσα δογματικῶς θεολογία τους μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν ἀλλοίωση τοῦ ἡθους καὶ ὀρθοδόξου κριτηρίου τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Οἱ ἀρετὲς εἶναι ἀπόσταγμα τοῦ αἵματος καὶ τῶν δακρῶν τῶν ἁγίων μας, ἄρα καὶ γέννημα οὐράνιο, γνήσιο καὶ καθαρὸ τῆς Παράδοσης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος συνοψίζει αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλήθεια, ἀρχίζοντας τὸ λόγο του γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Ἀθανάσιο μὲ τὴ φράση: «Ἀθανάσιον ἐπαινῶν, ἀρετὴν ἐπαινέσομαι. Ταυτὸν γὰρ, ἐκεῖνόν τε εἰπεῖν, καὶ ἀρετὴν ἐπαινέσαι, ὅτι πᾶσαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ συλλαβὼν εἶχε τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἢ, τό γε ἀληθέστερον εἰπεῖν, ἔχει. Θεῷ γὰρ ζῶσι πάντες οἱ κατὰ Θεὸν ζήσαντες, κἀν ἐνθένδε ἀπαλλαγῶσι». (Λόγος κα΄, εἰς τὸν Μέγαν Ἀθανάσιον, ἐπίσκοπον Ἀλεξανδρείας).

Αὐτὲς τίς ἀρετὲς τίς μεταλλάσσουν, τίς προσδίδουν ἄλλο νόημα καὶ ἀπὸ σωστικὰ πνευματικὰ ἰάματα τίς μετατρέπουν σὲ θανατηφόρα δηλητήρια, γιὰ τὴν νέκρωση τῆς ψυχῆς. Ὡς συνεργάτες δὲ τῶν κοσμικῶν ἀρχῶν καὶ ἐξουσιῶν, μεθοδεύουν δολίως τὴν χειραγώγηση τοῦ λαοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ἐπιβολὴ μίας κακόζηλης, καινοφανοῦς, κενόσοφης ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπάνθρωπης κοινωνικῆς, πολιτικῆς, πολιτιστικῆς ὁμογενοποίησης. Κυρίως ὅμως, ἐνὸς ἐξουθενωτικοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ συγκρητισμοῦ, κατάλληλου γιὰ τὴν προετοιμασία τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὥστε νὰ ὑποτάσσονται εὐκολα, δίχως ἀντιστάσεις σὲ ὅποιασδήποτε μορφῆς ὀλοκληρωτικὰ συστήματα.

Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μᾶς διδάσκουν καθαρῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐμμέσως, πλὴν σαφῶς, πῶς νὰ φυλαχτοῦμε ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τίς παγίδες καὶ νὰ στηριχτοῦμε πρῶτα στὶς ἔνθεες ἀρετές. Σ' αὐτὲς ποὺ δωρίζονται στὶς ταπεινὲς καρδιὲς ἀπὸ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ μᾶς φωτίζουν, γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη καὶ

μέσα στὴν πραγματικὴ ἐλευθερία. Αὐτοὶ ἀπηχοῦν καὶ ἐρμηνεύουν κατὰ κανόνα τίς ἀπόψεις τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς περὶ ἀρετῆς. Προκειμένου δὲ νὰ τονίσουν τίς ἐπὶ μέρους ἀρετές, ἀναφέρονται στὰ πρόσωπα, καὶ στὰ ἰδιαίτερα χαρίσματά τους, τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης καὶ

τῆς Καινῆς ἢ σὲ μάρτυρες καὶ ἁγίους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τοὺς ὁποίους παρουσιάζουν ὡς ὑποδείγματα ἀρετῆς.

Ἡ ἐνάρετη ζωὴ καὶ ὁ ἀρετηφόρος λόγος τῶν ἁγίων, ποὺ λάμπουν καὶ φωτίζουν ἀπὸ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, μᾶς στηρίζουν, μᾶς καθοδηγοῦν καὶ μᾶς βοηθοῦν, νὰ θεμελιώσουμε ἐσωτερικὰ τὸ ἔνθεο φρόνημα. Νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ δοῦμε καὶ νὰ ἐκφράσουμε στὸ βίο καὶ στὴν πολιτεία μας τίς ἀρετὲς μὲ ὀρθὴ ἀξιολόγηση. Ἐξάλλου, στὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀληθινὴ ζωὴ, ἡ ἀξιολόγηση καὶ ἡ κατάταξη τῶν ἀρετῶν δὲν γίνεται μὲ τὰ γνωστὰ ἀνθρωποκεντρικὰ κριτήρια ἀλλὰ μὲ τρόπο μυστικὸ καὶ ἱεροκρύφιο: «Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι πάσα ψυχὴ ζωοῦται, καὶ καθάρσει ὑψοῦται λαμπρύνεται, τῇ τριαδικῇ Μονάδι ἱεροκρυφίως».

Οἱ ἀνθρωποὶ λησμονοῦν, ἀλλὰ οἱ πνευματικοὶ νόμοι δὲν παύουν ποτὲ νὰ λειτουργοῦν! Διότι συνεχίζει στὸ λόγο του ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος: «Ἀρετὴν δὲ ἐπαινῶν, Θεὸν ἐπαινέσομαι, παρ' οὗ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἡ ἀρετὴ». Σύμφωνα μὲ αὐτό, ἡ αὐθαίρετη ἀλλοίωση τῶν ἀρετῶν εἶναι ὕβρις κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, πλάνη καὶ αἵρεση.

Ὅλα τὰ κακά, ποὺ κατὰ τρόπο χεμαρρῶδη πνίγουν σήμερα τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὴν πατρίδα μας, ἔλκουν τὴν

γέννα τους από τὸν Οἰκουμενισμό! Κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ σκιά τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ συνεχίζονται νὰ διενεργοῦνται σήμερα ὅλα τὰ προδοτικὰ ἀντιχριστὰ καὶ ἀντεθνικὰ ἔργα, ὅλων τῶν ἐπισήμων κρατικῶν, ἐκκλησιαστικῶν, καὶ λοιπῶν, προσώπων καὶ φορέων. Τίποτε δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖο οὔτε ἄσχετο καὶ ἀνεπηρέαστο ἀπὸ τὴν κακοδοξία αὐτή, ποὺ ἐργάζεται πλέον ἀνεμπόδιση σὲ ὅλες τὶς ἐκφάνσεις τῆς ζωῆς. Ἀπολύτως τίποτε! Ἄκομη καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ συνάλγηση τῆς φύσεως, μὲ τὰ ἀκραία καταστροφικὰ ξεσπάσματα! Εἶναι νόμος πνευματικὸς! Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τρελάθηκε ἔτσι ξαφνικὰ ὁ κόσμος! Δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀνατρέπονται ἀρχές, ἀξίες, σεβάσματα καὶ ἱερὰ καὶ ὅσα αἰώνων μέσα σὲ τόσο σύντομο χρόνο καὶ μάλιστα μὲ τέτοια ὀρμὴ καὶ πάθος!

Ἄν δὲν τὸ πιστέψουμε αὐτό, ἂν δὲν τὸ τοποθετήσουμε στὴν κορυφαία θέση τῆς καρδιάς μας, ἂν δὲν κάνουμε αἴτημα προσευχῆς τὴν μετάνοια τῶν πρωτεργατῶν ἱεραρχῶν καὶ λοιπῶν συνενόχων τους, ὥστε νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὴν Ἁγία Πατερικὴ Παράδοση καὶ νὰ ἐπανορθώσουν, δὲν θὰ ὑπάρξει θεῖο ἔλεος, διότι, ἀπλούστατα, δὲν θὰ εἶναι τοῦ συμφέροντός μας!



Εχουμε μεγάλη δύναμη ὡς πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἂν προσευχώμαστε μὲ ὀδύνη ψυχῆς καὶ ταπεινὴ καρδιά. Δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ περάσουμε τὸ πέλαγος, οὔτε νὰ κάνουμε μεγάλες ἀποδημίες· κάθε ἕνας καὶ κάθε μία, καὶ ὅταν συναντιῶνται στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ ὅταν μένουν μέσα στὸ σπίτι, ἄς παρακαλοῦμε μὲ πολλὴ κατάνυξι τὸ Θεὸ καὶ ὅπωςδήποτε θὰ εἰσακουσθοῦν οἱ προσευχές μας.

Ἄπὸ ποῦ εἶναι φανερὸ αὐτό; Ἄπὸ τὸ ὅτι ἐπιθυμεῖ πολὺ πάντοτε νὰ καταφεύγουμε κοντὰ Του, καὶ νὰ Τὸν παρακαλοῦμε σὲ ὅλες τὶς περιπτώσεις καὶ νὰ μὴν κάνουμε τίποτε ἢ νὰ λέμε τίποτε χωρὶς Αὐτόν. Διότι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὅταν τοὺς ἐνοχλοῦμε συνέχεια γιὰ τὶς διάφορες ὑποθέσεις μας, μᾶς συμπεριφέρονται ἐχθρικά· ὁ Θεὸς ὅμως κάνει τὸ ἐντελῶς ἀντίθετο· καὶ ὄχι ὅταν Τὸν ἐνοχλοῦμε συνέχεια γιὰ τὰ προβλήματά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅταν δὲ τὸ κάνουμε αὐτό, τότε πρὸ πάντων «ἀγανακτεῖ».

Ἄκουσε λοιπὸν γιατί κατηγορεῖ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους λέγοντας: *Λάβατε ἀπόφασι, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐμένα καὶ κάνατε συνθήκες, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς τὸ πνεῦμα μου.* (Ἦσ. 30:2). Διότι ἡ συνθήθεια αὐτῶν ποὺ ἀγαποῦν εἶναι ἡ ἐξῆς: θέλουν νὰ ἐκπληρώνουν ὅλα τα θελήματα ἐκείνων ποὺ ἀγαποῦν καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοὺς δὲν θέλουν νὰ κάνουν ἢ νὰ ποῦν τίποτε. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς ὄχι μόνον ἐδῶ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλοῦ τα ἴδια ἐπαναλαμβάνει λέγοντας: *Ἐκαναν βασιλεῖς, ἀλλὰ ὄχι διὰ μέσω ἐμοῦ ἔκαναν ἄρχοντες καὶ δὲ μοῦ τὸ γνώρισαν.* (Ψηψ 8:4).

Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Χρυσοστόμου

Ὅταν Ἐπρεπε Σιωπούσαμε, Τώρα Κλαίμε καὶ Ὀδυρόμαστε

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιὸς, δάσκαλος.

Δικαίως διαμαρτυρόμαστε καὶ πονᾶμε καὶ αἰσθανόμαστε ὀρφανοί, γιατί κλειδαμπαρώθηκαν οἱ ναοὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Καὶ ὅπως οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔχασαν ἓνα πολυαγαπημένο πρόσωπο, τὸ θυμοῦνται μὲ συγκίνηση, θρηνοῦν περισσότερο καὶ νιώθουν ἔντονα τὴν ἀπουσία του, τὶς «χρονιάρες» ἡμέρες, Πάσχα καὶ Χριστούγεννα, ἔτσι καὶ ἐμεῖς, οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί, αἰσθανόμαστε θλίψη καὶ σπαραγμό, γιατί δὲν μπορέσαμε οὔτε τὰ φετινὰ Χριστούγεννα, νὰ «δειπνήσουμε» στὸν οἶκο τοῦ Πατέρα τους. Ὅπως καὶ τὸ περασμένο Πάσχα, δὲν εἰσέλθαμε στὴν χαρὰ τοῦ Κυρίου μας. Ὁ σύγχρονος Πιλάτος ἔχει τοποθετήσει φρουρὲς καὶ κουστωδίες, νὰ ἀπαγορεύουν διὰ ροπάλου τὴν εἴσοδο.

Γράφονται πολλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ πολλοὺς. Ξιφουλκοῦν ἐπώνυμοι καὶ ἀνώνυμοι κατὰ τῆς ἀπόφασης. Συμφωνῶ, μὲ χέρια καὶ ποδάρια προσυπογράφω, ὅσα ἐμπόνως γράφουν ἱεράρχες, ὅπως τὸ παλληκάρι τῆς Κύπρου μας, ὁ ἐπίσκοπος Μόρφου κ. Νεόφυτος.

Νὰ σημειώσω ὅμως κάτι. Αὐτὴ τὴν στιγμή φοιτοῦν στὴν Ἑλλάδα, στὴν Πρωτοβάθμια καὶ Δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση, περίπου 1.400.000 μαθητές. Εἶναι, ὅπως συνηθίζεται νὰ λέγεται, τὸ μέλλον τῆς πατρίδας μας.

Ἄπὸ αὐτοὺς οἱ μισοὶ φοιτοῦν στὸ Δημοτικὸ σχολεῖο, στὴν κρίσιμη, ἐξοπλιστικὴ ἡλικία, ὅπου ἐντυπώνονται ἀνεξίτηλα στὴν μνήμη τους γνώσεις, δεξιότητες, συνήθειες καὶ συμπεριφορές. Ἐνας καλὸς δάσκαλος ἀφήνει τὴν εὐεργετικὴ θυμὴσή του ὀλοζωῆς στὸν μικρὸ μαθητὴ. Ὅπως καὶ τὸ ἀντίθετο.

Στὸ Σύνταγμά μας, προβλέπεται στὸ ἄρθρο 16, ἡ «ἀνάπτυξη τῆς ἐθνικῆς καὶ θρησκευτικῆς συνείδησης» τῶν μαθητῶν καὶ—οὐδεὶς τὸ ἀμφισβητεῖ—αὐτὸ ἐρμηνεύεται ὡς καλλιέργεια τῆς φιλοπατρίας καὶ τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης πίστεως. Μὲ λίγα λόγια τὸ μέλλον τοῦ μέλλοντος τῆς πατρίδας κρίνεται στὶς σχολικὲς αἰθουσες. Ἐνας ἐκπαιδευτικὸς ζεῖ πολὺ περισσότερες ὥρες μὲ ἓνα παιδί, ἀπ' ὅσο αὐτὸ ζεῖ μὲ τοὺς γονεῖς του, λαμβάνοντας ὑπ' ὄψιν τους καὶ τοὺς φρενήρεις ρυθμοὺς τῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ ἀναγκάζουν πολλὲς φορὲς καὶ τὴν μητέρα νὰ ἀπογαλακτίζει τὸ παιδί της γιὰ λόγους βιοπορισμοῦ, πράγμα ἐπιζήμιο γιὰ τὴν ἀνατροφή του.

Καὶ ἐρωτῶ: Ἐδῶ καὶ τρία χρόνια καταργήθηκε ὁ ἐκκλησιασμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν, ὁ ὁποῖος πραγματοποιεῖται—τὸ πονήρευμα, τὸ σύνθηδες δημοκρατικὸ καρύκειμα—μετὰ ἀπὸ ἀπόφαση τοῦ συλλόγου διδασκόντων, δηλαδή, σχεδὸν ποτέ. Ρωτῶ τοὺς ἀναγνώστες. Πότε εἶδαν τελευταία φορὰ σχολεῖο νὰ πηγαίνει γιὰ ἐκκλησιασμό; (Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς ἐλάχιστες

έθμιοτυπικές επισκέψεις και αυτές με λειψές τάξεις ή ελάχιστους μαθητές). Μήπως έκλεισαν οι ναοί, έδώ και τρία χρόνια, για 1.400.000 Έλληνες και μάλιστα στο πιό λαμπρό τμήμα της κοινωνίας; Αντιδράσαμε; Όχι.

Καταργήθηκε ή μηνιαία έπαρση της Έλληνικής Σημαίας, την πρώτη Δευτέρα κάθε μηνός, με την ταυτόχρονη άπαγγελία - ψαλμωδία, του Έθνικού μας Ύμνου. Πλέον—νόμος Γαβρόγλου, πρόλαβε κι αυτός να αφήσει τις κουτσουλές του στην Παιδεία—«ή σημαία παραμένει άνηρητημένη στον ιστό του σχολείου, όπως προβλέπεται σε όλες τις δημόσιες υπηρεσίες». Έρωτώ: είναι κάποια δημόσια υπηρεσία το σχολείο, όπως το ΚΕΠ, σε κάποια πολίχνη; Πότε άκουσαν τα τελευταία έτη, όσοι διαβάζουν αυτές τις άράδες, να ψάλλεται ο Έθνικός Ύμνος στην αύλη ένδς σχολείου, με παρατεταγμένους όλους τούς μαθητές και τούς δασκάλους τους; Υπήρξε κάποια δυναμική αντίδραση γι' αυτήν την κακοβουλία; Όχι.

Να γράψω κι ένα τελευταίο, από τα πολλά που βιώνουμε στην εκπαίδευση. Τούτες της ήμέρες του αναγκαστικού έγκλεισμού μας και της τηλεκπαίδευσης, που μόνο έθισμο και καταπόνηση προκαλεί στα παιδιά που στήνονται άποσβολωμένα και άκίνητοποιημένα δέκα ώρες μπροστά στις όθόνες. (Θα μπορούσε να άποφευχθεί αυτός ο ψυχοβγάλτης με μία έπιμήκυνση του σχολικού έτους κατά 15 ήμέρες. Και αναφέρομαι κυρίως στο Δημοτικό). Όπως και την προηγούμενη, ύποχρεωτική οίκουρία μας, από τα διαδικτυακά μαθήματα ένα μόνο λείπει. Το μάθημα των Θρησκευτικών. (Παραπέμπω και σε άρθρο μου στις 25 Φεβρουαρίου του 2020 με τίτλο «ποιό μάθημα ξεχάστηκε στις τηλεδιδασκαλίες; Μά τα Θρησκευτικά»). Γιατί; Για τον ίδιο λόγο που καταργήθηκε ο εκκλησιασμός, ή έπαρση της σημαίας, όσονούπω ή πρωινή προσευχή, ή εικόνα του Χριστού στις αίθουσες, λόγω πολυπολιτισμικότητας, που είναι το καλλιτεχνικό όνομα του αντιχριστιανισμού. Να ξεμυρωθούν, να ξεβαπτιστούν και να άφελληνιστούν τα παιδιά μας, έπαναλαμβάνω το μέλλον, για να χορεύουν άπτόητοι οι «άνθρωποκάμπιες που μαραζώνουνε το πνευματικό όλόδροσο δέντρο της φυλής μας», κατά τον Φώτη Κόντογλου. Έρωτώ: Υπάρχει κάποια αντίδραση γι' αυτό; Η Ίερά Σύνοδος άντέδρασε; Όχι.

(Προσωπικώς διδάσκω, όπως και μες στην αίθουσα, κάθε Παρασκευή το Εύαγγέλιο της Κυριακής ή συναξάρια άγιών και αυτήν την περίοδο έχουμε πολλούς άθλητες της Πίστεως. Πειθαρχείν δεί Θεώ...).

Να κλείσω με μία εύφρόσυνο παραπομπή. (Διδάσκοντας δεκαετίες μικρά παιδιά, βλέπω πόσο λυτρωτικό είναι, όταν βαρύνονται από μαθήματα και ασκήσεις, να γλυκαίνεις λίγο το «κλίμα», διηγώντας τους κάτι που θα άποκαλύψει την άνθοβολή και την

εύωδία τους: το γέλιο.) Είναι μία νόστιμη έπιστολή του λόγιου Κωνσταντίνου Δαπόντε, (1713-1784), ο όποιος άργότερα έγινε μοναχός με το όνομα Καισάριος. Έζησε και έκοιμήθη στο Άγιον Όρος. Διαβάζω λίγες εισαγωγικές γραμμές από την έπιστολή, που την άπέστειλε σε κάποιον Πούρβουλο, άπαντώντας, μάλλον, σε πρόσκληση για τραπέζι.

«Έπιθυμιάν έπεθύμησα τούτην την έβδομάδα φαγείν μετά της εύγενείας σου: εις το τραπέζι δέν θέλω να είναι άρτος άρπαγής, πρόβατον άδικίας, όρνιθα άσελγείας, ούτε δορκάς ύπερηφανείας, ούτε όρτύκι μνησικακίας, ούτε λαγός φιλοχρηματίας, αλλά ούτε χοίρος άκαθαροσίας. Θέλω δε και παρακαλώ να είναι άρτος ίδρωτος, φακές ταπεινοφροσύνης, φασούλια σωφροσύνης, ρεβίθια έλεημοσύνης, ίχθύες άπλότητος, έλιές ίλαρότητος και λάχανα εύλαβείας...».

Στα «δέν θέλω», στα άνεπιθύμητα έδέσματα του Καισάριου, περιγράφεται ή Ελλάδα της παρακμής, των μνημονίων, των προδοτικών συμφωνιών, του έξευτελισμού από την εύφημιστικώς λεγόμενη Εύρωπαϊκή Ένωση, την χώρα των Γαδαρηνών. Η Ελλάδα που ταΐζεται με λαγούς φιλοχρηματίας και πρόβατα άδικίας. Στα «θέλω» είναι ή Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη, της νηστείας, του φιλότιμου, της οίκογένειας, της άξιοπρέπειας, της φιλοπατρίας, του Χριστού οι «φίλοι». Η Ελλάδα που δειπνεί με φακές ταπεινοφροσύνης και λάχανα εύλαβείας.

Όσο δε για την έσταυρωμένη Παιδεία μας; Άς κοιτάξουμε πίσω, τί έκαναν οι παλιοί, καλοί μας δάσκαλοι. Έρωτώ: Τελείωνε ποτέ μαθητής του Δημοτικού χωρίς να γνωρίζει το άπολυτίκιο της Γέννησης του Χριστού; Το θαυμάσιο «*Η Γεννησίς σου Χριστέ ο Θεός ήμών...*». Η άκόμη το έκπληκτικό Κοντάκιο «*Η Παρθένος σήμερα...*». Η το «*Πιστεύω*». Ποιός τα μαθαίνει αυτά σήμερα στα παιδιά, που έχουμε σιχαθεί τα γλυκανάλατα φράγκικα μουρμουρητά; Ποϋ άφήσαμε τα παντερπνά λόγια των άγιών, τα όποια γαληνεύουν τις πεινασμένες ψυχές των παιδιών— «άπό την Εύρώπη γυρίσαμε πεινασμένοι», έγγραφε ο Σεφέρης—και τα «ταΐζουμε» με τα ξέψυχα, μίζερα και ψευτορομαντικά «μπαχαρικά» και ψελλίσματα της άθεις Δύσης.



Χριστιανός είναι εκείνος, που άποτελεί άπομίμηση του ίδιου του Χριστού, όσον είναι δυνατόν στον άνθρωπον, και στα λόγια και στα έργα και στην σκέψη. Και πιστεύει όρθα και άλάνθαστα στην Άγία Τριάδα.

«**Η Κλίμακα**» για Όλους»

THE HOLY ORTHODOX FATHERS ON ILLNESS, PART I

Fr. Alexey Young, *FatherAlexander.org*. Due to its length, this article's second half will be included in our March-April 2021 issue.

Everyone, whether or not he is a Christian, must expect a certain amount of sickness and discomfort to enter his life. Physical pain is universal; no one escapes it. Therefore, how much we suffer from illness, or how intensely, does not matter so much as how we understand these infirmities. The understanding is all.

If a man supposes that life should be one long, luxurious «vacation,» then any amount of suffering that comes to him is unbearable. But if a man views life as a time of sorrows, correction, and purification, then suffering and pain become not only bearable, but even useful.

Saint Ambrose of Milan says of the Christian attitude toward sickness: “*If the occasion demands it, a wise man will readily accept bodily infirmity and even offer his whole body up to death for the sake of Christ... This same man is not affected in spirit or broken with bodily pain if his health fails him. He is consoled by his struggle for perfection in the virtues.*” (“Exegetical Works”). Hearing this, the man of the world is quite likely to exclaim: “What an idea! How can a man ‘readily accept’ illness and disease?”

To an unbeliever this is indeed an incomprehensible thing. He cannot reconcile the *fact* of human suffering with his own *idea* of God. To him, the very thought that God would allow pain is repugnant; usually he sees every kind of suffering as evil in an *absolute* sense.

Without the aid of Divine Revelation man cannot understand the origin and cause of pain, nor its purpose. Many people, not having help in understanding, are haunted by fear of pain, terrified at the thought of a lingering illness, and quick to seek medical relief because they believe illness is only the result of «chance.»

If it is true that infirmity comes through mere «bad luck» (which even common sense tells us is not so, since much disease is the result of immoderate living), then indeed it is permissible and even desirable to use all means to avoid the pain of illness and even the illness itself. Furthermore, when a disease becomes irreversible and terminal, worldly wisdom teaches that it is acceptable to end the life of the patient—what is called euthanasia, or «mercy killing»—since, according to this view deathbed suffering is useless and cruel, and therefore «evil.»

But even in everyday life we know that suffering really is not «absolutely evil.» For example, we submit to the surgeon's knife in order to have a diseased part of the body cut away; the pain of the operation is great, but we know that it is necessary in order to preserve health or even life.

Thus, even on a strictly materialistic level, pain can serve a higher good.

Another reason why human suffering is a mystery to an unbeliever is because his very «idea» of God is false. He is shocked when the Holy Fathers speak of God in the following way: *Whether God brings upon us a famine, or a war, or any calamity whatsoever, He does so out of His exceeding great care and kindness.* (St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 7, “On the Statues”*).

The God-bearing Elder Macarius of Optina, in 19th century Russia, wrote thusly to a friend: *Being weak in health as you yourself are, I cannot fail to feel much sympathy for your plight. But kind Providence is not only more wise than we are; it is also wise in a different way.* It is this thought which must sustain us in all our trials, for it is consoling, as no other thought is.

Wise in a different way... Here we can begin to see that the Patristic understanding of God's ways is contrary to the world's view. In fact, it is unique: it is not speculative, scholarly, or “academic.” As Bishop Theophan the Recluse has written: *Christian faith is not a doctrinal system but a way of restoration* for fallen man. Therefore, the criterion of faith—true knowledge of God—is not intellectual. The measure of truth, as Professor Andreyev wrote, **is life itself**; Christ spoke of this clearly, plainly, and definitely: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.* (Jn 14:6). That is, I am *the Way* of perceiving the Truth; I am Myself the incarnate *Truth* (everything I say is true), and I am *Life* (without Me there cannot be life)” (“Orthodox Christian Apologetics”). This is very far from the wisdom of this world.

We can either believe or disbelieve Christ's words about Himself. If we believe, **and act upon our belief**, then we can begin to ascend the ladder of living knowledge, such as no textbook or philosopher can ever give: *Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* (1 Cor 1:20)

One of the difficulties in compiling a handbook of Patristic teaching on illness is that sickness cannot be strictly separated from the general question of pain (e.g., psychological pain and the suffering which results from war, famine, etc.). Some of what the Holy Fathers have to say here about illness also establishes a foundation for their teaching about adversity.

Another difficulty is that the Orthodox Fathers sometimes use such words as «sin,» «punishment,» and «reward» without limiting themselves to the meanings our modern society gives them. For instance, «sin» is a transgression of the Divine Law. But in Patristic thought it is also **more** than this: it is an act of «treachery,» a faithlessness to God's love for man and an arbitrary violation of [man's] sacred union with God. Sin is not something we should see within a

strict legal framework of «crime and punishment»; man's faithlessness is a universal **condition**, not limited to just this or that transgression. It is always with us, *for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23).

God's dealings with man are not limited to our legalistic ideas about reward and punishment. Salvation, which is the ultimate goal of Christian life, is not a «reward,» but a **gift freely given** by God. We cannot «earn» or «merit» it by anything we do, no matter how pious or self-effacing we think ourselves.

In everyday life we naturally think that good deeds should be rewarded and crimes punished. But our God does not «punish» on the basis of human standards. He corrects and chastises us, just as a loving father corrects his erring children in order to show them the way. But this is not the same thing as being «sentenced» to a «term» of pain and suffering for some misdeed. Our God is not vindictive; He is at all times perfectly loving, and His justice has nothing to do with human legal standards.

He knows that we cannot come to Him without purity of heart, and He also knows that we cannot acquire this purity unless we are free from all things: free of attachments to money and property, free of passion and sin, and even detached from bodily health if that stands between us and true freedom before God. He instructs us, through both Revelation and correction, showing us how we may acquire this freedom, for *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* (Jn 8:32). As St. John Cassian teaches: *God leads you on by a still higher step to that love which is free of fear. Through this you begin effortlessly and naturally to observe all those things you originally observed out of fear of God and punishment, but now you do them no longer from fear of punishment, but from love of Goodness itself, and delight in virtue.* (“Institutes”).

Keeping in mind this deeper spiritual meaning of such words as “sin,” “reward,” and “punishment,” we can proceed to study the divinely-wise discourses of the Holy Fathers on the subject of illness, thanking God that *our Faith has been made secure by wise and learned Saints.* (St. Cosmas Aitolos), *for truly, to know oneself is the hardest thing of all,* as St. Basil the Great writes. The Holy Fathers point the way. Their lives and writings act, as it were, like a mirror in which we may take the measure of ourselves, weighed down as we are by passions and infirmities. Illness is one of the ways by which we can learn what we **really are.**



The Origin and Cause of Pain

For we know that all creation groans and travails in pain until now. [Rom 8:22]

The way of salvation which leads to eternal life is **narrow and hard** (Mt 7:14). *It is appointed both by our Lord's holy example and by His holy teaching. The Lord foretold to His disciples and followers that in the world, that is, during their earthly life, they would have tribulation* (Jn 16:33; 15:18; 16:2-3)... *From this it is clear that sorrow and suffering are appointed by the Lord Himself for His true slaves and servants during their life on earth.* (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, “The Arena”).

But why is this? Why are “sorrow and suffering,” together with attendant ills, actually “appointed” for together with attendant ills, actually “appointed” for us? The teaching of the Holy Fathers shows how suffering is to be understood in the context of man's first-created state and his subsequent fall into sin.

In the beginning, there was no pain, no suffering, no illness or death. Man was a *stranger to sin, sorrows, cares, and difficult necessities.* (St. Symeon the New Theologian, “Homily 45”).

If Adam and Eve had not transgressed, *they would in time have ascended into the most perfect glory and, being changed, would have drawn near to God... and the joy and rejoicing with which we then would have been filled by fellowship one with the other would, in truth, have been unutterable and beyond human thought.* (Ibid). Since there would have been no suffering, there would have been no illness, and consequently no need for the science of medicine.

But when man had been deceived and beguiled by the wicked demon...God came to man *as a physician comes to a sick man.* (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 7, “On the Statues”). God descended to Eden *in the cool of the day,* and called out, *Adam, where art thou?* (Gen 3:9). His first manifestation to man after the sin of disobedience was not as a vengeful Judge, *for God, when He finds a sinner, considers not how He may make him pay the penalty, but how He may amend him and make him better.* (St. John Chrysostom, Ibid).

Man, the creature, had succumbed to the temptation to be like unto God the Creator—something against all reason or possibility. This, the first sin, brought with it not “godhood,” but pain, disease, and death—and not by “chance,” but for a specific corrective reason: in order that man might know without doubt and for all time that he is not “as God.”

Therefore the Heavenly Physician “made the body [of man] subject to much suffering and disease, so that man might learn from his very nature than he must never again entertain the thought *that he could be like unto God*. (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 11, “On the Statues”). God said to Eve: *In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children* (Gen 3:16); and to Adam: *Cursed is the earth in thy word; with labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread until thou return to the earth.* (Gen 3:17, 19).

It is extremely important to understand this at the outset, for if we do not grasp this truth about the nature of fallen man, nothing else the Holy Fathers teach on this subject will have any meaning. On the other hand, *if we can understand this, we will be able to learn about ourselves and we shall be able to know God and worship Him as Creator*. (St. Basil the Great, “Hexaemeron”). *Sin breeds evil, and evil breeds suffering*, writes Professor Andreyev; *yet this very suffering, which originated with Adam and Eve, is a blessing for us all because it forces us to realize how harmful to our souls, and even to our bodies, our faithlessness to God is.* (“Orthodox Christian Apologetics”).

The Purpose of Illness

But if we are sons, we are heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided, however, we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him. [Rom 8:17].

Our Savior and the God-bearing Fathers teach that our only concern in this life should be the salvation of our souls. Bishop Ignatius says: *Earthly life—this brief period—is given to man by the mercy of the Creator in order that man may use it for his salvation, that is, for the restoration of himself from death to life.* (“The Arena”). Therefore, we must look upon everything in this world as upon a fleeting shadow and cling with our heart to nothing of it... *for we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (St. John of Kronstadt, “Spiritual Counsels”). For Orthodox Christians, the center of our life is not here, but there, in the eternal world.

How long we live, what disease or illness accompanies our death—such things are not the proper concern of Orthodox Christians. Although we sing “many years” for one another at namesdays and other celebrations, this is only because the Church in her wisdom knows that we indeed need “many years” to repent of our sins and be converted, not because a long life has any value in *itself*. God is not interested in how old we are when we come before His Judgment, but whether we have repented; He is not concerned about whether we died of a heart attack or cancer, but whether our soul is in a state of health.

Therefore, *we should not dread any human ill, save sin alone; neither poverty, nor disease, nor insult, nor malicious treatment,*

nor humiliation, nor death (St. John Chrysostom, “On the Statues”), for these “ills” are only words; they have no reality for those who are living for the Kingdom of Heaven. The only real “calamity” in this life is offending God. If we have this basic understanding of the **purpose of life**, then the spiritual meaning of bodily infirmity can be opened for us.

We have learned how the all-wise God allowed suffering to enter the world in order to show us that we are but creatures. It is a lesson still not learned by the race of Adam which, in its pride, ever seeks to be like “gods”: for every sin is a renewal of the sin of the first-created ones, a willful turning away from God towards self. In this way we set ourselves in the place of God, actually worshipping self instead of the Creator. In this way the suffering of illness serves the same purpose today as it did in the beginning: for this reason it is a sign of God’s mercy and love. As the Holy Fathers say to those who are ill: *God has not forgotten you; He cares for you.* (Sts. Barsanuphius and John, “Philokalia”).

Yet, it is difficult to see how sickness can be a sign of God’s care for us—unless, that is, we understand the relationship that exists between body and soul. Elder Ambrose of Optina Monastery spoke of this in a letter to the mother of a very sick child: *We should not forget that in our age of “sophistication” even little children are spiritually harmed by what they see and hear. As a result, purification is required, and this is only accomplished through bodily suffering... You must understand that Paradisal bliss is granted to no one without suffering.*

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain explained that since man is dual, made up of body and soul, *there is an interaction between the soul and the body* (“Counsels”), each one acting on the other and actually communicating with the other. *When the soul is diseased we usually feel no pain*, St. John Chrysostom says. *But if the body suffers only a little, we make every effort to be free of the illness and its pain. Therefore, God corrects the body for the sins of the soul, so that by chastising the body, the soul might also receive some healing... Christ did this with the Paralytic when He said: Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. What do we learn from this? That the Paralytic’s disease had been produced by his sins.* (Homily 38, “On the Gospel of St. John”).

On one occasion a woman was brought to St. Seraphim of Sarov. She was badly crippled and could not walk because her knees were bent up to her chest. She told the Elder that she had been born in the Orthodox Church but, after marrying a dissenter, had abandoned Orthodoxy and, for her infidelity, God had suddenly punished her... She could not move a hand or foot. St. Seraphim asked the sick woman whether she now believed in her Mother, our Holy Orthodox Church. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, he told her to make the sign of the Cross in the proper way. She

said that she could not even lift a hand. But when the Saint prayed and anointed her hands and breast with oil from the icon-lamp, her malady left her instantly. *Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee!*

This connection between body and soul, sin and sickness, is clear: pain tells us that something has gone wrong with the soul, that not only is the body diseased, but the *soul* as well. And this is precisely how the soul communicates its ills to the body, awakening a man to self-knowledge and a wish to turn to God. We see this over and over in the lives of the saints, for illness also teaches that our *true self, that which is principally man, is not the visible body but the invisible soul, the "inner man."* (St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, "Christian Morality").

But does this mean that the man who enjoys continual good health is in "good shape" spiritually? Not at all, for suffering takes many forms, whether in the body or in the mind and soul. How many in excellent health lament that life is not "worth living"? St. John Chrysostom describes this kind of suffering: *Some think that to enjoy good health is a source of pleasure. But it is not so. For many who have good health have a thousand times wished themselves dead, not being able to bear the insults inflicted upon them... For although we were to become kings and live royally, we should find ourselves compassed about with many troubles and sadnesses... By necessity kings have as many sadnesses as there are waves on the ocean. So, if monarchy is unable to make a life free from grief, then what else could possibly achieve this? Nothing, indeed, in this life.* (Homily 18, "On the Statues").

Protestants often "claim" health in the "Name of Christ." They regard health as something to which the Christian is naturally *entitled*. From their point of view, illness betrays a *lack of faith*. This is the exact opposite of the Orthodox teaching as illustrated by the life of the Righteous Job in the Old Testament. St. John Chrysostom says that the saints serve God not because they expect any kind of reward, either spiritual or material, but simply because they *love Him*: *For the saints know that the greatest reward of all is to be able to love and serve God. Thus, God, wishing to show that it was not for reward that His saints serve Him, stripped Job of all his wealth, gave him over to poverty, and permitted him to fall into terrible diseases. And Job, who was not living for any reward in this life, still remained faithful to God.* (Homily 1, "On the Statues").

Just as healthy people are not without sin, so too, God sometimes allows truly righteous ones to suffer, *as a model for the weak.* (St. Basil the Great, "The Long Rules"). For, as St. John Cassian teaches, *a man is more thoroughly instructed and formed by the example of another.* ("Institutes").

This we see in the Scriptural case of Lazarus. *Although he suffered from painful wounds, he never once murmured against the Rich Man nor made any request of him... As a result, he*

found rest in the Bosom of Abraham, as one who had accepted humbly the misfortunes of life. (St. Basil the Great, "The Long Rules").

The Church Fathers also teach that illness is a way by which Christians may imitate the suffering of the martyrs. Thus, in the lives of very many saints, intense bodily suffering was visited upon them at the end, so that by their righteous suffering they might attain to physical martyrdom. A good example of this may be found in the life of that great champion of Orthodoxy, St. Mark of Ephesus: *He was sick fourteen days, and the disease itself, as he himself said, had upon him the same effect as those iron instruments of torture applied by executioners to the holy martyrs, and which as it were girdled his ribs and internal organs, pressed upon them and remained attached in such a state and caused absolutely unbearable pain; so that it happened that what men could not do with his sacred martyr's body was fulfilled by disease, according to the unutterable judgment of Providence, in order that this Confessor of Truth and Martyr and Conqueror of all possible sufferings and Victor should appear before God after going through every misery, and that even to his last breath, as gold tried in the furnace, and in order that thanks to this he might receive yet greater honor and rewards eternally from the Just Judge.* ("The Orthodox Word," vol. 3, no. 3).

You who believe when you are well, see to it that you do not fall away from God in the time of misfortune.

[St. John of Kronstadt]



And if it is not this temple, a shack, and if it is not a shack, a catacomb, a room. And if there is no such thing, the forest. The night will cover with her veils so that those who worship God are not seen.

Nothing can ever prevent us from worshiping God. I insist very much on this point. I do not know what days are coming. However, I will always insist on the uninterrupted worship of God. It will never cease. Never ever think that God's word will be interrupted. The interruption will be on the obvious, the open worship, no doubt; however, the hidden will never be interrupted. Do not think that the religiosity of our people will be interrupted, never think that. Because the word of God is rooted in the hearts of men, and whatever prevails, the word of God always bears fruit.

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

THE CANAANITE WOMAN AND THE MOTHER OF GOD

Archbishop Christodoulos (Paraskevaïdis) of Athens (+2008).

The Gospel of the first Sunday during Triodion is about a Canaanite woman. We hear how she called out to the Lord, followed Him, and was ignored by Him. His disciples were at a loss to understand why He did not either help her or tell her to go away, instead of leaving her to plead. He explained His silence: *I came only for Israel, not for foreigners, for the Gentiles, such as this Canaanite.* But the woman persisted, approached Him and asked for His assistance. The Lord's answer was a lesson to her, to His disciples and to all of us ever since then. He said harshly: *It is not right to take the food out of the mouth of your children and to give it to the dogs.* He compared God's blessing with the most basic human need: food. But the woman did not give up. She answered back: *Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.* Christ then told her: *Woman, your faith is great, so I'm granting you your wish.*

Let us dwell on this a little. The Lord had left Judaea and was on His way to Sidon, in the Lebanon. This was the land of the Canaanites, a nation which had been living in the region even before the Israelites came from Egypt with Moses. They worshipped idols and their women practiced magic.

So while it was true that Christ went to their land, the woman herself had to want to see Him, to call to Him from the depths of her soul. She felt His presence beside her and started calling to Him. She was not calling to some enchanter, to some magician who worked "miracles." She called to Him in His own specific capacity, in a sense by His own name: *Son of David*, the Lord. And the more she calls out to Him, the closer she gets; the more she seeks, the more she finds. At first, the Lord does not even speak to her, which is a severe test of her faith. He lets her follow on behind, without any response, and when he does reply it is with harsh words. Obviously, there is no question here of any racial prejudice. Christ was talking about idolatry and magic. But we see that the faith of the Canaanite woman is not shaken at all by the comparison. She continues to ask for mercy and for His intervention in her life and that of her daughter.



What are the cries of the Canaanite woman if not a prayer to the Lord? What is her pursuit of Him if not a pivotal point in her life where she turns to His word? Her humility, her acceptance of the fact that, yes, she was an unworthy dog who was asking only for a few crumbs as a blessing, only what was left over from the table of the masters, what is that if not repentance and confession? And the final answer of the Lord is nothing other than His open embrace, God's acquiescence in the face of unshakeable faith.

Today's Gospel does not merely tell us about a miracle performed by the Lord. It presents us with the way to approach the Lord, the only way by which we avoid the traps of the idols of this world and are able to cast ourselves, in tears, into the embrace of our Father. It presents us with how the Father operates in order to open to us the path of return to Him, without doing away with our freedom. It presents us with the face of our Savior. It presents us with the way in which we must open our souls to His miraculous Grace. In other words, it presents us with the feast of our salvation, it presents the Church.

The Church is the mystical locus where we all meet. Here are the Lord, the angels, the saints and the faithful. And here also, drawing us to her with great love, is the lady of this house, the Mother of God.

The Mother of God labored long for God to open His embrace to the Canaanite woman and to all of us. Mary was not simply a pious girl who participated in our salvation in a passive way by accepting God's will, when she spoke to the angel. It is not like when God took earth and made humankind, without us doing anything ourselves. Mary took an active part in God's plan, she labored in order to bring to God all the elements His merciful plan required so that He could take flesh and redeem us.

Saint Nikolaos Kavalas, one of the Church's holy Fathers, explains what these features were: *Blameless conduct, pure life, rejection of all wickedness, practice of all the virtues, a soul purer than light, a body spiritual in all things...* As we chant at Matins on the eve of the Annunciation: *Christ loved your beauty, most pure Maiden, and dwelt in your womb... that the human race might be saved...*

By accepting active participation in God's merciful plan, Mary herself says, in a prophetic spirit: *For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.* And indeed, the same year, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, did that

very thing: *Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb... And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.*

We cannot enter any Orthodox Church without being greeted by an icon of our Lady the Mother of God, bringing us into the mystery of our salvation. We cannot pray, we cannot think about the Church, without reference to her whom God's grace- and her own perfect conformation to His will- made the All Holy Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

Saint John Chrysostom calls Our Lady the Mother of God the pride of the human race, the gateway to our life, the agent of our salvation. Wonderful pages have been written explaining the position of the Mother of God as the Mother of Christ and of the Church. The Fathers of the Church have written incomparably more wonderful, inspired texts explaining Mary's achievements and hymning the august person she is.

And we also know that all Orthodox Christians have her image in their hearts. In the hidden depths of their souls, ordinary, anonymous people who escape the web of history but not the gaze of God, always have a candle lit for Our Lady. And the more the pall of darkness thickens, the fiercer our torments become, the more we hasten to hide in her arms, to let our tears flow on her lap. We flee to her as our Mother, expecting to feel her hand wiping away the tears, giving us strength and calming our turbulent souls.



God is everywhere. There is no place God is not... You cry out to Him, 'Where art Thou, my God?' And He answers, 'I am present, my child! I am always beside you.' Both inside and outside, above and below, wherever you turn, everything shouts, 'God!' In Him we live and move. We breathe God, we eat God, we clothe ourselves with God. Everything praises and blesses God. All of creation shouts His praise. Everything animate and inanimate speaks wondrously and glorifies the Creator. Let every breath praise the Lord!

The only hope of salvation from the delusions and the heresies, the innovations and the traps of wicked people and of the devil is prayer, repentance and humility.

God always helps. He always comes in time, but patience is necessary. He hears us immediately when we cry out to Him, but not in accordance with our own way of thinking.

St. Joseph the Hesychast

ON THE BEAUTIFUL ROAD OF LOVE

By the Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019).



I pray that the All-good God will send down upon you the All-holy Spirit, as He did to His divinely sent holy Apostles, so that you may be enlightened to walk the arduous path of salvation. *Behold now, what is so good or joyous as for brethren to dwell together in unity with love?* (cf. Pss 132:1). There is nothing more beautiful than for a *synodia* to be

replete with godly love. Then, everything is radiant; everything is full of beauty, while God above delights, and the holy angelic spirits rejoice above where love is boundless. *Love one another, as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.* (Jn. 13:34, 35).

O love, whoever possesses you has a truly blessed heart, for within love, what could one possibly want and not find! Humility, joy, patience, goodness, compassion, forbearance, enlightenment, and so on, are all there. But in order to obtain this supremely wondrous love, we must constantly call upon the God of love to give it to us. When the name of God is remembered through the prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*, it contains within it eternal life, and eternal life is the God of love! Therefore, he who prays this prayer obtains true, godly love. So, onwards; behold the way and means of victoriously conquering love. Take courage and bravely proceed into the battle. Say the prayer constantly: orally and noetically. It is more beneficial to say it orally during the day, because at that time the nous is scattered by one's work.

The beautiful road of love is effortless, and there is neither blemish nor stain in love, but rather the conscience testifies that the soul has boldness towards God. But when there is no love, the soul has no boldness in prayer, and as one defeated and cowardly, it cannot lift its head because it feels remorse for not having loved as God has loved it; it is a transgressor of the commandment of God.

If we do not love our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? (cf. 1 Jn 4:20). He who has true love has God; whoever does not have love does not have God in himself. The Holy Fathers say, *If you have seen your brother, you have seen God; your salvation depends on your brother.* The holy monastic fathers of old walked the path of salvation effortlessly, because they sacrificed everything so that they would not fall away from love. Love was their goal

in life. Our path, though, is completely strewn with thorns which sprouted because we lack love. And this is why when we walk, we constantly bleed. The foundations of the house shake when we do not lay the foundation of love well.

