

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

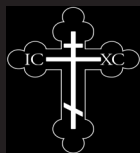
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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## THE VALUE OF TIME [THE "NUMBER" 8,760]

*By the late Rev. Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis of Florina (+2010), from the weekly bulletin "Kyriaki" («Κυριακή», "Sunday"), January 1, 2005 [translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen]. Originally published in Orthodox Heritage, vol. 04, issue no. 12, pp. 1-3.*

On midnight of December 31<sup>st</sup>, when the clocks reached exactly 12:00, one full year—with all of its joys and sorrows—was fully erased, and a new year rose. The previous year became part of history; all of its 365 days were left behind, a simple memory.

My dear brethren, did you ever think, I mean truly contemplate about the time period of these 365 days that on each December 31<sup>st</sup> becomes part of our own history? What have we truly accomplished during its



duration? Let me assure you that all of us are immensely indebted for all of these days. In an effort to provide a notion of our responsibility as well as accountability for each year of our earthly lives, I will draw you a picture and provide you a comparative example; I will present a small parable.

There was a king with many subjects who carried great fondness and devotion for all of his kingdom's citizenry. He loved them all very much, every

single one of them, without any exception. One day, he decided to give them all a gift. He prepared and distributed purses filled with gold coins, one to each citizen. The grateful subjects opened the purses up and began counting the coins within. They each counted them, over and over, again and again... All of them had the exact same quantity of gold within their respective purse: 8,760 coins! This was a significant amount of gold. The good and loving king gave it to them out of his goodwill and love, so that they could each use it for their own benefit and the benefit of their fellow men. And do you know what each of them did with their respective small

fortune? You could have never guessed it! Instead of using this blessed inheritance for their home, neighbor or society, they each went by the river bank, opened up their purses and began throwing the gold coins away into the deep river water, one by one, until all of their small fortune was completely gone and their purses stood empty. If any one of us had been there observing them, what might we have said? Surely all of us would have assumed that they had all gone mad.

My brethren, this is where my simple parable ends. Now who is this loving king? He is our God. Who are these senseless citizens? We are the King's citizenry. And what is this 8,760 number?

*The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed, healthy and prosperous 2022. Personal circumstances resulted in the interruption of our publication for the last six months. We sincerely apologize for this poorly communicated interruption and we pray that related issues are behind us as we reestablish our bimonthly issues. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2022 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.*

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
USA

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

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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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Grab a pencil and paper and figure it out. Every day that passes by has 24 hours and all of the year has 365 days. If we multiply the 365 days with the 24 hours of each day, we then determine that an entire year contains 8,760 hours; these are then the hours that each year of our life has to offer. From January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year to the next December 31<sup>st</sup> that follows 8,760 hours will have passed. I thus repeat my question: What have we truly accomplished during the duration of the year we are about to leave behind? Have we made it a worthwhile year? Did we add any value? Or, perhaps we are all like those foolish citizens that threw away all of their 8,760 gold coins. Let us then make an examination, each one of us on our own, and let us evaluate and estimate the usefulness of last year’s 8,760 hours that are about to draw to a close.

Among all of these hours, was there any time set aside for listening to the divine word of God and for the study of Holy Scriptures? Were there any days that we ran to a Church to listen to sermons or attend Church services? How about opening and studying the Bible? Did we do that? If the answer is yes, then we may consider ourselves blessed. This is how the Psalter begins. We read that “blessed” is that person, happy and with good fortune. Who does the Psalmist refer to? Is it the person that has lots of money, apartment buildings, businesses, limousines, and enjoys the finest of worldly entertainment? Not quite; the Psalmist says: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the*

*seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* (Ps 1:1-2). Blessed is he who takes time to place the Holy Bible in his hands and read it. I thus ask all of us: During the year that is coming to an end, did our angel see us hold the Holy Gospel in our hands and read it on a regular basis? Christ Himself tells us: *Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* (Lk 11:28).

We are coming to the close of this year’s 8,760 hours. I ask another question: During this entire year, were there hours regularly devoted to prayer? During the earlier years of Christianity, the faithful would dedicate hours upon hours for the purpose of prayer. Does our angel ever “catch us” on our knees, in prayer to our Heavenly Father? Oh if we only knew the great power of prayer and how much we truly lose by not making prayer a companion to our daily life. There would have been so many unsolved problems (personal, family, professional, etc.) that would simply find rapid solutions if, and only if, we used this invaluable key to unlock such solutions; the key of prayer is just another valuable gift granted to us by our God and Creator. What great comfort and consolation can be found when we whisper *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all of Your saints, have mercy upon me!*

This year’s 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During this time, were there any hours or days of fasting? There are certain days such as Wednesdays and Fridays, and others that are even more significant, such as Holy Friday, that must be



days of fasting for all of us. A politician dedicated 15 straight days for his campaign, and vested several towns. When he returned to his office, he pridefully announced: "I traveled for 15 days straight and toured 15 different towns, In every single one I was treated and fed as royalty; freshly slaughtered meat every single day..." And one of the villagers that heard him, a shepherd, asked him in a soft tone: "Your Excellency, how can there be no Wednesday and no Friday for 15 days straight? Was every day a Pascha?..." You see, my brethren, fasting is nowadays not even a "custom" among many of our faithful—there is no desire or will to fast even on Great Friday! Satan has gotten hold of the special eraser and wiped out fasting from the daily lives of Christians.

This year's 8,760 hours are ending. Among these hours was time set aside for repentance and confession? These hours would have been the year's most blessed ones for that is the time that we placed the devil on the ground and stampeded him while angels in Heaven are singing divine victory hymns. It was during those hours that we the sinful ones, full of contrition and in utmost humility, knelt in front of our spiritual father and opened up our lips to whisper not words of criticism and condemnation but the ones that our Lord thrives to listen to: I sinned my Lord, please, grant your mercy upon me the wretched one... And all of us have so many sins to repent for and confess... So, I ask all of us, during this last year, did we manage to spend time with our confessor, to open our heart, to tearfully confess our sins and then say *God be merciful to me a sinner* and *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?* (Lk 18:13 & 23:42). Did we do this? If not, we better ask ourselves why not.

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. Is it possible that we might have also forgotten the other golden hours of the year that are coming to a close? Which hours are these, you ask? These are the hours of almsgiving and mercy towards our fellow man. Did you reach into your pocket and silently, secretly and with as little attention as possible place a few crumbs from your many blessings into the hands of a less fortunate man? Did you dedicate a few moments in prayer for a neighbor or a colleague who was in a moment of crisis? Did you spend a few dimes from your earthly blessings towards a Christian mission or cause? Never forget that the hands that spread goodness and alms are the hands of God, the hands of Christ!

This year's 8,760 hours are rapidly coming to an end. During these hours were there any of the most significant and spiritually highest moments, the moments of receiving Holy Communion, our Lord's holy Body and most precious Blood? These are indeed blessed moments; once we repent and confess our sins, once we are cleansed with tears of true repentance, once we embrace and make peace with our enemies, we approach the Royal Gate with the look of the thief on the cross and receive the Holy Mysteries: *Take,*

*eat; this is my body... Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* (Mt 26:28). These are the moments that carry a unique and incomparable weight and significance; there is no price for them and can neither be purchased nor sold. They are truly above all other hours of our life.

So now we all need to ask: Were there such hours for any of you my brethren, and most pointedly for me the wretched one? I am greatly afraid that in reality we have no such hours. Our hours are almost exclusively hours of sin, the devil's hours; they are everything and anything except one thing: hours of God. Let us not kid ourselves; we waste each year's hours like all those who threw their gold coins into the river.

We truly are inexcusable. Our Holy Gospel says that, during the time of our Lord's time on earth, the citizens of Jerusalem showed great interest in spiritual matters. When they heard that a preacher and confessor came to the area, St. John the Forerunner, they closed their shops, took their wives and children, walked for several miles past the Jordan river, and came to the desolate desert to listen to his sermons and confess their sins. And all of them *were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins* (Mk 1:5). In comparison with the faithful of those days, most of the so-called Orthodox Christians today remain completely indifferent on such matters. The bells ring, yet they stay away from Churches. In the not-too-distant past, when the faithful could find no confessor in their area, they would travel for days to go to the Holy Mountain to find a spiritual father and partake of the Holy Sacrament of confession. In our days, this is an extremely rare occurrence for most of our neighbors and friends.

One year is comprised of 8,760 hours and each week has 168 hours. My fellow brethren, let us dedicate to God a couple of hours each week and make our way to our local Church so we can at least attend Liturgy. We anxiously throw away so many hours each week on worldly matters; is it not proper to devote at least a couple of hours for our God? We have completely forgotten Him and have literally pushed Him out of our lives. Putting it simply, we have forgotten Him. We are an adulteress generation, like trees that bear no fruit and are fit to be only fuel for fire. Our Lord represented this type of condition very accurately during His homily at the mountain: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* (Mt 7:19).

What is it then that we should do, you ask? Why are you asking me or any of your clergy? The answers lie elsewhere, in black and white, as written by St. John the Evangelist. What does he have to tell us? One simple word that is the one and only key: Repent! (*Repent ye: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*, Mt 3:2). In other words, change your mind, your behavior, your life, your daily spiritual path; the road that our ultra-progressive society has carved for the citizens of our

days leads the faithful to the deep, dreaded canyon of eternal damnation, Hell. That is the destination towards where most of us are marching; unless we choose here and now to change, re-program our lives, use wisely every minute granted to us by our Lord. Let us stop wasting time now, let us stop throwing our gold coins senselessly into the river.

My dear brethren, if we could hear the repeated petitions of those judged to eternal damnation, those countless souls in Hades, do you know what we would hear them ask? To return to life for a little time, a few moments, a few seconds, so that they can emphatically pronounce: *Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son and Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom* (Lk 15:21 & 23:42). Let us therefore waste no more time. Let us all comprehend how much we have lost, the countless hours we have wasted. Let us repent, let us shed tears of contrition and kneel in the sight of a spiritual father, let us confess our sins. Starting with this January 1<sup>st</sup>, let us commit to make full use of our God-granted time, let us not waste a single one of next year's precious hours. Let us promise God that this year, we will not grant or allow the devil to take possession of even a single hour. All of next year's hours, all of next year's days, all of next year's weeks, and all the days of our lives will be spent near God, near His angels, near His Most Holy Mother so that we can be worthy of the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ unto the ages of ages. Amen.



What is more beautiful than spiritual forcefulness? Indeed, it gives a hidden but perfect joy along with a holy, promising future.

Therefore, my child, struggle in holy self-reproach. Continually reproach yourself; cast the blame upon yourself and cry out: "My Jesus, here too I am at fault; neither the devil nor any person, but my evil self is at fault, because I don't pay attention to where I walk. Cast light upon the path of my life, send the dew of humility into my heart, so that I may feel Thee, my meek and humble Jesus. Do not disregard my tears, O joy of the angels, but accept them as a fragrant scent and grant me the petitions of my heart, so that I may find relief, and chant as an ecstatic youth the triumphal hymn of Thy glory."

Concentrate on yourself and see everything with a simple eye and as something that need not concern you. Work according to your strength and with a pure conscience. Pray for yourself and for all your brethren. May your love cover everything and may you fly over snares like a soaring eagle.

**From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"  
The Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim**

## REMISSION OF SINS, AND FALSE CHRISTIAN LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

*By the saintly Archbishop Averky (Taushev, +1976). The future Archbishop Averky immigrated with his family in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia to Bulgaria, and there became a monk and a priest. Having witnessed the horrifying result of liberal ideology and apostasy in his homeland, his writings are startlingly relevant to us today.*



One of the most important consequences of the great work of man's redemption wrought by Christ the Life-Giver Who rose after three days from the dead, was precisely forgiveness, or the remission of sins. This is why after appearing on the first day after His Resurrection to His disciples who were gathered together, the Risen Lord gave them peace; He breathed on them and said, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (Jn 20:19-23).

Further in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles we see that in preaching Christ crucified and risen from the dead, the holy apostles immediately afterwards called their listeners to repentance and to receive baptism "unto the remission of sins." *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38)—that is what the apostle Peter said to the great crowd of people listening to him on the day of Pentecost.

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out* (Acts 3:19), he and the holy apostle John called to the people gathered around them, after the miraculous healing of a man who was lame from birth. *God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*, said the apostle Paul to the Athenians in his famous sermon at the Areopagus, *because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.* (Acts 17:30-31).

From this it is clearly seen that this "forgiveness" about which St. John Chrysostom speaks, or, "remission of sins," are given to us not unconditionally, but conditionally—that is, under the condition of repentance (sincere repentance, of course). Therefore, in giving His disciples the power to "remit sins" by the Holy Spirit, the Lord gave them at the same time, as we see, the power to *not* remit sins—obviously to those

who do not really repent: *whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained*—which means that they are not forgiven.

#### Unconditional All-Forgiveness?

How understandable this is, how logical and how completely opposite this clear and definite, pure Gospel teaching is to the propaganda of our days. For it has become fashionable today among many to call upon some pseudo-Christian love and unconditional all-forgiveness, which is too all-encompassing; it supposedly extends even to the enemies of the Christian faith who actively war with the Church and faith in God itself and are undoubtedly the servants of the coming Antichrist!

In order to strengthen their shaky “position,” such false preachers of this trendy, pseudo-“Christianity” like very much to abuse the Lord’s famous saying, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.* (Mt 7:1). This is their very favorite saying, which nevertheless does not hinder them in the least from judging and condemning in the cruelest manner all of those who do not agree with their heresy, which is no more than a totally deceitful distortion of the Gospel teachings—a fraud by which they confuse and disturb many.

In order to correctly understand this saying of the Lord we have to remember that after all, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who said, *Judge not, that ye be not judged*, right afterwards taught: *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you* (Mt 7:6).

Who are these “dogs” and “swine”?

By these “dogs” and “swine” the Lord means morally perverted people who are incapable of accepting the Gospel Truth, for whom everything sacred is alien and even repulsive, because they cannot understand its value. These are morally fallen, impious and evil people who often only mock the Gospel Truth, trample it under foot, and can treat the very preachers of it with fury, causing them various disasters and even death.

Is it not clear from this that by the words, “Judge not that ye not be judged” the Lord by no means forbid us from making a moral assessment of people—to discern the difference between good and evil people? And He not only does not forbid us, but as we shall see further, He even commands us to do so.

Thus, the Lord directly commands that we rebuke a sinning brother. *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother...* (Mt 18:15).

And that is not all! Such a wise and Christian judgment is not only allowed to us concerning a sinning brother—we are even supposed to bring other brothers into it: *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established* (Matt. 18:16). But that is still not all! If a brother continues to persist in the evil he is doing, then we need to “inform” the Church about it—that is, the ecclesiastical authorities, who have received from the Lord Himself the blessed right to “bind and

to loose”: *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.* (Mt 18:17).

These last words are the most terrible and totally unacceptable to the perverted pseudo-Christian ideology of those modern propagandists of liberal, fashionable neo-Christianity, for they go completely against its basic principles. But whether someone likes them or not, they cannot be stricken from the Gospels—after all, they are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. How can we not take them into consideration?

But modern neo-Christians, among whose numbers are some learned theologians and many high ranking bishops, have no desire at all to be reconciled with the true, authentic Gospel of Christ, but instead self-willfully fabricate their own personal “gospel,” as their ideological predecessor Leo Tolstoy of dark memory did in his time.

Alas! For many modern, totally unstable “Christians” who are not firm in the true Christian faith, this is a great temptation and scandal that completely knocks them off the right path. *Judge not, that ye be not be judged!* How alluring this neo-Christian distorted explanation seems: “I will not stop you from sinning, and in return, don’t you stop me from sinning!”

#### The Perversion of Sacred Text

This is the horrifying, perverted, criminal refraction of this sacred text, presented to us in our times! But in fact, we should know and remember that there are different kinds of condemnation. One condemnation is sinful, while another, as we have already seen, is not only not sinful but commanded of us by the Gospel itself. And this is quite understandable, for if we never judge anyone under any circumstances we will soon lose all ability to discern good and evil, and we will easily be drawn onto the path of evil.

The greatest of those born of women, to whose sanctity and irreproachable moral heights Christ the Savior Himself testified, the Holy Forerunner of the Lord, John, when seeing the Pharisees and Sadducees approaching him said to them, *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* (Mt 3:7). What is this? Sinful condemnation?

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself invited His followers to take their example from Him, saying, *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.* (Mt 11:29). Nevertheless, He used the same expression [as St. John the Forerunner used] with regard to sinners hardened in their evil, who did not want to hear His divine teaching: *O generation of vipers*; and He often addressed people around Him, especially the scribes and Pharisees, with very sharp words of condemnation: *wicked and adulterous generation!* (Mt 12:39), *O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?* (Mt 17:17). He constantly called the Scribes and Pharisees “hypocrites,” “fools and blind,” “serpents” (Mt 15:7, 16:3, 6–12; the whole of Chapter 23); He once called King Herod a “fox” (Lk. 13:32); He “upbraided,” as the Gospel itself says, whole cities: Chorazin,

Bethsaida, and Capernaum because they “did not repent.” (Mt 11:20–24).

More than that! We know from the Gospel that the meek and humble Lord Who prayed for His crucifiers, *Lord forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34), not only used sharp words of condemnation but at times had recourse to very strong and decisive measures of physical action. Thus, twice—at the very beginning of His service in society, and second, at the very end of it—not long before His sufferings on the Cross cast the money changers out of the temple. The Evangelists tell us about these events vividly and graphically. Not able to abide the shameless commerce they conducted under the protection of the priests themselves and even with the participation of the high priests, who received great profits from the sale of doves, the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Jews in the Jerusalem Temple and *made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables, saying to the sellers, make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise* (Jn 2, 14–17). And after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, before His suffering, He again entered the Temple and said, *My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves* (Mt 21:12–13; Mk 11:15–17; Lk 19:45–46).

So, what is this? And how far is this from that false Christian “love” and all-encompassing “all-forgiveness” that the modern liberals, the “neo-Christians” preach! And wouldn’t these people who are supposedly more “loving” than the Lord Himself find these words and actions of the Sinless Lord sinful and unacceptable, and contradictory to His own teaching? Wouldn’t they label them with their beloved expressions, such as “obscurantist,” “bigoted,” “dark medieval,” “retrograde,” “inquisition,” and such like?

But can we think that our Lord, the Incarnate Only-Begotten Son of God, Who came to earth for the sake of our salvation, for the sake of teaching us divine Truth and Life, would have contradicted in any way His own Self or acted against His own teaching? Of course that is out of the question. That would be terrible blasphemy! But that is what He did!

#### The Example of the Holy Apostles

Following the example of the Lord Himself, His holy disciples and apostles were not afraid when necessary to “judge” people, stubbornly contradicting the Gospel Truth they were preaching, and had recourse at times to the most categorical measures in order to bridle and cut off evil. Thus, Apostle Peter severely condemned Ananias and Sapphira for their cunning and punished them on the spot with death only because they “kept back the price of the land” that they had sold instead of giving it over completely as an offering to the Church. (Acts 5:1–11).

Holy Protomartyr Archdeacon Stephen openly and publicly condemned his fellow Jews at the Sanhedrin, calling

them “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised in heart and ears,” accusing them of “always resisting the Holy Spirit,” that they “persecuted the prophets,” and finally became “betrayers and murderers.” (Acts 7:51–52).

Holy Apostle Peter condemned Simon the Sorcerer for his attempts to purchase the grace of the Holy Spirit with money, saying to him, *Thy money perish with thee... I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity* (Acts 8:18–23).

During his first missionary journey, the holy apostle Paul harshly condemned the sorcerer and false prophet Barjesus, or Elymas, who was trying to turn the proconsul Sergius Paulus away from Christ. The apostle said, *O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness! and punished him with blindness.* (Acts 13:6–12).

What is this? Sinful judging? The apostles’ lack of Christian love?

When the newly converted Christians in Corinth informed the same apostle Paul that the repulsive and wicked sin of incest was being practiced amongst them, *that one should have his father’s wife*, he did not say to them, “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged!” or, “Why behold ye the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not feel the beam in your own?” No! Nothing of the sort! The holy apostle immediately condemned that sinner and commanded the Corinthians to condemn him, pronouncing a very harsh sentence and punishment against him: *To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus* (1 Cor 5:9–13).

The passages from Holy Scripture we have cited above seem more than sufficient to show us how we have to correctly understand the Lord’s words, *Judge not, that ye be not judged*; to be persuaded that these words do not at all exclude every kind of condemnation of our neighbor; that is, “condemnation” is not only allowable but even necessary, prescribed by God’s Law itself and our conscience. This is because a true Christian cannot relate to barefaced evil and sin indifferently; he cannot refuse to notice it or reconcile himself with it under the cunning excuse of being “nonjudgmental,” having “Christian love,” and “all-forgiveness.”

#### The Example of the Holy Fathers and Mothers of the Church

Every true Christian is irreconcilable to evil, no matter where or in whom he finds it. The holy apostles followed the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and others after them warred against it, even at the cost of all possible and serious deprivations, even of their own lives. That is how the holy martyrs warred with the evil of dark paganism and idol worship—not only passively dying in Christ’s Name, but also quite decisively condemning, at times with very sharp words and expressions and even actions, the errors and wickedness of the idol worshippers.

The holy fathers of the Church decisively and uncompromisingly fought against heretics, by no means considering the heretics to be people who “think differently” (as it has become fashionable in our time to express it!), to whom we have to show “tolerance,” and whom we have to “approach with understanding,” but to view them as *grievous wolves ... not sparing the flock*, according to Holy Scripture (Act. 20:29), and sternly condemning them at the Ecumenical and Local Councils, the right-believing Christians being cautious of every association with them, and giving them over to anathema.

What is this? Sinful condemnation or a lack of love? No! It is none other than the lawful application in life of the apostle’s words: *What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor. 6:14-15).

And our venerable monastic fathers and mothers—Christian ascetics—“judged” this world which lieth in evil by the very fact of their departure from it. They followed the call of God’s Word: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* (2 Cor 6:17-18).

### What Is Our Obligation?

And now, in in these terrible times of cynical and openly fierce atheism, we as Christians faithful to Christ the Savior and His True Church cannot but condemn with all our resolve the atheists and blasphemers, the fierce theomachists who are striving to uproot the Christian faith throughout the world and destroy the Holy Church, defiling our Fatherland and desecrating our holy shrines. We cannot but condemn also all those who cooperate with them, who support them and aid them in consolidating their power, helping them by this in their hellish plans. We condemn the servants of the coming Antichrist and the Antichrist himself..

Could this really be sinful judgment that is forbidden by the Gospel, as the modern-day smarties—neo-Christians filled with some kind of “super love” and all-encompassing “all-forgiveness”—are trying to persuade us to think?

Let them not lie against the Lord and His Holy Gospel! Let them not in their pharisaical pride and self-deception ascribe to themselves more love than the very Incarnation of Love, our Lord and Savior, had!

And how we need to correctly understand the Lord’s saying, *Judge not that ye be not judged!* The great father of the Church St. John Chrysostom explains this beautifully:

“Here the Savior is not commanding us to not judge all sins in general, and He does not forbid everyone without exception to do this, but only those who, themselves filled with numberless sins, reprove others for insignificant mistakes. Christ is pointing here also at the Jews who themselves being evil were the accusers of their neighbors over some unimportant and insignificant mistakes, while they themselves unconscionably committed great sins.

It follows that judgment is not forbidden about a neighbor, nor is it forbidden to condemn his evil actions in and of themselves, but forbidden rather is the evil feeling in the soul for one’s neighbors by a person who himself sins in the same way or even more, without thinking about his own correction. It is not objective “judgment” of a neighbor that is forbidden, not dispassionate condemnation of his bad behavior, but evil gossip and calumny, which often comes from vain and impure impulses—from pride and ambition, envy or resentment.

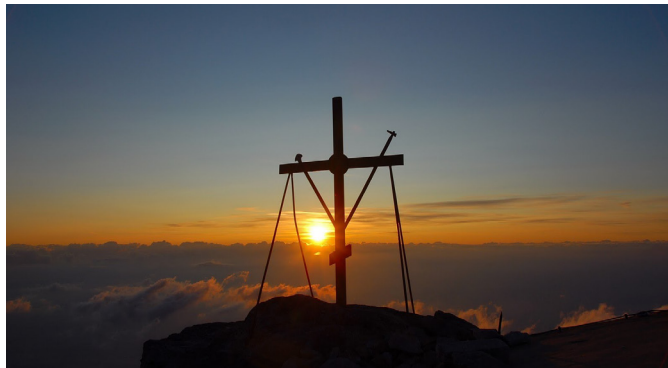
In other words, forbidden is all anger and glee for personal reasons over one’s sinning neighbor, and by no means the just, pure, ideological, principled, and dispassionate evaluation of his actions and behavior. This is not only not contradictory to the Gospel and reprehensible, but to the contrary is even necessary, so that we would not end up indifferent to good and evil, and so that evil would not triumph in the world due to our indifference.

Therefore, those modern pastors, whom it would be better to call false pastors, commit a great crime by unconsciously or consciously teaching their flock the Tolstoyan “resisting not evil.”

What terrible, utter deceit! What true pharisaical hypocrisy! “To never judge anyone for anything”—such a disposition in modern Christian society is just what the servants of the coming Antichrist want to bring about, so that all would be simple and wide open for them to do their work of preparing a favorable atmosphere for the speedy enthronement of their “sovereign.”

Could it really be that in our time it is still not clear to every honest and conscious Christian that unconditional “all-forgiveness” is needed only by the enemy of Christ—the Antichrist? This is so that people would finally lose all feeling for discerning good and evil, that they would make peace with evil, readily accept it, and then accept the Antichrist himself without giving a thought to any struggle against him?

This is no more than the hypocritical pharisaical deceit of the enemy who thirsts for our destruction! After all, if Christian all-forgiveness, given to us by the resurrected Christ the Savior, extended so to speak “automatically” also to those who do not



wish to repent and correct their lives, then the Lord would have not given the apostles, and in their person to all their successors, along with the power to “remit sins,” the power also to “bind” them; He would not have said to them when He appeared after His Resurrection, *Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained* (Jn. 20:23).

Indeed, what outrageous and foolish audacity it is to consider yourself more loving than God Himself and to “correct” the Gospel of Christ, inventing your own “gospel.” Let us make every effort to guard ourselves, brothers, from this evil leaven of modern phariseism!

Resolutely struggling with every tiniest manifestation of evil and sin in our own souls, let us not be afraid to expose and rebuke evil everywhere it appears in modern life—not out of pride or vanity, but only out of love for the truth. Our main task in these evil times of lying shamelessness is to preserve whole our faithfulness and dedication to the authentic Gospel Truth and to the Author of our salvation—Christ the Life-Giver Who rose after three days from the grave, the Conqueror of hell and death.

#### Obedience to the Treasury of Divine Truth

*If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* (Mt 18:17).

We have heard these terrible words of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the Gospel reading. We should always remember them, but first of all, we should correctly understand their sense and meaning.

What is this?

When the Lord bade farewell to His disciples at the Last Supper, to console them who were grieving over their imminent separation from their Divine Teacher He said: *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever* (Jn 14:16); *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth* (Jn 16:13); *The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you* (Jn. 14:26).

The Lord fulfilled His promise on the tenth day after His Ascension (or on the fiftieth day after the Resurrection). On the great and glorious day of Pentecost, the promised “Comforter”—the Holy Spirit—descended upon the apostles, and on earth appeared the *Kingdom of God come with power* (Mk 9:1), about which the Lord spoke many times during His earthly life: it is the Church of Christ. The Lord earlier gave His Church a great promise: *I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* (Mt16:18).

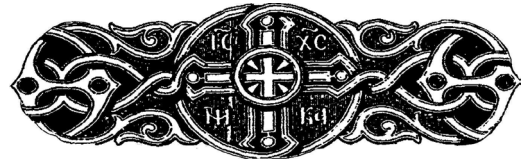
The Church of Christ is the Kingdom of the Spirit of God; it is the Treasury of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and it is also the Treasury of Divine Truth, because the Holy Spirit, in the words of Christ the Savior Himself, is the “Spirit of Truth.” That is why the great apostle of the nations Paul wrote to his

disciple Timothy: *the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.* (Jn 18:37).

The Church of Christ is filled to abundance with Divine Truth, and in it is only Truth. There can be no untruth in it, no lie, for it preserves the teaching of Christ Who is the Truth, as the Lord Himself said at Pilate’s judgment seat: *To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.* (Jn 18:37).

When the Lord Jesus Christ said, *if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican* (Mt 18:17), He of course meant the true Church—the Church that sacredly and unshakably preserves intact and undistorted the pure teaching of Christ, and which is completely foreign to any lie or untruth no matter what kind. Every lie and untruth is completely incompatible with the true Church of Christ, for lies are from the devil, as the Lord clearly said to the Jews who stubbornly resisted believing in Him: *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.* (Jn 8:44).

And truly, homicide and lies are closely bound to each other: Homicide leads to lies, and lies often lead to homicide. Both of them come from the devil and therefore they cannot have any place in the true Church. We should evaluate everything that is happening in the world from this point of view!



#### On the Antichrist

He will provide opportunities for Church life, allow her to hold services, and promise that wonderful temples will be built, provided that he be recognized as “Supreme Being” and worshipped. He will have a personal hatred for Christ. He will thrive on this hatred and will rejoice in people’s apostasy from Christ and the Church.

There will be a mass falling away from the faith, during which many bishops will betray the faith, and point to the wonderful position of the Church as justification. A search for compromise will be the characteristic state of the people’s faith. Directness of confession will vanish. People will subtly justify their fall, and solicitous evil will support such a general state of mind. People will grow used to apostatizing from the truth and will be accustomed to the sweetness of compromise and sin. The Antichrist will allow people anything as long as they, falling down before him, worship him.

**St. John the Wonderworker  
of Shanghai and San Francisco**



## THE AMERICAN CHURCH HAS FALLEN

### A SHOCKING POLL SHOWS “FAKE CHRISTIANITY” HAS SUPPLANTED THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

*By Rachel Bratton, July 4, 2021, from “The Western Journal,” <https://www.westernjournal.com/>. While this article is authored by a non-Orthodox, it nevertheless captures some sad realities about the state of affairs in the United States.*

American Christianity has fallen. Thanks to cultural corrosion and a lack of biblical literacy, a new “fake Christianity” has raked the dry ground of the American church. This counterfeit religion is moralistic therapeutic deism, a worldview that has quickly gained prominence and given many Americans a theology that looks nothing like historical Christianity, despite what they may claim.

George Barna, director of research at Arizona Christian University, said MTD (*Moralistic Therapeutic Deism*)—or “watered-down, feel-good, fake Christianity”—is “the most popular worldview in the United States today,” according to Christianity Daily. A recent poll conducted by ACU found that 38 percent of adults hold this view.

What’s more, three out of four people who hold to MTD still consider themselves Christians. The poll was conducted in February among 2,000 adults with a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points.

“The fact that a greater percentage of people who call themselves Christian draw from [MTD] than from the Bible says a lot about the state of the Christian church in America, in all of its manifestations,” Barna said. “Simply and objectively stated, Christianity in this nation is rotting from the inside out.”

#### What Is MTD?

Barna explained to The Western Journal what MTD is and how it affects the way Christians engage in culture.

“MTD is essentially what I would call fake Christianity. Because it has some Christian elements in it, but it’s not really biblical, it’s not really Christian,” Barna said.

He then went on to explain each element of this worldview.

“The moralistic perspective is we’re here to be good people and to try to do good,” Barna said. “That’s really what life is about. I’ll be good to you, you be good to me, it’ll all work out.

“The therapeutic aspect is everything is supposed to be geared to making me feel good about myself, ultimately to make me happy.”

Deism is the idea that God created the world but has no direct involvement in it. Basically, according to MTD, there is a distant God who just wants everyone to be nice, and the purpose of life is to be happy.

American “Christians” who have adopted this philosophy have borrowed heavily from the modern secular world, which elevates personal definitions of right and wrong above any objective standard of truth—like the Bible.

According to a study conducted by Lifeway Research, a little more than half of Americans would describe the Bible as a “good source of morals.” Only 38 percent said it was an historical account and 37 percent said it was helpful today. The study was conducted from Sept. 27 to Oct. 1, 2016, among 1,000 Americans with a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

MTD is a cake-and-ice cream theology for those who want to feel good about themselves without sacrificing cultural relevance.

#### Why Is MTD a Problem?

MTD distorts the God of the Bible in an attempt to make Him bless all the dissipations and vanities of the modern world.

“It’s one of those models that says—and there are a number of worldviews that say this—you gotta live in the moment. This is all you’ve got, and you’ve gotta make the most of it,” Barna said.

It makes sense that “Christians” who embrace MTD are hesitant to criticize the culture. How can anyone pass judgment if everyone’s just trying to be happy? The only sin is getting in the way of someone’s personal “truth.”

Without a firm foundation in the Truth, increasing numbers of Christians are ill-prepared to fight the moral battles being waged in our country. That’s why so many are siding with groups like Black Lives Matter and the LGBT movement. They’ll listen to the loudest voice on either side.

Enter the screaming woke mob.

Some “Christians” have tried to argue for secular trends using biblical language. And while it is true that the Bible condemns racism and hatred, progressive agendas certainly do not reflect Christian values. They promote sin under the guise of “loving everyone.”

Followers of Christ have forgotten that Jesus didn’t come to tell people to be nice. His message has always been a stumbling block, and it’s especially hard for 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans to accept. There is no such thing as “your truth”; there is only the Truth and deception.

#### What Is the Solution?

If the church does not train up believers in the Truth, they will find themselves floundering in a culture that desperately needs Christ.

In essence, Christians need to return to a competent state of biblical literacy.

Churches must focus on shepherding their sheep instead of obsessing over numbers. And believers must take the initiative to read and learn the Bible in order to apply it to their daily lives.

Barna said that conservative Christians were the least likely to talk to others about candidates and issues during the last election cycle. This was because they did not know what they believed or how to put it into words.

“Christians have to be clear about why they believe the Bible is trustworthy, why they would say it’s reliable for their own life, and then to be able to articulate that to other people,” he said.

“Secondly, we’re gonna have to have churches that are willing to bring the Bible into the real world.”

“We found that two-thirds of conservative Christians said they were dying for their pastors not to tell them who to vote for, but how to think biblically about the issues so that they could make up their own minds based on biblical principles,” Barna added.

Having a solid understanding of what the Bible teaches will help Christians engage confidently with the culture. They need to be prepared to give a defense of what they believe, because challenges to their faith are guaranteed.

America needs a firm foundation on which to stand. The Truth is the only one that will not sway with the ever-shifting sands of our sinful culture.



## A PROPHECY ON OUR DAYS

*By Elder Justin Parvu (+2013); excerpted from an interview as found in Atitudini magazine no. 8, October 2009.*



**W**e must prepare for martyrdom and beyond this, I would not have to speak if people were not powerless in spirit and mind to understand. It’s not easy to live these days. But if the Lord has so pleased that we should suffer these times, then we must obey and receive with joy all that comes upon us, as from the hand of

God, and not from the enemy...

Therefore, please stop looking for solutions. Human solutions are nonexistent, my dears! The solution is to die for Christ. Fathers will give up their sons, mothers, their daughters, unto death. Behold, we witness the fulfillment of this prophecy. If the mother will let the child be vaccinated, it’s as if giving him over to die...

Therefore I say to you, trust that the Lord will give you power to confess Him. We live in an anarchic world, the

entire political class is an enemy of Christ and a servant of evil, that is why even living our simple life without abdicating our Christian principles is a daily confession and martyrdom.

So do not receive this vaccine or anything that the new political powers bring you today. The Zionists rule the world and the westerners work for them and they think they have come to own it because they have no shyness. Everything is in sight and they are aware that they have no opponent to fear and they fight to depopulate the world, with the few who will remain to worship them.

Now they are studying and sorting, and the way they are going to distinguish people from each other is the chips. Do you or do you not have a chip? For what is the chip after all? A weapon against Man. And we have no weapons; our youth is weary, that even if they want to rise from the spell in which they live, they have no power.

Our only weapons are spiritual ones: prayer, humility, love, but also confession [of Faith]. You cannot love without confession [of Faith]. Love is sacrificial, and if we fear to confess the truth, what sacrifice do we have? Or if we do not care about our neighbor who is unaware and we do not inform him and we let him fall prey to this system, what love do we have?

Those who still struggle today to awaken their brother, who have not remained indifferent to the future of a nation and a church, those are the children of the love of God, who lay their lives down for their brethren...

It is important to oppose antichrists and die with dignity; not to have a cowardly position.

† † †

**N**ow more than ever, lay people have to pray from the heart, because this will be our only salvation. In the heart is the root of all passions and that is where we need to direct our struggles.

If in the later years Christianity became lukewarm and superficial, we have to end all that now, this is not going to be enough anymore.

If we will not pray from the heart, we will not be able to sustain the psychological attacks, because the evil one has hidden brainwashing methods that are unknown to us.

The greatest sin today is carelessness. We pray carelessly, we repent carelessly, even if we do it. Times will come when only the ones that have the Spirit of God will be able to know good from evil. Human mind itself on its own will not be able to tell the difference.

There will be great deceptions and only the Holy Spirit will give us the discernment we need so we could save ourselves. Pray that you will not be deceived! Only through prayer we can receive the Holy Spirit. If we do not pray and just persevere in our laziness and unrepentful ways, we will completely lose the Holy Spirit and His guidance.

May it not be that we lose the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

## WHEN IS A PLACE DEFILED BY THE DEMONS?

An "Orthodox Ethos" article (<https://orthodoxethos.com/>)—from a homily by Geronda Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006), delivered on the 30th of March 1990, Original YouTube clip in Greek at : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M66E\\_2aZ-BA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M66E_2aZ-BA).

**Introductory Remarks by the Translator:** *In anticipation of our article explaining that the question of vaccines is not only a medical question (despite many bishops and priests shamefully telling their flock this), we at Orthodox Ethos have translated a homily from Geronda Athanasios Mitilinaios that states demons do indeed inhabit places and things. Fr. Athanasios explains further in this catechetical homily how this is possible. We strongly encourage our readers to study the holy elder's words since it is a part of the Orthodox phronema which is now important for us to understand when faced with the dangers and temptations we suffer in these days.*

† † †

Now we come to a second point, once again from Abba John. He said the following: "My children, let us not defile [1] this place, which our fathers cleansed from demons." We are truly speaking of the defilement of a place. Could you ever imagine that there is also defilement of demons? This saying is deep, but to many it is also unknown: can a place be defiled by demons?

The prayers of exorcism in the prayer book of our Church are replete with this position, namely, that a place can be defiled, that is, a place can be polluted, by the presence of demons. For example, a prayer of St. Basil says the following, when the priest addresses the man being exorcised, and of course he is really addressing the demons: "Fear and flee, unclean and accursed spirit, whether coming upon him unawares, whether from the sea, or a river, or from beneath the earth, or from a well, or a ravine, or a hollow, or a lake, or a thicket of reeds, or from woodlands, or from a grove, or a thicket, or a tree, whether from the roof of a bath or a pool of water, or from a pagan sepulcher or from any place where you may lurk, from whence we know and whence we know not."

Oh, so demons can come from some place? So demons can defile a certain place? Yes! What is it that defiles a place? It is sin in general. Pay attention to this: it is sin in general, the sin that is committed in a certain place. More specifically, it is sexual sins, and also pagan rituals, and the performance of

magical acts. These things defile a place; and this place becomes a habitation of the demons, just as those men that do these magical, demonic things also become a habitation, a dwelling-place, of the demons. In any case, though, first man is defiled by the demons and after that is the place defiled.

And how is a place cleansed? Did you see how Abba John told his disciples not to defile the place since the fathers had cleansed it? But how indeed? Listen: a place is cleansed, first, by exorcisms, that is, by the expulsion of the demons; second, by Holy Water, and third and most importantly, by the holy life of men. It was as if Abba John were saying to his disciples, Brethren, do not sin. Our forefathers have sanctified this place; therefore please do not defile it with sins! Since they drove out the demons.



So, my dear people, whenever we get anything new, a house, a field, a machine, a car, anything, first we do the blessing of the waters, precisely so as to remove far from this place any possibly inhabiting demons. The same is done to those about to be baptized. Two are the places in this case, the water in the baptismal font and the man about to be baptized. Both the one and the other are dwelling-places of the demons. That is precisely why the exorcisms are said, so as to expel from the water and to expel from the heart and body of the man the demons that lurk there. Pay attention to this: they lurk, they make their lair there. This is very characteristic. This is the reason why we say these exorcisms, at which time the catechumen looks westward and the priest (the one priest that is there, or if there are two, then one of them); and then we come to the font and, once we have expelled the demons from the water as well, we perform the baptism.

The folk belief in ghosts originates from here. Not that it is the soul of the dead man, of course; when each man dies, no matter how sinful he might be, his soul goes to its appropriate place. Man's soul does not haunt places, it does not become a vampire; instead, the demons impersonate the souls of men, especially the souls of the sinful, because those men had defiled the place with their sin, and so now the demons come and inhabit this place where a man had sinned, and thus make this place unclean. Do not think that these are fairy-tales; they are entirely true. Therefore unclean is the place where a sin was committed.

Now pay attention to one thing more. Unclean is also the place where a treasure—money—has been hidden in a dirty way. You know, for forty-fifty years now—I will not mention the incidents that occurred here in Greece [2]—huge amounts

of money were hidden, were buried. Do you know under what conditions this money was often hidden and buried? Under murderous conditions; many were murdered. Oftentimes, men would go to hide a treasure (which they had of course stolen from who-knows-where). I know personally of such a story: there was four of them; they hid the treasure, and then the one murdered the other three so that he could one day return back to Greece and find the treasure.

Demons sit upon such treasures, because it is a polluted place, because there men have killed each other. You must have heard such stories many times, and as you very well know, in our age some travel the mountains on motor-bikes so as to find money and treasure. I repeat: these places are defiled, they are dirty. How are they dirty? Because demons are sitting there. And should someone actually find that money, it is impossible for it to come to any good, it is impossible! That is why, my dear ones, as Abba John tells us here, let us be careful not to defile the place where we live, whether by injustice or by immorality, or by any thing whatsoever, by sin in general. The place is defiled, the persons and bodies of men are defiled, even objects are defiled. In the New Testament the following is written. Jude, the brother our Lord, says, *Do not take and do not wear clothes from the skin of sinful men.* (cf. Jude 23). Clothes that have come into contact with the skin of sinful men, do not take them and do not use them.

You might regard what I have told you tonight as odd, even fanciful. That is not so! I even used Holy Scripture. Let us therefore be careful. Only virtue and holiness can drive out the demons and purify a place. They purify the place, and they also purify the bodies. That is why, my dear ones, we are cleansed by confession. With Holy Communion we are sanctified, and we become holy. And when we have a holy place, a holy body, a holy soul, then the demons are driven away and never come again.

† † †

#### Endnotes:

[1] The Greek verb used in this quotation (ῥυπῶ) and the variation used throughout the text (ῥυπαίνω) mean “make foul and filthy, befoul” and “defile, disfigure, be or become foul, get dirty; metaphorically, contaminate, infect” respectively (LSJ).

[2] Fr. Athanasios is probably referring to the Second World War, the Greek Civil War, and the mass emigration that followed them.



The time will come when your shepherds will betray you. They will watch the wild beasts tear you apart and they will NOT come to your aid. Know that these are apocalyptic times that will be hard for us!

Blessed Elder Justin Parvu of Rumania (+2013)

## EMBRACE HER! NO CALAMITY IS STRONGER THAN HER PROTECTION!

By St. Paisios the Athonite.



Listen, my children: At the beginning of our century [the 20th Century], a huge fire broke out on Mount Athos and threatened the Monastery of St. Panteleimon. Then 2000 monks and 3,000 workers working there. These took what they found in front of them and went out to face the fire. But they could not.

Then the fire spread to Vatopedi. Hundreds of monks and workers who were there could not stop it. The fire destroyed everything.

Then the fire went on and reached Philotheou. Only 15 monks and as many workers lived there at that time. Frightened, they took the shovels and ran outside to face the fiery flame that devoured everything.

But a venerable Elder stopped them and said:

“Where are you going brothers? Thousands of people in Vatopedi and St. Panteleimon could not put out the fire and we, some thirty people, will save the Monastery?”

“And what shall we do then, Elder? How will we be saved?” the brothers asked.

“We cannot do it alone. Embrace Glykophilousa (Sweet-kissing” or “Loving Kindness” icon of our Panaghia)! She is in front and we are behind!” the Elder told them.

So they did. In a short time, the fiery flames reached outside of the Monastery, burning everything, but it did not advance even a millimeter through the walls of the Monastery!

And Saint Paisios added:

“I know that evil, like uncontrollable fire, threatens you and your children.

But hug Glykophilousa and do not be afraid!

She has the power to put out the fire that threatens our home!

She has the power to put out the fire that threatens our children!

She has the power to extinguish the fire that threatens our soul!

Because the Virgin Mary is the Mother of God and the Mother of the whole world, and no fire is greater than Her Love !!!

Her Hands are wings, and no calamity is stronger than Her Protection!

Embrace Her!”

## «Ἐπιστήμη Ἐπιστημῶν καὶ Τέχνη Τεχνῶν» ἡ Ἀνατροφή τῶν Παιδιῶν

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

Μιάς καὶ περίσσεψαν τὰ φαινόμενα νεανικῆς βίας, ἃς δοῦμε τί γινόταν στὸ παρελθόν μας, ποὺ πάντα διδάσκει μὲ τὴν ἐπικαιρότητά του. Ἄς ἀρχίσουμε μὲ τὴν Πονεμένη καὶ Ἀγιασμένη Ρωμοσύνη, τὸ Βυζάντιο.

Στὴν χιλιόχρονη Ρωμανία ἡ ἀνατροφή τῶν παιδιῶν κατέχει κυρίαρχο ρόλο. Στόχος δὲν εἶναι μόνον ὁ καλὸς κάγαθος πολίτης, ἀλλὰ ὁ πολίτης τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ὁ οὐρανοπολίτης, ὁ ἅγιος. Ἡ ἀνατροφή εἶναι ἡ ὑψηλότερα τέχνη. «Τῷ ὄντι γὰρ αὕτη μοι φαίνεται τέχνη τις εἶναι τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν, ἄνθρωπον ἅγειν, τὸ πολυτροπώτατον καὶ ποικιλώτατον ὄν», λέει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος.

Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατανοώντας τὶς δυσκολίες ἀνατροφῆς τῶν παιδιῶν γράφουν πλῆθος συγγραμμάτων, ὅπου παιδαγωγοῦν, συμβουλεύουν, νουθετοῦν γονεῖς καὶ παιδιά. Ἡ δροσιὰ καὶ ἡ ἐπικαιρότητα τῶν παρατηρήσεών τους εἶναι ἐκπληκτικὴ. Θὰ περιοριστοῦμε ἐδῶ σὲ λίγα χρυσὰ ρήματα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τοῦ Χρυσόστομου, τοῦ «θεμέλιου λίθου τοῦ καινοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ» κατὰ τὸν ἱστορικό τοῦ 19<sup>ου</sup> αἰώνα Σπ. Ζαμπέλιο.

Στὸ ἔργο του «Πῶς Πρέπει οἱ Γονεῖς ν' Ἀναθρέφουν τὰ Παιδιά τους» γράφει τὰ ἐξῆς θαυμάσια. Ξεκινᾷ μὲ μία μεγάλη ἀλήθεια: «Δὲν κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο γονέα—πατέρα ἢ μητέρα—τὸ γεγονὸς καὶ μόνο ὅτι συνετέλεσε νὰ γεννηθεῖ παιδί, ἀλλὰ νὰ τὸ διαπαιδαγωγήσει σωστά». Τὰ παιδιά δὲν εἶναι κτῆμα μας νὰ τὰ κάνουμε ὅ,τι θέλουμε ἢ νὰ βγάζουμε τὶς δικές μας ἀποθημμένες ἐπιδιώξεις. Τὸ μόνο ποὺ μᾶς ἀνήκει εἶναι ἡ διαπαιδαγώγησή τους. Ἡ διαπαιδαγώγησις εἶναι ὅμως δύσκολο πρᾶγμα. Οἱ γονεῖς ἀγχώνονται. Θέλουν νὰ εἶναι τέλειοι. Τέτοιοι δὲν ὑπάρχουν. Πολλὲς φορὲς ὁ γονεὺς (ἢ ὁ δάσκαλος) πέφτει σὲ σφάλματα ἢ κάνει λάθη ἀπέναντι στὰ παιδιά. Ζητᾷμε συγγνώμη.

Ἡ συγγνώμη ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά τὰ διδάσκει τρία πολύτιμα μαθήματα.

**Πρῶτον.** Ἡ ὁμολογία τοῦ γονεὸς ὅτι ἔκανε λάθος δίνει στὸ παιδί τὴν δυνατότητα νὰ διαπιστώσει ὅτι κανεὶς δὲν εἶναι ἀλάθης.

**Δεύτερον.** Ὅταν οἱ γονεῖς ἔχουν τὴν δυνατότητα νὰ ζητήσουν συγγνώμη ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά τους, τότε ἐκεῖνα

ἀρχίζουν νὰ μαθαίνουν ὅτι ἡ συγγνώμη εἶναι τὸ ὑψόδι τῆς ζωῆς ποὺ συνέχει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μαθαίνουν ὅτι ἓνα λάθος δὲν εἶναι τὸ τέλος μίας σχέσης καὶ ὅτι μπορεῖ νὰ ξεπεραστεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀπαλειφθεῖ μὲ τὴν συγγνώμη καὶ τὴν συμφιλίωση.

**Τρίτον.** Ἡ συγγνώμη τῶν γονέων ἐνισχύει τὴν δυνατότητα τῶν παιδιῶν νὰ διακρίνουν τὸ καλὸ ἀπὸ τὸ κακό.

Στηλιτεύει παρακάτω ὁ ἅγιος τὴν ἀδικαιολόγητη ἀνοχὴ τῶν γονέων στὰ παραπτώματα τῶν παιδιῶν. «Πολλοὶ γονεῖς», γράφει, «ἐπειδὴ δὲν θέλουν νὰ μαλώσουν ἢ νὰ λυπήσουν τὰ παιδιά τους, γιὰ τὴν ἄτακτη ἢ ἀπρεπὴ συμπεριφορὰ τους, τὰ εἶδαν ἀργότερα πολλὲς φορὲς νὰ συλλαμβάνονται ἐπειδὴ ὑπέπεσαν σὲ μεγάλα ἐγκλήματα».

Δυστυχῶς σήμερα οἱ πιδὸς πολλὲς οἰκογένειες ἔχουν σὰν κέντρο τῆς ζωῆς τους τὶς ἐπιθυμίες καὶ τὰ κέφια τοῦ παιδιοῦ. Ἰκανοποιοῦν κάθε του ἐπιθυμία. Γίνεται τὸ παιδί ἓνας κακομαθημένος τυραννίσκος, γιὰτὶ δὲν τὸ παιδαγωγοῦν οἱ γονεῖς του.



Χαρακτηριστικὸ εἶναι τὸ παρακάτω ἀνέκδοτο. Τὸ γεγονὸς συνέβη στὴν Ἀμερικὴ. Ἕνας πιτσιρίκος πηγαίνει μὲ τὴν μαμὰ του σ' ἓνα πολυκατάστημα. Φωνίζει ἐκεῖνὴ κάτι εὐτελὲς καὶ χρειαζοῦμενο, μὰ ὁ μικρὸς ἔχει χωθεῖ σ' ἓνα αὐτοκινητάκι καὶ ἀρνείται νὰ βγεῖ ἀπ' αὐτό. Μὲ γοερὲς κραυγὲς καὶ τσιριδὲς ἀπαιτεῖ νὰ τοῦ τὸ ἀγοράσουν. Ἡ μάνα δὲν ἔχει τόσα χρήματα. Τρέμει ἀκόμη μήπως ἡ ἄρνησή της δημιουργήσει στὸ παιδί τραύματα, ψυχικὲς, ἀνεπανόρθωτες ζημιές, ποὺ ἴσως γίνουν κάποτε ἡ αἰτία γιὰ νὰ γίνει τὸ παιδί κομπλεξικὸ ἢ... Ἄλ Καπόνε.