Compel yourself, my child, for the sake of your soul. Compel yourself to comfort the brethren, and the Lord will comfort you—He will give you His grace. Have patience, have patience. Let everyone treat you like dirt, and He will give you His grace. Great is he who has more humility. God gives grace to the person who has fear of God and obeys everyone like a small child and constantly seeks God's holy will. Such a person never seeks that his own will be done, but the will of God and of the others. He always says, "As you wish, as you know best." He does not give his own opinion because he considers himself lower than everyone. When they tell him to do something, he eagerly says, "May it be blessed." So, my child, this is what you should do, too. This makes the demons tremble, flee far away, and not approach anymore. They are very afraid when they see humility, obedience, and love towards all.

My child, just do your duty. If the others do not obey, leave it to God and be at peace. It is due to the devil's jealousy, my child. Will the devil go out perhaps to the mountains to create temptations? He goes wherever people are struggling for their salvation. And since we, too, are seeking our salvation, he jumbles us up without our realizing it. Carry the burden of the brethren. God rewards everyone justly. The time will come when you will see how much He will give you for the pains you went through to look after so many souls.

Labor in this world; keep helping, and you will never be deprived of God's help. Now you are sowing; the time will come for you to reap. Pray that God will make you strong in patience, discernment, enlightenment, etc. I am constantly praying for you, but I have no boldness before God, and thus my prayer bears no fruit. Just think what the Fathers went through to save others. It is no small matter; you are helping the others, which is why the devil will take it out on you and afflict you. So start showing patience and bravery, and say: "I am ready to die in the battle helping my brethren to be saved, but God will not let me perish, since I am doing it for the sake of His love." Yes, do so, and you will see how much strength and joy you will receive in the struggle. For sometimes impatience, despair, and pessimism deprive a person of God's grace, and then he wrongly attributes it to the burdens he is bearing. But courage, self-sacrifice, bravery, and faith in God bring the grace of God. I pray that God will invigorate your spiritual nerves to fight with renewed strength.

Abide in the bond of mutual love, for love is the beginning and the end—the foundation. It is on love towards God and your brothers that *all the law and the prophets hang* (cf. Mt 22:40). Without love we are a clanging cymbal—a big zero. According to the Apostle Paul, even if we give our body to

be burned for Christ and distribute our belongings to the poor and mortify our life with harsh asceticism for Christ, yet lack love, we have accomplished nothing (cf. 1 Cor 13:3). Therefore, with all our strength we must see to it that we keep a strong hold on mutual love, so that our trivial works may be approved by Him Who examines the secret thoughts of our hearts.

You write, my child, about someone who kept grieving you, and you cursed him, etc. No, my child, do not curse anyone, no matter how much he has harmed you. Our Christ tells us to love our enemies, so how can we speak evil? Seek forgiveness from God, and henceforth love him as your brother, regardless of whether or not you agree with him. Didn't Christ on the Cross forgive his crucifiers? Then how can we do otherwise? Yes, my child, we must love everyone, regardless of whether they love us or not—that is their business.

My child, always justify your brother and reproach yourself. Never justify your deeds. Learn to say, "Bless"—in other words, "Forgive me"—and humility will dwell within you. Have patience and overlook your brother's faults, remembering God's forbearance towards your own faults. Love as Jesus loves you and as you want others to love you. Hold on to silence, constant prayer, and self-reproach, and then you will see how much mourning and tears and joy you will feel. But if you fail to hold on to them, in other words, if you neglect to apply them, then coldness and dryness will replace the above graces. Love the brethren. Your love will show when, despite all your brother's weaknesses, you count them as nothing and love him. Love will keep you from all sins. Think of nothing but your own sinfulness. Reproach yourself constantly—this is the best path.

I pray your soul is in good health, for when it is healthy, it has patience in afflictions, it has self-denial with the body and in its thoughts; and it fears neither illnesses nor selfish thoughts. When the soul is healthy, it has love within itself; it does not scandalize others; it endures a brother's harsh words; it does not expose his faults in public; it always has something good to say about his brother; it gives way in quarrels and escapes having bitter thoughts and distress. When the soul is healthy, it does not get angry, complain, talk back, murmur, disobey; it does not follow its own whims, and it does so many other things indicative of spiritual health. This health is what I seek from you; this is what I advise; for this do I pray.



Read the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints, especially those of the holy Great Martyrs..., because each saint gives a little piece of his strength to those who read his life with faith, and he will help them to pass through the toll-houses.

St. Barsanuphius of Optina

YOU WERE SENT TO ME BY CHRIST!

From "Memoirs of a Greek Taxi Driver," translated by Constantine Zalalas.

One morning, I received a call by the taxi call center directing me to a nearby shore. When I arrived at the address, I saw a very elderly man slowly coming towards the taxi, accompanied up to the door by his daughter. When this elderly man entered inside and sat in front, he made a very good impression on me. His smile, his courteousness, his entire demeanor drew my attention. He also had an appetite for discussion during our trip since the route was quite long. We were heading to some village where his summer house was. Thus, with the appetite to talk and much time at our disposal, we discussed various social matters. In the beginning, I politely asked him about his field of work. From what this man was saying, I realized that he must have been very educated.

"I am a doctor Mr. Thanasi, but I have been retired for many years. I spent most of my life in an operating room. I also had my own clinic on such and such street; do you remember it?"

"Although I was born in 1961, I remember something about it."

"So, as a scholar, I loved medicine very much, and I loved mankind. In my zeal and thirst for knowledge, God granted me on top of material wealth, an invention in the surgical field which made my name very well known. Patients would visit me not only from all over Greece, but also from abroad. I worked many hours and on quite a few nights, one would find me with the lancet in my hand. Sometimes, I would even sleep in the clinic because I would be too tired to return to my home. I considered it my duty to help my fellow man over and above everything else."

"Doctor, please allow me to tell you that I am so pleased that we have met."

"The feeling is mutual Thanasi, and I am sincere in saying this; by the way, I am also interested to find out your educational level because I have the feeling that you are not just a taxi driver."

"I am an elementary school graduate, I replied."

"Thanasi, I understand that you are trying to be humble, but please, tell me the truth, what did you major in?"

"I'm telling you the truth."

"Well, I am sorry, but I don't believe you."

"Then, you will allow me to tell you a very true story from my childhood which is a little comical, and then I am certain that you will believe me. When I was little, the greatest nightmare for me was school and education. Just imagine, it took me eight years to finish that wretched elementary school. During the last grade, I was already shaving. I was a foot taller than the other children. So in all these eight years, I don't remember, even once, answering my teacher correctly

on the verbal quiz on the daily lesson. Every day in class, I would try to hide behind my fellow students. I didn't want my teacher to see me, so she wouldn't call me up to the blackboard for the daily lesson drill. Every time I was called up to the blackboard, I was not only clueless of the daily lesson, but I didn't even know what subject we were on, whether it was geography, history or religion.

"In order to hide very well behind the back of the student who was in front of me, who was also hiding behind the one in front of him, I would whisper to him, 'Hey, don't move and don't bend down.' He, would then turn and tell me, 'What are you saying you dunce? You want me to be get in trouble instead?' And despite my hiding attempts, my name would be called out loud and clear to walk towards the board and to demonstrate my knowledge of the daily lesson in that class. The mere announcement of my name was enough to make my legs tremble.

"I will never forget during one of these times, when I was standing for quite a while at the board and I would say, 'Today we will learn about our fatherland.' I stopped for about five minutes, and then again, 'Today we talk about our fatherland,' since I didn't know what else to say. So I turned and saw the teacher's gaze. She was looking at me from above her glasses and gritting her teeth. In that nasty voice of hers she said, 'You deafened us.' I barely kept from soiling myself. The children were bursting with laughter, and the whip would fall like a storm. As you can understand, doctor, from the frequency of the daily beatings, when I heard my name, I would no longer go to the board. Instead, I would make the trip shorter by going straight to the desk to reap what was due. So what do you say, now, do you believe me?" [Note: Corporal punishment was the rule in those decades.]

The doctor broke out in laughter and said, "Thanasi, you are a riot, truly awesome," and he continued to laugh. We both laughed very much, and while we spent some time discussing much about the fruitless public educational systems, I wanted to shift the conversation a bit towards spiritual matters, before our arrival.

I had this good persisting thought working inside of me: I wonder, if this good doctor, and very dear elderly man, who must be nearing his nineties, is ready for heaven? Thus, after a brief prayer, and the use of much discretion, I shifted the conversation towards this area. By the grace of God, the doctor was very open for spiritual conversation. Furthermore, he told me, "Thanasi, I see that you are very religious."

"The Scribes and the Pharisees were religious as well, but they remained outside the kingdom. You, doctor, are you are you in good standing with the church?" I asked.

"Yes, I don't have a problem, although I didn't have much time over the years for church attendance. I had, however, my own way all these years, to approach and to believe in Christ."

"Would you mind sharing your way with me, doctor, so I can understand?"

“Let me tell you; every time I was faced with a difficult operation, I would spend some time in the room adjacent to the operating room, which I had transformed as my own personal chapel. I would kneel, pray extensively and lift my hands, to ask Christ to help me and my patient.”

Oh, my friends, when I heard the doctor speaking like this, I was overflowing with joy, especially since it is not very common to hear such words from the mouths of today’s doctors. Unfortunately this joy did not last very long because when we focused the conversation more directly to the area of repentance, confession, Holy Communion, the doctor was not on board. He became increasingly defensive and justifying himself and said, “What area of my life do I need to repent for, and why do I need to go to confession? I don’t remember having done anything evil. Thanasi, please listen so you can see where I am coming from. I have my own philosophy in matters of faith, and I have held on to it throughout my life.”

I replied, “Doctor, it is not a matter of philosophy. Here we are dealing with matters of faith. There are many philosophers, but there is only one Savior.”

He came back with, “Please consider that being older than you, I may know something more.”

I added: “It is not a matter of age, either. It is about the teachings of the Gospel which calls one to sincere repentance and confession so he or she may properly prepare to often partake with reverence of the Body and the Blood of our Christ,” I replied.

“No, Thanasi, I don’t agree with repentance and confession. Furthermore, I don’t feel the need to repent for anything nor to go to confession.”

“Very well, since you don’t agree with repentance, and since you happen to be wiser than me, tonight when I go home, I will open the New Testament, and wherever I encounter the word repentance, I will draw a smudge or better yet, rip the page out, which means that I will remove over 100 pages from the New Testament. What do you say?”

“Well, now, I didn’t mean it like that!”

“Doctor, since you don’t agree with it, and I don’t agree with it, we can wipe it out with one stroke of the pen so it’s no longer there to reprove us.”

“Now just a minute Thanasi, so I can get things straight. To begin with, why must I go to a physical church? Isn’t the Church of God everywhere? Furthermore, why must I have any dealings with a priest? That’s what I could not understand all these years. Why should I go to the priest?”

“Doctor, please allow me to ask you, are you married?”

“Why, what are you saying now? I have grandchildren.”

“Great! Where did your marriage ceremony take place?”

“What, do you mean where did it take place? We went to church, where else?”

“Ohhh! So, you went to church, in front of a priest. Doctor, why the church and not the patio on the flat roof of your house? What would the church possibly have more so than

your roof top patio? You could call fifty, one hundred friends, open a few bottles of wine, play some music, and have someone from your group bless the crowns. What more could the priest offer you? Everything would be just fine. So, why did you go to a church, and why did you go to a priest? I would like you to answer me. Moreover, when you baptized your children, and your grandchildren, where did you go? I will tell you, my doctor. You went to the church. But why the church? Why didn’t you stay at your home, fill your bathtub with water, and have someone dip the children three times and why not thirteen times since these things don’t have much significance? Someone could slap a little oil on them, and everything would be just fine. So, what more could the priest do for you that you couldn’t take care of yourself. Furthermore, for you to understand it better, the next time my stomach hurts, and I choose to go to a plumber, what would you think? Oh, my dear doctor, for all sacraments, we go to a priest, but when it is time for repentance and confession, we are so quick to say ‘Why should I go to a priest?’

“I am very much afraid, that many of us, due to the great egotism and pride we have, will not only be separated with houses, land, money, stocks and bonds, taxis, and clinics, but worst of all, we are in danger of being separated with Christ eternally. My dear doctor, as a man of high education, I would like you to consider eternity without Christ! The loss of Christ! God forbid!

My friend, in a few minutes as you enter your home, stand before your iconostasis, and ask the saints there, ‘My saints, did any of you reach sainthood without holy confession and shedding tears of repentance?’ And I’m certain the answer will come to you soon enough.”

At that point, the doctor refrained from asking me any other questions. Seemingly perplexed, he lowered his head, and remained silent.

And my last words were, “My doctor, forgive me, but you forgot one thing in your life. You have been holding the surgical scalpel in your hand for so many years, and it has healed thousands of people, it has performed some miraculous healings, but it never occurred to you to turn it inside of you to make your own incision, your own personal surgery in order to excise your spiritual maladies. As you understand, I’m referring to the spiritual lancet, which hurts even more.”

Here, my friends, these words finally touched a sensitive chord in the doctor. As his tears began to flow, he tried to apologize and I said, “No, my doctor, don’t apologize because these tears are the most beautiful tears Christ has been waiting from you for ninety years now.” My dear Lord, how could I possibly describe the indescribable? He cried and sobbed like a child and in this spiritual wailing, he turned and said to me, “My dear Thanasi, Christ sent you my way today!”

My God! My God! What beautiful words! What a beautiful outcome! What beautiful moments. These special blessings will stay with me for the rest of my life! In the last couple of

miles our relationship became completely different. He asked me to come by two days later to take him to a good spiritual father if I happen to know of one.

I said, "My doctor, I have a wonderful spiritual father for you, full of meekness and love. By the way, have you ever been to confession?"

"I have never confessed, my dear Thanasi, ever."

"Nor have you communed?"

"Not even once."

Oh, my dear Lord, a ninety year old man who never communed even once after his infant baptism.

When I left, I immediately called Father Thomas, because Father Triantafyllos was not available. I gave him a brief account of the events, and precisely what transpired with our dear doctor, and Father Thomas asked me, "Are you speaking about the world-renown doctor who had the clinic on such and such street?"

"Yes, father, do you know him?"

"What are you saying, Thanasi? All of Greece and Europe knows him. Please bring him; just call me a few minutes before you come."

"It will be my pleasure," I said and I was flying with untold joy. Sure enough, I drove with my private car to the doctor's house to pick him up, and we had a soul-benefitting conversation on the way concerning confession. I wanted to prepare him so that he understood that repentance needs to precede confession. Among other things, I said, "Confession, my doctor is not merely a pronouncement of a list of sins; it must be accompanied with pain of soul, and compunction, it is an acknowledgment of our sinfulness, just like the prodigal son's."

The doctor was accepting and understanding everything I was telling him, without any objection. Thus we finally ascended the stairs of the church, and we arrived at the confessional to find many people waiting and most of them young students. Of course, they immediately requested that we go ahead of them, understanding that an elderly man could not remain standing for a long time. Father received the doctor with much joy and love. While my elderly friend was in the confessional, I was praying through the inner depths of my soul. I was asking our sweetest Jesus to enlighten and soften this heart, regardless of my sinfulness. The devil had trapped his heart in the passion of self justification for 90 years, and I prayed and wished for both of us to be together again, not just here on earth, but in heaven for all eternity.

In a few minutes, the door opened and I apprehensively went to receive our elderly doctor. Father Thomas smiled and told me, "Everything is fine, Thanasi. Everything is fine. He may commune whenever he wants." "Glory to Thee our Lord, glory to Thee." My joy was complete. I thanked the student who had given us his turn telling him, "May the Panaghia reward you for your kindness!" His eyes glowed

with emotion. As we were exiting the church, the doctor was very happy and told me, "My dear Thanasi, you don't know what the father told me."

"What did he tell you?"

"To begin with, when I entered, he immediately recognized me. He knew me from the days I ran the clinic. As soon as I entered, he told me, 'Come, my doctor, come, because we are colleagues.'

'Really, my father, are you a doctor as well, I asked?'

'Yes, I am a doctor of the soul, as a priest of the Most High, and you are a doctor of the body.' This helped us to connect, and from there we progressed into confession and the prayer of absolution."

"Didn't I tell you that father is wonderful? He is full of meekness and love."

We continued our joyous discussion in the car, and in a few minutes we arrived outside his home. I offered to give him a ride to Church so we could take Holy Communion together next Sunday morning, but out of courteousness and humility, he didn't accept my offer. As we bade each other farewell with much joy, the elderly gentleman, deeply touched by the day's events, reiterated, "My dear Thanasi, I know and fully understand that Christ sent you on my path. From here on, I know the way."

I escorted him to the door of his house, and after we exchanged a warm handshake, I wished him "the joy and eternity of paradise." Even though I knew where his house was, I never saw the doctor again. I had the sense that my mission had come to an end. Now that I'm sitting and narrating this event, years later, I would like to say to him the same thing over again, "Doctor, may you abide in the joy and blessings of paradise, and please remember us in your prayers."



Here I am again, writing against those who say they have the Spirit of God unconsciously, who think that they have Him in themselves as a result of divine Baptism and who, while they believe they have this treasure, yet recognize themselves as wholly deaf to Him. I am writing against those who, even while confessing they felt nothing whatever in their baptism, still imagine that the gift of God has indwelt and existed within their soul, unconsciously and insensibly, from that moment up to the present time. Nor are they the only ones, but I am also against those who say they have never had any perception of that gift in *theoria* or in revelation, but that they still receive it by faith and thought [reason] alone, not by experience, and hold it within themselves as a result of merely hearing the scriptures.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMILITY?

By St. Isaac the Syrian, from "The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Abba Isaac the Syrian," Homily 71.

Just as presumption dissipates the soul through imaginings that distract her and gives her free rein to fly among the clouds of her thoughts and to circle round all creation, so humility collects the soul through the stillness of the thoughts and concentrates her within herself. As the soul is unknown and invisible to corporeal eyes, so a humble man remains unknown amid men. As the soul abiding within the body is hidden from the sight and association with all men, so the truly humble man not only does not wish to be seen or known by men (for which reason he is secluded and distant from all men), but more, his will is—if possible—to plunge himself away from himself into himself. He wishes to enter and dwell in stillness, to forsake totally his former conceptions together with his senses, and to become as something that does not exist in creation, that has not come into being in this world, that is totally unknown even to his soul and his senses. And so long as such a man is hidden, locked away and withdrawn from the world, he remains wholly with his Lord.

A humble man is never pleased to see gatherings, confused crowds, tumult, shouts and cries, opulence, adornment, and luxury, the cause of insobriety; nor does he take pleasure in conversations, assemblies, noise, and the scattering of the senses; but above all he chooses to be by himself and to collect himself within himself, being alone in stillness, separated from all creation, and taking heed to himself in a silent place. Insignificance, absence of possessions, want and poverty are in every wise beloved by him.

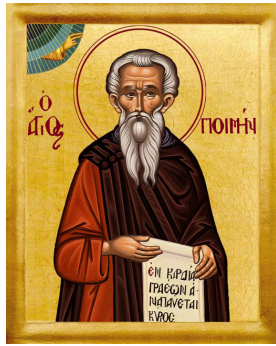
He is not engaged in manifold and fluctuating affairs, but at all times he desires to be unoccupied and free of the cares and the confusion of the things of this world, that he may keep his thoughts from going outside himself. For he is persuaded that if he becomes involved with many activities, it is not possible for him to remain without confused and disturbed thoughts. For many activities collect many cares and a swarm of diverse and complicated thoughts. These cause a man to leave the peacefulness of his thoughts (whereby he was superior to all earthly cares, except for the small necessities of life which are inevitable), and a state of mind that has a single concern amid peaceful reflections. And when necessities do not permit him to restrain his mouth from speaking, he is both harmed and causes harm. Then the door is thrown open to the passions, the tranquillity of discernment retires, humility flees, and the door to peace is shut. For all these reasons a humble man unceasingly protects himself from many affairs, and thus at all times he is found to be tranquil, gentle, peaceful, modest, and reverent.

A humble man is never rash, hasty, or perturbed, never has any hot and volatile thoughts, but at all times remains calm. Even if heaven were to fall and cleave to the earth, the humble man would not be dismayed. Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet. There is no humble man who is not self-constrained; but you will find many who are self-constrained without being humble. This is also what the meek and humble Lord meant when He said, *Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* For the humble man is always at rest, because there is nothing which can agitate or shake his mind. Just as no one can frighten a mountain, so the mind of a humble man cannot be frightened.

If it be permissible and not incongruous, I should say that the humble man is not of this world. For he is not troubled and altered by sorrows, nor amazed and enthused by joys, but all his gladness and his real rejoicing are in the things of his Master. Humility is accompanied by modesty and self-collectedness: that is, chastity of the senses; a moderated voice; mean speech; self-belittlement; poor raiment; a gait that is not pompous; a gaze directed toward the earth; superabundant mercy; easily flowing tears; a solitary soul; a contrite heart; imperturbability to anger; undistracted senses; few possessions; moderation in every need; endurance; patience; fearlessness; manliness of heart born of a hatred for this temporal life; patient endurance of trials; deliberations that are ponderous, not light; extinction of thoughts; guarding of the mysteries of chastity; modesty; reverence; and above all, continually to be still and always to claim ignorance were any truly humble man who would venture to supplicate God when he draws nigh to prayer, or to ask to be accounted worthy of prayer, or to make entreaty for any other thing, or who would know what to pray.

The humble man keeps a reign of silence over all his deliberations, and simply awaits mercy and whatever decree should come forth concerning him from the countenance of God's worshipful majesty. When he bows his face to the earth, and the divine vision within his heart is raised to the sublime gate leading to the Holy of Holies, wherein is He Whose dwelling place is darkness which dims the eyes of the Seraphim and Whose brilliance awes the legions of their choirs and sheds silence upon all their orders [and when they are waiting for mysteries to shine forth from the Invisible One, in that airless realm through a soundless motion, through bodiless senses, through image less perception of that formless Essence and of revelations which surpass them, the power of their thoughts being too weak to contain the waves of those mysteries]: then he dares only to speak and pray thus, *May it be unto me according to Thy will, O Lord.* And may we also say the same for ourselves. Amen.

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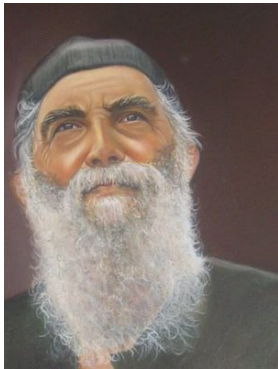
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ELDER PAISIOS AND THE BOILED MILK DURING LENT

By George Skambardonis.



At Panagouda, the hut of Elder Paisios, there are two visitors from Thessaloniki. They stand, leaning on the chestnut tree. Both in their fifties, they are pale and cantankerous. They seem to be from an ecclesiastical organization, because they are looking reproachfully at the Elder, and making comments to each other quietly. The children are playing, making a fuss—at which Paisios turns and says

quietly, in a soft voice:

“Do not make noise, because beside here, beneath the earth, Americans are hidden and we will wake them, and they will come to interrupt our silence.”

The children stop, and are silently puzzled. At the opposite end, John leans sideways against the rock atop his sack. He lights a cigarette. The two visitors, who appear to be harsh pietists, continue to look at the Elder with disapproval as he boils milk and oversees that it does not spill over. One of them can't stand it anymore and tells the monk:

“Elder Paisios, we are in the first days of Lent, we have a strict fast, and you are boiling milk to drink?”

The Elder is silent. He does not respond. He grabs the pot and lowers it, since the milk is now boiled.

He then goes into his hut, bringing six small, old china cups, he puts them next to each other, and carefully pours the milk into each one. He waits a bit for it to cool off, while everyone looks at him with amazement and silence. The two pietists observe this with disgust, thinking that since there are six visitors and six cups, perhaps the monk will offer them milk during these strict days of the fast.

Elder Paisios takes the full cups one by one, places them on a wooden tray, and carries them seven meters away, where he places them down on the dirt, at the edge of a bush.

He places them there in order, then he comes, sits next to us, and begins to do something with his mouth silently, an eery whistling, while looking towards the bushes. Not a few moments pass, and over there, from the bushes, comes out a viper with five small snakes very carefully—her children. I hold my breath.

The snakes are coming, all of them approaching, one by one, slithering, passing right next to us, and they go slowly-slowly to the cups, and begin drinking calmly, slurping their morning milk...

† † †

The devil does not hunt after those who are lost; he hunts after those who are aware, those who are close to God. He takes from them trust in God and begins to afflict them with self-assurance, logic, thinking, criticism. Therefore we should not trust our logical minds.

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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 ἐδίδαχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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In This Issue:

- **The Great Miracle of Orthodoxy!** (p. 5)
- **Carrying Home the Flame of Faith** (p. 7)
- **The Anxiety of “What-if” Thinking** (p. 8)
- **On Greek Pascha** (p. 10)
- **The Good Shepherd** (p. 11)
- **Man’s True Life** (p. 21)
- **Life in the Face of Death** (p. 22)
- **Thy Cross We Worship, O Master!** (p. 24)
- **The Strait and Narrow Way** (p. 28)
- **The Divine Liturgy** (p. 30)



- **Θάνατον Θανάτω, Σὺ Θανατοῖς Θεέ μου** (σελ. 14)
- **Ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἐν Σιωπῇ** (σελ. 15)
- **Πασχαλινὸ Δῶρο** (σελ. 17)
- **Κεραυνὸς ἐν Αἰθρία** (σελ. 19)



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OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

By St. John Maximovitch.

When the Lord had finished the Mystical Supper with His disciples and given them His Instructions, He went with them to the Mount of Olives. On the way He continued His final teachings, after which He addressed the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and those who would believe their word (Jn 17).

On crossing the stream of the Cedron, the Lord and His disciples went into the garden of Gethsemane, where He had been accustomed to gather with them earlier. Here, He left His disciples, except for Peter, James and John, telling them to sit down for a time while He prayed. Then, He Himself with Peter, James and John went on a little further. He wanted to be on His own as much as possible, but knowing all that was going to happen, He began to sorrow, to be distressed and horrified, and He said to those with Him: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.* And going a little further off, He fell face down on the earth and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer, and went up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were there, but not watching: sleep had overcome them. In vain did their Divine Teacher exhort them to watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples again fell asleep and immediately the Savior departed from them in order to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour of the betrayal of the Son of Man into the hands of sinners drew near. Jesus' intensity of prayer reached the highest degree—He

came out in a bloody sweat which fell in drops on the earth (Lk 22:44).

What did Jesus pray about with such fiery intensity? What did He beseech the Heavenly Father, falling face down to the earth three times? *Abba, My Father! All is possible to Thee; O if only Thou wouldst grant that this cup be taken from Me. If it is possible, let this cup pass by Me; take this cup from Me. However, not as I will, but as Thou wilt; not My will, but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me, but I must drink of it, may Thy will be done.*

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. The Divine and human natures, without merging into each other and without changing, *undivided and unseparated* (the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council) were united in Him in one Person. In accordance with His two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one substance with God the Father and had one Will with Him and the Holy Spirit. But as perfect man, consisting of a soul and a body, the Lord also had human feelings and a human will. His human will was completely obedient to His Divine will. The Lord subjected His human will to the Divine will—He sought only to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was *to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34).

But the work which was set before Him to finish was greater than any other, and even unfeeling, soulless nature was bound to be amazed at it. It was necessary for Him to redeem man from sin and death, and reestablish the union of man with God. It was necessary that the sinless Savior should take upon Himself all human sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, should feel the weight of the sin of all humanity and sorrow over it in such a way as

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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.

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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was possible only for complete holiness, which clearly feels even the slightest deviation from the commandments and Will of God. It was necessary that He, in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united, should in His holy, sinless humanity experience the full horror of the distancing of man from his Creator, of the split between sinful humanity and the source of holiness and light - God.

The depth of the fall of mankind must have stood before His eyes at that moment; for man, who in Paradise did not want to obey God and who listened to the devil’s slander against Him, would now rise up against his Divine Savior, slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy to live upon the earth, would hang Him on a tree between Heaven and earth, thereby subjecting Him to the curse of the God-given law (Deut 21:22-23). It was necessary that the sinless Righteous One, rejected by the sinful world for which and at the hands of which He was suffering, should forgive mankind this evil deed and turn to the Heavenly Father with a prayer that the Divine righteousness should forgive mankind, blinded by the devil, this rejection of its Creator and Savior. Such a holy prayer could not fail to be heard, such a power of love was bound to unite the source of love, God, with those who even now would feel this love, and, understanding how far the ways of men had departed from the ways of God, would manifest a strong determination to return to God the Father through the Creator’s reception of human nature.

And now there came the time when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours the Son of Man, raised upon the cross, would draw all men to Himself by His own self-sacrifice. Before the force of His love the sinful hearts of men would not be able to stand. The love of the God-man would break the stone of men’s hearts. They would feel their own impurity

and darkness, their insignificance; and only the stubborn haters of God would not want to be enlightened by the light of the Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who would not reject Him Who called them, irradiated by the light of the love of the God-Man, would feel their separation from the loving Creator and would thirst to be united with Him. And invisibly the greatest mystery would take place—mankind would turn to its Maker, and the merciful Lord would joyfully accept those who would return from the slander of the devil to their Archetype. *Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* (Pss 84:10); righteousness has pressed close from Heaven, for the incarnate Truth has shone out on the cross from the earth. The hour had come when all this was about to take place.

The world did not suspect the greatness of the coming day. Before the gaze of the God-Man all that was to happen was revealed. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the human race. And now He came for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. Here He would accomplish that sacrifice which would save the race of men. He would voluntarily give Himself up to sufferings, giving Himself over into the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice would not be saving if He would experience only His personal sufferings—He had to be tormented by the wounds of sin from which mankind was suffering. The heart of the God-Man was filled with inexpressible sorrow. All the sins of men, beginning from the transgression of Adam and ending with those which would be done at the moment of the sounding of the last trumpet—all the great and small sins of all men stood before His mental gaze. They were always revealed to Him as God—*all things are manifest before Him*—but now their whole weight and iniquity was

experienced also by His human nature. His holy, sinless soul was filled with horror. He suffered as the sinners themselves do not suffer, whose coarse hearts do not feel how the sin of man defiles and how it separates him from the Creator. His sufferings were the greater in that He saw this coarseness and embitteredness of heart, the fact that *men have blinded their eyes that they should not see, and do not want to hear with their ears and be converted, so that they should be healed*. He saw that the whole world was even now turning away from God Who had come to them in human form. The hour was coming and had already come (Jn 16:31) when even those who had only just declared their readiness to lay down their lives for Him would be scattered. The God-Man would hang in solitude upon the Cross, showered with a hail of insults from the people who would come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls remained faithful to Him, but they, too, by their silent grief and helplessness would increase the sufferings of the heart of the Virgin's Son, overflowing with love. There would not be help from anywhere...

True, even in these minutes He would not be alone, for the Father was always with Him (Jn 8:19; 10:30). But so as to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, the Son of God would voluntarily allow His human nature to feel even the horror of separation from God. This terrible moment would be unendurable for His holy, sinless being. A powerful cry would break out from His lips: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* And seeing this hour in advance, His holy soul was filled with horror and distress.

Still earlier, when some Hellenes came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of that dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* came to Him, the God-Man saw that the hour when everyone would come to Him as He was raised upon the cross, was near. His human nature shuddered, His soul was in distress. But Jesus knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, that without them His earthly activity would leave a trace as small as that of a grain which lies for a long time on the surface of the earth before being dried up by the sun. It was therefore at that time that He appealed to His Father

not to allow human weakness to prevail over all the thoughts and feelings of His human nature: *Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? And yet for this purpose have I come to this hour.* (Jn 12:27).

And as if heartened by the remembrance of why He had come to the earth, Christ prays that the Will of God for the salvation of the human race be carried out: *Father, glorify Thy name.* (Jn 12:28)—glorify it on earth, among men, show Thyself to be not only the Creator but also the Savior (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, Bk 4). *I have glorified it and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28) came a voice from Heaven announced that the time for the fulfillment of the Mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the age was coming (Col 1:26; Eph 1:9; 3:9).



And now that time had already come. If before the human nature of Christ had shuddered and been troubled at the thought of what was to come, what did it experience now, when in expectation of the coming of His enemies and betrayer He for the last time prayed alone to God? The Lord knew that every prayer of His would be answered (Jn 11:42), He knew that if He would ask the Father to deliver Him from torments and death, more than twelve legions of angels would appear (Mt 26:53) to defend Him. But had He not come for this? So that at the last moment He should refuse to carry out that which He had fore-announced in the Scriptures?

However, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The spirit of Jesus now burns (Rom 12:11), wishing only one

thing—the fulfillment of the Will of God. But by its nature, human nature abhors sufferings and death (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, chapters 18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theodoret; St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, word 6, *On the Remembrance of Death*). The Son of God willingly accepted this weak nature. He gives Himself up to death for the salvation of the world. And He conquers, although He feels the approaching fear of death and abhorrence of sufferings. Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not so much in themselves, as from the fact that the soul of the God-Man was shaken to its depths.

The sin of man that He takes upon Himself is inexpressibly heavy. This sin weighs Jesus down, making the sufferings that are to come unendurable.

Christ knows that when His sufferings reach their peak, He will be completely alone. Not only will no man be able to relieve them *I looked for one that would sorrow with Me and there was none, for one that would comfort Me and none was found.* (Pss 68:21). *I looked, but there was none to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.* (Is 63:5). But in order that He should feel the full weight of sins, He would also be allowed to feel the burden of separation from the Heavenly Father. And at this moment, His human will can wish to avoid the sufferings. But it will not be so. Let His human will not diverge for one second from His Divine Will. It is about this that the God-Man beseeches His Heavenly Father. If it is possible for mankind to re-establish its unity with God without this new and terrible crime against the Son of God (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* Bk 4), then it is better that this hour should not come to pass. But if it is only in this way that mankind can be drawn to its Maker, let the good Will of God be accomplished in this case, too. May His Will be done, and may the human nature of Jesus, even at the most terrible moments, not wish anything other than the fulfillment of the will of God, the completion of God's economy. This is precisely what Christ prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane: *He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 5:7).

He offered up prayers and supplications to Him Who was able to save Him from death, but He did not pray for deliverance from death. It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as follows to His Father: **Abba, My Father, the Father of Him Whom Thou has sent to gather into one the people of Israel and the scattered children of God—the people of the Gentiles, so as to make out of two one new man and by means of the cross reconcile them with Thee. All is possible to Thee, all is possible that is in accord with Thy boundless perfections. Thou knowest that it is natural for human nature to abhor sufferings, that man would always like to see good days** (Pss 34:14) **But he Who loves Thee with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind wishes only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I have come down to earth to fulfill Thy wise will and for this purpose I have communed with flesh and blood, assuming human nature with all its weaknesses, except the sinful ones. I also have wished to avoid sufferings, but only on one condition—that this is Thy holy will. If It is possible that the work of economy should be completed without a new and terrible crime on the part of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these mental sufferings, to which in a few hours' time will be united the terrible sufferings of the human body; if this is possible—deliver Me then from**

the experiences and temptations which have already come upon Me and which are still to come. Deliver Me from the necessity of experiencing the consequences of the crime of Adam. However, this request is dictated to Me by the frailty of My human nature; but let it be as is pleasing to Thee, let not the will of frail human nature be fulfilled, but Our common, pre-eternal Council. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not reject It. But I ask only one thing: may Thy will be done. May Thy will be done always and in all things. As in Heaven with Me, Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thee there is one will, so may My human will here on earth not wish anything contrary to Our common will for one moment. May that which was decided by us before the creation of the world be fulfilled, may the salvation of the human race be accomplished. May the sons of men be redeemed from slavery to the devil, may they be redeemed at the high price of the sufferings and self-sacrifice of the God-Man. And may all the weight of men's sins, which I have accepted on Myself, and all my mental and physical sufferings, not be able to make My human will waver in its thirst that Thy holy will be done. May I fulfill Thy will with joy. Thy will be done."

The Lord prayed about the cup of His voluntary saving passion as if it was involuntary. (Sunday service of the fifth tone, canon, eighth *eirmos*), showing by this the two wills of the two natures, and beseeching God the Father that His human will would not waver in its obedience to the Divine will (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). An angel appeared to Him from the Heavens and strengthened his human nature. (Lk 22:43). His human nature, while Jesus Who was accomplishing the exploit of His self-sacrifice prayed still more earnestly, being covered in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and constant obedience to the will of the Father, the Son of God was heard. Strengthened and reassured, Jesus rose from prayer (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). He knew that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the load of the sins of men would be taken away from Him, and that by His obedience to God the Father He would bring human nature that had gone astray to Him. He went up to His disciples and said: *You all sleep and rest. It is finished, the hour has come: Lo! The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go, he who betrays Me is at hand. Pray that you do not fall into temptation.*

Coming out to meet those who had come for Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. And when Peter, wishing to defend His Teacher, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the servant, and reminded Peter that He was voluntarily giving Himself up: *Put your sword into its sheath: am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given Me? Or do you think that I cannot now ask My Father and He will send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must*

come to pass? And willingly drinking the whole cup of mental and physical sufferings to the bottom, Christ glorified God on earth; He accomplished a work which was no less than the very creation of the world. He restored the fallen nature of man, reconciled Divinity and humanity, and made men partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which *the Father gave Him to do*, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which He as God had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and sat in His humanity at the right hand of God the Father, waiting until His enemies should be laid at the footstool of His feet (Heb 10:13).

Having been made for all those who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), Christ remains even after His ascension *known in two natures without confusion*" (*Dogmatikon* of the sixth tone), *bearing two wills according to each nature unto the ages* (Sunday canon of the fifth tone, *troparion* of the eighth *eirmos*), but His glorified body cannot now suffer and does not need anything, while in accordance with this His human will, too, cannot diverge from His Divine will in anything. But with this flesh Christ will come again on the last day *to Judge the living and the dead*, after which, as King not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His humanity, He will be subject to God the Father together with the whole of His eternal kingdom, so that *God may be all in all*. (1 Cor 15:28).



We all receive God's blessings equally. But some of us, receiving God's fire, that is, His word, become soft like beeswax, while the others like clay become hard as stone. And if we do not want Him, He does not force any of us, but like the sun He sends His rays and illuminates the whole world, and he who wants to see Him, sees Him, whereas the one who does not want to see Him, is not forced by Him. And no one is responsible for this privation of light except the one who does not want to have it.

God created the sun and the eye. Man is free to receive the sun's light or not. The same is true here. God sends the light of knowledge like rays to all, but He also gave us faith like an eye. The one who wants to receive knowledge through faith, keeps it by his works, and so God gives him more willingness, knowledge, and power.

St. Peter the Damascene

THE GREAT MIRACLE OF ORTHODOXY THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Gathered from various Orthodox pamphlets.

TTrue Orthodoxy, how much our Lord Jesus Christ loves you, to send his Holy Light and blaze down our hearts with Heavenly jubilation, light up our minds and raise our hope?

Every Holy Saturday, at noon, in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem reoccurs the Great Miracle of the Holy Light that stirs, affects rejoices and gives delight and faith to those who have the honor and blessing to be there for the ceremony of the Holy Light.

Description of the Annual Miracle

1. Preparation of the Holy Sepulchre: In the morning of the Holy Saturday, before the ceremony of the Holy Light takes place a very thorough check of the tomb and after that they seal it with a mixture of honey and wax that was prepared in the morning. This check takes place so that everyone is ascertaining that there is nothing in the Holy Sepulchre that can cause a fire or create a flame. After the tomb is sealed, the authorities affix the wax with their seals. All the other doctrines that have rights in the Holy Sepulchre show great interest in this procedure. This interest is by no means accidental. If for one year the miracle of the Holy Light doesn't happen when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch performs the ceremony, the other doctrines will try to undertake the precedence in the Holy Sepulchre.

The examination begins at 10:00 and finishes at 11:00. While this takes place, Orthodox Arabs demonstrate in the church for the Orthodox rights. It must be recorded that this ostentatious check of the Holy Sepulchre is conducted by the representatives of the Armenians and several other doctrines.

2. The Ceremony of the Holy Light: The ceremony of the Holy Light takes place at 12:00 and constitutes of three stages: a) The Litany, b) The entry of the Patriarch in the Holy Sepulchre and c) The prayers of the Patriarch in order for the Holy Light to come out.

Following the tradition, at noon of the Holy Saturday the Greek Orthodox Patriarch with his escort—archpriests, priests and deacons and the Armenian Patriarch—enter the Holy Sepulchre, while the bells strike mournfully. Before the entry of the Patriarch the keeper of the Sacristy of the Holy Temple carries the unsleeping oil lamp, (it is put out that day in order that it be lit with the Holy Light). From the interior entry of the Temple of Apostle Jacob the Patriarch enters in the sanctuary and seats on the Patriarchal throne. Then the representatives of the Armenians, the Arabs, the Copts and others pass and kiss the hand of the Patriarch so that they will have the right to receive the Holy Light.

According to the privileges if they don't kiss the hand of the Orthodox Patriarch they do not have the right to receive the Holy Light from his hands. Immediately afterwards begins the Holy Litany that goes three times around the Holy Sepulcher and then it stops in front of the Holy Sepulcher where the officials stand.

After the litany, the Holy Sepulcher is unsealed and the Patriarch takes off his pontifical vestments and remains only with his white priest's tunic. The governor of Jerusalem and the police director examine the Patriarch in front of everybody so that everybody is assured that he is not carrying anything that can transmit light (create a flame). After this, his Beatitude, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem takes the (extinct) torches and enters the Holy Ciborium. All the lamps are off and nothing is on in the Holy Temple and the Holy Sepulcher.

3. How the Holy Light Comes Out: Inside the Holy Sepulcher the Patriarch prays kneeling and reading the special wishes requesting our Lord Jesus Christ to send His Holy Light as a gift of sanctification for the people. And in the absolute quietness at the hour, when the patriarch prays a wheeze is heard and almost simultaneously blue and white lightning's of Holy Light penetrate from everywhere, as though millions of photographic flashes turn on embracing the walls and all the lamps light up miraculously. In the Holy Sepulcher the torches the Patriarch holds while he prays are instantaneously lit by the Holy Light. The crowd bursts out in cheers while teardrops of joy and faith run from the eyes of the people.

For a few minutes the Holy Light does not have the attributes of fire. This happens the first minutes after the patriarch comes out of the Holy Sepulcher and gives the Light to the people. Anyone can touch the fire of the 33 candles and does not burn. After 33 minutes the flame becomes normal.

A Miracle of Orthodoxy—1549 A.D.

As far as the claim that it proves the truth of Orthodoxy the following incident occurred in the 16th century. The split

column where the Holy Fire went thru to light the candles of the Orthodox Patriarch is still there and is depicted in the depicted photograph. A tremendous lesson for all heresy loving pseudo Orthodox Hierarchs and clergy...

In the year 1549 A.D., the Arabs occupied Jerusalem, the Armenians took advantage of their presence. They approached the Moslem governor with gifts of gold, and asked for the

privilege to receive the Holy Light. This they asked and this they succeeded. They also implored to him that the Orthodox be forbidden entrance to the Holy Sepulchre for the sacred ritual.

Holy Saturday dawned and the most Holy Church of the Resurrection was closed to all the Orthodox. Even the Patriarch and the clergy were not allowed to enter. The Patriarch was kneeling at the entrance of the Most Holy Church. He was holding in his hand the bundle of the thirty three candles and praying. Tears

streamed down his face as he pleaded to God: "Lord, You who abhors injustice, heed the prayers of our children. Grant that Your glory may appear through Your miracle and do not deprive Your Holy Light from Your faithful people."

On that fateful Holy Saturday in 1549, the Divine Light did not visit the Holy Sepulchre where the Armenians were in charge and waiting. Instead before the amazed eyes of clergy and pilgrims, the Holy Light flashing brilliantly, struck the column the Patriarch was standing behind with the sound of a forceful wind. Instantly the stone column was split and blackened near the bottom. And the light appeared and lit the candles of the Patriarch. The column is still there on the left hand side of the entrance to the Sepulchre (depicted within the photo on this page).

The Holy Light symbolizes and reminds us in a miraculous way the Resurrection of Christ. It is a Godsend miracle through centuries from the light of the world, and this light is Christ for the world. Science cannot explain this great miracle and this time in its honor science never tried to explain it not even theoretically. Besides how can anyone explain a genuine miracle?



The Holy Light delivered to the faithful within the church of the Holy Sepulcher, on each and every Holy Saturday



The column struck by the Holy Light in 1549 to miraculously deliver the Holy Light onto the hands of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch who was standing behind it

CARRYING HOME THE FLAME OF FAITH

By Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov, 03 May 2013, delivered following the Matins for Great Friday with the reading of the Twelve Passion Gospels.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

Dear brothers and sisters, we have celebrated the Matins of Great and Holy Friday and our candles have remained kindled following the Gospel's proclamation of the long-suffering of the most humble Savior, Who tasted the fullness of suffering for the redemption of us sinners: betrayal by one of His closest disciples and handing over to the frenzied Jews, who had rejected their Messiah, and later to the cruel Romans. Mockery, abuse, insults, beatings, imprisonment, Pilate's cunning, and the crowd's frenzied cries: "Crucify Him!" And, finally, bearing the Cross and crucifixion thereon.

Not having extinguished our candles after the twelve readings we, according to custom, will carry this flame from the Holy Twelve Gospels to our homes, to bring there the light of the Gospel, to bring there the grace that is abundantly poured out during these days in the Church of God. This journey at dusk, at night, of Orthodox Christians with burning candles is profoundly symbolic: the more impenetrable the darkness and gloom of apostasy and the forgetting of the commandments, the brighter the grace of God shines in God-loving souls who are devoted to and love the Mother Church.

On this evening the Lord's words come true with literal accuracy: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven.* (Mt 5:16). Today another command of the Lord is also being fulfilled for us: **May your lights be burning, and your loins girded by the struggle of fasting and abstinence.** Today we, who are unworthy, are like the wise virgins who went out at midnight to meet the Bridegroom. While the world is immersed in the deep sleep of forgetfulness of the commandments and the law of the Lord, the small flock of disciples is wakeful, not sleeping, but praying and carrying to all corners of the universe the remembrance of Christ's suffering and His saving Resurrection.

For us this flame reflects the spark of God's grace that the right hand of Christ kindled in our hearts at the hour of baptism. It is a flame of warm, living faith, keen-sighted and hot, by whose warmth we keep ourselves from the defilement of the world that lies in evil. Only faith in Christ—Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—can

safeguard us from confluence with the world with its vices and passions.

Have a look at those who do not believe in God, who will not yield to the Gospel: do they have any sense of the danger of their position, at a time when many unfortunates are entangled in the snares of fornication, worldly malice, pride, avarice, and other vices? No, the unseeing world, which has quenched the lamp of faith, is not concerned for the future and does not want to know of the world's approaching end, forever thinking about performing this terrible dance of life that is more akin to death.

But Christians are not such. The flame of faith, illuminating their minds, highlights for them all the specters and horrors of mortal sins and the turbid stream that has drenched the earth. "Blessed is he who believes, his world is warmer," our people say. And, indeed, our path will be better if we conceal this candle of faith in our mind and heart, conversing with God alone rather than participating in the general madness, this "Walsingham's feast" (from Aleksandr Pushkin's "Feast in Time of Plague") that has taken over the entire universe.