Τὸ πολυκατάστημα ὅμως ἔχει παιδοψυχολόγο, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ καλὰ πολυκαταστήματα παιδικῶν εἰδῶν στὴν Ἀμερικὴ. Ἡ μαμὰ καταφεύγει ἀπελπισμένη σ' αὐτόν. Γιατρέ, τοῦ ἐξηγεῖ, καὶ τρέμει ἡ φωνή της, τοῦ μίλησα λογικά, τοῦ ἐξήγησα πῶς δὲν ἔχω χρήματα, τὸ παρακάλεσα, τοῦ ἔταξα λαγούς μὲ πετραχήλια. Μὰ τίποτε, δὲν σηκώνεται ἀπὸ τὸ παιχνίδι. Μπορεῖτε νὰ βοηθήσετε.

Ὁ ψυχολόγος πρόθυμα πῆγε δίπλα στὸν μικρό, τοῦ ψιθύρισε κάτι στὸ αὐτί καὶ ἀμέσως—ὦ τοῦ θαύματος—ὁ μικρὸς ἀκολούθησε σὰν ἀρνάκι τὴν μητέρα του. Ἡ μαμὰ συγκινήθηκε, θαύμασε τὴν παιδαγωγικὴ κατάρτιση τοῦ γιατροῦ. «Αὐτὸ θὰ πεῖ μοντέρνα ἀντίληψη παιδαγωγικῆς», κραύγασε. «Τί εἶπατε στὸ παιδί μου, γιατρέ, καὶ πείστηκε», ρωτᾷ νὰ μάθει. Ὁ ψυχολόγος χαμογέλασε: «Τοῦ εἶπα: «κατέβα

ἀμέσως γιατί θα φᾶς δύο σφαλιάρες που θα δεις τον ουρανὸ σφοντύλι».

Ἐδῶ τελειώνει τὸ ἀνέκδοτο. Νὰ πῶς θίγει ἀκόμη ὁ ἅγιος ἓνα ἰδιαίτερο σοβαρὸ θέμα: Γράφει: «Γιὰ τὰ κτήματα ποὺ ἔχουν δοθεῖ στὰ παιδιά φροντίζουμε, ὄχι ὅμως καὶ γιὰ τὰ παιδιά. Βλέπεις γονεά τὴν ἀνοησία; Ἄσκησε τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ παιδιοῦ σου πρῶτα καὶ κατόπιν θὰ ἔλθουν ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα: Ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ παιδιοῦ δὲν εἶναι ἐνάρετη, καθόλου δὲν τὸ ὠφελοῦν τὰ χρήματα καὶ ὅταν εἶναι, καθόλου δὲν τὸ βλάπτει ἡ φτώχεια. Θέλεις νὰ τὸ ἀφήσει πλούσιο, μάθε το νὰ εἶναι σωστὸς ἄνθρωπος». Οἱ παρατηρήσεις αὐτὲς εἶναι πολὺ ἐπίκαιρες.

**Ἡ μεγάλη πλειοψηφία τῶν γονέων σήμερα φροντίζει νὰ προσφέρει στὰ παιδιά, ὑλικὲς ἀνέσεις καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ συχνά, γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐπιτύχει αὐτό, στερεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά της, αὐτὸ ποὺ ἐκεῖνα χρειάζονται περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅτιδήποτε ἄλλο, δηλαδὴ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς γονεῖς τους.** Στὴ συνέχεια οἱ γονεῖς προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὰ ἀποζημιώσουν μὲ ἐξωφρενικὲς παροχές. Τὰ δωροδοκοῦν, δηλαδὴ, γιὰ νὰ ἀγοράσουν τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τους. Ἡ δείχνουν αὐτὴν τὴν ἀποπνικτικὴ ἀγάπη, κυρίως οἱ μάνες, ποὺ ὀνομάστηκε προσφυῶς, «σύνδρομο τῆς κλώσας». Ἔτσι δὲν μεγαλώνουμε ἐλεύθερους ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ ἄβουλα ὄντα.

Μνημονεύει ἀκόμη ὁ ἅγιος ἓνα πολὺ σημαντικὸ θέμα. Αὐτὸ τῆς γλώσσας: «Ρήματα παιδεύοντες τὸ παιδίον φθέγγεσθαι σεμνὰ καὶ εὐσεβῆ», νὰ μαθαίνουμε στὸ παιδί νὰ χρησιμοποιοῖ λέξεις ὠραίες. Ἡ τουλάχιστον νὰ μὴν ἀκούει αἰσχρολογίες. Δυστυχῶς σήμερα καὶ στὰ Δημοτικὰ ἀκόμη σχολεῖα ἀκοῦμε μαθητὲς στὰ διαλείμματα νὰ βρωμολογοῦν. Ποιὸς φταίει; «Ὅταν τὰ μῆλα εἶναι ξινά, ποιὸν πρέπει νὰ κατηγορήσουμε τὰ μῆλα ἢ τὴ μηλιά;», ἔλεγε ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός. «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι τὸ μιμητικότερον τῶν ὄντων», ἔλεγε ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης. Τὸ παιδί μιμεῖται ὅ,τι βλέπει καὶ ὅ,τι ἀκούει. Σ' αὐτὸν τὸν τομέα περισσότερη προσοχὴ χρειάζονται οἱ πατεράδες, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔχουν τὴν νοσηρὴ ἐντύπωση πῶς ἀποτελεῖ χρέος τους ἡ διδασκαλία καὶ ἡ ἀποκάλυψη στὸν νεαρὸ γιὸ του κάποιων «ἀντρικῶν» μυστικῶν ἢ ἡ ἐκμάθηση βρισιῶν ποὺ ἀρμόζει σὲ πραγματικοὺς ἄντρες. Ἀποαθωποιοῦνται ἔτσι τὰ παιδιά σὲ πολὺ ἀκατάλληλη ἡλικία καὶ ὀδηγοῦνται πολλὲς φορὲς στὴ διαφθορά, γιατί «φθειροῦσι ἤθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλῶν κακά».

Καταστρέφονται χρηστὰ ἤθη ἀπὸ κακὲς συναναστροφές καὶ ὁμιλίες, σημειώνει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος. Τὰ παιδιά πολὺ συχνὰ γνωρίζουν, πόσο τὰ βαρύνουν τὰ λάθη καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτίες τῶν γονέων. Τὰ ἀκόλουθα ἀποτελοῦν μία πολὺ εὐγλωττὴ μαρτυρία.

Σὲ μία πρόσφατη σχετικὰ ἔρευνα σὲ παιδιά τοῦ

Δημοτικοῦ μὲ θέμα «πῶς θὰ θέλατε τοὺς γονεῖς σας», ἓνα παιδί Δ' Δημοτικοῦ ἔγραψε: «Ἐγὼ θέλω τοὺς γονεῖς μου νὰ εἶναι καλοί, νὰ μὴν λένε κακὰ λόγια, γιατί ἄλλιῶς θὰ μάθουν καὶ σὲ μᾶς τὰ λόγια αὐτά». Ἐνα ἄλλο Ε' τάξης ἔγραψε: «Ἐγὼ θέλω τοὺς γονεῖς μου νὰ εἶναι καλοί, εὐγενικοὶ καὶ νὰ μὴν μαλώνουν μεταξύ τους».

Μίλησε τὸ δεύτερο παιδί γιὰ τὴν συζυγικὴ ἀγάπη. Αὐτὴ ἡ εὐλογημένη ἀγάπη εἶναι ἀληθινὴ εὐεργεσία γιὰ τὰ παιδιά, τὸ ὠραιότερο μάθημα. Ὅλοι οἱ τόμοι τῆς παιδαγωγικῆς ἐπιστήμης ὠχριοῦν μπροστὰ στὸ ἀνεπανάληπτο μάθημα ποὺ λέγεται συζυγικὴ ἀγάπη. Αὐτὴ ἀρωματίζει τὰ παιδιά, ὥστε νὰ μοσχοβολοῦν κι αὐτὰ στὴ ζωὴ τους.

Τελειώνοντας μὲ τὸ Βυζάντιο θὰ ἀναφέρουμε τὴν κορωνίδα τῶν παιδαγωγικῶν συμβουλῶν τῆς ρωμαϊκῆς παράδοσής μας, ἡ ὁποία ἐπαναλαμβάνει τὴν ἀρχαία ἐλληνικὴ: «Δὲν θὰ χρειάζονταν λόγια στὰ παιδιά μας, ἂν ἔλαμπε ἀληθινὰ ἡ ζωὴ μας, δὲν θὰ ἦταν ἀπαραίτητοι οἱ δάσκαλοι τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἂν παρουσιάσαμε ἑμεῖς οἱ ἴδιοι στὰ παιδιά μας ἔργα ἀρετῆς».

**Ἡ ἀξία τοῦ παραδείγματος εἶναι ἀνεπανάληπτη. Εἶναι ἡ βασιλικὴ ὁδὸς γιὰ μία ὑγιὴ ἀνατροφὴ τῶν παιδιῶν μας.**



**Κ**ι ἂν μὲς τὸ σπῆτι σου δὲν πιστεύει κανεὶς, οὔτε ὁ ἄνδρας οὔτε τὰ παιδιά σου, καὶ μένεις ἓνας μὲς τὸ σπῆτι, ἐξακολούθει νὰ πιστεύεις στὸν Θεό.

Κι ἂν μέσα στὴν κοινωνία, τὴν πόλη, τὸ χωριό, τὴν Ἀθήνα πέσουν καὶ προσκυνήσουν τὸν διάβολο, ἓνας νὰ μένεις μέσα στὴν Ἀθήνα, ἐσὺ νὰ μὴν ἀρνηθεῖς τὸν Χριστό.

Κι ἂν ὅλη ἡ Ἑλλάδα—ὁ μὴ γένοιτο—γονατίσει στὸν διάβολο κι ἀρνηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό, ἓνας νὰ μένεις στὴν Ἑλλάδα, μὴν ἀρνηθεῖς τὸν Χριστό.

Κι ἂν ὅλος ὁ πλανήτης ἀρνηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό κι ἓνας μείνει στὸν πλανήτη, μείνε ἐσὺ μὲ τὸν Χριστό.

Γιατὶ ὁ Ἐνας θὰ νικήσει, ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστό!

**Μακαριστὸς Ἐπίσκοπος πρῶν Φλωρίνης  
Ἀγιοσύνης Καντιώτης (+2010)**

**Ἐνας σύγχρονος «Πατροκοσμάς» καὶ  
λέοντας τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας**

## Ποίος θὰ Σαλπίσῃ τὴν Ἐπιστροφὴν τῶν Πιστῶν εἰς τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Ναοὺς;

*Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.*

**Ο**ἱ εὐσυνείδητοι καὶ εὐαίσθητοι πνευματικὰ κληρικοί βιώνουν δυσάρεστες καταστάσεις ἀπὸ τὴν ἐρήμωση τῶν Ἱερῶν Ναῶν λόγῳ τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀντιεκκλησιαστικῶν μέτρων, ποὺ ἐπέβαλε ἡ κυβέρνησις. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν πανικοβληθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ ὅσα προπαγανδιστικὰ μεταδίδονται ἀπὸ τὰ Μ.Μ.Ε., ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ἀστυνομικὰ μέτρα ποὺ λαμβάνονται καὶ τὰ παράλογα πρόστιμα ποὺ ἐπιβάλλονται.

Οἱ πολιτικοὶ δὲν γνωρίζουν τὸ θέμα τῆς πανδημίας καὶ συμβουλευόνται τοὺς εἰδικοὺς ἐπιστήμονες, οἱ ὅποιοι ἐπίσης δὲν γνωρίζουν τὶς πιθανὲς ἐξελίξεις. Ὡστόσο, πολλοὶ ἐπιστήμονες μπροστὰ στὸ γυαλὶ τῆς τηλεόρασις γίνονται σοφοὶ καὶ παντογνώστες, λένε πολλὰ, φοβίζονται τὸ λαὸ καὶ τονίζουν ὅτι τὰ μέτρα προστασίας εἶναι ἀσφαλῆ. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ, ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ ἀκούγονται οἱ διαφωνοῦντες ἐπιστήμονες καὶ μερικοὶ ὀδηγοῦνται στὸν εἰσαγγελέα, γιατί εἶπαν κάτι ποὺ δὲν εἶναι σύμφωνο μὲ τὶς κυβερνητικὲς ὑποδείξεις!

Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ χάσαμε τὴ δημοκρατία καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερία καὶ πετύχαμε τὸν ἐπικίνδυνον διχασμὸ τοῦ λαοῦ. Παράλληλα ἔγινε καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία στόχος. Ἐμφανίστηκαν ἐπιστήμονες καὶ εἶπαν ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία μὲ τὶς ἀκολουθίες στοὺς ναοὺς, τὴ Θεία Μετάληψη, τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν ἱερῶν εἰκόνων, τὴν κοσμοσυρροὴ καὶ τὶς λιτανεῖες διαδίδει τὸν κορωνοϊὸ καὶ πρέπει νὰ ληφθοῦν ἐξοντωτικὰ μέτρα, κλείνοντας τοὺς Ἱ. Ναοὺς καὶ ἀπαγορεύοντας κάθε ἐκδήλωση σ' αὐτοὺς. Καὶ ἔρχεται ἡ «στοργικὴ» πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησία κυβέρνησις τῆς δεξιᾶς, νὰ τὰ ὑλοποιήσει, γιὰ νὰ προστατευθεῖ ἡ δημόσια ὑγεία. Περιορίζει τὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιαζομένων, ἄλλοτε σὲ 5, ἄλλοτε σὲ 10 κ.λπ., ἀνάλογα μὲ τὶς διαθέσεις καὶ ἐκτιμήσεις τῶν εἰδικῶν ἐπιστημόνων. Τὴν ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὴ τῆς στάσις ἐνισχύουν οἱ δημοσιογράφοι, οἱ προοδευτικοὶ πολιτικοί, οἱ ἀριστεροὶ καὶ ἄθεοι, καὶ οἱ πολύξεροι ἄνθρωποι τῆς τέχνης καὶ τῶν γραμμάτων, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ ποὺ δὲν γνωρίζουν ποῖα εἶναι ἡ ἐνορία τους...

Τὴν ἀρνητικὴ εἰκόνα ὀλοκληρώνουν οἱ αὐστηροὶ Μητροπολίτες, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ τηροῦμε ἐπακριβῶς τὰ κυβερνητικὰ μέτρα, λὲς καὶ εἶναι ἐντολὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, καὶ ἐντυπωσιάζουν μὲ τὶς δηλώσεις τους, γιὰ νὰ χαρακτηρίζονται ἀπὸ τοὺς κοσμικοὺς ὡς ἀληθινοὶ ποιμένες, αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ τῶν χριστιανῶν, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πῶ ὅτι σκανδαλίζουν μὲ ὅσα λένε καὶ πράττουν. Ἔχουν κλείσει τοὺς ναοὺς, ἔχουν ἀπαγορεύσει στοὺς πιστοὺς νὰ στέκονται στὴν αὐλὴ τῶν ναῶν καὶ ὅπου ὑπάρχει περίφραξις βάζουν στὶς πόρτες ἀλυσίδες καὶ λουκέτα!

Καὶ μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς στέκονται οἱ ἴδιοι στοὺς θρόνους, τελοῦν τὶς ἀκολουθίες, ἄνευ ἐκκλησιάσματος, καὶ εὐλογοῦν τοὺς ἱστορημένους στοὺς τοίχους Ἁγίους. Ἔτσι λοιπὸν λειτουργοῦν οἱ ναοί, προφυλάσσεται ὁ λαὸς ἀπὸ τὸν κορωνοϊό (!), **ἐνῶ ὁ διάβολος γελάει γιὰ τὸ κατόρθωμά του!**

Πολλὰ μπορεῖ νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς γιὰ τὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολιτικοὺς εἰς βάρος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὅπως πολλὰ μπορεῖ νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὄλη στάσις τῆς Ἱερᾶς Συνόδου, ἡ ὁποία δειλὰ συμπλέει μὲ τοὺς πατέρες τοῦ Ἔθνους, ὄχι βέβαια καὶ μὲ τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὅλα εἶναι ἀποκαρδιωτικὰ καὶ ἀτελέσφορα. Οἱ ἀπλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν χάσει πῶς τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τους στὰ ὅσα ἰσχυρίζεται ἡ κυβέρνησις, στὶς διαβεβαιώσεις τῶν γιατρῶν καὶ στὴν ἀποτελεσματικότητά τῶν μέτρων προστασίας κατὰ τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ καὶ τῶν διαφόρων ἐμβολίων.

Ἐκεῖνο ὅμως ποὺ πρέπει νὰ ἀπασχολήσει ἀπὸ τώρα τὴν Ἐκκλησία, εἶναι ὁ τρόπος, μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ ἐπαναφέρει τὸ σκορπισμένον ποίμνιον στοὺς ναοὺς. Ἡ κυβέρνησις τὸ ἔδωξε μὲ τὴν ἀστυνομία καὶ τὰ πρόστιμα. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὅμως διαθέτει μόνον τὸ λόγο. Πρέπει νὰ πείσει καὶ ὄχι νὰ ἀπειλήσει. Τὸ ἔργο εἶναι δύσκολο. Πῶς θὰ διαλυθοῦν οἱ θεωρίες τῶν ἀντιχρίστων καὶ πῶς θὰ ἀτονήσουν οἱ συνεχεῖς ἐπιθέσεις τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς;

Οἱ σύγχρονοι καὶ προοδευτικοὶ Μητροπολίτες τί μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν; Μὲ ποιὸν κληρικοὺς θὰ συνεργαστοῦν; Μὲ αὐτοὺς ποὺ τιμώρησαν ἀπερίσκεπτα καὶ ἀδικαιολόγητα ἢ μὲ ἐκείνους ποὺ τοὺς ἀπειλοῦν καὶ τοὺς συμπεριφέρονται ἄγρια; **Οἱ συγκεκριμένοι Μητροπολίτες πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστέψουν ὅτι δὲν ἐμπνέουν τὸ λαὸ οὔτε καὶ τοὺς ἐμπιστεύεται κανεὶς.** Μόνον μία ἐλπίδα ὑπάρχει. Οἱ ἐνάρετοι κληρικοὶ νὰ ὑπερηγήσουν τὰ ἐμπόδια καὶ νὰ σαλπίσουν. Νὰ φωνάξουν, νὰ ἐλέγξουν, νὰ παρακαλέσουν, νὰ παρηγορήσουν καὶ γενικὰ νὰ πείσουν τοὺς πιστοὺς μὲ τὴν ἀρετὴ τους καὶ τὸν ποιμαντικὸ ζῆλο, κι ἂς ἔχουν ἀντίθετους τοὺς πνευματικούς τους πατέρες, οἱ ὅποιοι πρέπει νὰ περιοριστοῦν στὶς δημόσιες ἐμφανίσεις κατὰ τὶς ἐθνικὲς ἐπετείες καὶ νὰ συνεχίσουν τὴν συνεργασία μὲ τοὺς τοπικοὺς ἄρχοντες, γιὰ νὰ περνοῦν καλά.

Αὐτὰ ποὺ σημειώνουμε ἐδῶ, δὲν ἰσχύουν γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Μητροπολίτες. Ὑπάρχουν ἀρχιερεῖς ποὺ μένουν σταθεροί, εἶναι ἀφιλόδοξοι κι ἐργάζονται μὲ ταπεινῶση, προσφέροντας μυστικὸ ποιμαντικὸ ἔργο. Μακάρι, ὅλες αὐτὲς οἱ καθαρὲς παρουσίες νὰ ἐνωθοῦν, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουν νὰ ἐπαναφέρουν τοὺς πιστοὺς στοὺς ναοὺς, γιὰ νὰ συνεχιστεῖ τὸ σωτήριον ἔργο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπολογίζονται τοὺς ἐφήμερους πολιτικοὺς ἐξουσιαστὲς καὶ νὰ μὴ παρασύρονται ἀπὸ τὰ ψιχία τῆς κυβερνητικῆς τραπέζης, ποὺ τοὺς πετάει ὑπεροπτικά, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς κατευθύνει, ὅπου ἐκεῖνη ἐπιθυμεῖ.

## Ἡ Παιδοκτονία

Αὐγουστῖνος Καντιώτης. Απομαγνητοφωνημένη ὁμιλία, ἡ ὁποία ἐγινε στὸν ἱ. ναὸ Ἁγ. Ἀγίων Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Ἐλένης Ἀμυνταίου τὴν Δευτέρα 26-12-1983.

«**Ραχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς...**»

[Ματθ. 2:18]

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**Ο** Ἡρώδης, ἀγαπητοί μου, ὅπως ἀκούσαμε στὸ εὐαγγελικὸ ἀνάγνωσμα σήμερα, ἔσφαξε 14.000 νήπια. Ἀνατριχιάζει καὶ φρίττει ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὅταν τ' ἀκούη αὐτό. Ἀλλά, ἀδελφοί μου, μὴν εἴμαστε ὑποκριταί. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἔγκλημα γίνεται καὶ τώρα.

Στὴν πατρίδα μας δὲν εἶνε ἓνας ἢ δύο οἱ Ἡρώδης ποὺ ἐκτελοῦν τὸ ἀπαίσιον ἔργο τῆς παιδοκτονίας. Δολοφόνοι ἀθῶων νηπίων εἶνε πρῶτα-πρῶτα οἱ γιατροί. Ὅχι ὄλοι. Ὑπάρχουν γιατροὶ ποὺ τιμοῦν τὸ ἐπάγγελμά τους. Μοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς ἁγίους Ἀναργύρους, τὸν ἅγιον Παντελεήμονα καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἱαματικούς ἁγίους. Ὑπάρχουν γιατροὶ ποὺ τηροῦν τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν

τοῦ Ἱπποκράτους, ποὺ λέει: «Ποτέ δὲν θὰ δώσω φάρμακο σὲ γυναῖκα γιὰ νὰ κἀνη ἔκτρωσι». Τὸν ὄρκον τοῦ Ἱπποκράτους, ποὺ θεωρεῖται πατὴρ τῆς ἱατρικῆς ἐπιστήμης, ἐπαναλαμβάνουν οἱ γιατροὶ μας ὅταν παίρνουν τὸ δίπλωμά τους. Καὶ ὅμως ὑπάρχουν καὶ γιατροὶ-Ἡρώδης, ποὺ σφάζουν συνεχῶς νήπια. Οἱ κακοῦργοι αὐτοὶ ἴδρυσαν τὶς κατ' εὐφημισμὸν λεγόμενες γυναικολογικὲς κλινικὲς, ποὺ στὴν πραγματικότητά εἶνε σφαγεῖα μικρῶν παιδιῶν.

Πρέπει νὰ κλάψουμε, ἀδελφοί μου. Πρέπει ν' ἀνοίξη ἡ γῆ νὰ μᾶς καταπιῇ καὶ ὁ ἥλιος νὰ στείλῃ τὶς ἀκτίνες του καυστικὲς καὶ νὰ μᾶς κἀνη κάρβουνο. Πρέπει νὰ σειστοῦν οἱ κορυφές τῶν ὀρέων καὶ τὰ ἄστρα τ' οὐρανοῦ νὰ γίνουν ἀστροπελέκια πάνω στὰ κεφάλια μας. Γιατὶ ὅλος ὁ κόσμος, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος ἡ μικρὴ μας πατρίδα, διαπράττει τὸ μεγάλο καὶ φοβερὸ αὐτὸ ἔγκλημα.

Πόσες ἐκτρώσεις γίνονται; Ἄν σᾶς βάλω νὰ μετράτε ἐκτρώσεις, θὰ φτάση μεσημέρι καὶ δὲν θὰ ἔχετε τελειώσει. «Φρίξον ἦλιε, ἀναστέναξον γῆ». Πάνω ἀπὸ 400.000 ἔμβρυα τὸ χρόνο σκοτώνονται στὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ ῥίχνονται στοὺς ὑπὸνόμους!

Ὅταν ἔγινε σεισμὸς κάτω στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, πολλοὶ κάτοικοι ἔντρομοι ἄφησαν τὴν πόλιν τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου καὶ καμμιά διακοσαριὰ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ἦρθαν στὴ Φλώρινα. Πέρασαν κι ἀπὸ τὸ γραφεῖο μου. Ἦταν

φοβισμένοι. Προσπάθησα νὰ τοὺς παρηγορήσω καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐνισχύσω. Κάποιος μοῦ εἶπε: «Δικαιῶς μᾶς τιμωρεῖ ὁ Θεός». Καὶ μοῦ διηγήθηκε τὸ ἐξῆς περιστατικόν. Κοντὰ στὴ συνοικία ποὺ καθόταν ἔφραξε ὁ ὑπόνομος τῆς περιοχῆς. Εἰδοποιήθηκε ὁ δῆμος τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἔστειλε συνεργεῖο. Ἦταν καὶ ὁ ἴδιος παρὼν στὸ ἄνοιγμα τοῦ ὑπὸνόμου. Ἐφριξαν ὅταν βρῆκαν τὴν αἰτία. Μέσα στὸν ὑπόνομο ἦταν 80 κεφαλάκια ἐμβρύων κομματιασμένα! Δίπλα στὸν ὑπόνομο λειτουργοῦσαν τρεῖς γυναικολογικὲς κλινικὲς, σφαγεῖα φοβερά, ποὺ κατασφάζουν τὰ ἀθῶα νήπια...

Ἡρώδες λοιπὸν ὅσοι γιατροὶ ἀθετοῦν τοὺς ὄρκους τους. Ἀλλὰ Ἡρώδες κατὰ μείζονα λόγο εἶνε οἱ μανάδες καὶ οἱ πατεράδες ποὺ συνεργοῦν στὸ ἔγκλημα αὐτὸ τῆς γενοκτονίας.

Μίλησα καὶ παλαιότερα γιὰ τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ καὶ παρεξηγήθηκα. Διότι κάποιοι διέδωσαν, ὅτι ὁ δεσπότης στὴν ἐκκλησία καταράστηκε τὶς γυναῖκες ποὺ κάνουν ἐκτρώσεις. Ὅχι, τέτοιο λόγο δὲν εἶπα. Εἶπα κάτι ἄλλο, τὸ ἐξῆς. Ὅτι μεγάλοι ἐπιστήμονες



τῆς ἱατρικῆς, Ἀμερικανοί, Ἄγγλοι, Γερμανοὶ καὶ Ῥώσοι ἀκόμη, ποὺ κάνουν ἔρευνες, βρῆκαν, ὅτι ἡ γυναῖκα, ὅταν γεννᾷ, εἶνε ὑγιής ὅταν ὅμως ἐμποδίσῃ τὴ γέννα, εἴτε μὲ φάρμακα εἴτε μὲ ἄλλα ἄτιμα μέσα, ποὺ δὲν τολμῶ ἐδῶ νὰ τὰ ὀνομάσω, εἴτε μὲ τὶς ἐκτρώσεις καὶ ἀμβλώσεις, αὐτὴ ἢ γυναῖκα, ποὺ κάνει

τέτοια πράγματα, παθαίνει στὰ μυαλὰ καὶ γίνεται ψυχοπαθῆς, στὴν καρδιά ἔχει κάρβουνο ἀναμμένο, καὶ τέλος πολλὲς φορὲς παθαίνει καρκίνο μήτρας καὶ μαστῶν. Δὲν τὰ λέω ἐγὼ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα, ἀλλὰ διαπρεπεῖς γιατροὶ.

Κάτω στὴν Ἀθήνα εἶνε μιὰ συνοικία ποὺ κατοικοῦν πλούσιοι. Ἔχουν καράβια, ἐργοστάσια, πολυκατοικίες καὶ αὐτοκίνητα. Ἔχουν λίρες, δολλάρια καὶ μάρκα. Ἔχουν τὰ πάντα. Παιδιὰ ὅμως δὲν ἔχουν. Σκυλιὰ καὶ γατιὰ γαυγίζουν καὶ νιαουρίζουν στὰ σπίτια τους. Τώρα τί μαθαίνω; Σκούπα ἠλεκτρικὴ τοὺς θερίζει. Οἱ γυναῖκες τους πεθαίνουν ἀράδα ἀπὸ καρκίνο μήτρας καὶ μαστῶν. ὦ Θεέ μου! Σὲ ἀγνοοῦμε, σὲ περιφρονοῦμε καὶ σὲ ἐμπαίζουμε. Ἀλλὰ σὺ εἶσαι ἰσχυρὸς καί, ὅπως τιμώρησες τὸν Ἡρώδη, κατὰ παρόμοιον τρόπο τιμωρεῖς καὶ σήμερα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ κάνουν τέτοια πράγματα.

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Τὸ ἔγκλημα τῆς παιδοκτονίας λαμβάνει διαστάσεις στὴν πατρίδα μας. Καὶ τὸ χειρότερο· σὰν νὰ μὴν ἔφτανε



τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἐκτρώσεων, ψηφίστηκε καὶ νόμος, διὰ τοῦ ὁποίου ἐπιτρέπεται ἡ ἐκτρωσις. Ὁ γιατρὸς πετᾶ μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ σπλάχνα τῆς γυναίκας τὸ ἄνθος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ποὺ εἶνε τὸ νήπιον, ὅπως πετάει ἓνα σάπιο δόντι. Ἐκεῖ καταντήσαμε.

Εἶνε τοῦτο ἐθνικὴ αὐτοκτονία. Διότι ἔχουμε τὰ λιγώτερα παιδιά στὰ Βαλκάνια. Πηγαίνετε στὴν Ἀλβανία. Γνωρίζετε, μὲ πόσο καυστικὴ γλῶσσα ἤλεγξα γιὰ τὸ καθεστῶς του τὸν Ἐμβερ Χότζα, σύμβολο τοῦ ὀλοκληρωτισμοῦ. Καὶ ὁμως οἱ Ἀλβανοί, μέσα σὲ 20 χρόνια, ἀπὸ 1.500.000 ἔγιναν 2.500.000. Διότι, παρ' ὅλη τὴν ἀθεία τους, τίμησαν τὴ μητρότητα. Τὴν ἔχουν ὑψώσει σὲ ἐθνικὴ εορτή. Ἔστηναν ἐξέδρα, τὴ στολίζαν μὲ ἄνθη, τὴ ἔστρωναν μὲ χρυσά, κι ἀνέβαζαν ἐκεῖ ὄχι τὸν Ἐμβερ Χότζα ἀλλὰ τὴ μάνα. Διάλεγαν μανάδες ἀπ' ὅλη τὴν Ἀλβανία, ποὺ εἶχαν πολλά, 10-12 παιδιά, καὶ τίς ἀνέβαζαν στὴν ἐξέδρα ἐκείνη. Καὶ περνοῦσαν ἀξιωματοῦχοι καὶ στρατηγοί, περνοῦσαν μικροὶ καὶ μεγάλοι, καὶ ὅλοι χαιρετοῦσαν τὴ μητέρα. Ἔτσι τιμοῦσαν οἱ Ἀλβανοί, οἱ ἄθεοι, τὴ μάνα. Κ' ἐμεῖς ἐδῶ ἐγκληματοῦμε κατὰ τρόπο ἀπαράδεκτο. Εἴμαστε ἐθνοκτόνοι.

Κοντὰ στὸν Ἐβρο ποταμὸ εἶνε οἱ Τουρκάλες ἔχουν 7-8 παιδιά, εἶνε πολύτεκνες. Ἐδῶ στίς Ἑλληνίδες ἔπεσε ἡ κατάρα, ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, νὰ μὴ γεννοῦν παιδιά. Τὸ ἔθνος μας τὸ ἱστορικὸ σβήνει καὶ ἐξαλείφεται ἀπὸ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς γῆς. Τοῦτο εἶνε συμφορὰ, εἶνε δολοφονία.

Πρέπει ἰδιαιτέρως, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ προσέξουμε. Ἐδῶ στὸ μικρὸ ποίμνιο τῆς Ἑλλάδος νὰ μὴ γίνεταί καμμιά ἐκτρωσις. Παιδιά, ἄθῳα νήπια, χαριτωμένα βρέφη νὰ στολίζουν τὴν πατρίδα μας.

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Γιὰ νὰ μὴν τελειώσω ὁμως μὲ ἀπαισιοδοξία, ἀγαπητοί μου, λέγω τὸ ἐξῆς. Μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι αὐτό, στὴν κολασμένη γενεά, σ' αὐτὴ τὴ ζούγκλα, ὑπάρχουν καὶ φωτεινὰ παραδείγματα, αἰσιόδοξα σημεῖα.

Μιὰ μέρα στὴ μητρόπολι ἦρθε ἓνα φτωχαδάκι, ἓνας τσομπάνος ποὺ εἶχε λίγα προβατάκια. Ἦρθε γιὰ νὰ ζητήσῃ τὴν εὐλογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ μοῦ εἶπε μὲ χαρά: «Μ' ἀξίωσε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ γεννήσω τὸ δέκατο παιδί· δόξα νὰ ᾗχῃ τὸ ὄνομά Του!»... Ἐκλαψα ὅταν τὸν ἄκουσα. Μέσα στὴν κόλασι αὐτὴ ὑπάρχει ἓνα φτωχαδάκι ποὺ ἔχει δέκα παιδιά!

Ἔλα, βρὲ σύ, ποὺ ἔχεις τόσα λεφτὰ ποὺ μπορεῖς ν' ἀγοράσῃς ὅλη τὴ Φλώρινα καὶ τὸ Ἀμύνταιο καὶ τὴν Πτολεμαΐδα. Ἔλα, σὺ ὁ ἄλλος, ποὺ κάθε μέρα πετᾷς ἑκατομμύρια στίς ντισκοτέκ. Ἔλα, σὺ ποὺ παίζεις χαρτιά. Ἔλα, σὺ ποὺ σπαταλᾷς τὰ λεφτὰ σου ἐδῶ κ' ἐκεῖ καὶ μετὰ λὲς ὅτι δὲν σὲ φτάνουν γιὰ νὰ μεγαλώσῃς παιδιά καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὰ σκοτώνεις. Ἄν ἦμουν κυβερνήτης—δὲν θέλω νὰ εἶμαι κυβερνήτης ὅσο ἀξίζει μιὰ κλωστή τοῦ ῥάσου μου, δὲν ἀξίζουν ὅλες

οἱ ἐξουσίες τοῦ κόσμου—ἀλλ' ἂν ἦμουν κυβερνήτης καὶ μάξευα ὅλα τὰ χρήματα ποὺ σπαταλοῦν τὴν πρωτοχρονιά, θὰ μπορούσα νὰ θρέψω 500.000 παιδιά. Αὐτὸς ὁ τσομπάνος θὰ δικάσῃ μιὰ μέρα τὸν κόσμο καὶ τίς μανάδες αὐτὲς ποὺ λένε ὅτι δὲν ἔχουν λεφτὰ καὶ σκοτώνουν τὰ παιδιά τους.

Θέλετε ἄλλο παράδειγμα; Μιὰ γυναίκα σ' ἓνα ἀκριτικὸ χωριὸ τῆς περιφερείας μας ἔμεινε ἔγκυος τὸ ὄγδοο παιδί. Μόλις τὸ ἀντελήφθη ὁ ὑλιστὴς καὶ ἄθεος ἄντρας τῆς, τῆς λέει: «Νὰ τὸ πετάξῃς». Ἐπειδὴ ἐκείνη ἄρνησταν, τὴν πίεξε καὶ τὴ χτυποῦσε. Ἡ γυναίκα ὁμως ἔμεινε σταθερή. Καὶ στὸ τέλος τοῦ εἶπε: «Τὸ παιδί ἐγὼ δὲν τὸ ῥίχνω, ὅ,τι καὶ νὰ κάνῃς, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν μὲ χωρίσῃς. Χωρὶς ἄντρα μπορῶ νὰ ζήσω, χωρὶς Θεὸ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ ζήσω!»...

Ἐπάρχουν λοιπὸν καὶ φωτεινὰ σημεῖα. Καὶ θ' αὐξηθοῦν, ἂν κάθε ἐκκλησία ἔχῃ ἱερέα ποὺ πιστεύει στὸ Θεό. Ἄν ὅλοι οἱ ἱερεῖς, οἱ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ὁ λαὸς μας κινηθοῦμε δραστηκῶς, τὸ ἐγκλημα αὐτὸ θὰ ἐκλείψῃ, καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάς θὰ γίνῃ χώρα χριστιανικὴ, ποὺ θὰ ὑμῆ τὸν Κύριο εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων. Ἀμήν.



Σήμερα ὁ Θεὸς ἀνέχεται τὴν κατάστασι γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ἄναπολόγητος ὁ κακός. Εἶναι περιπτώσεις ποὺ ὁ Θεὸς ἐπεμβαίνει ἄμεσα καὶ ἀμέσως, ἐνῶ σὲ ἄλλες περιπτώσεις περιμένει· δὲν δίνει ἀμέσως τὴν λύσι καὶ περιμένει τὴν ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὴν προσευχή, τὸν ἀγῶνα. Τί ἀρχοντιά ἔχει ὁ Θεός! Ἐνας πόσους εἶχε σφάζει τότε μὲ τὸν πόλεμο καὶ ἀκόμη ζῆ. Θὰ τοῦ πῆ στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ ὁ Θεός: «Σ' ἄφησα νὰ ζήσῃς περισσότερο καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς καλοὺς». Δὲν θὰ ἔχῃ ἐλαφρυντικά.

–Γέροντα, μερικοὶ τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι, ἐνῶ εἶναι βαριὰ ἄρρωστοι, πὼς δὲν πεθαίνουν;

–Φαίνεται ἔχουν βαρεῖες ἀμαρτίες, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν πεθαίνουν. Περιμένει ὁ Θεὸς μήπως μετανοήσουν.

–Καὶ τὸν κόσμο ποὺ παιδεύουν;

–Αὐτοὶ ποὺ παιδεύονται καὶ δὲν φταῖνε, ἀποταμιεύουν. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ φταῖνε, ἐξοφλοῦν.

–Γέροντα, τί θὰ πῆ «Πονηροὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ γόητες προκόψουσιν ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον, πλανῶντες καὶ πλανώμενοι»;

–Κοίταξε· ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔχουν κάποιον ἐγωισμό καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς δίνει ἓνα σκαμπίλι νὰ πάνε παρακάτω. Ἄλλοι ἔχουν λίγο παραπάνω ἐγωισμό καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς δίνει ἓνα σκαμπίλι καὶ πάνε ἀκόμη παρακάτω. Αὐτοὺς ὁμως ποὺ ἔχουν ἐωσφορικὴ ὑπερηφάνεια, ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς ἀφήνει. Μπορεῖ νὰ φαίνεται ὅτι κάνουν προκοπή, ἀλλὰ τί προκοπή εἶναι αὐτή; Μαύρη προκοπή. Καὶ μετὰ δὲν πέφτουν ἀπλῶς κάτω, ἀλλὰ πέφτουν κατ' εὐθείαν στὸ βάραθρο. Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ φυλάγῃ!

**Ἅγιος Παΐσιος Ἀγιορείτης**

## Τὰ Φῶτα στὸ Αἶβαλι

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Στὰ θαλασσινὰ τὰ μέρη ρίχνουμε τὸν Σταυρὸ ὕστερ' ἀπὸ τὴ Λειτουργία τῶν Θεοφανείων. Ἔτσι τὸν ρίχναν καὶ στὴν πατρίδα μου κι ἦταν ἓνα θέαμα ἔμορφο καὶ παράξενο.

Ἐκινούσε ἡ συνοδεία ἀπὸ τὴ Μητρόπολη. Μπροστὰ πηγαίνανε τὰ ξαφτέρουγα καὶ τὰ μπαϊράκια κι ὕστερα πηγαίνανε οἱ παπάδες μὲ τὸν Δεσπότη, ντυμένοι μὲ τὰ χρυσὰ τὰ ἄμφια, παπάδες πολλοὶ κι ἀρχιμανδρίτες, γιατί ἡ πολιτεία εἶχε δώδεκα ἐκκλησίες καὶ κατὰ τὶς ἐπίσημες μέρες στὶς μικρὲς ἐνορίες τελειώνανε γρήγορα τὴ λειτουργία καὶ πηγαίνανε οἱ παπάδες στὴ Μητρόπολη γιὰ νὰ γίνει ἡ γιορτὴ πιδ ἐπίσημη. Οἱ ψαλτάδες ἦτανε κι ἐκεῖνοι κάμποσοι κι οἱ πιδ καλλίφωνοι, καὶ ψέλνανε μὲ μεγαλοπρέπεια βυζαντινά, δηλαδὴ ἑλληνικά. Ἀπὸ πίσω ἀκολουθοῦσε λαὸς πολὺς.

Σὰν φτάνανε στ' Ἀγγελὴ τὸν Γιαλό, ὅπως λέγανε κείνη τὴν ἀκρογιαλιά, ὁ Δεσπότης μὲ τοὺς παπάδες ἀνεβαίνανε σὲ μίᾶ μεγάλη σανιδωτὴ ἐξέδρα ἔμορφοσκαρωμένη, γιὰ νὰ κάνουνε τὸν Ἁγιασμό.

Ὁ κόσμος ἔπιανε τὴν ἀκρογιαλιά κι ἀνέβαινε ὁ καθένας ὅπου ἔβρισκε, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ βλέπει. Τὰ σπίτια ποὺ ἦτανε γύρο, γεμίζανε κόσμο. Οἱ γυναῖκες θυμιάζανε ἀπὸ τὰ παραθύρια.

Ἀπὸ τὸ μέρος τῆς θάλασσας ἦτανε μαζεμένα ἴσαμε ἑκατὸ καΐκια καὶ βάρκες ἀμέτρητες, μὲ τὶς πλώρες γυρισμένες κατὰ τὸ μέρος ποὺ στεκόταν ὁ Δεσπότης. Ἔτσι ποὺ ἦτανε παρατεταγμένα τὰ καΐκια, μοιάζανε σὰν ἀρμάδα ποὺ θὰ κάνει πόλεμο. Πιδ ἀνοιχτά, κατὰ τὸ πέλαγο, ἔβλεπεσ φουνταρισμένα τὰ μεγάλα καΐκια, γεμάτα κόσμο κι ἐκεῖνα. Ἄλλα πάλι εἶχανε περιζωσμένες τὶς βάρκες ποὺ βρισκότανε γιαλὸ κι ἦτανε κι αὐτὰ γεμάτα κόσμο, προπάντων θαλασσινοὶ καὶ παιδομάνι.

Σ' αὐτὰ τὰ μέρη κάνει πολὺ κρῦο καὶ τὶς πιδ πολλὲς φορὲς οἱ ἀντένες τῶν καραβιῶν ἦτανε χιονισμένες, ἓνα θέαμα πολὺ ἔμορφο. Ἀπάνου στὰ ξάρτια καὶ στὶς σκαλιέρες, στὶς γάμπιες καὶ στὰ μαστούνια τῶν καραβιῶν ἦτανε σκαλωμένοι πλῆθος θαλασσινοί, μεγάλοι καὶ μικροί. Ἡ θάλασσα ἦτανε κομισμένη, μπουνάτσα. Κρούσταλλα κρεμόντανε ἀπὸ τὰ ξάρτια σὲ πολλὰ καΐκια. Κρῦο τάρταρος.

Στὴν κάθε βάρκα ἀπὸ κείνες ποὺ εἶχανε κοντοζυγώσει στὴ στεριά καὶ περιμένανε νὰ πέσει ὁ Σταυρὸς στὴ θάλασσα, στεκόντανε ἀπὸ ἓνα δύο νοματέοι ἀπάνω στὴν πλώρη, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι δύο ἦτανε στὰ κουπιά. Οἱ πιδ πολλοὶ ἦτανε σὰν θερία, χεροδύναμοι, πλαταράδες, χοντρολαίμηδες, μαλλιαρόστηθοι, τὰ κορμιά τους ἦτανε κόκκινα ἀπὸ τὸ κρῦο. Τὰ ποδάρια τους ἦτανε γερὰ καὶ φουσκωμένα σὰν ἀδράχτια. Θαλασσάνθρωποι, γεμιτζήδες, κοντραμπατζήδες, ψημένοι μὲ τ' ἄλατι. Οἱ πιδ πολλοὶ εἶχανε ριγμένες στὶς πλάτες τὶς γούνες τους γιὰ νὰ μὴν παγώσουνε, ἓνας - δύο ὅμως στεκόντανε γυμνοὶ καὶ κάνανε κάπου κάπου τὸν σταυρὸ τους. Μὰ τὸ μάτι τους ἦτανε καρφωμένο στὸ μέρος ποὺ θὰ ἔριχνε τὸν Σταυρὸ ὁ Δεσπότης.

Ἀνάμεσά τους ἦτανε ὁ Κωστής ὁ Γιωργάρας, ὁ Στρατὴς ὁ Μπεκός, ὁ Γιωργὴς ὁ Σόνιος, ὁ Δημητρός ὁ Μπούμπας, ὁ Πέτρος ὁ Κλόκας, ὁ Βασίλης ὁ Ἄρναούτης, ὁ παλαβο-Παρασκευᾶς κι ἄλλοι. Σὰν νὰ τοὺς βλέπω μπροστὰ μου.



Σὰν σίμωνε λοιπὸν ἡ συνοδεία στὴ θάλασσα κι ἀκουγόταν ἀπὸ μακριὰ ἡ ψαλμωδία, γινότανε μέγανος ἀλαλαγμὸς ἀπάνω στὶς βάρκες. Οἱ βουτηχτάδες πετούσανε τὶς γούνες τους κι οἱ ἄλλοι τραβούσανε τὰ κουπιά, γιὰ νὰ ἔναι οἱ βάρκες τους κοντὰ στὸ μέρος ποὺ θὰ ἔπεφτε ὁ Σταυρὸς. Ἄλλοι φωνάζανε ἀπὸ τὰ ξάρτια, ἄλλοι μαλώνανε,

ἄλλοι ἀνεβαίνανε στὶς κουπαστὲς γιὰ νὰ δοῦνε.

Τέλος φτάνανε οἱ στρατιῶτες καὶ ταχτοποιούσανε τὸν κόσμο. Μπροστὰ πήγαινε ὁ ἀξιωματικὸς ὁ Τοῦρκος κι ἄνοιγε τὸν δρόμο νὰ περάσει ὁ Δεσπότης, κι ἔλεγε: «Γιὸλ βέριν ἐφεντιά!» (Κάντε δρόμο στὸν ἀφέντη). Ὁ στρατὸς ἀραδιαζότανε σὲ παράταξη κι οἱ ψαλτάδες ψέλνανε πολλὲς φορὲς «Ἐν Ἰορδάνη βαπτιζομένου σου Κύριε». Στὸ τέλος τὸ ἔψελνε κι ὁ Δεσπότης κι ἔριχνε τὸν Σταυρὸ στὴ θάλασσα.

Ἄλαλαγμὸς σηκωνότανε μέσα στὴ θάλασσα. Οἱ βάρκες καὶ τὰ καΐκια καργάρανε τὰ κουπιά καὶ τρακάρανε τὸ ἓνα στ' ἄλλο. Οἱ πλώρες χτυπούσανε ἢ μίᾶ τὴν ἄλλη. Κουπιά, κοντάρια, καμάκια, ἀπόχες μπερδευότανε μεταξύ τους. Οἱ βουτηχτάδες πέφτανε στὸ νερὸ κι ἡ θάλασσα ἄφριζε σὰν νὰ παλεύανε σκυλόψαρα. Πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς κάνανε ὦρα πολλὴ ν' ἀνεβοῦνε ἀπάνω, παίρνανε μακροβούτι καὶ ψάχνανε στὸν πάτο νὰ βροῦνε τὸν Σταυρὸ. Γιὰ μίᾶ στιγμὴ

φανερωνότανε κανένα κεφάλι και βούλιαζε γρήγορα πριν να τὸ δεῖς.

Ἄξαφνα βγήκε ἓνα κεφάλι με κόκκινα γένια κι ἓνα χέρι ξενέρισε και βαστούσε τὸν Σταυρό. Ἦτανε ὁ παλαβο-Παρασκευᾶς. Με δύο τρεῖς χεροβολιές κολύμπησε κατὰ τὸ μέρος τοῦ Δεσπότη και σκάλωσε στὴν ἀραξιά. Ἔκανε μετάνοια και φίλησε τὸ χέρι του κι ἔδωσε τὸν Σταυρό. Ὁ Δεσπότης τὸν πήρε, τὸν ἀσπάστηκε και τὸν ἔβαλε στὸν ἀσημένιο δίσκο κι ὕστερα ἔδωσε τὸν δίσκο στὸν Παρασκευά. Οἱ ψαλτάδες πιάσανε πάλι και ψέλνανε κι ὁ κόσμος ἀλάλαζε. Ὑστερα ἡ συνοδεία τράβηξε πάλι γιὰ τὴν ἐκκλησιά.

Ὁ Παρασκευᾶς, με τὸν δίσκο στὰ χέρια, γύριζε στοὺς μεγάλους καφενέδες και στὶς ταβέρνες κι ἔριχνε ὁ καθένας ὅ,τι ρεγάλο ἤθελε. Τόσες ὥρες γυμνὸς και βρεμένος μήτε κρύωνε μήτε τοὺς ὤμους του δὲν ἀνασῆκωνε.

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἔπεφτε ὁ Σταυρὸς στὴ θάλασσα, ὅλα τὰ καΐκια και τὰ καράβια ποὺ ἦτανε φουνταρισμένα ἀνοιχτὰ στὸ πέλαγο, γυρίζανε τὴν πλώρη τους κατὰ τὴν Ἀνατολή, ἀπὸ κει ποὺ ἦρθε ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν κόσμο.



Εἶναι λοιπὸν μέγα ἀπόκτημα ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη και γρήγορη μεσίτρια πρὸς τὸν φιλεύσπλαχνο Θεό, γιὰτὶ ἔχει μεγάλη παρησία μπροστὰ Του. Γι' αὐτὸ και ὅταν θέλει πηγαίνει πρὸς Ἐκεῖνον και κάθεται στὰ δεξιά Του. Ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἀγαπάει πάρα πολὺ και τὴν ἔχει ὡς πρώτη μεταξὺ τῶν θυγατέρων Του, γιὰτὶ ἐκεῖνη εἶναι πάντοτε μαζί Του. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἴδια Τὸν παρακάλεσε νὰ κατέβει στὴ γῆ και νὰ σώσει τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος**

Ἡ τελειότητα στὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη φτάνει μέχρι σημείου νὰ μὴν θυμᾶται κανεὶς οὔτε τῶν προγόνων τῆ λαμπρότητα, οὔτε νὰ ἐπαίρεται γιὰ τὸ τυχόν ὑπάρχον προτέρημα, σωματικὸ ἢ ψυχικὸ, οὔτε τίς ὑπολήψεις τῶν ἄλλων νὰ τίς λαμβάνει ὡς ἀφορμὴ ἐπάρεσως και ματαιοδοξίας.

**Μέγας Βασίλειος**

Αὐτὸν ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κρίνουμε σκληρὰ, και ἔχουμε τὸ δικαίωμα, εἶναι ὁ κακὸς μας ἑαυτὸς, τὸν ὁποῖο, ἐάν δὲν τὸν τιμωρήσουμε μόνοι μας σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ γιὰ τὰ σφάλματα ποὺ ἔκανε και δὲν κόψουμε και τίς κακὲς ἐπιθυμίες μας, θὰ μᾶς τιμωρήσουν αὐτὰ αἰώνια.