For us this flame is a flame of Christ's love. Indeed, the love of God is hot. Its rays, spreading over the Church of God, warm all of God's creation, even the most infirm and wretched. Have a look at how cold today's world is, which calls love that which is contrary to it: lust,

self-interest, and defilement. We are witnesses of how the grace-filled warmth of the love of God is going out from the world: how hearts are turning to stone and how smiles are becoming predatory, aggressive, and dangerous. However, despite the multiplying wickedness, from which no one guards even children today, we are called to draw from Christ—at His Cross, kissing His feet and pierced side—the warmth of genuine charity, compassion, pity, and love, for the sake of which the world still stands upon its rotten foundations.

As we heard today in the Holy Gospel, the warmth of love encompasses the mind, thoughts, and feelings, being spread through the words and eyes of Christians, and especially through living acts of help. The warmth of love is a distinguishing quality, the radiant stamp of a true disciple of Christ. If this mystical warmth is present, if it is increased through the struggle of repentance and good deeds, this means that Christ Himself abides in faithful hearts. But if hearts grow cold and turn to stone in their egoism and self-love, overwhelmed by the specters of sensual pleasures and turning in fear to earthly goods, this means that Christ is invisibly removed from this



“country of the Gerasenes,” leaving the unfortunate residents to feed their swine. But where God is present, there will surely become apparent in one way or another—in secret prayer for one’s neighbor, in the considerate effort to listen to him, in the desire to help him—the love that reveals the radiant garment of the Godhead.

Finally, for us this flame is a perpetual reminder of the greatness of the suffering that our Redeemer underwent for each of His disciples. Remembrance of the saving passions is of extraordinary importance for a Christian’s moral life, because by reading the Passion Gospels and remembering the crown that cut into the Savior’s head and the spear that was thrust into His side, the soul is warmed by both faith and love. The Savior’s suffering shows us, who are forgetful and of little faith, the fullness of the Man-Befriending God’s mercy for His creation. For Christ suffered solely out of love for us, His perishing creation. That is why we make the sign of the cross with this flame on thresholds: it is the sign of the Savior’s suffering. The power of this cross watches over and protects our homes from dark powers and wicked people, if we will preserve and multiply in our hearts faith, love, and prayer to the Savior, Who suffered, was crucified, tasted death, and arose again.

Brothers and sisters, we shall depart from God’s church, carefully shielding this flame from the wind and accidental gusts, so that we may bring it back to our homes. Such is the journey of Christians in this cold, cruel world to Christ’s Kingdom and His Dread Judgment, where the souls of the Orthodox will shine with uncreated light and the heart that has been inflamed with faith, love, and prayer will become luminescent, bearing witness that one has loved Christ, fulfilled His commandments, become like unto Him, and allowed Christ’s grace to dwell in his heart to cleanse, transform, and sanctify our nature by this grace.

Thus, let us accomplish our short earthly pilgrimage carefully and prudently, so that with the burning lamp of faith, prayer, and love we might stand before Christ the Lord in the hour in which the deeds of all will be reckoned. The Lord’s Pascha—now the Pascha of the Cross, and in a day the Bright and Light-Bearing Pascha—is an anticipation of the Dread Judgment. Thus we, being of good will, will not be left in these days with a dark, extinguished candle of mind and heart. The Lord, seeing our small labors—our feeble attempts, our effort, our small suffering—will of course touch, and has already touched, the hearts of His disciples in which has been kindled a lamp, not-made-by-hands, of secret inner prayer, of living faith—which allows us to bypass easily all the specters and horrors of this earthly life—and of the love that bears witness better than all else to the sincerity of our faith and the depth of our convictions.

Amen.

THE ANXIETY OF “WHAT-IF” THINKING AND THE CALMNESS OF SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By Hieromonk Alexios Karakallinos, monastery of Karakallou on the Holy Mountain, April 12, 2013.



Sometimes, in this fallen world when it is as though God is far off, there seems to be plenty of reasons for fear. In that context, which is the context of our disconnection with

a loving God, the basic emotion of fear is a powerful and all-too frequent motivator, subconsciously directing our thoughts and our actions. Thinking about fears that have been realized in the past may make us feel depressed, but thinking about fears in the future, that is what can really fill us with dread.

Fearful emotions often rise to the surface when we engage in “what-if” thinking, with thoughts such as “what if I lose my job?” or “what if my child becomes gravely sick?” “what if, what if?” And although these misfortunes happen in life, we feel as though our own personal answers to such questions are too harrowing to even imagine, like a horror story that never ends. It is so different from the history of redemption that we are called to make our own.

Those “what if” thoughts become a self-perpetuating stream of anxiety-producing ruminations that lead us to obsessively focus on the material, transitory aspects of our earthly existence and flee from the present moment and from our God Who is found therein. Such thinking leads us to focus on matters that are very often outside of our control and influence. Yet, because they have seized our thought process, they become the focus of our attention, draining all our energy.

In Saint Matthew’s Gospel, the Lord addresses such harmful thinking when he commands, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.* In his commentary on this very same passage, Saint John Chrysostom remarks, “*When He had set the soul free from anxiety, He also mentioned Heaven, for He came to do away with old things and to call us to a greater country. Thus, He does everything in order to deliver us from unnecessary things and our attachment to the earth. This is also why He mentioned the gentiles, saying that ‘the Gentiles seek after these things;’ they labor solely for the present life with no regard for the things to come, with no thought of Heaven. But these things of the*

present life are not to be your chief concern, for there are other matters. We were not born for the purpose of eating, drinking and being clothed, but that we might please God and attain the good things to come. Since things here come second when we work, let them also come second when we pray. Thus, He said, 'Seek the kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you.'"

Saint John Chrysostom's thoughts put our own "what-if" thoughts into perspective. Our "what-if thoughts" are not so much about seeking God's eternal heaven, but about maintaining our transitory earth. In giving ourselves over to them, we are not putting first things first, but putting first things last or not at all. From the broader perspective of eternity, the very things we fear might even be the way we find our way back to God.

Saint John Chrysostom continues, *"And He said not, 'shall be given,' but 'shall be added,' so that you might learn, that present things are not the greater part of His gifts, compared with the greatness of the things to come. Hence, He does not bid us even to ask for them. Instead, while we ask for other things, we are to have confidence that these things will also be added to those. Seek then the things to come, and you will receive the things present as well. Seek not the things that are seen, and you shall surely attain unto them. Yea, for it is unworthy of you to approach your Lord for such things. And you, who ought to spend all your zeal and your care for those ineffable blessings, do greatly disgrace yourself by consuming your zeal on the desire for transitory things.*

"How then?" one might say, 'did He not bid us to ask for bread?' Nay, He added, 'daily,' and to this again, 'this day.' And He does the same thing here. For He did not say, 'Take no thought,' but, 'Take no thought for the morrow,' at the same time both setting us free and attaching our souls to those things that are more necessary to us."

Saint John Chrysostom and the ancient fathers recognized the dangers inherent in focusing our attention on needs in the near future. They try to set our gaze on further sights, beyond the "what-ifs" of tomorrow into the abiding permanence of eternity, an eternity that can be known in the present moment. They show us that trust in God and the ending of our story that God reveals to us is more important than any story we set spinning in our anxious minds. They show us that if we seek the Kingdom, the calmness of the Kingdom will descend on us like the morning dew.

In previous articles, I have written concerning the psychological and spiritual harm caused by focusing on the future without due regard for the present. Those comments still apply today: We all have a spiritual heart that we can strive to discover through simple repentance and by calling upon the name of our Lord. It will take time for our fears, anxieties, and imaginings to weaken. Remembering

God, remaining in the present, vigilantly guarding the heart against the "terrors of the night" by trust in God will help. Love, we are reminded in Scripture, casts out all fear. Love that is not selfish, but given wholly over to God, does not have the mental space to give itself over to fear. As I mentioned in a previous article, so too, in our own lives, Jesus is not to be found in death (fear). "He is not here." He has overcome death and cast out all fear, trampling down death by death.

Whatever we fear, whomever we fear has been conquered by the glory of the Cross and Resurrection. If we have fear ever dwelling in our hearts, we are harming our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Neuroscience, psychiatry, and the Gospel agree on this point. Such fear is certainly not of God. Such fear keeps us chained to illusory and deceptive thoughts that alienate us from God and one another. Yet, that chain has been broken, Satan has been conquered, fear has been overcome. We need only recognize this and be glad in Him who has made us a new creation. Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee!

Amen.



Humility is the thought and conviction of our heart that we are more sinful than all men and unworthy of the mercy of God. Reviling ourselves does not mean that we have true humility. True humility is when someone shames and abuses us publicly, and we endure it and say, "God ordered that brother to shame me for my many sins." We should receive everything as a command from God. When someone shames you, say that God commanded him to do it. When someone takes something of yours, God commanded him to take it, in order to make you a monk. When you are removed from a higher place, God changed your place so that you would change from your passions and bad habits.

This is true humility. And the pride is when we trust in ourselves, in our mind, our strength, when we think we are more capable than someone else, better, more beautiful, more virtuous, more pleasing to God. Then it is certain that we are overcome by the ugly sin of pride, from which may God, who humbled Himself for our salvation, preserve us. Let us humble ourselves, brethren, because a proud man cannot be saved. Let us weep for our sins here, so we can rejoice forever in the next life, for after we leave this world everyone will forget us. Let us not hope in men, but only in God..

Father Paisius (Olaru) of Sihla Skete, Romania

ON GREEK PASCHA WHAT HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN SAID ABOUT GREEK PASCHA

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was a prolific Danish author and poet. This article is an excerpt from his travel memoirs "A Poet's Bazaar: A Journey to Greece, Turkey and Up the Danube," about Paschal festivities in Greece in the 19th century, specifically the early 1840's.

The "Easter" of the Catholics in Italy, and particularly in Rome, is grand, fascinating; it is an elevating sight to see that immense mass of beings fall on their knees in St. Peter's Place, and receive a benediction. The Pascha festival in Greece cannot show such magnificence, its resources are too small; but after having seen both, one comes to the conviction that in Rome it is a feast which in its glory and splendor issues out from the Church to the people; but in Greece it is a feast which streams from the heart and thoughts of the people, from their very life; the Church is but a link in the chain.

Previous to Pascha there is a long and rigorous fast which is religiously observed, the peasants living almost entirely on bread, onions, and water.

The Athenian newspaper appeared on Good Friday with a black border, in memory of the death of Christ: the vignette-title was a sarcophagus with a weeping willow, and above it was a poem on the Passion by Lutzos.

The festival itself began that evening. I went to the principal church; it was splendidly illuminated and completely full: before the altar stood a glass coffin, fastened with silver plates. The coffin contained fresh roses, intended to represent the dead Saviour. A strange humming of voices from the praying congregation sounded through the house of God! Priests, in parti-colored vestments, and bishops, came and went before the altar where they read the prayers.

At nine o'clock in the evening sacred chanting began, and the procession started from the church through the chief street, to the palace. I saw the slowly moving procession conveniently from my window; it was one of the most solemn I have ever seen. It was a glittering starlight night, so mild and calm! Every spectator in the balconies and open windows stood with a burning candle in his hand. The chanting ascended to us from the side-street, the smell of incense filled the air. Mournful music proceeded from the military bands as though the people carried their King to his grave.

The coffin containing the fresh red roses was borne along, surrounded by the priests; over it hung a long red mourning veil which was held by the chief statesmen and higher

officers of the kingdom. A crowd of these officers, and then the great mass of people, all, as I have said, with burning candles, concluded the procession. There was a stillness, an apparent sorrow or devotion, which worked its effect upon every mind. The Bishop made a short speech outside the palace where the King and Queen stood, and then the King kissed the holy Gospel. During the whole ceremony there was a monotonous ringing of bells, always two strokes and then a short pause.

Day and night the church was filled with people. The King, the Queen, and the whole court were there on the midnight before Easter Day: the priests stood praying and mourning around the flower-filled coffin; the whole congregation prayed in silence. The clock struck twelve, and at the same moment the Bishop stepped forth, and said: *Christ is risen!*

Christ is risen burst from every tongue. Kettle-drums and trumpets sent forth their strains; the music played the liveliest dances! The whole people fell on each other's necks, kissed, and joyously cried, *Christ is risen!* Shot after shot was heard



outside; rockets darted into the air, torches were lighted, men and young lads, each with a candle in his hand, danced in a long row through the city. The women kindled fires, slaughtered lambs, and roasted them in the streets. Little children, who had all got new fez and new red shoes, danced in their shirts

around the fires, kissed each other, and exclaimed like their parents, *Christ is risen!* O, I could have pressed each of these children to my heart and exulted with them. *Christ is risen!* It was touching, elevating, and beautiful.

It may be said that the whole was a ceremony; and it may be added, certainly with some truth, that their rejoicings expressed the satisfaction of the people that the rigorous fast was over, and that now they could eat their lamb, and drink their wine: well, admit that the fact was so, still I dare venture to say there was something more; **there was a true, a sincere religious jubilee.** Christ was in their thoughts, as on their lips. *Christ is risen* was the mutual assurance, made as though it were no by-gone event; no, it was as if it had taken place on that night, and in this land. It was as if the assurance had reached their ears at that moment, and for the first time.

There were music and dancing everywhere in the capital, and in every little town throughout the kingdom. All labor was suspended, everyone thought only of pleasure; there were dancing and mirth near Theseus' Temple and under Zeus's marble columns. The mandolin twanged, the old joined in the song; and during the general joy the words of welcome and leave-taking were: *Christ is risen!*

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By Mrs. Helene Kontzevitch, translated from "Russkaya Zhizn," Sept. 20, 1955.

In the spring of 1909 I turned 16. That same year a priest was assigned to the church built by my parents near their estate. Before his arrival we were informed of his appointment by the provincial archpriest who wrote to us the following words: "We hear that an archangel-like bear is coming your way."

We sent the sleigh to the station to pick up Fr. Simeon (our new priest). From the window I saw them arrive. There were three figures in the sleigh, all wrapped in thick, red blankets: Fr. Simeon, his matushka Eulalia Stepanovna, and their faithful servant Paula. When first I set eyes on Fr. Simeon after he had come into the house, I was quite taken aback; his unsightly, rather sickly appearance was almost frightening. The features of his narrow face were ill-proportioned and very homely. "Really," I thought, "just who is this they sent!"

We sat down to dinner. Batiushka was anxious to see the church, so I ran off to have the sleigh readied. The stables and other out-buildings were located a short distance from the house. Batiushka accompanied me. As we were walking, my first impression vanished without a trace. I don't remember now what it was we talked about along the way—it may have been very insignificant but to my amazement, as soon as this rather ugly man began to speak, his uncomeliness simply disappeared. Before me stood a man of enormous strength of spirit and an equally great power of love. He could conquer anyone. The charm of his meek personality was irresistible. He could do with each of his parishioners whatever he wanted—in spite of the spiritually uncultivated nature of those who surrounded him.

Fr. Simeon lived with us for about two years. He found our new church very much to his liking, but thought that the interior was rather poorly furnished. There began to arrive—heaven only knows from where—all sorts of donations for the church. We barely had time to bring a cart-load of crates from the station when another shipment arrived: candlestands, censor, a set of service books, rizas, a silver set of vessels, a shroud.

Not a year had passed and Fr. Simeon engaged a group of artists who covered the interior with frescoes depicting scenes from the Gospel. Batiushka also intended to

purchase a better quality set of bells, but his untimely death cut short his plans. Where did all these gifts to our church come from?

It turned out that Fr. Simeon was known by many in Russia as a man of prayer. For example, I remember he once received a hundred roubles with the request to pray for a certain Ivan. And such requests were numerous. But Batiushka was very reticent on this subject. Our job was simply to send the horses to the station for the boxes. Soon the church interior was transformed beyond recognition.

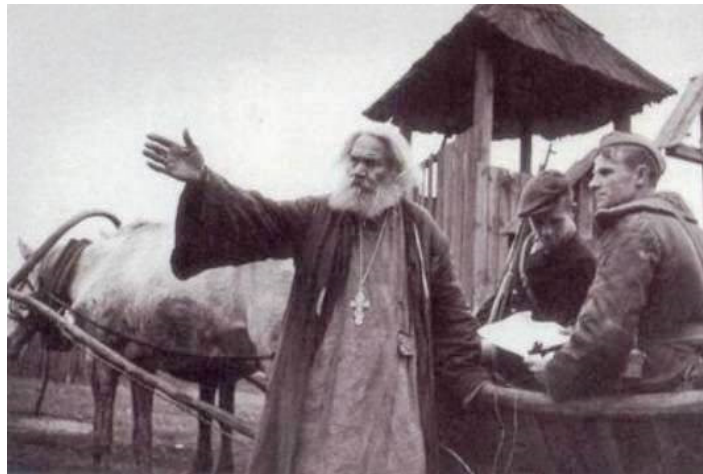
Fr. Simeon used to travel around the border posts where there lived officers and soldiers of the border guard (we lived near the German border). For the military men and their families, his arrival was a joyous occasion. Even the Germans in the neighboring town took part in the general celebration by sending masses of flowers to decorate the makeshift church. In these border towns Fr. Simeon left cups affixed with signs which read: "For the church." These cups soon returned to him filled with the soldiers' pennies.

With the death of Fr. Simeon all this came to an end.

Fr. Simeon's family consisted of four souls: first—his matushka, Eulalia Stepanovna, a tall, dignified older lady. She had a northern accent with its very pronounced, rounded "o's". The eldest son we nicknamed Absalom, because of his thick crop of hair and his endless quarrels with his father. He

was a university student and related to his father with a distinct feeling of his own superiority. The second son was a surveyor, and there was a daughter who was a student. All of them loved their father dearly, but little did they understand him.

To say that Fr. Simeon lived humbly would be an understatement; he cut his own wood, he engaged in carpentry work, he wore homespun cassocks which came from Archangelsk; these were of a nondescript color, sometimes lined with fustian. On his head he wore a broad rimmed hat, also handmade. This outfit gave him a very unique, rather odd appearance. Yes, here was a man from another, a very special world, who had nothing in common with the mediocre, prosaic aspects of the daily provincial life which surrounded us. He was the son of the far north whose beauty, forever impressed in the depths of his soul, enhanced his poetic nature. His sermons were never contrived; rather, they flowed from his heart, conveying a spirit of life and never tiring the listener.



How fascinating it was of an evening to hear Fr. Simeon describe his travels on the White Sea or the majestic beauty of his homeland, wondrous pictures of the northern landscape. Those playing whist threw down their cards and everyone formed a tight circle around Fr. Simeon. Among other things, he described how the bishop who had ordained him invited him, his young protege, for tea, during which he gave him a lesson in manners: how to use the sugar tongs, what was proper and what was not. This bishop was clairvoyant and foretold that Fr. Simeon would fall ill three times and that the third illness would be fatal. Everything came to pass just as the hierarch had said.

I remember the story Fr. Simeon told about meeting Eulalia Stepanovna. Having finished seminary and desiring to become a priest, he had to find himself a wife. He didn't know any eligible girls and didn't trust matchmakers. So, he decided to travel about as a menial laborer. He came to the home of a priest who had five daughters, and was engaged as a workman. One of the daughters was his future matushka. Without suspecting the new workman to be an eligible husband, she showed herself to be very warm and possessed of a kind and good character. Convinced of her positive spiritual qualities, Fr. Simeon revealed his true identity and made her a proposal of marriage. In this way he found himself a good wife.

Souls thirsted for contact with him. Even non-Orthodox—Jews and Catholics—came to him for consolation in their sorrows. I, too, loved to visit him. It happened that you'd go to him with some kind of heaviness on your soul. But after sitting with him in his cozy dining room, without even saying a word about yourself, about what was troubling you, you left as if you had wings, as though your burdens had simply disappeared into thin air.

Fr. Simeon's best and closest friends, however, were the local children. It was a common sight to see Fr. Simeon walking around the village square surrounded by children. Some hung on to his fingers with both their hands, one of the older ones carried his briefcase and walking stick. The little Jewish boys would take off their caps, bow deeply and run on ahead. When Batiushka caught up with them this performance would be repeated. And again they would run ahead and again stop to bow. They, poor things, could express their love only from a distance.

Once the schoolchildren noticed that in winter Batiushka's hands got very cold. They made a collection amongst themselves and together purchased some gloves.

In the school Fr. Simeon gave catechism lessons. Once there was a Polish Catholic holiday and school was cancelled. As a new arrival, Fr. Simeon was unaware of this. The children met him as usual and led him to the classroom. The lesson went on, and on. "Why isn't there a bell?" Asked Fr.

Simeon, puzzled. "Batiushka! Forgive us, we tricked you! Today there is no school," replied the children.

When vacations came the children begged Fr. Simeon not to interrupt the lessons. One boy came more than nine miles on foot to attend the class. They all gathered in church. Even we older ones, almost adults, came. Fr. Simeon was a talented and inspiring teacher. What he communicated was both ancient and eternally fresh and new. It captivated both heart and mind. We listened to the Gospel stories and parables as if hearing them for the first time in our lives.

Of all the children, Batiushka's favorite was a little three-year-old girl, Mary Prilutskaya. One Saturday evening there was the usual vigil. The Gospel reading was from St. John: *Jesus saith unto her, Mary; she turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.* The service ended, the lamps were extinguished, and everyone dispersed. Fr. Simeon was detained in the altar. The children had run home long ago for dinner. But for little Mary there was no greater happiness than to be in the presence of Batiushka, to accompany him on his way home, during which time she enjoyed her special privilege of holding his hand. Batiushka knew this, he knew that she was patiently waiting for him there in the growing darkness of the church. "Mary," he called out to her. "Master," came the little voice of his faithful disciple.

Once, in winter, I drove Fr. Simeon home in the sleigh. I myself sat at the reins and together we rode over the snow-covered fields. Evening was approaching. All that remained of the setting sun was a faint strip of light glowing far away on the horizon. I turned to Fr. Simeon: "Batiushka, what do you think?"

Suppose that a person loves God but has no fear of belittling his brother. If we seriously thought about how closely and inseparably the first and second Gospel commandments are bound together, think how much easier life would be!" It was a moment before Batiushka said anything. "You, at least, have understood me. But little do my own children understand me—let alone anyone else."

This was not quite true. Everyone loved him without exception. Those who were unable at the time to fully grasp what it was he was after, understood this later. Some years afterwards Fr. Simeon's daughter wrote to me about her older brother and said how much his character had come to remind them of their father's.

Fr. Simeon was not with us for long. He was soon struck by a cruel illness: cancer. His physical sufferings were intense. When I came to see him he would hold me by the hand and tell me how much my visit meant to him, because I understood him. Obviously, during the last days of his earthly life the awareness of his spiritual loneliness grieved him terribly.

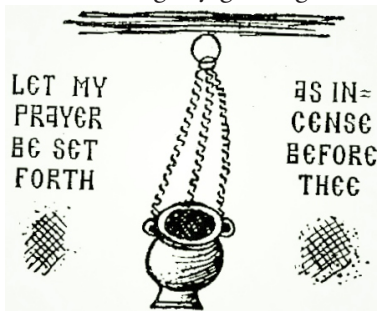
Pascha came. By this time another priest was serving in the church. On Holy Night Fr. Simeon sat at home on the

windowsill of his apartment, listening to the ringing of the bells, the tears running down his cheeks.

Soon the sick one was taken to the medical facility nearest us, a hospital in the German town of Königsberg. There they tried to save him with an operation, but in vain. He died on May 19, 1911.

Two days later a whole crowd of us went to meet his body. All the local inhabitants came, Russian and non-Russian, Orthodox and non-Orthodox. On the day of his funeral there were just as many people crowding the church. His body arrived in a closed coffin, but because everyone was so anxious to see once more their beloved pastor, the coffin was opened. In spite of the fact that the body had been transported 13 miles in a zinc coffin through the sweltering heat, there wasn't the least sign of decay. Fr. Simeon lay there, peaceful and majestic; his marble-like face reflected a spiritual beauty not of this world. He was buried behind the altar in the church yard. On his gravestone appeared the following inscription: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth: You conquered our hearts through meekness and love.*

Nearly a year went by. Again it was Pascha. I arrived at the church before the beginning of Matins and decided to sit for a while on the bench at Batiushka's grave. As I approached I heard a strange sound. Peering into the darkness, I saw a group of school children; they were huddled by the grave, sobbing. The children had not forgotten their meek and kindly Batiushka. And I think that wherever life led them, the image of Fr. Simeon remained in the heart of each and every one of them as a brightly guiding star.



Any sort of theology that has no connection with *hesychasm* (in the Orthodox sense of the word), and any sort of theology that is not the fruit of Orthodox noetic *hesychia* and does not lead towards it, is secularized, rationalistic, cerebral theology, which has **absolutely nothing to offer human beings, but rather increases their confusion and misery.**

Hesychia is the means by which a person is healed and sees the things of God. According to the divinely-inspired words of the God-seeing St. Gregory Palamas, Orthodox noetic *hesychia* is "true praxis, a means of approaching theoria or, to state it more aptly, the vision of God, which is the only proof of a soul in good health."

Fr. John Romanides, from "Empirical Dogmatics"

NO ONE SHOULD DESPAIR

From "The Evergetinos."

The Blessed Synkletike said: We should laud remiss and indolent souls who are easily exhausted in the struggle for good, as well as those souls who are easily discouraged and fall to despair. Indeed if such souls should display even the smallest good deed, we must praise it and marvel at it, giving them encouragement in their struggle for the good. Contrarily the most serious and greatest of their faults we must characterize, in front of them, as the least and unworthy of note. For the Devil, who wishes to destroy all things, or rather to succeed at our spiritual destruction, resorts to the following ruse. On the one hand, with accomplished and ascetic monastics, he tries to cover their sins and to make them forget them, so as to create pride in them. On the other hand, he constantly exposes the sins of neophytes—whose souls have not yet been strengthened in the ascetic life—before them, exaggerating these sins, so as to drive such neophytes to despair, until they abandon their ascetic efforts.

For this reason, then, these still irresolute souls we must care for with tenderness, reminding them continually of the boundless compassion and kindness of God. Among other things, we must emphasize that our Lord is merciful and long-enduring and that He annuls His righteous judgments against wrong-doers, as long as they surely repent.

To render this teaching of ours convincing, we will bring forth examples from Holy Scripture. Let us recall that Raab was a prostitute, but was saved through her faith; St. Paul was a persecutor, but through repentance became a chosen vessel; and the thief who was crucified together with Christ on Golgotha, who had stolen and murdered, first opened the door of Paradise with one word of repentance: *Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.* Moreover, let us cite the instance of St. Matthew, who was appointed to the Apostolic ranks by the Lord and who, even though a former tax collector, relates the parable of the tax collector, as well as that of the Prodigal Son. In general, then, let us bring to mind all of these stories which emphasize the worth of repentance and which extol the compassion of God towards the repentant man.

On the other hand, we must correct those souls who are ruled by pride by providing them with greater examples, just as we give the weaker souls encouragement, so as not to be ruled by despair. Let us take an example from the work of the best gardeners, who, when they see that a plant is of small stature and sickly, water it profusely and care for it greatly, so that it will grow and be strong; while, when seeing in a plant the premature development of sprouts, they immediately trim the useless sprouts, so that the plant does not quickly wither. Likewise, physicians give rich nourishment to some patients, prescribing that they walk, while to others they give a strict diet and require them to remain at rest.

Θάνατον Θανάτω, Σὺ Θανατοῖς Θεέ Μου!

Θεολογικὸ σχόλιο στὴν Ανάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου, τοῦ Λάμπρου Κ. Σκόντζου, Θεολόγου - Καθηγητοῦ.

Ἡ λαμπροφόρος Ανάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν κορυφαία ἐορτολογικὴ ἐκδήλωση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας. Μόνη Αὐτή, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴν αἰρετικὴ ἑτεροδοξία, βιώνει ἀδιάκοπα τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς τὴν πιὸ χαροποὶ καὶ ἐλπιδοφόρα ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας. Ὁ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς δὲν ἐορτάζει ἀπλᾶ τὴν Ἐγερση τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀλλὰ ζεῖ τὸ συγκλονιστικὸ αὐτὸ γεγονὸς, ὡς μιὰ προσωπικὴ μεταμόρφωση καὶ ἀνάσταση!

Τὴν ἀγία αὐτὴ ἡμέρα, τὴν «*ἐορτὴ τῶν ἐορτῶν καὶ τὴν πανήγυρη τῶν πανηγύρεων*» κατὰ τὸν ἱερὸ ὕμνογράφο τοῦ Πάσχα ἐορτάζεται ἡ νίκη τοῦ Ἀγαθοῦ κατὰ τοῦ Κακοῦ, ἡ ἐπικράτηση τοῦ φωτὸς στὸ νοητὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀμαρτίας καὶ τῆς φθορᾶς, ἡ κατάργηση τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα ἡ ἀναίρεση τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦ χειρότερου ἐχθροῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους. «*Ἐσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος*» (1 Κορ. 15:26) ἀναφωνεῖ ἐνθουσιωδῶς ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος!

Ἡ εἴσοδος τοῦ κακοῦ στὸν κόσμο μαζί μὲ τὰ ἄλλα μύρια κακά, ἔφερε καὶ τὸν θάνατο, ὡς τὴν φυσικὴ κατάληξη μιᾶς ἀφάνταστα μαρτυρικῆς ζωῆς. Ὁ πικρὸς Ἄδης ὑπῆρξε ὁ τόπος κατάληξης ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπινων ψυχῶν. Ἡ ἔννοια τῆς ἀθανασίας, ὡς τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀρχέγονο δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἔμεινε ὡς μιὰ μακρινὴ ἀνάμνηση στὴν ἀνθρώπινη σκέψη καὶ ὡς μιὰ ἀμυδρὴ προσδοκία ἀνάκτησής της στὸ μέλλον.

Ἡ λαχτάρα γιὰ τὴν νίκη τοῦ θανάτου ἐκφράστηκε ποικιλότροπα μέσα στὶς διάφορες μυθολογίες τῶν λαῶν. Οἱ προφῆτες καὶ οἱ συγγραφεῖς τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, ὡς ὄργανα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν προετοιμασία τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους γιὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ σωτηρία, προεῖδαν πιὸ καθαρὰ τὴν μελλοντικὴ νίκη τῆς ζωῆς κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου. Ὁ Ἰδιος ὁ Θεὸς θὰ δοκιμάσει τὸ πικρὸ ποτήρι τοῦ θανάτου καὶ θὰ νικήσει τὸν Ἄδη, θὰ τὸν συλήσει ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀπ' αἰῶνος δεσμίους τοῦ νεκροῦ καὶ θὰ κλείσει ὀριστικὰ τὸ δρόμο τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς Του.

Ὁ μοναδικὸς ζωντανὸς Θεὸς εἶναι ὁ Ἰδιος ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς σὲ ὅλα τὰ ὄντα. Αὐτὸς «θανατοὶ καὶ ζωογονεῖ, κατάγει εἰς ἄδου καὶ ἀνάγει» (1 Βασιλ. 2:6). Ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ ὁ Ἐλισαῖος ἀνασταίνουν νεκροὺς στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου (3 Βασιλ. 17:23, 4 Βασιλ. 4:33). Ὁ προφήτης Ὡσηέ, προβλέποντας τὴν εἰς ἄδου κάθοδον τοῦ Μεσσία, τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνάστασή Του καὶ τὴν συντριβὴ τοῦ θανάτου διακηρύσσει στοὺς ἄπιστους

συμπατριῶτες τοῦ «*Πορευθῶμεν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωμεν πρὸς Κύριον! ... Ὑγιαίνει ἡμᾶς μετὰ δυὸ ἡμέρας, ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐξαναστηθῶμεθα καὶ ζησόμεθα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ*» (Ὡσηέ 6:1) καὶ γι' αὐτὸ σκιρτώντας ἀπὸ ἄκρατο ἐνθουσιασμὸ φωνάζει νὰ τὸ ἀκούσουν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι «*Ποῦ σου ἡ δίκη σου, θάνατε, ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου ἄδη;*» (Ὡσηέ 13:14).

Στὸ θεανδρικό πρόσωπο τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βρῆκε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος τὸν πραγματικὸ λυτρωτὴ του. Αὐτός, ὡς ὁ σαρκωμένος Θεός, ὑλοποίησε τὸ θεῖο σχέδιο τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ κόσμου. Πέτυχε τὴ σωτηρία μας ὡς διδάσκαλος, ὡς ἱερεὺς καὶ ὡς βασιλεὺς. Δίδαξε πρωτόγνωρη διδασκαλία, ἀποκάλυψε τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔδωσε νέο τρόπο ζωῆς στοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἰερουργῆσε τὴν πιὸ ἀποτελεσματικὴ θυσία ὅλων τῶν ἐποχῶν, μὲ ἱερεῖο ἄμωμο τὸν ἴδιό Του τὸν ἑαυτό, πάνω στὸν φρικτὸ Γολγοθὰ καὶ πέτυχε τὴν περιπόθητη καταλλαγὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸ Θεό. «*Ὁ δὲ Θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασι συνεζωοποίησε τῷ Χριστῷ... καὶ συνήγειρε καὶ συνεκάθησεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις.*» (Ἐφ. 2:4-6).

Τέλος ὡς θριαμβευτικὸς νικητὴς, νίκησε τὶς ἀντίθεες δυνάμεις καὶ τὸ κακό, νίκησε τὸ θάνατο καὶ ἀνέστη ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς, ἀνελήφθη στοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ κάθισε στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, συνεχίζοντας τὸ ἀπόλυτο καὶ ἀναντικατάστατο μεσιτικὸ Του ἔργο. Ἀποτέλεσμα: «*Νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτὲ ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγγὺς ἐγενήθητε ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἐχθραν, ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ τὸν κόσμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δογμασι καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δυὸ κτίσει ἐν ἑαυτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην*» (Ἐφ. 2:13-15).

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς διακήρυξε: «*Εγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται*». (Ἰωάν. 11:25). Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ μόνος, ὁ Ὅποιος μπορεῖ νὰ νικήσει τὸν θάνατο. Μὲ τὴν λαμπροφόρο Ἀνάστασή Του πραγματοποιοῦσε αὐτὴ τὴν λαμπρὴ νίκη, ἀνάστησε τὸ σῶμα Του καὶ μαζί ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση, δηλαδή ὅλα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πρόσωπα ὅλων τῶν ἐποχῶν, ὡς κύτταρα τοῦ σώματός Του. «*Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσι, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται*». (1 Κορ. 15:22). Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἤδη ἀναστημένος δυνητικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου.

Εἶναι μιὰ δυνητικὴ κατάσταση τὴν ὁποία μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀξιοποιήσει. Ὁ βιολογικὸς θάνατος, ὡς προσωρινὴ κατάσταση, δὲν αἶρει τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς

ἀναστάσεως καὶ τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς, διότι «ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτι οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσι τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσονται». (Ἰωάν. 5:25). «Ὁ ἐγείρας τὸν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ζωοποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν διὰ τὸ ἐνοικοῦν αὐτοῦ Πνεῦμα ἐν ὑμῖν». (Ρωμ. 8:11). Αὐτὴ εἶναι (πρέπει νὰ εἶναι) ἡ μόνη χαρὰ στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν πιστῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διότι ἔχουμε τὴ βεβαιότητα, ὅτι χάρις στὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μας, «μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν» (1 Ἰωάν. 3:14) καὶ «Πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα». (Ἰωάν. 11:26).

Ἀπτὰ παραδείγματα τῆς ἀναστάσεώς μας εἶναι οἱ θαυμαστὲς νεκραναστάσεις ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Κύριος κατὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς παρουσίας Του, τῆς κόρης τοῦ Ἰαεῖρου (Μάρκ. 5:21-42, τοῦ γιοῦ τῆς χεῖρας στὴ Ναὶν (Λουκ. 7:11-17), τοῦ Λαζάρου (Ἰωάν. 11:1-44). Ἐπίσης ἡ ἀνάσταση τῶν «κεκοιμημένων ἀγίων» (Ματθ. 27:52) κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Σταυρώσεως τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι οἱ προάγγελοι καὶ τῆς δικῆς μας ἀναστάσεως.

Ἡ λαμπροφόρος Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Σωτῆρος μας σημαίνει ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ὄντολογικὴ ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ κόσμου. Ὁ παλαιὸς πτωτικὸς κόσμος τῆς φθορᾶς ἄλλαξε κυριολεκτικᾶ σύσταση, διότι μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου νικῆθηκαν οἱ ἀντίθεες δυνάμεις τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ ἀπαλλάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ κράτος τοῦ διαβόλου. Χάρη στὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ξαναβρῆκε ὁ κόσμος τὴν πραγματικὴ τοῦ θέσης μέσα στὴ θεία δημιουργία. Τὴ φθορά, ποὺ δημιούργησε ἡ πτώση, διαδέχτηκε ἡ ἀφθαρσία. Ὁ πιστὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν ζεῖ πλέον γιὰ νὰ πεθάνει, ἀλλὰ ζεῖ γιὰ νὰ μεταβεῖ στὴν αἰωνιότητα καὶ νὰ συμβασιλεύει αἰῶνια μὲ τὸν Χριστό.

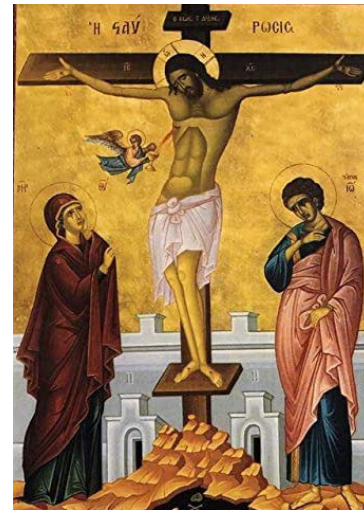
Τὸ μέγα καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτο γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς Του μιὰ διαρκῆς χαρὰ καὶ ἀτέλειωτη αἰσιοδοξία. Οἱ ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι ἔγιναν οἱ διαπρύσιοι κήρυκες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου στὰ ἔθνη χάρις στὴν ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ. Τὰ νέφη τῶν Μαρτύρων θυσίασαν τὴν πολύτιμη ζωὴ τοὺς χάρις στὴν βεβαιότητα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας ζοῦσαν τὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ὡς μιὰ ἀτέρμονη προσωπικὴ συγκλονιστικὴ ἐμπειρία.

Αὐτὴν ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἀναστάσιμη χαρὰ καὶ αἰσιοδοξία θέλει ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία νὰ μεταδώσει καὶ σὲ μᾶς σήμερα. Μᾶς καλεῖ νὰ ἀποβάλλουμε τὸ ἄγχος τῆς καθημερινότητος καὶ κυρίως τὸ φόβο τοῦ θανάτου καὶ νὰ διαποτίσουμε τὴν ὑπαρξὴ μας μὲ τὴν μακάρια ἐλπίδα καὶ τῆς δικῆς μας ἀνάστασης, τῆς ὁποίας τεκμήριο καὶ ἀπαρχὴ ὑπῆρξε ἡ Ζωηφόρος Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Αυτρωτῆ μας Χριστοῦ.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἐν Σιωπῇ

Ἀπὸ τὸν Παναγιώτη Σημάτη, Ἐφημερίδα «ΕΡΕΥΝΑ» Αἰγίου, 27 Ἀπριλίου 2005.



Κάθε χρόνο, ὅταν φτάνει ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδα, ὁ πιστὸς προσκαλεῖται γιὰ μιὰ ἐπανατοποθέτηση τῆς ζωῆς του μπρὸς στὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Πάθους τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀτενίζει καθηλωμένος ἐκεῖ στὰ μεσοῦρανα, στὸ Σταυρὸ Του, προσκαλώντας μας καὶ προκαλώντας ταυτόχρονα πιστοὺς καὶ λιγότερο πιστοὺς.

Καὶ ποῖος ἄραγε θὰ μπορούσε νὰ διαβεβαιώσει ὅτι προσπέρασε τὸ Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ αἰώνιο αὐτὸ σκάνδαλο τῆς λογικῆς ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀγγέλων, χωρὶς κλυδωνισμοὺς ἀμφιβολιῶν, χωρὶς κραδασμοὺς στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν αὐτονόητων ἐνδοκοσμικῶν βεβαιότητων;

Φέτος ἰδιαίτερα, καὶ ἐνῶ ἀκόμη εἶναι νωπὲς οἱ ἐντυπώσεις ἀπὸ τὰ σκάνδαλα ποὺ ἤρθαν, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ θὰ ἔρθουν, θὰ ἀντικρίσουμε καὶ πάλι τὸ Χριστό. Ἴσως φέτος νὰ φαντάζει περισσότερο μόνος: δεμένος σὰν κακοῦργος, περιτριγυρισμένος καὶ λοιδορούμενος ἀπὸ τὸν ὄχλο καὶ τὸ ἀρχοντολόι τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ «καιροῦ ἐκείνου»· μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του ἀποσυναρμολογημένους, διασκορπισμένους καὶ ἀνήμερους νὰ τοῦ προσφέρουν κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἄρνηση τοῦ Πέτρου.

Κι Αὐτὸς σιωπηλός, νὰ ἀτενίζει ὅλους, ὅπως τότε τὸν Πέτρο πρὶν λαλήσει ὁ πετεινός, καὶ νὰ ἀναμοχλεύει μέσα μας ὅλες τὶς ἀρνήσεις κι ὅλες τὶς προδοσίες στὸ πρόσωπό Του, ὅλα τὰ πάθη κι ὅλες τὶς πληγές.

Νὰ μᾶς κοιτᾶ μὲ μίαν ἀπέραντα μεγαλόπρεπη Σιωπῇ—ὄση κι ἡ ἀγάπη Του—ποὺ θεραπεύει τὴν κούφια καὶ ὑβριστικὴ πολυλογία τῶν «ἐκπροσώπων» Του, κάθε μεγαλόστομη καὶ ὑπερφίαλη καπηλεία τῆς Σιωπῆς καὶ τοῦ Πάθους.

Μία ἀγιασμένη, πονεμένη Σιωπῇ γιὰ τοὺς πόνους καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, μυστικὴ φωνὴ στὰ μύχια τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Μία μεγαλειώδης, εὐγλωττη, κατανυκτικὴ Σιωπῇ Ἀγάπης.

«Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα». Στὸν πόνο καὶ στὸν θρίαμβο. Καὶ ὅταν ἔκανε τὰ θαύματα, καὶ ὅταν δεχόταν τὰ

ραπίσματα. Καὶ ὅταν εἰσέρχεται θριαμβευτικὰ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα «μετὰ βαΐων καὶ κλάδων», καὶ ὅταν ἐρωτᾶται ἀπὸ τὸν ἀρχιερέα Καϊάφα, τὸν Πιλάτο, τὸν βασιλιὰ Ἡρώδη: «Οὐδὲν ἀποκρίνη; οὐκ ἀκούεις πόσα σου καταμαρτυροῦσιν; Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα».

Σιωπᾶ ὅταν ὁ ὄχλος καὶ οἱ στρατιῶτες τὸν χλευάζουν, ὅταν τὸν προκαλοῦν λέγοντας: «Σῶσον σεαυτὸν εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ». Ὅταν καταφέρουν στὸ ἅγιο πρόσωπό Του ραπίσματα καὶ μὲ σαρκαστικὴ εἰρωνεία τὸν ἐξωθοῦν νὰ «προφητεύσει» ποιὸς τὸν ράπισε. Ἀνταποδίδει στὴν παράλογη πρόκληση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης κακότητος τὴν πορφυρὰ Σιωπῆ τῶν σταυρωμένων Του χεριῶν, τὴ ματωμένη καρδιὰ τῆς Ἀγάπης.

Σιωπᾶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς μπροστὰ στὴν μισαλλοδοξία ἐχθρῶν, στὴν ἀλαζονεία καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία τῶν «φίλων», γιατί οἱ λέξεις δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ποῦν τίποτα περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσα πολυσήμαντα μαρτυροῦν τὰ πάθη, ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ ἡ Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶναι διακριτικὴ συνομιλία, ἕνας ἀένας διάλογος ἀγάπης μὲ τὶς ψυχές, ὅταν τὰ λόγια καθίστανται ἀνήμερα νὰ διασπᾶσουν τὰ τεῖχη τοῦ ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀμφιβολίας πὸν ἔχουν ἐρμητικὰ σφραγίσει τὰ «ῶτα» μας. Ὅταν τὰ πάθη ἔχουν ἀλλοιώσει τὴν «λογικὴ» ψυχὴ μας καὶ τὴν ἔχουν παραδώσει στὸ παράλογό της τυχειότητος, τὸ χαοτικὸ ἐνήδονο κυνήγι τῆς ὀδύνης.

Συνομιλεῖ καὶ τότε «ἐν τῇ σιωπῇ» ὁ Χριστὸς μαζί μας, γιατί ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποτὲ δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι Εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν χάνει τὴν ἰκανότητα νὰ διαισθάνεται, νὰ ξέρει, νὰ «καταλαβαίνει πολὺ περισσότερο πράγματα ἀπ' ὅσα μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφράσει», ἀπ' αὐτὰ πὸν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀκούσει. Ὁ Σιωπῶν Χριστὸς τοῦ Πάθους, μᾶς ἔχει ἐξασφαλίσει τὸ προνόμιο, ὥστε «νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ» νὰ μποροῦμε νὰ ψιθυρίζουμε τὸ «μνήστητί μου, Κύριε» τοῦ ληστοῦ, ἀκόμα καὶ πάνω στὸ σταυρὸ τῆς πιδ μεγάλης ντροπῆς, τῆς πιδ μεγάλης ἀπελπισίας.

Ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Σιωπῆς, εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀναμονῆς, δηλαδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας: κανένα δὲν ἐξαναγκάζει, μὰ ἀγαπᾶ, σιωπᾶ καὶ περιμένει τὴν μετάνοιά μας. Ἡ σιωπῆ εἶναι ὁ ἐσχατολογικὸς τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖον μιλεῖ καὶ πράττει ὁ Θεός. Ὅποιος ἀγαπᾶ δὲν φλυαρεῖ... μὰ ὑποφέρει καὶ ὑπομένει.

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Λόγου! Τὰ λόγια εἶναι τὰ ἐργαλεῖα τῆς χρονικότητος. Ἡ κατανόηση τῆς οὐσίας τῶν λόγων εἰσάγει στὴν αἰωνιότητα τοῦ ὑπέρ-λόγου, ἐκεῖ ὅπου τὰ λόγια εἶναι περιττά. **Ἡ σιωπῆ εἶναι ἡ γλῶσσα τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ.** «Ἡ σιωπῆ μυστήριόν ἐστι τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ μέλλοντος οἱ δὲ λόγοι ὄργανόν ἐστι τούτου τοῦ κόσμου». (Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος).

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Λόγου λογοποιεῖ τὴν παράλογη λογικὴ τοῦ πεπτωκότος ἀνθρώπου. Σιωπηλὰ ἀνασκάπτει τὶς καρδιές, ἀποκόπτει τὰ καρκινώματα τοῦ ἄλογου ἐγωϊσμοῦ, δένει τὰ τραύματα, ζωντανεύει τὴν ἐρειπωμένη πίστη, ἐτοιμάζει τὴν ἐξανάσταση.