**Ἅγιος Παΐσιος Ἀγιορείτης**

## Ἀνευλαβὴς Εὐλάβεια

Γεώργιος Κ. Τζανάκης. Ἀκρωτήρι Χανίων. 25 Ἰανουαρίου 2022



Βλέπουμε ἀρχιερεῖς και ἱερεῖς, ἐνώπιον τῆς Ἁγίας Τραπέζης, νὰ ἱεουργοῦν μασκοφορεμένοι. Νὰ βγάζουν τὰ ἅγια μασκαρεμένοι. Νὰ κοινωνοῦν τὸν λαὸ με τὰ μουρόπανα μέχρι τὰ μάτια. Καὶ τὸν λαὸ νὰ «προσκυνᾶ» τίς ἅγιες εἰκόνες χωρὶς τὰ χεῖλη του τὰ ἄλλαλα νὰ ἀκουμποῦν, γιὰτὶ μεσολαβοῦν μιὰ ἢ δυὸ «μασκοῦλες». Γιὰ νὰ μπῆς στὸν ναὸ ἐλέγχεσαι ἀπὸ «σεκουριτάδες», οἱ παπάδες οἱ ψάλτες και καντηλανάφτες πρέπει νὰ ἐμβολιαστοῦν ὑποχρεωτικά. Τὸν λαὸ τὸν ἔχει ἀναλάβει ἐκβιάζοντάς τον ὁ τύραννος ὁ ἀπάνθρωπος, ὁ ὁποῖος δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐκβληθῆ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς. (Πότε; Παναγία μου;)

Και ὅμως ἀπὸ ὅλο αὐτὸ τὸ θλιβερὸ θέατρο δὲν λείπει ἡ «εὐλάβεια». Τουλάχιστον ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ κάποιων ἀρχιερέων. Τόσο ὁ εὐρισκόμενος στὴν θέσι τοῦ ἀρχιερέως στὴν Ἀλεξανδρούπολι, ὅσο και ὁ ἀντίστοιχος στὰ Χανιά, ἐγγράφως ἀπαιτοῦν «εὐλάβεια» ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς στοὺς ὁποῖους ἀπηύθυναν τίς γραπτὲς ἐντολές τους. Καὶ μάλιστα «εὐλάβεια θρησκευτική». Ἄρα τὴν θυμοῦνται τὴν εὐλάβεια, τουλάχιστον ὡς λέξι, και τὴν ἀπαιτοῦν;

Πρῶτος ὁ Ἀλεξανδρουπόλεως κελεύει: «Ὡς πρὸς τὴν λειτουργία τῶν ἱερῶν Ναῶν μας, νὰ τηρεῖτε με θρησκευτικὴ εὐλάβεια ὅλα τὰ ὑγειονομικὰ μέτρα προσώπων και κτιρίων.»

Ἀντιγράφει ὁ Χανίων (και πασπαλιζετα ἡ ἐγκύκλιος με πατριαρχικῆς καθαρευούσης πούδρα, χωρὶς νὰ ἀποφεύγονται τὰ λαθάκια—ἀπὸ τὸν κειμενογράφο του ἐννοεῖται): «Ὡς πρὸς τὴν λειτουργίαν τῶν Ἱερῶν Ναῶν μας, νὰ τηροῦνται με θρησκευτικὴν εὐλάβειαν ὅλα τὰ ὑγειονομικὰ μέτρα προσώπων και κληρικῶν συμφώνως πρὸς τὰς Ἐγκυκλίους τῆς πολιτείας.» (Ὁ κληρικὸς δὲν εἶναι πρόσωπο; Κτήρια, ἔγραφε, καλέ, ἐκεῖ ἀπὸ ὅπου ἀντέγραψες;)

Μπορεῖ ἡ εὐλάβεια ποὺ ζητοῦν νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται θρησκευτικὴ, ἀλλὰ ἀφορᾶ τὰ ὑγειονομικὰ μέτρα τῆς πολιτείας, ὅπως βλέπετε. Θὰ ἦταν μεγάλοι χιουμορίστες ἂν μιλοῦσαν γιὰ τὴν ὄντως εὐλάβεια, τὴν ἐν Θεῷ, ἐν κημῷ περιφερόμενοι ἐν ναῷ ἁγίῳ. Πάντως γιὰ εὐλάβεια μιλοῦν.

Οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες μιλοῦν γιὰ ἐνθεο εὐλάβεια ἀλλὰ και γιὰ προσποιητὴ εὐλάβεια, ἐπίπλαστη εὐλάβεια, καταγέλαστη εὐλάβεια, σατανικὴ εὐλάβεια, ἀδάπανη εὐλάβεια (τζάμπα μάγκες ποὺ ἔλεγε ὁ

τριπλοεμβολιασμένος, αλλά νοσῶν, Ἀργολίδος) κλπ. Ἄς διαλέξει ὁ κάθε ἕνας τί ἐπιθετο θὰ τοποθετήσῃ στὴν εὐλάβεια ποὺ διακηρύσσουν οἱ ποιμένες αὐτοί.

Ἐμένα μοῦ ἀρέσει κάτι ποὺ λέει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος. (Τὸ λέει γιὰ τοὺς τότε κατηχουμένους ποὺ φοβόταν νὰ βαπτιστοῦν μήπως καὶ δὲν ἀντέξουν σὲ διωγμὸ καὶ μολύνουν τὸ βάπτισμα. Ὁμιλία εἰς τὸ ἅγιον Βάπτισμα, PG36 360-425 ἀπὸ ὅπου τὰ χωρία).

**Ἦ, τῆς ἀνευλαβοῦς εὐλαβείας, λέει ὁ ἅγιος. Ἀνευλαβῆς εὐλάβεια!!!** Ἄν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ποῦμε—λέγει ὁ ἅγιος. Τί, ἂν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ ποῦμε, ἅγιέ μου. Σήμερα τὸ βλέπουμε μὲ τὰ μάτια μας. Κυκλοφοροῦν στὴν ἐκκλησία σὰν κλόουν. Κἄναν κλόουν καὶ τοὺς τρομοκρατημένους πιστοὺς. Βεβήλωσαν τοὺς ναοὺς. Μίαναν τὸ θυσιαστήριο. Ἔγιναν ὄργανα τῶν τυράννων. Βιάζον ἱερεῖς καὶ λαὸ νὰ μολυνθοῦν καὶ νὰ διακινδυνεύσουν τὴν ζωὴ τους μὲ δαμιονικὰ σκευάσματα.

**Ἦ τῆς ἀνευλαβοῦς εὐλαβείας, εἰ δεῖ τοῦτο εἰπεῖν!** Ἦ τῶν τοῦ πονηροῦ σοφισμάτων! Ὀντως σκοτός ἐστὶ, καὶ φῶς ὑποκρίνεται. Ὅταν μηδὲν ἰσχύση φανερῶς πολεμῶν, ἀφανῶς ἐπιβουλεύει. Καὶ γίνεται σύμβουλος ὡς χρηστὸς, ὦν πονηρὸς ἴν' ἐνὶ γε τῷ τρόπῳ πάντως ἰσχύση, καὶ μηδαμόθεν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐπιβουλήν διαφύγομεν». (Ἦ!, τὰ σοφίσματα τοῦ πονηροῦ. Εἶναι σκοτάδι καὶ ὑποκρίνεται τὸ φῶς. Ἐπειδὴ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καταφέρει τίποτα ἂν πολεμήσῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους φανερὰ ἐπιβουλεύει χωρὶς νὰ φαίνεται. Παρουσιάζεται σὰν καλὸς σύμβουλος ἐνῶ εἶναι πονηρὸς. Πάχνει κάθε τρόπο ὥστε ὅπωςδήποτε νὰ ὑπερισχύσῃ καὶ ἀπὸ πουθενὰ νὰ μὴνμποροῦμε νὰ ξεφύγομε).

Λὲς καὶ μιᾶ γιὰ τὴν σημερινή ἀθλία κατάστασί μας ὁ ἅγιος. Δὲν εἶναι ἴδια τὰ γεγονότα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἴδιος ὁ δράστης, ὁ διάβολος, ἴδιος ὁ στόχος του, ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἴδιες οἱ μέθοδοί του, ἡ ἀπάτη καὶ ὁ φόβος. Γι' αὐτὸ θεωρῶ—ἀπὸ ὅσα εἶδα στὴ ζωὴ μου—ὅτι εἶναι χρήσιμο νὰ ἀκοῦμε τοὺς ἀγίους καὶ τοὺς ζῶντες, καὶ τοὺς ἀπελθόντες ἀπὸ τὰ βιβλία τους. Γιατί βίωσαν καὶ ξέρουν τίς μεθοδεῖες τοῦ διαβόλου.

**Ὅπερ οὖν κἀνταῦθα σαφῶς τεχνάζεται. Τὸ γὰρ φανερῶς καταφρονεῖν τοῦ βαπτίσματος πείθειν οὐκ ἔχων, ζημιοῖ σε διὰ τῆς πλαστῆς ἀσφαλείας, ἴν' ὁ φοβῆ γε, τοῦτο λάθης παθὼν διὰ τοῦ φόβου καὶ τὸ φθεῖραι τὴν δωρεὰν δεδοικῶς, αὐτῷ τούτῳ τῆς δωρεᾶς ἐκπέσης.** (Τί ἔκανε τότε; Ἐπειδὴ δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς πείσῃ νὰ καταφρονήσουν τὸ βάπτισμα, τοὺς ζημιώνει μὲ τὴν πλαστὴ ἀσφάλεια. Τὸ ἴδιο ἀκριβῶς δὲν κάνει καὶ τώρα; Δὲν λέει στὸ ποίμνιο ξεβραφτήσου, μόλυνε τὸ βάπτισμά σου. Λέει ἀσφαλίσου ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρρώστια, προστατέψου ἐσύ καὶ προστάτεψε καὶ τοὺς γύρω σου. Κάμε τὸ ἐμβόλιο,

καλέ μου ἄνθρωπε! Βάλε τὴν μασκούλα σου στὴν ἐκκλησία!! Ἔτσι αὐτὸ ποὺ φοβᾶσαι ὅτι θὰ πάθῃς, θὰ χάσεις δηλαδὴ τὴν υἰεῖα σου, θὰ τὸ πάθῃς διὰ τοῦ φόβου, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ καταλάβῃς, προσπαθώντας νὰ σώσῃς τὴν υἰεῖα σου. Πῶς; Μὲ τὰ ἐμβόλια, καλέ μου. Αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶναι γιὰ νὰ σώξουν ζωές, ὅταν εἶναι κατασκευασμένα ὅπως πρέπει καὶ ὄντως γιὰ τὴν τάχα υἰεῖα τῶν ἀνθρώπων).

Τώρα, ἡ πικρὴ ἀλήθεια, αὐτὰ ποὺ κυκλοφοροῦν, εἶναι γιὰ ἄλλη δουλειὰ φτιαγμένα... ὅπως λὲν αὐτοὶ ποὺ ξέρουν καὶ ὅπως βλέπουμε ἀπὸ τὰ ἀποτελέσματα. Τὰ ἴδια, λοιπὸν, ποὺ ἔκανε πάντα κάνει καὶ τώρα ὁ ταγκαλάκιας μὲ τοὺς συνεργάτες του, εἴτε φοροῦν ἱατρικὲς ρόμπες, εἴτε ράσα κληρικῶν.

**Ὁ μὲν οὖν τοιοῦτός ἐστι, καὶ οὔποτε παύεται τῆς ἐαυτοῦ διπλότης, ἕως ἂν βλέπῃ πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἐπειγομένους ἡμᾶς, ὅθεν αὐτὸς ἐκπέπτωκεν. Σὺ δὲ, ὦ ἄνθρωπε τοῦ Θεοῦ, γνῶθι τὴν ἐπιβουλήν τοῦ ἀντικειμένου. Πρὸς γὰρ τὸν ἔχοντα, καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν μεγίστων, ἡ μάχη. Μὴ λάβῃς σύμβουλον τὸν ἐχθρόν μὴ καταφρονήσης τοῦ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ γενέσθαι πιστός.** (Τέτοιοι εἶναι καὶ πάντα τέτοια θὰ κάνει, ὅσο θὰ βλέπει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ, ἀπὸ ὅπου αὐτὸς ἐξέπεσε. Καὶ λέει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος, ἀπευθυνόμενος σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο, κάθε ἐποχῆς: Μάθε τὴν ἐπιβουλήν τοῦ ἀντιπάλου. Ἡ μάχη εἶναι γιὰ τὰ μέγιστα. Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ σου εἶναι. Μὴν πάρεις σύμβουλο τὸν ἐχθρό, μὴν καταφρονήσεις τὰ λόγια μου καὶ νὰ γίνῃς πιστός).

Βλέπουμε πάλι, ὅτι τὸ κινδυνευόμενο εἶναι ἡ πίστις. Καὶ λοιπὸν; Καὶ βλέπουμε καὶ ἀκοῦμε τι μᾶς λέγει ὁ ἅγιος «Σκασίλα τους», κατὰ τὴν ρῆσι τοῦ «πρώτου ἄνευ ἴσων»... Ἄλλοι παπάδες ἤρθανε κι' ἄλλα χαρτιά βαστοῦνε. Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος εἶναι πολὺ μακρὸν ἀπὸ τὸ σήμερα γι' αὐτούς... Πιδ κοντὰ εἶναι ὁ Πάπας καὶ ὁ Γκαίητς καὶ ὁ Μπουρλά ... καὶ ὁ Μπαίντεν. Αὐτοὺς ἀκοῦν, αὐτοὺς τιμοῦν σ' αὐτοὺς ὑπακούουν.

Ἡ διαφορὰ τοῦ τότε καὶ τοῦ σήμερα; **Ὁ διάβολος ἴδιος, οἱ μεθοδεῖες τοῦ ἴδιου, ὁ στόχος τοῦ ἴδιου, ὅπως εἶπαμε. Ἡ διαφορὰ; Οἱ ποιμένες.**

Τότε προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ βοηθήσουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὰ τεχνάσματα τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ νὰ ξεφύγῃ ἀπὸ τίς παγίδες του, ὅπως κάνει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος στὸ παρὸν κείμενο. Τώρα ὄχι μόνον μεπερδεύουν καὶ παραπλανοῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους—ἀποδεικνύοντας μόνον τοὺς ὅτι εἶναι ψευτοποιμένες—ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἐκβιάζουν κιόλας προφασισζόμενοι τὸ καλὸ τοῦ συνανθρώπου καὶ προτρέπουν σὲ εὐλάβεια γιὰ τὴν τήρησι τῶν ἐντολῶν τῶν ... ἀντιθέων τυράννων.

Ὀντως ἀνευλαβῆς καὶ σατανικὴ εὐλάβεια. Τὸ συναισθάνονται ἄραγε;

**Ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω!...**

## SPIRIT-FILLED WORDS FROM A TRUE SHEPHERD OF OUR DAYS

By Bishop Longin (*Zhar, of the canonical church of Ukraine under the holy Metropolitan Ounouphry*), Abbot of the Holy Annunciation Monastery (about 5 miles from the Romanian border). Among his many Christ-centered ministries is his care of a nearby orphanage which houses several hundred children, mostly abandoned by their parents, a large number of whom have physical and/or mental impairments. A heart-warming video on the Metropolitan's work (known as Fr. Mikhail at the time of the video's recording) is presented at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4m7kjt7wxA>.

**D**earest beloved faithful, let us bless the Lord for this wonderful day and for the Divine Liturgy this day. May the mercy of God be with each one of you.

Until the end [of time] there will be those faithful to Christ. For the trials will be heavy and great, but you are strong because you are Orthodox and because you have God. Our strong fortress is God; our might is God. Therefore, we place our hope on God, so that we may successfully travel through this world and reach the joy of eternal life.

It is vital not to forget to what God has called us; God has established us for service, be you a bishop, a priest, a monk, a layman, or whatever you may be. God has called us to serve Him. Let us not forget where we are called, and with what we must enrich ourselves. Everything here is fleeting, and eternal life awaits each of us; so we should be strong and ready for the trials that come upon us. For they will be severe, as we can see in everything that is being prepared and currently taking place.

It is written in the Scriptures, and you hear of it even now, you will not be able to buy or sell. How close this state of which God spoke: that whoever is not marked with the name of the Beast will not be able to sell or buy. But God also tells us that He will care for us, *See the birds of the sky; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them, are you not of more value than they?* (cf. Mt 6:26).

**O you of little faith, God cares for you!** You are in His image and likeness, and He will care for you at all times, only let us be faithful to the Lord. Let us fully dedicate ourselves to the service of the Lord; let us serve the Lord. Let us be calm, and let us walk in this world so as to acquire the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Let us never forsake God, for God shall never forsake mankind. He always works to do everything needed for man, but this also depends on the person: will he remain in God or forsake Him?

Tremendous events are being prepared. I am speaking of those who desire one ("new") faith, meaning that there would be a uniting of religions. This must happen soon. Because if they do not establish this one (new) faith, they will not be able to crown the Antichrist. I want to tell you, for I believe and it is said, it will be given to you according to your faith—in what you place your faith that is what you

will be. What do you think? Does God exist? We believe that He does. Why would anyone think God does not exist? Simply because he or she doubts that God exists.

Go to the great ones of this world, the great scientists, and ask them to remove your brain and place a new one in your head. Can this be done? No. God has placed your brain there; you can not imagine the millions of nerves and capillaries, no one can do what God has done. Look around: if God does not lay His hand on something, nothing will be accomplished. Even the fact that you came to church today, you could not come here outside of God's will.

They (worldly powers) are preparing everything. Maybe you have already heard, seen and understood that they are preparing for the destruction of people. Do you believe in the mystery of confession? In repentance? Confess your sins, says God. Do you believe you will receive forgiveness? I believe, brethren, that through repentance, God will forgive us and will set our lives aright.

You believe that Communion is the very Body and Blood of Christ on the altar, which our most-precious God left for us—I leave you My Body and My Blood, this is My Body and this is My Blood; take, eat, this is My Body, broken for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do you believe this? This is My Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. What do you think, will God forgive you? I believe that He left His Body and Blood for this: for the healing of soul and body; for the healing of the faithful. I believe all this.

I just do not believe in a vaccine. Do not kill me for not believing in a vaccine. I do not believe! I do not believe in any "medicine" that did not go through all the proper laboratory methods of control (and testing). I have acted correctly, I did not believe and now they have brought humanity a 2<sup>nd</sup> dose, a 3<sup>rd</sup> dose, and a 4<sup>th</sup> dose! And they keep bringing them. Why? So that I could (eventually) receive the devil into myself? I will not receive it.

I prefer to die; who are "they" who are so worried about my death? The world has been dying from hunger for ages; the world has been dying without medicine; the world does not even have a penny to save its life. And, look how "they" now care for us! They care for us so that we would not die; that we would not be ill; that we would not be contagious.

Pay attention and observe closely those who are afraid: in whatever you believe, with that you will be left, my brethren.

We believe in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But they are talking about more vaccines! Quick, we must make another vaccine! In three months we will have a better and stronger vaccine, then comes an altogether more serious sickness or virus!

Do not believe this senselessness, this stupidity, my brethren, for all that God allows will come upon His people. We remain faithful to the Lord; and if we are truly Christians, then—indeed—we have trust.

It is terrible that some come before the people and before the altar and say crazy things, for example, when bishops suspend priests from serving because they are not vaccinated. The time is coming when they will not allow you in church without the vaccine. What does the one even have to do with the other?

Those who got vaccinated so as not to die, may God keep them from death. I want to die for Christ and His Gospel, and the guarding of the holy.

And why did they begin to lie before the people? They created a vaccine, and the world is dying; they created a vaccine, and the world is sick. I do not play politics, but I ask you all: **live in the grace of God, bathe yourselves in the grace of God.** And so what if I get sick and die? Which of us will live on this earth forever?

Therefore, be at peace; and do not be afraid, as the holy Fathers say. Things will become troublesome and ugly. There will be enmity between vaccinated and unvaccinated. This hatred and sin will be huge, but hatred is a death-bearing sin.

Why not leave people in peace, let them choose what to do. Those who believe in God the Holy Trinity, in the crucifixion of Christ, come to Him! Those of you who believe that Holy Communion destroys evil and cleanses our sins and transgressions, what could be stronger than this! Plus we have holy unction, holy water, and holy prosphora. Let them say that I am crazy, but I am no fanatic; for **we must speak the truth to the people.**

They even want to prevent people from working as well. Why? Why have they not been able to stop the virus? Because they did not stop the madmen who made it in a laboratory; why are they not contending with them? Rather they are contending with us! People have been suffering in this world. There are those who live day to day on crumbs, and they eat them with tears, suffering and poverty.

This is why I desire and ask that you maintain much faith and hope in God; faith and hope in Him removes fear and ensures we are not troubled. Remember, *those who seek to save this life will lose it, and those who lose it for the Kingdom of God and eternal life will be victorious.* I will place my hope in God. If I die, I die with God; because I have placed my hope on Him. But if someone places his hope on some earthly things, then he will remain with them.

This is why you are witnessing a battle. With whom do you want to remain—with God or the devil? Remain in the true Orthodox faith, guard the faith as purely as possible and as beautifully as possible. This land [Ukraine] is filled with

the blood of the holy martyrs, for the Faith. Their blood is still fresh, yet undried on the walls of darkness.

What is taking place today is neither funny nor entertaining, for even the communists did not bring so much harm as those today—who call themselves Christians, and yet themselves forbid (other people) entrance into churches! They would have us go around like dogs in muzzles, all in a frenzy—all the year in masks, which are full of microbes; this is how they torture people. It is as if we have lost our common sense, our God-provided reason, and we do not understand what is happening around us. We do not know where we are going, or from where we came.

Lift your hands to God in heaven in prayer, turn to God! Pray that as bishops and priests we would not think about wealth and money, nor about that which is passing away, rather that we would think about the (true) life and soul of the people, which we must protect. Let us no more put a price on (coming to) church ... Let us work for the Lord and for the eternal. Let us do everything the Lord has commanded. Let us bless the words of the Father and seek the Kingdom that has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

I leave you to the arms of the Lord, my dear ones. May a guardian angel be in your homes. Never forget that the Lord loves you. The Lord is waiting for you even in those places you have yet to go. Do not be disturbed by the (secular) laws being passed.

I very strongly believe, based on the words of the holy Fathers, that we have entered a terrible apocalyptic battle. Be ready. Read the Scriptures, even as we read from the apostle today about the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which we must bear. Please read the Scriptures and according to that image bear fruit, so that we may manifest them as long as we are on this earth, and that they may be established in our souls unto the Kingdom of God. And the rest that is from the devil, let us flee from it. Live with the Lord and rejoice, because He loves you—even though we are sinners and unfeeling. Do you not desire to hear the voice of the Lord, full of love, that is calling you to Himself; His voice that is full of forgiveness? He has done everything that we may come to Him. Do not remain without eternal life. Do not remain without salvation. Do not remain without Christ, dear brethren.

It is vanity if we say we believe in God, but do not fulfill what He says. May He have mercy on us and help us, together with each person on this earth. May the Lord help us all to return to Him. Then, there will be one flock and one Shepherd. Amen.



**Metropolitan Ounouphry of Ukraine and bishop Longin with the Children in his care celebrating Pascha**

## ON THE MARK OF THE BEAST: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

By Fr. Jeremiah, from "Orthodox Road," May 14, 2021,

There are numerous interpretations of the mark of the beast—666—mentioned in Apocalypse (Revelation) 13:18. Most are ridiculous forms of fear-mongering. The newest theory floating among some Christians is that the Covid-19 vaccine is, or will be, the mark. Others say if governments enforce vaccine passports, then those will become the mark. For these groups, the mark of the beast is something different every year.

In this article, I will present ways that ancient Christians viewed symbolism, numbers, and the mark of the beast, which will hopefully debunk incorrect modern interpretations without having to address each one individually. Counterfeit theology is often exposed simply by knowing true theology.

### The Great Parody

The devil does not come up with anything original. He is not a creator. Rather, he is a perverter of what exists. Sin—which the devil helped introduce into humanity—is a misuse of the good things that God has created. Unlike the Hindi religions that teach good and evil exist as opposing forces, Christianity teaches that only good truly exists. Darkness and evil are an absence of good.

In several places of Revelation, the devil and his forces are parodies of God. Because evil is not a force that exists on its own, it must borrow from and pervert the good. Therefore, evil ends up being a parody or perversion of good. In Revelation, for example, the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the false prophet are an unholy trinity parodying the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The mark of the beast is also a parody.

So, what are 666 and the mark on the hand and forehead a parody of? Let's begin in the Old Testament.

### The Hand and Forehead

God commanded the annual celebration of the exodus from Egypt. This celebration, called Pascha (often rendered Passover in English), was meant to *serve as a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes.* (Exod 13:9).

Reading the chapter confirms that the Hebrews were not physically marked. Rather, their celebration of deliverance served symbolically as a mark on the forehead and hand. For we remember with our mind (forehead) and obey God's decrees through action (symbolized by the hand).

After delivering the Mosaic Law, God states, *Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.* (Deut 10:18). Once again, we see a connection between God's decrees and the forehead and hand. The latter are symbols for contemplation and action. Contemplating God's words results in obedient action.

St. John's Revelation most vividly recalls the Prophecy of Ezekiel. During the time of Ezekiel, the Hebrew people abandoned God and His ways. Repeatedly, God tried to turn them back through the prophets, but they refused to listen. So, God foretold the city's impending doom. A great slaughter would occur there.

However, those who followed God and were grieved by the evil around them would spiritually receive a mark on the forehead that would protect them from the coming devastation. Seven angels approach God, six bearing weapons, the seventh bearing a writing utensil: *six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lieth toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side.* (Ezek 9:2). The Lord tells the latter angel, *Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.* (Ezek 9:4). For then they would be protected from the coming judgment and slaughter: *Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary.* (Ezek 9:6).

In Revelation, we see that God protects those whom He seals. It states, *I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.* (Rev. 7:2-3). Other



**An Icon depicting St. John the Evangelist's receiving the content of his divinely-inspired book of the Apocalypse (Revelation)**

references appear throughout Revelation regarding those sealed on the forehead with the name of God.

In biblical literature, the seal of God is symbolic, not literal. The people of God are sealed on the forehead with God's name by contemplating His words and ways. Such contemplation leads to action and obedience – symbolized by the hand. Conversely, those who reject God bear the marking of their master (the beast or the devil), whose ways they follow. The mark of the beast is a parody of the Old and New Testament markings of God's people. It symbolically shows that our thoughts and actions mark us as God's people or the devil's.

### Trade and Commerce

Some people may be inclined to argue that the mark of the beast must be something physical, for it affects the ability to participate in trade and commerce. The inspiration for the number 666 itself likely originated in 1 Kings 10:14. There King Solomon, in his lucrative (and probably immoral) taxation and trade, was earning 666 talents of gold: *Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold.*

There is, without a doubt, a connection between worldly wealth and the mark of the beast. However, that connection does not require the mark to be anything physical. A cultural philosophy, firmly held, can have the same effect without physically marking anyone. For example, gay couples have put pastry chefs out of business when the latter refused to decorate cakes celebrating gay marriage. Nobody received any bodily markings, but economic persecution occurred anyway.

Another example is the medical and psychological trades. Political activists have shut down many doctors and researchers when their practices or scientific findings do not conform to the latest politically correct ideas. Today's progressive person easily becomes the target of tomorrow's activists if that person fails to toe whatever is the latest ideological line.

Through these examples, we see that a physical mark may be completely unnecessary. The pressure of a cultural philosophy, firmly held, is enough to create economic devastation for those who will not conform. The beast and his mark are symbols of the ways that sin dominates our culture's mindset. That is why St. Paul tells us, *And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* (Rom 12:2).

### Numeric Symbolism of 6 and 8

Before we adopted the Arabic numeral system, letters of the alphabet represented numbers. Because of that, many ancient people were fascinated with *gematria* (the practice

of assigning a numerical value to a name, word or phrase according to an alphanumerical cipher). Every single word had a numerical value since it was composed of letters, and letters were numbers. While some of the lengthy ancient ponderings on numbers are tedious, certain numbers held great significance.

Here are what some numbers symbolized: one displayed unity; two could mean duality; three and four symbolized completeness. Seven (3+4) was often ascribed to divinity, hence the sevenfold Spirit of God in Rev. 1:4 (plurality in a person's title demonstrated royalty or greatness). Twelve, which is 3×4, likewise was a symbol of wholeness or perfection.

While seven represents God's divinity, six is the number for humanity. It is one less than divine perfection. God created man on the sixth day as the crown and ruler of the entire physical world (Gen 1:26-31). Therefore, six is man in his greatness and glory, the one made "*in the image of God*" being all that he can be.

However, because we fell into sin, six is also a number that emphasizes our imperfection. Because of our sin, our Lord

**If we enthrone Christ there, then we need not worry about any antichrist. But if Christ is not enthroned in our hearts, then we are filled with worry and fear because the throne is vacant, and the antichrist can occupy it.**

Jesus had to die upon the cross for us. He hanged on the cross on the sixth day (Friday) and on the sixth hour of that day (Mt 27:45, Mk 15:33, Lk 23:44). He then

rested in the tomb on the seventh day (Saturday), by which He fulfilled the Sabbath.

However, on the eighth day (Sunday), He arose from the dead, defeating death. The eighth day is thus a symbol of resurrection and hope for all humanity. This day is not trapped in the seven-day cycle of weeks that has existed since the world began. Rather, it is outside of this cycle since eternity has neither beginning nor end. That is why we Orthodox Christians sometimes refer to Sunday as the eighth day. The resurrection is also why Christians have been worshiping on Sunday since the first century. On Sunday, the eighth day, we enter eternity.

### 666, 777, and 888

In many ancient Greek manuscripts, the title KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev 19:16) is written in all capital letters. Its capitalization drew attention to its numerical equivalent of 777.

There is another often overlooked fact. Ancient Christians knew the numerical value of Jesus' name in Greek, which is 888. It is 8, the resurrection and eternity mentioned above, but so emphatically 8 that it is written thrice. Since God's people had the Lamb's name written on their foreheads (Rev 14:1), and that Lamb's name is Jesus, the implication is that Christians have JESUS/888 spiritually inscribed upon them because their thoughts are always on Christ.



*Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six. (Rev. 13:18).*

Since the devil can do nothing except twist or parody God, the number ascribed to his followers is the number of man, 6, but emphatically so, 666. It is the number of humanity's greatest achievements, the best we can do in our own strength without God. We can thus surmise that 666 is all that this world and life have to offer without God.

### The Numerical Meaning of 666

Many attempts have been made to calculate a name for the numerical value of 666. Caesar Nero is the most referenced one, though innumerable others have been speculated. Nero is interesting for two reasons. Though he was dead when St. John wrote Revelation, Nero represented the height of human achievement: Emperor of the Roman Empire. He was also the epitome of that which opposes God as a persecutor of Christians while demanding worship of himself.

However, to get this numerical value, Caesar Nero must be translated into Hebrew and then transliterated back into Greek from Hebrew, so it is a bit strained. A host of names and titles can be forced into the numerical value of 666 by playing around with translations and transliterations in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

St. Andrew of Caesarea gives the best advice: *stop trying to force names to fit. Let it be a mystery, for the name will be apparent to believers when the time comes.* (Commentary on the Apocalypse, 13.18). When the end is here, and the antichrist has arrived, **those who devoutly follow Christ** will recognize him for who he is, even without gematria.

### It Will Not Be a Trick

It is popular in some Evangelical circles to scare people into thinking they can be tricked into receiving the mark of the beast. This scare tactic comes from an errant interpretation of Rev. 19:20: *And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image.*

However, the Evangelist John is not stating that the mark is given deceptively, but that those who received it were deceived into thinking the beast could be their savior. There is no hint of trickery regarding the mark itself. About the antichrist, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians: *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders; and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thes 2:9-12).

Here we see an affirmation of what is recorded in Revelation, that the antichrist will work signs and wonders which

deceive people. They place their faith in the antichrist instead of the true Christ. St. Paul states above that people perish because they did not accept the love of the truth. People allow themselves to be deceived because they have already made up their minds that they want neither God nor truth. They surround themselves with teachers who "tickle their ears" with things they want to hear: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.* (2 Tim 4:3). The devil offers humanity substitutions (deceptions) for those who are looking for an alternative to God. If we delight in unrighteousness, then we will be duped by the devil. However, those who love the truth and dwell in righteousness will not be deceived.

Again, St. John is not stating that the mark is received deceptively. Rather, he is stating—along with other biblical authors—that those who turn away from the truth live in deception, thus accepting a counterfeit for the real Savior. Deception is the path away from God and not a tricky mark.

### Who Is on the Throne?

St. Porphyrios was given a divine vision of the end of the world. He experienced the Apocalypse firsthand with St. John. ("Wounded by Love," pg. 246). Because of what he saw, he was extremely critical of fearmongers who use Revelation to stir up fear. Instead, he emphasized the need to focus our lives on Christ. If we are continuously looking toward Christ, the deceiver cannot pull us away from God. After all, God promised nobody can snatch us from His hands (Rom 8:38-39)—not the antichrist nor a mark received unintentionally.

St. Porphyrios gave an example that I will paraphrase: If I am sitting on a chair, can anyone else sit on the chair? No, because there is no room on it. However, if I get up and leave, then someone else can occupy the chair. It is the same with the throne of our hearts. If we enthrone Christ there, then we need not worry about any antichrist. But if Christ is not enthroned in our hearts, then we are filled with worry and fear because the throne is vacant, and the antichrist can occupy it.

The prefix anti in Greek often means "in place of." So, an antichrist is that which takes the place of the true Christ. It is whatever we set our hope on or whatever we dedicate our strength and attention to. While there will be a final antichrist, and perhaps even a physical mark of the beast, there are already innumerable antichrists in the world (1 Jn. 2:18). They disguise themselves in politics, science, medicine, pleasure, entertainment, philosophy, and many other things. Whatever takes the place of Christ in our hearts is an antichrist.

We could be **forcefully** tattooed 1,000 times over with 666, but if Christ reigns in our hearts, we have nothing to fear. The antichrist cannot snatch us away from the love of God if we stay fixed on Christ.

*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* [Mt 11:15]

## MONKS AND MISSION

Elder Epiphanius (Theodoropoulos, +1989). This article was originally published in the journal "Athonite Dialogues" (Αθωνικοί Διάλογοι) on September 15, 1980.

The clergy who labor in the world carry out an extremely important task, which no one can belittle or despise. They are instruments of grace, *ministers of Christ, and stewards of the Mysteries of God.* (1 Cor 4:1). They continue the work of the Holy Apostles down through the centuries. They preach Christ Crucified and Risen, they teach repentance and remission of sins "in His name." By means of this teaching and the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, they lead multitudes of people to the eternal Kingdom of God. *Apart from these, there is no Church,* according to St. Ignatius the God-Bearer of Antioch. ("To the Trallians" 3:1).

But if it is impermissible to denigrate the mission and work of clergy serving in the world (as well as of the zealots and bearers of gifts of grace from among the laity), it is also impermissible to denigrate the mission and work of monks. The Church is led unerringly by the Holy Spirit.

If monasticism was something superfluous and useless, if it were a state without essence and meaning, it would not be an institution in the Church, the holy Ecumenical and Local Councils would not concern themselves with it, and the great and God-bearing Fathers would not have written about it. If monasticism was not the work of God, if it was not the fruit of the Holy Spirit, if it was not a plant that the Father has planted (cf. Mt 15:13), it would have been expelled as a "foreign body" from the body of the Church from its very appearance.

But monasticism sprouted in His field (cf. 1 Cor 3:9), in the holy Church, and in it was strengthened and bore fruit this field precisely because it was *the plant of God.* Doubt about the dignity of monasticism is unthinkable from an Orthodox point of view. Any attacks on it as an "institution" are pure theomachy.

And I, brothers, belong to the number of the clergy serving in the world. But as an obedient child of the Orthodox Church, I must follow her teaching and not question or even condemn that which it, *led by the Holy Spirit,* has approved and embraced.

Do we not know that our calendars are full of the names of monastics? Martyrs and monastics (also martyrs *by will*) make

up eight, and maybe nine-tenths in the "catalog" of our saints! We are not more perfect in theology or wiser than the Church. We do not know better than it, what agrees and what disagrees with the spirit of the Gospel. He who rejects monasticism as discordant with the spirit of Christianity becomes a heretic, because he places himself above the authority of the Church.

No one forces anyone to become a monk. If someone has the desire (but also the calling!) to serve the Church in the world, then this is holy work, and the path to him is open, and no one hinders it. But those who have a draw to monasticism should not be attacked or hindered by us. Holy is their desire and blessed their choice. The Holy Spirit divides gifts *to every man severally as He will.* (1 Cor 12:11).



I am not going to reveal the dignity of monasticism as the *most perfect path of deification,* based, of course, not on my own experience, which does not exist, but on the teachings of the Holy Fathers. I am not going to speak about the difficult and truly heroic *spiritual struggles* of monks to purify themselves from "shameful passions," *spiritual struggles,* the "taste" of which we living in the world barely know. I will not speak about the unceasing Divine service to God, worshiped in the Trinity, celebrated in the sacred monasteries and in the heart of every monk. I am not going to talk about the Heavenly gifts with which many monks were adorned.

I will focus on just one point, which is directly relevant to the given question. And I dare say that the monk's offering to "suffering society" is very great! I dare say that a monk—every

monk (of course, a true monk)—is a **missionary!**

I said "every monk" because I do not want to limit missionary work only to those monks who, having the grace of the priesthood, go beyond their sacred enclosures, and with permission of the local bishop, go around teaching and confessing in cities and villages; or to those who, endowed with a talent for writing, sometimes of rare strength, publish wonderful books and thereby edify thousands of souls, and for whole generations, as, for example, St. Nikodemos the Athonite.

I am convinced, brothers—and do not think I am speaking paradoxically, because I will substantiate this certainty—that those monks who have never left their monastery and never written a single line are also missionaries.

"You mean prayer?" you might say. Of course I have in mind prayer, but not **only** prayer. The power of prayer, and

especially of the prayers of those who have *a life purified or cleansed for God*, of those *who have acquired much boldness before God*, is all-powerful. One “heartfelt tear” of a holy man can lead to results that would otherwise require many sermons and many books. Prayer works miracles. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.* (Jas 5:16-18).

I am not addressing non-believers now, or people who are indifferent to faith; I am talking to believers. So there is no need for me to expand on this point. We all accept the power of prayer, we all know about its salvific activity. Therefore, everyone should look at the prayers of monks as the greatest offering to the world.

Think about it! There is not an hour, or a single moment in the day when fervent prayers are not ascending to the throne of the Almighty. All twenty-four hours in a day, God is “besieged” with fiery and tearful petitions to have mercy and save the world. When we are working, when we are eating and when we are sleeping, someone is praying for us, someone is “working out,” watching and calling out in a *spiritual struggle*: *Lord, have mercy!* Is not this offering enough?

I visited one large monastery a few years ago. Among the monastics I knew was one who was almost a hundred years old—illiterate, but a holy soul. She no longer got out of bed due to her age. Weeping, she told me her complaint:

“Ach, that abbess! I ask her to give me work to do here on my bed, since I cannot get up if they do not hold me up, but she does not give me any. I can twist yarn into skeins. But she does not give me any work. She says I worked eighty years in the monastery” (she joined when she was sixteen). “But that means I eat my bread for nothing. Others work and feed me. What should I do? The abbess is unyielding. I was so worried that I did not even want to eat. But then I thought of something and calmed down. I decided to constantly pray for everyone. Thus, it seems to me that I work. You see this prayer rope?” (She showed me a prayer rope with very large knots). “I never let it out of my hands, neither day nor night, except for the two or three hours I sleep. I always pray for the abbess and the nuns who work so that I can eat. And I pray for others: for our bishop and for other hierarchs, for priests, for preachers, for bosses, for judges, for the army, for the police, for teachers, for students,

for widows, for orphans, for everyone I remember. Thus, I feel less of the weight on my soul that comes from eating without working...”

I cry every time I remember this scene. I never saw this venerable nun after that. A few months later, she departed to the other world, to continue her prayers “from the depths,” “for everyone she remembers” from there (I hope for me too...), although now without her thick prayer rope, which was buried together with her holy body.

But prayer is one of the means—the first—by which a monk carries out missionary work; that is, helping souls be saved. There are two more ways, brothers.

The second way: Where has there ever been a monastery that did not become a drawing point for the people? Where has a hermit labored where a cloud of visitors did not come to

his cave, his mountain, his den of the earth (cf. Heb 11:38), seeking from him either a *word of comfort*, or at least to behold his face—a sight that teaches many things and edifies much?

And this is not just in olden days, but in our day too. How many wanderers through life *that labour and are heavy laden* (Mt 11:28) run to the holy monasteries, to find a little silence of soul! How many benefit from the impressive atmosphere that reigns there during the Divine services! How many unbelievers or indifferent people, visiting the sacred abodes of monasticism as tourists, feel a prick in their hearts from what they see there! Quite often, one such visit was enough to put their



unbelief or indifference to the test.

Moreover, are there really only a few cases where they felt how their inner world was shaken when they left the sacred monasteries, **reborn** after a few days or hours there? Any monastery is a true oasis in the arid desert of this present life, especially of modern life... Especially for the nearest towns and villages, every monastery is a set of **lungs delivering spiritual oxygen**. And Holy Mount Athos is the “lungs” for all of Greece, and for the whole world!

Let the monks not go out into the world. The world comes to them. Let monks take shelter in enclosed places. Their light shines and illuminates everything around; and sometimes it illuminates even that which is far away. Let them talk little. There is also the *silent eloquence of a holy life*.

Brothers, let there be monasteries! But let us pray that they might be worthy of their calling. And then, by some Divine law, they will automatically become like missionary centers, spiritual beacons, oases of souls, Divine hotels for many

who *fell among thieves*. (Lk 10:30). The world can benefit greatly from monasteries.

The third way: Even if he is silent and hidden, a monk is a shouted sermon—a sermon not in words, but deeds; a sermon strong and astounding.

Brothers, what do missionaries, that is, those who work in the Church, proclaim in their sermons? What do they write about in their books, what are their topics? What do they prompt us to do? To love God, to pray, to fight against vice, to commune of the Holy Mysteries, to repent of our sins, to be humble, not to cling to material goods, to have a home in Heaven, and so on and so on.

But does not a monk proclaim the exact same thing—not in words, but by deeds and example?

If I decide to become a monk, a true monk, it means that love for God—Divine eros—consumes my entire being. (It is understood that such love is found mainly and principally among monks, but it cannot be said that only and exclusively a monk has such love and no one else. Such a statement would be one-sided, unacceptable for Orthodoxy. We have already said that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts as He pleases. St. John of Kronstadt, for example, was a “secular” priest. But who could deny the fiery Divine love burning in his sanctified heart?) Prayer is the water and air of my soul. The Church’s Mysteries are my daily food. Repentance is my whole life’s work. My “I” is condemned to death. I disdain material goods. *I count all things ... but dung, that I may win Christ.* (Phil 3:8). Wealth, prosperity, position, honor, and glory do not concern me. I pass them by. My steadfast gaze is fixed upon the Heavenly Jerusalem...

So, when you hear that your friend, neighbor, relative, or friend left the world and departed to a monastery, is not that the same as hearing a resounding and deafening sermon about everything above, especially if the one who left possessed wonderful qualities and could have had great “success” in this life? Your friend left in silence. You did not see him before he left, he did not say goodbye. But his act, a heroic act, an act of the greatest sacrifice for the sake of the love of God, speaks for itself. His footsteps sound forth quite clearly as he walks out the door, and will never trail off. You will hear the sound your whole life.

You will never see your friend again, or hear about his death when he dies. The memory of him will not leave you alone. You will always have a saving turmoil and a holy uneasiness from it. It will constantly rebuke you. You will think: “I cannot fast on Wednesdays and Friday, but he... I did not even commune on Pascha this year, but he... I have to force myself to barely say two words of prayer, but he... I earn a lot of money, I amass a great fortune—and I am afraid to give a little to the poor, but he... I lie and flatter in order to rise up in society, but he... I chase after honors and fame, but he... I cling to the ground, but he...”

But even if you are an unbeliever or indifferent, this act of your friend, in addition to the surprise it causes, will continuously chip away at the foundation of your unbelief or indifference. You will be thinking about this act in a moment of spiritual sobering up, and perhaps in a moment of frustration and disappointment in the “joys of the world,” and you’ll hear an inner voice asking you: “The faith that inspires such sacrifices—perhaps is it not just a product of fantasy. The faith that makes you happy when you deny and reject everything that others consider important—that is, pleasure, money, convenience, success, glory, and so on—maybe the truth is there? Perhaps there *is* life after death? Maybe the decision of your friend—who is otherwise so intelligent and gifted—is not a heroic “madness,” but a very “profitable undertaking?” Maybe he really did find the *pearl of great price* (Mt 13:46) that the Gospels tell us about?...”

This and other similar things will be proclaimed to a great many people by the example of a monk. Who will dare claim that this silent, but also thunderous “sermon” does not “break bones,” according to the well-known expression?

This sermon is not theoretical, but **practical**. It does not last a few minutes, but strikes your ear continuously. It literally **follows** you! The monk, taking up the Cross and following Christ, **teaches by deed**—and teaches loudly—to *disdain the flesh, as something transient, but to care for the soul as something immortal*.

So, is a monk or is he not, by his example alone, a **herald of eternity**?

Is he or is he not an **indication of the path to Heaven**?

Is he or is he not a **preacher and missionary**?



**A**lways do a *metanoia* when you are wrong and do not lose time, because the longer you wait to seek forgiveness, the more you allow the evil one to spread his roots within you. Do not let him make roots to your detriment.

Therefore, do not despair when you fall, but get up eagerly and do a *metanoia* saying, “Forgive me, my dear Christ. I am human and weak.” The Lord has not abandoned you. But since you still have a great deal of worldly pride, a great deal of vainglory, our Christ lets you make mistakes and fall, so that you perceive and come to know your weakness every day, so that you become patient with others who make mistakes, and so that you do not judge the brethren when they make mistakes, but rather put up with them.

**St. Joseph the Hesychast**

## AN APPEAL TO ALL ORTHODOX, WORLDWIDE

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022.

St. Ignatius, when discussing the image and likeness of God in man, tells us: *When the Creator created all the other creatures out of nothing, He was content to merely utter His almighty command. However, when He wanted to complete the work of creation by making a refined, perfect creation, He preceded it with a counsel.* And this ineffable “counsel” was by the Holy and Life-giving Trinity! How indescribable is God’s limitless, never-ending and unconditional love for the pinnacle of His creation: you and me!

As I have shared with you before, every human being is a living ikon of Jesus Christ. *On Thee have I been made fast from the womb; from my mothers’ womb Thou art my protector* (Pss 70:5), King David exclaims. And in another Psalm, he offers this God-sent revelation: *My bone is not hid from Thee, which Thou madest in secret... My being, while it was still unformed, Thine eyes did see, and in Thy book shall all men be written; day by day they are formed, when as yet there be none of them.* (Pss 138:14-15).

When the Word of God took flesh in the virgin womb of our Most Beloved Panaghia, St. John of Damaskos, tells us that He *sanctified the garment* (our human nature) *that He put on.* And then, in a state of ecstasy, he cried out, *O great mystery!* Over 800 years before St. John wrote that awesome hymn, St. Paul was aware of this “great mystery;” for he reminded the Christians in Corinth, and all of us, that the human body is *the temple of the Holy Spirit.* (1 Cor 6:19).

However, 49 years ago on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, six members of the U.S. Supreme court decided that the living ikon—being formed within his/her mother’s womb, and **visible to God from the moment of his/her conception**—could be legally slaughtered, right up until the moment of natural delivery. Since that demonic decision, over 62 million living ikons of Jesus Christ have been sacrificed on the altar of the ungodly trinity of pleasure, privacy and profit!

During the past five decades, millions of Christians belonging to Roman Catholic and a multitude of different Protestant denominations have been very active in supporting the right to life of the pre-born child, as well as providing support for unwed mothers—both materially and spiritually. However, **the overwhelming majority of the Orthodox Christians, both clergy and laity, have done very little to protect the most innocent and pure pinnacles of God’s creation**—whose souls are contained within a “garment” that has been sanctified by the incarnate Lord Jesus—a garment that is called to be a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Church’s two thousand year history, the lay people have often been God’s instrument in times of crisis, both those within and outside the Church. Therefore, I am reaching

out to all of you to take action, to be the voice for those who have no voice. Obviously, it is too late to get the clergy involved on January 22<sup>nd</sup> of this year. However, you can help convince our hierarchy and priests to consider offering Clean Monday 2022 (March 7<sup>th</sup>) as a day of intense prayer and fasting for God to deliver us from this terrible crime against His innocent ones. Think of what a message that would send to God, if many thousands of the members of His One True Church offered up that special Monday as a cry of repentance, a heart-centered pleading to be delivered from the shedding of innocent blood.

Therefore, please give consideration to sending a letter, in the very near future, to your Hierarch and your parish priest. It would be good if you could get several people to sign a single letter. Pray to our Most Beloved Panaghia to give you both the words and humble spirit needed to write such letters.

Kindly also give thought to begin praying today, and everyday, both for the pre-born babies and the mothers planning to abort them. I believe in my heart that many miracles will occur if we do this! We could also offer at least one meal on a non fast day for this Godly appeal.

Beloved ones! God has blessed each of us with a free will, which gives us a certain amount of autonomy over our own bodies. However, that autonomy does not concern another person’s body; and **the tiny bodies being formed in the wombs of their mothers have absolutely nothing to do with a woman’s autonomy of her personal body.** In fact, a woman goes against her very nature (every woman has been blessed by God with an innate desire to nurture and protect the young, both inside and outside of the womb), when she willingly aborts the living ikon of Jesus growing within her. That is why, for many decades, my heart pains for any woman who has had an abortion, and I want to do what little this sinful priest can do to help her heal that deep wound in her precious soul!

*O my Most Beloved Panaghia please receive my letter as a poor offering for thy Son’s little ones. If my feeble words have any value, allow them to reach those who will read this. But most importantly Panaghia mou, please intervene; and deliver us, and our respective nations, from this horrific infanticide. Receive this prayer from your sinful slave, Panaghia mou!*

Amen.

Unworthy priest, +Demetrios



**F**or thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

Pss 138:13-16

## THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GOD'S COMPASSION AND JUDGEMENT

By St. Paisios of Mount Athos (+1994).

Saint Paisios told us the following story, wishing to give us an example of the way God looks after His children, while many times we get angry at Him and do not understand His actions:

An ascetic was praying to God asking Him to reveal why the righteous and pious people are miserable and suffer unjustly, whereas the unrighteous and sinful ones are rich and contented. While he was asking God to reveal to him this mystery, he heard a voice saying to him: "Do not ask to comprehend what your mind and power of knowledge cannot grasp and do not examine the mysteries of God, as His judgments are like an endless ocean. However, since you wish to know, go out there in the world and watch carefully the people, and you will be able to understand a small part of God's judgment. Then, you will know that God's prudent governing is unexplored and inscrutable."

When the ascetic heard all this, he left for the world. After walking for a while, he reached a meadow. There was a fountain nearby and an old tree with a large hollow. He hid inside the hollow, in order to watch the busy street passing by the meadow. After a while, a rich man passed by riding his horse. He stopped by the fountain to drink some water and rest. While he was sitting there, he took a purse out of his pocket containing one hundred golden coins, and started counting them. When he finished counting, he mistakenly left the purse on the grass instead of putting it in his pocket. After he ate, he rested and slept for awhile, and then he took off without realizing that he had left his purse on the grass.

After some time, another passer-by appeared. He stopped by the fountain, and when he saw the purse with the golden coins, he took it and left running in the fields. A few minutes later, a third man came along. As he was tired, he too went by the fountain to drink some water and sat to eat a piece of bread. As this poor man was eating, the rich man came back to look for his purse. He had an extremely angry look on his face and went straight to him, shouting in a rage and demanding his purse. The poor man, though, who had no idea about the purse and the golden coins, assured him that he had not seen it. Then, the rich man began beating him up so badly that he finally killed him. He searched through his clothes and found nothing. He left feeling very sad.

The ascetic was watching the incident sitting inside the hollow and was astounded. He felt very sad and began to cry, feeling sorry for the unjust death of the poor man and prayed to God: "Lord, what is the meaning of this will of Yours? Let me know how Your kindness can tolerate such an injustice. Someone lost the coins, another man found them, and a third man was unjustly murdered."

As he was praying and crying, an angel of the Lord appeared and told him: "Do not feel sorry for the poor man, nor think that this incident is not the will of God. Bear in mind that some things occur, either because God permits them to, or in order to instruct people or because He causes them to happen for our benefit."

"Now, listen: The man who lost the golden coins is the next door neighbor of the one who found them. He owned a farm worth one hundred golden coins. The rich man, who was an avaricious person, forced him to sell his farm to him for only fifty golden coins. The poor man, feeling helpless, prayed to God to punish his unjust neighbor on his behalf. And God rewarded him in double. The second man who was unjustly killed, had once committed a murder. He had honestly repented and lived the rest of his life according to God's will. He constantly prayed to God to forgive him and said to Him: 'God, let me have the same kind of death as the one I gave.' Of course, our Lord had forgiven him since the first time he expressed his repentance for his sinful act. However, He was moved by the sensitivity and righteousness of this man, who not only tried to live according to His will, but also wished to pay back for his

sinful act. So, God fulfilled his wish and gave him the chance to experience a violent death, as he himself had asked for, and took him to heaven by His side, granting him a glorious laurel for his deep and responsive repentance."

"The third man, the avaricious one, who lost the golden coins and committed the murder, had fallen in two sins, avarice and stinginess. God permitted a violent murder to be committed, so that he may experience pain, which in turn, would lead him to repentance. The sin of murder turned out to be the cause for his decision to leave the world and become a monk."

Thus, where and under what circumstances do you see that God was unjust, merciless and cruel? You should not examine God's judgments, as He always makes them correctly and according to the way He knows, whereas you misjudge them and find them unjust. You should also know that many things happen with God's will for reasons we do not know. Therefore, the right thing for us to say is: *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.* (Pss 118:137).



## MANDATORY OR FREE CHOICE?

*By an Orthodox layman of sound mind and spirit.*

Today we are bombarded by constant pressure with things pertaining to our health and well being. There is now an active push to vaccinate people in many countries like (Israel, Greece, Cyprus etc.) to have mandatory shots for the “greater good.” We have “health experts”, politicians and now even bishops pressuring people and saying that we should get vaccinated to help protect ourselves and others and if we don’t, we are heretics and or committing a sin!

This is absolute nonsense and satanical! If we look from the Holy Bible, from two small examples in the Old & New Testament, we find that the Lord gave us free will to choose:

*See, I set before you today life and death, good and evil...I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live. (Deut 30:15, 19) and ...saying, “What do you want Me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.” (Lk 18:41-42)*

The Lord knew what that man wanted but He still asked him before He healed him. God has set the path of free choice (whether good or bad) and respects and doesn’t interfere with that human choice.

To say that it is a sin or we are heretics for not listening to these bishops is simply not true and they are aligning themselves with people that have gone against God’s Holy Commandments.

To enforce people to the point of possibly sacrificing their own health and lives is purely evil. Throughout history we have seen dictators and other political systems like communism and socialism, start wars when taking away human free choices.

Today when we feel pressure and/or are bullied or even coerced, we should not allow others to violate what our conscience says and we also have the Charter of Rights and the The Nuremberg Code, besides the Holy Scriptures to support that.

We have a legal, ethical, moral and spiritual right to refuse to be vaccinated and not be treated or categorized as a lower class citizen.



God has a very large sifter and He is sifting the crew of the Church. However, the crew of the Church will change at some point in the near future. Now therefore, the bishop is being sifted, the priest is being sifted, the monk is being sifted and the lay person is being sifted. We are all in the same sifter and we are bouncing back and forth.

**Elder Dorotheos Tzevelekas (+2021)**

## ANOTHER SAD DAY FOR THE GOA

*By George Karras, “Orthodox Heritage” Editor.*

We have written in the past about the embarrassing and treacherous actions of the GOA when it had chosen to issue awards and recognition to abortion-leading architect politicians. We are once again saddened by the GOA’s confusing, misleading and potentially blasphemous message issued by its Archbishop (AB). In specific, and in sharp contrast to the candid actions of several true pro-life (non-Orthodox) Christian hierarchs and leaders, the GOA AB Elpithoforos chose to (once again) water down (to say the least) his message on the tragic day of January 22nd, when every American ought to weep for the legalization of infanticide in the USA.

The GOA AB’s message, after stating that “every life is worthy of our prayer and our protection, whether in the womb, or in the world” proceeded to shift the character of his message and bring the Mother of God into his argument for “affirming respect for the autonomy of women.” He proceeded to tell the Lord’s flock that, following the Lord’s “conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary,” she ... “freely chose to bring Him into the world, and God respected her freedom.”

What was the AB trying to infer, that our Lord was “lucky” that His Most Holy Mother did not exercise here autonomy to abort Him (may God forgive us for even writing down such a statement). Surely His Eminence is fully aware that it was not until **after** Panaghia said *Behold the slave of God ...* that the Holy Spirit descended upon Panaghia, and Christ was placed in her womb. Therefore his illustration, in addition to being blasphemous, is unrelated to the autonomy theme: the child is already in the womb, when the mother chooses to sacrifice her child’s sacred right to life.

His Eminence’s “March for Life” letter with its theologically improper references to our Savior and His Most Holy Virgin Mother constitute pure and utter blasphemy. Sadly, not one of the 11 Orthodox hierarchs that were present, during the AB’s horrible expression of duplicity, has admonished him. We weep for those who may be misled by this statement and we appeal to His Eminence to retract and correct his message, focusing upon the legalization of murder and foregoing his Byzantine politics of at least this one significant matter.

We shall all be held accountable for not extending our finest efforts to defend God’s most innocent martyrs, the aborted children. We suspect such spiritual liability will easily extend and perhaps even be greater to the clergy and especially those who select to call themselves Orthodox hierarchs.

May God bring His Eminence into shifting his language into a clearer and succinct message that is God-pleasing and not Caesar-acceptable. Even if one Orthodox woman is misled by the AB’s call for “her autonomy” and proceeds with an abortion, the blood of that innocent child shall be upon him and all of us who standby and not raise our voice of objection.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



A 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION  
HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG  
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
US POSTAGE  
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## THE ORGANISM OF THE CHURCH

By St. Justin Popović.

In all respects, the organism of the Church is the most complex known to man. Why? Because it is a unique theanthropic organism in which all divine and human mysteries and all divine and human powers constitute one body. Only the omniscient, omnipotent *Theanthropos*, the Lord Christ, could unite and assemble all this into one Body, His own, of which He is the eternal Head. He, the miraculous and wonderworking God and Man, guides and directs the whole of life in this miraculous and wonderworking Body. Every tiny part of this Body lives by the whole Body, and the whole Body lives in its every part. All live through each and in each, and each lives through all and in all. Every part grows by the general growth of the Body, and the whole Body also grows by the growth of each tiniest part. All these numerous, tiny parts of the body, all these organs, limbs and senses, all these cells, are united in one eternally-living, *theanthropic* Body by the Lord Christ Himself, who coordinates the action of each part with the conciliar life of the Body. Each part works according to the measure of its powers. The strength of each member of the Church comes from the evangelical virtues. The evangelical activity of each member of the Church, although separate and personal, is always ultimately conciliar, common and general; it is integrated into the general activity of the whole Body.

While man is transformed by this evangelical activity, growing into Christ, the Lord Christ turns this activity into general, conciliar, theanthropic energy and thus *maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*. (Eph. 4:16). The activity

of each member of the Church is, therefore, always at the same time personal and conciliar, personal and collective. Even if it appears that a member acts only on his own behalf (for example, in the ascesis of hermits), each member of the Church always works for the whole. Such is the dispensation of the theanthropic organism of the Church which is constantly led and guided by the Lord Christ Himself.

The lives of angels and men, of the righteous and unrighteous, of the departed and those living on earth, are interwoven in the conciliar life of the Church. Those who are more righteous and holy help those who are less so, to grow by divine growth into greater and greater righteousness and holiness. The holy power of Christ the *Theanthropos* flows through all these members, even the smallest and most insignificant, according to the measure of their incorporation by grace into the organism of the Church, through the ascesis of faith, love, prayer, fasting, repentance and other holy virtues. Thus we all grow together *unto an holy temple in the Lord* (Eph 2:21), organically linked through grace with each other by one faith, the same holy mysteries and virtues, **one Lord, one Truth, one Gospel**.

We all partake in the one theanthropic life of the Church, each in the place allotted to him by the Lord, for the Body of the Church grows from Him and is by Him harmoniously joined and assembled. The Lord determines the place of each according to his spiritual aptitude and character, especially according to the evangelical love that each freely nurtures in himself and by which he acts. In this conciliar life of the Church, each edifies himself in love through all, and all through each. Hence, **even an apostle needs the prayers of the ordinary members of the Church**.



# 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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Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

By *Protopresbyter George Metallinos, Professor Emeritus, School of Theology, University of Athens, Greece.*

In speaking about Orthodoxy, we must not repeat the mistake of Pilate when he asked Christ, *What is truth?* (Jn 18:38). The correct question is: *Who is Truth?* For the truth is not an idea, a theory, or a system, but a Person, the All-Holy Person of the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. This is how we should ask about Orthodoxy, too, since it is identical with the Theanthropic Person of God the Word. He, as God-Man is Orthodoxy; He is the All-Truth.

### Introduction

If we wanted to define Christianity, *qua* (in the character of, *Ed.*) Orthodoxy and in conventional terms, we would say that it is the experience of the presence of the Uncreated (God) in history and the potential for the created (man) to become God *by Grace*. Given the continuous presence of God in Christ in historical reality, Christianity offers man the possibility of deification (*θεώσις=theosis*), just as medical science provides him with the possibility of maintaining or restoring his health, in both cases through a definite therapeutic process and a specific way of life.

The unique and absolute goal of the life in Christ is *theosis*, namely, union with God, so that man, through participation in the Uncreated Energy of God, becomes *by Grace* that which God is by nature (unoriginate and unending). This is, in Christian terms, the meaning of salvation. It is not a matter of man's moral improvement, but of the re-creation and re-formation in Christ of man and society, through a real and existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate manifestation of

God in history. Such is the implication of the expression of the Holy Apostle Paul: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* (2 Cor 5:17).

He who is united with Christ is a new creation. For this reason, in Christian terms the Incarnation of God the Word, the redemptive entry of the Eternal and Supratemporal into historical time, is the beginning of a new world—literally, of a “New Age”—which will continue until the end of the ages, in the persons of authentic Christians, that is, the saints. The Church, as the *Body of Christ* and communion in Christ, exists in the world in order to offer salvation, understood as the incorporation of man and society into this process of regeneration. This salvific work of the Church is accomplished through a specific therapeutic method, whereby the Church, in essence, operates in history as a universal infirmary. St. John Chrysostom (†407) thus calls the Church a *spiritual hospital*.

In the ensuing paragraphs we will answer the following questions:

(1) What is the sickness that Orthodox Christianity cures?

(2) What is the therapeutic method that it employs?

(3) What is the hallmark of authentic Christianity that radically differentiates it from heretical deviations therefrom, and also from every form of religion?

### Curing the Sickness

The sickness of human nature is the fallen condition of mankind and at the same time of all of creation, which suffers together with him. This diagnosis pertains to every human being, regardless of whether he is Christian or not. Orthodox Christianity is not confined within the narrow bounds of a religion that is interested only in its own followers. Rather, like God, it *will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*, (1 Tim 2:4) since

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
USA

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

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

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God is the *Savior of all men*. (1 Tim 4:10). The sickness about which Christianity speaks, therefore, is universal: *Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*. (Rom 5:12). Just as the Fall (that is, the sickness) is universal, so too salvific therapy depends directly upon the interior functioning of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is defined in Patristic terms, by the functioning inside him of three memory systems, two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is a matter for pastoral therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, the functioning of the brain, which regulates our relationship with our self and with our environment. Both of these systems are familiar to medical science, whose concern it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the saints knows another memory system, the memory of the heart, or noetic memory, which operates inside the heart and with which medical science is unfamiliar. The heart, according to Orthodox Tradition, does not function merely physically, as a pump to circulate the blood, for beyond its natural function it has one that is supernatural. Under certain preconditions it becomes the locus of communion with God, namely with His Uncreated Energy. This, of course, can [only] be understood through the experience of the saints, the true Christians, and not through the rational faculty or intellectual theologizing.



St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (†1809), recapitulating the entire Patristic Tradition in his work “Handbook of Spiritual Counsel,” calls the heart a natural center, a supernatural center, and also a para-natural center, whenever the heart’s supernatural functioning is inactive on account of its domination by the passions. The supernatural functioning of the heart is the absolute precondition for the perfection and fulfillment of man, namely, his theosis, his full incorporation into communion in Christ.

In its supernatural functioning, the heart becomes the place in which the *νοῦς (nous)* is activated. In the nomenclature of Orthodoxy, the *nous* (in the New Testament it is called the *spirit* of man and the *eye of the soul*) is the activity of the soul by which man knows God, attaining to the vision of God (*Θεοπεία*). Of course we must point out, by way of clarification, that knowledge of God does not mean knowledge of the unapproachable and inaccessible Divine Essence, but of the Divine Energy. The distinction between the Essence and the Energy of God is the fundamental difference between Orthodoxy and every other version of Christianity. The energy of the *nous* within the heart is called the *noetic functioning* of the heart. For the sake of further clarification, *νοῦς (nous)* and reason (*λόγος=logos*) are not identical in Orthodoxy, because reason operates in the brain, whereas the *νοῦς (nous)* operates in the heart.

Noetic functioning is actualized as the *unceasing prayer* (cf. 1 Thess 5:17) of the *Holy Spirit in the heart* (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:26; 1 Thess 5:19), which the Holy Fathers call *remembrance*

of God. Having within his heart the *remembrance of God*, man has the sense of God's *indwelling* within him. (Rom 8:11). St. Basil the Great says in his second epistle that the remembrance of God remains unceasing when it is not interrupted by earthly cares, when the nous "retreats" to God, that is, has communion with God. This, however, does not mean that the believer who is acted upon by Divine Energy avoids the necessary cares of life, remaining inert or in some kind of ecstasy. It means, rather, the liberation of the nous from these cares, with which reason is preoccupied.

To use an example relevant to us: a scientist who has acquired noetic functioning deals with his problems by means of reason, while his nous within his heart preserves the memory of God unceasingly. The person who maintains the three aforementioned memory systems is the saint. In Orthodox terms, he is a healthy (normal) human being. This is why the therapy of Orthodoxy is linked to man's journey towards holiness.

The dysfunctionality or sub-functionality of man's noetic energy is the essence of his fall. The notorious "ancestral sin" is precisely man's failure, at the very outset of his presence in history, to preserve the remembrance of God, that is, communion with God, in his heart. All of the descendants of the first-fashioned human beings share in this morbid condition, since it is not some moral—that is, personal—sin, but a sickness of man's nature, transmitted from person to person, exactly like a sickness that a tree transmits to all other trees originating from it.

Inactivity of the noetic functioning or of the remembrance of God, and its confusion with the functioning of the brain—as happens to all of us—enslaves man to angst and to the environment, and also to the quest for happiness through individualism and an antisocial outlook. In the sickness of his fallen state, man manipulates God and his fellow man in order to reinforce his individual security and happiness. God is manipulated through "religion" (the attempt to elicit power from the Divine), which can degenerate into the "self-theosis" of man. One manipulates his fellow men and, by extension, creation by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure by becoming fully incorporated into the "spiritual hospital" of the Church.

### The Therapeutic Method

The purpose of the Church's presence in the world, as a communion in Christ, is to cure man through the restoration of the communion of his heart with God—in other words, of his noetic functioning. According to late Father John Romanides, **the Patristic Tradition is neither a social philosophy nor an ethical system, nor is it religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic regimen.** In this respect, it is very similar to medicine, and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul, which prays mentally and unceasingly inside the heart, is a physiological organ that everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this organ.... This is why one who is unhealed is not even aware of the existence of this organ."

Man's need to be cured, according to the foregoing, is an issue that concerns all human beings, pertaining primarily to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence through the reactivation of the **third mnemonic faculty** (that of the *nous*). However, it also extends to man's social existence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest, which ultimately functions as self-love, must be transformed into selflessness.

The love of the Triune God, which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange, is selfless. That is why the social ideal of Orthodox Christianity is not "common ownership," but "non-acquisitiveness," as a voluntary renunciation of any entitlement. Only then is justice



possible.

The therapeutic method provided by the Church is the spiritual life, a life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as *ascesis* and as participation in the Uncreated Grace bestowed by means of the Mysteries. *Ascesis* is the forcing of our autonomous nature deadened through sin, which is on the way to spiritual or eternal death, i.e., eternal separation from the Grace of God. The aim of *ascesis* is victory over the passions, for the purpose of overcoming internal enslavement to the breeding-grounds of [spiritual] sickness and participating in Christ's Cross and Resurrection. The Christian who practices self-restraint under the guidance of his spiritual Father (therapist) becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the Mysteriological (Sacramental) life of the Body of the Church. There is no such thing as a

non-practicing Christian, just as there is no such thing as a person under treatment who does not follow the therapeutic regimen prescribed by his doctor.

### Authentic Christianity

The foregoing considerations thus lead us to certain constants, which confirm the nature of Orthodox Christianity:

(1) The Church, as the Body of Christ, functions as a clinic or hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a religion. The clergy were originally chosen by those who were cured, in order to serve as therapists of others. The therapeutic work of the Church is upheld today chiefly in monasteries, which, since they still offer resistance to secularism, are continuators of the Church of Apostolic times.

(2) The Church's expert therapists are those who are already cured. One who has not had the experience of therapy cannot be a therapist. This is the essential difference between pastoral therapeutic science and medical science. Skilled ecclesiastical therapists (both Fathers and Mothers) produce other therapists, just as professors of medicine produce their successors.

(3) For the Church to confine itself simply to forgiving sins for the purpose of affording entry into Paradise after death is a distortion, and is tantamount to medical science forgiving a patient, in order that he might be healed after death! The Church does not aim to send someone to Paradise or "Hell" (=eternal torment). Besides, Paradise and "Hell" are not places, but modes of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares a person to behold Christ eternally in His Uncreated Light as Paradise, and not as Hell, that is, as *a consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29) And this of course concerns every single human being, since ALL people will look eternally upon Christ as "Judge" of the world.

(4) The validity of a science is verified by the realization of its goals (for example, in medicine, by the cure of the patient). This is how genuine scientific medicine is distinguished from quackery. The criterion of the Church's pastoral therapy is the accomplishment of spiritual healing through opening the path to *theosis*. Therapy is not postponed to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here in this world (in the here and now). This can be ascertained from the incorrupt relics of the saints, which have overcome biological decay, such as those of the saints of the Ionian Islands: Spyridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios, and Theodora the Empress. Incorrupt relics are, in our Tradition, indisputable evidence of *theosis*, that is, of the fulfillment of the Church's ascetical therapy.

I would like to ask the medical establishment of our country to pay special attention to the case of incorrupt holy relics, given not only that they have not been tampered with by scientists, but also that the energy of Divine Grace manifests itself in them. For precisely at the moment when the disintegration of the cellular system begins, such disin-

tegration automatically ceases, and instead of any stench, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I confine myself to medical symptoms, and will not venture into miracles as evidence of *theosis*, since that belongs to another domain.

(5) Finally, the sacred texts of the Church (Holy Scripture and the synodal and patristic texts) are not codifications of any Christian ideology but are therapeutic in nature and function just as textbooks do in medical science. The same applies to liturgical texts, such as prayers. The simple reading of a prayer, without a parallel involvement of the believer in the therapeutic procedure of the Church would be no different from a case in which a patient with severe pains resorts to a doctor and the latter, instead of actively intervening, merely places the patient on an operating table and reads him the chapter that pertains to his ailment!

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It is of no importance whether one accepts it or not. For this reason, I am addressing everyone, including non-Christians and the indifferent, and also [nominal] "Christians." **Any other version of Christianity constitutes a falsification and distortion thereof, even if it seeks to present itself as Orthodoxy.**



**H**e who hopes, will be harmed if he recalls all his sins, one by one. The sorrow which will come with their remembrance, will drive away hope; if, again, he remembers his sins without feeling any sorrow, it is as though he is repeating them.

When your *nous* forsakes itself, and succeeds in clinging exclusively to hope, then the enemy—under the pretext of confession—will remind it of past sins, so that it might awaken passions which the person had forgotten (through God's grace), and in this sly fashion, harm him. Because even a strong person, or one who is averse to passions, will become distressed with the things he has done, and his conscience will inevitably be clouded.

The one who still lives in the fog, and is still perceptive to sensuality, will relive the same passions, in such a way, that the remembrance of past sins will prove to be a contamination, and not a confession.

A prudent man who is aware of the truth does not confess to God by numbering the sins he has committed, but by patiently accepting the painful consequences of those sins.

**St. Abba Mark the Ascetic**

## HAVE MERCY ON ME, O GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME!

By St. Innocent of Kherson (+1857).

*Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!*

† † †

Does it seem to anyone, my brethren, that throughout these present days the holy Church too often and repeatedly fills our ears with this touching appeal? If anyone has had such an idea, then let him labor to examine with us, albeit a little, the whole of human life from its beginning to end. It may be that what seems to be too often repeated in church now will not seem excessive later at home; and not just in this time of fasting and repentance, but also on other days, on the most festive days, it will come to mind of itself, and at times come forth from our very mouths.

To this end, let us examine first the very beginning of our existence on earth. What do we find there? Darkness and impurity, lust and passions. *For behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.* (Pss 50:5). Conceived in iniquities, I am therefore myself iniquitous; born in sins, I am myself a sinner. Is this not what is indicated by the pains of my birth?

Why does the one giving birth and the one being born suffer if not for guilt and impurity? Is this not what was expressed by my wail at my appearance in the world? What was it within me that cried out then? Not reason, not memory, not imagination—it was my whole nature that cried out. What troubled it and what did it suffer from? From an innate, inner disorder, impurity, and guilt. My first cry was addressed not to the earth, but to Heaven—to Thee, the Giver of Life, Who formed me in my mother's womb, and Who alone can recreate me outside my mother's womb.

Seeing all this now in my mind, mentally penetrating into my appearance in the world, I now cast my face down, ashamed of the impurity of my origin, fearful for the heritage born forth in me, and I cry out: *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!* Be merciful to this poor creature who has appeared on earth with all the uncleanness of the fathers and forefathers, who instead of an inheritance brought forth a terrible inclination towards evil, who has and will face a struggle with many sorrows, seductions, and temptations! *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!*

After our first birth of flesh and blood followed another, higher and better birth—of the Spirit. Despite my impurity and insensibility, the holy Church took me into Her arms

immediately after birth; it washed the defilement of my nature in the Baptismal font; sanctified me with the grace of the Spirit; sealed me with the Sign of the Cross; and clothed me in a white garment of innocence. From a child of anger, I became a child of grace.

But where is this royal garment now? Where are the gifts poured out upon me? Alas, I too, like Solomon's bride, must say: *They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept* (Cant 1:6). I have not preserved the grace of Baptism; I have not remained loyal to Him to Whom I was yoked! I have defiled the white robe of innocence! I have lost grace and the Spirit! The world has taken one thing from me, the passions have seized another; and yet another has disappeared from negligence and carelessness. All-in-all, I am like a man who has fallen among thieves: There is no integrity in me, from head to toe. To whom can I turn for help but Thee, my All-good Creator and All-powerful provider? *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!*

*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant.* (Pss 118:176). *Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy Name.* (Pss 141:8). *Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.* (Pss 50:12).



After the years of my foolish infancy, of which the first sage could not help but say to the Lord with David *I was as a beast before Thee* (Pss 72:22), came the years of adolescence and youth. The time is most precious when the mind and will are revealed in a man and he can be said to be in some sense himself the creator of his spiritual being. At that time, I, like my forefathers, was in the paradise of innocence, and before me was the tree of life with its promise and the tree of death with its commandment. I was able to not stretch out my hand to the forbidden fruit; I had the power to remain on the path of truth and purity. Everything held me back: the grace of Baptism, and the voice of my conscience, and my parents, and my educators; but, alas, nothing held me back!

The serpent tempter seemed to me more reliable than my Creator and Benefactor; and for me the tree of death seemed *good for food... pleasant to the eyes, and... to be desired to make one wise.* (Gen. 3:6). I am a hundred times more foolish than my forefathers, for I had their experience before me, and I, the wretched one, tasted the forbidden food and lost Paradise.

Ah, my brethren, who would not wish for the days of his youth to return—those precious days when it was up to us to either start out upon the path of the Lord or turn away to the crossroads of sin and worldly vanity? But these days will not

return, and remembering them, we can only exclaim from the depths of our souls: *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me! Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.* (Pss 25:7).

Then came adulthood and the time of courage: We created various family ties, friendships, acquaintances, embarked upon the path of public service, clothed ourselves with various obligations. Many of us swore we would be loyal to the truth—steadfast guardians of truth for ourselves and others. What could be expected from us after that? The firm and steady fulfillment of our duties; a courageous struggle with vice in all its forms; the judicious use of the gifts of happiness, to whom they are sent, and the gracious endurance of the blows of misfortune, to whom they befall; that we would always be ready for every good deed, far from all lies and untruths; abstinent and strict with ourselves, generous and merciful to others; meek, sincere and loving to everyone and every individual; not remembering the sins of our enemies.

But, my brethren, tell me—are there many who can boast of these qualities? Who, casting the most superficial gaze upon their duties, would not say: “Ah, I have not and will not fulfill them as I should! At the holy altar I stand not with the purity and reverence befitting servants of the Most High God; in court, I do not preserve truth and righteousness with the self-sacrifice that the fate of my defendants requires; in the sanctuary of the sciences, I value not so much the truth as the vainglory of my name and am often ready to defend lies that are pleasing to me; in buying and selling, I am self-serving; in ruling I am cruel and capricious; in menial labor—cunning and obstinate.

How much time I have wasted and continue to waste in vain! How many talents given by God have been ruined and are lost in vain! Many times I have resolved to do good, and still I do bad. I see that I am on the wrong path, but I continue on. And when will this hapless battle of my conscience with the passions within me come to an end? Where is the end of my spiritual captivity and slavery?

Almighty Creator, my prayer is to Thee! Have mercy upon Thy poor creature! Grant me the strength to break the bonds of sinful habits and passions! *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken Thou me in Thy way.* (Ps. 118:37). Touch my sin-loving heart; may it cease to beat for dust and corruption! *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me! Save me from myself!*

Then comes the years of old age: My body will weaken, my senses will shut down one by one, and the world that now flatters me will start to flee from me. But will all this turn me to God and eternity? Will I use at least this pitiful remainder of my life for good deeds? Will not the same lusts and passions divide it between themselves? Ah, how many elders who seem to grow younger in malice and in love for the world

over the years! How many stand at the doors of their coffins and look back! Will I be like them? Will my final years and days pass in vanity and blindness, as happens with so many? O merciful Lord, let me not fall into this terrible blindness! Spare me from this hellish insensitivity! *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!*

Following my infirmities, then finally comes the final sickness: We will lie down on a bed from which we will never rise. The doctor will back away and the priest will draw near, and relatives and friends will surround our bed, awaiting our demise. In this terrible hour, amidst the final anguish of body and spirit, amidst the everlasting turmoil of thoughts and feelings, what words would you, my brethren, like to have coming from your mouth? I would like nothing else for myself but: *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!* Have mercy upon a sinner whose life has vanished into vanity and sins! Show the last sign of mercy and grant that I might come out of this prison of my flesh with the feeling of the thief who repented on the cross!

Finally, the hour of the general universal awakening from the sleep of death will strike: We will have to rise up from the womb of the earth, clothe ourselves in a new and indestructible body, and appear at the Dread Judgment together with our deeds to hear the verdict over us for all eternity. What will you feel then, my poor soul, in the midst of Heaven and hell, between angels and outcast spirits? Will you cry out for the last time: *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me!*

Yes, my brethren, **this prayer comes to an end at the universal Dread Judgment of God**, not before: It will stop when the fate of every one of us will be decided forever, before the face of the whole universe. There will no longer be place for it after that. In Paradise, the righteous will know only joy and the eternal glorification of the name of God. In hell, sinners know only wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Which of these fates awaits us? The Lord alone knows. But if we remain as we are, if we die in our sins, then it is obvious where and with whom our lot is to be found. Let us cry out to the Lord God from the depths of our soul, each and every one of us: *Have mercy upon us! Grant us all repentance before the end!*

Amen.



**M**y heart only has entrances. It doesn't have exits. Whoever enters remains there. Whatever he may do, I love him the same as I loved him when he first entered into my heart. I pray for him and seek his salvation.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)

## THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY

By St. Luke, Archbishop of Crimea (+1961).

On the first Sunday of Lent, our Holy Church celebrates the Triumph of Orthodoxy, of true faith, which trampled down all heresies and was established. For this reason this Sunday is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Heresies showed up even at the very beginning of Christianity. The Apostles of Christ themselves warned their contemporaries, and with them us too, about the danger of false teachers.

The Holy Apostle Peter writes the following in his Second General Epistle: *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.* (2 Pet 2:1-2).

St. Paul, returning to Palestine from Greece, made a stop in Ephesus. To the Christian inhabitants of the town there he said: *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* (Acts 20:29-30).

Many such false teachers and schismatics existed in the first centuries of Christianity. Some heresies troubled the Church for centuries, such as the heresies of Arius, of Macedonius, Eutyches, Dioscorus, of Nestorius and also the heresy of Iconoclasm. These heresies caused much disturbance in the Church and afflicted the Church greatly. There were many confessors and martyrs who shed their blood defending the true faith in the fight against false teachers and heretics.

There were also many great prelates, who also suffered under persecution and were often exiled. St. Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, for example, in a council chaired by Dioscorus, called the Robber Synod and was “beaten so savagely that he died three days later.”

The last in the line-up of heresies, the heresy of Iconoclasm, was the one that tormented our Orthodox Church the most.

This heresy first appeared during the reign of Emperor Leo the Isaurian, who came to the throne in 717. He ascended the throne with the help of the army, which had many opponents of those who venerate holy icons, within its ranks. Because he wanted to please the army he started a harsh persecution against Iconophiles.

This persecution continued on into the reign of Emperor Constantine Copronymus, who succeeded Leo to the throne. The name Copronymus (“dung-named”) comes from coprus meaning manure, i.e. feces. He was called Copronymus because he defecated in his baptismal font. These two emperors were in power for many years and brought great affliction upon the Church. Following these, there were other Iconoclast emperors, who continued the work of their predecessors and tormented the Church for years.

We can not begin to describe the suffering endured by the Church during the years of Iconoclasm, and especially the monks who were in the frontline in the battle for holy icons. The Iconoclast emperors closed many monasteries and turned many churches which had icons into shells. The monks were savagely beaten: they took out their eyes, noses were cut off, icons were broken on their heads. They burnt the fingers of icon-painting hagiographers with burning irons.

The persecution only stopped when Empress Irene came to the throne of the Byzantine Empire, but this was not yet final. In 787, Irene convened the Seventh Ecumenical Council, which set down Orthodox teaching on the veneration of holy icons. But even after this Council Iconoclast emperors still existed, for example, Michael and others. The heresy was crushed only under the God-fearing Augusta, Theodora, when a local council was convened in Constantinople in 842, which upheld the Orthodox teaching. The council pronounced an anathema on all those who dare to say that the veneration of holy icons is idolatry and that Orthodox Christians are idolaters.

And here various sects still tell us exactly this thing. They dare to call our icons idols and call us idolaters. And with what nerve? I will tell you of an incident that took place recently in a city in Siberia. During the Liturgy two Baptists walked into the church and started shouting that the Orthodox are pagans idol-worshippers and that the icons are idols. What nonsense!



How dare they open their mouths and say these words dripping with venom, calling us pagans and our icons idols? This shows that they have not understood correctly the second commandment of Mosaic Law: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.* (Exod 20:4).

What does this commandment mean? I think the meaning is clear. The commandment prohibits the building of idols for worship, instead of worshipping the One, Unique and True God - as did ancient peoples: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and others—instead of worshipping the One, Unique and True God. That is idolatry. But is our veneration of holy icons anything like idolatry? Certainly not. Idols represented something that does not really exist, something that is a product of imagination. Our own icons depict reality. Really, did the Lord Jesus Christ, who we glorify and who we venerate in icons, not live among us? Did the Virgin Mary, who was painted by the apostle and evangelist Saint Luke not live among us? This icon was blessed by the very Theotokos herself, saying that grace would always be with this icon. Do you know how many miracles happen from icons of the Virgin Mary?

And the other icons, do they not show real saints of God who lived here on Earth? These icons are their portraits and in no way are idols. Only an impious and filthy mouth dares to say that our icons are idols and that we are idolaters. Let the ungodly be silent as the Ecumenical Council has pronounced anathema upon them. You should know this, and remember this and not keep company with heretics.

Do not leave the Church, do not rip the robe of Christ. Remember that Christ in his prayer at Gethsemane, the hierarchical prayer, begged his Father, saying: *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* (Jn 17:21). The Lord wants unity of the Church. The dissenters, the schismatics, who find errors in the teaching of the Church, are removed from it and believe they will find salvation in their heretical organizations.

But do you know what the great saints said about people who tear the tunic of Christ? Saint Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, said that people who leave the Church and do not have communion with it even if they become martyrs, even with their blood, will not be cleansed of their sin because this grievous sin of dividing the Church cannot even be cleaned with shedding of blood. And the holy martyr Ignatius the God-bearer said that he who causes schism in the Church will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**All heretics, however, are preachers of schism.** While the apostle says: *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.* (Rom 16:17). And in another

letter says this: *As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* (Gal 1:9). And all the heretics do not preach what the Orthodox Church, which gave us spiritual birth, preaches.

Remember also, the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who told the apostles, and through them us, their successors: *He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.* (Lk 10:16). These words of the Lord are awesome. Remember them always. Do not forget this day, the day of the Triumph of the Orthodox faith. The faith that was set down by the Seventh Ecumenical Council which established Orthodoxy and trampled down all heresies and schisms.

Over a thousand years have passed since the time of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and no such Ecumenical Councils have been convened since. Why? The reasons are political. It was impossible to call them. But we should not be sorry that others did not take place and that there are no Ecumenical Councils today. These Seven that we have sorted out all questions and solved all the problems that the Church had with heresies and established the Orthodox faith.

You will say that there are many new heresies and schisms today. Yes, you are right. But we should know that the new heresies are not saying anything new but repeating what the old heretics have already said. All of these heresies were anathematized by the Seventh Ecumenical Council. So the decisions of seven Ecumenical Councils are enough for us, especially the Seventh Ecumenical Council. This is why we rejoice today and celebrate the Triumph of Orthodoxy, which was expressed and fixed by the Seventh Ecumenical Council. It was precisely for this reason that it was appointed that a doxology should be gloriously chanted on this day, as a thanksgiving to God for securing the Orthodox faith.



**I**f you truly desire to expel every anti-Christian thought and to purify your nous, you will achieve this only through prayer, for nothing is able to regulate our thoughts as well as prayer.

Be careful, because if you are lazy and inattentive in prayer, you shall not make any progress either in your pursuit of devotion towards the Lord, or in the acquisition of salvation and peace of thoughts.

The name of Jesus Christ, which we invoke in prayer, contains within it self-existing and self-acting restorative power. So do not worry about the imperfection and dryness of your prayer, but with perseverance await the fruit of the repeated invocation of the Divine Name.

**From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"  
The Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim**



## ON THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

*By Metropolitan Philaret (of blessed memory), a homily delivered on the Fourth Sunday of Great and Holy Lent.*



More than once, brethren, the fact has been mentioned that on each Sunday in the Great and Holy Lent, there are other commemorations besides that of the Resurrection. Thus, on this day, the Church glorifies the righteous John of the Ladder, one of the greatest ascetics, which the Church, in speaking of them, calls *earthly angels and Heavenly men*.

These great ascetics were extraordinary people. They commanded the elements; wild beasts willingly and readily obeyed them. For them, there were no maladies they could not cure. They walked on the waters as on dry land; all the elements of the world were subject to them, because they lived in God and had the power of grace to overcome the laws of terrestrial nature. One such ascetic was St. John of the Ladder. He was surnamed “of the Ladder” (Climacus) because he wrote an immortal work, the “Ladder of Divine Ascent.” In this work, we see how, by means of thirty steps, the Christian gradually ascends from below to the heights of supreme spiritual perfection. We see how one virtue leads to another, as a man rises higher and higher and finally attains to that height where there abides the crown of the virtues, which is called *Christian love*.

Saint John wrote his immortal work especially for the monastics, but in the past his “Ladder” was always favorite reading for anyone zealous to live piously, though he were not a monk. Therein the Saint clearly demonstrates how a man passes from one step to the next. Remember, Christian soul, that this ascent on high is indispensable for anyone who wishes to save his soul unto eternity.

When we throw a stone up, it ascends until the moment when the propelling force ceases to be effectual. So long as this force acts, the stone travels higher and higher in its ascent, overcoming the force of the earth’s gravity. But when this force is spent and ceases to act, then, as you know, the stone does not remain suspended in the air. Immediately, it begins to fall, and the further it falls the greater the speed of its fall. This, solely according to the physical laws of terrestrial gravity.

So it is also in the spiritual life. As a Christian gradually ascends, the force of spiritual and ascetic labours lifts him on high. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: *Strive to enter in through the narrow gate*. That is, the Christian ought to be an ascetic. Not only the monastic, but every Christian. He must take

pains for his soul and his life. He must direct his life on the Christian path, and purge his soul of all filth and impurity.

Now, if the Christian, who is ascending upon this ladder of spiritual perfection by his struggles and ascetic labours, ceases from this work and ascetic toil, his soul will not remain in its former condition; but, like the stone, it will fall to the earth. More and more quickly will it drop until, finally, if the man does not come to his senses, it will cast him down into the very abyss of Hell.

It is necessary to remember this. People forget that the path of Christianity is indeed an ascetic labour. Last Sunday, we heard how the Lord said: *He that would come after Me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Me*. The Lord said this with the greatest emphasis. Therefore, the Christian must be one who takes up his cross, and his life, likewise, must be an ascetic labour of bearing that cross. Whatever the outward circumstance of his life, be he monk or layman, it is of no consequence. In either case, if he does not force himself to mount upwards, then, of a certainty, he will fall lower and lower.

And in this regard, alas, people have confused thoughts. For example, a clergyman drops by a home during a fast. Cordially and thoughtfully, they offer him fasting food (i.e., food prepared according to the rules of the Fast), and say: “For you, fast food, of course!” To this, one of our hierarchs customarily replies: “Yes, I am Orthodox. But who gave you permission not to keep the fasts?”

All the fasts of the Church, all the ordinances, are mandatory for every Orthodox person. Speaking of monastics, such ascetics as St. John of the Ladder and those like him fasted much more rigorously than the Church prescribes; but this was a matter of their spiritual ardour, an instance of their personal ascetic labour. This the Church does not require of everyone, because it is not in accord with everyone’s strength. But the Church DOES require of every Orthodox the keeping of those fasts which She has established.

Oftentimes have I quoted the words of St. Seraphim, and once again shall I mention them. Once there came to him a mother who was concerned about how she might arrange the best possible marriage for her young daughter. When she came to the saint for advice, he said to her: “Before all else, ensure that he, whom your daughter chooses as her companion for life, keeps the fasts. If he does not, then he is not a Christian, whatever he may consider himself to be.” You see how this great saint, St. Seraphim of Sarov, a man who, better than we, knew what Orthodoxy is, spoke concerning the fasts?

Let us remember this. St. John Climacus has described the ladder of spiritual ascent: then let us not forget that each Christian must ascend thereon. The great ascetics ascended like swiftly-flying eagles; we scarcely ascend at all. Nonetheless, let us not forget that, unless we employ our efforts in

correcting ourselves and our lives, we shall cease our ascent, and, most assuredly, we shall begin to fall.

Amen.

† † †

## THE ICON OF THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

Among the important icons depicted on the walls of our churches is the icon of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This icon is given great prominence, usually in the narthex of some of the churches or *trapezas* of Mount Athos, as well as in some parish churches throughout the world.

The icon is a depiction of the famous spiritual classic entitled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* written by St. John Climacos (of the Ladder), who lived during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and whose memory is celebrated on March 30<sup>th</sup> as well as the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. In this book, St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development, which he likens to thirty steps upward on a ladder. The steps lead the struggler to *theosis*, divinization, and salvation—the ultimate goal of *askesis* or spiritual struggle.

St. John's Ladder expresses the Orthodox understanding that *theosis* and ultimately salvation is not something attained all at once, as by a leap, but comes after a long and arduous process of spiritual striving or asceticism. In this process, with sustained effort one rises gradually from lower to higher and higher levels of spiritual development. As St. John writes, *no one can climb a ladder in one stride*. Just as St. John's book, the icon stands as a witness to the violent effort needed for entrance into God's Kingdom. The spiritual struggle of Christian life is a real one, *not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the present darkness, the hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*. (Eph 6:12).

In the icon, a ladder stands on the earth and reaches to Heaven. St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development in his book and he likens the stages to thirty steps upward on a ladder. At the right side of the scene is shown a monastery building. Standing outside its door is St. John Climacos. His right hand points at the ladder and watching monks stand behind him. In his left hand he holds a scroll on which is written: *Ascend, ascend, Brethren*.

### Some of the Icon's Details

**Ladder:** St. John Climacos was inspired by the Ladder which the righteous Jacob saw in a dream. Jacob saw a lad-

der which rose from earth to Heaven, on which some angels were ascending and others were descending. His vision is described in the book of Genesis: *And Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. ... And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.* (Gen 28:12-13, 15). The ladder in this icon is sometimes depicted in such a way to express the idea

that more effort is required for rising to the highest levels of spiritual development.

**Christ from Heaven:** With His right hand Christ blesses the monk who has climbed to the top of the ladder. The scroll in His left hand is symbolic of His Gospel. Reaching this heaven is a heaven of the mind within the heart. Its effect is to sanctify the mind and to detach it from material things, and it does so in such a way, that after entering this heavenly harbor, a man, for most of his earthly life, is enraptured, like someone already in heaven, and he is lifted up to the contemplation of God.

**Climbing Monks:** Below the victorious monk, there are other monks at various stages of ascent. Some stand on the ladder firmly, and are

about to rise to the next rung. Others, however, are barely retaining their hold, as they are drawn by demons. One of the monks has fallen off the ladder and is being swallowed by a dragon with wide open jaws.

**Demons:** The demons are flying at the ladder. The demons are depicted in order to remind the observer that they exist. Such evil spiritual beings act upon us through mental suggestion and assaults. Their tails symbolize their fallen state, their animalistic state. The demons also symbolize various sins. Saint John's book minutely analyzes the nature of the passions of pride, gluttony, lust, anger, despondency, malice, and so on.

**Dragon:** The dark dragon is used as a symbol of Hell.

**Angels:** Angels are viewed as real beings. The angels also symbolize positive qualities, virtues, the opposites of the "passions," humility, temperance, chastity, gentleness, hope, love, etc.



## OUR DUTIES FOR HOLY AND GREAT WEEK

*By the holy Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotes of Florina (+2010), from his homily at the Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior, in Moschato, Athens, on April 10, 1960.*

***This very day is clothed with the bright robes of the first-fruits of the Lord's passion.***

***Come, then, all feast lovers, let us welcome it with songs.***  
[Kathisma, Holy Monday]

† † †

We have arrived, my beloved, at the saving Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, at Holy and Great Week. This week is called Great, because in its 168 hours, from today until the night of the Resurrection, we give honor to great events, unique and world historic, which shocked the earth, the heavens, and that which is below the earth. This is why this week is called Great, and it is why it should not pass us by like all the others.

And I put forward the question: What are the duties of a Christian for Holy and Great Week? I am not addressing unbelievers, atheists or chiliasts; I am addressing believers who want to celebrate properly. What therefore are our duties during this week?

The first duty, my brethren, is to thank our Lord Jesus Christ from the bottom of our hearts. Of course, our whole life must be a thank you, a *Glory be to Thee, O Lord*, for His small and great benefactions, the visible and the invisible, for all the good things, material and spiritual, that His grace abides in; the sun, air, water, flowers, beaches, all over the place. We should also thank Him for our parents and siblings, our spouse and children, for times and seasons, for what is blessed and necessary.

An ungrateful person is worse than an animal. You have a dog, you throw him a piece of bread, and he wags his tail and says thank you. People also must be grateful to God. To thank Him for everything, but above all for the sacrifice of His Son, for His revered Passion. We would also like to thank Him for something else; for His longsuffering in so many of our crimes and blasphemies, for which the earth should open up to swallow us and the sea to swell to drown us, and yet it tolerates us. That is why on Great Friday the Church says, *Glory to Thy long-suffering, O Lord, glory to Thee.*

So one of our duties is to thank God. The other is to follow the sacred services. The services of Great Week are

not like the others; they differ in many ways. The hymns are sweeter than honey, those inspired poems, such as the lamentations at the tomb, these exist in no other religion in the world. These hymns alone, which neither the Franks nor the Protestants or anyone else possess, are enough to prove that our Church is not of this earth, but of heaven, inspired by God. Who did these? Where were they written? In schools and universities? They were done in caves by holy ascetics, as their tears fell to the ground and blossomed. They were not simply written with the mind and due to their education, but they were the blood of their hearts, of healthy feelings, an expression of life, of holy experiences, truths, which only those who truly love Christ can have. One must be unconscious so as not to be moved.

Our third duty is to fast. This week is a week of fasting, strict fasting. Do not listen to the materialists and the impious. We keep the fasts of our holy Church, and especially this fast, as a tradition of the apostles and fathers of Orthodoxy. When we talk about fasting, we do not simply mean the fasting of the stomach to remember the vinegar

of the cross, but with the fasting of the stomach our mouths must also fast from bad-mouthing, our tongue from obscenity, our eyes from filthy spectacles.

During these days in Byzantine times the emperors would sign a decree: Great Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Pascha Sunday the

hippodromes and all the theaters were closed. The Church is in mourning. If we were a Christian nation, centers of corruption would have to be closed from Great Monday, for mourning to be established for the One who was raised up for us on the cross.

But we have another duty. It is the duty of Confession and Divine Communion. I will not expand on this, but will only say that during these holy days, and especially on the night of the Resurrection, we are called to stay in church till the end with our Resurrection candle. Whoever hears *Christ is Risen* and then leaves, it would be preferable if they had just stayed home. That which takes place, where the churches empty after *Christ is Risen*, is a desecration, a contempt for Christ. Let us remain therefore until the end and prepare to receive Divine Communion.

This week is especially a week for Divine Communion. What is Divine Communion? The Body and Blood of our Christ, fire from heaven. I ask, what are you? Are you straw? If so, then do not approach the holy things, otherwise you will burn. Are you gold? If you are gold, then gold is not



threatened by the fire; the more it approaches the fire the more it is cleansed. So if you are a Christian, and remain unrepentant, the fire will burn you, just like it burned Judas who communed unworthily. But if you have gone through the furnace of sacred Confession, then approach; Divine Communion will be for you a medicine of immortality.

During Holy and Great Week we also have a sacred duty to our brethren who are suffering and are in need. It is a week of love and mercy. Give a fine meal to someone who is hungry, a new piece of clothing—not old and used—to someone who does not have any, help a widow and an orphan, give some medicine to someone who needs it, visit someone who is sick, give a consoling word to someone that is sad, do whatever a heart of love thinks it can.

What I have said is nothing. There is something else which is more difficult. If you do everything we have said so far, and do not do this last thing, then you are not a Christian. What is it?

I know Christians who are people of prayer, whose ears are drawn to sacred words, who fast strictly, who confess and commune, but few are the Christians who have—what? *Let us forgive all things with the Resurrection.* (*Doxastikon* of the Praises, Pascha Sunday).

Great Week is a week of forgiveness. Who, my brethren, in this life has no dislikes, coldness, contradictions, who does not have an enemy? During these holy days let us look up towards the Crucified One. No one was wronged or hurt like our Christ. While the nails ripped into His flesh, at the same time the curses and anathemas of the Pharisees ripped into His heart, yet He prayed on the cross, saying: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* (Lk 23:34). Let us forgive one another therefore during these holy days; brides and mothers-in-law, brothers and sisters, friends with friends, children with parents, all without exception. Let us expand our hearts, let us feel the love of our Christ within us. How can we celebrate without love?

My brethren! Holy and Great Week equals a hand open to mercy, eyes with tears of repentance, feet that hasten to church, hearts reconciled, full of worship towards the Crucified One. Do we perform these duties? Do you know who we are like? We are like a beggar who every day has fifteen cents thrown at him, but one day a certain king passes by him and says, “Open your pockets!” and begins to count 1, 2, 3,... 5,... 10,... 100,... 168 gold coins that dazzle his eyes. And he, instead of taking this treasure to use it, he goes to the river and throws the gold coins in the water. Is this not insanity? These hours therefore that the Church gives us are a treasure. Every hour—every bell ring, every beat, every second—is an important hour.

Let us take advantage of these holy days. Let us not allow them to escape from us like the rest of our lives. Do we know if we will live to celebrate another Great Week?

Perhaps this Great Week is the last of our lives? How many people did we have with us last year? Where are they now? We are leaving, the train is whistling, only once do we go through life with this skin.

I pray this Holy and Great Week is an important milestone in our lives. May the Lord give us this week holy thoughts, holy feelings, heroic decisions, sanctification of the soul. May we seal Holy Week with the words, *Remember me, Lord, when thou cometh into Thy kingdom.* (Lk 23:42).



**W**e live in difficult times of globalization, in times of trampling on basic human rights—human rights to life, the right of the child to be born, the right of parents to raise and care for their child, the right of a mother to be a caring mother to her husband, the right of a man to be a man! A monstrous globalist civilization is being created according to perverted morals, without the yeast of the eternal meaning of human life. Such a civilization, as long as it is contrary to the risen Christ and his gentle teaching, **cannot survive.**

With that in mind, let us be wise and careful as we approach the unhealthy table of this world’s offerings. Let us choose from it only that which is valuable for Christ and worthy of our vocation and dignity. Let us reject everything pseudo-civilizational, twisted and inhumane, just as Christ rejected the offer of the tempter on the Mount of Temptation: If you worship me, all that you see will be yours! We know the right answer: It is written: **serve God only and worship Him alone!**

**Saintly Patriarch Pavle of Serbia (+2009)**

**M**ay your entire soul cleave with love to the meaning of the prayer, so that your nous, your inner voice, and your will—these three components of your soul—become one, and the one become three; for in this way man, who is an image of the Holy Trinity, comes into contact with and is united to the prototype.

As the great worker and teacher of noetic prayer, the divine Gregory Palamas of Thessalonica said, *When the oneness of the nous becomes threefold, yet remains single, then it is united with the divine Triadic Unity, and it closes the door to every form of delusion and is raised above the flesh, the world, and the prince of the world.*

**From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain”  
The Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim**

## Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή, Πορεία προς τὸ Πάσχα

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

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

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

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

Ἔτσι τὸ Πάσχα πανηγυρίζουμε τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν γεγονὸς ποὺ ἔγινε καὶ ἀκόμη γίνεται σὲ μᾶς. Γιατὶ ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ μᾶς ἔλαβε τὸ δῶρο αὐτῆς τῆς νέας ζωῆς καὶ τὴ δύναμη νὰ τὴν ἀποδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ζήσει διὰ μέσου της. Εἶναι ἓνα δῶρο ποὺ ριζικὰ ἀλλάζει τὴ διάθεσή μας ἀπέναντι σὲ κάθε κατάσταση αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπέναντι στὸ θάνατο. Μᾶς δίνει

τὴ δύναμη νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώνουμε θριαμβευτικὰ τὸ «νικῆθηκε ὁ θάνατος».

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

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

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

Μπορεῖ κατὰ καιροὺς νὰ παραδεχόμαστε τὶς ποικίλες ἁμαρτίες μας καὶ νὰ τὶς ἐξομολογούμαστε, ὅμως ἐξακολουθοῦμε νὰ μὴν ἀναφέρουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας σ' ἐκεῖνη τὴ νέα ζωὴ ποὺ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκάλυψε καὶ μᾶς ἔδωσε. Πραγματικὰ **ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν ἦρθε ποτὲ Ἐκεῖνος**. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μόνη πραγματικὴ ἁμαρτία, ἡ



ἀμαρτία ὄλων τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν, ἡ ἀπύθμενη θλίψη καὶ τραγωδία ὄλων τῶν κατ' ὄνομα Χριστιανῶν.