Μέσα στὴν σιωπῆ συντελεῖται ἡ θεανθρώπινη συνάντηση. «Ἴδού, ὁ Νυμφίος ἔρχεται ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός». Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ, στὴ σιγῆ τῆς ἡσυχίας, «τῶν ὑπερφυῶν γεύεται ἀγαθῶν καὶ ὑπερκοσμίων ἀπολαύει καλῶν, καὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγάπης καθίσταται χώρημα καὶ οὕτω ἐρωτοληπτεῖται καὶ χαίρει καὶ εὐθυμεῖ». (Ἄγ. Κάλλιστος). «Ὁ φίλος τῆς σιωπῆς προσεγγίζει τὸν Θεὸ καὶ συνομιλῶντας μυστικὰ μαζί Του, φωτίζεται ἀπ' Αὐτόν». (Ἰωάννης Κλίμακος).

Ὅσοι αὐτὴ τὴν Μεγάλην Ἑβδομάδα κατορθώσουμε—ἀτενίζοντες τὸν Ἰησοῦ—ν' ἀφουγκραστοῦμε ταπεινὰ τὴ πολυφθογγὴ Σιωπῆ Του, ἀποφασίσουμε «ἐν μετανοίᾳ» νὰ ἐναποθέσουμε στὰ χέρια Του τὴν ζωὴ μας καὶ μποῦμε στὴ σιωπῆ τοῦ «ὄλβιου» τάφου, θὰ μᾶς χαρίσει ἄλλη μία φορὰ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου Του τὴν «ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἀνάσταση».



Ἡ Ἀνάσταση συνδέεται μὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐνῶ ἡ Ἀνάληψη μὲ τοὺς ἀγίους. Μὲ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του ὁ Χριστὸς νίκησε τὸν θάνατο καὶ ἔδωσε σὲ ὅλους τὸ δῶρο τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Ὅλοι θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ δίκαιοι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ· τὴν ἀνάληψη ὅμως δὲν θὰ ἐπιτύχουμε ὅλοι, ἀλλὰ μόνο ἐκεῖνοι γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ θάνατος εἶναι κέρδος (Φιλ. 1:21), ὅσοι πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατο σταύρωσαν τὴν ἁμαρτία μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν εὐαγγελικὴ διαγωγή. Μόνον οἱ δίκαιοι, οἱ θεοῦμενοι, θὰ ἀξιωθοῦν αὐτῆς τῆς μεγάλης ἐμπειρίας, ὅπως ὁ Μέγας Ἀπόστολος ὁμολογεῖ: «Καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ Κυρίου εἰς ἄερα, καὶ οὕτω πάντοτε σὺν Κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα». (Α΄ Θεσ. 4:16-17). Ὅλοι θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν, ἀλλὰ μόνον οἱ δίκαιοι θὰ ἀναληφθοῦν, θὰ ἀρπαγοῦν μὲ νεφέλες γιὰ νὰ προῦπαντήσουν τὸν Χριστὸ ἐρχόμενο ἀπὸ τοὺς Οὐρανούς. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀπὸ σωτηριολογικῆς ἀπόψεως ἡ Ἀνάληψη θεωρεῖται μεγαλύτερη ἐορτῆ, ἀκριβῶς γιατί αὐτὸς πού μετέχει τῆς Ἀναλήψεως μετέχει τῆς θεώσεως.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς

Πασχαλινό Δῶρο

Ὁ παπᾶς πού δὲν «ἐβγαζε» Ἀνάσταση ἀν δὲν ἦσαν ὄλοι οἱ χωριανοὶ παρόντες!

Πηγή: Γέροντας Δαμασκηνὸς Ζαχαράκης, καθηγούμενος Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Ἀγάθωνος Φθιώτιδος, «Τὸ πάσχα τοῦ Γεωργακοῦ».

Απ' ὅλες τὶς διηγήσεις τῶν παλαιῶν γερόντων, πού κατὰ καιροὺς ἔχω ἀκούσει, τὴν πιὸ ὁμορφή καὶ τὴν πιὸ συγκινητικὴ θεωρῶ πὺς τὴν ἄκουσα ἀπὸ τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση Παπαντώνη, τὸν γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια ψάλτη τῆς ἐκκλησίας μας. Τὴν ἄκουσά το Μεγάλο Σάββατο τοῦ ἔτους 1970, μέσα στὸ σπιτοκάλυβό του, πού βρισκόταν στὸν κάτω μαχαλὰ τοῦ χωριοῦ μας.

Εἶχε τελειώσει, θυμᾶμαι, ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία μὲ τὴν πρώτη Ἀνάσταση. Ἐγώ, φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησία, ἀκολούθησα τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση στὸ σπίτι του.

Μὲ ἀγαποῦσε ὁ γέροντας καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη του μὲ τραβοῦσε κοντά του, καί, ὅπως μ' ἔλεγε, μὲ προετοίμαζε γιὰ διάδοχό του στὸ ἀναλόγιο.

Ὅταν φθάσαμε στὸ σπίτι, καθίσαμε κοντά στὸ ἀναμμένο τζάκι. Ἡ θεία Θανάσαινα, ἀφοῦ μὲ καλωσόρισε, ἔσπευσε νὰ γεμίσει τὴ χούφτα μου μὲ ξερὰ σῦκα, καρύδια καὶ σταφίδες. «Σήμερα παιδί μου», μοῦ εἶπε, «ἔχουμε αὐστηρὴ νηστεία, γι' αὐτό σου δίνω, νὰ φᾶς, ξηροὺς καρπούς. Αὔριο, πού θὰ εἶναι Λαμπρὴ, ἔλα νὰ σὲ κερᾶσω κόκκινο αὐγὸ καὶ γλυκιά καρυδόπαστα πού ἐφτιάξα γιὰ τὴ γιορτῆ».

Τὴν ὥρα πού ἡ θεία Θανάσαινα μοῦ ἔλεγε αὐτά, εἶδα τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση νὰ κουνᾶει δακρυσιμένος τὸ κεφάλι του καὶ αὐθόρμητα τὸν ἐρώτησα: «**Τί συμβαίνει μπαρμπα, γιατί κλαῖς;**»

«Ἄχ, Δημήτρη μου, (αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ κοσμικὸ μου ὄνομα) μοῦ εἶπε, μέρα πού εἶναι σήμερα, ὁ νοῦς μου πῆγε στοὺς παλιότερους χωριανούς μας πού ἔζησαν ἐδῶ στὸν τόπο μας καὶ πού τώρα ἀναπαύονται κάτω στὸ κοιμητήριό τοῦ χωριοῦ. Ἦταν ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι αὐτοί, παιδί μου, δὲν τοὺς φτάνουμε ἐμεῖς στὴν πίστη καὶ στὴν ἀγιότητα. Αὐτοί, χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία, μιλοῦσαν μὲ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀγίους Του.

Θυμᾶμαι, σὰν ἀπόψε, Μεγάλο Σάββατο, κάτι θαυμαστὸ πού συνέβη ἐδῶ στὸν διπλανὸ συνοικισμό. Ὅταν χτύπησε ἡ καμπάνα τῆς ἐκκλησίας, γιὰ τὴν

Ἀνάσταση, ὅλο το χωριό, κατὰ οἰκογένειες, ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὴν ἐκκλησιά.

Μαζί τους ἀνέβαιναν καὶ ὁ γερο-Γεωργακός, ὁ τσέλιγκας, μὲ τὴ φαμελιά του. Μόλις πέρασαν τὴ μεγάλη ἀνηφόρα, ἄκουσαν, μέσα στὴν ἠσυχία τῆς νύχτας, πέρα στὰ μαντριά τοῦ Γεωργακοῦ, μεγάλο θόρυβο. Ὁ Γεωργακὸς ἔκαμε λίγο πιὸ πέρα καὶ ἔβαλε αὐτὶ γιὰ ν' ἀκούσει καλύτερα τί συμβαίνει. Μαζί του στάθηκαν καὶ ἄλλοι χωριανοί.

«Λύκοι μπῆκαν στὸ μαντρί μου, εἶπε. Ἀπόψε διάλεξαν νὰ τὸ κάνουν. Ξέρω ἐγώ, ὁ σατανᾶς τοὺς ἔστειλε γιὰ νὰ μὲ ἐμποδίσει νὰ πάω στὴν Ἀνάσταση, ἀλλά, ἐννοιά του, δὲν θὰ τοῦ κάνω τὸ χατίρι.»

Κοίταξε πέρα πρὸς τὰ μαντριά καὶ φώναξε δυνατά: «Ἀπόψε προβατάκια μου σᾶς δίνω τοῦ Θεοῦ μου». Καὶ στρέφοντας τὸ πρόσωπό του στοὺς συνοδοιπόρους τοῦ χωριανούς, τοὺς εἶπε: «Ἐγὼ θὰ πάω στὴν ἐκκλησία

νὰ ἀκούσω τὸ **Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη**, πού τόσο πολὺ το περιμένω καὶ τὸ λαχταρῶ. Θέλω νὰ λειτουργηθῶ μὲ τὴ φαμελιά μου καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε τὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια. Πενήντα μέρες ἐτοίμαζόμαστε γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη αὐτὴ νύχτα, δὲν τὴ χάνω μὲ τίποτα.»

«Τί εἶναι αὐτὰ

πού λὲς Γεωργακέ;» τοῦ εἶπαν οἱ πλησιέστεροι συνοδοιπόροι του. Τρέξε γρήγορα νὰ γλυτώσεις τὰ πρόβατά σου καὶ νὰ σώσεις τὴν περιουσία σου πού μὲ πολλοὺς καὶ πολύχρονους κόπους ἐφτιάξεις. Φύγε γρήγορα, μὴ χασομερᾶς. Κάθε λεπτὸ πού περνᾶει ἡ ζημιὰ πού σοῦ κάνουν οἱ λύκοι γίνεται καὶ πιὸ μεγάλη. Σκέψου, σὲ παρακαλοῦμε, τὴν οἰκογένειά σου πού ζεῖ ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ πρόβατα.»

«Ἐνα νὰ μὴν μείνει, τοὺς ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ τσέλιγκας, ἐγὼ θὰ πάω στὴν Ἀνάσταση καὶ ὅ,τι θέλει ὁ Θεὸς ἄς γίνει».

Αὐτὰ εἶπε καὶ κίνησε γιὰ τὸ Ναό, σκορπίζοντας σ' ὅλους τοὺς χωριανούς του τὸν θαυμασμὸ γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη του πίστη!

Στὴν ἐκκλησιά, πρῶτος καὶ καλύτερος ὁ τσέλιγκας! Στεκόταν, ἀγέρωχος, στὸ στασίδι τοῦ κρατώντας στὰ χέρια τοῦ τὴν ὀλοφώτεινη λαμπάδα του, πού μὲ τὸ φῶς τῆς χαΐδευε τὸ ρυτιδωμένο πρόσωπό του.

Στὸ κάλεσμα τοῦ ἱερέα: «**Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ, πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης προσέλθετε**», πῆγε πρῶτος αὐτὸς καὶ μαζί



του ιεραρχικά ὅλη ἡ φαμελιά του καὶ κοινώνησαν τὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια.

Ὅταν ὁ λειτουργὸς διάβαζε τὸν Κατηχητικὸ Λόγο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου, ὁ Γεωργακὸς στεκόταν μπροστὰ στὴν Ὁραία Πύλη καὶ ἄκουγε μὲ προσοχή.

Στὰ λόγια του παπᾶ: «Ὁ Ἄδης, φησὶν, ἐπικράνθη», ἐπαναλάμβανε τὸ «ἐπικράνθη» μὲ πείσμα καὶ θυμὸ, λὲς καὶ ἐκδικιόταν τὸν Ἄδη καὶ μαζί του τὸν διάβολο μὲ τὴ σκοτεινὴ δυναστεία του. Καὶ ὅταν τὸ κείμενο ἔφτασε στὸ: «*Ἀνέστη Χριστὸς καὶ ζωὴ πολιτεύεται*», ὁ τσελιγκας, στὴν κάθε ἐπανάληψη τοῦ «Ἀνέστη», φώναζε δυνατὰ καὶ θριαμβευτικά, μὲ φωνὴ ποὺ σκέπαζε ἐκεῖνες τῶν συνορταστῶν του, τὸ δικό του «Ἀνέστη».

Παρὸτι δὲν ἤξερε πολλὰ γράμματα, ὁ τρόπος ποὺ ἀντιδρούσε στὸ ἄκουσμα τῶν ρημάτων «ἐπικράνθη καὶ Ἀνέστη», ἔδειχνε πὼς ὄχι μόνον τὰ καταλάβαινε, ἀλλὰ κυριολεκτικὰ τα βίωνε μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ του. Χωρὶς, δηλαδή, νὰ τὸ ξέρει, θεολογοῦσε!

Βγαίνοντας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιά, ἀφοῦ εἶπε τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη» μὲ τὴ φαμελιά του καὶ τοὺς χωριανούς καὶ ἄκουσε τὸ «Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη», κίνησε γιὰ τὸ σπίτι του, γεμάτος ἀναστάσιμη χαρὰ καὶ ἀγαλλίαση.

Ὅταν ἔφτασαν στὸ σπίτι, ἀφοῦ πρῶτα ἄναψαν τὸ καντήλι μὲ τὸ Ἀναστάσιμο Φῶς, ἔστρωσαν τραπέζι γιὰ νὰ φάνε τὴν παραδοσιακὴ μαγειρίτσα καὶ νὰ τσουγκρίσουν τὸ κόκκινο αὐγὸ.

Ἀφοῦ φάγανε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἀποσύρθηκαν γιὰ ὕπνο, ὁ Γεωργακὸς, ποὺ δὲν τὸν χωροῦσε ὁ τόπος, πῆρε τὴν γκλίτσα του καὶ βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι γιὰ νὰ πάει στὰ μαντριά νὰ δεῖ τί ζημιὰ τοῦ ἔκαναν οἱ λύκοι καὶ πόσα ἀπὸ τὰ πρόβατα τοῦ ἀπόμειναν. Ἀνέβαινε τὸν ἀνηφορικὸ δρόμο ποὺ ὀδηγοῦσε στὶς στάνες του, μὲ γρήγορο βηματισμὸ, ἔχοντας διαρκῶς τὸ νοῦ του στὰ ζωντανά του.

Ὅταν ἔφτασε πολὺ κοντὰ τὸν ἀνησύχησε ἡ μεγάλη ἡσυχία ποὺ ἐπικρατοῦσε ἐκεῖ.

«Ἄιντε, εἶπε, πᾶνε τὰ προβατάκια μου, δὲν θὰ γλύτωσε κανένα», καὶ μ' αὐτὲς τὶς σκέψεις, μπῆκε στὸ μαντρί. Ἐκεῖ, ἔζησε ὅλο το θαῦμα τῆς Ἀνάστασης.

Τὰ πρόβατά του εἶχαν στρωμνοχθεῖ ὅλα μαζί στὴν ἀριστερὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ μαντριοῦ, ἀκίνητα, σὰν μαρμαρωμένα. Στὴν ἄλλη πλευρά, εἶδε νὰ γυαλίζουν, μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι, τέσσερα μάτια. Πάνω στὰ ξερὰ χορτάρια ποὺ στρώνουν οἱ βλάχοι γιὰ νὰ νᾶναι τὰ ζωντανά τους στεγνά καὶ ζεστά, κάθονταν, σὰν τὰ ἡμερὰ σκυλιά, δύο λύκοι καὶ τὸν κοίταζαν.

Συγκλονισμένος ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔβλεπε, πῆγε ἀθόρυβα καὶ ἄνοιξε σιγὰ-σιγὰ τὴ μαντρόπορτα. Ὅστερα, στάθηκε λίγο παράμερα καὶ γιὰ νὰ διώξει τοὺς δύο λύκους, κτύπησε μὲ δύναμη τὶς παλάμες τῶν χεριῶν του. Οἱ λύκοι πετάχτηκαν ἀμέσως ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ μαντρί καὶ ἐξαφανίστηκαν.

Ὁ Γεωργακὸς τότε στράφηκε πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα. Τὰ μέτρησε ἓνα πρὸς ἓνα καὶ ὦ τοῦ θαύματος! Τὰ βρῆκε ὅλα, ὄχι μόνον ζωντανὰ καὶ σωστὰ στὸν ἀριθμὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνέγγιχτα! Οἱ λύκοι, δηλαδή, δὲν τὰ εἶχαν ἀκουμπήσει. Οὔτε καν μία σταλαγματιὰ αἵματος δὲν βρέθηκε πάνω στὸ μαλλί τους καὶ στὸ δάπεδο!

Ὁ πολὺπειρος βοσκὸς, ποὺ στὰ τόσα χρόνια ποὺ φρόντιζε τὰ πρόβατά του, γνώρισε κι ἄλλες τέτοιες «ἐπισκέψεις», ποὺ ὅλες εἶχαν τὸ κόστος τους, ἄλλες μικρὸ καὶ ἄλλες μεγάλο, κατάλαβε πὼς αὐτὸ ποὺ τοῦ συνέβηκε τὴν Ἀναστάσιμη αὐτὴ νύχτα, ἦταν Θεῖα παρέμβαση!

Χωρὶς καμιά, γι' αὐτόν, ἀμφιβολία, ὁ Ἀναστᾶς Κύριος φίμωσε τὰ στόματα τῶν λύκων καὶ προστάτευσε τὰ πρόβατά του. Γι' αὐτό, πῆγε καὶ γονάτισε ἀνάμεσά τους καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔκανε τρεῖς φορὲς τὸν σταυρὸ του, φώναξε θριαμβευτικά: «*Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!*» Καὶ τότε, ὦ τῶν θαυμασιῶν Σου Κύριε, ὅπως ἔλεγε στοὺς χωριανούς του, ἄκουσε τὰ πρόβατα νὰ τοῦ ἀποκρίνονται, μὲ ἀνθρώπινη φωνή: «*Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!*»

Τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι, παιδί μου, ζοῦσαν στὰ χωριά μᾶς ἐκεῖνα τὰ χρόνια», εἶπε ὁ μπάριμπα-Θανάσης τελειώνοντας τὴν ἱστορία του, «ἄνθρωποι, φτωχοὶ μὲν, ἀλλὰ ἀληθινοὶ χριστιανοί, μὲ μεγάλη πίστη καὶ εὐσέβεια. Καὶ συνέχισε:

Ἦταν ἀδιανόητο, γιὰ ὅλους μας ἀνεξαιρέτως, νὰ λείψουμε, τὴν ἀγιασμένη νύχτα τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου, ἀπ' τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Ὁ παπᾶς μας δὲν «ἔβγαζε» Ἀνάσταση ἂν δὲν ἦσαν ὅλοι οἱ χωριανοὶ παρόντες, ἀπὸ τὰ βυζανιάρικα παιδιὰ μέχρι τοὺς γέροντες, μόνον οἱ κατάκοιτοι ἐξαίρουντα».

Ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ μπαριμπα-Θανάση κυριολεκτικὰ μὲ μάγεψε καὶ ἀπὸ τότε φυτεύτηκε γιὰ πάντα μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ μου καὶ ποτὲ δὲν ξαναβγήκε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ. Κάθε Μεγάλου Σάββατο τὴν ἀναπολῶ καὶ ἡ θύμησή της μὲ συγκινεῖ βαθύτατα. Τὴν θεωρῶ πνευματικὴ ἔνεση ποὺ μὲ δυναμώνει καὶ μὲ ἐνισχύει πνευματικὰ γιὰ νὰ γιορτάζω καὶ ἐγώ, μὲ τὴν πρόεπουσα εὐλάβεια, τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μου. Τὴν διηγούμαι καὶ στοὺς πιστοὺς ποὺ ἔρχονται στὸ μοναστήρι μας γιὰ νὰ ὠφελοῦνται καὶ αὐτοί.



Ἡ δύναμη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι νὰ ἀναλάβῃ τὴν εὐθύνη τῶν κακῶν του πράξεων ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ περιμένη πειρασμὸ ἕως τὴν στερνὴ του πνοή.

Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν

Κεραυνός ἐν Αἰθρία: Ἄσμα Διαβολικὸν Ἠκούσθη, ἐν Μέσῳ ... Εὐσεβείας καὶ Ἀγιότητος

Γεώργιος Κ. Τζανάκης Ακρωτήρι Χανίων. 3/3/2021.

Μὲ τὴν ὑποχωρητικότητά μας μπροστὰ στὶς ἀπαιτήσεις τῶν ἐξουσιῶν δείχνουμε ὅτι ἔχουμε πνεῦμα δειλίας καὶ ἔλπει ἀνδρείας καὶ διαθέσεως νὰ ὑπερασπιστοῦμε τὴν πίστι μας.

Μὲ τὴν ὑποχωρητικότητά μας αὐτὴν δουλώσαμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία στὶς σατανοκίνητες μαριονέτες ποὺ κυβερνοῦν.

Μὲ τὴν μετατροπὴ τῶν ναῶν ἀπὸ χώρους χάριτος, ἀγιότητος καὶ θεραπείας σὲ χώρους μολύνσεως καὶ ἀπιστίας καὶ τρομοκρατήσεως, σπείραμε τὴν ἀμφιβολία καὶ τὸν φόβο στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Κλωνίσαμε τὴν πίστι, παγώσαμε τὶς καρδιὲς κάναμε τὸν φόβο παντοδύναμο στὰ μάτια τους.

Μὲ τοὺς μασκοφορεμένους δεσπότες καὶ παπάδες, μὲ τὴν ἀπαγόρευσι τῆς τελέσεως τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν καὶ τῶν λειτουργιῶν, μὲ τὰ κορδελάκια καὶ τὰ... ψεκαστήρια μεγαλώσαμε τὴν φοβία ποὺ καλλιεργοῦν οἱ πουλημένες ἐξουσίες καὶ οἱ πληρωμένοι εἰδικοί.

Μὲ τὶς ἐνέσεις τῶν ἐμβολίων νὰ τρυποῦν τὰ μπρατσάκια τῶν μασκοφορεμένων δεσποτάδων σὲ βίντεο ἢ σὲ φωτογραφίες ἐντυπώθηκε στὶς καρδιὲς ἢ σφραγίδα τοῦ φόβου, καὶ μὲ τὶς ἐγκυκλίους τοὺς στέλνουν τὸ τρομοκρατημένο κοπάδι στὰ ἐμβολιαστικά σφαγεῖα τῶν Μεγάλων Φαρμακευτικῶν κολοσσῶν...

Δὲν διστάζουν νὰ γελοιοποιήσουν καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους ὑιοθετώντας τὶς γελοιογραφίες τῶν ἐκκλησιομάχων οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ μητροπολίτες στὰ ἐντυπά τους... καὶ μετὰ ζητᾶνε καὶ συγνώμη...

Καὶ τρίβουν τὰ χέρια τους οἱ Γκείητζδες καὶ οἱ Τσιόδρες καὶ ὅλα τὰ ὄργανα τοῦ σατανᾶ...

Ἔ! Τί τὸ παράξενο νὰ στείλουν καὶ ἓνα τραγούδι στὴν Γιουρροβίζιον γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐκπροσωπήσει, τὸ ὁποῖο ὑμνεῖ τὸν διάολο; Ὅλες οἱ ἄλλες πράξεις μας ποιὸν ὑμνοῦν; Τὸ φιλόδοξο, τὸ λιγώτερο, κοριτσάκι φταῖει ποὺ τὸ βάλανε νὰ τραγουδάει αὐτὰ τὰ ἄσματα; Νὰ μὴν γίνῃ καὶ αὐτὸ σὰν τοὺς πατέρες του; Σὲ ποιά μεριά ἔχει κατευθυνθῆ ἢ καρδιά τους; Ποὺ ἔχει πιστέψει τὸ πνεῦμα τους;

Τόσο καιρὸ, ἐδῶ καὶ ἓνα χρόνον, πόσα τέτοια τραγούδια καὶ τέτοιους χοροὺς στὸν ἔξω ἀπὸ δῶ δὲν λένε συνεχῶς ἐπίσκοποι, παπάδες καὶ πιστοί; Ἦ δὲν

καταλαβαίνουμε τί κάνουμε; Ποιὸν ὑμνοῦμε ὅταν ξεφτιλίζουμε τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας;

Ὅταν ἀποδεχόμασταν τὸ «μάσκα, ὁ φύλαξ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης-μάσκα ἢ ὠραιότης τῆς ἐκκλησίας» ξεχνώντας ὅτι ὁ Σταυρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου εἶχε αὐτὲς τὶς ιδιότητες, καὶ ἔτσι παρουσιαζόμασταν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τελοῦσαμε τὰ μυστήρια ποιὸν ὑμνοῦσαμε (καὶ ὑμνοῦμε) καὶ ποιοῦ τὸν χορὸ χορεύαμε (καὶ χορεύουμε);

Τώρα ποὺ κοιτάμε τὴν σύριγγα τοῦ ἐμβολίου καὶ μὲ ὅλη τὴν ὑπαρξί μας λέμε: «Τὴν πᾶσαν ἐλπίδα μου εἰς σὲ ἀνατίθῃμι» τί κάνουμε; Δὲν γνωρίζουμε ποιὸι θέλουν τὴν Μεγάλῃ Ἐπανεκίνησι τοῦ πλανήτη καὶ μεθοδεύουν αὐτὲς τὶς διαδικασίες; Τόσο πολὺ κοιμώμαστε;

Ἄφοῦ βλέπει ὁ διάολος ὅτι ὄσα σχεδιάζουν τὰ ὄργανά του γίνονται ἀσυζητητὶ ἀποδεκτὰ χωρὶς τὴν παραμικρὴ ἀντίδρασι, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἀπαιτήσῃ ὑμνοὺς καὶ ἄσματα ἀγάπης καὶ ἀφοσιώσεως; Νὰ μὴν πανηγυρίσουν τὰ ὄργανά του; Νὰ μὴν τραγουδήσουν; Πότε μέχρι τώρα στὴν ἱστορία τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος εἶχε κερδίσει τέτοια νίκη; Ποτέ!

Πότε ξανάδε ἱεράρχες νὰ κλείνουν τοὺς ναοὺς, νὰ διώκουν τοὺς ἱερεῖς, νὰ κυνηγοῦν τοὺς πιστοὺς, νὰ τοὺς λένε ὅτι δὲν ὀφελεῖ νὰ πηγαίνουν στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ νὰ μεταλαβαίνουν;

Πότε εἶδε πνευματικοὺς νὰ τιμωροῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τὸ θέλουν νὰ πᾶνε νὰ μεταλάβουν τὰ παιδάκια τους, καὶ ταυτόχρονα νὰ λένε ὅτι ὅσοι δὲν πᾶνε νὰ κοινωνήσουν εἶναι ἐνάρετοι καὶ ταπεινοὶ ἐνῶ ὅσοι τὸ ἐπιδιώκουν εἶναι μιὰ ἐλίτ ὑπερηφάνων καὶ ἀπανθρώπων; Πότε ξανάδε τόσους ἀνθρώπους νὰ αὐτοκτονοῦν νὰ σκοτώνονται δολίως καὶ νὰ τρελαίνονται;

Μποροῦσε ποτὲ νὰ σκεφτεῖ τέτοιες ἐπιτυχίες;

Τώρα ποὺ τὰ βλέπει νὰ μὴν ζητήσῃ καὶ ἀπὸ μᾶς ἓναν ὕμνο στὴν Γιουρροβίζιον; Στὸ δικό του μαγαζί; Τόσα χρόνια ποιὸς ὑμνεῖται ἐκεῖ μέσα;

Ἄς μὴν φωνασκοῦμε καὶ ταρασσόμαστε, λοιπόν. Θάρθει καιρὸς ποὺ τέτοια ἄσματα θὰ γίνουν ὑποχρεωτικά, ὅπως τὶς μάσκες, καὶ θὰ τὰ λέμε μέσα στὶς ἐκκλησίες. Δὲν προσέξατε τὰ ντεκὸρ ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ παπιστὲς στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῶν ὀφιοειδῶν αἰθουσῶν τους, ὅπου συντρέχουν καὶ συναγελάζονται μαζί τους καὶ τὰ δικά μας ἐκκλησιαστικά λεβεντόπαιδα; Γιὰ ψάξτε καὶ δεῖτε...



Ψυχραιμία, λοιπόν. Είναι μόνον ή αρχή. Όπως ακούγαμε «Βάλτε τή μασκούλα σας» και τώρα «κάντε τὸ ἐμβολιάκι σας» θὰ ακούσουμε «πείτε τὸ τραγουδάκι σας». Καὶ ὅπως συνηθίσαμε τὶς μασκούλες, ἔτσι θὰ συνηθίσουμε καὶ τὰ ἐμβολιάκια— θὰ εἶναι ἀπαραίτητα καὶ ἀναγκαῖα καὶ προαιρετικῶς ὑποχρεωτικά. Γιατί ὄχι καὶ τὰ ἄσματα;

Δὲν εἶπαμε ὅτι ὄλους τοὺς ἀγαπάμε; Γιατί ὄχι καὶ τὸν διάβολο; Θὰ ἐρμηνευτῆ καὶ θεολογικῶς. Ποῦ βλέπετε τὴν δυσκολία; Μὲ λίγη καλὴ θέλησι θὰ διαστρέψουμε λίγο τὸν ἅγιο Ἰσαάκ καὶ νάτο. «Καῦσις καρδίας ... καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν δαιμόνων». Ἐδῶ τὸ Πιστεύω λέει: «Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν» καὶ οἱ λαμπροὶ ποιμένες μας ἀπεφάνθησαν συνοδικῶς ὅτι ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς τέτοιες ἐκκλησίες, μία ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος, καὶ δὲν τρέχει τίποτα.

Όλα καλά, ὅλα εὐλογημένα. Καὶ κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας δὲν εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς ἀλλὰ ὁ.. πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ χωρὶς αὐτὸν ... δὲν ὑπάρχει ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὰ τὰ λένε εἶναι ἀρχιεπίσκοποι καὶ ἐπίσκοποι. Ἄλλοι διακηρύσσουν ὅτι τὸ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με» εἶναι λάθος προσευχή. Εἶδατε κανέναν νὰ ἐνοχληθῆ ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ νὰ φωνάξῃ, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ κάτι φανατικούς καὶ κολλημένους καὶ περιθωριακούς; Οἱ σοβαροὶ ποιμένες μας καὶ μοναχοὶ μας, ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν προσευχή, ἀσκοῦν σιωπὴ, ἐξετάζουν λεπτομερῶς τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους, καὶ κυρίως κάνουν ὑπακοή— τὴν ὁποία ἀπαιτοῦν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ποίμνιο—καὶ δὲν ἔχουν χρόνο γιὰ τέτοιους περισπασμούς. Εἶναι ὑπεύθυνοι καὶ συνετοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ ταπεινὰ τὸ λένε καὶ ἐγγράφως...

Φυσικὰ θὰ «καταδικάσουν» τὸ διαβολικὸν ἄσμα καὶ θὰ διαμαρτυρηθοῦν γιὰ τὸ ἀτόπημα, ὅπως ἔκαναν καὶ γιὰ τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, μιὰ ποῦ «πονοῦσε ἡ καρδιά τους νὰ εἶναι μακρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ποίμνιόν τους» κτλ. Όπως βλέπετε πλησιάζει τὸ δεῦτερο Πάσχα ποῦ θὰ εἶναι κλειστὲς οἱ ἐκκλησίες... Σιγά-σιγά θὰ πολλαπλασιαστοῦν καὶ τὰ τραγουδάκια. (Ἰπῆρχαν καὶ παλιὰ ἀρκετά, ἀλλὰ βέβαια κανένα δὲν εἶχε σταλεῖ στὴν Γιουροβίζιον καὶ δὲν εἶχε τόσο ξεκάθαρο στίχο. Εἶναι καὶ στὰ ἐγγλέζικα, ὁπότε δὲν καταλαβαίνουν ὄλοι...)

Ἀλλὰ, γιατί νὰ ὑποκρινόμεθα ἀδελφοί. Ἀφοῦ αὐτὸν ἀγαπάμε, τὰ δικὰ του ἔργα ποιοῦμε, γιατί νὰ μὴν τὸ τραγουδοῦμε;

Δὲν εἶναι μεγάλη ἁμαρτία ἡ ὑποκρισία; Ἐδῶ εἴμαστε ὑπερήφανοι γιὰ ἄλλα καὶ ἄλλα καὶ κάνουμε καὶ πορεῖες ὑπερηφανείας καὶ ἐνίοτε τιμοῦμε ἐκκλησιαστικῶς τοὺς πρωτοστατοῦντες.

Ἀφοῦ τιμοῦμε τὰ παιδιά νὰ μὴν τιμήσουμε καὶ τὸν πατέρα; Ἔστω καὶ μὲ ἓνα τραγουδάκι;

Καλὴ μαθητεία λοιπὸν στὸ κατηχητικὸ τοῦ διαβόλου... καὶ καλοὶ χοροὶ στὸ πάρτυ του. Τὸν χορὸ τὸν σέρνουν οἱ καλοὶ μασκοφορεμένοι ποιμένες κραδαίνοντας σύριγγες καὶ μὲ τὰ μπρατσάκια ἔξω. Μὴν χαλᾶμε τὴν εἰκόνα με ἄκαιρες διαμαρτυρίες... Μὴν ακούσουμε καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νέο ἀφεντικό, τὸ «*Ἡυλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ὠρχήσασθε*», ὅπως τὸ ακούσαμε καὶ ἀπ' τὸν Χριστό.

Ἔνας μογιγάλος καὶ ἀνάπηρος.



Κάποτε ἓνας πιτσιρικὰς εἶχε κάνει ἓνα καραβάκι. Το πῆρε στὸ ἀκρογιάλι καὶ τὸ ἄφησε νὰ ἐπιπλεύσει. Κάποια στιγμὴ ὅμως, κόπηκε ὁ σπάγκος καὶ τοῦ ἔφυγε τὸ καραβάκι στὰ βαθιὰ καὶ τὸ ἔχασε. Το παιδί στενοχωρέθηκε πολὺ.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες τὸ ἀγόρι πέρασε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγορὰ καὶ παραδόξως βλέπει τὸ καραβάκι του σὲ μία βιτρίνα ἐνὸς καταστήματος. Το ἀναγνώρισε ἀμέσως.

Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ καραβάκι, ἔγραφε ἓνα χαρτάκι: «Πωλεῖται».

Ἀφοῦ βεβαιώθηκε ὅτι ἦταν δικὸ του, μπαίνει μέσα στὸ κατάστημα καὶ λέει στὸν καταστηματάρχη:

- Κύριε, αὐτὸ εἶναι δικὸ μου, ἐγὼ τὸ ἔφτιαξα.

Ὁ καταστηματάρχης δὲν συγκινήθηκε καθόλου καὶ τοῦ λέει:

- Πλήρωσε ὅσα γράφει ἐκεῖ πάνω καὶ θὰ εἶναι δικὸ σου...

Ὁ πιτσιρικὰς, ὅμως, δὲν εἶχε χρήματα καὶ πάει στὸν πατέρα του καὶ τοῦ διηγείται τὰ συμβάντα. Ὁ πατέρας του τοῦ δίνει τὰ λεφτὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγόρι ἀγόρασε τὸ καραβάκι του.

Το πῆρε, τὸ ἔβαλε στὴν ἀγκαλιὰ του καὶ λέει:

- Τώρα εἶσαι δυὸ φορὲς δικὸ μου, μία πού σὲ ἔφτιαξα καὶ μία πού σὲ ἀγόρασα.

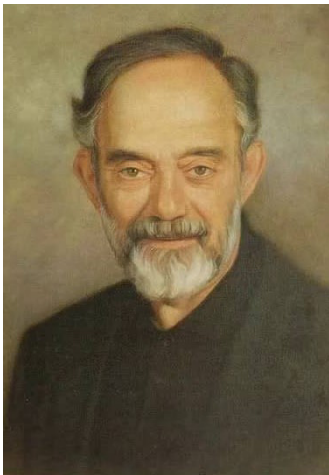
Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός! Εἶναι Αὐτὸς πού μᾶς ἔπλασε, ἀλλὰ καὶ Αὐτὸς πού μᾶς ἐξαγόρασε μὲ τὸ Αἷμα Του! Ἀπὸ φιλότιμο καὶ μόνο, γι' αὐτὰ πού μᾶς ἔκανε ὁ Χριστός, ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀλλάξει κάθε ἄνθρωπος καὶ νὰ πολιτευεῖται διαφορετικὰ στὴ ζωὴ του, ἐν μετάνοια.

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος, Ἱεροκήρυκας

MAN AND HIS TRUE LIFE

ACCORDING TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX SERVICE BOOKS

Source: "A Realism of Glory: Lectures in Christology in the Works of Protopresbyter John Romanides," by James L. Kelley, published by Orthodox Research Institute, Rollinsford, NH, orthodoxresearchinstitute.org (2009), pp. 9-15.



Fr. John Romanides' lecture on "Man and His True Life" proposes to answer the query: "If man can be thought of only in relation to his destiny to become perfect as Christ is perfect, how can we characterize this perfection, especially in the context of the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church?"

First, Fr. John lays the groundwork by emphasizing the Hebraic anthropology of

the Orthodox, which allows no Hellenistic dualism of soul and body, but rather sees the center of man as his *kardia* or heart, which is located in each part of man, and thus indicates man in his totality: soul, spirit, and body.

When we speak of the heart, we speak of our spiritual heart which coincides with the fleshly one; but when man achieves illumination and sanctification, then his whole being becomes a heart. The heart is synonymous with the soul, with the spirit; it is a spiritual place where man finds his unity, where his mind is enthroned when it has been healed of the passions. St. Gregory Palamas says that the heart is the very body of our body, a place where man's whole being becomes like a knot. When mind and heart unite, man possesses his nature and there is no dispersion and division in him any more. However, when mind and heart are united by the grace of God, then man has only one thought—the thought of God; he has only one desire—the desire for God; and only one sensation—the noetic sensation of God. That is why repentance and tears are so much appreciated: they help us to find that healing, that state of integrity because no human being can weep having two thoughts; we weep because of one thought that hurts us. If we are hurt by the thought that we are separated from God, that *salvation is far from the sinner* (cf. Pss 119:155) and all those things that inspire this pain in our heart, then, of course, we can cry.

This holistic anthropology of a heart-centered man is then shown by Fr. John to be the only Christologically sound view of man since Christ's life was not a mere manifestation of intellectual or rationalistic truth, but the Incarna-

tion of Life himself. The rest of his lecture illustrates the sacramental theology of the Orthodox Church by commenting upon the Christological basis of Holy Baptism, Holy Confession, and Holy Orders. Throughout, Fr. John's main point is that all of the services in the *Orthodox Mega Euchologion* presuppose the same thing: Man is saved from Satan and his power of disunity by sharing in the *Love, Life, and Truth* of God which is the destruction of the death and corruption inaugurated by the fall and the simultaneous incorporation of each into the unique, unconquerable unity that is the Body of Christ.

Along the way, Fr. John develops the following points:

[1] "Baptism is not a negative forgiveness of guilt inherited as a consequence of the sin of Adam. On the contrary, it is a release from the powers of the devil. This abolition of the power of the devil, however, does not happen with only a passive participation of the one being baptized. He must have not only faith, but also the desire to die with Christ in the waters of baptism."

[2] The actual, concrete spiritual labor required of the catechumen corresponds to an actual, concrete local community into which the Baptized enters. There is no catholic Church in general, only local centers where the Holy Eucharist is offered and where real people struggle together in a physical body against Satanic powers which operate both spiritually and materially.

[3] In the entire service of baptism there is not one statement made about the forgiveness of any kind of guilt that may have been inherited from Adam." The implication here is that the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has an organic relation to the new Christian's lifelong internal and ecclesial struggle against the devil.

[4] There cannot be any *ex opere operato* (a Latin phrase meaning "from the work performed", *Ed.*) version of sacraments and ecclesiology whereby the recitation of a magical formula relieves someone from corruption and enslavement to Satan. Instead, Holy Baptism, as the culmination of a long ascetic struggle fortified with spiritual instruction and corporate prayers, is "the reaching of that stage at which one can freely choose to die with Christ to the vanity of the ways of this world and live within the love of the corporate life in the body of Christ."

[5] Life in Christ is life in His Body, in the eucharistic cup. Holy Eucharist is an end in-and-of-itself, since it is participation in the *kenotic* (self-emptying) love of Christ. Because this love is unity in self-offering that aims at transcending any utility or necessity, no "individualistic piety" can exist

within it. Instead, one achieves eucharistic love according to “the measure by which he fights the devil and struggles to empty himself of self-concern within the life of Christ whose body is made up of real people.”

[6] Because there can be no reality higher or even on the same level as the unity of the Eucharist, there can be no “extra sacramental institutionalism,” such as a papacy. A corollary of this eucharistic conception of the Church is the notion that the Sacrament of Holy Confession, as it has developed throughout the centuries, in no way makes it possible for “a halfway spiritualistic membership in the body of Christ.” This would be a denial of the “reality of the Incarnation.” A further sub-point is the “royal priesthood” tradition, which Fr. John mentions to support the Christological basis of Orthodox ecclesiology. According to biblical and patristic “royal priesthood” teaching, each communing member of the Church who is engaged in the corporate, sacramental defeat of Satan “has his definite liturgy to perform whereby the body is being continuously formed together as a whole and not in parts.”

The thematic axis around which these keen in-sights into the Orthodox conception of sacraments and clergy orbit is the *kenotic* love of Christ. In Fr. John’s presentation of Orthodox theology, Christ is the unifying center. The key to this Christological axis is deification. Accordingly, “Man and His True Life” establishes the *theoric* basis of Orthodox sacramentology and ecclesiology by showing that both are constituted by a concrete unity in Christ’s self-denying love. (Note: *theoric* is from the Greek *theoria* meaning pertaining to glorification or union with the divine light).

Kenotic love is thus a dynamic movement of the whole man into a deeper and deeper unity with God and neighbor. This freedom in Christ is indeed man’s “true life” because it transcends the relative, utilitarian freedom of philosophical abstractions, magical religious rites, and ideological institutions.

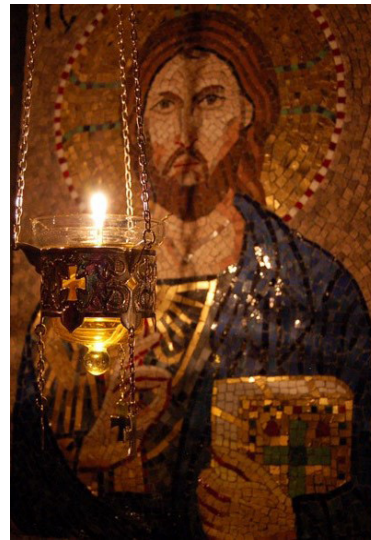


The commemoration of Christ’s saving Passion is at hand, and the new, great spiritual Passover, which is the reward for dispassion and the prelude of the world to come. Lazarus proclaims it in advance by coming back from the depths of Hades and rising from the dead on the fourth day just by voice and command of God, Who has power over life and death.

St. Gregory Palamas

LIFE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

By Fr. Vladimir Anderson, St. John the Almsgiver Mission, Willits, CA. From “Orthodox America” vol. VII, no. 2, August 1986.



In the Orthodox Church services, we often pray for a *Christian ending to our lives, painless, blameless, peaceful, and for a good defense at the dread judgment-seat of Christ*. Fortunate are those who are able so graciously to depart this life. The Church, in Her teachings tries to prepare us for such an end, but we are slow—sometimes even unwilling—pupils. Life in our modern world

is fast-paced and mobile; if we meet with hard times, we can always have hope there will come a change for the better. And therefore we have great difficulty in grasping the concept of eternity, of a changeless destiny which offers no chance of upward mobility.

Imagine, if you will, that you have just been diagnosed as having an incurable blood disease and the doctor has given you a matter of months to live. What is your reaction? Some people set about in a flurry of activity to fulfill the dreams and desires of a lifetime: a trip to Hawaii, dinners in fancy restaurants, golf in Palm Springs... Such a response reflects the pagan attitudes commonly found in our society: “Let us drink and make merry, for tomorrow we die.” Some spend all their remaining energy in seeking, at any and all cost, the prolongation of physical life. They may become angry at the doctors for being helpless, or at God, Who until that time had been comfortably anonymous. The Christian, while he is not likely to rush off in either of these directions, may throw himself into a similar frenzy of activity—of making amends, almsgiving, confession, increased prayer. The very fact that the prospect of death should invite a radical transformation of life magnifies our singular lack of preparedness for the one thing in life which is inevitable.

The Holy Fathers often speak of the need for a constant thought of death. Those Christians who have been able to benefit from a close encounter with death understand the wisdom of this counsel. The proximity of death opens a new perspective on life. Suddenly one is struck by the frailty of life and one’s utter dependence upon God. One of man’s first lessons after the Fall was *dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return*. While often

treated as a poetic image, it acquires a sobering reality in the face of death.

Without the knowledge of Christ and hope in His salvation, the prospect of death can be terrifying. Even a Christian secure in his faith suddenly experiences a quickening fear of God and His judgment. Knowing that *a contrite heart God will not despise*, he begins a thorough examination of his conscience. Are there any sins which, through shame or negligence, have never been confessed? In confession the priest reminds the penitent: *“But if thou shalt conceal anything from me, then shalt thou have the greater sin. Take heed, therefore, lest having come to the physician thou depart unhealed.*

In making peace with God, a person preparing for death is naturally led to make peace with his neighbor. Has he offended anyone? Is he harboring any ill feelings or resentment of wrongs, which will weigh him down on the Day of Judgment? This thought inspires a spirit of forgiveness which, under normal circumstances, is often stifled by pride. But in the face of death and eternity, even longstanding animosities are more easily erased in the desire to meet God with a clean heart.

The imminent prospect of death gives new value to earthly riches as a means towards heavenly gain. It no longer seems necessary to replace the car with a newer or fancier model, and last year’s wardrobe appears perfectly adequate without the addition of the latest fashions. Instead, the Christian living in the face of death may discover in himself a previously unknown generosity in giving alms, in seeking to help the poor.

Time becomes very precious; it is not wasted in frivolous amusements, in sitting for hours before the television. Each and every day is appreciated for what it is—a gift from God. Faced with death, the wise Christian uses his time in preparing for his journey into the next world: inwardly—by intensified prayer, by spiritual reading, and by becoming more closely acquainted with the saints, those who are already citizens of paradise; and outwardly—seizing every opportunity to do good, to spend quality time with family and friends, to visit the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned. How many such opportunities we let slip away, never stopping to think that we may be committing a sin of omission just as deplorable as any sin of commission.

In expectation of death a Christian more readily speaks out in situations when subjects such as premarital sex, homosexuality or abortion are raised, where previously he kept silent out of fear of offending, of appearing “fanatic” or being unwilling to “rock the boat.” Silence is not always “golden.” And he becomes more concerned in seeking the approval of God rather than man. Power, prestige and popularity appear superfluous before the sight of an open grave.