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

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

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

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

Γι' αὐτό, ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι, ὅταν ἄκουσαν τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Κυρίου Τὸν ρώτησαν ἀπελπισμένα: *Τις*

*ἄρα δύναται σωθῆναι;* (Ματθ. 19:26). Ἀληθῶς, δὲν εἶναι καθόλου εὐκόλο νὰ ἀπαρνηθεῖς ἓνα ἀσήμαντο ἰδανικὸ ζωῆς καμωμένο μὲ τὶς καθημερινὲς φροντίδες, μὲ τὴν ἀναζήτησι τῶν ὑλικῶν ἀγαθῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀσφάλεια καὶ τὴν ἀπόλαυσι καὶ νὰ δεχτεῖς ἓνα ἄλλο ἰδανικὸ ζωῆς τὸ ὁποῖο βέβαια δὲν στερεῖται καθόλου τελειότητας στὸ σκοπὸ του: *Γίνεσθε τέλειοι ὡς ὁ Πατὴρ ἡμῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς τέλειος ἐστίν.*

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



Σήμερα σπανίζει ἡ νοερὰ προσευχὴ στοὺς ἐπισκόπους, ἂν συνέλθη μιὰ Σύνοδος ἐξ ἐπισκόπων καὶ σηκωθοῦν κατὰ τὴν ἑναρξὶ καὶ ποῦν ὄλοι μαζί *Βασιλεῦ Οὐράνιε, Παράκλητε, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας...*, θὰ ἔλθη ὁποσδήποτε τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο νὰ τοὺς φωτίσει; Ἐπειδὴ δηλαδὴ εἶναι κανονικοὶ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ συνέρονται σὲ Σύνοδο καὶ κάνουν προσευχὴ;

Ὅμως δὲν ἐνεργεῖ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο ἔτσι. Μόνο δηλαδὴ κάτω ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς προϋποθέσεις. Χρειάζονται καὶ ἄλλες. Χρειάζεται ὁ προσευχόμενος νὰ ἔχη ἤδη ἐνεργομένη τὴν νοερὰ προσευχὴ μέσα του, ὅταν προσέρχεται στὴν Σύνοδο, γιὰ νὰ τὸν φωτίσει ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Στὶς ψευδο-συνόδους οἱ προσερχόμενοι δὲν εἶχαν αὐτὴν τὴν προσευχητικὴν κατάστασι.

Οἱ παλαιοὶ ἐπίσκοποι ὁμως εἶχαν τέτοια πνευματικὴ ἐμπειρία καί, ὅταν προσήρχοντο ὡς Σῶμα, ἤξεραν τί τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιο τοὺς πληροφοροῦσε μέσα στὴν καρδιά γιὰ ἓνα συγκεκριμένο θέμα. Καί, ὅταν ἔβγαζαν ἀποφάσεις, ἤξεραν ὅτι οἱ ἀποφάσεις τους ἦταν σωστές. Διότι εὐρίσκοντο σὲ κατάστασι φωτισμοῦ, ἐνῶ ὠρισμένοι ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶχαν φθάσει καὶ στὸν δοξασμὸ, δηλαδὴ στὴν θέωσι.

**Πρ. Ἰωάννου Σ. Ῥωμανίδου (+2001)**

## Είσοδικόν στή Μεγάλη Ἑβδομάδα

Γράφει ὁ π. Βασίλειος Ι. Καλλιακμάνης, καθηγητῆς Θεολογικῆς σχολῆς ΑΠΘ.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ ὁ Πάγκαλος ἠγεῖται τοῦ χοροῦ τῶν ἑορταζόντων στὸ μέγιστο καὶ παγκοσμίων διαστάσεων γεγονός τῆς θείας συγκατάβασης, τῆς πορείας τοῦ Κυρίου πρὸς τὸ ἐκούσιον πάθος. Στὸ πρόσωπό του βρίσκουν ἐφαρμογὴ τὰ εὐαγγελικὰ μηνύματα τῆς συμφιλώσης καὶ τῆς συγχωρητικότητας, τῆς σωφροσύνης καὶ τῆς καρδιακῆς καθαρότητας. Μπορεῖ ἐκεῖνος νὰ μὴν ἄκουσε τὸ γλυκόχο ἄγγελμα τῆς ἀγάπης πρὸς τοὺς ἐχθρούς; μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν γνώρισε ἀπὸ κοντὰ τὸ ἰλαρὸν πρόσωπο τοῦ Νυμφίου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐμπνέει τὴ διακονία, τὴ θυσία καὶ τὴν τιμιότητα; μπορεῖ νὰ ἔζησε ἑκατοντάδες χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ Αὐτόν. Ὅμως, ὅλα αὐτὰ δὲν τὸν ἐμπόδισαν νὰ ἀναδειχθεῖ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ, εὐαγγελιστῆς πρὶν τὸ εὐαγγέλιο, σῶφρων σὲ καιροὺς ἀφροσύνης, ὑπάκουος μαθητῆς πρὶν τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Διδασκάλου.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἀποτελεῖ τύπο, προτύπωση καὶ προεικόνιση τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη. *Καὶ ἦν Ἰωσήφ καλὸς τῷ εἶδει καὶ ὠραῖος τῇ ὄψει σφόδρα*, ἀναφέρει ὁ συγγραφεὺς τῆς Γένεσης (39:6), ποὺ ἀναδείχθηκε σπουδαία φυσιογνωμία, στὴν ὁποία συνδυάσθηκε ἄριστα τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ κάλλος μὲ τὴ λαμπρότητα τοῦ ψυχικοῦ κόσμου. Σκεπτόμενος τὸν Ἰωσήφ, ὁ νοῦς ἀνάγεται στὸν ἐράσμιο Νυμφίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι *τῷ κάλλει ὠραῖος παρὰ πάντας ἀνθρώπους*, ποὺ προσκαλεῖ σὲ ἐστίαση πνευματικὴ κάθε διψασμένη καὶ πεινασμένη ψυχή. Καὶ πράγματι, ἡ Μεγάλη Ἑβδομάδα ἀποτελεῖ συμπόσιο πνευματικὸ, στὸ ὁποῖο ἔχουν κληθεῖ νὰ μετᾶσχουν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι· χορταίνονται ὅμως ἀπὸ τὰ πνευματικὰ ἐδέσματα μόνο ὅσοι ἔχουν «ἐνδυμα γάμου», δάκρυα μετανοίας καὶ φόβο Θεοῦ.

Ὅπως ὁ Χριστός, *ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στοματι αὐτοῦ* (Α΄ Πέτρο. 2:22), ἔτσι κι ὁ Ἰωσήφ, στάθηκε τίμιος μὲ τὸν ἑαυτό του, μὲ τὸ Θεὸ τῶν πατέρων του, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς συνανθρώπους του. Κι ἐνῶ οἱ πειρασμοὶ τῆς φιληδονίας καὶ τῆς ἐκδίκησης στὴν περίπτωσή του ἦταν ιδιαίτερα ἀπειλητικοί, ἐκεῖνος κοσμοῦμενος μὲ σωφροσύνη οὔτε τὴν τιμὴ τοῦ κυρίου του προσέβαλε οὔτε τὰ ἀδελφία του ποὺ τὸν πούλησαν σκλάβο ἐκδικήθηκε. Καὶ μπορεῖ ἡ Αἰγύπτια σύζυγος τοῦ ἀρχιμάγειρα τοῦ Φαραῶ Πετεφοῦ νὰ εἶδε τὸν Ἰωσήφ ὡς σκευὸς ἠδονῆς, ἐκεῖνος ὅμως δὲν ἐνέδωσε στὸ πάθος. Μὲ ἀμετάτρεπτη γνώμη *ἔφυγε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, καὶ γυμνὸς οὐκ ἠσχύνετο, ὡς ὁ πρωτόπλαστος πρὸ τῆς παρακοῆς*.

Ἡ τιμιότητα ὅμως πληρώθηκε ἀκριβὰ, ἀφοῦ ὁδηγήθηκε στὴ φυλακὴ. Ἀλλὰ κι ἐκεῖ ἡ χάρη τοῦ

Θεοῦ δὲν τὸν ἐγκατέλειψε. Ἀντίθετα, ὅπως γράφει ὁ ὄσιος Νικόδημος, ἔγινε ἀφορητὴ «μὲ τὴν ἐπίλυση τῶν ὄνειράτων, ὅπου ἐκεῖ εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν τινῶν βασιλικῶν καταδίκων ἔκαμε, τὸν ἐβγάνουν ἀπὸ τὴν φυλακὴν καὶ εἰς τὸν βασιλεῖα παρρησιάζεται καὶ κύριος πάσης γῆς Αἰγύπτου γίνεται». Ὁ Ἰωσήφ παρὰ τὶς ἀντίξοες ἐξωτερικὲς συνθήκες ἀκολούθησε πιστὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴ φωνὴ τῆς ἀγνῆς του συνείδησης. Διότι, ἐνῶ τὰ ἀδελφία του τὸν πούλησαν, κινούμενα ἀπὸ φθόνον ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ πατέρα τους πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐκεῖνος ὄχι μόνο τὰ δέχθηκε καὶ τὰ στήριξε στὴν ἀδυναμία τους, ὡς «Ἄρχων γῆς Αἰγύπτου», ἀλλὰ θεώρησε καὶ τὴν πώλησή του στοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες ὡς θέλημα Θεοῦ!

Τὸν πάγκαλο Ἰωσήφ ἀκολουθοῦν στὸ πνευματικὸ χορὸ οἱ φρόνιμες παρθένες, ποὺ κρατᾶνε λαμπάδες ὀλόφωτες γεμίζοντας τὲς μὲ λάδι, τὶς θεῖες ἀρετές. Ἔπονται οἱ πιστὲς μαθήτριες, ἡ πόρνη γυναίκα, καὶ ὁ εὐγνώμων ληστής. Ἀναρωτιέται ὁ εὐλαβῆς προσκυνητῆς τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδας, τί νὰ πρωτοθαυμάσει ἀπὸ τὴ ἱερὴ αὐτὴ χορεία, τὴν φιλόθεη ξυνωρίδα; Τὴν ἐπαγρύπνηση καὶ ἐγρήγορηση τῶν πέντε φρονίμων παρθένων; Τὰ δάκρυα καὶ τοὺς στεναγμοὺς τῆς πόρνης; Τοῦ ληστή τὴ μετάνοια; Τὴν παρηγορία καὶ τῶν θάρρους τῶν μαθητριῶν; Ὅλα μποροῦν νὰ ἐμπνεύσουν. Ὅλα κρύβουν τὴ φύτρα τῆς ἐν Πνεύματι ζωῆς.

Ἀκολουθοῦν τὸν Χριστὸ στὸ ἐκούσιο πάθος καὶ συμπληρώνουν τὴ μεγάλη χορεία, οἱ φοβισμένοι, ταραγμένοι καὶ σκεπτικοὶ μαθητῆς, ποὺ παρότι μυσταγωγοῦνται στὸ μυστήριον τοῦ σταυροῦ ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Κύριο, τὰ γεγονότα τοὺς ὑπερβαίνουν καὶ σκανδαλίζονται. Ὁ Ἰούδας προδίδει τὸ Διδάσκαλο καὶ χάνεται μέσα στὴν ἐωσφορικὴ μοναξιά καὶ τὸ πάθος τῆς φιλαργυρίας. Ὁ Πέτρος ἀρνεῖται τὸν Κύριο, ἄλλοι μαθητῆς ραθυμοῦν, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι σκορπιζονται *ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα*. Χρειάσθηκαν τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετάνοιας, οἱ λαμπηδόνες τῆς θείας ἀγάπης καὶ ἡ ἀναστάσιμη ἐμπειρία, γιὰ νὰ ἀποκαταστήσουν οἱ μαθητῆς ὡς ἀπόστολοι πλέον πλήρη κοινωνία μὲ τὸν Ζωοδότη Χριστό.

Ἐπάρχουν κι ἄλλοι, ποὺ δὲν θεωροῦν ἀπλῶς «μακρόθεν» τὰ γενόμενα, ἀλλὰ καταδικάζουν ὡς κακοῦργο τὸν εὐεργέτη, ὡς παράνομο τὸ νομοθέτη, *ὡς κατάκριτον τὸν πάντων βασιλεῖα*. Καὶ δὲν εἶναι μόνο οἱ Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι, εἶναι οἱ ἀρηνητῆς ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ θρησκόληπτοι ὄλων τῶν αἰώνων ποὺ κατακρίνουν καὶ δικάζουν ὅλους τοὺς ἄλλους, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν κουνοῦν τὸ δάκτυλό τους νὰ μποῦν στὴ βασιλεία Του. Λόγω τῆς σκληροκαρδίας καὶ τῆς οἰήσης ἀδυνατοῦν νὰ ἀγαπήσουν τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸ συνάνθρωπο καὶ μένουν *ἔξω τοῦ νυμφῶνος τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ*.

## Ένα Πνευματικό Φυτόριο!

Πηγή: Εφημερίδα «Η Βραδυνή», 8 Ιουνίου 1960.

Οί άγρυπνίες του Άγίου Έλισαίου σταθήκανε πνευματικό φυτώριο. Μέσα στο ταπεινό αυτό έκκλησάκι, στους Άγέρηδες, τὸ ἰδιωτικό, τὸ ἀνύπαρκο τώρα πιά, ἀφοῦ τὸ γκρέμισε ἡ σκαπάνη τῆς οἰκονομικῆς σκοπιμότητος, ὁ Ὅσιος παπα-Νικόλας ὁ Πλανᾶς, ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Μωραϊτίδης καὶ μία πλειάδα ταπεινῶν ὀρθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν, εἶχανε ὀργανώσει αὐτὲς τὶς άγρυπνίες.

Λειτουργὸς ὁ ἀκούραστος παπα-Πλανᾶς, δεξιὸς ψάλτης ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, κι ἀριστερὸς ψάλτης ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Μωραϊτίδης. Καὶ γύρω τους ἕνα έκκλησίασμα ἀπὸ ταπεινοὺς Χριστιανούς, ποὺ δὲν κουραζόντανε, οὔτε ἀπὸ τὶς μακρὺς ἀκολουθίες, οὔτε ἀπὸ τὴν άγρυπνία, οὔτε ἀπὸ τὴν ὀρθοστασία. Οὔτε τὰ βλέφαρά τους κλείνανε, οὔτε τὰ γόνατά τους λυγίζανε.

Οἱ ταπεινοὶ αὐτοὶ Χριστιανοί, οὔτε συλλόγους εἶχανε σκαρώσει, οὔτε λόγους βγάζανε, οὔτε συχνάζανε στὰ γραφεῖα τῶν ἐφημερίδων, ἀπαιτώντας προσωπικὴ προβολὴ καὶ παινέματα τῶν δημοσιογράφων, οὔτε καλοῦσαν κανέναν ἰσχυρὸ νὰ ἔρθη, νὰ τοὺς καμάρωσῃ καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἐνίσχυσῃ.

Δὲν κάνανε κοινωνικὸ Χριστιανισμό, οὔτε εἶχε ψηλώσει ὁ νοῦς τους, ὥστε νὰ θέλουνε νὰ βολέψουνε τὰ στραβά τοῦ κόσμου, σὰν κείνους τοὺς πιὸ θεόστραβους ἀπ' ὄλους, ποὺ παρασταίνουνε τὸν ἐκλεχτό τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν προωρισμένο ν' ἀποκαταστήσῃ τὴν δικαιοσύνη του, στὸν ξεστρατισμένο κόσμο.

Εἶτανε ἄνθρωποι ἀπλοὶ, ταπεινοὶ Χριστιανοί, ποὺ πιστεύανε στὸν Θεάνθρωπο Χριστό, σὴν Παναγία Θεοτόκο καὶ στοὺς ἁγίους Του. Καὶ πιστοὶ στὸ Λόγο Του, δὲν νοιαζότανε γιὰ τὰ κρίματα τῶν ἄλλων, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὰ δικά τους. Κι' αὐτὲς τὶς δικές τους πληγὲς πασχίζανε νὰ ἐπουλώσουνε μὲ νηστεῖες, μὲ προσευχή, μὲ καθημερινὴ παρουσία στὸν Οἶκο Του, μ' ἀδιάκοπο διάβασμα τοῦ Λόγου Του, τοῦ

Εὐαγγελικοῦ καὶ τῶν βίων τῶν ἁγίων, ποὺ βρῖσκανε μέσα στὰ συναξάρια.

Οὔτε ὁ παπα-Νικόλας ὁ Πλανᾶς, οὔτε ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, οὔτε ὁ Μωραϊτίδης, οὔτε κανέναν ἀπὸ κείνους, ποὺ άγρυπνούσανε στὸν Ἅγιο Ἐλισαῖο, δὲν σπαταλοῦσανε τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς, βγάζοντας λόγους, τάχα γιὰ νὰ σώσουνε τοὺς ἄλλους, ἐνῶ σὴν οὐσία ἂν τὸ κάνανε δὲν θὰ σώζανε κανέναν μὲ τὰ λόγια, ἄλλα μονάχα θὰ προβάλλανε τὸν ἑαυτό τους.

Σὰν γνήσιοι ὀρθόδοξοι εἶχανε ἀφήσει στοὺς φραγκίζοντες καὶ προτεσταντίζοντες τὶς εὐσεβεῖς φλυαρίες καὶ κείνοι ζούσανε τὴν λειτουργικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ποὺ εἶναι μυστήριο καὶ κλείνει μέσα της ὅσα κανένα κήρυγμα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κλείσῃ.

Γιατί ὅλα τὰ λέει ἡ Λειτουργία, τὸ Λυχνικό, τὸ Ψαλτήρι κι' ἡ ὀρθόδοξη ὑμνογραφία. Ὅλα, πέρα γιὰ πέρα. Καὶ τόσο πολὺ, ποὺ καὶ μία προσταφαίρεσι δὲν εἶναι δυνατὴ καὶ νοητὴ.

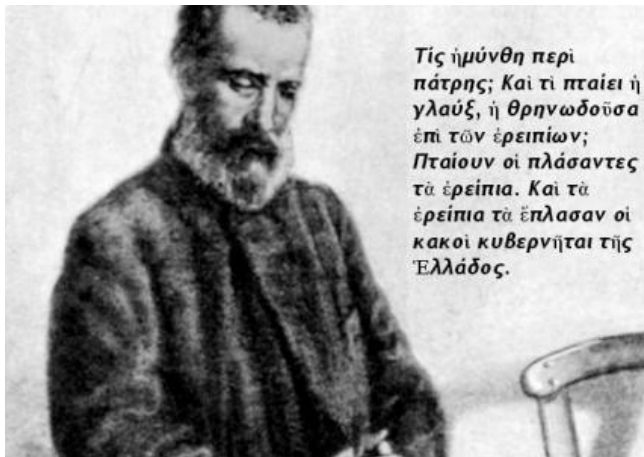
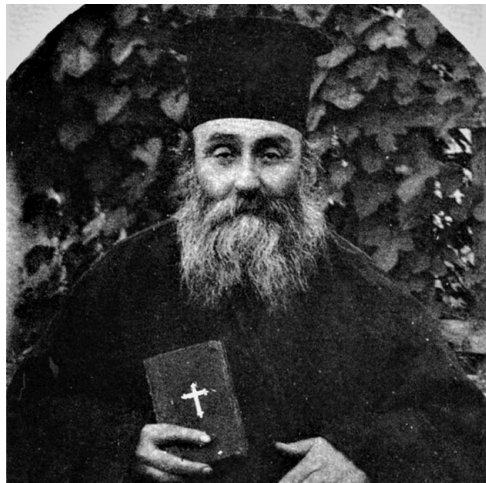
Ὁ παπα-Νικόλας ὁ Πλανᾶς στάθηκε ἡ πιὸ ὀλοκληρωμένη λειτουργικὴ ἔκφρασι μέσα σὴν ὀρθόδοξη Ἑλλάδα τοῦ δευτέρου μισοῦ τοῦ περασμένου αἰῶνα καὶ τῶν πρώτων εἰκοσιπέντε χρόνων

τοῦ τωρινοῦ. Λειτουργικὴ στάθηκε ὀλάκερη ἡ ζωὴ του. Ἡμερώματα ἄρχιζε καὶ μεσημέρι τελείωνε. Γιατί τάλεγε ὅλα, γιατί μνημόνευε ἑκατοντάδες νεκροὺς καὶ ζωντανούς. Καὶ τὸ έκκλησίασμα οὔτε ἀβάσταχτες εὕρισκε αὐτὲς τὶς ἀκολουθίες, οὔτε καταπονετικές, οὔτε ἐμπόδιο σὶς δουλειές του.

Φτωχοὶ καὶ πολλοὶ μεροκαματιάρηδες ἦτανε

αὐτοὶ ποὺ έκκλησιαζόντανε στὸν Ἅγιο Ἐλισαῖο, ἢ στὸν Ἅγιο Γιάννη τὸν Κυνηγό, τῆς ὁδοῦ Βουλιαγμένης, ὅπου χρόνια λειτουργοῦσεν ὁ παπα-Νικόλας ὁ Πλανᾶς. Ἄνθρωποι τῆς ἀνάγκης, θεόφτωχοι, κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι.

Κι' ὁμως δὲν κουραζόντανε γιὰ ἕνα καὶ μόνον λόγο: Δὲν ἦτανε ξένοι πρὸς τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τὶς ἀκολουθίες. Τὶς διαβάζανε, ξέφανε ὅλα ἀπ' ἔξω καὶ γευότανε τὴ Λειτουργία ἢ τὶς ἀκολουθίες τῶν άγρυπνιῶν, ὅταν τὶς τελοῦσε ἕνας ἱερέας ταπεινὸς καὶ καθαρὸς τὴν καρδίαν. Αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος γευότανε ὅσα ἔλεγε ὁ



Τὶς ἠμύνθη περὶ  
πάτρης; Καὶ τι πταίει ἡ  
γλαυξ, ἡ θρηνωδοῦσα  
ἐπὶ τῶν ἐρείπιῶν;  
Πταίουσι οἱ πλάσαντες  
τὰ ἐρείπια. Καὶ τὰ  
ἐρείπια τὰ ἐπλάσαν οἱ  
κακοὶ κυβερνήται τῆς  
Ἑλλάδος.



λειτουργός ὅσα ψέλνανε οἱ ψαλτάδες.

Τὰ σιγόλεγε καὶ τὰ σιγόφελνε καὶ τὸ ἐκκλησίασμα καὶ κάθε λέξη καὶ κάθε φράση καὶ κάθε μουσικὸς φθόγγος ἦτανε βίωμα. Δὲν ἀκούγανε λόγια ἀδιάφορα γι' αὐτοὺς ἢ μουσικὴ κοσμικὴ ἢ εἰκόνες φράγκικες, θεατρικὲς καὶ γλυκανάλατες.

Ὅ,τι ἀκούγανε σκορποῦσε γαλήνη στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ στὸ πνεῦμα τους καὶ τὰ μάτια τους δεχότανε σὰν ἴαμα τ' ἅγια εἰκονίσματα τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἀγιογραφίας.

Ὅξω καὶ μακρὰ ἀπ' τὴ λειτουργικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν βρῖσκανε οὔτε λύτρωση, οὔτε ἀνάπαυση.

Ὁ πόθος τους γιὰ χριστιανικὴ δικαιοσύνη, ὅπως τὸ βλέπουμε τόσες φορὲς στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη καὶ τοῦ Μωραϊτίδη, δὲν ἔκρυψε ποτὲ τὴν ὀργὴ τῆς ἐκδίκησης.

Ἡ ἀγάπη ποὺ τοὺς θέρμαινε δὲν ἦτανε ἡ ἀνήσυχη κι' ἐναγώνια ἀγάπη τοῦ κόσμου, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀτάραχη καὶ εἰρηνικὴ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Αὐτοὶ οἱ ἐπιζῶντες, ὅπως καὶ μερικοὶ ἄλλοι, καθὼς καὶ κείνοι ποὺ κοιμηθήκανε ἐν Κυρίῳ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγρυπνητὲς τοῦ προφήτη Ἐλισαίου, ξέρουνε πὼς ἡ λογικὴ τοῦ κόσμου δὲν ἔχει θέση στὸ χριστιανικὸ περίβολο, ὅπως δὲν ἔχει θέση κι' ἡ μεθοδολογία τοῦ κόσμου.

Γιατί αὐτὰ κρίνοντάς τα μὲ τὰ μέτρα τους καὶ βλέποντάς τα μὲ τὰ κοντόθωρα μάτια τους δὲν μποροῦνε νὰ καταλάβουνε πὼς ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἶναι ἡ πιὸ μεγάλη περιπέτεια, ἡ πιὸ μεγάλη ὑπερβολὴ καὶ τὸ πιὸ ἀπίστευτο ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ πιὸ ἀπίστευτα τοῦ κόσμου.

Γιὰ τοῦτο κι' ἡ λειτουργικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ἡ ὀρθοδοξία ἀνόθευτη ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς κοσμικὸφρονες ἐπιδράσεις τοῦ δυτικοῦ κόσμου.



## Νὰ μὴ Φύγη Σήμερα ἢ Μέρα μὲ Ἀργολογίες, νὰ Λέμε τὴν «Εὐχή»

Ἀπὸ μία ὁμιλία τῆς Γερόντισσας Μακρίνας, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Λόγια Καρδίας», ἐκδόσεις I.M. Παναγίας Ὁδηγητρίας Πορτιαρῖά Βόλου.

Δὲν χορταίνονται τὰ «γράμματα» τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδος! Ἕνας Θεὸς δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ κἀνὴ τὸν ἄνθρωπο λείο. Τὸν ὕβρισε καὶ τὸν ἐβλασφήμησαν. Εἶδατε τί ἔλεγε. «Διψῶ», «Κύριε, ἵνατί μὲ ἐγκατέλιπες;». Εἶχε πόνο τὴν ὥρα τοῦ Σταυροῦ, γιατί γνώριζε ὅτι ναὶ μὲν θὰ σταυρωθῆ, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι θὰ ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν θὰ ἐκτελοῦν τοὺς λόγους Του. Τί

ὠραία γραμματάκια! Τί ὠραία ποὺ συνομιλοῦσε μὲ τὸν Πατέρα Του! Τί ὠραία λόγια ἔλεγε στοὺς Ἀποστόλους! Τί συμβουλὲς τοὺς ἔδινε! Δὲν Τὸν καταλάβαιναν, τοὺς νικοῦσε ὁ ὕπνος, εἶχαν σκοτοδίνη. Τί ὠραῖο αὐτὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο! Πολὺ μ' ἀρέσει. Τί ὠραία ποὺ συμβουλεύει καὶ παρακαλεῖ τοὺς Μαθητάς!

Ὅταν ὁ νοῦς μας εἶναι καθαρὸς καὶ βρῖσκεται συνέχεια σὲ θεωρία κοντὰ στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ κάνουμε πνευματικὸ ἀγώνα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ δεχώμαστε ὅ,τι θὰ μᾶς φέρῃ ὁ διάβολος, ὅπως λογισμοὺς καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα, τότε ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ εἶναι κοντὰ μας. Θὰ βλέπουμε καὶ θὰ αἰσθανώμαστε τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ μας. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος ἔλεγε: «Τὸ χέρι μου εἶναι πῆλινο καὶ ἡ γλῶσσα μου εἶναι πῆλινη καὶ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ γράψω οὔτε νὰ διηγηθῶ τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ· εἶναι ἀνέκφραστα.»

Ἀλλὰ μόνο διὰ τῆς θεωρίας ποὺ κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἐκκλησίας, διὰ τῆς «εὐχῆς» ποὺ λέει, διὰ τῆς ἀδιαλείπτου προσευχῆς ποὺ ἔχει μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ του καὶ ὅταν δὲν φεύγῃ ὁ νοῦς του ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, ὁ Θεὸς «μεγενθύνει» τὴ διάνοιά του καὶ τὴν κάνει νὰ βλέπῃ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα νοερῶς, δηλαδὴ τὰ αἰσθάνεται, πὼς ἐνεργοῦν τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλέπει τὰ τάγματα τῶν Ἀγγέλων, τῶν Ἀρχαγγέλων, τὰ πολυόμματα Χερουβεὶμ καὶ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα Σεραφεῖμ.

Τὰ πολυόμματα Χερουβεὶμ εἶναι ἡ ἐξυπηρέτησι τοῦ Θεοῦ· εἶναι στὰ πόδια τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ περιτριγυρίζουν τὸν θρόνο Του, ἔτοιμα ἀνὰ πάσα στιγμή νὰ ἐκτελέσουν τὰ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μόλις μᾶς ἔρχεται ὁ κακὸς λογισμὸς, ἀμέσως νὰ πηγαίνουμε τὸν νοῦ μας σὲ ἀγαθὸ λογισμὸ. Νὰ μὴ μένη μῶμος στὴ διάνοιά μας. Μᾶς ἦρθε κατάκρισι; Νὰ πηγαίνουμε τὸ λογισμὸ μας στὴν Κόλασι, νὰ κάνουμε κάμποσες μετάνοιες... καὶ θὰ δοῦμε πὼς θὰ φύγῃ!

Νὰ προσέχουμε τὰ πάθη. Ὁ θυμὸς, ἡ ζήλεια καὶ ὁ φθόνος εἶναι τὰ μεγαλύτερα. Ἔτσι εἶναι. Ἔχουμε ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πάθη ποὺ ξεφυτρώνουν ἀπὸ ἴδω καὶ ἀπὸ ἴκει καὶ ἄμα δὲν τὰ κόψουμε μὲ τὸ δρεπάνι, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ προκόψουμε. Ἦρθε ἡ ζήλεια; Κόψε την. Ἦρθε τὸ ἄλλο; Πέταξέ το. Τὸ ἐπόμενο; Θέρισέ το. Νὰ μὴ ἔχουμε τὰ χεράκια μας σταυρωμένα καὶ μᾶς κυριεύουν τὰ πάθη.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ εἶναι πολυόματος· νὰ μὴ φύγῃ σήμερα ἢ μέρα μὲ ἀργολογίες. Τί λέει ὁ Γέροντας; Νὰ λέμε τὴν «εὐχή»: **Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με!**

Τί κοντὰ μυαλὰ εἴμαστε καὶ μᾶς αἰχμαλωτίζουν ὅλα τὰ χαζὰ καὶ τὰ τιποτένια καὶ χάνουμε αὐτὰ τὰ μεγαλεῖα! Καὶ μετὰ τί νὰ κάνουμε; Μᾶς φταίει ὁ ἕνας ὁ ἄλλος. Ὅταν θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν «εὐχή», θὰ λέμε ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι εἶναι ἀγιασμένοι κι ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ καὶ θὰ αἰσθανώμαστε μεγάλη συμπάθεια πρὸς ὅλους.

## «Σήμερα Γκρεμίστηκε μία Έκκλησιά»

Γράφει ο Δημήτρης Νατσιός, δάσκαλος, Κιλκίς.

Στά χρόνια του Σταλινισμού, ο οποίος είχε μετατρέψει την σοβιετική χώρα σε άπεραντο εργοτάξιο κνουτοκρατούμενων μυρμηγκιών (κνούτο=μαστίγιο) ή σε στρατόπεδο εξοντώσεως αντιφρονούντων, χιλιάδες φυλακισμένοι είχαν επισκεπτήριο μία φορά τόν χρόνο, για δεκαπέντε λεπτά.

Οί γυναίκες τους—όπως μās τὸ διηγείται ὁ Σολζενίτσιν στὸ «Ἀρχιπέλαγος Γκουλάγκ—ποὺ συχνὰ ζοῦσαν χιλιάδες μίλια μακριά, μάζευαν καπίκι-καπίκι τὰ ναῦλα τους, ὅλον τὸ χρόνο, γιὰ νὰ ταξιδέψουν τὴν ὀρισμένη ἡμερομηνία, ποὺ μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀντικρίσουν τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ συζύγου τους, μόλις γιὰ 15 λεπτά, καὶ μάλιστα πίσω ἀπὸ ἓνα ἀγκαθωτὸ πλέγμα. Κι ἐνῶ «ζοῦσαν» γι' αὐτὴν τὴν στιγμή καὶ ἐτοίμαζαν τὰ λόγια, ποὺ θὰ τοὺς ἔλεγαν μὲς στὰ λίγα αὐτὰ λεπτά, τὶς πιδὸ πολλές φορὲς δὲν ἄνοιγαν καθόλου τὸ στόμα, μόνο κοιτάζονταν μὲ πόνο ὅλη τὴν ὥρα, ὥσπου νὰ τὶς ἀπομακρύνουν οἱ δεσμοφύλακες. Κι αὐτὸ γινόταν γιὰ 10, 15 καὶ 25 χρόνια.

Τί κρατοῦσε τόσο σφιχτὰ δεμένες τὶς καρδιὲς ἐκεῖνες; Μὰ το βαθὺ καὶ δυνατὸ μυστήριο τῆς οἰκογένειας, τὸ εὐλογημένο καταφύγιο. Τὰ δεκαπέντε λεπτὰ ἀρκοῦσαν, γιὰ νὰ βιώσουν καὶ νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώσουν οἱ δύστυχες ἐκεῖνες γυναῖκες, τὴν θεόξευκτο ἔνωση.

Εἶναι γνωστὸ πὼς, ὅσο βασιλευαν στὶς χώρες ἐκεῖνες τὰ σκοτάδια τοῦ μαρξισμού, οἱ θεσμοὶ ποὺ δέχτηκαν τὰ πιδὸ βαριά πλήγματα ἦταν ἡ οἰκογένεια καὶ ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἡ ὁποία περιβάλλει τὸν γάμο καὶ τὴν οἰκογένεια μὲ τὴν ὁμορφιά καὶ τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ μυστηρίου.

Θυμίζω ὅτι ἡρωας τῆς Σοβιετικῆς Ἑνώσεως καὶ παράδειγμα πρὸς μίμηση, εἶχε ἀναδειχθεῖ ὁ Πάβελ Μορόζιν, ὁ φανατισμένος ἔφηβος, ποὺ κατήγγειλε στὶς ἀρχὲς τοὺς γονεῖς του, ὡς κουλάκους (=εὐποροὶ χωρικοὶ), προκαλώντας τὴν δολοφονία τους καὶ τοῦ ὁποίου τὸ ἄγαλμα κατεδαφίστηκε, ὅταν σαρώθηκε ὁ «ὑπαρκτὸς» ζῆφος.

Ὁ Μορόζιν εἶχε ὑψωθεῖ σὲ πρότυπο ἐπαναστατικῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ κομματικῆς ἀφοσιώσεως, ὄντας στὴν πραγματικότητα ἡ πιδὸ κυνικὴ ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ ὀλοκληρωτικοῦ πνεύματος, αὐτοῦ ποὺ ἀπέκοβε τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ κάθε κοινωνικὸ, πνευματικὸ καὶ προσωπικὸ δεσμό, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀπορροφηθεῖ ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου ἀπὸ τὸ Κόμμα, νὰ μεταβληθεῖ σὲ πειθίγιο ἐνεργούμενό του.

Ὅταν κατέπεσε τὸ καθεστὼς τοῦ τρόμου, ὅλα αὐτὰ σωριάστηκαν σὲ συντρίμια. Ὅμως, ὅ,τι ἄρχισε ἐκεῖ, τελειώνει στὴν σάπια Δύση, τῆς ὁποίας καταντήσαμε σκωληκοειδῆ ἀπόφυση καὶ κακέκτυπο. Τὸ βλέπουμε ὅλοι. Βάλθηκαν ὅλα τὰ κατακάθια τῆς ψευτοπροόδου νὰ μαγαρίσουν καὶ νὰ διαλύσουν τὴν οἰκογένεια. Σύμφωνα συμβίωσης,

ἀνάδειξη τῆς ἀσέλγειας σὲ ἰσόκυρο μὲ τὸν γάμο γεγονός, ποινικοποίηση οὐσιαστικά τῆς πολυτεχνίας, πρᾶξεις ποὺ μαραζώνουν τὸ ὀλόδροσο δέντρο τῆς οἰκογένειας. Καὶ ὅπως ἔχω ξαναγράψει τὰ δηλητήρια ἐνσταλάζονται ἀπὸ τὸ σχολεῖο ἀκόμη.

Δὲν θὰ βρεῖς στὸ Δημοτικὸ καὶ τὸ Γυμνάσιο οὔτε ἓνα κείμενο στὰ «περιοδικὰ ποιικίλης ὕλης», τὰ ζοφερὰ βιβλία Γλώσσας, στὸ ὁποῖο νὰ ἐξυμνεῖται καὶ νὰ προβάλλεται ἡ ὑγίης οἰκογένεια. Διαζύγια, ἀπιστίες γονέων, ἐνδοοικογενειακὴ βία, σκῦβαλα καὶ περιτρίμματα, ποὺ μαυρίζουν τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν παιδιῶν. Καὶ μετὰ ἀποροῦμε γιὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμὸ τῶν ἐγκλημάτων συζυγοκτονίας.

Πόσο ἐπικαιρὸς εἶναι ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ὅταν ἔγραφε πρὶν ἀπὸ 50 χρόνια, στὰ «Μυστικὰ Ἄνθη»: «Ἡ

νεότητα μαραζώνει γιατί δὲν ἔχει, ἢ δυστυχημένη, μῆτε σκοπὸ στὴ ζωὴ της, μῆτε ἐνθουσιασμὸ γιὰ κάποιες ιδέες, μῆτε ὄρεξη γιὰ τίποτα. Ἄκεφη καὶ ἀνόρεχτη. Εἶναι σὰν ὑπνοβάτης. Συζητᾷ ὀλοένα γιὰ ἀσήμαντα πράγματα ποὺ τοὺς δίνει μεγάλη

σημασία καὶ εἶναι νὰ κλαίγει κανεὶς ἀκούγοντας τὶς κουβέντες της, τὰ πειράγματά της, καὶ βλέποντας τὶς ἀνόητες σκηνοθεσίες, ποὺ μ' αὐτὲς προσπαθεῖ νὰ δώσει κάποια σημασία στὴ ζωὴ.

«Οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν νέων εἶναι ρημαγμένες ἀπὸ τὰ ἄγρια ἐνστικτα, ποὺ τὰ ἀνεβάσανε στὴν ἐπιφάνεια ἀπὸ τὰ σκοτεινὰ τάρταρα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης, κάποιιοι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, κάποιιοι πνευματικοὶ ἀνθρωποφάγοι, ποὺ ἀνάμεσά τοὺς πρωτοστατεῖ ἓνας τρελὸς λύκος λεγόμενος Νίτσε, μία μούμια σὰν παλιόγρια λεγόμενη Βολταῖρος, κάποιιοι ζοχαδικὸς Φρόνντ, κι ἓνα πλῆθος ἀπὸ τέτοια ὄρνια καὶ κοράκια καὶ νυχτερίδες. Ὅσοι τοὺς θαυμάζανε, ἄς καμαρώσουνε σήμερα τὰ φαρμακερὰ μανιτάρια ποὺ φυτρώσανε μέσα στὶς καρδιὲς καὶ στὶς ψυχὲς τῆς γαγγραινιασμένης ἀνθρωπότητας».

Ἡ ἀπροκάλυπτη ὁμως πολεμικὴ κατὰ τῆς οἰκογένειας «γεννᾶ» καὶ θρέφει καὶ μία ἄλλη καταστρεπτικὴ γιὰ τὴν ὑπαρξή μας παράμετρο. Ὁ θεσμὸς τῆς οἰκογένειας, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ προστασία καὶ θαλπωρὴ, ἱκανοποιεῖ καὶ



τὴν ἀνάγκη ποὺ αἰσθάνεται τὸ ἄτομο νὰ εἶναι μέλος μίας κοινότητας οἰκείας, ἀμεσότερης καὶ προσωπικῆς. Λειτουργεῖ ὡς συνεκτικὸς ἰσθὸς καὶ καταφύγιο. Εἶναι μικρογραφία τῆς πατρίδας. («Δὲν ζεῖ χωρὶς πατρίδα, ἢ ἀνθρώπινη ψυχὴ» λέει ὁ Παλαμᾶς).

Τὶς τελευταῖες ὄμως δεκαετίες ἐν ὀνόματι κάποιου νεφελώδους προοδευτισμοῦ καὶ ἀβασάνιστου ἐξευρωπαϊσμοῦ, καταστρέψαμε ἀδίστακτα τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας ρίζες, ἐγκαταλείψαμε τὴν ἔξοχη παράδοσή μας, ποὺ δὲν ἦταν ἓνα στοιχεῖο αἰσθητικὸ καὶ διακοσμητικὸ ὅπως συνήθως τὸ θεωροῦν οἱ «θολοκοιουλτουριάρηδες», ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑπαρξιακὸ ὑφάδι ζωῆς τοῦ λαοῦ μας, ἀποδυναμώσαμε καὶ διαλύουμε πιά τὴν οἰκογένεια καὶ ἰδοὺ τὰ ἐπιχειρήματα τῆς ἀφροσύνης.

Διάλυση τῆς οἰκογένειας σημαίνει διάλυση καὶ τῆς πατρίδας!

Διαβάζουμε τοῦτες τὶς πονηρὲς ἡμέρες ὅτι ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ διαζύγια φτάνουν οἰκογένειες λόγω τοῦ «ιοῦ τῆς διχόνοιας». Αἰτία τὸ ἐμβόλιο. Ἡ παραφροσύνη δὲν περιγράφεται. Στὰ χωριά μας στὴν Πιερίδα ἔλεγαν οἱ παπποῦδες μας, ὅταν ἄκουγαν γιὰ διαζύγια καὶ διάλυση οἰκογένειας, ὅτι «σήμερα γκρεμίστηκε μία ἐκκλησιά». Μεγάλη κουβέντα. Καταδεικνύει τὴν σπουδαιότητα τοῦ γάμου, τῆς συζυγίας. «Μόνο τὸ φτυάρι τοῦ νεκροθάφτη χώριζε τὰ ἀντρούγνα», ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ μακαριστὸς μητροπολίτης Φλωρίνης, Ἀύγουστίνος Καντιώτης. Ὁ λαὸς μας θεωροῦσε τὸ γλέντι τοῦ γάμου τὴν μεγαλύτερη χαρὰ στὴν ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ εὐχόταν «καὶ στίς χαρὲς σου» στοὺς ἐλεύθερους. Στὰ δημοτικὰ του τραγούδια βάζει τὴν φύση νὰ συμμετέχει, νὰ συστενάξει καὶ νὰ συνωδίνει, ὅταν χωρίζονται ἀντρούγνα.

† † †

*Ποτάμι ἐπλημμύρισε κι εἰς περιβόλι ἐμβαίνει  
Ποτίζει δέντρα καὶ μηλιές, μηλιές καὶ κνιδονίτσες.  
Καὶ μία μηλιά γλυκομηλιά δὲν σώνει νὰ ποτίσει.  
Ἄλλη μηλιά τὴν ἐρωτᾷ κι ἄλλη μηλιά τῆς λέγει:  
Μηλιά τὰ μήλα σὲ βαροῦν ἢ ὁ καρπὸς σὲ βλάπτει,  
ἢ ὁ περιβολάρης σου νερὸ δὲν σὲ ποτίζει;*

*Μηδὲ τὰ μήλα μὲ βαροῦν, μηδ' ὁ καρπὸς μὲ βλάπτει,  
μηδ' ὁ περιβολάρης μου νερὸ δὲν μὲ ποτίζει,  
μονάχα στὴ ριζούλα μου ἀντρούγνο εὐλογήθη  
κι ὄρκο ἔκαμε στοὺς κλώνους μου νὰ μὴν ἀποχωρίσει,  
τώρα θωρῶ χωρίζονται καὶ κτρινοφυλλιάζω.*



Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀπέβαλε τὴν φιλαυτία, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ ἡμιτέρα ὄλων τῶν παθῶν, μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ εὐκολα θεραπεύει καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ πάθη.

**Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητής**

## Τὸ Χειρότερο Κακὸ

Μητρ. Ἀύγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010).

Ὅτι μιλήσουμε, ἀγαπητοί μου, ὅπως πάντοτε, ἀπλᾶ. Ἐνα κακὸ ποὺ φοβοῦνται ὅλοι εἶνε ἡ ἀσθένεια. Ἐὰν ἀρρωστήσουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ἀνησυχοῦν, τρέχουν στὸ γιατρό, ἀγοράζουν φάρμακα, προσπαθοῦν νὰ γίνουν καλά. **Ἐπάργει ἄραγε ἄλλο κακὸ μεγαλύτερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρρώστια;** Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα θ' ἀπαντήσουμε.

Ἐνας δάσκαλος ρώτησε μιὰ μέρα τοὺς μαθητὰς: Ἀπὸ τὰ δυσάρεστα ποὺ συμβαίνουν στὸν κόσμον ἐσὺ ποιὸ σὰς κάνει πιὸ μεγάλῃ ἐντύπωσι; Οἱ μαθηταὶ ἀπήντησαν. Ἐνας εἶπε: Ἐμένα μοῦ φαίνεται μεγάλο κακὸ νὰ τρακάρουν δυὸ αὐτοκίνητα καὶ νὰ σκοτωθῇ ἄνθρωπος. Ἄλλος εἶπε: Κακὸ εἶνε νὰ περνᾷ λεωφορεῖο ἀπὸ μιὰ γέφυρα, ξαφνικὰ ἢ γέφυρα νὰ πέση, τὸ λεωφορεῖο καὶ βρεθῇ μέσ' στὸ ποτάμι καὶ νὰ πνιγοῦν οἱ ἐπιβάτες. Ἄλλος ἀπήντησε: Κακὸ εἶνε νὰ γίνῃ ναυάγιο, νὰ καταποντισθῇ τὸ καράβι καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἐπιβάτες νὰ χαθοῦν. Ἄλλος εἶπε: Κακὸ εἶνε νὰ πετᾷς καὶ ξαφνικὰ τὸ ἀεροπλάνο νὰ πέση καὶ νὰ γίνῃ κομμάτια. Ἄλλος εἶπε: Ἐγὼ θεωρῶ φοβερὸ νὰ πέση πείνα καὶ νὰ μὴν ἔχουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ψωμὶ νὰ φᾶνε. Ἄλλος εἶπε: Κακὸ μεγάλο εἶνε νὰ γίνῃ σεισμός, νὰ γκρεμιστοῦν τὴ νύχτα ὅλα τὰ σπίτια, καὶ νὰ πλακωθοῦν χιλιάδες ἄνθρωποι. Ἄλλος εἶπε: Κακὸ εἶνε νὰ γίνῃ πυρκαϊά. Καὶ ἄλλος εἶπε: Κακὸ εἶνε νὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος.

Τελειώσατε; ρώτησε ὁ δάσκαλος. Ἐχετε κάτι ἄλλο νὰ πῆτε; Κατὰ εἶνε ὅλα αὐτὰ μὰ παραπάνω ἀπ' αὐτὰ ὑπάρχει ἓνα ἄλλο κακὸ πολὺ μεγαλύτερο... Θεέ μου, φώτισέ μας νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε. Τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ κακὰ εἶνε μιὰ λέξι, ποὺ δὲν τὴν προσέχουμε. Τὴν ἀκοῦμε στὴν ἐκκλησία, στὰ ἱερὰ βιβλία: **τὸ μεγαλύτερο κακὸ εἶνε ἡ ἁμαρτία!**

Ποιὸς τὸ λέει αὐτό; Τὸ λέει τὸ εὐαγγέλιο σήμερα. Σὲ κάποιον χωριὸ ζοῦσε ἓνα παλληκάρι. Ἦταν γερός, μὲ μπράτσα καὶ πόδια δυνατά. Ἐτρεχε σὰν τὸ ζαρκάδι, πήγαινε ὅπου ἤθελε, ἔκανε δουλειές χαρὰ στὸ σπίτι του. Μὰ ξαφνικὰ ἓνα βράδυ μούδιασε τὸ πόδι του τὸ δεξιό, τὸ ἀριστερό, μούδιασε ὅλο τὸ κορμί του κ' ἔπεσε στὸ κρεβάτι. Δὲν μπόρεσε πιά νὰ σηκωθῇ. Αὐτός, ποὺ ἔτρεχε χιλιόμετρα, δὲν μπορούσε νὰ κάνῃ ἓνα βῆμα, οὔτε τὸ κουτάλι του νὰ σηκώσῃ ἢ μάνα του τὸν τάϊζε. Πόδια εἶχε, καὶ πόδια δὲν εἶχε· χέρια εἶχε, καὶ χέρια δὲν εἶχε. Ἀπλῶς μόνο ἀνέπνεε, τίποτα περισσότερο. Οἱ γονεῖς του ἀσφαλῶς θὰ ἔκαναν ὅ,τι ἔλεγε ἢ ἐπιστήμη. Ἀλλὰ τοῦ κάκου ὁ παράλυτος ἔμενε ἀθεράπευτος, σὰν νεκρὸς πάνω στὸ κρεβάτι.

Πέρασαν χρόνια ἔτσι. Κάποτε ἀκούστηκε, ὅτι ἦρθε στὸ χωριὸ κάποιος ξένος. Ἦταν πάμπτωχος, δὲν εἶχε δραχμὴ στὴν τσέπη, δὲν εἶχε σπίτι νὰ κοιμηθῇ ὅταν ὁμως μιλοῦσε τὰ λόγια του ἦταν γλυκύτερα ἀπ' τὸ

μέλι, κι όπου άπλωνε τὸ ἅγιό του χέρι ἔκανε θαύματα. Ὅλοι γι' αὐτὸν μιλοῦσαν. Ἦταν ὁ Χριστός. Ὅταν ἄκουσε γι' αὐτὸν τὸ παλληκάρι, εἶπε: Ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ μὲ κάνη καλά! Παρακάλεσε φίλους καὶ συγγενεῖς, τὸν σήκωσαν καὶ τὸν πῆγαν στὸ Χριστό. Τί περιμένε τώρα ὁ παράλυτος ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό; Ν' ἀπλώσῃ τὸ ἅγιό του χέρι ἐπάνω του καὶ νὰ τὸν κάνη καλά. Αὐτὸ ἔκανε ὁ Χριστός; Δὲν ἔκανε αὐτό. Ἦ μάλλον τὸ ἔκανε κι αὐτό, ἀλλὰ προηγουμένως τοῦ λέει: *Θάρσει, τέκνον ἀφένονται σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου*—παιδί μου ἔχε θάρρος, σοῦ συγχωροῦνται τὰ ἁμαρτήματά σου. (Ματθ. 9:2).

Γιατί ἄραγε, ἐνῶ πῆγε γιὰ νὰ θεραπευθῆ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀσθένεια τοῦ σώματος, ὁ Χριστὸς πρῶτα εἶπε *Τέκνον ἀφένονται σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου*; Τί ἤθελε νὰ δείξῃ μ' αὐτό;

Δὲν ἀδιαφορεῖ ὁ Χριστὸς γιὰ τὸ σῶμα. Ὅχι. Γιατὶ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ἔφτιαξε, κ' εἶνε ἓνα ἀριστούργημα. Καὶ ἡ καρδιὰ καὶ τὰ πνευμόνια καὶ οἱ ἀρτηρίες καὶ τὰ νεῦρα, ὅλα εἶνε ἀξιοθαύμαστα. Ἐνδιαφέρεται ὁ Χριστὸς γιὰ τὸ σῶμα. Ἀλλὰ παραπάνω ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ποὺ μιὰ μέρα θὰ σαπίσῃ μέσ' στὸν τάφο, ὁ Χριστὸς ἐνδιαφέρεται γιὰ κάτι ἄλλο ἀπείρως ἀνώτερο· καὶ αὐτὸ εἶνε ἡ ψυχὴ. Καὶ ἀκριβῶς γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ νέου, ποὺ ἦταν κι αὐτὴ ἄρρωστη, φρόντισε ὁ Χριστός. Γι' αὐτὸ τοῦ εἶπε *Τέκνον ἀφένονται σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου*.

Ἦθελε νὰ δείξῃ, ὅτι κακὸ μεγαλύτερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρρώστια εἶνε ἡ ἁμαρτία. Αὐτὴ εἶνε ἡ πηγὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία προέρχονται ὅλα τὰ κακὰ στὸν κόσμο. Ὅ,τι κακὸ νὰ φανταστῆς, ἀπὸ 'κεῖ πηγάζει. Καὶ ἂν κλείσῃς τὴν πηγὴ αὐτὴ, θὰ σταματήσουν ὅλα τὰ κακὰ. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Χριστὸς θεραπεύει πρῶτα τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ παιδιοῦ, ποὺ ἦταν καὶ αὐτὴ ἁμαρτωλὴ. Γιατὶ αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔπαθε τὸ παιδί, ἡ παραλυσία, προερχόταν ἀπὸ ἁμάρτημα. Ἐκανε κάποια ἁμαρτία, καὶ ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς ἁμαρτίας παρέλυσε.

Χειρότερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρρώστια τοῦ σώματος εἶνε ἡ ἀρρώστια τῆς ψυχῆς, ἡ ἁμαρτία. Αὐτὴ σκοτίζει τὸ μυαλό, μολύνει τὰ εὐγενέστερα αἰσθήματα, χαννώνει καὶ παραλύει τὴ θέλησι. Εἶνε ἡ πιὸ μεγάλη ἀσθένεια στὸν κόσμο. Καὶ ὅποιος δὲν προσέξῃ, θὰ ἔχῃ τὸ κατάντημα τοῦ παραλύτου. Σὰς ἀναφέρω μερικὰ παραδείγματα, νὰ δῆτε ποῦ καταντοῦν, ἰδίως τὰ παιδιά καὶ οἱ νέοι, ὅταν ἀφήνουν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους νὰ παρασυρθῆ ἀπὸ τὸ φοβερὸ ῥέυμα τῆς διαφθορᾶς.

Ἦταν ἓνα λαμπρὸ καὶ εὐφυὲς κορίτσι στὴν Ἀθήνα. Πρῶτη στὸ σχολεῖο, περνοῦσε τὶς τάξεις καὶ ἀρίστευε, τὴν καμάρωναν γονεῖς καὶ καθηγηταί. Ξαφνικὰ στόπ! Ἄρχισε νὰ καθυστερῆ στὰ μαθήματα, καὶ τέλος ἔμεινε στὴν ἴδια τάξι. Καὶ μόνο αὐτό; Ἐνῶ ἦταν παιδί ὅλο χαρὰ, τὴν ἔπιασε μελαγχολία· φαγητὸ δὲν ἔτρωγε, τὴ νύχτα δὲν κοιμόταν, σηκωνόταν ἐπάνω, φώναζε, ὠροῦσαν. Τὴν πῆγαν σὲ γιατρούς. Ἐκρυβε κάποιο

μυστικὸ· εἶχε μπλέξει μὲ κακὲς παρέες κι αὐτὲς τὴν κατέστρεψαν. Καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη δὲν εἶχε πιὰ ἡσυχία. Νὰ τ' ἀποτελέσματα τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

Θέλετε ἄλλο παράδειγμα; Στὴν Πτολεμαΐδα ὁδοκαθαριστῆς τῆς πόλεως βρῆκε τὶς πρωινὲς ὥρες ἔξω ἀπὸ ἓνα νυκτερινὸ κέντρο ξαπλωμένη σὲ ἐλεεινὴ κατάστασι, μὲ σκισμένα τὰ ρούχα καὶ μελανιασμένο τὸ πρόσωπο, μιὰ κοπέλλα 16-17 χρονῶν. Τὴ σκουντάει δὲν κουνιόταν. Εἰδοποιεῖ τὴν ἀστυνομία καὶ τὴν πῆρε τὸ «ἐκατό». Εἶδαν κ' ἔπαθαν νὰ τὴν ἀναγνωρίσουν. Ἦταν μιὰ φτωχὴ κοπέλλα, ποὺ ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ ἓνα χωριὸ νὰ κατέβῃ στὴν πόλι νὰ δουλέψῃ νὰ βοηθήσῃ τὸν πατέρα της, κ' ἔπεσε σὲ μαφία, σὲ κακοὺς ἀνθρώπους· αὐτοὶ τὴν κατέστρεψαν, καὶ τὸ πρῶτὴν ἄφησαν ἔτσι.

Θέλετε κι ἄλλα; Πρῶτα στὴν πατρίδα μας οὔτε ἓνας νέος δὲν ἔπαιρνε ναρκωτικά· ἄγνωστο ἦταν τὸ χασίς. Τώρα; Κάθε μέρα βρίσκουν ναρκομανεῖς πεσμένους στὸ δρόμο σὲ ἀθλία κατάστασι. Βλέπεις νέους χαννωμένους, κοιμισμένους, ἀποβλακωμένους. Καὶ εἶνε πολλοί, πάρα πολλοὶ οἱ ναρκομανεῖς. Νὰ λοιπὸν τ' ἀποτελέσματα τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Εἶνε ἀρρώστια χειρότερη ἀπ' τὸν καρκίνο.

Καὶ τὸ συμπέρασμα; Δὲν θὰ ἡσυχάσῃ ἡ γῆ, ἐὰν μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς καρδιές μας δὲν ξεριζωθῆ αὐτὴ ἡ λερναία ὕδρα. **Μία εἶνε ἡ λύσις· μακριὰ ἀπ' τὴν ἁμαρτία!**

Ἔτσι συμβούλευαν παλαιότερα οἱ μανάδες καὶ οἱ γιαγιάδες. Γνώρισα ἓναν ἀνώτατο ὑπάλληλο τοῦ κράτους καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε: Πέρασα ἀπὸ πολλὰ σχολεῖα, πῆγα στὸ ἐξωτερικὸ, μορφώθηκα, ἔμαθα γλώσσες. Ἀλλὰ τώρα τὰ ξέχασα ὅλα σχεδόν. Ἐνα θυμᾶμαι. Εἶχα μιὰ γιαγιὰ ἀγράμματη. Ἐγώ, μικρὸ ἀγοράκι τεσσάρων χρονῶν, βγῆκα στὴ γειτονιά. Ὅταν γύρισα, εἶπα μιὰ κακιὰ λέξι ποὺ ἄκουσα ἔξω, μιὰ βλαστήμια. Μόλις μ' ἄκουσε ἡγιαγιά, παίρνει μὲ τὴ τσιμπίδα ἓνα κάρβουνο, μοῦ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα καὶ μοῦ καίει τὴ γλώσσα. Ἀπὸ τότε δὲν ξαναεἶπα κακὴ λέξι... Ποιὰ μάνη, ποιὰ γιαγιὰ τὸ κάνει σήμερα αὐτό;

Ἦ καὶ νὰ ἴδινε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σβῆσῃ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο ἡ ἁμαρτία! Ἡ γῆ θὰ γινόταν παράδεισος. Θὰ μοῦ πῆτε: Εἶνε δυνατὸν ἓνας ἀνθρώπος νὰ μείνῃ ἀναμάρτητος; Ὅχι βέβαια. Ἀλλὰ γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Χριστὸς ἔδωσε τὴ μετάνοια, ποὺ συγχωρεῖ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα. Καὶ ὅποιος ἀνθρώπος στὸν κόσμο αὐτὸν γλιστρήσῃ, ὄχι ἀπελπισία!

Τί νὰ κάνουμε; Σὰν τὸν παράλυτο νὰ τρέξουμε στὸ Χριστό, σὰν τὴν πόρνη νὰ κλάψουμε, σὰν τὸ ληστὴ νὰ μετανοήσουμε. Νὰ ποῦμε: Χριστέ, συχώρεσέ μας! Κι ἅμα τὸ ποῦμε ἀπ' τὴν καρδιά μας, τότε ἀπὸ τὰ οὐράνια θ' ἀκουστῆ: *Θάρσει, τέκνον ἀφένονται σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου*. Παιδί μου, παίρνω σφουγγάρι καὶ σβήνω τ' ἁμαρτήματά σου· καὶ πρόσεξε ἀπὸ ἴδω κ' ἐμπρὸς νὰ μὴν ἁμαρτάνῃς νὰ φυλάγεσαι ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία ὅπως φυλάγεσαι ἀπὸ τὸ φίδι. (βλ. Σ.Σειρ. 21:2).

*Φεύγε καὶ σώζοι! Ἀμήν.*

## HOLY WEEK: AN EXPLANATION

Source: "Feast of Feasts" magazine, March 2007.

Great Lent and Holy Week are two separate fasts, and two separate celebrations. Great Lent ends on Friday of the fifth week (the day before Lazarus Saturday). Holy Week begins immediately thereafter. Let us explore the meaning of each of the solemn days of Passion Week.

**Lazarus Saturday:** Lazarus Saturday is the day which begins Holy Week. It commemorates the raising of our Lord's friend Lazarus, who had been in the tomb four days. This act confirmed the universal resurrection from the dead that all of us will experience at our Lord's Second Coming. This miracle led many to faith, but it also led to the chief priest's and Pharisees' decision to kill Jesus: *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.*

*If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.*

*And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand; and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him.* (Jn 11:47-57).

**Palm Sunday (The Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem):** Our Lord enters Jerusalem and is proclaimed king—but in an earthly sense, as many people of His time were seeking a political Messiah. Our Lord is King, of course, but of a different type—the eternal King prophesied by Zechariah

the Prophet. We use palms on this day to show that we too accept Jesus as the true King and Messiah of the Jews, Who we are willing to follow—even to the cross.

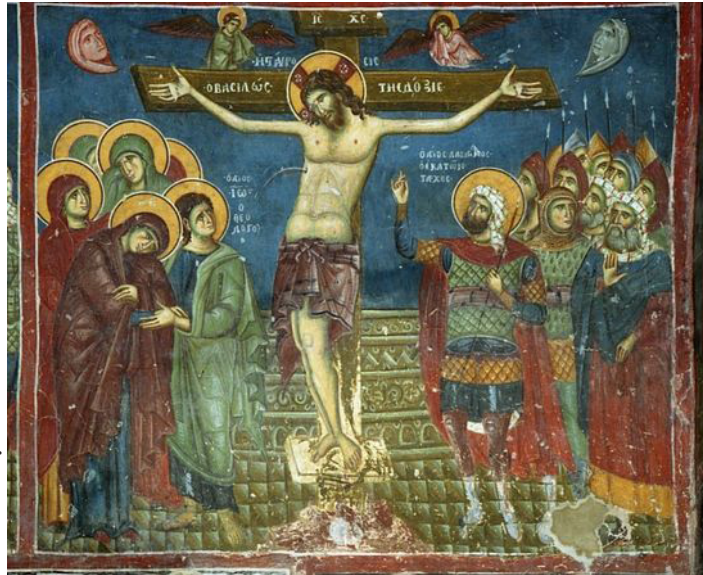
**Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday:** The first thing that must be said about these services, and most of the other services of Holy Week, is that they are *chanted* in anticipation. Each service is rotated ahead twelve hours. The evening service, therefore, is actually the service of the next morning, while the morning services of Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday are actually the services of the coming evening. [This *typicon* is followed in parishes; monasteries (for the most part) follow the original timetable, *Ed.*].

Understanding that, let us turn to the Services of Holy Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (celebrated Palm Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evening). The services of these days are known as the Bridegroom or *Nymphios* Orthros Services. At

the first service of Palm Sunday evening, the priest carries the icon of Christ the Bridegroom in procession, and we chant the *Hymn of the Bridegroom, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh...* We behold Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, bearing the marks of His suffering, yet preparing a marriage Feast for us in God's Kingdom.

Each of these Bridegroom Orthros services has a particular theme. On **Holy Monday**, the Blessed Joseph, the son of Jacob the Patriarch, is commemorated. Joseph is often seen as a "Type of Christ." Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, thrown into a pit, and sold into slavery by them. In the same way, our Lord was rejected, betrayed by His own, and sold into the slavery of death. The Gospel reading for the day is about the barren fig tree, which Christ cursed and withered because it bore no fruit. The fig tree is a parable of those who have heard God's word, but who fail to bear the fruit of obedience. Originally the withering of the fig tree was a testimony against those Jews who rejected God's word and His Messiah. However, it is also a warning to all people, in all times, of the importance of not only hearing the God's word, but putting it into action.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins is read on **Holy Tuesday**. It tells the story of the five virgins who filled their lamps in preparation for receiving the bridegroom while the other five allowed their lamps to go out, and hence were shut out of the marriage feast. This parable is a warning that we must always be prepared to receive our Lord when He comes again. The



theme of the day is reinforced by the *expostelation* hymn we chant: *I see Thy Bridal Chamber adorned, O my Savior, but have no wedding garment that I may enter. O Giver of Light, enlighten the vesture of my soul, and save me.*

The theme of **Holy Wednesday** is repentance and forgiveness. We remember the sinful woman, Kassiane, who anointed our Lord in anticipation of His death. Her repentance and love of Christ is the theme of the wonderful *Hymn of Kassiane* which is chanted on this night, reminding us one more time, before *it is too late*, that we too may be forgiven if we repent.

**Holy Unction:** The Mystery or Sacrament of Holy Unction is celebrated on **Holy Wednesday** evening. Actually this service can be celebrated any time during the year, especially when one is ill. However, because of our need for forgiveness and spiritual healing, we offer this service during Holy Week for the remission of our sins. We should prepare for this service in a prayerful way, as we do for Holy Communion.

**Great and Holy Thursday:** On Holy Thursday we turn to the last events of our Lord and His Passion. Thursday morning begins with a Vespertal Divine Liturgy commemorating the Mystical Supper. As previously mentioned, this is actually Holy Thursday evening's service celebrated in the morning in anticipation. Everyone who is able should make an effort to receive Holy Communion at this service as it was at the Mystical Supper that our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist. At this Liturgy a second Host is consecrated and kept in the Tabernacle. It is from this Host that Holy Communion is distributed to the shut-ins and the sick throughout the coming year.

Thursday evening actually begins the services of Great and **Holy Friday**. The service of the Twelve Passion Gospels commemorates the solemn time of our Lord's Crucifixion. After the reading of the fifth Gospel, the holy cross is carried around the church in procession, and Christ's body is nailed to the cross in the center of the church.

**Great and Holy Friday:** This is a day of strict fast. As little as possible should be eaten on this day. It is the only day in the entire year that no Divine Liturgy of any kind can be celebrated. In the morning we celebrate the Royal Hours. These solemn hours are observed as we read the various accounts and hymns concerning the crucifixion. In the afternoon we celebrate the Vesper service of the taking down of Christ's body from the cross. During the Gospel reading, our Lord's body is taken off the cross and wrapped in a new, white linen sheet. This act commemorates the removal of Christ's body from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea: *And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of*

*myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand. (Jn 19:38-42).*

Later in the service, the *Epitaphios*, or winding-sheet, with Christ's body on it is carried in procession and placed in the recently decorated tomb. In the evening the Lamentations Orthros service is chanted. This service begins in a solemn manner, but by the end of the service we are already anticipating the Resurrection of our Lord. Let us recall again that the Holy Friday evening Orthros is actually the first service of Holy Saturday, the day in which we commemorate our Lord's body resting in the tomb while His all-pure soul descends into Hades to free the faithful of the Old Covenant.

**Great and Holy Saturday:** This day is a day of hope and waiting. In the morning we celebrate a Vespertal Divine Liturgy which commemorates Christ's victory over death. Bright vestments are worn as we anticipate Christ's Resurrection. Laurel leaves are strewn throughout the church during the service, because in the ancient world laurel leaves were a sign of victory. As the leaves are strewn, the choir chants *Arise O God and Judge the earth, for to Thee belong all the nations*. The Old Testament story of Jonah in the belly of the whale is read at this service because Jonah is seen in the Church as a Type of Christ. As Jonah was three days in the belly of the great fish, and was then safely deposited back onto land, so our Lord was three days in the tomb before His glorious Resurrection.

The Vespertal Divine Liturgy of Holy Saturday concludes the services of Holy Week, and brings us to the eve of Great and Holy Pascha.



The mark of a great soul is to endure all things and to serve everyone. The example of this is near at hand: for the Son of Man Himself did not come to be served but to serve, and, what is even greater, He came to give His life as a ransom for many. For what could be greater and more marvelous than a man who not only serves, but who even dies for the sake of the one he serves? Yet the Lord's serving and His humble lowering of Himself to be with us has become the exaltation and the glory of Him and all creation. For before He became man, He was known only to the angels, but after His incarnation and crucifixion, His glory is even greater and He reigns over all the earth.

Blessed Theophylact

## ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI

By St. John Chrysostom, from his 88<sup>th</sup> homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 27:45-48), edited for length.

*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, and said, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that said, this man calleth for Elias. And straight way one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.*

† † †

There is a sign which He had promised to give them when they asked for it, saying to them, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas* (Mt 12:39); that sign is encompassed in His cross and His death, His burial and His resurrection. And again, declaring in another way the virtue of the cross, He said, *When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.* (Jn 8:28). And what He said is to imply: *When ye have crucified me, and think ye have overcome me, then, above all, shall ye know my might.*

After the crucifixion, the city was destroyed, and the Jewish state came to an end; and the gospel flourished and His word was spread abroad to the ends of the world. Both sea and land, both the inhabited earth and the desert perpetually proclaim His power. Indeed, it was much more marvellous that these things should be prophesied by Him when He was nailed to the cross, than when He was walking on earth.

And observe when it took place. At midday, that all that dwell on the earth may know it, when it was day all over the world. After all their insulting, and their lawlessness, this is done, soon after they had let go their anger, when they had ceased mocking; it is then that He shows the deep darkness, in order that at least so (having vented their anger) they may profit by the miracle.

This miracle was more marvellous than for Him to come down from the cross; for He worked these things while being on the cross! For whether they thought He Himself had done it, they ought to have believed and to have feared; and if not Him but the Father, they ought to have been moved to compunction, for that darkness was a token of His anger at their crime.

And what they saw was not just an eclipse, but both wrath and indignation; and it continued for three hours. We are aware that an eclipse takes place in one moment of time, and those who observed the miracle know this.

How is it then that all did not marvel and account Him to be God? Because the race of man was then held in a state of great carelessness and vice. And this miracle was but one, and when it had taken place, immediately passed away; and no one was concerned to inquire into the cause of it, for great was their prejudice and their habit of ungodliness.

He Himself worked this miracle. And he did so that they might learn that He was still alive, and that they might become by this also more gentle. And he exclaimed *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* (Mt 27:46) so that unto His last breath they might see that He honors His Father, and is no adversary of God. And His cry is from the prophet, (*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [Pss 22:1]), thus bearing witness



to the Old Testament in His last hour, and in Hebrew, so as to be plain and intelligible to them. By all things, He shows how He is of one mind with Him that begat Him.

Now observe here their maliciousness, ignorance, indulgence and foolishness. They thought (it is said) that it was Elias whom He called, and straightway they *gave Him vinegar to drink.* (Mt 27:48). But another came unto Him, and *pierced His side with a*

*spear.* (Jn 19:34). What could be more lawless and brutal than these men carrying their madness to such great of a length, offering insult at last even to a dead body? Observe, however, how He made use of their wickednesses for our salvation. For after the blow the fountains of our salvation gushed forth from thence: *and forthwith came there out blood and water...*

*And Jesus, when He had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the Ghost.* (Mt 27:50). This is what He had said, *I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again, and, I lay it down of myself.* (Jn 10:18). So for this cause He cried with a loud voice, that it might be shown that the act of His death is done by power. Mark the Evangelist informs us that "*Pilate marvelled if He were already dead* (Mk 25:44). And above all, this is the reason that the centurion believed; because He died with power: *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.* (Mk 15:39).

This cry rent the veil and opened the tombs and made the house desolate. And He did this, not as to offer insult to the temple (how could He, when he said *Make not my*

*Father's house a house of merchandise* [Jn 2:16]) but declaring them to be unworthy even of His steadfastness; and this was also a prophecy of the coming desolation, and a declaration of the change into the greater and higher state and a clear sign of His might.

And He also showed Himself by what followed after these things, the raising of the dead. Elisha, on touching a dead body rose again (2Kings 13:21); but now by a voice He raised the dead, His body continuing up there, on the cross! And they are not merely raised, but the rocks are also rent, and the earth shaken, so that they might learn, that He was able to strike themselves blind, and to rend them in pieces. For He that cleft rocks asunder and darkened the world, could have easily done these things to them, had it been His will. But He would not, but having discharged His wrath upon the elements, His will was to save them by clemency. But they did not abate their madness. Such was their envy. So even after placing a seal upon His tomb, and soldiers watching Him, He rose again, and they heard these things from the very guards; they even gave money, in order both to corrupt others, and to steal away the history of the resurrection.

Observe the great signs He had wrought, some from Heaven, some on earth, some in the very temple, at once marking His indignation, and at the same time showing that what were unapproachable are now to be entered, and that Heaven shall be opened. And they indeed said, *If He be the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross*, (Mt 27:42) but He shows them that He is King of all the world. And whereas those men said, *Thou that destroyest this temple, and buildest it in three days*, (Mt 27:40) He shows that it shall be made forever desolate.

Again they said, *He saved others, Himself He cannot save* (Mt 27:42), but He, while abiding on the cross, proved this most abundantly for so many of his deceased servants. If one considers Lazarus' rise on the fourth day as a great and miraculous event, how much more for all those who had long ago fallen asleep, and at once appeared alive; and this was a sign of the future resurrection to come. For, *many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, it is said, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many*. (Mt 27:52-53). And the Centurion too then glorified God, saying, *Truly this was a righteous man. And the multitudes that came together to that sight, returned beating their breasts*. (Lk 23:47-48).

The power of the Crucified was indeed so great that after so many mockings, and scoffs, and jeers, both the centurion was moved to compunction, and many people. And some say of this centurion that he became a martyr in His name, after he grew in the faith.

*And many women were there beholding afar off, which had followed Him, ministering unto Him, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.*" (Mt 27:52-53). All these events are closely observed

by the women, for they were most inclined to feel for Him, who were most of all bewailing Him. Observe their diligence and attentiveness. They had followed Him ministering to Him, and were present even during the most dangerous moments and they saw it all; how He cried, how He gave up the ghost, how the rocks were rent, and all the rest.

And these women are the blessed ones that also first see the resurrected Jesus; the sex that was most condemned shows its courage and first enjoys the sight of the blessings. When the disciples had fled, they were present. But who were these? His mother, for she is called mother of James, and the rest. But another evangelist (Lk 22:48) informs us that many women also lamented over the things that were done, and smote their breasts. This, above all, shows the cruelty of the Jews, who gloried in things for which the women were lamenting; the former were neither moved by pity, nor checked by fear.

*But Joseph went, and begged the body*. (Mt 27:57-58). This was Joseph, who was concealing his discipleship; now, however, he had become very bold after Christ's death. For neither was he an obscure person, nor unnoticed; he is one of the council, highly distinguished and extremely courageous. By his affection to Jesus, he exposed himself to death, taking upon him the hostility and animosity of many; he dared to beg the body of Christ and did not cease his efforts until he obtained it. He showed his love and his courage not only by taking Christ's body and burying it in a costly manner, but also by laying it in his own new tomb. And this was not coincidental; in this manner, there could not be any bare suspicion that one had risen instead of another.

*And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre*. (Mt 27:61). For what purpose do they await by the tomb? They had brought ointments, and were waiting at the tomb, so that if the madness of the Jews should relax, they might go and embrace the body. Do you see the women's courage, their affection, their noble spirit in money and their noble spirit even unto death? Let us men imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptations. Even though He was dead, they exposed their lives, but we (for again I say the same things) neither feed Him when hungry, nor clothe Him when naked, but seeing Him begging, we pass Him by.

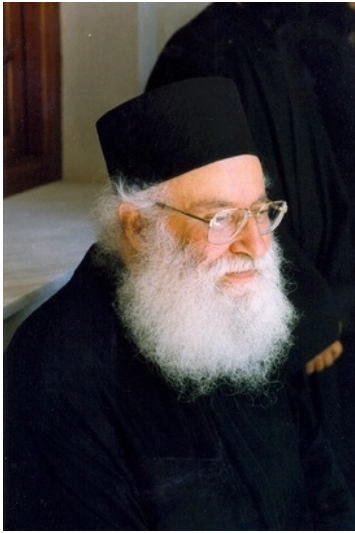
We say that Christ has done great things, having made angels of men; then, when we are called upon to give account, and required to furnish a proof out of this flock, our mouths will be shut and we will be absent of furnishing deeds in His name.

And let us do at any rate what each of us can accomplish, and from the present time purify our lives and attain the promised blessings, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.



## THE TEMPTATION COMING UPON THE ENTIRE WORLD

*From a homily by Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios of blessed memory (+2006), transcript by OrthodoxEthos.com. The original homily, with English subtitles, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhffvrkRgbQ&t=1s>.*



Then we have a third and final stage of Ecumenism. We said that first is Orthodoxy, then Roman Catholicism, then Protestantism. These will associate themselves with Judaism and Mohamedanism, and all these five joined together, and we will move to the third stage, which is all of the so-called natural religions, which are idol-worshipping, such as Buddhism, etc. They will all unite.

This is the so-called pan-religion.

For our people, the Orthodox people, the Christian people, whom I refer to as Orthodox Christian, for I do not recognize anyone else ... For these people, when this arrives, and it is on its way, it is going to be the great temptation of the end times.

What does "Great Temptation of the End-Times" mean? It is written in our Holy Scriptures, in the New Testament. It is that temptation which will cast doubt upon the Theanthropic Nature of the Person of Christ. This doubt will leave the door wide open for Ecumenism. This is the last temptation of history.

Let me explain. It has to do with that religion which [will come] before the rise of the Anti-Christ. Before the appearance of the Anti-Christ, all religions will unite. Ecumenism will unite them. It will unite them in that religion which will be before the coming of the Anti-Christ. Why only before the coming of the Anti-Christ? Because with the appearance of the Anti-Christ, Ecumenism is his instrument, for it is the work of the Devil, 100%; I repeat, 100% the work of the Devil. How does St. Justin Povovich refer to Ecumenism? Pan-Heresy! All of you who have read his books must have found this ... Pan-Heresy! Why? Because it is not only one heresy. It includes the totality of all heresies which have existed on earth.

So ... This Ecumenism leads to the Anti-Christ. This is why I told you that we will arrive at this Ecumenism before the coming of Anti-Christ. When the Anti-Christ comes, he will

abolish Ecumenism. Listen to what kind of game is played here. He will abolish Ecumenism. Listen to what [devilish] games are happening! He will do away with Ecumenism. And this is not because we imagine things will turn out this way, but it is written in the New Testament.

Listen to this: In the Apostle Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians, 2:4, he writes: ...who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

The Anti-Christ (the son of perdition) who opposeth (i.e., against/anti-Christ) and exalteth himself above all that is called God (above everything on earth that was of value). The Anti-Christ will claim to be above whatever is called "God" or is revered by people. This means he will exalt himself above our God the Holy Trinity, above Buddha, above everything! He will abolish the already united religions.

Let me state it once again: Who exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; whatever is called "God" or is worthy of respect of any religion. The Anti-Christ will abolish all these. So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God, so the Anti-Christ will sit in the temple of God as God and he will say to all: "I am the God, there is no other God, only myself, showing himself that he is God." And he will prove himself to be "god" by performing false miracles. (The Apostle Paul says this further down.) It is an unbelievable thing, where this Ecumenism leads us to.

Let me say a few words about the great temptation of the end times: Our Lord warns us in the book of Revelation, 3:10, to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia write (this means to the Bishop of Philadelphia): Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Since you have kept My word, to endure patiently, I will also keep you. So, since you have kept, I will keep you as well from the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world. And I will protect you from the time of temptation that everyone in all the world must go through, which shall come upon the entire world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. To try all those which dwell upon the earth!

What kind of temptation is this? Doubting (disbelief in) the Theanthropic Person of Christ. This is the temptation. "Who is Christ?" Ah, who is He? ... Theosophy and freemasonry have shown us [what this means]. They have a picture that comes in different sizes. Their so-called "Mystical Supper of the Initiates (mystis)" (mystikos signifies the believer who is united (initiated) with God, with regard, in this case, to Christ in the Mystical Supper). How? Listen to this.

They show Christ in the middle (of the picture), and on His left and His right you can see figures like Zoroaster,

Mithras, Moses, Mohamed, Buddha, on His right and on His left. These are called “mystis” [initiates]. Therefore, they accept Christ merely as one of the “mystis” [initiates]. The put him on the same level as Buddha, Mohamed, or whatever.

So, Christ as the Theanthropic Person is cast into doubt. This is a widespread depiction and if you ever see this picture in a house you visit, know that there is a Freemason living there. Yes. Yes! Therefore, THIS is the great temptation—a temptation which is already at work in our days and creates disbelief in the God-Man, the Theanthropic Person of Christ.

And, unfortunately, even here, in our country [Greece], people forge this temptation, when they constantly move away from Jesus Christ through apostasy, so that you may hear a minister of the Government say the word “God” without knowing who the God is he believes in. Have you ever heard the name of Christ? Never. What does this mean? This means that things are going ever-increasingly towards a de-christianization. What can we say here? Stand aright!

That is why the remnant alone will be saved. **This is why it is essential that we know the Name of God.** Because Buddhism also uses the term “god.” And Islam speaks of “god.” But WHO is THE [ONE] God? Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The true God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; One God, three persons. God the Holy Trinity.



## LET US OFFER OUR CONFESSION AS THOUGH IT WAS THE LAST TIME

*St. Innocent of Kherson.*

**A**nother day of repentance and confession! Once again we will unroll before the Omniscient One the gloomy scroll of our deeds; again we hear from Him forgiveness for everything we have done, and we will go to our homes justified! So inexhaustible is the mercy of our Lord to us! His righteousness could completely reject our present repentance; His righteousness could tell us that, having offered repentance so many times and having received forgiveness as often, we cease not to offend it with our sins; it remains for His righteousness to cease having mercy upon criminal and evil slaves in vain, but to arm itself against them with judgment and execution. But it won't act this way with us: We are before the throne of this Righteousness now, and we shall find the same love and forgiveness!

Do you feel it, O sinful soul? Do you feel that you have long since deserved hell a hundred times over, but Paradise and the Kingdom will be opened to you again? Take care that this mercy not be shown to you for the last time!

Indeed, my brethren, there is none on earth who could tell us for sure that our present confession will not be our last. This belongs only to Him in Whose right hand are *the keys of hell and of death* (Rev 1:18), in Whom *we all live, and move, and have our being.* (Acts 17:28). But in order to protect us from carelessness, He Himself was pleased to proclaim to us in His Gospel that the day and hour of both His coming to us and our departure to Him must remain a mystery to us.

After this, everyone who values the salvation of his soul, bringing his confession now, must bring it as though he were doing so for the last time in his life.

How would we confess were we on our deathbed? We would confess with the deepest contrition of spirit and unrepentant disgust for sin, which would then lose all fascination for us; we would confess completely, concealing nothing—for what is there to hide before death? We would confess with firm determination to no longer deviate to the side of lies and iniquity, for then the necessity of a pure and holy life for man would be opened up before us in full force.

Let us behave now just as we would on our deathbed. Let us reveal to Him Who is Omniscient our entire heart and soul, all the secrets of our passions and sinful desires. May the mercy of God behold all the wounds and rot of our inner man. It will see them only to then heal them in a more lasting way. Having received forgiveness of sins, let us immediately banish them not only from our lives and actions, but from our very imagination and memory. Let them remain the portion of our enemy, who encouraged us to sin and rejoiced when we transgressed the commandment of the Lord. Having vowed before the Holy Cross and Gospel to lead a pure and good life, let us repeat this oath to ourselves morning and evening, in hours of joy and sorrow, in the church of God and at home, sitting at table and taking a rest, that the work of our salvation might never leave our memory and might become the main work of our lives.

And to affirm ourselves in this necessary labor, to protect ourselves from new temptations in life, from new attacks from the passions, let us take from the holy *analogion* the memory of death on our path in life; for it is not in vain that the Wise one said: *Remember thy end, and thou shalt never sin.* (Sir 7:36). Amen.



**T**hose who pass speedy and harsh judgments on the sins of their neighbors fall into this passion because they themselves have so far failed to achieve a complete and unceasing memory of and concern for their own sins. Anyone untrammelled by self-love and able to see his own faults for what they are would worry about no one else in this life.

**St. John Climacus**

## PRESERVE UNITY!

*Metropolitan Mark of Berlin and Germany.*

During these terrifying days when streams of blood merge with the flow of deceit and wickedness, we Christians cannot allow ourselves to submit to the spirit of war. The spirit of war is demanding. It requires us to divide into parties. It forces us to hate.

We Christians must understand: the wrath with which war burns is the wrath of hell. The enemy of God drinks in not so much human blood as human bitterness and division. The devil wants nothing more than to separate man from his neighbor, from the Church and from Christ.

This is nothing new. Before the beginning of Great Lent, during Cheesefare Week, the Lord cautions us: *And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom... And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another... And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold... But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.* (Mt 24:6-13).

Ahead of us lies the just Judgment, the all-encompassing Divine Judgment. Those who forget this judge others quickly and carelessly—and this is already war, the ancient war of the devil against God. On whose side shall we stand?

This sermon is addressed to those who serve the Church, and to those who have newly come. Our Diocese is our local Church. Contained therein are priests and believers of various nationalities: Ukrainians, Russians, Belarussians, Carpatho-Russians, Jews, “Russian Germans,” migrants, and the local “native” Germans, Greeks, Moldovans, Serbs, Georgians, Poles, Czechs, Hungarians... Each of us loves our homeland. But the All-Merciful Lord united us, called upon us to establish Church life within this diocese, to the salvation of the present and future generations of Orthodox Christians in this nation. Here we must be the People of God, serving the One God.

If we allow this service to divide along national traits, we will commit a grave, most grave sin—the rending of the living, unified Body of the Church.

It is this rupture, this division that the prince of this world lusts after, and more persistently demands of us.

We recall that it was even demanded of Christ that He present Himself as a political leader and would destroy the occupiers. That He would separate Himself from the Roman invaders and would become the God not of all mankind but of a single suffering nation. And when He did not satisfy them—as many, many thought at the time to be well-deserved and righteous political expectations and imperatives—we recall what those who made these demands did to Him.

Politics always presumes division into “us” and “them.” But the bloodless Sacrifice of Christ is made *in all and for all*. If our hearts are in disagreement with the words *in all and for all*, then can we partake of Communion? Are we truly Christian?

Let us for a moment lift our spiritual gaze to the heavens. Let us think of the invisible angelic world. The bond with that world is particularly noted by the Church during Liturgy: during the Small Entrance, the Cherubic Hymn, the chanting of *Holy, Holy, Holy...*

But the angelic world is not enclosed by the walls of the church. Even in the heat of battle, under bullets and bombs, when it seems that hell reigns over everything, each warrior is accompanied by his own Guardian Angel, who tends to and protects the person, cares and suffers for him. Demons, the servants of the devil, strive through their hatred to destroy human bodies, and mainly, their souls. The Angels, as heralds of Christ, strive to save each soldier with their love, no matter which side he fights for. And this pain is felt for the mothers praying in church, the wives and sisters of the warriors, praying for the salvation and consolation of the warriors on both sides.

To what shall we open our hearts? To love or to hatred? Whose side are we on this genuine war?

If we are Christians, let us reject the spirit of war which is alien to Christ.

May peace take hold in our hearts—that sole genuine peace which the Savior brought to us already.

Let us follow the Apostle’s call: *Neither give place to the devil... rather... labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption... Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.* (Eph 4:27-32).

Let us firmly trust in the words of Christ: *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33).

Amen.



Nothing equals the mercy of God or surpasses it. To despair is therefore to inflict death on oneself.

St. John Climacus

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE THEOTOKOS

By the Russian Holy Hierarch Ilya Minyati (+1990).

*And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.*

[Lk 1:31–32]

† † †

When the fullness of time had come, when God the Father deigned to send His Only-Begotten Son and Word that He might be incarnate and become man, Gabriel, the champion of angels, was sent to the Galilean city of Nazareth to the Virgin Mary who was betrothed to Joseph, in order to greet Her with the words, *Rejoice, thou who art full of grace.* (Lk. 1:28).

All circumstances completely corresponded to this divine Annunciation: first, the bearer of it, the Archangel Gabriel, corresponded to it, inasmuch as this mystery is nothing other than the supernatural union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in one hypostasis of the Divine Word—of perfect God and perfect Man; and the name Gabriel means power of God. The place also corresponded to the event—the city of Nazareth, for the consequence of this mystery was the consecration of the human race through the participation of Divine nature, and Nazareth means consecration.

The time also corresponded—the month of March; the world was created at that time, and in this event was the creation of the world perfected. Then, the unsown soil first brought forth flower, and now the unwedded Virgin first conceived.

All the events of the present mystery are miraculous, but the most exalted of all that is miraculous is the Virgin Herself who received the good news—the Virgin and Mother; and this especially corresponds to the mystery, for such should be the Mother of such a Son. The Divine Word became what it never before was, and remained what it was, becoming a man and remaining God; and Mary became what She had not been, and remained what She was, having become a Mother and remaining a Virgin as before. The Divine Word became a Son born without a Father, and Mary became a Mother without a husband, giving birth without a man.

How different is God from man! But God, becoming a man and in taking flesh, did not abandon the nature of the Divinity. And how different a Virgin is from a Mother! But the Virgin, becoming a Mother, in maternal childbearing did not lose the glory of virginity. What a strange communion of two natures—the Godly and the human, united unmingled in one hypostasis! Divine nature assumed human traits, and God became perfect Man; the human became a participant in the Divine qualities, and the same Person became perfect God. In the same way, what extraordinary union of virginal purity and maternal childbearing, which in a strange manner were contained in one Woman! Virginity gave the Mother the purity that the Mother of God should have, *Who is all-pure all-undefiled, fair as the moon,*

*choice as the sun,* as the Holy Spirit calls Her (Songs 6:9). Childbearing gave virginity the blessing, which a Virgin should have had according to the Archangel's greeting: *Blessed art thou among women.* (Lk 1:28). Born there was the miraculous union—the God-Man; here a different union takes place, just as miraculous—the Virgin Mother. *Strange and marvelous, and removed in many ways from ordinary nature: one and the same Virgin and Mother, remaining in the sanctity of virginity and inheriting the blessing of childbirth,* proclaims the heavenly Basil (the Great). Such a Son, I repeat, should have such a Mother; the Son Who was born a man and did not cease to be God, to the Mother Who gave birth to a Son and did not cease to be a Virgin.



This mystery could not have occurred in any other way; the very God-Man, the very Son, Who is eternally born of the everlasting Father, and is born in time from a woman. One Son, Who knows both a Father in Heaven and a Mother on earth, but in heaven, where He has His Father, there is no place for a mother; while on earth, where He has His Mother, there is no place for a father. There is no place for a mother in heaven—and the Son is born without passion; there is no place for a father on earth—and the Son is born without seed; thus, the relationship of Persons is maintained perfect. He is the Only Son, and the Only Son has One Father, one Mother, who is by nature an unwedded Virgin.

Now, O Christian, I say to you what the Lord said to King Achaz: *Ask for thyself a sign of ... in the depth or in the height* (Isa 7:11); look down upon the earth, gaze upwards to heaven,

search the present and past ages, and you will not find another sign like unto this one, which God revealed many centuries before through the lips of the prophet Isaiah: *behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son* (Is. 7:14), and which was fore-written in many fore-types: in the burning bush, in the sprouting rod (of Aaron), in the uncut mountain, and in the closed gates that faced the east, through which the Lord alone entered and left. How could Solomon say that there is nothing new under the sun? Here is a new wonder that was never matched. A Virgin and Mother, but the Mother of God. And there can never be anything like this new wonder.

O Mother of God! I confess a truth that I cannot comprehend, nor can I explain the heights of this dignity. I turn to the holy fathers to at least in some way understand, but I find that the holy fathers are also perplexed and pass over it in silence. The angels themselves remain speechless, even if they should have wanted to explain it to us. Even the Virgin, Whose mind was illumined for contemplation incomparably more than the minds of all the angels, the Virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit, bearing the Divine Word, explains it to us in Divine words: *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things* (Lk 1:49), and says nothing more.

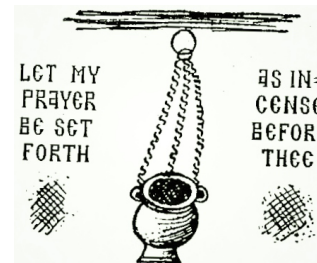
If She were the Mother of the Messiah (as the Hebrews believed in Him), that is, of only a man, and not God; and if She had given birth to the yearning of ages, the Son of blessing, the Redeemer of Israel, then as the mother of such a glorious king she would as a result of this honor and happiness have surpassed all the mothers of the world, and for this alone all generations should have called Her blessed. But to be the Mother of God, to give birth to the Savior of the whole world, to give birth in time to the very Only-Begotten Son, Whom God the Father begot outside of time—this is an honor that makes Her godlike. At the beginning of the ages, when to the angels was revealed the great mystery of the economy of the incarnation, and Lucifer saw this honor, he was immediately stricken with envy, he thought a vain thing, departed from God, and fell like lightning from the heavens. Thus is the opinion of St. Maximos the Confessor, based upon the Apostle Paul's famous words: *And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him* (Heb 1:6; question and answer 42 on the Epistle to the Hebrews).

The Mother of God! The more I think upon it, the more I am convinced that this cannot be understood, that this is a limitless splendor, which raises Her to the highest throne of the Thrice-radiant Divinity and brings Her nearer to God the Father. Rise up and behold the heights, O Christian, and contemplate on one side the eternal Father, and on the other, Mary, full of grace, and in the center, the Only-Begotten Son, the incarnate God-Man. He has two natures: the Divine and the human; the Divine is the offspring of the Father, the hu-

man is the offspring of Mary; the Son of God, as God, the Son of Mary, as the child both God and Man. But this Son has only one hypostasis, which contains two unmingled natures. The hypostasis is undivided, and therefore there are not two Sons—one, the Son of God the Father and the other, the Son of the Virgin Mary. This is one Person, in which, because it is not mingled, the particular qualities of two natures differ; nevertheless in this difference is preserved their undividedness, and in their duality—unity; there is only one Jesus Christ: God and man. The Father is the Father of Christ and the Father of God and man; Mary is the Mother of Christ and Mother of man and God. Thus, the relationship that God the Father has to the Only-Begotten Son is the same relationship that the Virgin Mary has to the same Son, and therefore She has in her birth of the God-Man Son the same glory, like unto the glory of the Father. Gabriel wants to express this in words: *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest* (Lk 1:31–32); *He shall save his people from their sins.* (Mt 1:21).

Could the mind conceive of a more exalted splendor? Now transfer your gaze from such a height to the world below, to all other rational creatures, as far from Her as the earth is from heaven, and look at how small and insignificant is all the grace and glory of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs compared to the grace and glory of the Mother of God. What does King Solomon say? That there is nothing new under the sun? But here is a new miracle—the Virgin and Mother. This is a new miracle, the likes of which there never was. A Virgin—the Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Virgin exceeding grace. The Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Mother a most exalted honor.

This is a miracle of miracles, and one that no other faith can boast—only the Christian Faith, in which this mystery is the beginning and end of all mysteries.



The Church is the Body of Christ and not a government agency! And she is truly the Church when she has Christ, not Caesar, as her Head.

**St. Nicholas Velimirovich**

The proponents of the New World Order (on both sides) desire the churches NOT to be emptied out but to be filled with men that will have the mindset of the Orthodox faith corrupted.

**Fr. Anthony Alevizopoulos (+1996)**

## CHRIST IS RISEN!

*An Anonymous Paschal Exhortation by an Orthodox priest.*

In greeting my true friends with these joyful tidings, there are so many bright and kindly wishes that my heart desires to convey. But of all these wishes there is one which I have especially chosen to communicate here, for I consider its fulfillment your most important concern.

On this chosen and holy day, I want your hearts to affirm that which once the blessed Psalmist voiced. Loving the Lord with all his mind and with all his soul, he said: *With my whole heart have I sought after Thee, cast me not away from Thy commandments.* (Pss 118:10). In celebrating the Light-bearing Resurrection of Christ, it is my earnest desire that you surrender yourselves entirely to our Saviour—giving to Him your whole heart, all your love and your soul's principal endeavor. This is my fervent wish for you, my friends, because *the love of Christ constraineth us ... for Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.* (2 Cor 5:14-15).

I once visited a spiritual man especially dear to me and found him wiping tears from his eyes. When asked the cause of his weeping he burst into fresh tears, and it was a few minutes before he could answer. "I am crying on account of a growing awareness of Christ's grief over the increasing coldness manifest towards Him in the hearts of men. I see believers who come to pray a little, to repent a little, to bring a meager offering. But I rarely see any souls truly dedicated to Him; I don't see any believers who have wholly given themselves over to Him. If it grieves me to see how many—who consider themselves believers—abbreviate their responsibilities towards Him and hurry away from His Liturgy to the marketplace of earthly life, how then must He look upon such Christians?"

There is no doubt that we live in times of spiritual impoverishment and disregard for truth. People feel no regret in abandoning their *first love* (Rev 2:4). Not so very long ago one could meet everywhere Christians of burning faith. Today's believers prefer to hide their little faith and to conceal it from the eyes of strangers. Inexplicable, unconquerable fears have seized the hearts of the Orthodox faithful. Obsessed by such fears, people are afraid to wear crosses, afraid to make the sign of the cross in front of others. And when the

godless ones begin to utter profanities in the company of such Christians, there is no longer anyone who will stand up to them.

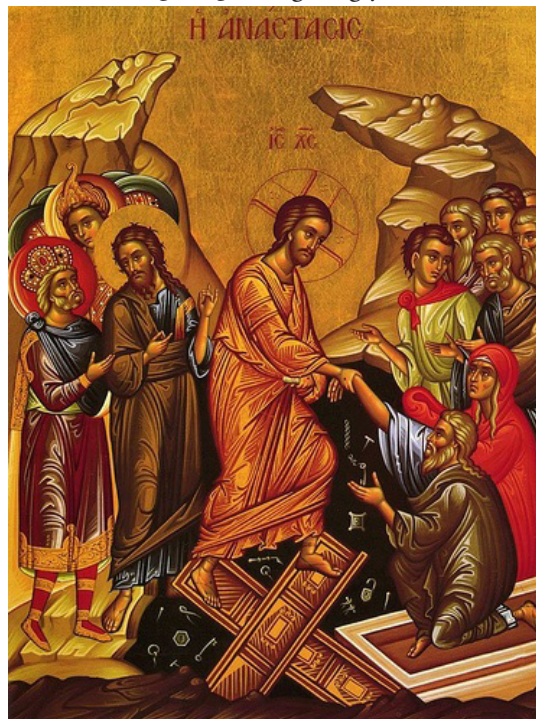
Surrounding us today is a sea of the most shameless vulgarity directed against that which we hold most precious, and this vulgarity not only meets with no rebuff from us, but even receives indirect support: not only do we keep silent in the face of such abuse, but we adopt an air of casual indifference which only encourages the impious.

And how little there is among contemporary believers in the way of deeds of love and Christian compassion. There is a sad story. A poor man prayed that the Lord might help him. As he was praying the Lord appeared to him and gave him a small silver coin, saying, "Do not be offended at My giving you so little. I Myself receive even less from people nowadays."

When we hear words of admonition, we usually respond by excusing ourselves: "Forgive me, but that's just the way I am." But is this really the way you should be, my friend? Think, were you always like this? If you changed from better to worse, is there any reason why you cannot change from worse to better? If you have changed for the worse through the power of sin, why can't you change for the better through the invincible power of Christ's Resurrection? Has your heart shrunk in its capacity to love God? Does not the life-creating, almighty power of the Resurrected Christ rest upon you? Is it not through His power that you live and have your being to this very day? Change yourself,

my dear friend—you who have been signed by the unapproachable light of His Resurrection, and place your whole heart at the feet of your Lord. If you neglect to do this, what kind of Pascha can you expect? You will only grieve Him with your celebration.

Through many profound and sorrowful reflections we are given to know the circumstances of our Saviour's burial. How few were those servants of His who gathered to take Him down from the Cross, to wrap Him in the shroud, to prepare His tomb and to give Him the last kiss. Where were all those to whom He gave sight, those whom He cleansed of leprosy, whom he fed, whose lips He made to speak? Where was Jairus' daughter? Where was the paralytic from the sheep's pool, and the blind Bartimeus? Where was the one blind from birth whom the Lord healed? The man with the withered arm, the deaf and dumb man, the possessed



Gadarene, and the many others who believed on Him? The news of what had happened to their Benefactor had at that time spread throughout all Judea. Why didn't all these believers hasten to give witness of their love for the Crucified One? Was it not because they were afraid, because they preferred their own concerns, because they shunned such a difficult exploit, because, although they believed in Him, they had not yet given Him their hearts?

Then there came into the world the power of His Resurrection, His victory which conquered the world. And just see, my friend, what this victory has accomplished. How many people have loved Him with their whole heart, their whole soul, and have given their whole life to Him. Just look at the multitude of His saints. Can you even begin to number all His martyrs, all His righteous ones, all those shining lamps which burned with love for Him in all nations and all ages? Can you recount all their ascetic labors, their deeds of spiritual valor and Christian charity which they performed by means of His power working through them?

And you, my friend, unite yourself to this glorious and immense company of Christ's true followers and slaves. Celebrate the day of His bright Resurrection as it was celebrated by those who pleased Him. Remember that you will truly experience the New Passover of Christ only then when your whole heart is full of love for Him. *If a man love Me, He says, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.* (Jn 14:23).

In your celebration of Pascha, may His blessed name be preserved in your hearts. May your lips sing His praises unceasingly, and may your eyes behold continually His Most Pure Face and His heavenly glory. Amen.



**O** Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, deliver us from the seductions of the coming antichrist, abhorred by God and crafty in evil, and from all his snares. Protect us, and all of our Christian neighbors, from his devious nets — keeping us in the hidden refuge of Thy salvation. Grant, Lord, that our fear of the devil may not be greater than the fear of Thee, and that we not fall away from Thee and Thy holy Church. But instead, grant us, O Lord, to suffer and die for Thy holy Name and for the Orthodox Faith, and never to deny Thee, nor to receive the marks of the cursed antichrist, nor to worship him. Grant us, O Lord, day and night, tears and lamentation for our sins. And on the day of Thy dread Judgment, O Lord, grant us pardon. Amen.

**St. Anatole the Younger of Optina**

## TWO KINDS OF FAITH AND TWO WAYS OF VISION (THEORIA)

*By Fr. John S. Romanides (+2001).*

**H**uman beings can have two kinds of faith. The first kind of faith, which has its seat in the mind, is the reasonable faith of acceptance. In this case, a person rationally accepts something and believes in what he has accepted, but this faith does not justify him. When Holy Scripture says, *man is saved by faith alone* (Eph 2:8), it does not mean that he is saved merely by the faith of acceptance.

There is, however, another kind of faith, the faith of the heart. It is referred to in this way because this kind of faith is not found in the human reason or intellect, but in the region of the heart. This faith of the heart is a gift of God that you will not receive unless God decides to grant it. It is also called *inner faith*, which is the kind of faith that the father of the young lunatic in the Gospel asked Christ to give him when he said, *Lord, help my unbelief.* (Mk 9:24). Naturally, the father already believed with his reason, but he did not have that deep inner faith that is a gift of God.

Inner faith is rooted in an (empirical) experience of grace. And since it is an experience of grace, what would this make inner faith as far as an Orthodox Christian is concerned? Inner faith is noetic prayer. When someone has noetic prayer in his heart, which means the prayer of the Holy Spirit in his heart, then he has inner faith. Through this kind of faith and by means of prayer, he beholds things that are invisible. When someone has this kind of vision, it is called *theoria*. *Theoria*, in fact, means vision.

As a rule, there are two ways for vision to take place.

When a person has not yet attained to *theosis*, it is still possible for him to see by means of the prayer that the Holy Spirit is speaking within his heart. After attaining to *theosis*, however, he can see by means of *theosis*, in which both this inner faith (i.e., prayer of the heart) and hope are set aside, and only love for God remains (as a gift of God). This is what St. Paul means when he says: *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.* (1 Cor 13:10 & 13:13). Note that since faith and hope have fulfilled their purpose and man has reached the point of seeing God, the source of his faith and hope, he now simply knows and loves the One Who is Love.

When the perfect is come, faith and hope are thus done away, and only love remains. And this love is *theosis*. In *theosis*, knowledge comes to an end; prophecy is set aside; tongues, which are in noetic prayer, cease; and only love remains. St. Paul says this in passages of great clarity and beauty. The Church Fathers in turn offer interpretations of these subjects that are indisputably correct. These interpretations are found throughout the entire *Philokolia*.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



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

*Archbishop Averky of blessed memory (+1976).*

We have neither the strength nor the authority to stop apostasy, as Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov) stresses: *Do not attempt to stop it with your weak hand.*

But what then should we do? *Avoid it, protect yourself from it, and that is enough for you. Get to know the spirit of the times, study it so that you can avoid its influence whenever possible;* this is what the same Bishop Ignatius teaches us.