These are but a few ways in which we might want to change our lives if we were given to behold the approach of death. But who are we to assume we shall be granted such a chance to transform ourselves into “real” Christians at death’s door? To most of us death will come unannounced. Will our lamps be trimmed and burning? Let us make use of our imagination—too often the playground of the devil—to see death just around the corner and thereby motivate ourselves to live as though our days were numbered—for indeed, they are.

Let us then keep close to our minds and within our heart the advice by the great saint and teacher of the desert, St. Anthony the Great:

It is well to meditate on the Apostle’s saying: *I die daily*; for if we live every day as if we were dying we shall not sin. And,

Never flag in the pursuit, nor relax your labors, nor say, “we have continued long in the exercise;” but rather, beginning anew each day let us increase our diligence. For the whole of man’s life is exceedingly short, compared with the ages to come, and the promise of eternal life is bought for a small price.



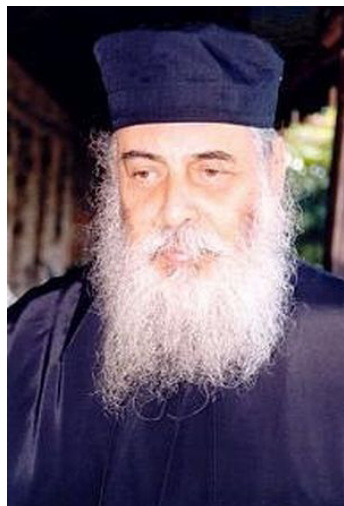
While we cannot see God, there is something we can do to open a way for the eye of our understanding to come to Him. It is certain that we can see now in His servants one whom we can in no way see in Himself. When we see them doing astonishing things, we can be sure that God dwells in their hearts.

In what is immaterial, let us take advantage of immaterial things. None of us can look directly at the rising sun by gazing at its orb. Our eyes are repelled as they strain to see its rays. But we look at mountains bathed in sunlight and see that it has risen. Because we cannot see the Sun of righteousness Himself, let us see the mountains bathed in His brightness, I mean the holy apostles. They shine with virtues and gleam with miracles. The brightness of the risen Sun has poured over them. Since He is invisible Himself, He has made Himself visible to us through them, as if through mountains bathed in light.

St. Gregory the Great

THY CROSS WE WORSHIP, O MASTER!

By Archimandrite George Kapsanis (+2017), previous abbot of the Athonite Grigoriou Monastery, translated 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. 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 round-about 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 redeem-

ing 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.* (Lk 12:50). 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 Œcumenical 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 7 Maccabees, and the 3 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 sufferings.*

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, and 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.

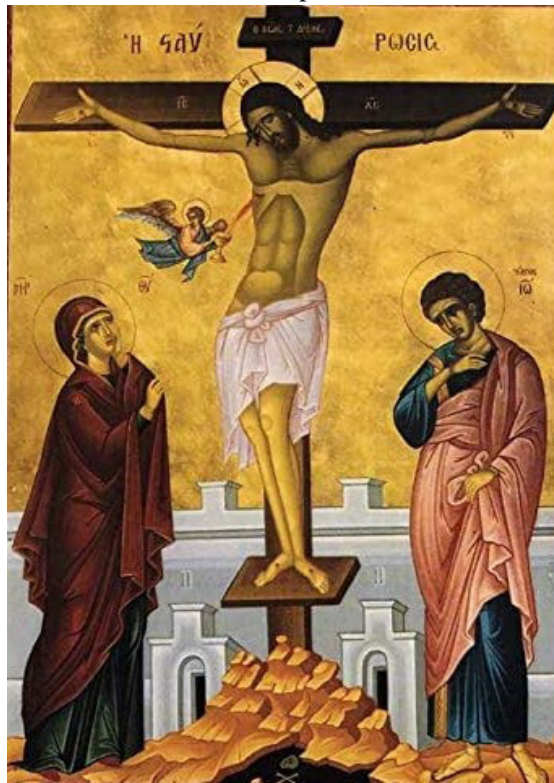
We must die to the world, as St. Paul repeatedly teaches. We must die to the world before Christ can live in us. *I no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). St. Gregory Palamas calls this the first mystery of the Cross: to distance all influences of the world around me which cause 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. And in this manner, 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 Adam-ic nature.

The second method is to forbear the involuntary afflictions of this earthy life courageously and thankfully, according to the Pauline adage: *En panti efxaristeite*. 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 misfortunes 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 antichristian 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 antichristian 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... (cf. Rom 8:18).

Amen.



Regard as free not those whose status makes them outwardly free, but those who are free in their character and conduct. For we should not call men truly free when they are wicked and dissolute, since they are slaves to worldly passions. Freedom and happiness of soul consist in genuine purity and detachment from transitory things.

St. Anthony the Great

THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAY

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



One frequently hears people say: “The Lord, having created man, led him into Paradise and provided him with everything for his enjoyment. After the fall, although man was expelled from Paradise, his capacity for pleasure and the means for pleasure remained: flowers offered the delight of smell, fruits—taste; the starry sky—sight; the singing of birds—hearing. Later,

along the same lines, man invented music. Everything in nature speaks of the goodness of the Creator. There are those, however, who, in spite of God’s good will, want to place restraints everywhere, limitations. They violate nature; they misrepresent God, holding forth a very distorted image.”

A sad state of affairs indeed! And I, having written you in my last letter that even laymen should not shrink from monastic strictness if they want to be genuine Christians, thought that I had convinced everyone and that all your perplexities had been resolved. But what a muddle we have here! Why on earth have you put yourself in such a quandary—as if truth is on their side. You should say to them: “Go ahead, my friends, have fun, amuse yourselves, open wide all the gates of pleasure and delight, and revel at the banquet of this life... No one is holding you back, no one will place any barriers in your way. Live as you want.”

However, you are told, in the words of the Lord, that there are two paths for the sons of men: the narrow path and the broad path, and that the first leads to life, while the latter leads to perdition. Read it for yourself, if you will. Here it is straight from the Gospel: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

If you want to hear, then hear, but if you do not want to hear, then do as you like. This is not some human invention; it is a command of the Lord, nothing less. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*, says the Lord on another occasion, *for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* (Lk 13:24). “Strive,” i.e., hasten, as if you are racing, competing with others to enter this strait and narrow gate, disregarding others, snatching it away from others: “Let me in, let me in!” as if fearful that these gates might close.

Why this is so is not for us to judge. The Lord ordained it this way, and that is that! Yes, and what Lord is this? He,

Who, for our salvation, Himself went ahead of us along this narrow path and, after all manner of suffering, gave His soul to God from the Cross, saying to the crucified thief, *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.* He is, after all, our Saviour! All those who wish to be saved must follow after Him. And to follow after Him is possible only by carrying one’s cross: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* (Mk 8:34). This is the way of all those who desired salvation: apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, saints, and all those who attained salvation and who now inhabit God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem.

So, what is to be done? Certainly, one cannot be saved otherwise when, among those that are saved, there is not one who attained eternal blessedness by any other path. Is it not better to submit to this necessity, even though it may not be that sweet? After all, to suffer eternally is worse. Let those who wish to be saved somehow constrain themselves, and not seek excuses. It is hard, but what can you do? Not without reason is life called a struggle, a *podvig*. As Saint Paul says, *Fight the good fight (podvigom dobrym podvizakhsya—1 Tim 6:12).* As for those who do not wish to submit, they will do as they please. They should know, however, that the various rules and constraints are not man’s invention; they are commands of God.

A word of explanation might be added here. Why is it that this or that constraint is necessary? Why, for example, do we need to fast, why solitude, why so much prayer, etc.? However, I will not go into this. Those who follow the salvific path know how necessary all this is, while those who shun this path would rather not hear about it.

Concerning those skewed interpretations of scripture that you had in your letter, I think I have already written to you. In Paradise, it is true, there were many things that brought man enjoyment, but these constituted but an external adornment of paradisiacal life; they were secondary elements. Man’s primary purpose was not to delight in these but to be in communion with God through the voluntary fulfillment of God’s will. If Paradise had remained man’s dwelling-place, people would certainly have taken pleasure in these externals as well, but they would not have thought anything of it, it would not have been a concern; it would have been a natural adjunct, a shadow of a God-pleasing life.

So you see, even in Paradise, they did not discuss or fuss about pleasures, while we, who have lost Paradise, want to set pleasure as the principal goal of life. If delights could lawfully have been the lot of fallen man, the Lord would not have expelled our forefathers from Paradise. By expelling them, He showed that a life of ease and pleasure does not befit fallen man. As you know, through the fall the entire order of things was changed. To man’s life was added a brief period of earthly existence, full of sorrows and troubles designed to enlighten, correct, and cleanse man, to make him worthy

of eternal enjoyment in a different, eternal paradise. Man's true life comes after the grave, or, more precisely, after his resurrection; while the present life is merely a threshold, a preparation for that future life. It is in the nature of this present life, as ordained by God, to have various external sorrows and misfortunes, and He prescribed for it various strictures as a means of cleansing.

Martyrs were flayed with iron claws, and thereby prepared for Paradise. This is an image of man's present life, in which, through these cleansing restrictions or constraints, like scourges, he is prepared for a blessed eternity! If you can get a man to understand well and to take to heart the brevity of this present life and how much benefit there is in its restrictions and confinements for the future, unending life, he will not only cease to shun them but, on the contrary, he will ask for them and strive for them as after something good and positive. This is how all those proceed who properly understand the meaning of this present life.

The fact that, after his expulsion from Paradise, man was not deprived of all means of pleasure, does not mean that there is no place for constraints in the order of the present life. In reaching for an explanation of this point, there come to mind the words of my dear teacher, Y. K. Amphiteatrov.

One day I was walking with him through a grove, and I asked him in passing, "Why are there such disparities in nature? Here is a lovely flower, and next to it is a stinging nettle or jimsonweed. And the sky: sometimes it is clear and sometimes it is overcast and dreary."

"Silly fellow," he replied. "These disparities are no trifling matter in the economy of God's providence concerning our salvation. The merciful God thereby says to you: It is only right that the sweat never leave your brow; it is your lot to be wearied by toil; but I sometimes give you to taste the sweetness of life, I allow your eyes to fill with light, your brow to be smoothed of furrows, and a smile to play upon your lips, so that you not lose hope and fall into despair. It is only right that the earth bring forth thorns and thistles for you, but I have ordained that it sometimes produce for you an abundance of delights so that you might not lose the assurance that there still exists the possibility of recovering the lost blessedness. It is only right that in the air above your head and all around you should be nothing but storms, thunder, lightning; but you often see bright sun and enjoy the pleasant coolness of morning and the delightful

tranquility of evening—so that you would remember that heaven is not altogether closed for you, that My embrace is always open towards you, and that I am ready to receive you into the heavenly habitations."

This, then, is the reason why certain enjoyments remain in nature, and not so that we might make these crumbs into a life-long party, or build out of these fragments a temple of happiness on earth! But our pleasure-seekers think otherwise. In their opinion, every constraint, every barrier to enjoyment is a violation of man's nature and is contrary to God's will. I have already said that this is not so, that God Himself ordained that man walk the narrow path. That this is in no way a violation of human nature may be understood from the following.

When man fell, he not only fell below his dignity, he also accepted internally some principles foreign to his proper nature, the seeds, as it were, of every kind of evil. Consequently, in fallen man we

must differentiate what is proper to his nature and what is alien to it, although this, too, is found in man. All constraining rules and measures, prescribed and established by God, are exclusively aimed against these alien and evil seeds, in order to crush them, to suffocate them, and thereby to set at liberty man's true nature.

So, constraints are not a violation of nature but are like beneficial tools or means. They are what an operation is for the surgical removal of a malignancy, or a plaster for the drawing out of harmful matter. Our nature is in bondage. By placing various restraints upon us, the Lord wants to free our nature. But we resist: "Do not touch! Do not hedge us in with rules!" And thereby, instead of defending, we calumniate ourselves.

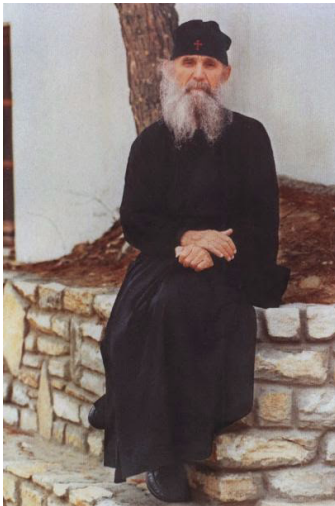
Pleasure-seekers are lost souls. It is not to say that there is no place in life for pleasure; we should accept everything from the hands of God with thanksgiving. At the same time, we should not strive after enjoyments, nor, all the more, rebel against all kinds of restraining precepts. This is not why the Lord Himself prescribed them. Such rebelliousness manifests not only a lack of understanding of the matter in question, but even a militant antitheism. You see where it all leads! But they think lightly of it.

For the present they may be all right, but what will they find in the next world? Straitness and, against their will, a bitter and wretched straitness, for then it will be of no benefit. Lord, have mercy and save us!



THE DIVINE LITURGY

By the blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona and Philotheou (+2019).



The Divine Liturgy, what a splendor indeed! Man has been honored by God in such a way that **He Himself comes down to earth with His Angelic Orders every time there is a Liturgy**, in order to nurture man with His Most Holy Body and His Most Precious Blood! For He has given us everything. Is there anything physical or spiritual, perishable or everlasting, that has not been offered to us? None! Is there anything superior to His Most Holy Body and Blood, which is given to us on a daily basis? There is certainly not. God has enabled man, who is full of soil and dirt, to serve the Divine Liturgy. So priceless is the Divine Love that just a tiny drop exceeds any earthly, physical and secular love.

Adam and Eve's sin was the starting point of all the distressing events that have occurred to this day and of those that will occur until the end of time. Disobedience, like a sperm inside Eve's womb, gave birth to and transmitted physical and spiritual death to all of humanity. Poor Eve, could there have been a way for her to see that "the split second" taste of the fruit would cause such turmoil, thus compelling the Holy Trinity to have a "co-entreaty" so that the one Person of the Life-Giving Trinity would be sent to the world and endure, by the works of His hands, the blows, insults, whipping, spitting as well as all kinds of obscenity and ultimately be hung on the Cross as a curse! *Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.* (Gal 3:13).

The sweet redemption of our Jesus, the light of our troubled souls, His Passion and Life-Giving Resurrection, are re-enacted in every Divine Liturgy through which every sinful soul is delivered. Great indeed is Jesus' love for us! For He took on our human nature and was hung on the Cross, giving us freedom and thus wiping clean all our debts towards our Heavenly Father. And as our beloved Brother He makes us worthy of His co-inheritance which consists of the infinite riches of His Heavenly Father. And if during the time when the Law, which existed before Christ, had overshadowed things, and the blood of oxen and goats as well as a calf's embers purified those who had partaken of them, **how much more will Christ's Most Holy Blood, which is partaken from the Holy**

Altar of the Holy Churches of God, cleanse us from sin and warm up our souls in order to receive the divine love of our most sweet Jesus. The Lamb which was slaughtered for our personal salvation will rinse us with His Most Precious Blood from the filth of our sins and give us eternal rest.

In any case, we owe it to ourselves to become partakers of this heavenly banquet which offers us this most wonderful Mystery of the Holy Altar. **Once inside the church, we should stand in fear and devoutness, since our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy angels are present. Those who are attentive and devout are filled with grace and blessings; however, those who are inattentive are condemned, being unworthy.**

On the one hand, the Angels serve the Divine Liturgy, and on the other, the faithful come to church in order to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ—*Receive the Body of Christ and taste the Fountain of Immortality*—so that they will live in Christ and not perish in sin. Thus, *let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* (1 Cor 11:28-29).

For instance, when someone wants to appear before a king, it takes him days to get ready, in terms of general preparation, cleanliness, speech, manner, ethos, etc., so that he would succeed in drawing the king's compassion and, in this way, have his desirable request granted. Even though there is no comparison as far as the two different kings are concerned, **each believer should prior to Holy Communion prepare oneself in order to obtain divine mercy and forgiveness.** Those who appear before a secular king are, most of the time, adorned by iniquity, flattery, pretense as well as deceit, in order to obtain that which is desired; nevertheless, **the Christian believer who appears before the King of kings who in turn keeps an eye on the inner person must be adorned by holiness, humility and the sheer ethos of the soul that is more precious than lost gold.**

The Lord created His Church on earth as a Bride, so that She would intercede for His children. **He left us the Great Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, in order to be cleansed, become holy and thus become one with God.** He has invited us all; some in their childhood, others in their middle as well as old age. As He is Good, He took hold of us like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, in order to make us partakers of His divine Kingdom. **Nothing repelled Him—no ulcer, no wound, no illness, not even the deformity of spiritual phenomena which may characterize our soul.** As a father He accepted us, as a mother He breast-fed us, and as an unmercenary doctor He took care of us and clothed us in the garment of adoption, with grace ignoring the heavy debt of our

trespasses. We thus owe Him infinite love and worship. Love should remain in the heart like a life-giving source, gushing forth springs of communion wine and streams of divine eros.

We should be partakers of the Sacrifice of the Slaughtered Lamb as often as we can, and as long as we are free to do so, since Holy Communion is a great aid for the believer which in turn helps him to fight sin. Also, we should approach this divine Mystery in a spirit of *compunction, crushed hearts, and a good sense of our sins.* Great is the mercy of God Who condescends to enter into us; not abhorring the multitude of our sins. Nonetheless, due to His infinite love and affection, we are sanctified, and in this way we are made worthy to become His children and co-heirs of His Kingdom. Hence, **let us prepare with a pure conscience aiming at the fortification of our senses, and in chastity let us enter along with the Holy Apostles to the Mystical Supper and partake of our sweet Jesus** so that He should dwell with us unto the infinite ages of ages.

Unworthy as I am, I serve my Lord. A ministry rendered that is holy and mighty. Everyday I offer God a well-pleasing sacrifice, the Lamb of God, Immaculate to His Immaculate Father and God, in order that He might be merciful for the things with which we sadden the most good God. He whom we cause grief and Who sacrificed His only begotten Son. My God, Your most beloved Son for our sake! And who are we to deserve this ultimate sacrifice! *For being enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.* (Rom 5:10).

The most unworthy of all,

‡Father Ephraim



ON FORCEFULNESS, COURAGE, AND SELF-DENIAL

By the blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona and Philotheou (+2019), from "Counsels from the Holy Mountain from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim."

I pray that you become fighters in a glorious battle whose victorious outcome the angelic powers will applaud, for we have the same Master, the same abode in the heavens; in the very same abundant light shall we live the eternal, blissful life—a life without end or evening, a truly divine day!

The Apostle of the Gentiles cried out in a stentorian voice: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness?* (Rom 8:35). I am

convinced that no one is able to separate us from the love of Christ when our longing burns like a furnace sevenfold. Yes, this is how I pray that you will become, so that He may be glorified—He Who for our sake became the object of insults, reproaches, slappings and death—even death on a cross!

Do not despair when you fall into temptations and afflictions. Do not think that God has abandoned us because of our sins. No, but He is chastising us in order to teach us wisdom. He does not want us to be ignoramuses, but wise in divine wisdom.

If we are not fought against, how will it show that we are soldiers of Christ? A soldier might get wounded in battle, but this does not mean that he has been defeated. Even if we are defeated, once again we shall rise and fight.

Of course, in the beginning of our calling, when we have chosen a life of chaste dedication to our Jesus, we are unable to meet His requirements because, as we know, there is another law within us which wars against the law of God and the lifestyle we have chosen, and it fights to separate us from the love of our Jesus. However, this fight does not mean that we are not worthy of our calling, but rather the fight to abolish the law of sin within us will render us more fervent in our love for Christ. For if it were possible to acquire the love of Christ without a struggle, our own will would have no merit, since we would gain it without a struggle.

So this is why we shall be rewarded when, despite all the opposition caused by the love of the world, we obtain the life-giving love of God, and when, despite the attraction of sin, we stand as firm towers of virtue!

Clouds will rise up against our goal, threatening destruction and havoc; they will try to frighten and demoralize us with their thunder. But take courage and fear not; *through many tribulations and trials shall we reach the gates of the kingdom of heaven!* (Acts 14:22).

The martyrs struggled with faith and complete and self-denial, and thus they *obtained promises* (Heb 11:33) and crowns of eternal glory! Thus, we too, through faith in our Christ and complete self-denial, shall be able to prevail by His grace.

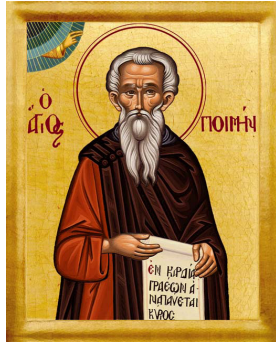
Our inner courage must reach the point of saying with resolution: “Even if I am put to death, I will not take a single step away from my faith in Christ Who has called me. I will give up my life for Christ, but not one inch of concession will I concede to sin.”

If our inner courage boasts in this manner, we may hope that victory, by the grace of God, will be ours. Say the prayer fervently; struggle mightily; abstain; pray; wear simple, humble clothes; read spiritual books; get up at night and pray in order to be warmed and become as sturdy as a rock. This is also, how I, the wretch, used to struggle when I was still in the world; I secretly got up at night and did *metanoias*; I prayed our Panaghia miraculously intervened for me, the lowly one.

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The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

THE JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

By George Papazahos, professor of Cardiology at the University of Athens.

The following story was told by the cardiologist of Elder Porphyrios, Dr. George Papazahos, when he visited the Elder in his cell one Bright Tuesday following Pascha.

I went to see him as a doctor. After the cardiological examination and the usual cardiogram, he asked that I not leave.

I sat on the stool near his bed. His face was shining with joy. He asked me:

“Do you know the *troparion* that begins, *We celebrate the slaying of death...*”

“Yes Elder, I know it.”

“Chant it.”

I began to chant it quickly. *We celebrate the slaying of death, the destroying of hell, the beginning of another way of life that is eternal. And leaping for joy, we sing a hymn to the Cause, the only blessed and most glorious God of our fathers.*”

“Did you understand it?”

“Of course I understood.” I thought he was asking me about its interpretation.

He made a sudden movement with his hand and told me:

“You understood nothing, George my man! You said it quickly like a chanter in a hurry. Listen to what awesome things are said in this hymn: Through Christ and His resurrection, we do not get across a river, a gorge, a canal, a lake, or even the Red Sea. We have moved across an abyss that no human being could cross on his own. Ages came and went

with the world waiting for this Pascha, for this passage. Our Christ passed from death to life! That’s why today *we celebrate the slaying of death, the destroying of hell*. Death is no more. We celebrate today *the beginning of another way of life that is eternal*, a life with Him.

He spoke with enthusiasm and conviction. He was moved. He paused for a moment then continued more loudly:

“Now chaos, death, and hades do not exist. Now there is all joy, thanks to the Resurrection of our Christ. Together with Him human nature was resurrected. Now we can be resurrected and live eternally near Him. What happiness is in the Resurrection! ‘And leaping for joy, we celebrate the Cause.’ Have you ever seen the little goats now in the Spring who jump on the grass? They eat a little from their mother and begin to jump again? This is what it means to leap – to jump. This is how we should also jump for unspeakable joy at the Resurrection of our Lord and our own.”

He stopped speaking again. I breathed in a joyous atmosphere. He continued:

“Can I give you some advice? In your every sorrow, in your every failure, concentrate for a moment within yourself and say this hymn slowly-slowly. You will see that the greatest thing in your life – and in the life of the whole world – happened. The Resurrection of Christ, our salvation. And you will realize that everything that is upside down which is occurring will seem to you very small to spoil your mood.”

He squeezed my hand saying:

“I pray that you leap for joy, looking at the chaos behind you from which the Risen Christ crossed you over, ‘the only blessed of our fathers’. Now chant *Christ is Risen!*”

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]

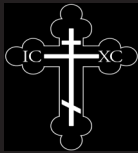
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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

In This Issue:

- Holy Zeal (p. 4)
- The Thorns of Apostasy (p. 7)
- Burning Love for God (p. 9)
- Concerning the Vaccines (p. 10)
- An Answer to America's Problems (p. 21)
- De-mystifying the Covid Vaccine (p. 22)
- St. Luke's Last Will & Testament (p. 25)
- Traitors Inside the Church (p. 28)
- New Heresies (p. 30)



- Ἀλλαγὴ Σωμάτων κατὰ τὴν 2α Παρουσία (σελ. 13)
- Ὁ Διωγμὸς τῶν Πιστῶν καὶ ἡ Προδοσία τῆς Πίστεως (σελ. 14)
- Ἡ Εὐλογία Ἀνησυχία Ἐνδὸς Γέροντα (σελ. 18)
- Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Παπισμὸς (σελ. 19)



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THE PATH TO OUR SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

By Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos.

The most important work of the Church is to cure man. Therefore the Orthodox Church is a hospital, an infirmary of the soul. This does not mean that the Church disregards other domains of pastoral activity, since she aims at the whole of man, consisting of both body and soul. She cares indeed for the physical, economic and social problems as well; yet the main weight of her pastoral service is put on the soul's therapy, for when man's soul is cured then many other intractable problems are solved.

Some people accuse the Orthodox Church of not being very much involved in social problems. However, the Church does care about all matters which concern man. This is evident in the content of her prayers during worship services as well as in the work and teaching of the Holy Fathers. But just as a medical Hospital is primarily interested in the treatment of the body—and through this therapy it gets involved with the rest of a person's problems—so it is in the Orthodox Church. She cures the core of human personality and through this, she heals the whole person. That is why even during times of social upheavals, when all governmental mechanisms are virtually brought to a halt—even peoples' external freedoms are disrupted—the Church maintains its work: to treat and cure the person.

Healing of man's personality is in fact his progress toward perfection which is actually identified as *theosis*, for in patristic theology *theosis* and perfec-

tion are synonymous terms. And this therapy is absolutely necessary, because man's fall, effected in the person of Adam, constitutes the sickness of man's nature.

In Paradise, before the Fall, Adam was in a state of *theoria* (vision) of God. The study of the book of Genesis reveals that Adam was in communion with God; however it was necessary for him to remain in that state, by virtue of his voluntary struggle, in order for him to become more stabilized and reach perfect communion and union with Him. St. John of Damascus describes this state of primordial "justice" characteristically. Adam was purified and nourished at the same time by the vision of God. His *nous* was illumined, and this signifies above all that he was a temple of the Holy Spirit, and was experiencing unceasing remembrance of God.

"Original" sin consists of the darkening of the *nous* and the loss of communion with God. This, of course, had other repercussions, as well: man was clothed in the fleshly garments of decay and mortality. The *nous* experienced a deep darkness. In other words, man lost the *illumination* of his *nous*; it became impure, impassioned and his body bore corruption and mortality. Thus, from the day of our birth, we bear within us corruption and death: a human life is brought into the world bound for death. Hence, because of the fall we experience universal malady. Both soul and body are sick and naturally, since man is the summation of all creation,—the microcosmos within the megacosmos—corruption also befell all of creation.

My mind is wounded, my body has grown feeble, my spirit is sick, my speech has lost its power, my life is dead; then end is at the door. What shalt thou do,

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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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then, miserable soul, when the Judge comes to examine thy deeds? (Great Canon).

In fact, when we speak of original sin and its consequences, we mean three things: first, the malfunction of the *nous*, since the *nous* ceased to work properly; secondly, the identification of the *nous* with reason (and to a certain extent, deification of reason) and thirdly the *nous*' enslavement to the passions, anxiety and the conditions of the environment. And this constitutes man's real death.

He experiences total disorganization; his inner self is deadened—his *nous* is overcome by darkness. And just as when the eye of the body is hurt, the whole body is obscure, so also when the eye of the soul—the *nous*—suffers blindness, the spiritual self as a whole becomes sick. It falls into the deepest darkness. This is what the Lord is referring, when He says: *If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!* (Mt 6:23).

In addition to the disruption of the soul's entire inner workings, original sin resulted also in the disorganization of man outwardly. He now confronts his fellow-men, God, the world and all of creation in a different way. The *nous* is unable to encounter God; so reason undertakes the effort. Thus idols of God are created leading to pagan religions and even heretical deviations.

Incapable of seeing man as an image of God, the *nous* encounters him under the influence of the passions. He

ambitiously exploits his fellow-man, through his love of pleasure and material gain. He regards him as a vessel or instrument of pleasure; at the same time he idolizes all creation, which is what the Apostle Paul describes in his Epistle to the Romans: *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* (Rom 1:22-23).

Therefore man needs to be cured, that is to be purified,



to reach the *illumination* of the *nous*—Adam's state before the Fall—and then attain *theosis*. This is achieved precisely through Christ's Incarnation and the entire work of the Divine Economy and of the Church. It is within this frame of reference we must see many liturgical texts according to which Christ is characterised a Physician and Healer of souls and bodies. Moreover, in the

same framework various patristic texts should be studied, where it is apparent that **the work of Christ is first and foremost a therapeutic one.**

After the Fall man needed a cure. This was effected by the Incarnation of Christ and ever since then it has been the work of the Church. She cures and is curing man; she primarily cures his ailing personality—his *nous* and heart. All the Fathers of the Church exhort men to seek to be cured. Man is cured by the energy of God whose source is uncreated and revealed *in the person of Jesus Christ*. Christ's

energy, from which comes man's cure, is granted freely, and for this reason is called divine grace. Therefore, whether we say uncreated energy or divine grace makes no difference; we mean the same thing. The Apostle Paul writes: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God.* (Eph 2:8).

Living within the Church by grace, man must first cleanse his heart of the passions; attain the *illumination* of the *nous*—Adam's state before the Fall—and then ascend to *theosis*, which constitutes man's communion and union with God and is identified with salvation. These are the steps of spiritual perfection—the **foundations of Orthodox spirituality**.

Yet a few things about the divine grace need to be said before we see the stages of spiritual perfection—the method and way of man's therapy—for it is closely connected with *purification, illumination, and theosis*.

In Orthodox spirituality *purification, illumination, and theosis* are not stages of anthropocentric activity, but rather are results of the uncreated energy of God. When the divine grace (energy of God) purifies man from passions, it is called purifying; when it illumines his nous it is called illuminating; and when it deifies man it is called deifying. The same grace and energy of God is given various names according to its effects.

Throughout all patristic tradition the Fathers allude to the three stages of spiritual perfection as the three degrees of one's cure. St. Dionysios the Areopagite makes mention of *purification, illumination and perfection*. St. Gregory of Nyssa also makes use of the same distinction. St. Maximos the Confessor refers, as well, to practical philosophy (*purification*), natural *theoria* (*illumination*) and mystical theology (*theosis*). St. Symeon the New Theologian, in his writings divides certain chapters into practical, gnostic, and theological.

In all of Orthodox Tradition these three stages of perfection are frequently mentioned. In this way man is cured and experiences Holy Tradition; he becomes *Tradition* and creates *Tradition*. He is a bearer of *Tradition*. Distinctive is the subtitle of Philokalia which is the work of St. Nicodemos, of the Holy Mountain and of St. Makarios, bishop of Corinth. In this work which is a compilation of the writings of the Holy Fathers [from the 4th to the 15th centuries], how man cures his *nous* by going through the three stages of spiritual life is discussed. And it is known that the Philokalia, which contains the complete method of cure for humans is a fundamental manual of the spiritual life.

† † †

The word *nous* has various uses in Patristic teaching. It indicates either the soul or the heart or even an energy of the soul. Yet, the *nous* is mainly the eye of the soul; the purest part of the soul; the highest attention. It is also called noetic energy and it is not identified with reason.

WE MUST TRUST IN GOD, NOT IN OURSELVES

By monk Antiochos.

Many people brag and boast, "My hands put food on the table for me and my family ... With my hands, I can support myself."

Such people who trust in their own strength truly think vainly, and speak vanity. They indeed have forgotten God Who created them, and Who bestows health and food to all living things. For anyone who has distanced himself from God and attributes his accomplishments to his own strength suffers from pride. Just as a person who wants to hang from a spider's web comes crashing to the ground, similarly, he who trusts in his own strength and power also suffers a hard fall.

Such people are unaware of Job's declaration: *And if my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God that is above.* (Job 31:27-28).

The Ecclesiastes also affirms: *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 of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.* (Ooh 9:11). He also adds: *Wisdom is better than weapons of war. But one sinner destroyeth much good.* (Ooh 9:18).

Even the Lord gave the following counsel to His disciples: *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* (Jn 15:4-5).

This is appropriate, for He is the Light and the Life of all people: *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (Jn 1:3).

To Him belongs the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.
the uncreated light



Neither the spoken word nor my poor written word can praise and glorify the One who transcends all praise, Who transcends all speech. If, in effect, that which is being fulfilled in me, the prodigal child, is unutterable, inexpressible, how would the One, Who is the giver and author of it, how, tell me, would He need to receive praise or glory from us? No, He Who possesses glory cannot receive glory, no more than this sun which we contemplate in the heavens can be illumined or could reflect light.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

HOLY ZEAL

Source: "The Orthodox Word," May-June 1975 (issue no. 62); originally translated from Saint Elias Publications "Faith and Life," no. 10, 1975.

I am come to send fire on the earth. and what will I, but that it be already kindled?

[Luke 12:49]

† † †

The chief thing in Christianity, according to the clear teaching of the Word of God, is the fire of Divine zeal, zeal for God and His glory—the holy zeal which alone is able to inspire man in labors and struggles pleasing to God, and without which there is no authentic spiritual life and there is not and cannot be any true Christianity. Without this holy zeal Christians are "Christians" in name only: they only "have a name that they live," but in reality "they are dead," as was said to the holy Seer of Mysteries John (*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.* Rev 3:1). True spiritual zeal is expressed, first of all, in zeal for God's glory, which is taught us in the words of the Lord's Prayer which stand at its very beginning: *Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Those who are zealous for God's glory themselves glorify God also in the same way, and therefore they cannot, of course, endure with indifference when in their presence, in some way or other, the name of God is blasphemed or holy things are mocked. Being zealous for God, they sincerely strive to please God themselves and serve Him alone with all the power of their being, and they are ready to forget themselves all the way to sacrificing their very life in order to bring all men to the pleasing and the service of God. They cannot calmly listen to blasphemy, and therefore they cannot support communion with and have friendship with blasphemers and mockers of the Name of God and despisers of holy things.

A striking and extremely clear example of such fiery zeal for God's glory comes to us from the depths of antiquity of the Old Testament in a great Prophet of God, the flaming Elias, who grieved in soul when he saw the apostasy from God of his people, led by the impious King Ahab, who introduced into Israel the pagan worship of Baal in place

of the true God. *I have been very jealous for the Lord God Almighty*—thus did he exclaim many times, expressing his grief—*because the children of Israel have forsaken Thee: they have dug down Thine altars, and have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I only am left, and they seek my life to take it.* (1 Kgs 19:10).

And behold, this holy zeal aroused him, by the power of the grace of God which reposed on him, as a chastisement of Israel which had apostatized from God, to *close heaven* (1 Kgs 17:1, 18:42-45; Jas 5:17-18), so that there was neither rain nor dew for three years and six months. This same zeal later aroused Elias to *slay the false prophets and priests of Baal*, after the miraculous descent of the fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, so that these deceivers might no longer turn the sons of Israel away from the true worship of God (1 Kgs 18:40).

By the power of the same Divine zeal, St. Elias brought down fire from heaven, which burned the captains and their fifties which had been sent by the king to seize him (2 Kgs 1:9-14).



That all this was in reality holy zeal which was pleasing to God is testified to by the fact that the Holy Prophet Elias did not die the usual death of all men, but was miraculously raised up to heaven *in a chariot of fire*, as if signifying his authentically fiery zeal for God. (2 Kgs 2:10-12).

But even then, in the severe Old Testament, the Lord Himself showed to His true servant that one can have recourse to such severe measures only in extreme cases, for the Lord was not in the great and strong wind *rending the mountains and crushing the rocks*, and not in the earthquake, and not in the fire, but in the voice of a gentle breeze (1 Kings 19:11-12).

This is why, when James and John, who were especially fervent in their zeal for the glory of their Divine Teacher, wished to bring down fire from heaven, imitating the Holy Prophet Elias, so as to punish the Samaritans who did not desire to receive him when He was walking through the Samaritan village to Jerusalem, the Lord forbade them to do this, saying: *Ye know not of what spirit ye are, for the Son of Man came not to destroy the souls of men, but to save.* (Lk 9:55-56).

And nevertheless, (let immoderate lovers of peace pay heed!), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who said, *Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29), found it sometimes necessary to manifest great strictness and have

recourse to severe measures, teaching us also by this very fact, that meekness and humility do not mean spinelessness and should not yield before manifest evil, and that a true Christian should be far from sugar-sweet sentimentality and should not step away in the face of evil which presumptuously raises its head, but should always be uncompromising towards evil, fighting with it by all measures and means available to him, in order decisively to cut off the spread and strengthening of evil among men.

Let us recall with what harsh accusatory words the Lord addressed the spiritual leaders of the Hebrew people, the scribes and Pharisees, condemning them for hypocrisy and lawlessness: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* and threatening them with God's judgment (Mt 23:29).

And when words turned out to be insufficient, He applied action against the lawless ones in very deed. Thus, finding that in the Temple they were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and money-changers were sitting, when He had made as it were a scourge of little cords, *and He cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves.* (Jn 2:14-15; Mt 21:12-13). And we know many other examples from sacred and Church history when mere words of persuasion turned out to be insufficient; and in order to cut off evil it was necessary to have recourse to more severe measures and decisive acts.

But it is essential that in such cases there should really be in a person only pure and holy zeal for God's glory, without any admixture of self-love or any other strivings of human passions which only hide themselves behind a supposedly holy zeal for God!

In the history of the Church, the great hierarch of Christ, Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, whose memory we celebrate on December 6th according to our Orthodox calendar, has become glorious by just such an authentically holy zeal, with a decisive irreconcilability towards evil. Who does not know this wondrous hierarch of Christ? The most characteristic feature of St. Nicholas, which has given him such glory, is his extraordinary Christian mercy: the simple Russian people usually call him *Nicholas the Merciful*, a title based on the facts of his life and the numberless cases of his help to men.

But once this great hierarch, so glorious for his mercy toward his neighbor, performed an act which disturbed many and continues to disturb them even now, even though its authenticity is witnessed by the Church tradition contained in our iconography and Divine services.

According to tradition, St. Nicholas took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, which brought forth a condemnation of the heretic Arius, who denied the Divinity of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God. During the disputes which occurred in connection with this,

St. Nicholas could not listen with indifference to the blasphemous speeches of the arrogant heretic Arius, possessed by pride, who demeaned the Divine dignity of the Son of God, and before the whole Council he struck him in the face with his hand. This evoked such a general consternation that the Fathers of the Council decreed that the bold hierarch be deprived of hierarchical rank. But in that very night they were made to understand by a wondrous vision: they saw how the Lord Jesus Christ gave St. Nicholas His Holy Gospel, and the Most Pure Mother of God placed upon his shoulders the episcopal *omophorion*. And then they understood that St. Nicholas was guided in his act not by any evil, passionately sinful motives, but solely by pure, holy zeal for God's glory. And they forgave the hierarch, abrogating their sentence against him.

By citing such a picturesque example, we do not in the least wish to say that every one of us can or should follow this example literally; for this one must be himself just as great a holy hierarch as St. Nicholas. But this should absolutely convince us that we do not dare to remain indifferent or be unconcerned about the manifestations of evil in the world, especially when the matter is one of God's glory, of our Holy Faith and Church. Here we must show ourselves to be completely uncompromising, and we do not dare enter into any sort of cunning compromises or any reconciliation, even purely outward, or into any kind whatever of agreement with evil.

To our personal enemies, according to Christ's commandment, we must forgive everything, but with the enemies of God we cannot have peace! Friendship with the enemies of God makes us ourselves the enemies of God; this is a betrayal and treason towards God, under whatever well-seeming pretexts it might be done, and here no kind of cunning or skillful self-justification can help us!

It is interesting to note how displeasing this act of St. Nicholas is to all the contemporary consenters to evil, these propagandists of a false "Christian love" which is prepared to be reconciled not only with heretics, persecutors of the Faith and the Church, but even with the devil himself, in the name of "universal love" and "the union of all"—slogans which have become so fashionable in our days. For the sake of this, these consenters strive even to refute the very fact of the participation of St. Nicholas in the First Ecumenical Council, even though this fact is accepted by our Holy Church and therefore must be respected by all of us as reliable.

All of this happens, of course, because among contemporary people, even those who call themselves "Christians," there is no longer an authentic holy zeal for God and His glory, there is no zeal for Christ our Savior, zeal for the Holy Church and for every holy thing of God. In place of this there prevails a luke-warm indifference, an indifferent

attitude to everything except one's own earthly well-being, with a forgetfulness of the just judgment of God which unfailingly awaits all of us, and of the eternity which will be revealed after death.

And without this holy zeal, as we emphasized at the beginning, there is no true Christianity, no authentic spiritual life—a true life in Christ. That is why this has been replaced now by all kinds of cheap surrogates, at times quite low ones, which however often answer to the tastes and attitudes of contemporary man. And therefore such pseudo-Christians, skillfully covering up their spiritual emptiness by hypocrisy, often have great success in contemporary society, from which authentic spirituality has been rinsed out; while authentic zealots of God's glory are despised and persecuted as "difficult people," "intolerant fanatics," "people who are behind the times."

And thus even now before our eyes is occurring the "winnowing"—some will remain with Christ to the end, and some will easily and naturally join the camp of His opponent, Antichrist. This shall be especially exemplified when the hour of threatening trials will come for our faith, when precisely it will be necessary to show in all its fullness the whole power of our holy zeal, which is abhorred by many as "fanaticism."

But at the same time one should not forget that, besides true holy zeal, there is also a 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.

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 a party politics like that which plays the leading role in political struggles. There can never be any place for such false zeal in spiritual life, in public church life; nevertheless, it is unfortunately often encountered in our time and is a chief instigator of every imaginable quarrel and disturbance in the Church. The managers and instigators of such quarrel 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!

And so, the choice is before us: are we with Christ or Antichrist?

The time is near (Rev 22:10)—thus did even the holy Apostles warn us Christians. And if it was "near" then, in Apostolic times, how much "nearer" has it become now,

in our ominous days of manifest apostasy from Christ and persecution against our Holy Faith and Church?!

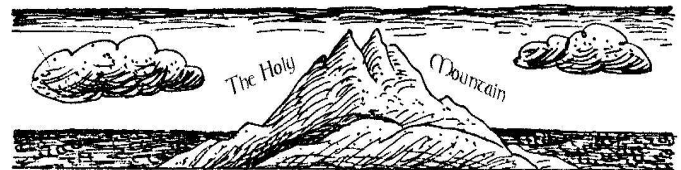
And if we firmly resolve in these fateful days to remain with Christ, not in words only but in deeds as well, it is absolutely indispensable right now, without putting it off, to break off every bond of friendship, every form of communion with the servants of the approaching Antichrist, who has enlisted so many of them in the contemporary world, under lying pretexts of "universal peace" and "prosperity"; and especially must one free oneself unconditionally from every subservience to them and dependence on them, even if this might be bound up with detriment to our earthly well-being or even with danger for our earthly life itself.

Eternity is more important than our brief existence on earth, and it is precisely for it that we must prepare ourselves!

And therefore, **only holy zeal for God, for Christ, without any admixture of any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning politics, must guide us in all deeds and actions.** Otherwise, a stern sentence threatens us: *Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.* (Rev 3:16).

Be zealous, therefore, and repent! (Rev 3:19).

Amen.



Guard yourself from thoughts, which appear holy and inflame an unreasonable zeal for themselves, of which the Lord speaks allegorically: *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits.* (Mt 7:15-16). Their fruit is the languishing and breaking of the spirit. Know that everything which draws you away from humility and from inner peace and quiet, however beautiful it may seem, is nothing but false prophets who, under the cover of sheep's clothing, that is, of a hypocritical zeal to do good to their neighbors without discrimination, are in truth ravening wolves who steal you of your humility, peace and quiet, so necessary to every man who desires steady progress in spiritual life.

From "Unseen Warfare," pg. 261

Men that seem worthy of confidence, yet teach strange doctrines, must not upset you. Stand firm, like an anvil under the hammer. It is like a great athlete to take blows and yet win the fight. For God's sake above all we must endure everything, so that God, in turn, may endure us. Increase your zeal. Read the signs of the times. Look for Him Who is above all time—the Timeless, the Invisible, Who for our sake became visible, the Impassible, Who became subject to suffering on our account and for our sake endured everything."

St. Ignatius of Antioch

THE THORNS OF APOSTASY

By Fr. Zechariah Lynch, from "The Inkless Pen," October 19, 2020.

And that which fell into the thorns, these are the ones who heard, and while they are going on their way, they being choked by the cares and wealth and pleasures of life, and do not bring forth fruit to perfection.

[Lk 8:14]

† † †

In another place our Lord says a similar thing, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Mt 6:21). If the heart is preoccupied with material, passing, things, then it will labor with all its might to preserve them. For the materialized heart, all that exists is physical existence. The preservation of material existence becomes the primary goal of the material-man; indeed it becomes the all-encompassing driving factor.

The fleeting pleasures of mortal life are very seductive and addictive. It is not without reason the modern man, mostly in the "Western" world, has become satiated on pleasures.

He grows ever more numb to old pleasures and tumbles forward seeking new and more tantalizing ones. And the powers that feed this addiction increase relentlessly.

Yet, even a more benign comfort and dependency on pleasure is potentially deadly to the spirit. All these pleasures have the potential to act as chains which will keep a person bound and spiritually impotent. There is a very healthy and balanced enjoyment of earthly life, which in the Christian sense is always framed in the context of Eternity. The root ailment of modernity is that it takes the passing nature of material pleasure to be the end-all of human existence. It perverts something good. A Christian should live in thankful enjoyment to God for all the *fruits of the earth* that are His most gracious gifts to His creature man. (It bears noting here, I am addressing a state of the heart. Wealth or poverty in and of themselves carry no vice or virtue.)

St. Seraphim of Vyritsa, speaking on the days near the end, teaches: *The time will come when there will be no persecution, but money and the attractions of this world will draw people away from God and many more souls will perish than during the period of open militant atheism. On the one hand, they will raise up crosses and gild cupolas, but on the other hand, the kingdom of lies and evil will come. The True Church will always be persecuted. Salvation will only be possible through*

sorrows and illness, persecutions will take on a very refined and unpredictable character. It will be terrible to live to those times.

The refined and unpredictable character quite possibly indicates the fact that humanity's addiction to pleasure and comfort will be used as a strong mechanism for control. Few will be ready to sacrifice the comforts of the times. Why? Because for them these material things are truly all they have.

Moreover, for Christians it may well be that few will be willing to sacrifice physical comfort so as to hold to Truth. God understands after all. He doesn't want us to be fanatics. Christians will be unwilling to sacrifice for Truth because they have been cultivated in a field of thorns. It will just seem like "normal" Christian living.

The message of *repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand* has been supplanted by the message of "let us build an earthly kingdom of well-being for all humanity." The health and salvation of the soul have been subordinated to the physical preservation and well-being of the flesh and its desires.

The Truth of the Gospel is no longer an all-encompassing eternal standard for the lives of men. Rather, it has been beat back to the realm of the "individual" and what seems good to him. Thus, a false separation has taken place. The needs of mankind have been compartmentalized into the strictly religious, which is viewed in subjective terms, and the socio-political.