His words, written more than 100 years ago and so obviously related to our time, exude genuine prophetic inspiration and undoubted enlightenment from on high: *Judging by the spirit of the age and the intellectual ferment, one must suppose that the structure of the Church, which has long been wavering, will collapse terribly and quickly. There is no one to stop or oppose this. The means adopted to support it are borrowed from the elements of the world which are hostile to the Church and will hasten its fall rather than prevent it. May the merciful Lord defend the remnant of those who believe in Him. But this remnant is tiny, and it becomes more and more so.*

Thus we evidently have lived to see this *terrible and quick collapse of the structure of the Church!*

The enemy of the human race is employing all his efforts and all his means to pull it down, and he is widely supported in this by open and secret apostates from the true faith and Church, including even those who have betrayed their high vocations and oaths as clergymen and even as hierarchs heading certain individual

churches. In truth, we are experiencing a terrible time—a time such as has never before been seen in the history of Christianity, in the history of mankind! A time of almost total instability! And insofar as we wish to remain faithful to true Orthodoxy, many obligations are placed upon us.

We must, as Bishop Ignatius instructs us, avoid and protect ourselves from the Apostasy which is growing so rapidly in the world. We must defend ourselves against the corrupting spirit of the times to avoid its influence.

And to this end we must first of all understand and never forget:

- that at the present time not everything that bears the most holy and most dear name of Orthodoxy really is Orthodoxy—there now also exists pseudo-Orthodoxy, which we must fear and from which we must flee as from fire;
- that true Orthodoxy is only that which does not accept and does not permit in anything, either in teaching or in church practices, any sort of innovations opposed to the Word of God and the decrees of the Universal Church;
- that true Orthodoxy does not bless and does not indulge modern fashion—the morality and customs of the modern, corrupt world, which, even more than in Apostolic times, is lying in evil, for it is a world which has abandoned God;
- that true Orthodoxy considers only pleasing God and saving souls, not arrangements for temporary, earthly happiness, a career, and earthly advantages and possessions;
- that true Orthodoxy is spiritual, not natural and carnal, not attached to the earth—to earthly feelings and experiences.



# 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]

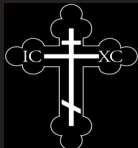
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Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## ORTHODOX TRADITION AND MODERNISM

*By Prof. Constantine Cavarinos, a distinguished contemporary philosopher, Byzantinist, and Orthodox thinker, from a lecture at the auditorium of the “Archaeological Society” of Athens, which was organized by the “Panhellenic Orthodox Union” and delivered on May 27, 1970. Professor Cavarinos fell asleep in the Lord as Schemamonk Constantine on the morning of March 3, 2011, at St Anthony’s Monastery in Arizona.*

Great ignorance and confusion exists today among the Orthodox as to what exactly is this thing that is called

Tradition, what is the relation of the Orthodox Church to it, and what is that of the heterodox, and whether it is possible for the Orthodox Church to remain faithful to Tradition and at the same time to be “modernized.” A result of this ignorance and confusion is the confusion and disturbance which exist among the Orthodox, the disregard and disdain for Tradition on the part of many, and the projection of mistaken, dangerous and subversive views. It is urgent, then, that this topic be studied very attentively. Only when this happens, and the correct answers are given and passed on, will it be possible for mutual understanding, unanimity and peace to come about among the Orthodox, and for the great danger, which Orthodoxy faces today from all kinds of plotters against her, to be put off.

For one to deal adequately with such an important and broad topic, he must write a book of many pages. In my ad-

dress tonight I shall simply sketch the most important points of the topic, and I shall give examples, so that as far as possible what I will say in general about Tradition and about modernism may be more comprehensible and useful.

To be precise, I shall explain what Sacred Tradition is, what its validity is, what has been the relation of the Orthodox Church to it, and what the relation of the heterodox, and also what the relation is between Tradition and the Synods, on the one hand, and the Fathers of the Church, on the other.

After this, I shall deal in general with the question of the “modernization” of the Church, and I shall speak specifical-



ly about various attempts which have been made, from the eighteenth century and thereafter, to “modernize” her.

I shall conclude by formulating some thoughts on a true and desirable modernization of the Church, and the true presentation of Orthodoxy in the contemporary world.

My sources for this study will be chiefly Holy Scripture, the writings of the Greek Fathers, and also of Greek saints, theologians and other learned men of the more recent period.

### What Sacred Tradition Is

In order to understand what Sacred Tradition is, right from the beginning we must distinguish it from the various kinds of human traditions.

Sacred Tradition originates from God, it is a Divine revelation, whereas human traditions originate from mankind, are products of the human mind. Christ Himself explicitly distinguishes these two kinds of tradition, the Divine and the human, when He disapproves of

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
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POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
USA

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

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the Scribes and Pharisees, because they disregard the Divine Tradition, the Divine Teaching, while they observe human traditions, saying: *Ye leave the commandments of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.* (Mk 7:8). And the Apostle Paul clearly distinguishes these two kinds of tradition, when he advises the Colossians, saying: *See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.* (Col 2:8); also when he says to the Thessalonians: *Now we command you, brethren, . . . that ye keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that ye received from us.* (2 Thess 3:6).

From these passages, as also from others, the distinction between Sacred Tradition and human tradition is clear, as is the placing of Sacred Tradition on an incomparably higher level than human tradition. They put forward Sacred Tradition as a Divine and consequently sure guide to our life, while on the contrary they demote human tradition. They proclaim that we should always observe Sacred Tradition, whereas we should break human tradition, which is composed of human teachings and customs, whenever it is opposed to Sacred Tradition. In saying that Sacred Tradition is a Divine revelation, I mean that it was given to men by God, whether directly, by the God-man, or indirectly, through the Prophets and the Apostles.

The incomparable superiority of Sacred Tradition is due to its revelatory character. Its revelatory, Divine character is evident in the Old Testament from phrases like the following: *Thus saith the Lord; And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying.*

In the New Testament this character is conspicuous, not only in the Gospels, where the God-man speaks, but also in the Apocalypse of John, which begins with the words, *The*

*Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him,* and in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, particularly those of St. Paul. He frequently stresses that what he is teaching is not his own, nor of the wise of this world, but teaching from God. For example, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says: *Yet we speak wisdom . . . not that of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish; but we speak wisdom of God that is in a mystery and hidden . . . which God has revealed to us through His Spirit.* (1 Cor 2:6-7, 10).

That which distinguishes Christianity from the various and countless systems which the human intellect has devised—religious, philosophical, ethical and social systems, etc.—is precisely its revelatory character.

The term “Tradition” is used by the Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers in a broader sense to indicate the written Divine word, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament, and also the unwritten Divine word of the Apostolic preaching, which is not written in Holy Scripture, but was preserved in the Church and was written in the Proceedings of the Synods and in the books of the God-bearing Fathers. In a narrower sense, the term “Tradition” indicates only the unwritten Divine word of the Apostolic preaching. The Apostle Paul uses the term “Tradition” in the broad sense, when he writes to the Thessalonians: *Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.* (2 Thess 2:15).

Before the canon of the New Testament was formed, the Fathers and Teachers of the Church called Tradition the written and the unwritten Divine word. Since the time that the canon of the New Testament was formed, the term “Tradition” is usually employed in the narrower sense, to designate the unwritten Divine word of the Apostolic preaching. Ac-

ording to the broader sense of the term, the relation between Holy Scripture and Tradition is that of part to whole. The two parts of Tradition, the written and the unwritten word, are considered by the Ecumenical Synods and the Holy Fathers to be of equal authority. *The sacred Synods*, writes St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, *in their deliberations, draw not only from the sacred Scriptures, but also from sacred Tradition as from a pure spring*. He makes a similar observation about the Fathers: *The holy Fathers*, he says, *regard this sacred Tradition as a pure spring, as also they regard the spring of the Holy Scriptures, from which we draw the life-begetting and salvific streams that provide eternal life, and that is why they ascribe the same authority to both written and unwritten Tradition*.

I shall mention two of the most important passages that confirm this observation: one from St. Basil the Great and one from St. John Chrysostom. St. Basil says: *Of the dogmas and proclamations preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching, while others we have received in secret from the Tradition of the Apostles; these both have the same validity for true religion. And no one will gainsay these points, at least if he is even moderately versed in ecclesiastical institutions*. (Concerning the Holy Spirit 27; PG 32:188A). The Divine Chrysostom says: *They (namely the Apostles) have not handed down everything in writing, but have also delivered many things in unwritten form. The former and the latter are equally trustworthy, and so we also consider the [unwritten] Tradition of the Church to be trustworthy. It is Tradition—seek no further*. (Homily on 2 Thess, Homily 4; PG 62:488).

The following words of St. John the Theologian, at the end of his Gospel, bear especial witness to the existence of a rich Apostolic Tradition: *And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*. (Jn 21:25). Another clear testimony of the rich unwritten Tradition is the Apostolic Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions.

Many passages of the Fathers inform us of the content of the unwritten Apostolic Tradition. One of the most important is found in St. Basil the Great's Concerning the Holy Spirit, chapter 27. Here he mentions the following, apart from other examples of this Tradition: (1) that we make the sign of the Cross; (2) that we look to the East when we pray; (3) that we do not kneel in our prayers on Sunday and throughout Pentecost; (4) that each person is baptized with three im-

mersions and emersions; (5) the renunciation of Satan and his angels in Baptism; (6) the confession of faith in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, word for word in this way; (7) the words which the priest utters at the change of the bread and the wine of the Divine Eucharist. (PG 32:188-189, 192-193).

Regarding the latter, I observe that St. Dionysios the Areopagite in his book Concerning the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy also stresses that the secret prayers, which sanctify and accomplish the Divine Mysteries, are part of the unwritten Tradition: *It is not permitted to interpret in writing the consecrating invocations or their mystical meaning, or to bring out from secrecy to the public the powers worked by God in them; but as our Sacred Tradition holds, when you have learned them thoroughly by secret instructions... you will be uplifted by the illumination which is originative of perfection toward the highest knowledge of them*. (7; PG 3:565C).

In his defense of the holy icons, St. John of Damascus observes that it is Apostolic Tradition that we make icons of Jesus Christ and the Saints and that we venerate them by



way of honoring them. And he gives as other examples of the unwritten traditions of the holy Apostles the veneration of the Cross and our practice of turning to the East when we pray. He adds that *the Apostles have handed down very many things to us unwritten*. (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith IV.16; PG 94:1172C-1173B; cf. 1304-1305).

Among other examples of the unwritten traditions which the Fathers give are the fast on Wednesday and Friday, the composition of the services and especially of the Divine Liturgy, the manner of celebrating the holy Mysteries, and our practice of doing memorial services for those who have died while faithful members of the Church.

### Tradition and Orthodoxy

The Orthodox Church has been the only faithful keeper of Tradition. The Protestants deny the unwritten sacred Tradition; they accept only the written Tradition, Holy Scripture. The rejection of the unwritten Tradition on their part is a superficial and disastrous act. It is superficial because it disregards the fact that Holy Scripture, which the Protestants generally accept as Divinely-inspired, is a product of oral Tradition, since the writings which constitute Holy Scripture were handed down in the Church only around the end of the Apostolic period. In order to be consistent, they ought to discard Holy Scripture also as a Divine revelation. Some Protestants have done this and

have ceased to be Christians except in name. The denial of the unwritten Tradition on the part of Protestantism was something ruinous, because it was the rejection of a treasury which is most necessary for salvation. (cf. St. Nektarios, *Two Studies*, pp. 71-72).

Only the Orthodox Church, as I said, remained a faithful observer of Tradition and preserved the sacred Deposit, as the Apostles handed it down, not distorting it with subtractions and additions. This loyalty to Tradition has been underscored by the Holy Fathers, by distinguished Orthodox theologians of the recent period, and also by heterodox theologians.

The following observations of Basil Ioannidis and Georges Florovsky are characteristic of Orthodox theologians. *The Orthodox Church*, says Ioannidis, who was a professor at the Universities of Thessaloniki and Athens, *possesses full and unaltered the teaching and the tradition of the one, ancient and undivided Church.... She has not altered anything of what she has received.* (Ekklesia, June 1954, p. 201). Father Florovsky, a leading Russian theologian of the Diaspora, writes: *From the first moment the Church has proclaimed that her faith remains the same throughout the ages. And this identity, this similarity of the faith, from the Apostolic times until our own days, without doubt constitutes a most conspicuous sign and a very strong indication of Orthodoxy.* ("Orthodoxos Typos," December 1964, p. 3).

Important also are the admissions which distinguished heterodox theologians make regarding the traditional character of the Orthodox Church. I shall mention two examples. The Protestant E. Seeberg, Professor at the University of Berlin, says: *The Orthodox Church is the one Church, the Catholic Church, the Apostolic Church. She has remained faithful to the Apostolic teaching and the Apostolic canons, and through uninterrupted succession has preserved undiminished the connection to the Apostles.* (The Nostalgia for Orthodoxy [Athens: "Zoe" Brotherhood, 1965], p. 37). The Roman Catholic theologian Julius Tyciak writes: *For the Eastern Church Tradition is everything. She wants to be the Church of Tradition, the Church of the ancient times.* (ibid., p. 73).

### Tradition, Synods, and Fathers

The Synods not only made wide use of the Apostolic Tradition, but also stressed its value and took measures for its preservation. They preserved and proclaimed it in their definitions. Likewise, the holy Fathers contended vigorously, both with the spoken word and with the written word, for the preservation and predominance of the Apostolic Tradition without additions or subtractions. A fair number of them contended through the Synods.

The following words of St. Athanasios the Great are characteristic of the line which the Fathers deliberately and persistently followed: *I have taught according to the Apostolic faith handed down to us by the Fathers, devising nothing outside it.* (Epistle to Serapion 33; PG 26:605C).

The amazing concord which exists in the teaching of the Greek Fathers is due to the fact that they completely assimilated Sacred Tradition and followed the line of transmitting it without modernizations, without external inventions.

Eugenios Voulgaris, the eminent eighteenth-century theologian, underscores the concord of the Fathers most vividly when he says: *The Fathers and the teachers of our Church agree on all the dogmas, are unanimous on all, and differ on none, but form a harmonious melody in the Church as from many voices, precisely because the Truth is one, and discord never enters into it. Where there is the illumination and operation of the Holy Spirit, there is concord.* (Epistle to Orthodox Christians, third edition [Athens, 1969], p. 18).

*It is to the Synods, then, and to the holy Fathers that we owe the preservation and guarding of Sacred Tradition, which the Lord gave, and the Apostles proclaimed, and upon which the Orthodox Church is founded* (cf. St. Nektarios, op. cit., p. 94, The Ecumenical Synods of the Church of Christ [Athens, 1892], p. 10, and Spyridon S. Bilalis, *Orthodoxy and Papism* [Athens, 1969], vol. 1, p. 45).



No matter how much we suffer, the time will come when all will end and each one of us will be given repose in accordance with his labors. Are you afflicted? Are you in pain? Do you weep from the pressure of sorrowful events? Are you weary? Take courage, for through such things the kingdom of God is acquired. But if you have it easy in everything and do not remember God, then grieve, for you are not walking the path that leads to God.

Afflictions, sicknesses, and torments weary us continually so that we abhor this world and desire the world there, where Cherubim and Seraphim hymn God, where there is real and true repose, the day without evening, the blessed light; while things here, in comparison with the eternal things, are dark and abominable. May our holy God grant us spiritual understanding, so that we always prefer the everlasting things, the highest good, our sweet God.

Even though we hobble along with a limp and are filled with wounds and sins, we like to speak about others. When we visit a hospital, we will observe that all the patients have some type of illness. However, we will not see anyone criticizing another sick person. Have you ever noticed this? No one says to another patient: "Why are you laying in bed?" Whereas we are all sick spiritually, and yet we criticize one another. We have a problem with our eye, and we like to occupy ourselves with someone else who has lung disease. Unfortunately, we wretched people fail to realize this.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

## BE ANGRY, AND SIN NOT—A HOMILY ON THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

*St. Luke, Archbishop of Crimea.*

The great feast has arrived, a feast of great joy for Christians: The Holy Spirit has descended upon the apostles, and not only upon the apostles—the Holy Spirit has come to the world to fulfill the promise made to us by our Lord Jesus Christ when He said, *I will not leave you orphans, I will send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.* And the Holy Spirit sanctified the Earth, and He will lead the Christian race on the path of salvation to the end of the ages.

The Holy Spirit came down first of all upon the apostles. And how did He come down? In the form of fiery tongues, visibly. The Holy Spirit has not descended visibly like this upon anyone else since then. What does this mean? Why was it needed that the Holy Spirit should descend upon the holy apostles in the form of fiery tongues, visible and tangible to all? Because the apostles were saints; because through them, through their preaching, the Holy Gospel would be confirmed throughout the whole world. They were the first preachers of the Gospel, the first to bring the light of Christ into the world. This is why the Holy Spirit marked them in this way, descending upon them in the form of fiery tongues. He made their hearts and minds fiery, sanctified and enlightened them, reminded them of everything they had heard earlier from the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave them strength, so that they would bring the whole world to Christ.

But does the Holy Spirit not come down upon all who are worthy to receive Him? Was not St. Seraphim of Sarov filled with the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit came down upon him not in the form of fiery tongues but in such a way that it took possession of all his thoughts, desires, feelings, and longings. He filled St. Seraphim. Thus did the Holy Spirit fill many, many saints, and thus did He fill also all of us unworthy contemporary Christians, for in the Sacrament of Chrismation and Baptism we are all given the grace of the Holy Spirit.

All are given this grace, all have received it, but not all have preserved it. Many have lost this treasure, lost the grace of the Holy Spirit. For could the Holy Spirit possibly abide in an impure heart that is filled with sin? As smoke chases away the bees, as stench repels all people, so does the stench of the human heart repel the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives only in pure hearts, and only to them does He grant His Divine grace, His holy gifts, for He is the *Treasury of good things*—all the true and most precious goods that the human heart could possibly possess. Could the impure heart receive them? Could the heart that is sinful and deprived of mercy and love possibly receive the grace of the Holy Spirit?

But how can we acquire a pure heart? How can we refrain from shameful sins? How can we refrain from the temptations of the enemy of our salvation, from the temptations of the world? How can we guard ourselves from them?

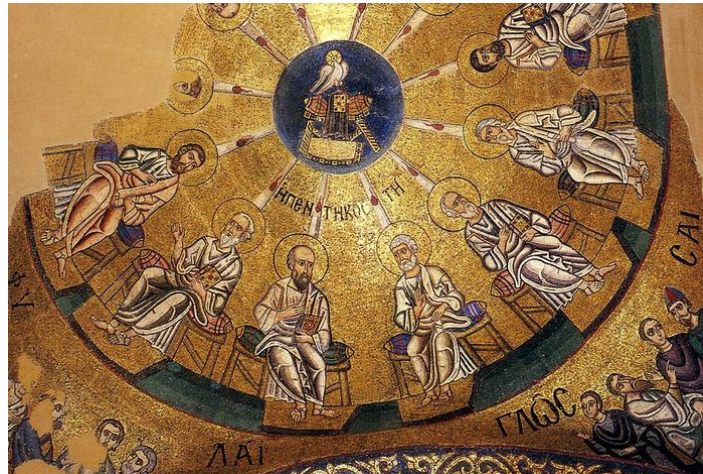
We need to tirelessly, always, throughout our days and every hour remember that the Holy Spirit does not live in an impure heart. We must not succumb to temptation, and when the unclean spirit, the enemy of our salvation whispers in our ear the longing for earthly prosperity, when he draws us a picture of a glorious, comfortable life, when he arouses our pride, a desire for honor and glory, we must not accept these

devilish whisperings, we must not accept the temptations of the world. When these temptations come to the heart we should understand right away that this is a temptation. We should immediately, with all the strength of our minds and hearts reject these temptations, not look at the seductive pictures that the unclean spirit draws for us to tempt us; we should not succumb to his suggestions. And if we

fail to do that, if we look at these pictures of glory and earthly prosperity, if we think more and more about them, then woe to us—for then the temptation will take possession of our hearts.

Great ascetics of piety, who knew how to observe the movements of their hearts, have said that if a person accepts these seductive images, he meshes with them; his soul becomes attached to them and unites with them. The holy fathers call upon us to fear uniting ourselves with all impure images. If we follow this instruction, we will not be stricken with that onerous and terrible woe—the Holy Spirit will not leave us. We must not admire, not delight in satan's seductions, we should not mesh ourselves with them, but should arm ourselves against them with holy anger. St. Paul spoke profound words that we should all firmly remember: *Be angry, and sin not.* (Eph 4:26). There is holy anger—that anger with which Jesus' heart was inflamed when He cast out the money-changers from the temple with a whip, and when He said to the holy apostle Peter, *Get thee behind me, satan!*

How could the Lord Jesus Christ say such words to the holy apostle who loved Him with all his heart? He said it in anger.



That is how it should be. The Lord could not but be angry with the apostle Peter when the latter was trying to persuade Him not to go to His death on the Cross. This is the holy anger that should fill every Christian's heart when he feels the whispered words against the path of Christ. Then may the Lord save us from remaining cold or lukewarm. May He give us holy anger to drive away the tempter. This is what we need. We need to also remember all our lives that the Lord Jesus Christ has called us to become God's children, and to strive all our lives for the light of Christ.

We must dedicate our whole lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must strive with every fiber of our souls to never anger the Lord in any way, and to pray that He would help us who are weak in spirit. And the Lord will help us. And the Holy Spirit will come to our hearts and illumine them, and give us the strength to walk the path of salvation.

May the Holy Spirit come down into our hearts. May the Holy Spirit console us and all who sorrow. This is what this great feast of Pentecost teaches us.



Sin is one thing but instinctive reaction or passion is another. These are our reactions: pride, anger, sexual indulgence, hate, greed, and so on. The corresponding sins are the gratification of these passions: when a man acts and brings into corporeal reality those works which were suggested to him by his desires. It is impossible to exist without desires arising, but not to give way to them is by no means impossible.

When a man is worthy to turn away from evil and is keen to rest with God and to do good, battles with the enemy come swiftly upon him. Henceforth he has to compete, to labor, to be ground down; not only does he fear to turn back toward evil but hopes for the reward of good. As he is being attacked, fighting with weapons and with his fists, he does good, but with much trouble and exhaustion. But when assistance from God is generated in him and afterwards he begins to take on a certain stability in his pursuit of what is good, then he is in sight of rest, then he steps forward towards peace, then he knows from experience the struggle of war and the joy and happiness of peace; and for the rest he ardently desires it and is keen to run in pursuit of it. And finally he obtains it, so that he possesses it and builds it into himself. And what is more fortunate than the soul of one who is worthy to attain to this measure? Such a man attains the measure of a son.

Who hated sin more than the saints? But they did not hate the sinners at the same time, nor condemn them, nor turn away from them. But they suffered with them, admonished them, comforted them, gave them remedies as sickly members, and did all they could to heal them.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

## PROPHET ELIJAH: THE SECOND FORERUNNER OF THE COMING OF CHRIST

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of blessed memory (+1976).

An angel in the flesh and the cornerstone of the prophets, the second forerunner of the coming of Christ... With these words the Holy Church glorifies the great Old Testament righteous man who lived 900 years before Christ—the glorious holy prophet of God, Elijah. By his unusually strict ascetic life, he appeared more like an angel than a man.

But why does the Holy Church call him a second forerunner of the second coming of Christ?

This is because, just as before the first coming of Christ in the world, St. John the Baptist appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17), so also before the second coming of Christ on earth the Prophet Elijah himself will appear. (cf. Mal 4:5). As we know, he did not die but was lifted up to heaven alive, with his flesh, in a chariot of fire (cf. Kgs 2:11).

The beloved disciple of Christ, St. John the Evangelist tells about this in his marvelous Apocalypse. The Holy Prophet Elijah, along with another Old Testament righteous man—Enoch, who was also taken to heaven alive because he walked with God (Gen 5:24), will appear again in the days of the Antichrist. They will prophesy and turn people away from worshipping Antichrist. The Seer of Mysteries calls them both witnesses of God, two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. (Rev 11:3-11). Both of them—Enoch and Elijah—will prophesy for one thousand two hundred sixty days (or 42 months, or three and a half years), that is, in all the reign of the Antichrist; they will do great signs and miracles to convince people not to recognize or accept the sign of Antichrist on their right hand and forehead. (Rev 13:16).

But by God's permission, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit, i.e., the Antichrist himself, shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Rev 11:7).

It is noteworthy that they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth, (Rev 11:10).

Why "tormented"?

The people are "tormented" because the prophets will appeal to their conscience. Because they will try to awaken the sleeping conscience—diverting them from worshipping the Antichrist and turning to the true God, to Christ. It has always been so with the prophets of God. None of them finished their life by a natural death—they were all tortured and killed by the people whom they rebuked for their sinful lives.

The same fate will befall those who do not wish to “keep up with the times,” do not want to take part in the general corruption of morals, and who try to awaken the conscience of others by indicating to them the error or mistake of their chosen path in life, of their improper approach and conduct.

Such people, who want to keep their conscience pure, the others will hate and seek to destroy in every way—if not physically, then at least mentally.

We do not have the information to assert that the Antichrist has already come, but ... only spiritually completely blind people cannot see that what goes mad in the world now is preparing for his speedy arrival and reign. Moreover, his faithful servants work with an extraordinary energy (worthy of a better work). They have already sold him their souls for money and all sorts of earthly goods: For honor, power and domination in human society, for all sorts of carnal pleasure and delight, in order to enjoy them without hindrance or punishment.

From numerous predictions by the ancient Fathers of the Church, we know that the majority of people, of all religions, including our Orthodox faith, and not excepting priests, will enthusiastically accept the Antichrist as their lord and king. They will worship him, and begin to persecute and destroy anyone who opposes the Antichrist.

And while we do not yet see the Antichrist as a particular person, even now a great “sifting” of people is taking place. Some “keep up” with the servants of the coming Antichrist, being bought for money or other earthly goods and recruited into his camp. Others, resolutely avoid, dissociate themselves, and quickly go off away from them, by this arousing the anger and hatred of the former.

Brothers! It has never been such a cunning time, in which people so excel at deception, falsehood, craftiness and lies. It is necessary to be extremely vigilant, especially attentive and cautious in one’s approach to them, in order to not be tempted by enticing words, and not get entangled in the nets of Antichrist. Do not trust anyone who comes to you with any flattering proposals whatsoever, or with lucrative promises, even if it is a person clothed in spiritual garments, if you know that they are close to some dubious or obviously anti-Christian organizations, if they entertain friendship with the enemies of Christ, and especially if they receive money from them, whatever the plausible excuse.

The time has come now, when more than ever before, you need to carefully distinguish who of the bearers of the high calling of Pastors of the Church of Christ is indeed serving Christ, and who has already sold himself to the servants of the coming Antichrist. By this, instead of serving Christ, they serve the Antichrist. You need to distinguish, in order that you not be found following a wolf—even one dressed in sheep’s clothing—instead of a true Pastor.

Particularly dangerous pastors among such false shepherds are those who preach a need for peace with everyone, under the pretext of “non-condemnation” and “Christian love and forgiveness.” Let us remember that the peace with the Antichrist (as with his servants) is already a betrayal of Christ, and hence enmity against Christ!

*For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor 6:14-15).

Even the smallest flirting with the servants of the Antichrist, and pleasing them with however plausible a purpose—is a crime and will not pass in vain. It is by no mistake that the old proverb says: “Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are!”

In our evil times, what is most necessary for all of us who wish to remain faithful to Christ the Saviour, is ardent zeal. This is what the holy and glorious prophet of God, Elijah was so famous for. Instead of any compromise with the servants of the Antichrist, we should have a complete irreconcilability toward them, even if we are threatened with temporal death. Let us remember that Enoch and Elijah, after being murdered by the Beast-Antichrist, will be revived to life again *after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.* (Rev 11:11).

After this Christ our Lord Himself will appear, Who will consume the Antichrist with the *spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.* (2 Thess 2:8). Yet after this, time will be shortened, and the end of this world will come, and the Last Judgement will be opened.

Brothers! If you hear of anyone who relates to preaching on the approach of the Antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, the end of the world and the Last Judgement with mocking, with an ironic smile on his face, or with anger and irritation, then know that you are dealing with a person who, one way or another, has been drawn in by the servants of Antichrist, to involvement in preparation for his speedy arrival and reign on earth. Beware of such people, as destroyers of our holy faith and the Church!

On the Day of Judgement, their “secrets” will be revealed, and all of them, along with the Antichrist and his servants, will receive a just recompense in the *lake of fire burning with brimstone.* (Rev 19:20). But for the righteous, such as the holy prophet Elijah, and for all those who did not bow, and did not join the service of the Antichrist, but rather honestly and earnestly opposed him, that eternal blessed life in the *New Jerusalem* will begin, which the seer of mysteries was made worthy to see coming down from God from Heaven (Rev 21:2).

*Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Amen.

## THE ORTHODOX POSITION OF “MIXED” MARRIAGES

By John Hudanish, from “Orthodox America,” Vol. IX, no. 9, April-May 1989.

**From the source’s Editor:** Although one cannot fault the author for his rigorous view of the Church’s judicial/canonical tradition regarding mixed marriages, one must keep in mind that the very purpose behind the Church’s enactment of these and other canons is the salvation of souls. In her canons, the Church provides a wise standard, not a rigid law which spells perdition to the transgressor. (New Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth, a Lutheran, when she married into the Russian Imperial Family, provides an outstanding case in point). Nor does adherence to the canons guarantee success; **the person who converts to the Faith solely in order to marry someone within the Church is building on shaky ground.**

As stewards of the Church, bishops must not be denied their right to exercise *economia* in the administration of the canons, and in certain limited circumstances this has meant permitting a mixed marriage. “Wisdom” is the operative term here. When a mixed marriage is permitted simply because it has become widely tolerated or because the faithful are not being properly instructed in the purpose and spiritual duties of marriage, *economy* is being abused.

While God’s mercy can in no wise be invoked as a blanket coverage for the disregard of canons, it is only thanks to such mercy that any of us can call ourselves Orthodox.

† † †

**A bird may love a fish, but where will they build a home together?**

[Tevye, from “Fiddler on the Roof”]

† † †

The July 24<sup>th</sup> (1988) issue of The Church Messenger, published by the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Diocese in the U.S.A., carried an article entitled “Perspectives in Marriages to Non-Christian Spouses” by Fr. George Papaioannou of the Greek Archdiocese.

The thrust of this article is that Orthodox Christians may marry outside the Faith. Fr. George wrote in part as follows: “Living in a pluralistic society such as ours, we cannot ignore those who marry outside the Church. Like a good shepherd, the priest has to serve them. Yet, there are others who find this approach condemnable. Is it? On the contrary, this writer believes that this approach is justified by both the Bible and the history of the Church.”

Having made this statement, however, Fr. George fails to back it up. The only justification he offers from “the Bible and the history of the Church” in support of mixed marriages is a passage from St. Paul’s first Epistle to the Corinthians: *If any brother hath a wife that believeth not,*

*and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband. (1 Cor 7:12-13).*

The implication here is that, since St. Paul mentions mixed marriages, the early Church must have permitted believers to marry non-believers. But this was not the case. In St. Paul’s day, the vast majority of Christians, including the Apostles and even Paul himself, were converts. They had come into the Church of their own volition as adults. And many of them were already married and had families before they were baptized. Since one’s convictions are a very personal thing, it naturally follows that the decision to become a Christian did not always come to both husband and wife simultaneously in every family. Thus it was that the Church in St. Paul’s day included a significant number of couples in which one partner had embraced the Faith and been received through baptism months or even years before the other. And that is how we must understand this passage of Scripture.

That is how St. John Chrysostom understands it. In his nineteenth homily, he addresses this very passage and then cautions: *...the issue here does not concern those who are contemplating marriage, but only those who are already married. He did not say, “If any brother wants to marry an unbeliever,” but “If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever.” This means that if anyone receives the Word of Truth after getting married, and the wife remains an unbeliever but wants the marriage to continue, then it should not be broken. “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife.” The purity of the believer is the stronger force.*

In 691 A.D., the Quinisextine Ecumenical Council convened in Trullo and deliberated on this very question. The assembled bishops spoke out against marriages between Orthodox and unbelievers in no uncertain terms: *An Orthodox man is not permitted to marry an heretical woman, nor is an Orthodox woman to be joined to an heretical man. But if anything of this kind appear to have been done by any, we require them to consider the marriage null, and that the marriage be dissolved. For it is not fitting to mingle together what should not be mingled, nor is it right that the sheep be joined with the wolf, nor the lot of “sinners with the portion of Christ!” But if any one shall transgress, the things which we have decreed let him be cut off. But if any, who up to this time are unbelievers and are not yet numbered in the flock of the Orthodox, have contracted lawful marriage between themselves, and if then, one choosing the right and coming to the light of truth, and the other remaining still detained by the bend of error and not willing to behold with steady eye the Divine rays, (and if) the unbelieving woman is pleased to cohabit with the believing man, or the unbelieving man with*



*the believing woman, let them not be separated, according to the divine Apostle, for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by her husband. (Canon LXXII)*

And the “divine Apostle” himself, in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, had this to say about marrying a heretic: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? (2 Cor 6:14-15).*

The message is unmistakably clear! Scripture, a universally acclaimed Church Father and a canon of an Ecumenical Council—all three inveigh heavily against marriages between Orthodox and heterodox. The teaching of the Orthodox Church is very clear on this subject: an Orthodox Christian may NOT marry someone who is not Orthodox. And a mixed marriage is permitted only when both partners were outside the Church when the marriage took place. The testimony of Scripture and Tradition specifically and emphatically denies any notion that marriage between Orthodox and heterodox is a practice that can be “justified by both the Bible and the history of the Church”!

In fact, the wording of Canon LXXII above is so uncompromisingly strong in forbidding such a practice, that it appears even to deny any and every local hierarch’s traditional discretionary right of *economia* in applying it, to wit: *...But if anything of this kind appear to have been done by any, we require them to consider the marriage null and that the marriage be dissolved...*

And yet, despite these clear prohibitions, mixed marriages are not uncommon, even in our own Synod. How do they occur? No doubt each mixed marriage is unique, a special case unto itself. However, we can be sure that all of them involve, to a greater or lesser degree, ignorance of or indifference to the canons and traditions of the Orthodox Church.

A number of factors combine to create this deplorable situation in the Western world. First of all, there is the popular image of Jesus Christ as a false, permissive god who loves everything, demands nothing and, in the name of divine love, rescues even the unrepentant from the consequences of their own behavior.

Then there are the three philosophical pillars of contemporary society: humanism, secularism and skepticism, which put man instead of God at the center of the universe, ad-

vocate a legal fiction that one religion is as good as any other, including no religion, and constantly question every tenet, every dogma, every accepted convention and revealed Truth in the name of Progress and Intellectual Freedom (false gods if ever there were any), and thereby deprive their adherents of ever knowing what it is to have firm ground under their feet.

There are also contemporary notions of romantic love, a heady form of dementia this writer knows only too well. It feels great for a season, but unless the starry-eyed couple has something more in common than just an intense physical attraction, they will inevitably wake up one day to find their mutual infatuation has evaporated, leaving them to consider a range of real issues like paying bills and raising children.

Finally, there are compassionate priests who painfully understand the dynamic interaction of all the factors just mentioned. They are constantly frustrated at their inability to keep the sheep Christ has put in their care safe from the

pernicious influences of contemporary society. To their eternal credit, they never stop caring for the lost sheep, the ones who have willfully wandered away from the Church’s salvific fold. But in their desperation to bring in all the sheep, they sometimes err by attempting to redefine the fold. Theirs is a misplaced compassion. **In stretching the boundaries of the fold to accommodate the lost sheep, they endanger**

**the rest of the flock.**

We are fortunate enough to live in a free country. No one old enough to marry can be forced to be Orthodox. Membership in the Orthodox Church is ultimately a matter of choice. So why would anyone call himself Orthodox if he rejects the Church’s authority and refuses to abide by the canons and standards of behavior She has upheld throughout Her history? Perhaps more to the point, why would one choose to be an Orthodox priest if he feels the Church is too rigid and out of step with the times? Rather than call upon the Church to lower her standards, such persons should reassess their personal views in light of Scripture and Tradition and, if they still prefer their personal convictions to the teachings of the Church, they ought to leave it. Given the multitude of so-called Christian churches in America, it would be a simple matter to find a congregation with a more elastic theology and join it.

Fr. George asks: “How do we deal with these people who were baptized and confirmed in the Orthodox faith but not



married in the Church?” Canon LXXII of Trullo directs that the marriage be dissolved. But if the Orthodox partner refuses to acknowledge the Church’s authority and continues to cohabit with an heretical spouse in a union not blessed by the Church, then let him (or her) be cut off.

Surely Fr. George must be aware of this canon. Why is it not acceptable to him? What other course of action is there? Would he administer the Sacraments of the Church to those who remain obdurate and unrepentant in defiance of Her authority? Is this the sort of behavior that defines a responsible shepherd? How will he answer for such behavior before Christ, Who Himself has said, *...if he [the sinner] neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* (Mt 18:17)?

God made us to be with Him forever in His Heavenly Kingdom; He does not want to see anyone going to hell. But He has given us free will. He lets us make choices, even if these choices separate us from Him. This is what free will is all about. So let Father George remember, as any parent of grown children knows, that good people sometimes make bad choices—and sooner or later they have to face the consequences.

It is not our place to speculate on the consequences in the hereafter. But anyone with eyes can see what bitter fruit mixed marriages often bear in the here and now. The Orthodox partner in a mixed marriage is compromised at least as often as the unbelieving spouse is consecrated. Contemporary sociologists have observed that marriages between persons of different faiths are peaceful enough provided both partners are indifferent to their respective religions. Conflicts occur when one partner attempts to bring his religious convictions into the home.

If the Orthodox spouse is devout and sincerely tries to live his faith, sooner or later this will be perceived as an imposition by the heterodox partner.

As impositions build, resigned acceptance will give way to passive resistance, which itself will be replaced eventually by ridicule and even hostility. And gradually, Saturday vespers, fasting, morning and evening prayers, prayers at mealtime, and even Sunday liturgy will be abandoned for the sake of domestic tranquility. This is how the Orthodox spouse is separated from the Body of Christ and defiled.

**The real losers in such a marriage are the children,** raised in an environment wherein an Orthodox mindset is just a dim memory for one of the parents.

We Orthodox are a peculiar people, a people set apart. Since Christ’s Resurrection, we are the New Israel. We are the children of Abraham. We are heirs to the Promise made to Jacob. And we claim our inheritance, not through genealogy or ethnic derivation, but through a dynamic faith in Christ. It is an awful lot of risk for the sake of a transitory infatuation.

## IT IS A MATTER OF THE HEART!

*Fr. David Moser.*

Each culture has its own “language,” its own mindset, its own “idiom,” if you will. Orthodoxy also has its own “language,” one that can be and is expressed in many different tongues. Some people seem to have a greater facility than others for learning this language. It has nothing to do with linguistic ability. Rather, it requires humility and obedience; it is a matter of the heart.

Inevitably, those of us who are converts bring with us to the Faith our “baggage,” our old way of thinking and understanding. We grew up with a “language” of a different religious culture, be it Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, humanist, or some other. It is not possible to understand the fullness of the Orthodox faith while continuing to use a different “language.” Therefore, we must change the way we think; we must acquire the mind of the Church (something which has also been called the mind of Christ, or the mind of the Fathers). This is not accomplished overnight; it is a long process, like learning a foreign language; progress is gradual and requires a great deal of effort. Those of us who were not brought up in the Church and who did not acquire an Orthodox outlook as children, must set aside our old way of thinking, our old way of expressing Christian ideas and replace that old “language” with the “language” of Orthodoxy.

Some of you readers will say, “I’ve done that. I use words like ‘Theotokos,’ and ‘liturgy’ instead of ‘mass,’ and ‘mystery’ instead of ‘sacrament.’” That is not the point. It is not a matter of semantics. What we are talking about here is a profound change of heart and mind.

I was raised in the Evangelical Protestant tradition. If I attempt to understand the Orthodox Faith in the context of the Christianity in which I was raised, such an understanding will be incomplete and faulty, because the concepts, the expressions, the meanings are either not there or are different. For example, a Protestant will say, so-and-so is “saved,” or someone “got saved,” as something that happens when a person accepts Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, whereas in an Orthodox context that person is said to be in the process of being saved (cf. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, p. 259), of *working out his salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12)—a passage never quoted by Protestants. Or again, Protestants commonly refer to believers as “saints,” and while this is true in the sense in which it is used by St. Paul, within the Orthodox tradition, a “saint” is someone worthy of awe and veneration, a model of Christian perfection. To take another example, the word “ascetic” and “asceticism” are virtually missing from the Protestant vocabulary, while they are among Orthodoxy’s ABCs.

These distinctions have significant ramifications. Until a convert to Orthodoxy turns his back on his former under-

standing and restrains himself to think and understand in the ways of the Church, he will not be able to comprehend even the simplest spiritual truths.

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing influx of former Protestants into the Orthodox Church. This is cause for rejoicing. But there are dangers here. Catechism is often inadequate, and assumptions are made about the level of understanding that these new converts have of the Faith, which may not be accurate. The conversions often result in a change of external habits with little change of heart, and, in many cases, no realization that such a change is needed. Outwardly, these converts may be Orthodox (sometimes more Orthodox than those raised in the Faith): they have icons, they fast, they cross themselves; but their mentality is still protestant; they have not acquired the mind of the Church. In order to meet the pastoral needs of these new converts, some of them are taken straight from the Protestant tradition and ordained to Holy Orders (the priesthood or diaconate); before they themselves have learned the “language” of Orthodoxy, they are given the responsibility of teaching others. This is unfortunate. Heterodox training is at best inadequate for passing on the Orthodox Faith. One can be steeped in Orthodoxy intellectually, but this is still not enough.

The Apostle Paul writes: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil. 2:5-11).

This passage is assigned by the Church to be read at certain feasts of the Mother of God, the paragon of Christian obedience and humility, indicating to us that it is precisely these virtues that are the key to acquiring the mind of the Church, the mind of Christ.

First, we must obediently acquire the external appearance, put on the robe of the Church, as it were, resisting the tendency—in our pride of mind—to alter those parts which feel uncomfortable, as if they were simply something “ethnic” which we should “Americanize”; but humbly, conforming ourselves to its contours, recognizing that this is the robe of Christ and His saints.

Then we must begin to effect that internal change, obediently submitting our mind and heart to the instruction of the Church. This is available to us in many forms: in the guidance of an experienced spiritual father, in the church services, in the writings of the Holy Fathers, in the Lives of

Saints (here the *savor* of Orthodoxy is readily apparent)... If there is some aspect of the Church’s teaching or her tradition that does not make sense to us, we must be patient and humble, realizing that **it is our understanding which is still deficient, not the Church.**

The most important means of acquiring the mind of the Church is prayer. This again is a learning process; we must learn to pray in the “language” of the Church. The Apostle Paul writes, *we know not what we should pray as we ought...* (Rom. 8:26), and therefore the Church gives us the prayers of saints—those who have mastered the art—to guide us, to help us develop an Orthodox consciousness, a proper disposition of mind and heart. Here again, we must not rely on our heterodox experience. By carefully attending to the prayers in our prayer books and the public prayers of the Church, we will be steered away from the presumption of the pharisee and towards the soul-saving humility and compunction of the publican.

Christian, it is imperative that you acquire the mind of the Church, but to do so you must relinquish your pride, your previous learning and experience outside the Church and become like a little child. Start at the beginning; set aside whatever you think you have, and, humbly and obediently following the direction of the Church, allow yourself to be molded into the image of Christ.



The majority of hierarchs and priests see to it that their golden altars, vestments and cassocks shine, but not their works. I am not saying that the hierarch or priest should be filthy, unclean, and ragged—far from it! He should be seemly and clean, as a minister, servant, and representative of the Heavenly King, yet he should not only have garments and boast in them, but also have God-pleasing and shining works. Strive to walk worthily of the vocation to which you were called. Do not pay attention to the majority, but to the few and the elect. Do not walk the wide and spacious road which leads to perdition, but the narrow and sorrowful one, which few walk and which leads to life. In this way you will please God and the angels, and benefit yourself and our brother Christians as well.

Foolish people having grasped from the Son of God the right to judge, having left their own sins, judge and censure one another. The heavens are amazed at this and the earth trembles, while people do not understand, nor feel the great sin which they are committing!

St. Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

## DO ALL RELIGIONS HAVE THE SAME HEAVENLY FATHER?

By Fr. Emmanuel Hatzidakis, June 15, 2014. *This courageous exclamation of the truth is more timely nowadays than ever; Patriarch Bartholomew recently committed his desire, plan goal, and commitment to have a joint Easter/Pascha with not only the Latins (Roman Catholics) but also with all other heresies. The plan is to “unify the churches” on “Easter Day” 2025, in the year that Orthodoxy will observe the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical council in Nicaea (325 AD). Sadly, there exists an overabundance of clergy, lay people and now even some monastics in Greece who are moving His flock into this satanical pseudo-unity.*



“We are all brothers and sisters.” Are we? First in Jerusalem (May 27, 2014), and then in Rome (June 8, 2014), Patriarch Bartholomew hammered the message of universal brotherhood with intra-Christian and interfaith prayer services (which according to the canons of the Orthodox Church are prohibited) and with statements and declarations to that effect.

Back on November 2, 2009, in an interview Patriarch Bartholomew had given to Charlie Rose (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRCKYCsAcqo&t=439s>) he had stated: “We are all created by God and as such we are all brothers and sisters. We have the same heavenly Father, whatever we call him.” Charlie interrupted the Patriarch: “All religions have the same heavenly Father?” “Of course,” was the Patriarch’s reply, adding: “God is but one, independently of the name we give him, Allah or Yahweh, and so on. God is one and we are his children.”

Although the two statements (everyone believes in the same God; and, we are all his children) appear to be self-proclaimed truths, for us Orthodox Christians (and to me, as I understand my faith), they are erroneous, outrageous and totally unacceptable. If the Patriarch is correct, what is the meaning of the words, *Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour.* (Isa 43:10-11)? What is he thinking of when he recites the following words in the divine Liturgy (our main worship service): *You are our God, beside You we know of no other [God] and in the final benediction of the same service, May Christ our true God... save us...?*

No. It is not a matter of a name (God, Allah, Jehovah, Buddha, Supreme Being, the Power), so that it does not matter what we call Him, as long as we call upon Him. No. Not so! Our God is Christ: *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him*

*that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.* (1 Jn 5:20-21). Outside of Christ every other “god” is an idol.

As far as all of us being children of God, clearly we are all God’s creation, but not His offspring. Our heavenly Father has only one Child: Jesus Christ. However, we all have the potentiality to become His children (by adoption): *To all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God.* (Jn 1:12). Therefore, unless we belong to **Christ’s family** (cf. Heb 3:6), the Church, we are not His children.

In the early Church the Lord’s Prayer was not revealed to the Catechumens until immediately before their baptism, because no one that was not baptized could presume to say, *our Father who art in heaven*, not having yet received the gift of adoption. The Lord’s Prayer is introduced in the Divine Liturgy with the words, *and make us worthy, Master, with boldness and without fear of condemnation, to dare call You, the heavenly God, Father, and to say, “Our Father...”* Only those who have been united with Christ, God’s only Son, can call God *Father*.

Sorry, your All Holiness: this is the faith of the Orthodox Christian people, and one would expect our Patriarch to be a leader **who rightly teaches the word of truth**: *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (2 Tim. 2:15), not one who betrays it.



*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.* [Prov 4:23]

**I**n the heart is the will; in the heart is love; in the heart is the mind; in the heart is the image of the divine Trinity. The heart is the home of the Father, the altar of the Son and the workshop of the Holy Spirit. God wants our hearts: Son, give Me thy heart. Oh, my brother, above and beyond all else that you keep safe, guard your heart. Let the mountains be overthrown and the seas dried up; let friends forsake you and riches betray you; let your body be eaten by worms; let the world pour on you all the scorn of which it is capable-and do not fear. Only guard your heart; guard it and make it cleave to the Lord; give it into His keeping. Life flows from the heart; but whence comes this life in the heart, unless it is the abode of the breath of the Lord and Source of life-God?

Oh, my brother, the Spirit of God Himself can, when He so desires, dwell in the human heart. He not only can, but wills to do so. Only, He waits for you to prepare your heart for Him; to make it into a temple, for God the Holy Spirit only lives in a temple. As a snake protects its head, so, my son, guard your heart. For the life that comes from the living God enters into it and flows forth from it.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

## Ὁ Ἐρημίτης Ἀσκητὴς καὶ ὁ Ληστὴς τῆς Ἐρήμου

Ἀπὸ χειρόγραφο «Γεροντικό» τῆς Ι.Μ. Φιλοθέου.

Ἦταν ἓνας γέροντας ἀσκητὴς καὶ ἀναχωρητῆς, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀσκήτευσε σ' ἓνα ἔρημο τόπο 70 χρόνια, μὲ νηστεία, παρθενία καὶ ἀγρυπνία. Στὰ τόσα δὲ χρόνια ποὺ δούλευε στὸ Θεό, δὲν ἀξιώθηκε νὰ δεῖ καμία ὄπτασία καὶ ἀποκάλυψη ἐκ Θεοῦ. Καὶ σκέφθηκε, λέγοντας τοῦτο:

«Μήπως γιὰ καμίαν ἀφορμὴ ποὺ δὲν ξέρω ἐγώ, δὲν ἀρέσει τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡ ἄσκησή μου, καὶ ἡ ἐργασία μου εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτη; Μήπως γιὰ τοῦτο δὲν μπορῶ νὰ ἔχω ἀποκάλυψη καὶ νὰ δῶ κανένα μυστήριο:».

Αὐτὰ λογιζόμενος ὁ γέροντας, ἄρχισε νὰ δέεται καὶ νὰ παρακαλεῖ τὸ Θεὸ περισσύτερο, προσευχόμενος καὶ λέγοντας:

«Κύριε, ἐάν σοῦ ἀρέσει ἡ ἄσκησή μου καὶ δέχεσαι τὰ ἔργα μου, δέομαι σου ὁ ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ ἀνάξιος, νὰ χαρίσεις καὶ σὲ μένα κάποιον ἀπὸ τὰ χαρίσματά σου, γιὰ νὰ πληροφορηθῶ μὲ μία φανέρωση ἐνὸς μυστηρίου ὅτι ἄκουσες τὴ δέησή μου, γιὰ νὰ περνῶ θαρρετὰ καὶ πληροφορημένα τὴν ἀσκητικὴ μου ζωή».

Ἐνῶ τὰ ἔλεγε αὐτὰ ὁ ἅγιος γέροντας καὶ παρακαλοῦσε, ἄκουσε τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ τοῦ λέει:

«Ἄν μὲ ἀγαπᾷς καὶ θέλεις νὰ δεῖς τὴ δόξα μου, πήγαινε μέσα στὴ βαθύτατη ἔρημο, καὶ θὰ σοῦ ἀποκαλυφθοῦν μυστήρια».

Ὅταν ἄκουσε αὐτὴ τὴ φωνὴ ὁ γέροντας, βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ κελλί του.

Ἀφοῦ ἀπομακρύνθηκε, τὸν συνάντησε ἓνας ληστὴς, ὁ ὁποῖος ὅταν εἶδε τὸν ἀββᾶ, ὄρμησε μὲ βία ἐναντίον του, θέλοντας νὰ τὸν σκοτώσει.