It is the latter that is given preeminence in the modern world because it, seemingly, tends the physical needs of man.

Since for modern man the material is the only "real," that which tends to his material cravings and desires is made divine. **Humanity never outgrows idolatry, it only becomes more sophisticated.** Man will always pinch incense on the altar of the gods of physical comfort.

In such a mindset, Christianity, specifically Orthodoxy, becomes a set of predominately outward rites which may be modified and adapted to meet the "needs of men." Truth may be sacrificed for the "greater good" of the physical well-being of humanity. It is, thus, easily molded to promote the gospel of the times, the preeminence of the physical well-being of man in the world. At this point serving as a minister, a priest, becomes just a profession.

Yet if the Church is only an institution primarily concerned with physical well-being, then it is indeed useless



and is sealing its fate as being obsolete. For there are plenty of other organizations that tend to material well-being in a far superior manner.

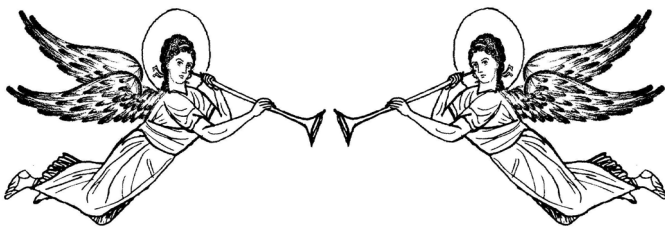
It is precisely the Revealed Truth, which is the essential reality of true Christianity, that guarantees its eternal relevance. Once these treasures are sacrificed in the name of mortal material existence then it truly becomes savorless salt.

In some sense, as “western” Christians, we stand in the most dire of positions, saturated as we are with physical “comforts and pleasures.” We are indeed to be pitied the most! Is our “standard of Western living” simply a prison in which we have become spiritually anemic? Will it be the means by which we softly accept the pillaging of the treasures of faith so to at least maintain external structures?

In a sobering article written in the 20th century during the crisis of Communism entitled “The Epoch of Apostasy,” the author, Pr. Boris Molchanov makes this prophetic observation: *The situation is completely different in the West, where people are fully and solely immersed in their material interests. This is leading people unto a total indifference towards faith and submerging them into spiritual blindness. This doesn't allow them to see the tortuous path, which leads towards the Antichrist. God's grace is departing from the bustling and materialistic masses and thus they will fall.*

And so the great danger of the thorns. Those who grow there will believe that such a place is indeed “Christianity.” In reality, all fruit is choked out and the spiritual life begins to die away. “Christianity” becomes indifferentism; as such it begins to *preach another Christ*. (cf. Gal 1:6).

May we of the “West” examine our hearts most diligently. If we find there thorns growing in abundance may we, by the grace of God, begin the labor of weeding them out. *Keep your heart with all watchfulness* (Prov 4:22-23), *honest and good ... held fast in patience*. (cf. Lk 8:15).



The Word of God, the Maker of all things, conquering Satan by means of human nature, and showing him to be apostate, has put him in the power of man. For He says, *Behold, I confer upon you the power of treading upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy*. (Lk 10:19), in order that, as he obtained dominion over man by apostasy, so his apostasy might be deprived of power by means of man turning back again to God.

St. Irenaeus

PROPER ORTHODOX PRIESTLY ATTIRE AND APPEARANCE ACCORDING TO THE SAINTS

From “Orthodox Ethos,” <https://orthodoxethos.com/>.



Nor may men destroy the hair of their beards, and unnaturally change the form of a man. For the law says: *You shall not mar your beards*. (Lev 19:27).

Apostolic Constitutions

Priests shouldn't cut their hair... This is because, when the Holy Spirit descends during ordination, the priest is sanctified; even his hair is sanctified... Their nails also would they gather.

St. Iakovos of Evia

I once met a young archimandrite wearing laymen's clothing at an airport. He was going abroad and introduced himself, “I am Father so-and-so,” he said. “Where is your cassock?” was my answer. Of course, I did not bow to him [to receive his blessing].

St. Paisios the Athonite

I am proud of the cassock I wear and consider it more valuable and seemly than every other kind of garment, even than the royal purple robes of kings. I consider myself unworthy to dress in such a modest, honorable and holy garb, which was honored by numberless monastic saints, monk martyrs, confessors and saints. I am saddened by and pity those clerics who reject the cassock and who shave their beards.

Blessed Elder Philotheos (Zervakos) of Paros

Those men who shave their beard are not possessors of a manly face, but of a womanly face.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite

Commentary on the 96th Canon of the 6th Ecumenical Council

This excommunication [of the 96th Canon of the 6th Ecumenical Council] is incurred also by those who shave off their beard in order to make their face smooth and handsome ... or in order to appear at all times like beardless young men.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, as above

BURNING LOVE FOR GOD

By St. Theophan the Recluse (homily no. 52), from *"The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It,"* published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Arizona (2017), pp. 210-212.



You are surprised that I spend so much time explaining the very same thing. "Of course," you say, "I need many other things."

Now I have finished. You have only to carry it out. The reason I spent so long explaining everything about remembrance of God is because all the power is in this. Once you are established in this remembrance—not just

barren remembrance, but with reverence and similar feelings toward the Lord—it will compel you to be diligent in everything else, too. You will be diligent in such a way that you will have a certain wondrous beauty, for there is also a crude, awkward sort of diligence. This remembrance will be for you lord, master and executor of all affairs, especially those of your inner life. That which the Apostle Paul prayed for and wished for the Ephesians, and through them for all Christians, will then be fulfilled within you: *That (God) grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* (Eph 3:16-17). This is what I have been talking about. Saint Paul considered this so important that, when praying about it, he prayed with a special fervor: *For this, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Eph 3:14). How could I not talk about this with you? Once the remembrance of God has been established in the inner man, then Christ the Lord will dwell within you. The two things go together.

A certain warm feeling toward the Lord will serve as a sign to convince you that this most wonderful thing has begun to operate inside of you. If you carry out everything that has been prescribed, this feeling will soon begin to appear more and more often, until finally it is there continually. Beginning from its first appearance, this feeling sweetly and blissfully arouses the desire to seek after it, so that it will never leave the heart, for in it is Paradise.

Would you like to enter into this Paradise a little sooner? Then do this: When you pray, do not stop praying until you have aroused some sort of feeling toward God in your heart. This can be reverence, or devotion, or thanksgiving, or praise, or humility and contrition, or trust and hope. Do this also when you begin reading during your devotions; do

not stop reading until you have felt the truth that you have read. If you pay attention to yourself, these two feelings (methods), by warming you up, are capable of keeping you under their influence all day. Work at carrying out these two methods precisely, and you will see for yourself what happens.

When something is out under the sun's rays for a long time, it gets very warm; the same thing will happen for you. By keeping yourself under the rays of the remembrance of God and your feelings toward Him, you will be warmed more and more with an unearthly warmth, and then you will become completely fiery, and not just fiery, but ablaze. The following will be fulfilled for you: *I am come to send fire on the earth of human hearts, and I could not wish for more other than that it inflame everyone as soon as possible.* (Lk 12:49).

Apply the following comparison to this: When a spark falls on a hot object, the object begins smoldering gradually; then it catches fire until finally it is engulfed by flame, and, being dark by its essence, it becomes bright and shining on account of the fire that engulfs it. That is how it will be for you. Growing warm gradually, you will begin to glow; the spiritual flame will break out, and, once it has penetrated to all parts of you, will engulf you and make you bright, although you are in and of yourself dark. Recall here how at the beginning we said something about the sheath of the soul, and then about the radiance of the grace-filled soul. That is how it will be with you and inside of you! Truly it will. Ahead of you, however, there is sweat and toil, and how long everything will take is known to God alone, for everything is from Him. Just know that God is not offended and has not forgotten your labor of love.



You wish, or rather, have decided, to remove a splinter from someone? Very well, but do not go after it with a stick instead of a lancet for you will only drive it deeper. Rough speech and harsh gestures are the stick, while even-tempered instruction and patient reprimand are the lancet. *Reprove, rebuke, exhort,* says the Apostle (2 Tim 4:2), *not batter.*

If someone observes that his brothers are satisfied with him, let him not start boasting to himself. There are thieves all around. Remember the warning: *When you have done all that was laid on you to do, say: We are unprofitable servants. We only did what we had to.* (Lk 17:10). We will find out at the time of death what judgment has been passed on us.

St. John Climacus

A LETTER FROM HOLY MOUNTAIN TO AN ABBESS CONCERNING THE VACCINES

By Elder Evthymios of Kapsala, Mt. Athos. Elder Evthymios of the Cell of the Resurrection in Kapsala on Mt. Athos, a disciple of Saint Paisios of Mt. Athos, more than a year after his first letter, now writes a second letter concerning mandatory vaccination in response to questions from an abbess (dated 20 June 2021).

Too long has our people been plagued with this painful coronavirus affair. Let them at last leave every one free to act according to his judgement, without pressure.

† † †



Venerable Abbess, your blessing. I received your letter some time ago, and I beg your pardon for delaying to respond due to a lack of time. It is indeed difficult for me to respond to letters, but, because I saw your concern for all that has been happening in our days and your good disposition to act according to the will of God, I am responding to you.

I do not know you, and it is difficult for you to meet me as you desire. You ask whether you may share my response with others, to which I have no objection. Besides, my views on the coronavirus and the vaccine are well-known, and I say more or less the same things to pilgrims as well, when they ask me.

Every day, *like the waves of a billowy sea*, pilgrims come to Mount Athos and some of them even to our cell. All of them, as well as those who send letters, have but one anxiety and one question: “What will happen with the obligatory vaccine?” All of their other problems which used to inundate them have now been delegated to second place.

In his attempt to deal with the coronavirus epidemic, the Prime Minister of our country has imposed a strict control, which seems to surpass the endurance of our people. He imposed the strictest limiting measures, the greatest fines, and the most extended lockdowns out of all the countries of Europe. He incompetently interfered in the matters of the worship of the Church by closing down the temples and depriving the faithful of the assistance of the sanctifying Mysteries with measures that are exceptionally strict and unfair toward Christians. His actions reveal his inclination to humiliate and weaken the Church.

In fact, in his excessive zeal to deal with the virus successfully, he has proposed a certificate of vaccination and announced that the vaccinated will enjoy privileges. This will not be a simple paper, a usual certificate. If (as we hope not) this is employed, then whoever will not be vaccinated and will not have this certificate will be excluded from ev-

erywhere. The Council of Europe (2361/2021) has ruled that the vaccine is not compulsory and that there should be no discrimination between those vaccinated and those not vaccinated. Behaving despotically, the Prime Minister of Greece becomes, as we say, “kinglier than the king,” he divides the Greek people, and he enforces a dictatorship of the worst kind.

Some bishops have undertaken to apply this anti-constitutional and illegal attempt of the Prime Minister, threatening and blackmailing priests, monks, and the people of God to become vaccinated. Do they have such authority to force them to be vaccinated against their will?

Our Saviour Christ would heal only those that asked for healing. As for the rest, before healing them he would ask them, *Do you wish to be made well?* He neither heals nor saves us without our consent, although He greatly desires our salvation. God does not abolish our freedom. He respects our free will, which He Himself gave to us. According to the holy Chrysostom, *God does not force those that wish not.* (PG 51, 143).

Our present-day “saviours” do not take us into account at all. Under the pretext of health they abolish our freedom. Then, from the fear of the virus we passed on to the terrorism caused by the compulsory vaccination. Unfortunately we are experiencing division, hatred, and the distinction of people into categories. The present-day situation is somewhat reminiscent of Greece at the time of the civil war. It prepares and prefigures the age of the Antichrist. Just as at that time whoever does not have the mark will be excluded from buying and selling, from public positions, and from travel, similarly, if this certificate of vaccination is put into practice, whoever is not vaccinated will be excluded from everywhere. Fear, coercion, surveillance are the common elements.

The topic of the coronavirus is of course, at first glance, a medical matter, but it has become more of political one (the politicians and the journalists speak more), it is also economic, and it has become a perfect means of enforcement and control. To be sure, it is also spiritual, since under its pretext our free will is abolished, while cells from an aborted fetus were used in the preparation of the vaccine.

There are testimonies going around which are continually increasing, according to which at the airports there is a device that recognizes who is vaccinated and also that on certain mobile phones with a certain application a twelve-digit number appears when a vaccinated man approaches. This evidence proves that the vaccinated can be tracked through the vaccine. On all these matters the experts will enlighten us and I believe that God will uncover the whole truth.

Much money has been employed and much advertisement has been done for this vaccine. Many have done it wishing to protect their health. They have every right to do so. We sincerely wish none of the vaccinated to come to any harm.

Nevertheless, they should let the people be, let them free to choose. No one should nor has any right to coerce those that do not wish to do the vaccine to be vaccinated.

We are not against vaccines in general. The old, tried vaccines saved many. The newer ones have many unwanted effects. Regarding this specific vaccine, people are justifiably fearful. This is a vaccine that became compulsory by law even before it was made, of which the producing companies were exempt from responsibilities and compensations, which was put into use so quickly before it was sufficiently tested, which does not fully protect the vaccinated, and every day we learn of serious side-effects and deaths of vaccinated individuals. We learn these facts not only from statistics but also from acquaintances and relatives of ours.

As we lamented for the death of acquaintances and relatives from the coronavirus, so now we lament for the sick and dead from the vaccine. To escape Scylla (the virus), is going to Charybdis (the problematic vaccine) the only solution? Is there no cure for the virus?

I am not a doctor to express an opinion. Nevertheless, I know doctors that have successfully treated patients with the coronavirus using antibiotics, vitamins, and other medicines. A doctor that I know gave antibiotics and other medicine to hundreds of patients and no one died. There is a cure for the virus, but some people do not want

it. They only promote the vaccine. I read the well-known statements of the French scientist Luc Antoine Montagnier, Nobel prize winner, who said, "There are effective cures which are also cheap, such as azithromycin, ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine. The vaccine is not a cure. Research must turn to the therapeutic approach."

If the vaccine was truly sufficiently tested and effectively protected without side-effects and deaths, people would be rapidly informed and all of this propaganda and pressure would be unnecessary. They would ask for the vaccine on their own. Too long have our people been plagued with this painful coronavirus affair. Let them at last leave every one free to act according to his judgement, without pressure.

In the difficult years that we are living, more than in any other age, our refuge and salvation is our Church. The Church is not simply the ark that saves us: she is for the difficulties; (i.e., she is particularly meant to help us especially in difficult situations.) Wherever science and human attempts are unable to help, the Church, when she uses her

own spiritual means and her own salvific medicine, makes possible even the impossible and heals every disease. She is able to eliminate any epidemic, no matter how contagious and deadly it may be, as Church history teaches us. Just as Noah's ark, which prefigured the Church, contained both clean and unclean animals, so also our Church contains saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous, masked and non-masked, vaccinated and non-vaccinated. There is room for everyone in the House of God.

We must not separate people, nor should we consider the vaccinated as marked deniers of Christ. And again, neither should the vaccinated reprove and unbearably pressure those that do not wish to take the vaccine, as is usually the case. In the future, when the truth concerning the vaccine will have been revealed, perhaps many will regret having done it, as some have already regretted it. It has already been announced that two well-known companies have

withdrawn their vaccines as being dangerous. Is it with such vaccines that the Prime Minister is trying to build the much-promoted "immunity wall"? And does he have no responsibility for those who have suffered irreparable damage to their health and for those that have died? Are they playing with people's health and life? How can we still believe that they are interested in our health?

Venerable Abbess! With these short lines I am expressing my pain of heart and replying to your question, which is similar to the anxiety and concern of a multitude of people. I worry over the division of our people. The political parties have always been partitioning and dividing the people. The Church unites us amongst ourselves into one body with Christ as the head. Even the name "Church" [*Ecclesia* – 'congregation'] is a name of unity. History teaches us that whenever the people were divided, disaster followed. Whenever the enemies of our Nation were planning and "meditating evils" for us, they prepared the division of the people beforehand. Before the Fall [of Constantinople] they had divided us with false unions into unionists and anti-unionists, before the Asia-Minor Catastrophe into Royalists and Venizelians, before the civil war into communists and nationalists, and before the Turkish invasion of Cyprus into Macarianists and Antimacarianists. In similar situations the solution is not the submission of the Truth to falsehood for the sake of unity but the selfless struggle for the prevalence of the



Truth which sets us free. We are in need of repentance and prayer that God may grant an end to this trial. The Holy Spirit, Whose descent we are celebrating, “calls all to unity.” Because He is also the Spirit of Truth, may He reveal to us the whole truth regarding the vaccines.

I pray the Trinitarian God grant His grace to all that act with pain of heart and sincerity for the health of men, to all that respect freedom, and to all that struggle for the unity of the people, giving hope and strengthening their faith.

With my love in Christ and boundless wishes,

Priestmonk Euthymios

Cell of the Resurrection, Holy Mountain

7/20 June 2021



PASTORAL CARE FOR MARRIED COUPLES & THE EVIL OF ABORTION

By the holy Elder Philotheos Zervakos, from “Paternal Counsels” vol. II, published by Orthodox Kypseli, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2005, pages 20-21 & “The Truth About Abortions,” published by Orthodox Kypseli, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2011, page 90-91.



Because I saw that it was necessary for me to answer you, I write you the following: Tell the couple about which you wrote, where the husband does not want children whereas the wife wants them, that God’s will must be done and not the devil’s. God allowed marriage for the birth of children and blessed it. Whereas the man-killing devil, when he is not able to murder, puts

brother against brother and advises men to murder. He advises the parents to murder their children inside the womb. The husband who does not want children, who does not listen to God, but prefers to hear the devil and takes his wife and pays the doctors to do abortions, becomes a murderer, not of foreign people, but of his own children. The wife, when she is pregnant, must not listen to her husband and have an abortion and become a murderess, but if her husband forces her, she should protest, she should go to the priest, or to the Metropolitan and seek help, and if her husband insists she should divorce him.

There are two solutions for this matter. The one is that if they do not want children, not to have relations anymore, but to practice chastity and keep continence. This is done with the agreement of both spouses and by economy so that they not become murderers. If they do not like this solution, but prefer to listen to the devil and to murder their children they

should prefer to separate. If they have faith in God, even if they obtain 20 or 50 children, God, Who gives and nourishes the birds of the sky, will provide for them! If the husband does not have faith then he will not be able to provide for his own self and he will be condemned to eternal hell... Let them be very careful and let them listen and do what I tell them so that they will have God’s blessing and inherit the eternal kingdom of the Lord. If again they don’t listen, they will receive a curse from God and will inherit, with the devil, eternal hell. I pray God enlightens them to accept my counsel, because obedience is life, while disobedience is death.

† † †

There is no worse crime than that which happens in Greece, for parents to kill 300,000 children each year before they are born. It exceeds even Communism, and all heresies and evils. Because if they had let their children be born, baptized them, and then killed them with a knife, the children would have gone as Christians and the responsibility of the parents would be less than now (in abortion) where they have also killed the child’s soul. God, of course, will compensate because in the dwellings of the Heavenly Father there are many mansions. Parents, however, reveal their hatred for their children and I wonder why God has not thrown fire the way He did on Sodom and Gomorrah. The sodomites did other terrible things, but they did not reach this level. The parents that agree to abortion, in this way, supersede the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, great wrath will come. Many things happen, especially to big evils.

Lewdness and the abortions that women do such great evil in the world never happened in any age: for mothers to kill 6 to 10 children and not feel any regret of conscience, who, if they had a little shade of repentance and feeling, would open tombs and enter into them to suffer, but they are unfeeling. They confess sometimes, but without repentance. This is one thing and the second is the nakedness of women. Now they walk around bare, and the men are bare also—they are not much better—but more so the women... And this is not possible for God to endure. He endured the sinners of Noah’s time and of Sodom and Gomorrah, but they had not reached this level to walk around naked and to expose their filthy bodies before men, to attract and draw them into sin. God is long-suffering and fore-bearing, but His tolerance also has limits. It is never possible for God—who always punishes sin—to allow such evil to happen without punishment. We should only be ready.

Learn that it is a commandment of God for parents to have as many children as God would be willing to give them. It is also my order and advice. Couples who don’t keep the Divine command—to have as many children as God would give them—will be punished. Also, whoever hinders them from keeping this Divine command will definitely be punished both in this life and also in the next.

Πώς θα Ἀλλάξουν τὰ Ἀναστημένα Σώματα κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία;

Μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἁγίου Συμεὼν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου, στὸν ὁποῖον ὁ Θεὸς ἀποκάλυψε πῶς θὰ ἀλλάξουν τὰ ὑλικά σώματα καὶ θὰ ἀφθαρτοποιηθοῦν κατὰ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τὸ κείμενο λήφθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Ἅγιος Συμεὼν Ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος», ὁ βίος τοῦ Ἁγίου, ἀπὸ τὸν Νικήτα Στηθάτο, κριτική ἐκδόση τοῦ Ἀρχιμ Συμεὼν Κουτσα, Ἐκδόσεις «Ἀκρίτας», σελ. 189-193.

Μία μέρα, καθὼς προσευχόταν [ὁ Ἅγιος Συμεὼν] μὲ καθαρότητα καὶ συνομιλοῦσε μὲ τὸν Θεό, εἶδε πῶς ὁ ἀέρας ἄρχισε νὰ φωτίζει τὸ νοῦ του, καὶ ἐνῶ ἦταν μέσα στὸ κελί του, νόμιζε ὅτι βρισκόταν ἔξω, σ' ἀνοιχτὸ χῶρο. Ἦταν νύχτα, πὸν μόλις εἶχε ξεκινήσει. Τότε ἄρχισε νὰ φέγγει ἀπὸ ψηλὰ ὅπως τὸ πρωινὸ ροδοχάραμα—ὡ τῶν φρικτῶν ὀπτασιῶν τοῦ ἀνδρός— καὶ τὸ οἶκημα κι ὅλα τ' ἄλλα ἐξαφανίστηκαν, καὶ νόμιζε ὅτι δὲν ἦταν καθόλου σὲ οἶκημα. Τὸν συνέπαιρνε ὁλοτελα θεία ἔκσταση ἀντιλαμβανόμενος καλὰ μὲ τὸν νοῦ του τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο πὸν τοῦ ἐμφανιζόταν. Αὐτὸ μεγάλωνε λίγο-λίγο κι ἔκανε τὸν ἀέρα νὰ φαίνεται πιδ λαμπερὸς κι αἰσθανόταν τὸν ἑαυτὸ του μ' ὁλόκληρο τὸ σῶμα του νὰ βρίσκεται ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ γήινα.

Ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ λάμπει ἀκόμη περισσότερο ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς καὶ τοῦ φαινόταν σὰν ἥλιος πὸν μεσουρανώντας ἔλαμπε ἀπὸ ψηλὰ, αἰσθανόταν σὰν νὰ στέκεται στὸ μέσο τοῦ φωτὸς καὶ ὅτι ὁλόκληρος ὁ ἑαυτὸς του μαζί μὲ τὸ σῶμα του ἦταν γεμάτος ἀπὸ χαρὰ καὶ δάκρυα λόγω τῆς γλυκύτητας πὸν τοῦ προξενοῦσε ἡ παρουσία του. Παράλληλα ἔβλεπε ὅτι τὸ ἴδιο φῶς κατὰ τρόπο θαυμαστὸ ἦρθε σὲ ἐπαφή μὲ τὸ σῶμα του καὶ σιγὰ-σιγὰ διαπερνοῦσε τὰ μέλη του. Ἡ ἐκπληξη αὐτῆς τῆς ὀπτασίας τὸν ἀπομάκρυνε ἀπὸ τὴν προηγούμενη θεωρία καὶ τὸν ἔκανε νὰ αἰσθάνεται μόνον αὐτὸ τὸ ἐξαίσιον πρᾶγμα πὸν συνέβαινε μέσα του. Ἐβλεπε, λοιπόν, ὅτι τὸ φῶς ἐκεῖνο σιγὰ-σιγὰ εἰσχωροῦσε σ' ὁλόκληρο τὸ σῶμα του, τὴν καρδιά καὶ τὰ ἔγκατά του καὶ τὸν ἔκανε ὁλόκληρο σὰν φωτιὰ καὶ φῶς. Καὶ ὅπως προηγουμένως τὸ οἶκημα, ἔτσι καὶ τώρα τὸν ἔκανε νὰ χάσει τὴν αἴσθηση τοῦ σχήματος, τῆς θέσεως, τοῦ βάρους καὶ τὴν μορφῆς τοῦ σώματος καὶ σταμάτησε νὰ κλαίει.

Τότε ἀκούει μία φωνὴ ἀπὸ τὸ φῶς νὰ τοῦ λέει: «Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο εἶναι ἀποφασισμένο ν' ἀλλάξουν οἱ Ἅγιοι πὸν θὰ ζοῦν καὶ θὰ βρίσκονται ἀκόμη ἐδῶ κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἔσχατης σάλπιγγας, κι ἔτσι μεταμορφωμένοι θ' ἀρπαγοῦν, ὅπως λέει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος».

Γιὰ πολλὰς ὥρες ὄντας ὁ μακάριος σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση, ἀνυμνώντας μυστικὰ καὶ ἀκατάπαυστα τὸ Θεὸ καὶ κατανοώντας τὴ δόξα πὸν τὸν περιέβαλλε καὶ τὴν αἰώνια μακαριότητα πὸν πρόκειται νὰ

δοθεῖ στοῦ Ἁγίου, ἄρχισε νὰ σκέφτεται καὶ νὰ μονολογεῖ μέσα του: «Ἄραγε θὰ ξαναγυρίσω πάλι στὴν προηγούμενη κατάσταση τοῦ σώματός μου ἢ θὰ ζήσω ἔτσι συνέχεια;»

Μόλις ἔκανε τὴ σκέψη αὐτή, ἀμέσως αἰσθάνθηκε νὰ περιφέρει τὸ σῶμα του σὰν σκιά ἢ σὰν πνεῦμα. Καταλάβαινε ὅτι εἶχε γίνει, ὅπως εἶπαμε, ὁλόκληρος μὲ τὸ σῶμα του φῶς χωρὶς μορφὴ, χωρὶς σχῆμα καὶ ἄυλο. Καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμα του τὸ αἰσθανόταν ὅτι ὑπάρχει, πλὴν ὅμως χωρὶς ὑλικὲς διαστάσεις καὶ σὰν πνευματικὸ. Αἰσθανόταν δηλαδὴ νὰ μὴν ἔχει καθόλου βάρους ἢ ὄγκο κι ἀποροῦσε βλέποντας τὸν ἑαυτὸ του πὸν εἶχε σῶμα νὰ εἶναι σὰν ἀσῶματος.

Καὶ τὸ φῶς πὸν λαλοῦσε μέσα του, ὅπως καὶ προηγουμένως, τοῦ ἔλεγε καὶ πάλι: «Τέτοιοι θὰ εἶναι μετὰ τὴν ἀνάσταση στὸν μέλλοντα αἰῶνα ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι περιβλημένοι ἀσωμάτως μὲ σώματα πνευματικὰ ἢ ἐλαφρότερα καὶ λεπτότερα καὶ πιδ αἰθέρια ἢ παχύτερα καὶ βαρύτερα καὶ πιδ γεῶδη, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα θὰ καθορισθεῖ γιὰ τὸν καθένα ἡ στάση καὶ ἡ τάξη καὶ ἡ οἰκείωση μὲ τὸ Θεό».

Αὐτὰ ὅταν ἄκουσε ὁ θεοπτικώτατος καὶ θεοληπτος Συμεὼν κι ἀφοῦ εἶδε τὸ ἀνέκφραστο θεϊκὸ φῶς κι εὐχαρίστησε τὸν Θεό, πὸν δόξασε τὸ γένος μας καὶ τὸ ἔκανε μέτοχο τῆς θεότητος καὶ τῆς βασιλείας Του, ξαναγύρισε πάλι στὸν ἑαυτὸ του καὶ βρέθηκε ξανά μὲς στὸ κελί του, στὴν προηγούμενη ἀνθρώπινη φυσικὴ κατάσταση. Ὅμως μὲ ὄρκους διαβεβαίωσε ἐκείνους μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους εἶχε θάρρος καὶ φανέρωνε τὰ μυστικά του, ὅτι «γιὰ πολλὰς ἡμέρες αἰσθανόμενοι αὐτὴ τὴν ἐλαφρότητα τοῦ σώματος χωρὶς νὰ καταλαβαίνω καθόλου οὔτε κόπο, οὔτε πείνα, οὔτε δίψα».

Ἐπειδὴ, λοιπόν, μὲ αὐτὰ ἐνωτόταν μόνον μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα κι ἦταν γεμάτος ἀπὸ τὰ θεϊκὰ χαρίσματά Του—καὶ φυσικὰ εἶχε καθαρίσει καὶ ὁ ἴδιος πλήρως τὸ νοῦ του— ἔβλεπε ὀπτασίες καὶ φρικτὲς ἀποκαλύψεις τοῦ Κυρίου ὅπως παλαιὰ οἱ Προφῆτες. Ἐτσι, ἔχοντας ἀποστολικὴ διάνοια, ἐπειδὴ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ του κατηύθυνε καὶ κινοῦσε τὸ θεῖο Πνεῦμα, εἶχε καὶ τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ λόγου πὸν ἔβγαινε ἀπὸ τὰ χεῖλη του καί, ἐνῶ ἦταν ὅπως κι ἐκεῖνοι ἀγράμματος, θεολόγησε καὶ μὲ τὰ θεόπνευστα συγγράμματα τοῦ διδάσκει τοὺς πιστοὺς τὴν ἀκριβεία τῆς εὐσεβοῦς ζωῆς.

Ἐχοντας ἀνέλθει σ' ἓνα τέτοιο πνευματικὸ ἐπίπεδο, ἀρχίζει νὰ συγγράφει ἀσκητικὸς λόγους κατὰ κεφάλαια γιὰ τὶς διάφορες ἀρετὲς καὶ τὰ πάθη πὸν ἀντίκεινται σ' αὐτές, ἀπὸ ὅσα αὐτὸς ἔμαθε ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴ του ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὴ θεία γνώση πὸν τοῦ δόθηκε, καὶ περιγράφει μὲ ἀκριβεία τὴ μοναχικὴ ζωὴ γιὰ ὅσους τὴν ἀσκοῦν καὶ ἔτσι γίνεται γιὰ τὸν ἰσραηλιτικὸ λαὸ τῶν μοναχῶν ποταμὸς Θεοῦ γεμάτος πνευματικὰ νερά.

Ὁ Διωγμὸς τῶν Πιστῶν καὶ ἡ Προδοσία τῆς Πίστεως

Γράφει ο Γεώργιος Κ. Τζανάκης, Ακρωτήρι Χανίων, 10/12/2020. Ἄν καὶ τὸ ἄρθρο χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὸν Δεκέμβριο τοῦ 2020, εἶναι ἐπίκαιρο ὅσο ποτὲ τώρα ποὺ οἱ «ἡγέτες» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀνέλαβαν τὸν καινούργιο τους ρόλο ὡς πωλητὰι τῶν ἐμβολιασμῶν. Ἄς μὴ λησμονοῦμε καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ τῆς Σαρακοστῆς, ὅταν ὄχι μόνο ξανα-ἐκλείσαν καὶ πάλι οἱ ἐκκλησίες, ἀλλὰ ἐπέβαλαν τὸν ἐρτασμό τοῦ Πάσχα τὸ Μεγάλο Σάββατο...

Ἀὐτὸ ποὺ ζοῦμε εἶναι διωγμὸς κατὰ τῆς πίστεως ἀπὸ τοὺς δαμινοκινήτους ἄρχοντες σὲ συνεργασία μὲ τοὺς προδότες τῆς πίστεως, ἱεράρχες καὶ κληρικούς. Φαίνονται βαρεῖα τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ, ἀλλὰ αὐτὰ λένε καὶ διδάσκουν οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες. Αὐτὰ ἀκούσαμε ἀπὸ τοὺς πατέρες ποὺ γνωρίσαμε καὶ αὐτὰ βεβαιώνονται ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν ἁγίων.

Οἱ ἐκκλησίες εἶναι κλειστὲς γιὰ δευτέρη φορὰ. Τὴν πρώτη φορὰ οἱ Ἱεράρχες (καὶ ἀκολούθως οἱ ἱερεῖς) εἶπαν ὅτι... αἰφνιδιάστηκαν, ὅτι βρέθηκαν μπροστὰ σὲ πρωτόγνωρες καταστάσεις καὶ μὲ τὸ πρόσχημα τῆς «φιλανθρωπίας», δῆθεν φροντίζοντας γιὰ τοὺς κινδυνεύοντες συνανθρώπους δέχτηκαν ἀδιαμαρτύρητα νὰ κλείσουν οἱ ἐκκλησίες, παραδεχόμενοι ἐμπράκτως ὅσα ἔλεγαν οἱ ἐχθροὶ τῆς πίστεως, ὅτι οἱ ναοὶ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς τελούμενα εἶναι ἐπικίνδυνα γιὰ τὴν υἰεῖα τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἔχουν εἰπωθῆ καὶ ἔχουν γραφτεῖ τόσα, ὅμως οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἐκμεταλευόμενοι τὸ ἱερατικὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὴν προβολὴ τῶν ἀπόψεών τους ἀπὸ τὰ πληρωμένα μέσα ἐνημερώσεως καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς κυβερνητικούς καὶ μὴ μηχανισμούς, συνεχίζουν τὴν ἐξαπάτησι τῶν χριστιανῶν.

Τώρα συνοοῦνται μὲ τοὺς πολιτικούς γιὰ τὸ δῆθεν ἄνοιγμα τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τὴν περίοδο τῶν Χριστουγέννων, μὲ τρόπους ποὺ θὰ ἐπινοήσουν, ὥστε νὰ φανῆ ὅτι ὑπάρχει μέρμινα γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς καὶ ὅτι ἀγωνίστηκαν γι' αὐτό. Καὶ τοῦτο διότι ὁ λαὸς, ὅσο ἀκατήχητος καὶ ἂν εἶναι ἔχει τὴν διαίσθησι, μυρρίζεται τὴν προδοσίαν καὶ φοβοῦνται ἀντιδράσεις, ὅπως φοβοῦνται καὶ οἱ πολιτικοὶ μὲ τὰ ἀλλόκοτα παράλογα καὶ ἀτελέσφορα μέτρα ποὺ ἐφαρμόζουν.

Καὶ ἂν ἀνοίξουν οἱ ἐκκλησίες τὴν παραμονὴ καὶ τὴν ἡμέρα τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τῶν Φώτων καὶ προγραμματιστοῦν περισσότερες τῆς μιᾶς λειτουργίες

κατὰ περίπτωσι, τί θὰ σημαίνει αὐτό; Ἄλλαξε τίποτα; Σταμάτησε ὁ διωγμὸς; Οἱ ἐπίσκοποι ἀγωνίστηκαν ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως; Τὰ «προβληματίζομαι» καὶ «ἀγωνιῶ» καὶ «πονῶ» καὶ «θλίβομαι», ποὺ ἀναμασοῦν, δείχνουν κάτι; Γιὰ αὐτὰ ὑπάρχουν οἱ ἐπίσκοποι; Γιὰ νὰ ἐκφράζουν συναισθήματα, νὰ κάνουν δηλώσεις καὶ νὰ γράφουν σχόλια καὶ κείμενα;

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἐπικαλοῦνται τὴν κόπωση καὶ τὴν ἀγανάκτησι τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ νὰ παρουσιάζουν ὑπογραφές καὶ διαμαρτυρίες, προκειμένου νὰ «πιέσουν», δῆθεν, τοὺς κυβερνῶντες νὰ παραχωρήσουν κάποια ψυχία καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐμφανίσουν ὡς ἀγώνα καὶ νίκη; Δὲν ἀντιλαμβάνονται πόσο ἐξευτελίζονται μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτόν;

Οἱ κυβερνῶντες βλέποντας ὅτι ὁ κόσμος ἀγανακτεῖ μὲ τὰ παράλογα καὶ καταστροφικὰ μέτρα τους καὶ λόγω τῆς ἀβεβαίας ἐκβάσεως τους ὡς πρὸς τὸ ὑγεινομικὸ σκέλος καὶ τῆς βεβαίας οἰκονομικῆς καταστροφῆς ποὺ ἐπαπειλεῖται, ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγω τῆς κοπώσεως ἀπὸ τὸν ἐγκλεισμό καὶ τὰ κατοχικὰ μέτρα περιορισμοῦ



τῆς ἐλευθερίας, θέλουν νὰ κάμουν ἓνα μικρὸ διάλειμα πρὶν τοὺς ἐμβολιασμούς καὶ ὅτι ἄλλο τοὺς ὑποδείξουν οἱ κινῶντες τὰ νήματα. Οἱ συνεργάτες τους ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ αἰσθανόμενοι τὴν ἀπέχθεια τοῦ λαοῦ, ποὺ σιγά-σιγά συνειδητοποιεῖ τὴν πραγματικότητα τῆς προδοσίας τῆς πίστεως καὶ ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τοὺς

φθορεῖς πνευματικὸς πατέρες, θέλουν καὶ αὐτοὶ κάτι νὰ παρουσιάσουν.

Ὅμως στὴν ἐκκλησία οἱ ἀγῶνες δὲν γίνονται ἀπλῶς καὶ γενικῶς ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ λαοῦ ποὺ ἀγανακτεῖ. Γίνονται ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως, ἡ ὁποία πίστις εἶναι τὸ μέγιστο ἀγαθὸ γιὰ κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ἄρα καὶ γιὰ τὸ σύνολο τοῦ λαοῦ. Καὶ σ'αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀγῶνες ὀφείλουν νὰ πρωτοστατοῦν οἱ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ οἱ κληρικοί καὶ νὰ ἀκολουθῆ ὁ λαός.

Ἀγωνίστηκαν γιὰ τὴν πίστι οἱ πνευματικοὶ μας ἡγέτες; Ὅχι μόνον δὲν ἀγωνίστηκαν, ἀλλὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς συνέπραξαν μὲ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Αὐτοὶ ἄνοιξαν τὴν πόρτην καὶ ἔβαλαν μέσα τοὺς πραιτωριανούς. Αὐτοὶ πρόδωσαν καὶ τώρα ὁ χριστιανὸς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πάη στὴν ἐκκλησία γιὰτὶ καὶ στὸν δρόμο κινδυνεύει καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησίες εἶναι κλειστὲς. Αὐτοὶ ἔδωσαν τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς ὑποχωρητικότητος καὶ τοῦ συμβιβασμοῦ ὥστε νὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ καὶ ὁ λαός. Ἐκαμὰν ἀκριβῶς τὸ ἀντίθετο ἀπὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔπρεπε

νά γίνη. Ὁ πρωτομάρτυς Στέφανος ἔγινε παράδειγμα ὥστε οἱ μάρτυρες ποῦ θὰ ἀκολουθοῦσαν νὰ ἔχουν ἓνα ἰσχυρὸ στήριγμα τοῦ ζήλου καὶ νὰ μὴν γίνουιν μιμητὲς τῆς δειλίας.

«Ἴνα οἱ ἐξῆς ἐποικοδομοῦμενοι μάρτυρες ἰσχυρὰν λάβωσι τοῦ ζήλου τὴν ὑποβάθραν καὶ μὴ δειλίας γένωνται μιμηταί». Ἀστέριος Ἀμασειας, PG40,345.

Οἱ ἱεράρχες ἔκαμαν τὸ ἀντίθετο ἀπὸ τὸν πρωτομάρτυρα Στέφανο. Συνεργάστηκαν μὲ τοὺς πολιτικούς, ἐχθροὺς τῆς ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἔγιναν παράδειγμα δειλίας καὶ συμβιβασμοῦ γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς. Πρόδωσαν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὴν ἐκκλησία. Δὲν χρησιμοποίησαν οὔτε τὴν δύναμι τῆς πίστεως, οὔτε τὴν δύναμι τοῦ πλήθους τῶν πιστῶν, οὔτε τὰ δικαιώματα τὰ ἐκ τοῦ Συντάγματος τῆς χώρας. Καθαρὴ προδοσία ἀπὸ μέσα. Ἐξ ἄλλου ἀπὸ μέσα πέφτουν οἱ πόλεις. Ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐντὸς προδότες. Τὶς ὀχυρωμένες πόλεις πολλὲς φορὲς τὰ ὄπλα καὶ οἱ μεθοδεῖες τῶν ἀπέξω δὲν κατάφεραν νὰ τὶς πορθήσουν. Ὅμως ἡ προδοσία ἐνδὸς ἢ δύο ἀπὸ τοὺς κατοικοῦντες τὶς παρέδωσαν χωρὶς κόπο στοὺς ἐχθροὺς.

«Καὶ γὰρ τὰς ὀχυρὰς τῶν πόλεων ὄπλα μὲν πάντα πολλάκις καὶ μηχανήματα τῶν ἐξωθεν οὐκ ἴσχυσεν καθελεῖν, προδοσία δὲ ἐνδὸς ἢ δύο τῶν ἐνδον οἰκούντων πολιτῶν ἀπονητὶ παρέδωκεν τοῖς ἐχθροῖς». Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος (Πρὸς Θεόδωρον Ἐκπέσοντα Β'), PG 47,313.

Ἐδῶ τὴν ἐκκλησία δὲν τὴν πρόδωσαν ἓνας ἢ δύο τυχόντες ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐντὸς. Τὴν πρόδωσαν οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ ποιμένες. Καὶ δὲν ἔγινε ἡ προδοσία τῶρα ξαφνικά. Ἔχει ξεκινήσει χρόνια τώρα. Ἡ ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ ἀπὸ προσωπικὸς δρόμος ἀγάπης καὶ εὐθύνης ἐναντι τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατήντησε σιγά-σιγά ἔθιμο καὶ συνήθεια καὶ θεσμὸς καὶ στάδιο ἀνέλιξης καὶ ἀνόδου καὶ καριέρας καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ αὐτοεπιβεβαιώσεως πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων. Ἀτόνησε τὸ ἀσκητικὸ καὶ ἀγωνιστικὸ καὶ μαρτυρικὸ πνεῦμα καὶ φτάσαμε σὲ ἓναν ἄκοπο ἄνευρο ἄγευστο μαλακὸ ἐγκεφαλικὸ χριστιανισμὸ, δεκανίκι κάθε ἐξουσίας καὶ μοχλὸ χειραγωγήσεως τοῦ λαοῦ. Κέντρο ἔγινε πλέον ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ οἱ ἐπίγειες ἀξίες του καὶ ὄχι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ μαρτυρικὸς δρόμος Του. Ποιδὲς ἱεράρχης ἢ ἱερεὺς πλέον ἔχει ὡς κέντρο τῆς διδασχῆς καὶ τοῦ παραδείγματός του τὶς θεῖες γραφὲς καὶ τοὺς θεῖους νόμους καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν ἁγίων, ποιήσας προηγουμένως ὅσα διδάσκει; (Ἐννοεῖτε ὅτι ἀναφέρομαι στοὺς μηδίσαντες καὶ ὄχι σὲ ὅσους ἀντιστέκονται καὶ διώκονται ἢ χλευάζονται ἢ ἀπειλοῦνται).

Μιλᾶνε γιὰ σοφοὺς, γιὰ ἐιδικοὺς, γιὰ φιλοσόφους γιὰ λογοτέχνες καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἀντλοῦν ἀξίες καὶ

παραδείγματα καὶ διδασχῆς καὶ προτροπὲς. Τί εἶπε ὁ Καμὺ, τί εἶπε ὁ Ρουσσώ, τί ἔγραψε ὁ Καζαντζάκης, καὶ ἡ κάθε μεγάλη διάνοια κατ' αὐτοὺς. Ἀλλὰ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὔτε τὴν ἁμαρτία ξέρουν, οὔτε τὸν διαβολὸ γνωρίζουν, οὔτε τὰ τεχνάσματά του, οὔτε γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τὴν αἰώνιο ζωὴ ἐνδιαφέρονται. Ἔτσι χάθηκε ἡ ἀσφάλεια ποῦ προστατεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἔτσι βρεθήκαμε στὸ βάραθρο τῆς ἄγνοιας, ξεχάσαμε τοὺς νόμους τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔτσι γεμίσαμε αἰρέσεις, ἡ ζωὴ κατήντησε μιὰ διεφθαρμένη κατάσταση καὶ ὅλα γίναν ἄνω κάτω. Νὰ ἡ προδοσία τῆς σωτηρίας. Νὰ καὶ οἱ προδότες ποιμένες (καὶ ἀκολουθήσαμε καὶ μεῖς οἱ λαϊκοὶ, φυσικά),

«Μεγάλη ἀσφάλεια πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἁμαρτάνειν τῶν Γραφῶν ἢ ἀνάγνωσις, μέγας κρημνὸς καὶ βάραθρον βαθὺ τῶν Γραφῶν ἢ ἄγνοια, μεγάλη προδοσία σωτηρίας τὸ μηδὲν ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν εἰδέναί νόμων τοῦτο καὶ αἰρέσεις ἔτεκε, τοῦτο καὶ βίον διεφθαρμένον εἰσήγαγε, τοῦτο τὰ ἄνω κάτω πεποιήκεν». Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος, PG48,995.

Ὅταν μένει ὁ λαὸς χωρὶς πραγματικὴ ἀρετὴ, ἀλλὰ μαθαίνει στὸν τυποποιημένο εὐσεβισμὸ, στὴν ἐπίπλαστη εὐσέβεια, στὴν φαυλότητα τοῦ βίου τότε ἡ πόλις τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἔχει ἤδη προδοθῆ. Ἐδῶ νὰ ἀναζητηθῆ ἡ προδοσία, ποῦ σήμερα εἶναι ὀλοφάνερη σὲ ὅλους, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱεράρχες καὶ τοὺς πνευματικοὺς ποῦ ἐπιμένουν νὰ ζητοῦν ὑπακοὴ καὶ νὰ προπαγανδίζουιν τὴν συμμόρφωσι σὲ καθε δαιμονικὸ καθεστωτικὸ κέλευσμα προσθέτοντας... στῶμεν καλῶς, στῶμεν μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ!...

«Ἀσφάλεια γὰρ πόλεως, οὐκ οἰκοδομῆς ἀρμονία, οὐδὲ λίθων μέγεθος, ἀλλ' ἡ τῶν ἐνοικούντων ἀρετὴ. Ὅπερ οὖν καὶ προδοσία πόλεως οὐκ οἰκοδομημάτων σαθρότης, ἀλλ' ἡ τῶν πολιτῶν φαυλότης». Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος, PG64,793.

Ἔνα ἀπλὸ, ἀλλὰ κραυγαλέο, παράδειγμα ἀπομακρύνσεως ἀπὸ τὴν διδασκαλία τῶν πατέρων, εἶναι τὸ Κολυμπάρι καὶ ἡ, ἄς ποῦμε, σύνοδος ποῦ ἔγινε ἐκεῖ. Μόνον ἐθελοτυφλοῦντες ἢ ἀσπόνδυλοι δογματικῶς δὲν καταλαβαίνουιν τί συνέβη. Ἐκεῖ ἀναγνώρισαν ὡς ἐκκλησίες κάθε αἰρετικὸ μὲροφωμα, παπιστὲς καὶ προτεστάντες καὶ δὲν συμμαζεῦεται, ἐνῶ ἔχει εἰπωθῆ μυριάκις ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους πατέρες ὅτι αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ δαιμονικὴ μεθοδεία, ὥστε παρουσιάζοντας καὶ ὀνομάζοντας πολλὲς ἐκκλησίες ὁ διάβολος, ἢ καλύτερα στήνοντας εἰδῶλα ἐκκλησιῶν σὲ ὅσους πειστοῦν σ' αὐτὸν, τοὺς κάνει νὰ ἀποταχθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ. Ὅπως παλιὰ τοὺς ἀπομάκρυνε ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὰ εἰδῶλα, ἔτσι καὶ τώρα διὰ τῶν λεγομένων ἐκκλησιῶν τοὺς ἀπομακρύνει ἀπὸ τὴν ὄντως ἐκκλησία. Μὲ τέτοιες μεγάλες ἐπαγγελίες συνηθίζει

ὁ διάβολος νὰ ἐξαπατᾷ. (Σήμερα μὲ τὴν «ἀγάπη» γιὰ τοὺς εὐπαθεῖς συνανθρώπους μὴπως τοὺς κολλήσουμε ἀρρώστια).

«Ὁὐ παύεται (ὁ διάβολος) ἀπατῶν τοὺς ἀσθηρικούς ὡς γὰρ πρὸ τοῦ εἶδωλα μετονομάσας θεοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντως θεοῦ ἀπεπλάνησε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, οὕτως καὶ νῦν πολλὰς ἐκκλησίας ὀνομάσας, μᾶλλον δέ, εἰ δεῖ τὸ ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, εἶδωλα ἐκκλησιῶν ἀναστήσας τῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποταγῇ τοὺς πειθόμενους αὐτῷ, ἵν' ὡσπερ τότε διὰ τῶν λεγομένων θεῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπέστησεν, οὕτως καὶ νῦν διὰ τῶν λεγομένων παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐκκλησιῶν τῆς ὄντως ἐκκλησίας ἀποσπάσῃ. Ἔθος γὰρ τῷ διαβόλῳ διὰ μεγάλων ἐπαγγελιῶν ἀπατᾷ». Ἀμφιλόχιος Ἰκονίου (Ἐναντίον Αἰρετικῶν), στὸ TLG, 60,75.

Δὲν τὰ ξέραν αὐτὰ οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες ποὺ πῆγαν ἐκεῖ, στὸ Κολυμπάρι; Τὰ ξέραν, φυσικά. Ἄν δὲν τὰ ξέραν τότε δὲν κἀναν γιὰ αὐτὴ τὴν δουλειά. Ἄλλα ἦταν ἐκεῖ καὶ οἱ πράκτορες τῆς CIA καὶ ἡ κυρία Ἑλισάβετ Προδρομόου—μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων γυναικῶν τοῦ Πατριάρχου, ὅπως ἔγραφαν οἱ ἐφημερίδες—καὶ εἶχαν τὴν ἴδια νεοεποχίτικη ἀτζέντα ποὺ ἔχουν καὶ τώρα ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ ψευδοποιμένες.

Ὅταν λοιπὸν ἔτσι καθοδηγεῖται ὁ λαὸς, ἔτσι γυμνάζεται, ἔτσι ἐκπαιδεύεται ἀπὸ τοὺς πνευματικούς του, μὲ φίεςτες, χάπενινγκ, συνέδρια, κουβέντες, ἐκδρομὲς, πολιτιστικὰ κέντρα, ὁμιλητὲς στὴν νεο(α)πατερικῶν ἀστέρων, λείψανα καὶ εἰκόνες ποὺ πηγαίνουν πέρα δῶθε καὶ χιλιάδες φωτογραφίες καὶ μπουρδολογίες στὰ κοινωνικὰ μέσα καὶ πάσα νόσος καὶ πᾶσα μαλακία νὰ γίνεται πρότυπο πνευματικοῦ βίου τότε τί περιμένουμε; Οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ πιστοὶ προσκολλημένοι στὸν κάθε ἱκανὸ ἢ ἀνίκανο ὀργανωτικὰ πνευματικὸ, ὡς ὀπαδοὶ ἢ ἀκόλουθοι ἢ θαυμαστὲς, σὰν μέλη συλλόγου, σὰν ὀπαδοὶ ὀμάδας, σὰν θαυμαστὲς εἰδώλου τῆς σύγχρονης βιομηχανίας τοῦ θεάματος, ἀλλὰ ἐντελῶς ἄσχετοι καὶ ἀπὸ παράδειγμα καὶ ἀπὸ βίωμα καὶ ἀπὸ ἐμπειρία καὶ στόχευσι ὀρθοδόξου βίου, τί θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ κάμουν μπροστὰ σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ ἦρθαν;

Ἐλεγε ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος: «Ἄν συμβῆ, ποὺ μακαρὶ νὰ μὴν συμβῆ, πόλεμος ἐναντίον τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ διωγμὸς σκέψου πόσο γέλιο θὰ πέσει καὶ πόσες κοροϊδίες. Καὶ εἶναι πολὺ φυσικὸ. Ὅταν κανεὶς δὲν γυμνάζεται πῶς θὰ παρουσιαστῇ λαμπρὸς στοὺς ἀγῶνες;»—**«Εἰ τοίνυν γένοιτο, ὃ μὴ γένοιτο, μηδὲ συμβαίῃ ποτὲ, γενέσθαι πόλεμον Ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ διωγμὸν, ἐννόησον πόσος ἔσται ὁ γέλως, πόσα τὰ ὀνειδίη. Καὶ μάλα εἰκότως ὅταν γὰρ ἐν τῇ παλαιστῆρα μηδεὶς γυμνάζεται, πῶς ἐν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν ἔσται λαμπρός;»** Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος (Ἐρημνεῖα στὸ κατὰ Ματθαῖον Εὐαγγέλιον). PG57,395.

Καὶ ὁ διωγμὸς ἦρθε καὶ μαζὶ ἢ ἀναπόφευκτη γελοιοποίησις. Καὶ τὸ γελοιωδέστερον; Ἐπιμένουν οἱ Ἰεράρχες ὅτι δὲν εἶναι διωγμὸς. Φυσικὸ εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς, διότι ἀφοῦ εἶναι συνεργοὶ θέλουν νὰ ἀποσεῖσουν τὶς εὐθύνες τους. Καὶ ἂν δὲν εἶναι διωγμὸς σεβασμιώτατοι τί εἶναι; Ἐκκλησίες κλειστὲς, μυστήρια συκοφαντημένα, ἢ πίστις λαιωρεῖται, οἱ πιστοὶ διώκονται καὶ δικάζονται. Ποιὸς ἀκόμη τολμᾷ νὰ λέει ὅτι ἐτοῦτος ὁ καιρὸς εἶναι εἰρηνικὸς γιὰ τοὺς χριστιανούς καὶ ὄχι διωγμὸς; Καὶ μάλιστα διωγμὸς ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν ἔγινε μέχρι τώρα οὔτε ἄλλος θὰ κάμη παρὰ μόνο «ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας»;

«Ἄρα τίς ἔτι τολμᾷ λέγειν τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον εἰρηνικὸν εἶναι Χριστιανῶν καὶ οὐ μᾶλλον διωγμὸν; καὶ διωγμὸν, οἷος οὔτε πώποτε γέγονεν οὔτε τάχα τις ποιήσει ποτὲ τοιοῦτον εἰ μὴ ἄρα ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας». Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος, PG25,785.

Τολμοῦν καὶ τὸ λένε οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ ἐπίσκοποι τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ οἱ πνευματικοὶ ποιμένες τοῦ λαοῦ. Καὶ κατηγοροῦν καὶ ἀπὸ πάνω ὅσους δὲν ἀκολουθοῦν τὴν προδοσίαν τους, καὶ μάλιστα προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὰ στηρίξουν ὅλα αὐτὰ πατερικῶς, διασ-τρεβλώνοντας τὰ πάντα.

Μὴν πλανᾶσθε, πλανεμένοι ποιμένες. Κύκλω οἱ ἀσεβεῖς περιπατοῦσι. Ἔχουν γίνεαι καὶ ξαναγίνεαι ὅλα αὐτά. Πράγματι ὁ διωγμὸς γίνεται γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει—ὅπως ἐσεῖς τὸ ἐρμηνεύετε παραπλανῶντας τοὺς ἀνθρώπους—νὰ μείνουμε μὲ σταυρωμένα χέρια, δειλοὶ καὶ φοβισμένοι, ἐφαρμόζοντας ἐκουσίως τὶς ἐντολὰς τῶν τυράννων ποὺ διώκουν τὴν πίστι, ὥστε νὰ μὴ φαίνεται ὁ διωγμὸς ὅτι εἶναι διωγμὸς ἀλλὰ ὅτι πεισθήκαμε καὶ ἔτσι ἢ ντροπὴ καὶ ὁ ξευτιλισμὸς μας νὰ εἶναι μεγαλύτερος ἀπὸ τὸν κίνδυνον τῶν ἀπειλῶν τῶν τυράννων.

«Πειθοῦς ὄνομα προσεῖναι τῷ γινομένῳ, μὴ τυραννίδος, ὡς ἂν μείζον ἢ τοῦ κινδύνου τὸ τῆς αἰσχύνης ἀθαιρέτως χωροῦσι πρὸς τὴν ἀσέβειαν». Γρηγόριος Θεολόγος (Ἐπιτάφιος εἰς Καισάριον), PG35 768.

Καὶ βλέπουμε ὅτι συνεχίζεται ἡ συνεργασία σας μὲ τοὺς διώκτες καὶ ἀνακοινῶνουν δημόσια ὅτι «ἡ ἐκκλησία θὰ συμμετάσχη στὴν ἐκστρατεία ἐμβολιασμοῦ» (Κικίλιας 9/12). Στὴν ἐκστρατεία ἐμβολιασμοῦ! Μὲ τί ἐμβόλια; Παρὰ τὰ ὅσα λένε οἱ ἐπιστήμονες (ὄχι οἱ ἐπιταγμένοι καὶ πληρωμένοι) καὶ τὶς ἐπιφυλάξεις ποὺ διατυπώνουν... Καὶ καλὰ οἱ ἐπιστήμονες. Ὅποτε θέλουν καὶ ὅποιους θέλουν ἀκοῦν καὶ ἐπικαλοῦνται. Τουλάχιστον νὰ ἀκούγαν λιγάκι καὶ τοὺς ἀγίους; Προλέγει ὁ ἅγιος Παῖσιος: **«Τώρα πάλι παρουσιάσθηκε μιὰ ἀρρώστια, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία βρῆκαν ἓνα ἐμβόλιο ποὺ θὰ εἶναι ὑποχρεωτικὸ καί, γιὰ νὰ τὸ κάνη κανεὶς, θὰ τὸν σφραγίσουν».**

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος Ἀγιορείτης, Λόγοι Β' (1999), Σουρωτή Θεσσαλονίκης, σελ.181

Ἀλλὰ τὸν ἅγιο Παΐσιο θὰ ἀκούσουμε ἑμεῖς; Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε ἡ ἱεραρχία. Καὶ τότε ποὺ ζοῦσε τὰ ἴδια γινόταν: «*Ἐκάθαρα τὰ γράφω στὸ φυλλάδιο “Σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν”, ἃς ἐνεργήσῃ ὁ καθένας ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν συνείδησή του. Βέβαια μερικοὶ εἶπαν: “Ε, αὐτὰ εἶναι μιὰ γνώμη ἐνὸς καλοῦ ἄνθρωπου δὲν εἶναι ἡ θέση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας”. Ἐγὼ ὅμως δὲν εἶπα δική μου γνώμη, ἀλλὰ διατύπωση ἀπλὰ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, γιατί τὴν δική μας γνώμη πρέπει νὰ τὴν ὑποτάσσουμε στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ ἐκφράζεται μέσα στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο.*» Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ.π. σελ. 184.

Ὁ καλόγηρος βέβαια ἀγιοκατατάχθηκε, δηλαδή ἀναγνωρίστηκε καὶ ἐπισήμως ἡ ἀγιότης του καὶ ὀρίστηκε ἡμέρα ἑορτῆς του. Ἀλλὰ μέχρι ἐκεῖ. Ἐδῶ δὲν ἀκοῦν οὔτε Χριστὸ, οὔτε ἀποστόλους, οὔτε τοὺς παλαιοὺς ἀγίους πατέρες. Θὰ ἀκούσουν τὸν φτωχὸ καλόγερο; Ὅσοι τὸν γνώρισαν καὶ ὅσοι τὸν ἐμπιστεύονταν ἐλπίζω νὰ ξέρουν τί θὰ ἀκολουθήσουν. Οἱ ὑπόλοιποι κινδυνεύουν νὰ πᾶνε ὑπάκουοι καὶ φασκιομένοι: «*Λυστυχῶς, καὶ πάλι ὀρισμένοι “Γνωστικοὶ” φασκίωνουν τὰ πνευματικά τους τέκνα σὰν τὰ μωρὰ, δῆθεν γὰ νὰ μὴ στενοχωριοῦνται. “Ἄν πειράζει αὐτό· δὲν εἶναι τίποτε. Ἀρκεῖ ἐσωτερικὰ νὰ πιστεύετε.”*»!... Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ.π. σελ. 191.



Κι ἂν μὲς τὸ σπίτι σου δὲν πιστεύει κανεὶς, οὔτε ὁ ἄνδρας οὔτε τὰ παιδιὰ σου, καὶ μένεις ἕνας μὲς τὸ σπίτι, ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ πιστεύεις στὸν Θεό.

Κι ἂν μέσα στὴν κοινωνία, τὴν πόλη, τὸ χωριό, τὴν Ἀθήνα πέσουν καὶ προσκυνήσουν τὸν διάβολο, ἕνας νὰ μένεις μέσα στὴν Ἀθήνα, ἐσὺ νὰ μὴν ἀρνηθεῖς τὸν Χριστό.

Κι ἂν ὅλη ἡ Ἑλλάδα—ὅ μὴ γένοιτο—γονατίσει στὸν διάβολο κι ἀρνηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό, ἕνας νὰ μένεις στὴν Ἑλλάδα, μὴν ἀρνηθεῖς τὸν Χριστό.

Κι ἂν ὅλος ὁ πλανήτης ἀρνηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό κι ἕνας μείνει στὸν πλανήτη, μείνε ἐσὺ μὲ τὸν Χριστό.

Γιατὶ ὁ ἕνας θὰ νικήσῃ, ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός!

**Μακαριστὸς Ἐπίσκοπος πρῶην Φλωρίνης
Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010)**

Ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν ἔπεσε μόνο στὰ Σόδομα, Ἀλλὰ Μπορεῖ νὰ Πέσει καὶ σὲ Χριστιανικὲς Πόλεις Παρόμοιες μὲ τὰ Σόδομα!

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Δὲν Φτάνει μόνο ἡ Πίστη», *Τεραποστολικὲς Ἐπιστολὲς Β', Ἀγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς.*



Σ’ ἕνα κάτοικο τοῦ Ζέμου, γὰρ τὴν καταστροφὴ τῶν Σοδόμων: «Γιατὶ ὁ Θεὸς κατέστρεψε τὰ Σόδομα;», ρωτᾶτε. Μὰ δὲν σὰς κατέστη σαφὲς ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴ Γραφή τοῦ Θεοῦ; «*Εἶπε δὲ Κύριος κραυγὴ Σοδόμων καὶ Γομόρρας πεπλήθυνται πρὸς με, καὶ αἱ ἁμαρτίαι αὐτῶν μεγάλαι σφόδρα*»

(Γεν. 18:20). Καὶ ὅτι ἡ ἁμαρτία Σοδόμων ἦταν ὄντως πολὺ μεγάλη καὶ σφοδρὴ, φαίνεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ὅτι δὲν εἶχαν βρεθεῖ οὔτε δέκα δίκαιοι. Διότι στὴν ἐρώτηση τοῦ δίκαιου Ἀβραάμ, ἐὰν θὰ καταστρέψει τὴν ἁμαρτωλὴ πόλη, σὲ περίπτωσι ποὺ βρεῖ σ’ αὐτὴ δέκα δίκαιοι, ὁ Κύριος ἀπάντησε καὶ εἶπε: «*Οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσω ἕνεκεν τῶν δέκα.*» (Γεν. 18:32).

Ἀλλὰ δὲν βρέθηκαν οὔτε δέκα. Ὅλοι οἱ πολῖτες ἦταν σὲ πόλεμο ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐναντίον τῆς φύσης. Οἱ ψυχὲς τους ἦταν νεκρὲς ἐνὸς τὰ σώματα ἐκφυλισμένα. Γι’ αὐτὸ χτύπησε «*θεῖον, καὶ πῦρ*» (Γεν. 19:24), τὸ σύμβολο τῆς βρώμας καὶ τῆς ἔξαψης τῶν παθῶν τους, καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ Σόδομα δὲν ἔμεινε τίποτα πλὴν τοῦ κακοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς φρικιαστικῆς ἀφήγησις.

Ὅμως δὲν ἔπεσε ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ μόνο στὰ Σόδομα, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ πολλὲς ἄλλες πόλεις, ὅπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶχε κάνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δύσμορφους σὲ τέτοιο βαθμὸ, ὥστε νὰ μὴν μοιάζουν καθόλου πιά μὲ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ οὐράνιου Δημιουργοῦ. Καὶ ἐφόσον ἔτσι ἔγινε μὲ τίς κακὲς πόλεις, στὶς ὁποῖες δὲν εἶχε ἀκουστεῖ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, πὼσω μᾶλλον μπορεῖ νὰ συμβεῖ μὲ τίς χριστιανικὲς πόλεις—τίς ἐφάμιλλες ἢ παρόμοιες ὡς πρὸς τὸ κακὸ μὲ τὰ Σόδομα—τίς βαπτισμένες στὸ... ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ;

Διαβάστε τὴν ἀπειλὴ τοῦ Σωτήρα πρὸς τὴν πόλη Καπερναοῦμ: «*Καὶ σὺ Καπερναοῦμ, ἡ ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθεῖσα ἕως ἄδου καταβιβασθήσῃ ὅτι εἰ ἐν Σοδόμοις ἐγενήθησαν αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ γενόμεναι ἐν σοί, ἔμειναν ἂν μέχρι τῆς σήμερον.*» (Ματθ 11:23).

Καὶ πράγματι, ἡ προφητεία ἐκπληρώθηκε: ἐκεῖ ὅπου κάποτε στεκόταν ἡ υπερήφανη πόλη τῆς Καπερναοῦμ τώρα εἶναι ἀδιαπέραστος θαμνώδης τόπος, πέτρες καὶ φωλιὲς φιδιῶν. Μὲ τὰ μάτια τους τὸ εἶδαν καὶ μὲ τὴν καρδιά ἔτρεμαν ὅλοι οἱ προσκυνητὲς τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων.

Ἡ Εὐλογία Ἀνησυχία Ἐνός Χαριτωμένου Γέροντα

Γράφει ὁ Ἡλίας Καλλιώρας.

**Ἄς κάνουμε ἐμεῖς τό πρώτο βῆμα καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς
θὰ ἀναλάβει τὰ ὑπόλοιπα**

† † †

Χθὲς μὲ κάλεσε ἀπροσδόκητα ἕνας γεμάτος χάρη γέροντας ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑπειρωτικὴ Ἑλλάδα. Ὁμολογῶ ὅτι πράγματι ξαφνιαστήκα ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ τηλεφώνημα! Διότι, ἡ ἐν λόγῳ ἁγία ψυχὴ δὲν συνηθίζει νὰ κάνει κάτι τέτοιο. Κάθε ἄλλο μάλιστα. Τὸ ἀντίθετο ἰσχύει.

Σὰς κοινοποιῶ, στὴ συνέχεια ἐν συντομίᾳ, κάποια ἀπὸ αὐτὰ πού μοῦ εἶπε καὶ ὑπογράμμισε ὁ ἐν λόγῳ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ:

«Παιδί μου, ὁ Κύριος εἶναι πάρα πολὺ θλιμένος.

Ὅσο, ὁμοίως, καὶ ἡ Μητέρα Του, ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος, μὲ ὅλα αὐτὰ πὸν γίνονται στὶς μέρες μας, στὸν ἅγιο τόπο μας. Θλίψη μεγάλη γεμίζει τὴν ψυχὴ μου, πὸν ὑπάρχουν σήμερα ἱεράρχες μὲ αὐτὲς τὶς πνευματικὲς θέσεις, κοσμικὲς συμπεριφορὲς καὶ ἀνθρώπινη στάση ἀπέναντι κυρίως στὰ ἐμβόλια. Εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτο λ.χ. νὰ πιέζουν κάποιοι ἀπὸ τὸν ἅγιο Ἄμβωνα γιὰ νὰ ἐμβολιαστοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Νὰ ἐμβολιασθεῖ, δηλαδή, ὅλο ἀνεξαιρέτως τὸ ποίμνιό τους.

Πάρα πολὺς πόνος στεναχωρεῖ καὶ ματώνει τὴν καρδιά μου, παιδί μου, γιὰ τὴ σημερινὴ Διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὶς μὴ πατερικὲς τῆς θέσεις ἀπέναντι στὰ θέματα καὶ τὶς ὑποχρεώσεις τῆς ἁγίας μας Ἐκκλησίας, εἰδικῶς ἀπὸ πέρουσι τὸν Μάρτιο καὶ τὴν πρώτη φάση τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ. Ὅπως εἶναι γιὰ παράδειγμα, τὸ κλείσιμο ἱερῶν ναῶν, ἡ ἀπαγόρευση ἢ τὸ σταμάτημα τῶν λιτανειῶν, ἢ ἐπιβολὴ τῶν μασκῶν μέσα στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς, καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα.

Μπορεῖς, παιδί μου, νὰ μοῦ πεῖς, γιατί τὰ κάνουν ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἁμαρτωλά, τὰ φρικτὰ καὶ ἀπαράδεκτα οἱ ἅγιοι δεσπότες μας; Δὲν καταλαβαίνουν ὅτι τὰ δῆθεν ἐμβόλια εἶναι ἀργὸς θάνατος γιὰ πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς συνανθρώπους μας; Τί ἄραγε συμβαίνει; Μὰ ἐδῶ γίνεται μία ἄνευ προηγουμένου γενοκτονία! Δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνουν μήπως αὐτὸ οἱ ἱεράρχες μας; Γιατί ἄραγε δὲν τὸ αἰσθάνονται κάτι τέτοιο καὶ πάρα πολὺ μεγάλο κακὸ πὸν ἀφορᾷ ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα;

Μπορεῖς νὰ μοῦ πεῖς, ἀκόμη, γιατί ἡ κυβέρνησις ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἐπιτροπὴ τῶν εἰδικῶν τοῦ κράτους ἐπιμένει τόσο πολὺ στὸ νὰ γίνουν μὲ κάθε κόστος, ἄμεσα καὶ πάση θυσία τὰ ἐμβόλια; Μὰ, δὲν τὸ λένε οἱ ἴδιες οἱ ἐταιρεῖες πὸν παράγουν αὐτὰ τὰ «ἐμβόλια» ὅτι τὰ ἐμβόλιά τους εἶναι, κατὰ πρῶτον, πειραματικὰ καὶ ἔχουν, ἐπίσης, δεύτερον, μόνον προσωρινὴ ἄδεια χρῆσις;

Ἀλλά, ἐν τούτοις ὅμως, δόξα τῷ Τριαδικῷ Θεῷ εὐτυχῶς ὁ Κύριός μας εὐλόγησε καὶ φώτισε πάρα πολλοὺς Ἕλληνες καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι βγήκαν, σὲ ὀλόκληρη πλέον τὴν χώρα, μὲ δυναμικὲς πορεῖες, μεγάλες συναθροίσεις, ἀνθρώπινη ἀντίσταση καὶ μὲ πολλὲς καὶ συγκεκριμένες διαμαρτυρίες κατὰ τῶν ἐμβολιασμῶν.

Παιδί μου, μία εἶναι ἡ ἀλήθεια: Εἶναι ἔγκλημα κατὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας ὁ ἐμβολιασμός! Καὶ εἰδικὰ τῶν παιδιῶν! Μεγάλο κακὸ καὶ μέγα ἔγκλημα!

Ἔχεις τὴν εὐχή μου, παιδί μου, νὰ κάνεις καὶ ἐσὺ ὅτι εἶναι ἀνθρωπίνως δυνατὸν νὰ ξεσηκωθοῦν στὴ συνέχεια ὅλο καὶ περισσότεροι Ἕλληνες κατὰ τῶν κυβερνητικῶν ἐγκλημάτων καὶ ὅλων ὅσων διαπράττουν ἐκουσίως ἢ ἀκουσίως ἐγκλήματα κατὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους!

Εἶναι πάρα πολὺ μεγάλη ἀνάγκη νὰ βρεθοῦν στοὺς δρόμους τὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα, ξανὰ καὶ ξανά!

Πρέπει νὰ συνεχίσετε μαζικότερα καὶ δυναμικότερα, γιατί δὲν ἔχετε ἄλλο τρόπο προστασίας, ἀντίστασης καὶ ἀντίδρασης κατὰ

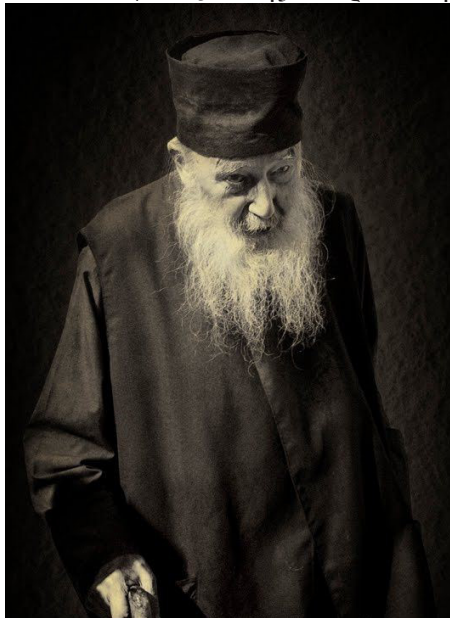
τῶν ζῶν τῶν ἀθῶν παιδιῶν μας!

Νὰ συγκεντρωθεῖτε, νὰ φωνάξετε, νὰ διαμαρτυρηθεῖτε, νὰ κλείσετε ὅλους τοὺς δρόμους, πάλι καὶ ξανά!.. Χωρὶς τέλος!

Τὸ ξαναλέω! Κινδυνεύουν ἡ Ἑλλάδα καὶ εἰδικότερα τὰ ἀθῶα καὶ ἁγνὰ παιδιά μας!

Ἔχετε, παιδιά τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μας, τὴν εὐλογία μου καὶ τὴν εὐχή μου νὰ πολεμήσετε καὶ νὰ ἀνατρέψετε τὴν ἐγκληματικὴ αὐτὴ κατάσταση, φρικτὴ στάση καὶ κατηφορικὴ ἐθνικὴ πορεία. Εἶναι ἐθνικὴ ἀνάγκη.

Ὅσο γιὰ μένα, ἐὰν φτάσουμε στὸ σημεῖο νὰ μοῦ ποῦν νὰ μπαίνουν στὸ ἅγιο Μοναστήρι μου ἀποκλειστικὰ καὶ μόνον οἱ ἐμβολιασμένοι, κάνω πολὺ προσευχὴ στὴν Παναγία μας, νὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψει καλύτερα νὰ τὸ κλείσω παρὰ νὰ ξεχωρίσω τὰ παιδάκια μου, πὸν ἔρχονται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονή, ὅπου διακονῶ τὸν Κύριό



μου και Θεό μου για πολλές δεκαετίες, για να βρουν οι ίδιοι αγία αγαλλίαση, ουράνιες ευχές, θεϊκές ευλογίες και έσωτερική ειρήνη και χαρά!

Τὸ ξαναλέω για μία ακόμη φορά και σᾶς ευλογῶ! Νὰ ἀντισταθεῖτε! Δυναμικά. Καὶ ὄλο και περισσότεροι νὰ συναθροίζεστε και νὰ διαμαρτύρεσθε τὴν κάθε ἐπόμενη φορά. Ὅλο και περισσότεροι οἱ συναθροισμένοι.

Οἱ σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις δὲν θὰ σταματήσουν ἐδῶ τὰ φρικτὰ τους σχέδια. Κάντε κάτι και ἐσεῖς. Ἔστω και κάποια πράγματα μικρὰ ἢ και μηδενικῆς ἀξίας. Καί, στὴ συνέχεια, ὁ γλυκύτατος και Πανάγαθος Ἰησοῦς μας θὰ κάνει ὅλα τὰ ὑπόλοιπα. Θὰ ἐπέμβει!..».

Κλείνοντας, τέλος, θὰ σᾶς καταγράψω αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶπε πολὺ γνωστὸς ἀγιορείτης γέροντας στὸν Διονύση Μακρῆ, ποὺ βρέθηκε στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος πρὶν λίγες μέρες: «Πρέπει νὰ δώσετε πολλαπλὴ και δυναμικὴ μάχη. Χρειάζεται πολλοὶ νὰ κάνουν ἀγωγές, μὴνύσεις, ἐξῶδικα, κλπ, κατὰ τῶν ἀρχῶν τοῦ κράτους, ὥστε κάποιοι νὰ φοβηθοῦν τὶς νομικὲς και λοιπὲς συνέπειες και νὰ ὑποχωρήσουν στὰ ἐμβόλια, κλπ.».



Παλιά, ὅταν γινόταν ἕνας πόλεμος, ἦταν ἐν ἀμύνη κανεῖς και πηγαινε νὰ ἀγωνισθῆ, νὰ πολεμήσῃ, για νὰ ὑπερασπιστῆ τὴν Πατρίδα του, τὸ ἔθνος του. Τώρα δὲν πᾶμε νὰ ὑπερασπίσουμε τὴν Πατρίδα μας ἢ νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε, για νὰ μὴ μᾶς κάψουν οἱ βάρβαροι τὰ σπίτια μας ἢ νὰ μὴ μᾶς πάρουν τὴν ἀδελφή μας και μᾶς ἀτιμάσουν, οὔτε πᾶμε για ἕνα ἔθνος ἢ για μία ιδεολογία. Τώρα πᾶμε ἢ για τὸν Χριστὸ ἢ για τὸν διάβολο.

Εἶναι καθαρὸ μέτωπο. Στὴν Κατοχὴ γινόνταν ἥρωας, γιατί δὲν χαιρετοῦσες ἕναν Γερμανό. Τώρα γίνεσαι ἥρωας, γιατί δὲν χαιρετᾶς τὸν διάβολο. Πάντως θὰ δοῦμε φοβερὰ γεγονότα. Θὰ δοθοῦν πνευματικὲς μάχες. Οἱ Ἅγιοι θὰ ἀγιασθοῦν περισσότερο και οἱ ρυπαροὶ θὰ γίνουν ρυπαρότεροι. Νιώθω μέσα μου μία παρηγορία. Μία μπόρα εἶναι και ὁ ἀγώνας ἔχει ἀξία, γιατί τώρα δὲν ἔχουμε ἐχθρὸ τὸν Ἄλλῃ Πασά ἢ τὸν Χίτλερ ἢ τὸν Μουσουλίνη, ἀλλὰ τὸν διάβολο. Γι' αὐτὸ θὰ ἔχουμε και οὐράνιο μισθό.

Ὁ Θεὸς ἂς ἀξιοποιήσῃ τὸ κακὸ σὲ καλὸ σὰν Καλὸς Θεός.

Ἁγίου Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου

Ὁρθοδοξία και Παπισμός

Ἐκ τοῦ περιοδικοῦ «Ὁ Ὅσιος Φιλότητος τῆς Πάρου» τεῦχος 20, Μάιος-Αὔγουστος 2007. Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυμῆλη». Κείμενο τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου συγγραφέως και ὁμολογητοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου. Ἄν και γραμμένο μισὸν αἰῶνα πρὶν και ἀναφέρεται στὰ τότε γεγονότα, ὅμως εἶναι ἄκρως και δραματικὰ ἐπίκαιρο. Ἴσως διότι πάντοτε ἡ προδοσία θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο δαιμονικὴ ἐνῶ ἡ Ὁμολογία τὸ ἴδιο Θεοδίδακτη. Ἄς διαφυλάξουμε τὸ μυστήριό τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μας.

Μεγάλο, πολὺ μεγάλο και σπουδαῖο εἶναι ἕνα ζήτημα ποὺ δὲν τοῦ δώσανε σχεδὸν καθόλου προσοχὴ οἱ περισσότεροι Ἕλληνες. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ὅτι ἀπὸ καιρὸ ἀρχίσανε κάποιοι δικοὶ μας κληρικοὶ νὰ θέλουν και νὰ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ δέσουν στενὲς σχέσεις με τοὺς παπικούς, ποὺ ἐπὶ τόσους αἰῶνες μᾶς ρημάξανε. Γιατί στ' ἀληθινά, δὲν ὑπάρχει πιδὸς μεγάλος ἀντίμαχος τῆς φυλῆς μας, κι ἐπίμονος ἀντίμαχος, ποῦ, σώνει και καλὰ θέλει νὰ σβῆσει τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία.

Οἱ δεσποτάδες ποῦ εἶπα πὼς τοὺς ἐπίασε, ἄξαφνα κι ἀναπάντεχα, ὁ ἔρωτας με τοὺς Λατίνους, λένε πὼς τὸ κάνουμε ἀπὸ «ἀγάπη». Μὰ αὐτὸ εἶναι χονδροειδεστάτη δικαιολογία και καλὰ θὰ κάνουμε νὰ παρατήσουνε αὐτὰ τὰ ροσόλια τῆς «ἀγάπης», ποὺ τὴν κάναμε ρεζίλι.

Ὁ διάβολος, ἅμα θελήσει νὰ κάνει τὸ πιδὸς πονηρὸ παιγνίδι του, μιᾶ, ὁ ἀλιτήριος για ἀγάπη. Ὅ,τι εἶπε ὁ Χριστός, τὸ λέγει κι αὐτὸς κάλπικα, για νὰ ξεγελάσει. Τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, τοὺς ρασοφόρους μας στὴν Πόλη, τοὺς ἐπίασε παροξυσμὸς τῆς ἀγάπης για τοὺς Ἰταλιάνους, ποὺ στέκονται, ὅπως πάντα, κρύοι και περήφανοι και δὲν γυρίζουνε νὰ τοὺς δοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς «ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφούς», ποὺ ὅσα τοὺς κάνανε ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἴσαμε τώρα, δὲν τοὺς τάκανε μῆτε Τοῦρκος, μῆτε Τάταρος, μῆτε Μωμαχετάνος.

Ἴσως κι οἱ δικοὶ μας νὰ κάνουν ἀπὸ παρεξηγημένη καλοσύνη. Ὅπως εἶπα, οἱ περισσότεροι δικοὶ μας δὲν δώσανε καμμιά σημασία σ' αὐτὲς τὶς φιλοπαπικὲς κινήσεις, ποὺ εἶναι θάνατος για τὸ γένος μας και ποὺ τὶς κινήσανε οἱ καταχθόνιες δυνάμεις ποὺ πολεμᾶνε τὸν Χριστὸ και ποὺ με τὰ λεπτὰ τους ἀγοράζουνε ὄλους, δὲν δώσανε λοιπὸν καμμιά σημασία, γιατί τὰ θεωροῦνε τιποτένια πράγματα, ἂν δὲν εἶναι κι οἱ ἴδιοι ἀγορασμένοι...

Τώρα τὰ μυαλὰ γινήκανε φαρδειά, και καταγίνονται με ἄλλα, κοσμοϊστορικὰ προβλήματα! «Θὰ καθόμαστε νὰ κυττάζουμε τώρα παπάδες και Ὁρθοδοξίες»; Μὰ αὐτοὺς δὲν τοὺς μέλλει κι ἂν ἐξαφανισθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο κάθε ἑλληνικὸ πρᾶγμα. Καὶ θὰ ἐξαφανισθεῖ ὄχι τόσο εὔκολα με τὸν ἀμερικανισμὸ ποὺ πάθαμε, ὅσο ἂν γίνουμε στὴ θρησκεία παπικοί. Γιατί γι' αὐτοῦ πᾶμε.

Παπική Ἑλλάδα θὰ πεῖ ἀξαφάνιση τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Νὰ γιατί εἶπα πὼς εἶναι πολὺ σπουδαῖο ζήτημα αὐτὲς οἱ ἐρωτηροπίες ποὺ ἀρχίσανε κάποιοι κληρικοὶ δικοὶ μας μὲ τοὺς παπικούς, κι ἡ αἰτία εἶναι το ὅτι δὲν νοιώσανε τί εἶναι Ὁρθοδοξία ὁλότελα, μ' ὅλο ποὺ εἶναι δεσποτάδες. Τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πὼς ὁ λαὸς δὲν πῆρε, καλὰ - καλὰ, εἶδηση γιὰ τὴ συνωμοσία. Ποιὸς νὰ τὸν πληροφορήσει ἀφοῦ οἱ γραμματισμένοι τὰ θεωροῦνε αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ἀνάξια γιὰ τὴ μοντέρνα σοφία τους, καὶ τρέχουν σημαιοφόροι σὲ κάθε νεωτερισμῶ; Ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ ἀρχίσανε οἱ λυκοφιλίες ἀνάμεσα στοὺς δικούς μας καὶ στοὺς παπικούς (καὶ σημείωσε πὼς οἱ δικοὶ μας φαγωθήκανε πρῶτοι νὰ πιάσουνε σχέση μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους σὰν νὰ πήρανε ἀπὸ κάπου διαταγή, κι ὁλοένα μιλάνε γιὰ «τὸν διάλογο μαζί τους», δίχως νὰ ξέρουνε καλὰ - καλὰ τί λένε), ἀπὸ τότε λοιπὸν, ἀκοῦμε, κάθε τόσο κάτι πράγματα θεατρικά, ἄνοστα, ἀνόητα, δίχως καμμιά σοβαρότητα, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ λεγόμενη «Διάσκεψις τῆς Ρόδου», τὰ νέα παρεκκλήσια τοῦ Βατικανοῦ, κ.λ.π.

Στὴ Ρόδο πήγανε οἱ δικοὶ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ πουλήσουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, γιατί γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι καθυστερημένη μορφή τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, δηλαδή ἓνας βλάχικος χριστιανισμὸς καὶ νὰ ἀρχίσουν τὸν «διάλογον», ποὺ νὰ τὸν πάρει ἡ εὐχή αὐτὸν τὸν «διάλογον». Καὶ τί κάνανε; Τίποτα! Λόγια πολλὰ καὶ χαμένα, ποὺ νὰ ντρέπεται κι ὁ τελευταῖος Ἕλληνας Ὁρθόδοξος. Προχθὲς πάλι μάθαμε πὼς ὁ Πάπας ἐγκαινίασε ἓνα νέο παρεκκλήσιο στὸ Βατικανὸ καὶ ἔβαλε γιὰ εἰκόνες (μὴ χειρότερα!) τὶς φωτογραφίες τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τοῦ Ἀθηναγόρα, «ὁ ὁποῖος ἴσταται ὀπισθεν τοῦ Ποντίφηκος»! Φαντασθεῖτε παρεκκλήσιο μὲ φωτογραφίες (τί ἀκαλαίσθητα πράγματα!).

Ὁ Πάπας λοιπὸν θὰ προσεύχεται μπροστὰ στὶς δικές του φωτογραφίες! Δηλαδή τρελλάθηκαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι! Αὐτὰ δὲν τὰ κάνανε μήτε οἱ ἀραπάδες τῆς Ἀφρικῆς. Συλλογίζομαι πόση σοβαρότητα ἔχουν οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι στὴ θρησκεία τους, καὶ ποῦ καταντήσανε τὴ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀθεόφοβοι Ἰταλιάνοι, ποὺ προσκυνᾶνε ἀγάλματα τῆς Παναγίας μὲ κοκκινάδια, μὲ σκουλαρίκια καὶ μὲ δαχτυλίδια. Κι ἐμεῖς οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι ποὺ φυλάξαμε τὸ βαθὺ μυστήριον τῆς εὐσεβείας, τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἓνα μ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ γελοιοποίησανε τὸν Χριστὸ ὅσο κανένας ἄθεος.

Ἀλλά, ἀπὸ ποῦ νὰ πιάσει κανένας καὶ πολὺ νὰ τελειώσει; Ὅσοι ἦταν ἕως τώρα ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ

θρησκεία καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, καὶ ποὺ πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τὴν περιπαίζανε μάλιστα, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ γινήκανε ἔξαφνα παπόφιλοι, καὶ μασᾶνε σὰν μαστίχι τὴν ψεύτικη λέξη «ἀγάπη». Μεγαλύτερο ρεζιλίκι δὲν ἔγινε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄλλοι ποὺ εἴμαστε κολλημένοι ἀπὸ νεότητος στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας, εἴμαστε στενοκέφαλοι, μοχθηροί, γυμνοὶ ἀπὸ ἀγάπη κι ἀπὸ ἀληθινὴ εὐσέβεια. Ἡ μόδα εἶναι τώρα νὰ φαίνεσαι ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποὺ ἐνοίωσε τὰ «αἰτήματά» της. [...]

Πίστη ἀσάλευτη στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποὺ ἐμεῖς οἱ προκομμένοι τὴν πήραμε κληρονομία καὶ τὴν πουλάμε «ἀντὶ πινακίου φακῆς» καὶ ἀσπασμοῦ τῆς παντόφλας τοῦ Πάπα! Μὰ σὲ τέτοιο σημεῖο ἐκφυλισθήκαμε; Αἰτία εἶναι ἡ ἔμφυτη ματαιοδοξία μας, ποὺ μᾶς κάνει νὰ θέλουμε νὰ φαινόμεστε ἔξυπνοι συγχρονισμένοι, προοδευτικοί, κι ὄχι καθυστερημένοι. Μὲ τὴ συναίσθηση τῆς κατωτερότητας ποὺ ἀποχτήσαμε,

φοβόμεστε σὰν τὸν διάβολο μήπως μᾶς ποῦνε «παλιὰ μυαλά, παλιομερολογίτες, τάχα καθυστερημένους». Καὶ τρέχουμε νὰ πᾶμε πρώτη σὲ κάθε κίνηση ποὺ περνᾶ γιὰ «μοντέρνα», θέλεις μίμηση τῆς «ἀφηρημένης ζωγραφικῆς», θέλεις αὐτὲς τίς ἀκαταλαβίστικες

«λογοτεχνίες» (καημένη λογοτεχνία, ποῦ κατάντησε!), θὲς φιλοπαπισμὸς, θὲς φιλοαμερικανισμὸς, στὰ πάντα, στὰ ντυσίματά μας (πρὸ πάντων τῆς νεολαίας), στὸν τρόπο ποὺ μιλάμε καὶ σκεπτόμαστε, ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς χειρονομίες. Δηλαδή, καταντήσαμε μαῖμοῦδες τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους «ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς προόδου καὶ τῆς θαυμάσιας ἐποχῆς μας»...



Πρέπει νὰ γίνης γενναιότερος. Νὰ παραταχθῆς στῆθος πρὸς στῆθος πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἄσαρκους (δαίμονες). Μὴν τοὺς φοβῆσαι. Ἐσὺ δὲν βλέπεις μὲ κάθε εὐχήν, ὅπου λέγεις, πόσοι πίπτουν, πόσοι στρέφουν τὰ νῶτα. Σὺ μόνον βλέπεις πόσον ἐσὺ πληγώνεσαι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ δέρονται. Καὶ αὐτοὶ φεύγουν. Εἰς κάθε ὑπομονὴν ὅπου κάμνομεν, φεύγουν ἀλματωδῶς, καὶ εἰς κάθε εὐχήν πληγώνονται σοβαρῶς. Λοιπὸν μὴ θέλῃς ἐν καιρῷ πολέμου νὰ ρίπτῃς ἐσὺ σφαῖρες καὶ βόλια καὶ αὐτοὶ νὰ σοῦ ρίχνουν λουκουμία καὶ σοκολάτες.

Ὅσιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστῆς

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN'S ANSWER TO AMERICA'S PROBLEMS

By Bill Connor, "The Christian Post," September 30, 2020. Bill Connor, an Army Infantry colonel, author and Orangeburg attorney, has deployed multiple times to the Middle East. Connor was the senior U.S. military adviser to Afghan forces in Helmand Province, where he received the Bronze Star.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918 – 2008) won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1970. He was pivotal in revealing what life was like in the days of the atheistic communist Soviet Union. He is the mind behind his powerful book Voice from the Gulag.

† † †

Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.

[Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn]

† † †



With the 2019 Pew Research Poll showing the percentage of Christians in America dropping from 77% in 2009 to 65% in 2019, the religious transformation of Americans cannot be ignored. For many Americans, religion is seen as a personal matter which should be disconnected from public life. Many of the political left assert Christian values are a danger to public decision making. Amy Coney Barrett was grilled by Democratic Senators about the potential dangerous role her religious beliefs might play during the 2018 Appeals Court confirmation hearings. The reality is that the level of religion in a nation is of utmost importance to the future of the nation. The prophetic warning of the danger of national Spiritual decline, by author and Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, is what America desperately needs right now. Let me explain.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was born in Russia in December 1918. Though Baptized in a Russian Orthodox family, Solzhenitsyn experienced the anti-Christian fervor of the Soviet Union growing up and he became a militant atheist communist. During World War II, Solzhenitsyn served as an Artillery Captain and was thrice decorated for bravery fighting Nazi Germany. Despite heroism in the Red Army, in 1945 Solzhenitsyn was given an 8-year sentence to a Soviet Gulag due to private criticism of Stalin. It was during that period the Solzhenitsyn experienced a religious conversion back to the Orthodox Christian faith of his youth. He came to see the hatred of Christianity at the heart of Communism, and came to better understand the ultimate reason for the horror of 60 million dead in the Soviet Union. As Solzhenitsyn wrote, it took root due to the nation turning from God.

Solzhenitsyn was released from the Gulag in 1953, and attempted to publish works critical of the Gulag system and the Soviet Union. After persecution by the Soviet authorities, Solzhenitsyn was ultimately stripped of his Soviet citizenship and expelled from Russia. He lived in America from 1976 until after the fall of the Soviet Union, when, in 1994, he returned to his home country of Russia. While in America, due to his international acclaim as a writer and dissident Solzhenitsyn was invited to give many speeches to various Western audiences. In 1978, Solzhenitsyn shocked liberal Harvard University by warning of the danger of the materialism and rising secularism he saw pervading and corroding the West. Solzhenitsyn compared the horrible consequences of state enforced atheism in Communism Soviet Union to the secularism and materialism he saw in America.

It was at his 1983 address when receiving the Templeton Award that Solzhenitsyn succinctly explained the reason for the Bolshevik Revolution and the barbarity and atrocities it wrought on the world: "Men have forgotten God, and that's why all this happened." This was the ultimate explanation for the horrors of Socialism. Solzhenitsyn was also providing warning that America could experience the same by "forgetting God."

According to Solzhenitsyn, violent revolution followed Godlessness and increased Godlessness: "It was Dostoevsky, once again, who drew from the French Revolution and its seeming hatred of the Church the lesson that 'revolution must necessarily begin with atheism.' That is absolutely true. But the world had never before known a godlessness as organized, militarized, and tenaciously malevolent as that practiced by Marxism. Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin, and at the heart of their psychology, hatred of God is the principal driving force, more fundamental than all their political and economic pretensions. Militant atheism is not merely incidental or marginal to Communist policy; it is not a side effect, but the central pivot. To achieve its diabolical ends. Communism needs to control a population devoid of religious and national feeling, and this entails the destruction of faith and nationhood."

Solzhenitsyn went on to explain the counter to the Marxism and secularism of his day. Prophetically, this provides the answer to the rising Marxism and anarchy we find growing in America today. As Solzhenitsyn explains, contrary to the group, racial, and class divisions of Marxism, America must look to God, both as a nation and as individuals:

"All attempts to find a way out of the plight of today's world are fruitless unless we redirect our consciousness, in repentance, to the Creator of all: without this, no exit will be illumined, and we shall seek it in vain. The resources we have set aside for ourselves are too impoverished for the task. We must first recognize the horror perpetrated not by some outside force, not by class or national enemies, but within

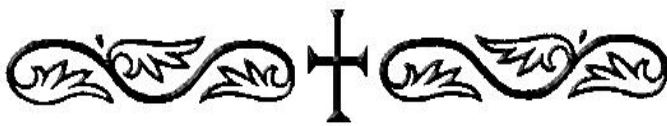
each of us individually, and within every society. This is especially true of a free and highly developed society, for here in particular we have surely brought everything upon ourselves, of our own free will. We ourselves, in our daily unthinking selfishness, are pulling tight that noose.”

In America today, we see the increasing attacks on the foundations of our traditional Christian faith and our nation by groups like antifa and BLM and ideas like Critical Race Theory and the 1619 project. Whether by destruction of statues and memorials to the nation and Church, or by shaming national history through fraudulent alternative historic narratives. Solzhenitsyn’s answer to this is the unbeatable power of Christianity.

“The centralized atheism (Soviet Union) before whose armed might the whole world trembles still hates and fears this unarmed faith (Christianity) as much today as it did 60 years ago. Yes! All the savage persecutions loosed upon our people by a murderous state atheism, coupled with the corroding effect of its lies, and an avalanche of stultifying propaganda—all of these together have proven weaker than the thousand-year-old faith of our nation. This faith has not been destroyed; it remains the most sublime, the most cherished gift.”

After his conversion from Communism to Christianity in a Soviet Gulag, Solzhenitsyn always foresaw the ultimate triumph of Christianity. Joseph Pearce put it best of Solzhenitsyn’s life and our hope in Christianity: “Little could Solzhenitsyn have known when he languished as one of the many millions in the Soviet prison system that he would outlive the Soviet system and, furthermore, that his own courage would play an important part in that very system’s collapse.”

Like Solzhenitsyn, let us put our faith in the power of Christianity to triumph over the modern darkness seeking to envelop our nation and let us never forget God.



Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.” Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: “Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (+2008)
From “Voice from the Gulag”

DE-MYSTIFYING THE COVID VACCINE

Monk Paul of the Holy Mountain, Biologist, MD Molecular Biology and Biomedicine.

It is with sorrow and wonder that we are observing an event unprecedented in world history. In the name of “love” for the elderly and the more vulnerable, vaccination is being scheduled for all people worldwide, in order to exterminate the implacable “invisible enemy,” known as Corona virus SARS-Cov2 (Covid-19):

- A necessary legal framework that will abolish the right to individual choice and will “defend” the benefit-right to public health (Law 4675/2020 for Greece).
- An accompanying governmental authoritarianism to enforce it.
- Creating demand and expectation for the vaccine (terrorism-brainwashing by the media with the dilemma of “vaccine or social incarceration-isolation”).
- Unilateral funding for the production of the vaccine, for controls by clinical trials, for mass-production in vast quantities and for delivery to every corner of the planet—at the expense of research for finding and producing specialized antiviral drugs.

These are just some of the steps in the protocol already being implemented in order to reach this milestone event. Businessmen, journalists, government officials, and international Non-Governmental Organizations are almost daily propagating the vaccine like a magic wand that will supposedly allow humanity to return to the pre-Covid era. On the other hand, instead of the scientific community (with the exception of an excessively projected, vaccine-obsessed elite), stigmatizing this misinformation, it has been keeping a “fishy silence” about what people should really expect from the vaccine, with the exception of a few inspired instances, such as Professor Dr. Yannis Ioannidis. In fact, this specific “pandemic” anything BUT justifies worldwide vaccination. Let’s see why:

1. The particularly low mortality rate of the disease, but also its distribution by age, clearly denote that vaccination, whenever it becomes feasible, must be targeted. This percentage is fictitiously over-evaluated for the time being (~2.5%): on the one hand, due to the over-representation of severely positive cases of the virus, and on the other, given that the death toll from Covid-19 has also included the deaths of cases found positive for Covid-19 but with other, underlying diseases (not the SARS respiratory syndrome). Recent studies which have estimated the number of deaths in relation to the actual number of people exposed to the virus—based on serological tests (antibody tests) in a specific geographical area—have determined that this percentage is of the order of magnitude of seasonal flu (certainly <1%).

It should be noted that even if the epidemic returns, as is the case with influenza, the health system will deal with it more effectively, as now there is experience in managing the disease (more ICUs). Hence, mistakes of “Italy’s kind” will not be repeated, leading to a further reduction of the mortality rate. Based on the above, even if a truly safe and effective vaccine is produced (something especially difficult for corona viruses’ biology), it can be justified for administering it only to high-risk groups, as is done with the seasonal flu vaccine. Needless to say that it is not justified for administering it to children—who are in their vast majority asymptomatic, nor to people who have been exposed and are immune to the virus (positive antibody test), given that they already have what the vaccine would have given them.

2. The Covid-19 virus, as opposed to influenza, mainly affects people in the third and fourth age groups, where the phenomenon of immune senescence occurs—that is, the reduction in size, quality and duration of their immune response-protection—which can occur, after being vaccinated. In other words, the vaccine-induced active immunity may not be capable of protecting the elderly, who are the par excellence “target” of the corona virus; hence, the finding of an anti-viral therapy should be a priority—assuming that the protection of the elderly is in fact what is desired.

3. Related to the above, is that with seriously ill patients, acute respiratory failure occurs through an immuno-pathological mechanism (a “storm” producing inflammatory cytokines and reducing CD4 and CD8 T-mediated immune response). There are serious concerns that vaccination will exacerbate this immune complication in the event of a subsequent viral infection and will consequently worsen the patient’s clinical course. A similar effect was observed with the FeCoV coronavirus vaccine, which affects cats and causes peritonitis.

4. The logic of eradicating an infectious disease through global vaccination, on the one hand presupposes the existence of a very safe and very effective vaccine, and on the other hand, most importantly that there be no other hosts of the virus in the natural environment. That is, man has to be the only species that can host the virus. This is true of the polio virus, but it does not apply to the coronavirus, because all research suggests that the virus originated from bats. Unknown and controversial remains the intermediate link (host?) which had transported it from the bats’ caves of Wuhan city.

In any case, the disappearance of the virus through global vaccination would only be temporary—in other words, a terrible waste of resources, inasmuch as it could transfer from its natural refuge (the bats or the intermediate host) to the human population at any given moment, capably

mutated for bypassing the existing herd immunity and initiating a new pandemic.

5. Coronaviruses, being RNA viruses, mutate rapidly, gaining genetic and therefore antigenic diversity. This diversity, especially for coronae, also increases through RNA recombination, due to the particularly inconsistent mode of transcription of viral RNAs. Two types have already been identified for SARS-Cov2, S and L. It is doubtful that a vaccine can provide both equal coverage for all strains of the virus that emerge, as well as permanent protection over time, hence underlining one more time the importance and priority of finding anti-viral drugs against coronavirus. It is quite likely, therefore, that over time, **a global vaccination evolve into regular global vaccinations.**

Could this perhaps be the aim? Perhaps the corona is the long-awaited pretext for launching the universal transition to a hybrid human biology, where the human body will be protected, strengthened and ultimately dependent on platform technologies (genetic engineering, digital interfacing) through regular vaccinations-updates. But why all the rush for a vaccine that not only does not promise much, but is the cause for concern in the scientific community, especially if it is produced in a hurry and implemented en masse? Finally, do the pharmaceutical industries serve man, or does the opposite apply?

The reality is that ~ 99% of people infected with coronavirus survive. Emphasis (i.e., funding) should be placed on how to target the 1% of those who do not survive, in spite of a host of pharmaceutical options (immunomodulators, monoclonal antibodies, RNA polymerase inhibitors, proteases, etc.). Already, the first results from the form of hydroxychloroquine-azithromycin as well as from a monoclonal antibody that targets the superficial glycoprotein S of the virus are very encouraging.

Of course, part of an anti-viral strategy is also the development of a safe and effective vaccine. However, as analyzed, its forced production (1 year instead of at least 6 years) with so many gaps in the knowledge of the biology of the corona is not indicated—much less its mandatory mass implementation. It is a tragic scientific forfeiture (if not absurdity) in the age of Molecular Biology—whose aim is to provide Medicine with specialized (even personalized) treatments minimizing any side effects—that there is discussion solely about intervention in 100% of the human population, in order to “protect” 1% of it from a flu-like virus, with a suspicious pharmaceutical half-measure. Quite simply, this is a **wrong** approach, certified by the fact that for so many years there has never been any global vaccination against the flu virus—which would have been far more plausible, inasmuch as it strikes all age groups.

Man, as a rational being with critical thinking, has the ability to voluntarily choose whatever is recommended by medicine and biotechnology in favor of his health, while simultaneously undertaking the consequences of those choices, given that interventions in the human body are rarely without side-effects. Vaccines are not exempt of this rule. The choice of not being vaccinated does not endanger public health, as long as it does not abolish another person's right to receive the vaccine—and with it, any protection it provides.

It is therefore self-evident that the final decision-responsibility for receiving a vaccine belongs to the person being vaccinated, since he will necessarily have to live with any complications that may arise. No eventual compensation can restore irreversible damages to a person's physical and mental health. Consequently, that which is condemnable is every kind of complaisance that criminalizes a person's stance towards living in a body free of suspicious vaccines, and which transforms societies from democratic, to herds of undecided and expendable animals.

One can perceive from the aforementioned that the law pertaining to compulsory vaccination and the related propaganda in favor of the vaccine—with the Covid-19 virus pretext—have no scientific origin and reference. They do not defend but rather undermine the good of public health, and they enable the monstrous financial interests involved, as well as the obscure agenda of certain “big brothers” with power-loving appetites. Finally, they militate against the freedom of a person's spirit and body. As such, they should be retracted at a scientific, legal and mainly at a spiritual level.

The clime in which these schemes are developed and consolidated is fear. The Mass Media of Intimidation carefully create and maintain this clime. Fear is a mighty inner force of man; it can paralyze his will, but it can even steel it. The question is in which direction a person directs that fear. If he turns it towards God, *the only One worthy of being feared* (Lk 4:5), then he will receive enlightenment in return, boldness and courage—according to His words: *Be of courage, for I have overcome the world.* (Jn 6:33).

If a person remains focused on the phobias of this age, he will receive in return even more anxiety, confusion and cowardice, according to the Psalm: *They covered in fear, where there was no fear.* (Pss 5:5). The intentional persis-

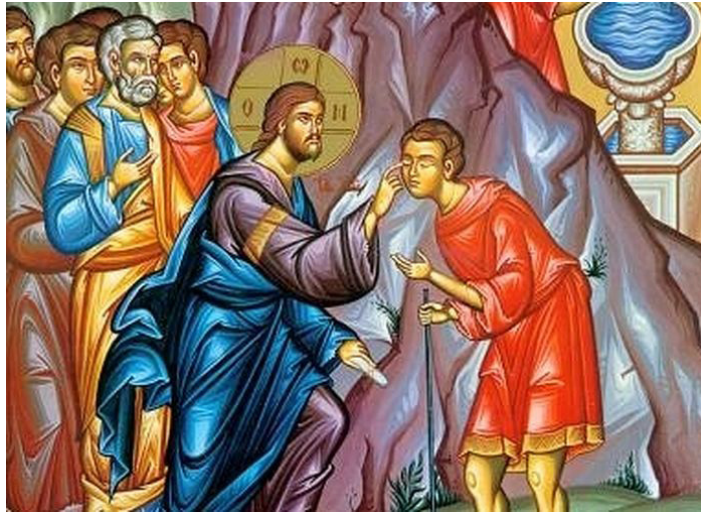
tence to de-sanctify the Sacrament of Holy Communion is not by coincidence; its purpose is to elicit and generate fear that will support the myth of the vaccine—as is the case throughout the ages, with all fictitious concoctions that lack any logical grounds.

Every time there is mention of saliva, spoons and the like—by those who have targeted Holy Communion—the miracle comes to mind of the born blind man (Jn 9). The Lord, with a “sanitarily unacceptable” action, restored the eyes of the blind man! He mixed His saliva (a means of spreading viruses and bacteria) with soil (a source of millions of germs) and “smeared” the clay mixture over the eye sockets of the blind man (mucosal conjunctiva: a point of entry for germs and the onset of infection). We are familiar with what ensued, just as we know that no science is able to reproduce that result. Quite simply, if it

had taken place today, **apart from the Pharisees of that time, among Jesus' accusers would also be certain narrow-minded infectious disease specialists.**

I pray from the depth of my heart that God will make them worthy of experiencing the Power of the Sacrament. The Lord is there, and invites them. He will never obligate them!

Hagiorite Monk Paul
Biologist, MD Molecular



Biology and Biomedicine
Vouleftiria, Holy Mountain.



Immediately—starting this next Sunday—our bishop should start visiting the congregations of this diocese every weekend, to convey strong messages of hope and reassurance. He should preside at the Sacred Mysteries openly, without regard to personal danger. He should appear conspicuously without the disgrace of a surgical mask. He should make a point of avoiding even the slightest appearance of apprehension.

A bishop must never, under any circumstances, convey fear. He should stride into our churches with the manly majesty of an Apostle, gather God's People into his arms, press them to his pastoral breast, and protect them from the social and political demons that are currently destroying the Church.

Fr. Patrick Reardon (retired Antiochian priest)
On “*What Must Bishops Do During This Present Crisis*”

THE LAST SPIRITUAL WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ST. LUKE OF CRIMEA

Saint Luke Archbishop of Symferoupolis and Crimea, a professor of surgery. From a publication of the holy monastery of Sagmata of the Transfiguration of Christ, near Thebes, Greece.

Some of the Saint Luke's remarkable life highlights are as follows:

1877: He was born in Kerts, in the Crimea. He grew up in Kiev where in addition to his studies; he studied also art in the School of Fine Arts.

1898-1903: He studies medicine and majors in surgery.

1904-1905: He was a volunteer military doctor in the Russian-Japanese War. He was married to Anna Vasilievna and they were blessed with four children.

1905-1917: He worked in various district hospitals. He prepares his dissertation on the importance of scientific studies.

1917: He moves to Tashkent. He is appointed as a university professor in the field of topographical anatomy and surgery.

1919: His first arrest took place. His wife Anna dies.

1921: He is ordained a priest.

1923-1926: He is ordained a bishop. He is arrested a second time and exiled to Siberia.

1924: He attempts his first kidney transplant from an animal to a human.

1930-1933: He is arrested for a third time and exiled to northern Russia.

1934-1937: His famous study is circulated on "A Study on Festering Sicknesses." He works intently on scientific discoveries. His investigations bring him very close to discovering penicillin.

1937: He is arrested for a fourth time. He suffers two years of difficult interrogation in Tashkent.

1939: He is exiled to Siberia.

1941: He is assigned to be the first surgeon at the military hospital in Krasnogiarsk.

1943: He is elected Archbishop of Krasnogiorask.

1944: He is transferred to Tambof as the chief medical doctor and Archbishop.

1946: He is decorated with the first prize of Stalin. He is assigned as Archbishop of Symferoupolis and in the Crimea. He slowly loses his eyesight.

1961: He fell asleep in the Lord on June 11 in Symferoupolis having served the people of God as Chief Shepherd

and doctor in sacrificial love and self-denial. His memory is commemorated on June 11.

† † †

To my three sons, my daughter, my grandchildren and my great grandchildren, my spiritual will:

I am now 79 years old. My heart is weak and my strength is failing me and it is evident that my time of departure from this world is near. St. Paul left a will to all the Christians. "Become followers of me, as I am of Christ." I certainly do not dare to say this to all the Christians but to you, my children; I can say follow my example just as I have followed the example of the Apostle Paul. My life has been tough and difficult but never did I pray to God to make it easy. Because *narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.* Mt 7:14.

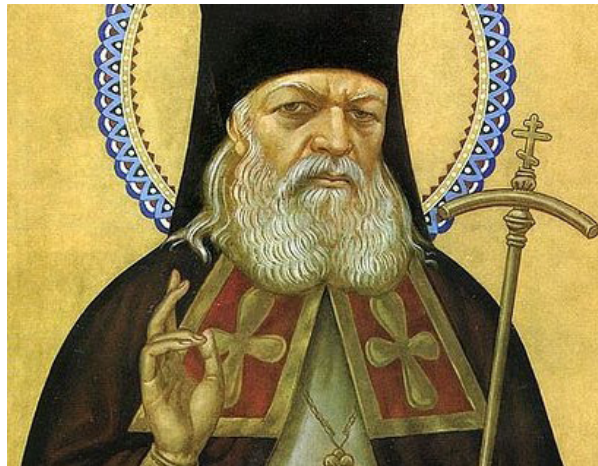
For more than twenty-five years my life was identified with the work of a rural surgeon and professor of surgery. And for eleven years I suffered persecution for the name of Christ by being jailed and exiled. From 1944 I combined the toilsome ministry of being a Bishop along with the healing the wounded at Tambor and only in 1946 did I stop being a surgeon and I continued as a Bishop.

Amongst most of the people it was inconceivable to understand how a great surgeon, who was honored with the First Prize of Stalin, could abandon a profession in surgery and become a Bishop. Yet there was nothing unusual about that because from

my youthful years, the Lord destined me to the high position of service to Him and to the people.

When I finished High School I received from the dean of the school my high school diploma. I placed this in the Book of the New Testament. I had read the New Testament before but now, when I read it again, I heard the words of Christ that were directed to the Apostles say: *The harvest is truly plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.* (Mt 9:37-38) My heart responded and I cried out in silence: "Oh Lord! Are you lacking workers?"

Many years went by. I became a doctor of medicine and I thought that I would write the book "A Treatise on Surgery in Treating Festering Wounds." When I made that decision, the following strange thought came to mind: "When that book is finished, it will be signed by a Bishop." I could not understand from where that thought came. But a few years later, I understood that it was a thought that was sent to me by God because after my first arrest, in the office of the



head jailer, the first edition of my book was published and on the facing page I wrote: "Bishop Luke, 'A Treatise on surgically treating festering wounds.' "

Two more years went by. I was in my first exile to Siberia, in the city of Geniseisk. A monk suddenly came to meet me from Krasnogiarsk. In this city, all the priests had compromised the faith and the faithful of the canonical Church had sent the monk to be ordained a priest but not to me at Geniseisk but to Minousinsk, to a non-canonical Orthodox bishop. But there was an unexplainable force which directed him to me at Geniseisk. When this monk saw me, he was startled and froze. He could not speak. He revealed to me, that when he saw me, he knew clearly that I was the same hierarch that he saw in an unforgettable dream ten years ago. That Bishop ordained him to the priesthood. At that time, I was just a country doctor in the city of Perezlavl, Zaleski.

The Lord God has blessed me with different talents. In High School, I finished my studies in the School of Fine Arts in Kiev. I was very talented in artist and I decided to enter the Academy of Fine Arts in Leningrad. But in the middle of exams, I abandoned this effort because I thought that I should serve God and His people, in work that is more beneficial than art. Even though at that time it was clear to me the direction my art would take if I didn't abandon it; it would purely be a religious direction or I would follow in the footsteps of V. Vasnetsov and Nesterov.

From that time theological issues concerned me very much. The driving force in my character was a strong desire to serve God and His people, only because of that. But in spite of my opposition toward the physical sciences, I took exams for medical school at the University of Kiev and I graduated with honors.

My talent was revealed at the university in anatomy and surgery and my fellow students didn't want to hear that I desired to become a rural doctor. They had decided unanimously that I would become a professor of anatomy or a surgeon. From what you now know, they had prophesied my future correctly.

As a rural doctor, I worked for thirteen years twelve to fourteen hours a day. I was thinking seriously of abandoning the rural hospital in order travel to distant villages where the people were poor and dying because of the lack of medical help. But the Lord had decided differently for me. He sent me to Tashkent where I was one of the organizers of the University of Middle Asia and became a professor of topographical anatomy and the chief surgeon. This was at the beginning of the decade of the 1920s.

During the years of the antireligious demonstrations during which they derided the Lord Jesus Christ, my heart was saying: "I cannot keep silent." At that time there was a clergy-laity congress taking place in Tashkent. I was pres-

ent and during the discussions on some important issues I made an impassioned speech. That speech made a great impression on Bishop Innocent of Tashkent and at the end of the congress he said to me; "Doctor, you must become a priest." That was something that was completely unexpected by me but the words of the Hierarch brought forth a calling through his lips and I did not hesitate one second in answering him: "Of course, Your Eminence, if that is the will of God, I will become a priest." And the following Sunday, I, the professor of medicine, with a borrowed robe, appeared before the Bishop who was standing on his throne and I was ordained a sub-deacon and then during the course of the Divine Liturgy I was then ordained a deacon. Within two weeks I became a priest and the pastor of the Cathedral Church.

One and a half years before that great event in my life, my wife and your mother died. The smallest of you, Valentine, was then six years old and the oldest was fourteen.

Two years and four months later, the Lord made me worthy of being elevated to the rank of Bishop. It was divine providence for me and for you, my children that was revealed to us at that time when the Lord called your mother to eternal life by allowing her to get sick with tuberculosis. By this happening to her the road was opened for me to enter monastic life and the hierarchical ministry. All the responsibility for you, my children, I gave over to the care of the Lord and truly, I was not made a liar by believing in Him. Your care and upbringing was provided for by sending me an unknown woman, Sofia Sergakevna Veletskagia, who during the times I was jailed and the three times I was sent into exile she provided for your care. With a great deal of self-sacrifice and love she lifted the heavy cross for your care during those years of the plague. She raised you successfully and gave you a good education.

Later on all three of you and my daughter, with the protection and the help of your guardian angels, completed your advanced studies. Michael for some time now has become a professor, while Aliosa and Valia are teachers in the medical and biological sciences and in a little while they will become professors.

The Lord accepted all the sacrifices which I have offered Him and not only did He accept them but He changed and corrected many of them. I abandoned doing any more surgeries so that I could spend more time preaching about Jesus Christ. I was not concerned with the fame of a surgeon which certainly I deserve. While this glory is important and belongs to God, the new freedom I had increased the power and content of my sermons. My well-known and famous book "The Treatise on Surgery for Festering Wounds" was completed while I was in exile and when I was Archbishop. My determination to sacrifice everything

for the glory of Him, the Lord gave me another talent, that of preaching. The nine volumes of my sermons have been recognized by the Spiritual Academy of Moscow as unique in contemporary ecclesiastical theology and a treasure of commentary on the Holy Bible. And I, a self-taught theologian was chosen to be a member of the Spiritual Academy of Moscow. For the Church, my sermons will have greater meaning than my "Treatise on Surgery for Festering Wounds."

In addition to this, the miraculous events which I spoke about earlier which were directed by the Lord without my realizing it led me mystically to the Hierarchical ministry. I often physically felt the presence of God in my communion with Him, in my spiritual life and in my prayers.

But if I have not said enough for any of you to convince you of these things then I think his (Michael's) involvement with the physical sciences have bewitched him so much that he does not want to hear those things that I have lived; the things I have undeniably felt many times.

In other words, I will tell you just the way it is, how astonishing and clearly the Lord God reveals His desire for those who fear Him and love Him. When I was in Leningrad for an operation, during the time of a memorial service, the Lord in a miraculous and shocking way caused me to tremble with fright when He gave me this command: *Shepherd my sheep, feed my lambs*. The years have since gone by and I, under the spell of a cunning diabolical spell, forgot that command of God and Satan again placed in my soul that great urge to return to surgery. And this is why the Lord punished me by allowing the retina in my eye to tear. My eye was operated on twice unsuccessfully by professor Ontintsof because God's punishment had to remain with me.

The day after the second operation, when I was lying flat with my eyes bandaged, the strong urge to do surgery again overwhelmed me when the Lord sent me a shocking dream: I was in a Church without lights. The only lit up place was the altar. A little beyond the altar was a casket of a saint. They had placed on the altar a wooden board and on this was a naked human body. In the back and next to the altar I saw students and doctors smoking cigarettes and I was teaching them anatomy of the human body.

I was then startled by a noise and when I turned my head, I saw that the covering of the saint's casket fell off. The saint sat up in the casket, he turned and looked at me with a look of pain and shock. I finally realized the great burden of my sin, of my disobedience to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to *shepherd my sheep and feed my lambs*. For the last fourteen years I begged the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me remembering clearly my dramatic dream with the body and the dead person lying on the Holy Altar. Lately I have been informed by God that my sin has been forgiven. Day after

day, I see the body less and less on the Holy Altar where it finally disappeared completely.

And now, my children let me offer to you my last will and testament. I believe deeply in God and I have built my whole life upon His commandments. And I bequeath to you that you offer your lives to God and build all things upon the commandments of Christ.

For a long time and with great determination I sailed through life against the current of the world and to you my children I bequeath that you sail against the current, as difficult at that may be. Turn your attention and your heart away from the great majority of human beings who pursue not the higher goals but those which are easy to acquire. Do not accede to the great majority of people who live according to their own thinking and with the mind of their leaders. They anchor their lives not with the commandments of Christ but on the directives of people who have the power to lead them not to the Kingdom of Heaven but to the riches of the earthly kingdom.

The purpose of life is to seek after the highest truth and to never divert from that road even when they force you to serve the purposes of the lowest form of truth by trampling upon the truth of Christ.

You should be ready even to be martyred since you are sailing against the current. Keep your faith firmly in your thoughts, in your husbands and in your wives just the way I kept it.

In your scientific endeavors and in your efforts to study the mysteries of nature, you should not look for your own glory but only to lessen the pain of your sick and helpless fellow human beings.

Remember that I, your father, sacrificed all my life in doing these things. Imitate me just the way I imitated the Apostle Paul and do not work for your stomach but to help those who without your help cannot free themselves from the tortures of poverty and lies.

If you fulfill all these things that I bequeath to you, the blessing of God will come upon you in harmony with the words of David the prophet: *But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember his commandments to do them.* (Pss 103:17-18.)

I have always prayed for that blessing and grace of God in my life for you my children, my grandchildren and my great grandchildren and surely I will always pray for your eternal life when I will stand before the throne of my God and your God, my Creator and your Creator. That time is most likely near because my heart and my strength have been weakened.

Your father

Alousta, July 22, 1956

TRAITORS INSIDE THE CHURCH

By the saintly and prophetic Elder Athanasios Mytilinaios (+2006), one of the most distinguished, dynamic and beloved Orthodox preachers of the 20th century. This is a homily by the Elder, translated and transcribed by Fr. Peter Heers; the original homily in Greek is available at https://youtu.be/Y_CeTsfuORU. Sadly, the Elder's prophetic words herein on "secretly conducted divine services" did take place in Greece and even in the US or Canada or Australia during the various horrific lockdowns some of which are still going on.

Then as I said, Apostle Peter asked them to be quiet. A very serious problem arises here, which has been troubling me for years now. Since you and I are inside the Church, and we are the Church, this is the problem: The secrecy of the issues of the Church by the faithful.

The Church was once a closed circle. A relic of this closed circle that has remained to this day is when we say: *The doors! "The doors!"* In other words: "Close the doors." Of course, today we don't close the doors because there's supposedly no reason to close the doors and we have given to the contemporary interpreters of the Holy Liturgy a new, metaphorical so to say, dimension to this: "Close the doors to the soul which represents the five senses," for example. Your eyes shouldn't be staring or looking about in a strange way when attending a service. Your eyes should avoid listening to whatever shouldn't be heard, etc. In other words, close whatever distracts you from concentrating on the Holy Liturgy.

Yet, this isn't a spiritual order at all; it's clearly a technical order. Just like: *Wisdom. Arise.* There's a full pause after *Wisdom* and another one after *Arise*. This means that the *Evangelion* (Gospel) is *Wisdom*. When the Priest says *Wisdom*, there should be a pause. A pause to signify the full stop and then, *Arise* and pause again. This means that the *Evangelion* (Gospel) is the Wisdom of God so you should stand up from your seat. Because the faithful had the option of sitting even from ancient times.

Just like today, we have seats inside the church, maybe not enough for everybody, but people could sit in the old days too. They had stools that were called *scymbous*. (Let me say something strange here, concerning our language. *Scymbous* was a Greek word meaning "Stool." This word travels to Europe and came back as "Escabeau" (This word is used today).

So ... people could sit if they wanted to. So at that time they had to get up, to stand up. This is just a practical order. And all these matters were taken care of by the Deacons or others who had such a responsibility.

So, here, again, with *The doors* what we mean is "Close the doors." A technical order. Why? Because the Church was a closed issue. You couldn't enter the Church if you hadn't been baptized. The Catechumen can enter the Church but they had to leave before the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts (i.e. after the Sermon).

During the persecutions, the Church was in hiding. Those who had nothing to do with the Church should never find out the activity of the Church. This should never happen. This secrecy of early Christianity was kept meticulously. I have talked to you in the past and I'm going to remind

you again when we read the teaching, the *catechesis*, of St. Cyril (of Jerusalem).

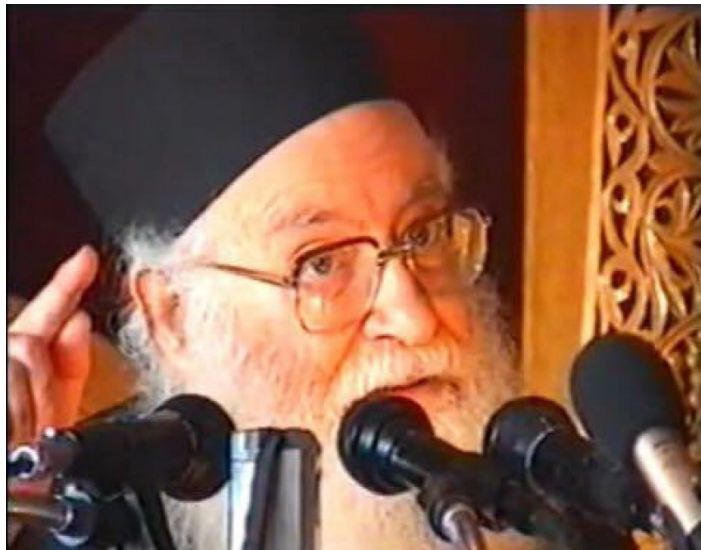
There is a quote outside but it's not by St. Cyril but by someone else: "Be careful, for this is not to be delivered to the uninitiated." St. Cyril, in his first *catechesis*, clearly states: "Mind you, that if you have come here to spy on us and see what we are doing here, God is spying on you instead." And St. Cyril keeps stressing how careful a Christian should be because it was an absolute necessity

that spies should be kept away, and no one should be spying on what they did during the services. This should never take place because Christians were persecuted. Therefore, keeping the secrets was an absolute necessity for everyone, both clergy and laity.

Now, how could a priest go out in public? There is something that has been done, will be done, and is being done, take it as you will. Namely, the following:

Let's assume that one day I stop wearing the priest's garment (the cassock or *rassa*), not under the influence of modernism but because of a strict prohibition. Thus, I'm not allowed to wear my Priest's garment and my dress is the same as a layman's, or a person in the world, and nobody knows that I am a priest.

By the way, I just remembered that I had been offered a tiny *epitrachelion* a few days ago. I thought: This is to be worn underneath my shirt so that no one can see and I can do the work! This is actually something I have already done, I've listened to people's confession on the street! In the street—can you imagine? Or at the entrance of a block of



flats! And wearing my *epitrachelion* underneath my black cassock, today we are allowed to wear our black *rassa*, but there may come a time when we won't be allowed to wear them, so an *epitrachelion* could be worn as a shirt underneath.

Thus, to summarize, a very small *epitrachelion* could be worn and you could start (the confession on the street) by saying: "Well George, how are you? How is everyone at home?"—Whispering, "go ahead and say your sin." Then, George replies: "How's work?," in other words, some words to be heard out loud and others whispered, pretending to have a conversation while one is quietly confessing.

Now, can you imagine in this case if that person who confessed later went and said to other people, "Brother, you know, Father Athanasios took my confession on the street ... Of course, he didn't wear a robe or a priest's cassock..." Note that everything is done in secret because it's a time of persecution and I don't know if this is the second, third or tenth person to hear this story from George. For, certain people lack the virtue of discretion and keeping a secret and so they could openly point to the priest and say: "That is a truly a priest and a Father-confessor who performed in secret." So, then they go and arrest Father Athanasios with the charge of being the father confessor and therefore a priest.

If you think these things belong to the distant future, allow me to tell you that five or six years ago we read in the newspaper the following event: A high ranking official of the Russian synod (during Soviet times, *Ed.*) was found dead in a train. He was there for an inspection concerning the bookkeeping. As I said he was a high-ranking official and he had a small briefcase always with him. So the man had a heart attack and died on the train. When they opened the briefcase, do you know what they found? A Bishop's vestment! He was a secret Bishop. This happened recently, in our days. Tomorrow, things may be worse, we don't know, there will be retrogressions of phenomena.

A question: Is there any confidentiality between the faithful? When Apostle Peter asked them to be quiet, could anyone have shouted out to their neighbors: "Do you know something? We saw Peter... etc." No, not a word, not a peep! Are you listening? Unfortunately, among the faithful today there are frivolous people; indiscreet, shallow, and irresponsible. And these people, without looking deeply into things, are capable of harming the Church enormously.

For example, (let's suppose that) fifty of us are gathered somewhere to perform a secret Divine Liturgy. In other words, we are hiding from the authorities (to do so). And

then one of the faithful goes to a neighbor and says: "What a wonderful Divine Liturgy that was!" .. And they ask, "where...how... what...?" Can not such a secret be kept?!... The news goes around and the second time we go there, they come and arrest us.

And there, what is there to do? What can we do now? This problem has always been troubling me. If difficult times come how can a priest perform his priestly obligations when there's so much frivolity all around? For, I have to tell you that in time of persecution this issue, which is, in fact, a problem, is almost insurmountable. It is a great problem. This is why, dear children of God, the faithful must acquire what is called an *ecclesial conscience* and a responsible attitude towards the Church, so they don't get to the point of harming the Church.

Let's not forget that, in the end times, when the Divine Liturgy won't be an easy thing to perform, what do you think, when Christians retreat to the mountains, when the Antichrist comes or just before that, that you won't face such a problem? This is something very important, extremely important: how to be able to perform the Divine Liturgy in secret, or perform your duties as an Orthodox Christian in secret.

In those days the ones who are not serious, the ones who are frivolous and reveal secrets, who are ready to "spill the beans,"



The holy monastery of Komnineiou in Stomion, Greece (re-established by the Elder—previously abandoned) and the Tomb of the Holy Elder

to reveal what is to be kept secret, then God—this is how I understand it—will **allow these people to bow down before the Antichrist among the first.** You may ask why. It is very simple: because they'll get arrested. After this frivolity, which brought them to this situation, in order to avoid any kind of maltreatment, they'll resort to denying Christ. Therefore they bow down before the Antichrist. This is something that awaits those who cannot keep a secret.

So, please, try to do some work (on yourself) concerning this issue. Let's try to be very careful and serious and discreet in Church matters. Let's not be ready to go out and tell whatever crossed our minds. And, lots of time we distort things we hear in Church. Of course, such a person, whether he realizes it or not, turns into a traitor. And unfortunately, as the Holy Spirit informs us in the holy writings of the Apostle Paul: in the end times, there shall be traitors around. In his letter to Timothy, 3:4, St. Paul says: *In last days men shall be truce-breakers, ... Traitors.* "Truce-breaker" is someone who, interpreted... isn't stable in his friendship, nor true to what he agrees. These people show a frivolity in regard to agreements they promise to keep. These are the truce-breakers, the ones who break a truce (lit. "not the same confederacy" in Greek).

Therefore these are the people who break the agreements, and the Apostle Paul calls them *traitors*. Pay attention: *Traitors!* And this is a major issue, indeed, the issue of treason (or betrayal) and of traitors. One may become a traitor out of frivolity. Just like some children, after some pressure, were forced to reveal where the Bishop of Smyrna, St. Polykarpos, was hiding. These children showed the authorities where Bishop Polykarpos was hiding and they found him and arrested him. But sometimes, a person truly has the disposition of being a traitor.

Unfortunately, this element of treason (or betrayal) has never been eliminated. Either for obtaining benefits, or whatever may be the reason. In any way, a traitor is the one who could even get to the point of betraying his fellow men, those belonging to his own faith but also to his own people at home, his family, and relatives. Just like our Lord said to us: *that a father will betray his child, etc., in difficult times.*

Also, traitors are the ones our Lord mentioned, that one will be betraying the other because of different personal interests. Also, betrayal inside the Church has unfortunately a broader character. For example, a person who is baptized into the Orthodox Church, and he writes a book in favor of Ecumenism, an ecumenistic book, trying to mislead the believers concerning the heresy of Ecumenism. Isn't this person a traitor of our faith?...

This is why we should be very careful and never forget that **traitors exist in the environment of a decadent of spirituality.** Because **the person who has a booming, a flourishing, a thriving of spirituality prefers to be a martyr rather than a traitor.**

NEW HERESIES

By Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotes of Florina (+ 2010).



Of late, certain theologians, under the influence of contemporary, world-wide currents, have begun to savour the words "ecumenicity," "ecumenical spirit," and "ecumenical movement," as if they were hard-candy. Ecumenicity; what a beautiful word! And yet, behind these words, lay hidden a most fearful danger for Orthodoxy. What is this danger? We will show you by means of an example.

Imagine a woman, a woman faithful to her husband, a woman who will allow no third party to enter into their relationship, ever mindful of the promises which she had made before God and before men. She is a woman of exceptional beauty, drawing the eye of many a man. On account of her uprightness, however, anyone who dares to touch, or to proposition her, immediately meets with her anger. Should such a one persist, this honourable woman will deliver a strong slap to his face in order bring him to his senses.

Those men who are learned in this vile business, however, will try another method. These will try to uncover what it is that this woman likes; does she perhaps love poetry, or philosophy, or art? By means of these things the secret admirer will trap her. With great deftness he will begin having innocent conversations with her on those subjects that are beloved to her. "What a wonderful poem!"; "What a beautiful painting!"; "What a wonderful play!"; "How sweet a piece of music!" And thus begins the dialogue.

Gradually the unsuspecting woman is lured into longer conversations with the deceiver who, while his tongue speaks of philosophy and art, his heart leaps at the hope of taking the woman for himself. Finally, after an air of great familiarity and mutual understanding has been achieved through these conversations, the door is opened to the foul deed, the shameful union. Just as the most-evil serpent succeeded in beguiling Eve by means of a simple conversation, in like manner the seed of shameful union was sown.

Did you catch what we are trying to say, beloved? We have spoken in a parable.

The woman concerning which we have spoken is our Orthodox Church. She is this beauty. She is the woman who, according to the Book of Revelation is *clothed in the Sun*, who wears *upon her head a crown of twelve stars*, and who has *the moon under her feet.* (Rev 12:1-2). It is the Orthodox Church which has remained faithful to the Lord, to the eternal bridegroom. It is she who has kept pure the tradition of the Lord and of the Apostles—both written and unwritten—in accordance with the God-inspired call to, *stand fast, and hold*

the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. (2 Thess 2:15).

It is she, the Orthodox Church, which for nineteen centuries has fought the hard and bloody battle against various deceptions, against the various heresies which have sought to pollute and corrupt her holiness. One of the worst of these heresies is Papism, which, on account of its delusions, its authoritarian spirit, and its atrocities, caused the rise of Protestantism and the fracturing of all of Christendom. Yes, the Papists are heretics. The enemies of the Orthodox Church, including Papism to be sure, know well that she has persevered in the faith of her Fathers. Yet, having been persuaded through many examples that they cannot conquer that fortress which is Orthodoxy by means of a frontal attack, these enemies have recently begun trying by other means. They have begun a new war, a war of peace, a war worse than the Crusades. Do you not hear the voice of the serpent, seeking to corrupt the minds of Orthodoxy, leading us away from our simplicity? *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Cor 11:3).*

Here is what the serpent says: O, Orthodox Church! Why do you keep your distance? Why are you afraid of me? I am no dragon; I am a sweet angel bearing the message of love. I am not going to hurt you. Keep your dogmas and your traditions. Leave these things to the theologians... I invite you into my room to discuss other matters. Let us make a common stand against hunger, against poverty, against atheism, against communism, against war. Do these matters not move you? Does this proposition not excite you? Come then, let us begin our conversation on high, on the level of ecumenicity, on the level of mutual understanding. You will see just how beautiful our coming together can be!

O, Orthodox Church! Our suffering mother! Will you accept this proposition? Will you enter into dialogue with Papism? Can you not see the danger inherent in this proposition? That those who ineptly and unworthily represent you are creating conditions favorable to your enemies to such a fearful degree that you, without even taking notice, will fall into the arms of Papism. And what will follow then? A union, a pseudo-union, spiritual adultery, a most vile act; something which ought never to have occurred, and which will require centuries of repentance from those Orthodox who played the role of pimp for the Orthodox Church. The hour will come when these will sigh and say: "Let the language which we spouted concerning 'ecumenicity' and 'mutual understanding' cease; let these feet which ran to bring together Orthodoxy and wolves in sheep's clothing become leprous; let these hands which signed ecumenical epistles and documents fall off!"

This, my beloved, is the famous 'theory of ecumenicity' which our leaders savour!

We repeat: the Ecumenical Movement, under whose umbrella gather all manner of heresies, represents a danger to the Orthodox Church. It deprecates the importance of the dogmas which, having been miraculously articulated in the brief definitions of the Ecumenical Councils, and which are the skeleton, the backbone without which the body becomes a limp and formless lump. It deprecates the Holy Canons, which the ecumenists call obsolete, rusty weapons. To put it concisely, the ecumenists deprecate the Orthodox Church as a whole, saying that it is self-centered, that it is a blasphemy for us to consider her to be the one true Church, possessing the genuine truth of Divine Revelation. Within this context the dogmas and the moral life, inseparably joined in the Orthodox Church, tend to evaporate, leaving behind nothing but a fraudulent version of love. The theory of ecumenicity, the theory which calls all different peoples to live together in the name of some tenuous peace, a theory supported within worldly and political circles in our century and which has already been applied to the spiritual sphere where compromise is unacceptable, will ultimately lead to conflict and turmoil, truly, to Babel.

Leaven, if it becomes contaminated, loses its ability to make things rise; Orthodoxy, the most excellent leaven, the leaven of truth, is capable of leavening the whole lump, but only so long as it remains unpolluted by foreign ingredients, so long as it remains pure. For this reason the followers of this theory of ecumenicity are the enemies of Orthodoxy. For this reason we do not hesitate to call this movement—the Ecumenical movement—a new heresy, from which the Orthodox Church must be protected.

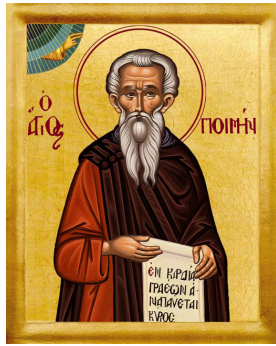
In conclusion, during these critical moments when the Orthodox Church stands in danger, we call out to the faithful from our own watchtower: "Orthodox faithful! Remember that Church, of which you are children. Remember the rivers of blood our Fathers spilled to keep our Faith unadulterated; not one iota did they permit to be subtracted or added to our Faith. Remember the rallying cry of the heroes of the Revolution of 1821. These men—may their memory be eternal—struggled first for the faith, and then for their homeland. All of these heroes and martyrs, known and unknown, call to us from their graves: "Stand firm upon the bulwark of Orthodoxy!"



Compel yourselves, my children, in the spiritual struggle. Do not forget the vast experience of the devil and our own weakness. Just as a leaf in autumn falls at the slightest wind, likewise we fall at the slightest temptation or trial when the grace of God does not assist us. And when does the grace of God assist us? Only when humility guides our every thought and deed.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona (+2019)

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A SAINTLY BISHOP OF OUR DAYS

From the strongly recommended webpages of Fr. Kosmas of Australia, "Orthodox Talks," <https://www.orthodoxtalks.com/>.



In these difficult times of forced restrictions in the churches due to Covid-19, the life of Metropolitan Augoustinos is a great inspiration not only for bishops and priests, but for all the faithful.

His Eminence Metropolitan Augoustinos (Kantioties; 1907–2010) was bishop of the Holy Metropolis of Florina in northern Greece. He was a defender of traditional Orthodox beliefs

and Greek nationalism, as well as a highly productive writer, and many of his spiritual works have been translated into different languages. Metropolitan Augoustinos contributed greatly to the spiritual rebirth of Greece and the renewal of traditional Orthodox theology. He also preached countless sermons, which have been printed and distributed worldwide.

As a hieromonk he was a fiery preacher, and travelled throughout Greece, stirring the people to a greater love for Christ and their suffering nation. But this was during the war years, and the messages he preached were not popular with the German and Italian occupants and later, during the Civil War, with the Communists. Fr Augoustinos' life was filled with many trials and tribulations and he miraculously escaped death on many occasions.

Loved and revered by the populace, by divine providence he was elected metropolitan of Florina in 1967, where he energetically continued to care for the spiritual and material needs of his flock.

Metropolitan Augoustinos was known for his conservative activism and ideals, and he staunchly opposed ecumenism, believing it to be contrary to the basic principles of Orthodoxy. This brought him great popularity, not only in Greece, but in the Greek *diaspora* throughout the world. But his immense popularity and his opposition to corruption and heresy often disgruntled those in power. Metropolitan Augoustinos was subjected to considerable persecution and slander, including a failed attempt by the government (and even some bishops) to have him officially declared insane.

But none of these persecutions deterred him in his quest to uphold the Truth. He inspired a great number of people and affected countless lives until his repose in 2010, at the advanced age of 104.

Even today his bold example, the numerous books he authored, and his sermons published in print and audio format continue to inspire people to a higher moral standard. His wonderful books in English can be purchased from the Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies (<https://ibmgs.org/chatechetic.html>).

There exists a superb two-video series in English on the holy Metropolitan's life at: (1) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38_ngNqKTg8, and (2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4DWvTdp405c>.