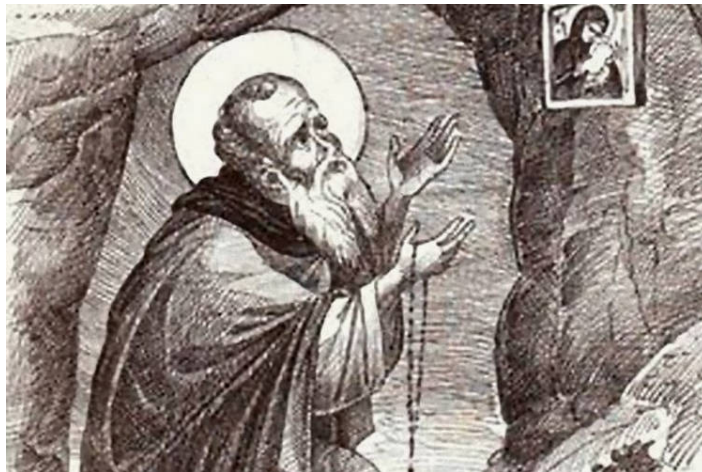
Ὅταν τὸν ἔπιασε, τοῦ εἶπε:

«Σὲ καλὴ ὥρα σὲ συνάντησα, Γέροντα, γιὰ νὰ τελειώσω τὴν ἐργασία μου καὶ νὰ σωθῶ. Διότι ἐμεῖς οἱ ληστὲς ἔχουμε τέτοια συνήθεια καὶ τέτοιο νόμο καὶ πίστη. Ὅτι δηλαδὴ ὅποιος μπορέσει νὰ κάνει ἓκατὸ φόνους, πηγαίνει στὸν παράδεισο! Ἐγώ, μετὰ ἀπὸ πολλοὺς κόπους ἕως τώρα, ἔκανα ἐνενηντὰ ἐννιά φόνους... Μοῦ λείπει ἀκόμα ἓνας γιὰ νὰ τελειώσω τὴν ἓκατοντάδα μου καὶ νὰ σωθῶ. Λοιπὸν, σοῦ χρωστῶ μεγάλη χάρη καὶ σὲ εὐχαριστῶ, γιατί σήμερα γιὰ σένα θ' ἀπολαύσω τὸν παράδεισο».

Ὅταν ἄκουσε τὰ λόγια τοῦ ληστῆ ὁ γέροντας, ξαφνιασθηκε καὶ τρόμαξε μὲ τὸ ξαφνικὸ καὶ ἀνέλπιστο πειρασμό. Καὶ ἀφοῦ μὲ τὸ νοῦ του κοίταξε πρὸς τὸ Θεό, σκέφτηκε καὶ εἶπε:

«Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ δόξα Σου, Δέσποτα Κύριε, ποὺ θέλησες νὰ δεῖξεις σὲ μένα τὸ δοῦλο σου; Τέτοια συμβουλή ἔδωσες σὲ μένα τὸν ἁμαρτωλό, νὰ βγῶ ἀπὸ τὸ κελλί μου, γιὰ νὰ μὲ πληροφορήσεις τέτοιο φοβερὸ μυστήριο; Μὲ τέτοιες δωρεὲς ἀμείβεις τοὺς κόπους τῆς ἀσκήσεως ποὺ ἔκανα γιὰ σένα; Τώρα ἀληθινὰ γνώρισα, Κύριε, ὅτι ὅλος ὁ κόπος τῆς ἀσκήσεώς μου ἦταν μάταιος· καὶ ὅλες οἱ προσευχῆς μου θεωρήθηκαν ἀπὸ σένα σίχαμα καὶ βδέλυγμα. Ὅμως εὐχαριστῶ τὴ φιλανθρωπία Σου. Κύριε, ὅτι, καθὼς γνωρίζεις, παιδεύεις τὴν ἀναξιοτήτά μου, ὅπως μοῦ πρέπει, γιὰ τὶς ἀμέτρητες ἁμαρτίες μου καὶ μὲ παρέδωσες στὰ χέρια τοῦ ληστῆ καὶ φονιά».

Αὐτὰ λέγοντας ὁ γέροντας, λυπημένος, δίψασε πολὺ καὶ εἶπε στὸ ληστή:



«Παιδί μου, ἐπειδὴ μὲ τὸ νὰ εἶμαι ἁμαρτωλός, μὲ παρέδωσε ὁ Θεὸς στὰ χέρια σου νὰ μὲ θανατώσεις καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ἔτσι ἡ ἐπιθυμία σου, ὅπως τὸ θέλησες, καὶ ἐγὼ στεροῦμαι τὴ ζωή, σὰν κακὸς ἄνθρωπος ποὺ εἶμαι, γι' αὐτὸ σὲ παρακαλῶ κάνε μου μία χάρη καὶ ἓνα πολὺ μικρὸ θέλημα καὶ δός μου λίγο νερὸ νὰ πιῶ, καὶ μετὰ

ἀποκεφάλισέ με».

Ὅταν ἄκουσε ὁ ληστὴς τὸ λόγο τοῦ γέροντα, θέλοντας μὲ προθυμία νὰ ἐκπληρώσει τὴν ἐπιθυμία του, ἔβαλε στὴ θήκη τὸ σπαθί, ποὺ κρατοῦσε, καὶ ἔβγαλε ἀπὸ τὸν κόρφο τοῦ ἓνα δοχεῖο καὶ πήγε στὸ ποτάμι ποὺ ἦταν ἐκεῖ κοντὰ καὶ ἔσκυψε νὰ τὸ γεμίσει, γιὰ νὰ φέρει στὸ γέροντα νὰ πιεῖ.

Καὶ ἐκεῖ ποὺ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ γεμίσει τὸ ἀγγεῖο, πέθανε!

Ὅταν πέρασε λίγη ὥρα καὶ δὲν ἐρχόταν ὁ ληστὴς, σκεπτόταν ὁ γέροντας καὶ ἔλεγε

«Μήπως καὶ ἦταν νυσταγμένος καὶ ἔπεσε καὶ ἀποκοιμήθηκε καὶ γιὰ αὐτὸ ἀργεῖ καὶ ἔτσι μπορῶ νὰ φύγω καὶ νὰ πάω στὸ κελλί μου; Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως εἶμαι γέρος, φοβᾶμαι, γιατί δὲν ἔχω δύναμη νὰ τρέξω, θὰ κουραστῶ καὶ θὰ μὲ προφθάσει, καὶ στὸ θυμὸ του θὰ μὲ τυραννήσει χωρὶς λύπη, κόβοντάς με ζωντανὸ σὲ πολλὰ κομμάτια. Λοιπὸν ἂς μὴ φύγω, ἀλλὰ ἂς πάω στὸ ποτάμι, νὰ δῶ τί κάνει».

Πῆγε λοιπὸν ὁ γέροντας μὲ τέτοιες σκέψεις καὶ τὸν βρῆκε πεθαμένο. Ὄταν τὸν εἶδε γέμισε θαυμασμὸ καὶ ἐκπληξῆ. Καὶ σηκώνοντας τὰ χέρια του στὸν οὐρανὸ ἔλεγε:

«Κύριε φιλάνθρωπε, ἐὰν δὲν μοῦ ἀποκαλύψεις τὸ μυστήριον αὐτό, δὲν κατεβάζω τὰ χέρια μου. Λυπήσου λοιπὸν τὸν κόπο μου καὶ φανέρωσε μου αὐτὸ τὸ πρᾶγμα».

Ἐνῶ προσευχόταν ὁ γέροντας, ἦλθε Ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ τοῦ εἶπε:

«Βλέπεις, ἄββᾶ, αὐτὸν ποὺ βρίσκεται μπροστά σου πεθαμένος; Ἐξαιτίας σου πέθανε μὲ αἰφνίδιο θάνατο, γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσεις ἐσὺ καὶ νὰ μὴ σὲ θανατώσει. Λοιπὸν θάψε τον ὡς ἓνα σωσιμένο. Διότι ἡ ὑπακοὴ ποὺ ἔκανε σὲ σένα καὶ ἔκρυψε τὸ φονικὸ σπαθὶ στὴ θήκη του, γιὰ νὰ πάει νὰ σοῦ φέρει νερό, νὰ σβήσει τὴ φλόγα τῆς δίψας σου, μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο καταπράυνε τὴν ὁργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸν δέχθηκε ὡς ἐργάτη τῆς ὑπακοῆς. Καὶ ἡ ὁμολογία τῶν ἐνενήντα ἐννέα φόνων θεωρήθηκε ὡς ἐξομολόγησις.

Λοιπὸν θάψε τον καὶ ἔχε τον μὲ τοὺς σωσιμένους. Καὶ γνώρισε ἀπ' αὐτό, τὸ πέλαγος τῆς φιλανθρωπίας καὶ εὐσπλαχνίας τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ πήγαινε χαίροντας στὸ κελλί σου καὶ νὰ εἶσαι πρόθυμος στὶς προσευχῆς σου καὶ νὰ μὴ λυπᾶσαι καὶ νὰ λές, ὅτι πὼς εἶσαι ἀμαρτωλὸς καὶ στερημένος ἀπὸ ἀποκάλυψη.

Γιατί ὅπως εἶδες, σοῦ ἀπεκάλυψε ὁ Θεὸς ἓνα μυστήριον. Νὰ ξέρεις δὲ καὶ τοῦτο, ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ κόποι τῆς ἀσκήσεώς σου εἶναι δεκτοὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, διότι δὲν ὑπάρχει κανένας κόπος ποὺ γίνεται γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ νὰ ἀπορρίπτεται ἀπ' Αὐτόν».

Ἄφου ἄκουσε αὐτὰ ὁ γέροντας ἔθαψε τὸν νεκρό...



## Κατὰ τὴν Ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς Ἐγινε καὶ ἡ Κάθοδος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ ἡ Ἰδρυσις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον: «Ἱερά ἱστορία τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης», τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου πατρὸς Κωνσταντίνου Παπαγιάννη, ἐκδόσεις «Τὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας».

**Κ**ατὰ τὴν Ἰουδαϊκὴ παράδοσι, ὁ νόμος δόθηκε τὴν πεντηκοστὴ μέρα ἀπὸ τὴν ἔξοδο· καὶ αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς τὸ γεγονός γιόρταζαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι κατὰ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς. Πράγματι, ἂν λάβουμε ὑπ' ὄψιν ὅτι ἡ ἔξοδος ἔγινε στὰ μέσα τοῦ πρώτου μηνός, τοῦ Νισᾶν, πρέπει τώρα νὰ ἦταν οἱ πρώτες μέρες τοῦ τρίτου μηνός.

Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς ἔγινε καὶ ἡ κάθοδος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ ἡ

ἴδρυσις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι καθόλου τυχαῖο, γιατί ἡ παλαιὰ Πεντηκοστὴ ἦταν εἰκόνα καὶ προτύπωση τῆς νέας. Κατὰ τὴν παλαιὰ Πεντηκοστὴ δόθηκε ὁ νόμος καὶ συνήφθη ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, ἡ συμφωνία μεταξὺ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἰσραηλιτικοῦ λαοῦ· κατὰ τὴν νέα Πεντηκοστὴ δόθηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ συνήφθη ἡ νέα διαθήκη, συμφωνία τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὸν νέο Ἰσραήλ, μὲ ὅσους δηλ. ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη δέχονται τὴ λύτρωσι ποὺ τοὺς προσφέρει ὁ Θεός. Ἡ Παλαιὰ διαθήκη ἔγινε στὸ ὄρος Σινᾶ· ἡ καινὴ στὸ ὄρος Σιών, ὅπου εἶναι κτισμένη ἡ Ἱερουσαλήμ. Στὴν παλαιὰ σαλεύθηκε τὸ ὄρος Σινᾶ· στὴν καινὴ τὸ σπῖτι ὅπου βρισκόταν οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Βροντῆς καὶ ἀστραπῆς στὸ ὄρος Σινᾶ· πνοὴ βιαία καὶ φωτιὰ στὴ Σιών. Σάλπιγγες ἠχοῦσαν στὸ Σινᾶ· πνευματικῆς σάλπιγγες, τὰ στόματα τῶν ἀποστόλων, ἐκήρυτταν στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ. Ὁ Θεὸς κατέβηκε στὸ Σινᾶ· τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ.

Ἐπάρχουν ὅμως καὶ μεγάλες διαφορῆς μεταξὺ τῶν δύο διαθηκῶν, ποὺ τονίζουν τὴν ἀσύγκριτη ὑπεροχὴ τῆς δευτέρας. Στὸ Σινᾶ γράφτηκε ὁ νόμος σὲ πλάκες πέτρινες· στὴ Σιών γράφτηκαν οἱ ἐντολῆς στὶς καρδιῆς τῶν πιστῶν. Ἐκεῖ ἐπικρατοῦσε φόβος καὶ τρόμος· ἐδῶ ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Θεὸς ἀπευθυνόταν μόνο πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους· ἐδῶ ἀπευθύνεται πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μεσίτης ἐκεῖ ἦταν ὁ Μωυσῆς· ἐδῶ ὁ Χριστός. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Θεὸς ὑποσχόταν ἐπίγεια ἀγαθὰ, ἂν θὰ τηροῦνταν οἱ ἐντολῆς του· ἐδῶ ὑπόσχεται πνευματικὰ καὶ αἰώνια. Ἡ παλαιὰ διαθήκη ἐπισφραγίστηκε μὲ τὸ αἷμα ζώων· ἡ νέα μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Μεγάλῃ ἡ τιμὴ ποὺ ἔκαμνε ὁ Θεὸς στοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες· ἀσυγκρίτως μεγαλύτερη καὶ ὑψηλότερη ἡ τιμὴ ποὺ ἔκανε σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανούς, ποὺ ἀποτελοῦμε τὸν νέο Ἰσραήλ, τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μᾶς ἐδιᾶλεξε ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη, μᾶς ξεχώρισε καὶ μᾶς ἐξύψωσε σὰν λαὸ του περιούσιον καὶ ἀγαπημένο. Μᾶς ἔκανε ἀδελφοὺς καὶ ὑπηκόους τοῦ ἐνὸς μεγάλου βασιλέως καὶ ἀρχιερέως, τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ ἔχει αἰώνια τὴν ἱερωσύνη καὶ ἀτελεύτητη τὴ βασιλείαν. Μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ τὸν ἐπικαλούμαστε σὰν πατέρα, καὶ σὰν πνευματικοὶ ἱερεῖς νὰ τοῦ προσφέρουμε θυσία τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ μας, νὰ καθαγιάζουμε καὶ νὰ ἀφιερώνουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας. Καὶ τότε γινόμαστε ὄχι ἀπλῶς ἔθνος ἅγιο καὶ λαὸς ἐκλεκτὸς καὶ περιούσιος, ἀλλὰ σῶμα καὶ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ «ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ» (Ἐφεσ. 5:30), τέκνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, θεοὶ κατὰ χάριν. Ἄς μὴν ἀφήσουμε λοιπὸν τὴν ἀμαρτία νὰ μᾶς χωρίσῃ ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ νὰ μᾶς στέρησῃ ἀπὸ τὰ ἐξαιρετικὰ αὐτὰ προνόμια ποὺ μᾶς πρόσφερε ἡ χάρις καὶ τὸ ἔλεός του, ἀλλὰ ἄς μένουμε πιστοὶ στὴ διαθήκη, στὶς ὑποσχέσεις ποὺ ἔχουμε δώσει, γιὰ νὰ βασιλεύουμε μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

## Γερόντισσα Γαλακτία: Μία Μεγάλη Όσιακή Μορφή της Κρήτης και Συμπάσης της Όρθοδοξίας (+2021).

«Παναγία μου πρόφταξε στον κόσμο! Φόβος και τρόμος...»

Πηγή: *Γερά Μητροπολις Μόρφου· μιλά ένα παιδί της γερόντισσας, μία συνέντευξη με την κ. Ριρίκα Χρονάκη.*

**Η** γνωστή σε όλους τους επισκέπτες της Γερόντισσας Γαλακτίας, κυρία Ριρίκα Κουμαντάκη-Χρονάκη, υπήρξε το «παιδί» της Γερόντισσας από τότε που γεννήθηκε. Είχαν μία μοναδική σχέση ισόβιας πορείας. Δεν είναι δυνατόν να μιλάμε για την Γερόντισσα και αυθόρμητα να μην πάει ο νοῦς μας και στην ευγενική και αρχοντική κυρία Ριρίκα. Όταν ερχόμασταν από Κύπρο, μᾶς υποδεχόταν με έγκαρδιότητα.

**Κυρία Ριρίκα εύχαριστούμε πού δεχτήκατε να μιλήσετε μαζί μας.**

Δική μου ή εύχαριστία παιδιά. Να 'στε καλά. Εύχαριστώ ακόμη για την αγάπη των Κυπρίων στη Γερόντισσα. Σχεδόν δεν υπήρξε μέρα να μην έρθουν επίτηδες επισκέπτες από την Κύπρο. Εκείνη, ιδιαίτερος σας αγαπούσε και σας υποδεχόταν. Σας έλεγε «τά πονεμένα μου παιδιά» επειδή περάσατε πολέμους, προσφυγιά, κατατρεγμούς. Να 'στε καλά πού την θυμάστε.

**Κυρία Ριρίκα, μπορείτε να μᾶς πείτε από πότε άρχισε ή στενή σχέση πού είχατε με την Γερόντισσα;**

Από τότε που γεννήθηκα. Αυτή με μεγάλωσε. Η υπόθεση έχει μία ιστορία.

Η μακαρίτισσα ή μητέρα μου γεννήθηκε σε ένα όρεινό χωριό πού λέγεται Μιαμιού. Ήταν πολλά παιδιά και όρφάνεψαν νωρίς από πατέρα. Πήγε κάποτε ο μακαρίτης ο γιατρός ο πατέρας της Γερόντισσας και έκανε ιατρείο στο χωριό. Είδε την φτώχεια και την ταλαιπωρία των όρφανών και πήρε μαζί του την μικρή τότε Κυριακούλα την μητέρα μου και τον αδερφό της το Γιώργη. Τά είχε σαν παιδιά του. Ο θεός μου ο Γιώργης γύρισε πίσω στο χωριό νωρίς. Δεν μπορούσε να συνηθίσει στην Πόμπια. Η μητέρα μου κάθισε. Μεγάλωσε τις θυγατέρες του γιαιτρού. Με την τρίτη την Γαλάτεια ήταν παραπάνω από αδελφές. Μαζί πάντα. Στις δουλειές, στα χωράφια, στο νοικοκυριό. Ακόμη και στο κρεβάτι μαζί κοιμόντουσαν. Δεν υπήρχε τότε χώρος για πολλά κρεβάτια και έβαζαν τά παιδιά στρωματσάδα.

Όταν αργότερα παντρεύτηκε ή μητέρα μου στην Πόμπια με τον πατέρα μου, ή Γαλάτεια σαν πραγματική αδελφή ανέλαβε να βοηθά την μητέρα μου. Έμένα με μεγάλωσε εκείνη. Και ένα αδελφάκι μου, το Μανωλιό, πού πέθανε νωρίς και ήταν βαρύν πλῆγμα για την Γαλάτεια. Σε τέτοιο σημείο πού την παρηγορούσε ή μάνα μου. Ποτέ δεν το ξεχάσε. Το έγραφε μαζί με τους γονέους

μου στο μνημονογράφι. Έλεγε ότι όταν θα ανέβαινε στον ούρανό, ήθελε να συναντήσει πρώτα την άνιψιά της την Άντωνούλα και το αδελφάκι μου το Μανωλιό. Έμένα με φωνάζουνε Ριρίκα αλλά βαπτίστηκα Ειρήνη για χατίρι της γιάτρυνας της μητέρας της Γερόντισσας Γαλακτίας πού την λέγανε Ειρήνη.

**Είχατε καταλάβει το μέγεθος της πνευματικότητάς της;**

Βέβαια! Πάντα ήταν μοναδική και άνεπανάληπτη. Τόν μισθό της όλόκληρο τόν έδινε έλεημοσύνη «έν κρυπτῶ» όπως έλεγε για την σωστή έλεημοσύνη. Όλα τά 'δινε και πάντα είχε τά δεκαπλάσια πού τά 'δινε κι αυτά. Κάποτε είχε ανάγκη από 250 ευρώ και έκανε μυστική αίτηση στην Παναγία. Αργότερα μου φανέρωσε ότι καθυστερούσαν να έρθουν αλλά πήγαινε και έλεγε κάθε μέρα στην εικόνα: «Άφου ξέρεις πώς δεν άπογοητεύομαι αλλά θα σου τó λέω κάθε μέρα μέχρι να 'ρθουν μόνο μη μου τά καθυστερείς».

Όταν έληγε ή προθεσμία τών λογαριασμών, ήρθε μία έπιταγή 250 ευρώ από πρόσωπο πού ζούσε στην Άθήνα και την αγαπούσε. Πρώτη και τελευταία φορά τότε, της έστειλε χρήματα. Έτσι, έξαρτημένη πάντα από την μέριμνα του Θεού, περνούσε χωρίς άγχος, ήρεμη και χαρούμενη τη ζωή της...

Ένα θα σε πώ για να δείτε πόσο αγαπούσε τους ανθρώπους. Περίμενε κάθε μέρα τά ξημερώματα 5 π.μ. τó σκουπιδιάρικο για να φιλέψει με γλυκίσματα και κουλούρια τους εργάτες. Έλεγε: «Τά καημένα τά παιδιά! Τίμια, εύλογημένα. Βουτηγμένα στη βρωμιά για να βγάλουνε τó ψωμάκι του σπιτιού τους». Κι αυτά την αγαπήσανε πολύ! Ένα τόν έκανε γιό της. Από τη Γαλιά είναι. Τόν όδήγησε στο γάμο, στην έξομολόγησή, τόν έκανε ζωντανό χριστιανό.

Όταν έπεσε τó παιδί του σε άσβεστόλακκο και καήκανε τά ματάκια του, της τó είπε άπελπισμένος. Του 'δωσε θάρρος εκείνη και του 'πε να μη φοβάται και ότι τó παιδί θα γίνει καλά. Όπως πριν. Όντως έγινε όπως πριν με θαύμα της προσευχής της. Οί γονέοι του έχουνε να τó λένε...

Σε όλους έδινε ξύλινο σταυρό και κρεμούσανε στο λαιμό τους. Δεν ήθελε κανείς να μην μείνει χωρίς σταυρό. Έλεγε πώς ο σταυρός είναι άσπίδα και ταυτότητά μας. Μία έποχή έφοδιάσε όλο τó χωριό και κάθε επισκέπτη με φωτοτυπημένους και ώραία φτιαγμένους τους χαιρετισμούς της Παναγίας! Θεωρούσε τους χαιρετισμούς την πιό δυνατή προσευχή στην Παναγία! Να τους διαβάσετε με εύλάβεια έλεγε, και μετά να λέτε στην Παναγία τά προβλήματά σας.

**Μάθαμε ότι τροφοδοτούσε όλους τους άναξιοπαθούντες του χωριού.**

Όσο ζούσε και στεκόταν στα πόδια της γινόταν αυτό. Ένας με μία διανοητική διαταραχή ήταν άμεσα

προστατευόμενος απ' αυτήν. Άγαπούσε πολύ, έλιωνε για ανθρώπους με ειδικές ανάγκες. Τους αποκαλούσε «επίλεκτο στράτευμα του παμβασιλέως Χριστού».

Έδω, έλεγε, οί κυβερνήτες που κάνουν και λάθη, τιμούν με παράσημα και συντάξεις όσους τραυματίστηκαν σε πολέμους. Φαντάσου, έλεγε, τί θα κάνει το κυβερνείο του Χριστού για όσους ήρθαν τραυματισμένοι στον κόσμο! Αίμορραγούσε ή καρδιά της όταν έβλεπε κάποιον να εμπαίζει τέτοια άτομα...

### **Την διόραση και την προόρασή της τα είχατε αντιληφθεί έσείς;**

Άκου τί λέει! Κυρίως έμεις οί κοντινοί της τα ζήσαμε αυτά. Δεν ξεφεύγαμε από τίποτα. Ήξερε κάθε λεπτομέρεια για τη ζωή μας. Καταλάβαινε κάθε επισκέπτη. Ακόμη και τους λογισμούς του, τις σκέψεις του. Δεν έλεγε όμως τίποτα. Όσο ήταν ύγιης στα πόδια της, ελάχιστα μίλησε φανερά να ελέγξει κάποιον. Τό έκανε πλάγια, ευγενικά και καταλαβαίνανε οί άνθρωποι. Κάποιες φορές τό έκανε και δυναμικά. Πάντα όμως με αγάπη.

Προσευχή κυρίως έκανε και έτσι βοηθούσε την αλλαγή των ανθρώπων. Έλεγε: «Ο διάβολος χάρεται να ξεσκεπάξει και να διαπομπεύει τα κρυφά των άλλων. Ο Θεός δεν τό κάνει αυτό ποτέ...». Τώρα που ήταν στο κρεβάτι και δεν καταλάβαινε έγκεφαλικά, ό,τι έβλεπε αυτό και έλεγε. Και πάλι διακριτικά και με αγάπη. Συνήθως καταλάβαινε, μόνο εκείνος στον όποιο απευθυνόταν.

Σε περιπτώσεις έγωιστικές, μιλούσε φανερά μπροστά σε όλους μας... Έχουμε άπειρα περιστατικά. Δεν υπήρχε μέρα να μη ζήσουμε τέτοιες εκπλήξεις από την Γερόντισσα... Θυμάμαι, μία φορά με τί πόνο και με πόση αγάπη, προσπάθησε να νουθετήσει μία νιόπαντρη με παιδιά, που άπατούσε τον άνδρα της. Την δεχόταν πολύ καιρό με αγάπη. Της μιλούσε πλάγια και δεν ήθελε μάλλον εκείνη ή κοπελιά να καταλάβει.

Μία μέρα την πήρε και την έβαλε στο δωμάτιό της. Πήρε και μένα για μάρτυρα μάλλον, για να μη λείει μετά η άλλη, ό,τι της κατέβαινε στην κεφαλή, ό,τι της είπε τάχα η Γερόντισσα. Έκλεισε την πόρτα και της

είπε: «Σε παρακαλώ παιδί μου πάψε να άπατάς τον άνδρα σου. Τό κάνεις από τον τρίτο μήνα του γάμου σου. Έσφιξες τό χέρι συνθηματικά ένός άλλου πάνω στο χορό και ξεκίνησε τό κακό. Μετανόησε παιδί μου! Τα καλύτερα παιδιά του Θεού είναι τα μετανοημένα. Αυτά που γλυκάθηκαν στην άμαρτία και μετά έκαναν άγώνα και την σιχάθηκαν...».

Έπειτα γονάτισε και της είπε με δάκρυα: «έμένα που με βλέπεις έχω κάνει πιδό πολλές άμαρτίες από έσένα. Όμως, μετανοώ κάθε μέρα και έχω έλπίδα και χαρά μέσα μου πως θα με δεχθεί ο Χριστός! Μετανόησε κι έσύ και θα ζεις όμορφα, παράδεισο θα ζήσεις... δεν κοροϊδεύεις μόνο τον άνδρα σου. Τό Θεό κοροϊδεύεις,

Θα ύποφέρουνε τα παιδιά σου...». Η πιδό καθαρή, έλεγε ότι ήταν άμαρτωλότερη από την μοιχεύουσα, για να την ένθαρρύνει. Η γυναίκα εκείνη, λίγο σοκαρίστηκε, έφυγε και δεν ήξερε που πατούσε, αλλά δεν ξανάρθε. Δυστυχώς δεν μετανόησε. Μακάρι τώρα να αλλάξει με τις εύχες της Γερόντισσας.

**Θα σάς κάνω τώρα μία δύσκολη έρώτηση. Είναι αλήθεια ότι έκανε δύσκολες «χειρουργικές» έπεμβάσεις και έσείς ήσασταν ή βοηθός της;**

(Γέλασε) Άν είναι αλήθεια; Καθημερινό έργο! Έρχόταν άνθρωποι με διάφορες άρρώστιες. Έβλεπε άμέσως τί είχαν. Έπαιρνε τό σταυρό και τους γονάτιζε στο κρεβάτι της μπροστά. Σταύρωνε άμέσως εκεί που είχαν τό πρόβλημα. Δεν είχε

ανάγκη να της πεί κανείς τίποτα. Συνήθως όταν είχαν κάποιο όγκο ή κύστες στο κεφάλι, βοηθούσα κι εγώ...! Έσερνε τα μαλλιά τους γιατί κάτι έβλεπε ότι έβγαζε. Μου λέγε: «Σέρνε κι έσύ Ριζία». Έσερνα κι εγώ λίγο. Κάποιες φορές με έβαζε και έκοβα λίγα μαλλιά. Μετά ανακουφιζότανε από την διαδικασία και έλεγε: «Έντάξει είσαι εδώ!» Όλοι θεραπευόντουσαν.

Θυμάμαι ένα νεαρό από τό Ρέθυμνο που έχασε τό μάτι του. Τον σταύρωνε πάνω από μισή ώρα και κάτι έβγαине γύρω γύρω από τό μάτι που έμεις δεν βλέπαμε. Όταν τελείωσε, του είπε: «Πήγαινε τώρα να κοιμηθείς 4 ώρες και είσαι έντάξει». Όντως κοιμήθηκε 4 ώρες. Ξύπνησε και έβλεπε. Πήγε στο νοσοκομείο για έλεγχο





καὶ οἱ γιατροὶ ἐσοκαριστήκανε ἀπὸ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ποὺ εἶδανε.

Ἦρθε πάλι ἓνας Ἑλληνας μεγαλογιατρός ἀπὸ τὴν Βοστώνη τῆς Ἀμερικῆς. Ὑπέφερε ἀπὸ ἓνα νευρολογικὸ αὐτοάνοσο. Ὑπέφερε ἡ ἀριστερὴ πλευρά του καὶ τὸν ἐμπόδιζε στὴ δουλειά του. Ἔκανε «ἐπέμβαση» καὶ σ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἔγινε καλά. Ἐνα μικρὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὸ Ρέθυμνο ποὺ ἀπὸ γεννησιμοῦ του εἶχε ἀνάπηρο τὸ χεράκι, τὸ σταύρωσε καὶ κίνησε ἀμέσως τὸ χέρι του. Ἐνθουσιασμένοι οἱ δικοὶ του παιδιοῦ, τὸ διαδώσανε στὸ Ρέθυμνο καὶ θυμοῦμαι πὼς ἦρθε μετὰ ποῦλμαν ὁλόκληρο νὰ τὴν ἐπισκεφθεῖ. Ὁ π. Ἀντώνιος ὁμως τοὺς ἐμπόδισε νὰ μποῦν μέσα...

**Σὲ σὰς προσωπικὰ εἶχε κάνει κάτι μὲ θεραπευτικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα;**

Συνέχεια! Νὰ πῶ δύο περιστατικά. Ὅταν ἔπεσε στὸ κρεβάτι, μοῦ παρουσιάστηκε ὀξὺ πρόβλημα στὸ δεξι ὄμο. Παρουσίασα ἄκανθα, ποὺ πλήγωνε τὴν σάρκα γύρω γύρω καὶ εἶχα ἀφόρητους πόνους καὶ ἐσωτερικὴ αἰμορραγία. Μοῦ κάνανε δύο φορὲς παρακέντηση γιὰ νὰ βγεῖ τὸ αἷμα, μοῦ ἀκίνητοποιήσανε τὸ χέρι, ἔπινα φάρμακα ἀλλὰ τίποτα. Εἶχα ἀπογοητευθεῖ. Ἐκεῖνη δὲν μποροῦσε πλέον νὰ ἀκούσει καὶ νὰ καταλάβει. Ὅμως κατάλαβε μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο.

Ἐνα πρωινὸ μοῦ φώναξε καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Νά... πάρε τὸν ξύλινο σταυρὸ ποὺ φορῶ καὶ βάλετονε πάνω σου. Νὰ τόνε φορεῖς μέχρι νὰ φύγει τὸ κακὸ ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι σου. Μετὰ θὰ μοῦ τόνε ξαναδώσεις...». Ἐγὼ θαύμασα ποὺ κατάλαβε τὸ πρόβλημά μου καὶ ἔβαλα τὸ σταυρὸ. Ἀμέσως ἀνακουφίστηκα. Σὲ μία ἐβδομάδα δὲν εἶχα τίποτα. Δὲν τολμοῦσα ὁμως νὰ βγάλω τὸ σταυρὸ ἀπὸ πάνω μου. Ἐκεῖνη ξαφνικά μοῦ εἶπε, μετὰ ἀπὸ ἀρκετὸ καιρὸ: «Νὰ τόνε φορεῖς πάντα! Ἐγὼ θὰ βάλω ἄλλο σταυρὸ». Ἔτσι, μοῦ ἔμεινε ὁ σταυρὸς της.

Τώρα τελευταία εἶχα κατεστραμμένο τὸ δεξι γόνατο. Πόνους ἀφόρητους. Ἐνα δικὸ μας παιδί, ὁ Γιώργης ὁ Κακουλάκης, μοῦ ἔφερε τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῶν τελευταίων ἐξετάσεων ἀπὸ τὸ Πανεπιστημιακὸ Γενικὸ Νοσοκομεῖο Ἡρακλείου. Τὸ πόρισμα ἔλεγε «ἄμεσα ἐγχείρηση». Φοβόμουνα τὴν ἐπέμβαση ἀλλὰ δὲν μποροῦσα καὶ νὰ περπατήσω. Μία μέρα καθόμουνα δίπλα στὸ κρεβάτι της. Σὰν ἀστραπὴ βγάζει τὸ χέρι της, σταυρώνει τὸ γόνατό μου καὶ μετὰ κάτι τράβηξε ἀπὸ τὸ γόνατο καὶ τὸ πέταξε... ἔκανε τέτοιες κινήσεις. Σὰς πληροφοροῦ ὅτι ἔκτοτε, πῶς πολλὸ πονεῖ τὸ ἀριστερό μου γόνατο ποὺ ἦτανε γερό, παρὰ τὸ δεξί. Ἀποκαταστάθηκε, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, τὸ πρόβλημά μου...

**Οἱ χωριανοὶ ἐκεῖ, εἶχαν καταλάβει τὸ πνευματικὸ τῆς μέγεθος;**

Τὴν ἀγαποῦσε ὅλο τὸ χωριὸ γιατί κανεὶς δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τῆς καταμαρτυρήσει τὸ παραμικρό! Δὲν μποροῦσαν βέβαια νὰ καταλάβουν τὸ βάθος ποὺ εἶχε.

Δὲν ἔζησαν ὅσα ζούσαμε καὶ βλέπαμε ἐμεῖς κάθε μέρα. Δικαιολογημένα οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Λίγοι τὴν κακολόγησαν. Ἐκεῖνη καταλάβαινε ὅταν ἦταν κατάκοιτη τὶς διαθέσεις ὀρισμένων καὶ ἔλεγε: «Μὰ τί ἔκανα σὲ ὀρισμένους καὶ μὲ κακολογοῦν καὶ μὲ λένε ψευτοαγία; Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἀγία; Πότε ἔκανα ἐγὼ τὴν ἀγία; Ἄκου κάνω τὴν ἀγία...! Ὅχι ἀγία! Ἄγρια εἶμαι! Χειρότερη ἀπ' ὅλους...!».

**Εἶχате δεῖ ποτὲ τὴν Γερόντισσα σὲ στιγμὲς ἱερῆς, προσευχητικῆς ἀνάτασης καὶ ἀρπαγῆς;**

Κάθε μέρα! Κάθε πρωὶ ἔπρεπε μὲ πολὺ εὐλάβεια νὰ περμιένω νὰ περάσει ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς εἰκόνες. Προσκυνοῦσε καὶ κουβέντιαζε στοὺς Ἁγίους. Μετὰ ἔπαιρνε ἓνα δίφυλλο εἰκόνημα καὶ περνοῦσε τὸ ΠΙ ποὺ κρατοῦσε ἀπὸ πάνω μέχρι κάτω γιὰ νὰ μὴν τὸ ἀκουμπᾶνε οἱ δαίμονες. Τοὺς ἔβλεπε ποὺ τὴν πείραζαν καὶ ἤθελαν νὰ τὴν ρίξουν. Σταύρωνε τὸ κρεβάτι της μὲ τὸ σταυρὸ τοῦ παπποῦ της καὶ ὅλα τὰ βασικὰ σημεῖα τοῦ σπιτιοῦ. Ἄκουμποῦσε τὸ κεφάλι πάνω στὸ τραπέζι τοῦ μεσαίου δωματίου καὶ ἄκουε μὲ πολλὰ δάκρυα τὸν ἀπόστολο καὶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ραδιόφωνο. Εἰδικὰ ὅταν ἔλεγε γιὰ τὸν πρωτομάρτυρα Στέφανο ξεσποῦσε σὲ λυγμούς: «Στεφανιό μου, Στεφανιό μου, Στεφανιό μου». Εἶχε δεῖ ζωντανὰ πολλὰ ἀπὸ τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ γεγονότα. Τὴν συγκλονίζε ὁ λιθοβολισμὸς τοῦ Στεφάνου καὶ μᾶς περιέγραφε μὲ κλάματα κάθε λεπτομέρεια... Ἡ ἀδελφή της ἡ μακαρίτισσα ἡ Λιλίκα ποὺ ἐρχότανε κάπου κάπου ἀπὸ τὸ Ἡράκλειο καὶ ἔμενε μαζί της, μᾶς ἔλεγε, ὅτι κάθε λίγο, ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν νύχτα, ἀνέβαινε «σὰν τὸν ἀτσέλεγα» (σπουργίτι) πάνω σὲ μία καρέκλα, ἐνῶ εἶχε φοβερὰ μυοσκελετικὰ προβλήματα καὶ φιλοῦσε μία συγκεκριμένη εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὅχτῶ φορὲς, ἔλεγε ἡ Λιλίκα, τὸν ἀσπᾶσθηκε καὶ τοῦ ἔλεγε: «Ἀγάπη μου, ἔρωτά μου, φῶς μου, ἀναπνοή μου...» κ.α.

Ἀγαποῦσε πολὺ μία εἰκόνα τοῦ Ὁσίου Μεθοδίου τῆς Νιβρύτου. Εἶναι τοπικὸς μας Ἅγιος. Τὸ τί φιλιὰ τοῦ ἔκανε κάθε πρωὶ, δὲν λέγεται... Κάποτε τὰ μέτρησα. 120 φορὲς τὸν ἀσπᾶσθηκε καὶ μοῦ ξεφύγανε καὶ κάποιοι ἀσπασμοὶ καὶ δὲν πρόλαβα νὰ τοὺς μετρήσω. Τὴν ρώτησα γιατί τὸν ἀγαπᾶ τόσο πολὺ. Μοῦ ἀπάντησε: «Γιατί μοῦ εἶπε πὼς εἶναι Ρεθεμνιώτης!» Αὐτὴ τὴν εἰκόνα, τὴν χιλιοπροσκυνημένη καὶ πολυμυοσκεμμένη ἀπὸ τὰ δάκρυά της, τὴν ἔχει τώρα ὁ Δεσπότης τῆς Μόρφου.

Κάθε μεσημέρι ἔκανε μία δική της ὑπέροχη προσευχὴ δοξολογίας στὸ Θεό. Ὑπάρχει ἠχογραφημένη. Λέει πολλὰ. Πρὶν τὸ φαγητό, πῆγαινε καὶ προσκυνοῦσε τὶς πολλὲς εἰκόνες ποὺ ἦταν κολημένες στὸ ψυγεῖο της. Ἐκεῖ συνομιλοῦσε συνήθως μὲ τὸν Ἅη Γιώργη... Ἐβλεπε τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ τοὺς περιέγραφε μὲ κάθε λεπτομέρεια. Εἰδικὰ τὰ τελευταία χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς της ποὺ ἦταν τελείως κοπελάκι στὴν καρδιά καὶ δὲν

καταλάβαινε ότι την θαυμάζαμε. Ειδικά παρίστανε τὸ ἄλογο τοῦ Ἁγ Γιώργη. «Ἀνεβαίνω—ἔλεγε:σ' αὐτὸ καὶ μὲ γυρίζεις, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει τρόπος νὰ σᾶς μεταφέρω εἰκόνας καὶ φωτογραφίες ἀπὸ τοὺς μυστηριώδεις κόσμους ποὺ μὲ πάει...»

#### **Σᾶς εἶχε πεί κάτι ἀπὸ τὴν πάλη της μὲ τοὺς δαίμονες;**

Μόνο γι' αὐτὰ πρέπει νὰ γραφτεῖ ἓνα βιβλίο. Φρικιαστικὰ πράγματα. Ὅλορθα τὰ μαλλιά τους, ὅπως τὰ κάνουνε τώρα οἱ νεαροί, καρφάκια. Ὅταν ἔβλεπε κάποιο νεαρὸ μὲ καρφάκια μαλλιά, τὸν πήγαινε στὸν νιπτήρα καὶ τὸν ἔπλυνε. Τοῦ τὰ χαλοῦσε ἐπειδὴ ἐμφανιζόταν ἔτσι οἱ δαίμονες. Εἶχαν σκουλαρίκια στὴ μύτη, στὴ γλώσσα, στὸ φάλι (ὀμφαλὸ) καὶ ζωγραφιὲς παντοῦ (τατουάζ). Ὅ,τι μόδα κυκλοφορεῖ σήμερα ἢ πρόκειται νὰ ῥθει, τὸ ἔβλεπε πάνω τους. Τὰ δάκτυλα τους ἦταν μακρόστενα σὰν τὸ πόμολο τῆς πόρτας. Γι' αὐτὸ πόμολο δὲν ἀκουμποῦσε ποτέ... Τὰ ὑπόλοιπα δὲν τὰ περιγράφω γιὰ νὰ μὴν φοβηθοῦνε ὅσοι τὰ ἀκούσουνε...

#### **Τὴν πείραξαν ποτέ;**

Μόνο ἓνα βράδυ ποὺ σηκώθηκε, τὴν ἔβαλαν κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ κρεβάτι. Ἦταν 3 π.μ. Ἐκείνη τράβηξε τὸ καλώδιο τοῦ τηλεφώνου καὶ ἔπεσε ἀπὸ μίᾶ πλαϊνὴ καρέκλα ἢ συσκευή. Θυμόταν τὸ τηλεφώνό μου καὶ μοῦ τηλεφώνησε. Πήγα ἀμέσως, ξεκλείδωσα καὶ τὴν σήκωσα. Ὅταν καθόταν εἰδικὰ τὴν νύχτα νὰ διαβάσει κάτι, πήγαιναν καὶ ἀρποῦσαν τὴν καρέκλα καὶ τὴν γύριζαν γύρω γύρω. Αὐτὴ γελοῦσε καὶ τοὺς κοροΐδευε. Τοὺς ἔλεγε: «Ἀφοῦ δὲν ἔχετε ἐξουσία νὰ μὲ ρίξετε, ἦντα μαυροκακομοίρηδες κουράζεστε». Αὐτοὶ δὲν ἀντέχανε καὶ φεύγανε ἀμέσως...

#### **Ἐκτὸς τὰ θαυμαστὰ σημεῖα ποὺ μᾶς διηγηθήκατε, τί ἄλλο θυμόσατε τὴν περίοδο ποὺ ἦταν κατάκοιτη;**

Ἐνῶ δὲν ἄκουε τίποτα καὶ δὲν συγκρατοῦσε τίποτα τὸ μυαλό της, μόλις λέγαμε κάτι ποὺ ἦταν κατάκριση ἢ κάτι ἐπαινετικὸ γι' αὐτήν, ἀμέσως μᾶς διέκοπτε μὲ πολλὴ ἀυστηρότητα. Τώρα τελευταία, ὁ Χρῆστος ὁ Λενιδάκης μιλοῦσε γι' αὐτήν σὲ ἄλλο δωμάτιο. Οὔτε τὸν ἔβλεπε, οὔτε ἄκουε τίποτα. Φώναξε ὁμως: «Αὐτὸς ποὺ μιλάει μέσα γιὰ μένα νὰ σταματήσει ἀμέσως». Ἀκόμη καὶ τὶς τελευταῖες μέρες ποὺ ἦταν στὸ παθολογικὸ τοῦ Βενιζέλειου, κάτι εἶπαν δύο δικές μας κοπελιές ποὺ τὴν συνόδευαν ποὺ δὲν τῆς ἄρρεσε. Ἐνῶ ἦταν σὲ λήθαργο, ἀμέσως ἄνοιξε τὰ μάτια, τὶς κοίταξε ἀυστηρὰ καὶ τοὺς ἔκανε νόημα νὰ σωπάσουν. Ἀμέσως μετὰ ξαναθυθίστηκε... Δὲν γεύτηκε ποτὲ κατάκριση...!

#### **Τί εἶναι αὐτὸ ποὺ σᾶς μένει ἀξέχαστο;**

Τὰ πάντα, ἀλλὰ κυρίως ὅταν ἔφερε ἓνας Ἀρχιμανδρίτης - Ἱεροκλήρυκας ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπάνω Ἑλλάδα μίᾶ δαμιονισμένη κοπέλα. Ἐτσιρίζε μὲ βραχνὴ ἀνδρική φωνὴ ὁ δαίμονας. Τὸ τί ἔγινε δὲν περιγράφεται! Πήγα μὲ τὸ θυμιατὸ πίσω ἀπὸ τὴν κοπελιά καὶ χωρὶς νὰ μὲ

δεῖ, μοῦ ἴδωσε μίᾶ κλωτσιὰ καὶ κόντεψε νὰ μὲ σκοτώσει. Πανικὸς σὲ ὅσους βρέθηκαν στὸ σπῆτι. Φώναζε καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ἐνὸς θρησκόληπτου ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ μας ποὺ μισεῖ τὴν Γερόντισσα καὶ μπαίνει μὲ ψεύτικα ὀνόματα στὰ ἰντερνέτια καὶ ἀνεβάξει συνέχεια ἐναντίον της μίᾶ ἐγκύκλιο γιὰ τὶς προφητείες! Ποῦ ἤξερε ἢ κοπελιά ἀπὸ τὴν Πάτρα ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔλεγε ὁ δαίμονας;

Ἡ Γερόντισσα ἀπάντησε στὸ δαμιόνιο: «Μὴ μοῦ φωνάζεις μωρὲ μαϊμόνι, γιατί θὰ γυρίσω τὴ χέρα μου καὶ θὰ σοῦ δώσω ἓνα χαστούκι καὶ θὰ δεῖς τὸν κόσμον ἀνάποδα!» Δὲν θὰ ξεχάσω τὰ μάτια τῆς κοπέλας. Δὲν εἶχανε χρῶμα. Ἦταν κατακόκκινα. Ὅταν σταμάτησε τὸ δαμιόνιο νὰ τὴν πειράζει, εἶπε στὴν κοπέλα ἢ Γερόντισσα: «Ἔλα νὰ σοῦ πῶ παιδί μου πῶς μπήκε μέσα σου τὸ μαϊμόνι...». Ἄρχισε νὰ τῆς λέει, ὅτι μίᾶ φθονερὴ γειτόνισά της, ὅταν ἦταν παιδάκι, μάγεψε μίᾶ κούκλα καὶ τῆς τὴν ἔδωσε νὰ τὴν παίξει... καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα τῆς εἶπε γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν περιπέτειά της. Ἡ κοπέλα ἔφυγε ὑγιής. Ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ ξεχάσω τὰ μάτια της. Μετὰ ἦταν ἡρεμῆ, καλοσυνάτη καὶ πολὺ καλοχάρη κοπέλα...

#### **Εἶχε πεί προφητείες γιὰ τὸ μέλλον;**

Πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔχει πεί ἔχουνε βγεῖ. Ὅπως ὁ κορωνοϊός, ἢ συμφωνία τῶν Τούρκων μὲ τὴ Λιβύη κ.ἄ. Εἶχε πεί στὰ καλά της ἐλάχιστα. Δὲν ἤθελε νὰ μᾶς τρομάξει. Τώρα τελευταία, ἔχω ἀκούσει συγκλονιστικὲς λεπτομέρειες. Δὲν θέλει ὁμως ὁ πάτερ Ἀντώνιος νὰ μιλοῦμε γι' αὐτά.

#### **Τί σᾶς συγκίνησε περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ περιστατικὰ ποὺ ζήσατε ἐκεῖ;**

Ὅλα ἦτανε συγκινητικὰ καὶ διδακτικὰ. Δὲν θὰ ξεχάσω τὴν περίπτωσι μίᾶς πονεμένης μάνας ποὺ ἔχασε ξαφνικὰ 30 χρονῶν τὸ γιό της. Πόνος ἀβάσταχτος. Ἦρθε μὲ μοναχὲς ἀπὸ τὴν Καλυβιανὴ τὸν πρῶτο χρόνον ποὺ ἔπεσε στὸ κρεβάτι. Μόλις τὴν εἶδε, τῆς ἔκανε νόημα νὰ πάει κοντά της. Τὴν ἀγκάλιασε, τὴ φίλησε καὶ τῆς εἶπε: «Μὴ κλαῖς παιδί μου! Ὁ ὁμορφός σου εἶναι ὀλοζώντανος μέσα στὶς ὁμορφιὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ! Κι ἐσύ, ὅ,τι ἐχρωστοῦσες σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον τὸ ξεπλήρωσες». Τῆς εἶπε κι ἄλλα. Τὸ πόσο ἀλαφρωμένη καὶ χαρούμενη ἔφυγε ἢ γυναίκα δὲν λέγεται...

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγους μῆνες ξανάρθε. Τῆς εἶπε φωναχτὰ στὸ αὐτὸ γιατί τότε ἄκουε ἓνα ἐλάχιστο: «Γερόντισσα, ξέρω πῶς ὁ ὁμορφός μου ζεῖ στὴν ὁμορφιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ! Ὅμως μοῦ λείπει πολὺ! Τὸν ἀναζητῶ. Βοήθησέ με». Ἡ Γερόντισσα, ποὺ δὲν θυμότανε κανένα τὸ ἐπόμενο δευτερόλεπτο, τῆς ἀπάντησε σοβαρά: «Θὰ σοῦ τόνε φέρω παιδί μου νὰ τόνε δεῖς».

Ἡ γυναίκα ἔφυγε χωρὶς νὰ σπουδαιολογήσει τὰ λόγια της Γερόντισσας. Τὸ ἴδιο μεσημέρι ξάπλωσε νὰ ξεκουραστεῖ. Ἐνῶ εἶχε γυρίσει στὸ πλάι καὶ δὲν τὴν εἶχε πάρει ὁ ὕπνος, αἰσθάνθηκε κάποιον νὰ τὴν ἀγκαλιάζει.

Θεώρησε ότι ήταν κάποιο από τα μικρά εγγόνια της που είχε στο σπίτι. Φώναξε αλλά διαπίστωσε πως ήταν στο δωμάτιό τους. Γυρίζει πλευρό και τί να δει! Τόν γιό της! Πιό πολύ όμορφο, όλοζώντανο, χαμογελαστό! «Παιδί μου έσύ;» είπε με φωνή που δεν έβγαине. Της απάντησε με άλλο τρόπο, στην ψυχή «Γαλακτία» και έφυγε....

Φανταστείτε τί δύναμη, τί παρηγοριά πήρε ή μάνα εκείνη. Τα πρόσωπα που έπαιρναν πιό πολύ στοργή και ένδιαφέρον από εκείνη ήταν τα κάθε λογής σημαδεμένα άτομα, οί πονεμένοι και τα παιδιά! Με τα παιδιά ήταν οί καλύτεροι φίλοι. Θέλω πολλές ώρες να σε παραστήσω ιστορίες και περιστατικά με μικρά κοπέλια. Κι αυτά όμως τρελαινότανε γι' αυτή. Και τα πιό ζωηρά την έπλησιάζανε, πέφτανε στην άγκαλιά της, γινότανε άρνάκια κοντά της...

#### Πώς ήταν ή τελευταία περίοδος της ζωής της;

Είχε άγωνία να φύγει. Να πάει στο σπίτι της. Συνέχεια μου έλεγε: «Δώσε μου παιδί μου τα παπούτσια μου να φύγω. Σε όλονώ τα σπίτια πάω. Να μὴν πάω έπιτέλους και στο δικό μου;». Είχε συνήθως τα μάτια στραμμένα στον ούρανό και σήκωνε, όσο μπορούσε τα χέρια, σε στάση προσευχής. Έλεγε με δέος: «**Παναγία μου πρόφταξε στον κόσμο! Φόβος και τρόμος...**». Δεν ξέραμε τί έννοούσε. Τα υπόλοιπα της τελευταίας περιόδου τα έχει γράψει ο π. Αντώνιος.

#### Τώρα την νοιώθετε κοντά σας;

Συνέχεια! Πιό πολύ από πριν! Νοιώθω ήρεμία, γαλήνη, δύναμη. Κάπου κάπου, πολλές φορές την ήμερα, μυρίζω μία στιγμιαία ευωδία. Ξέρω ότι είναι αυτή. Ξέρω τί σάς λέω. Ούτε παραισθήσεις έχω, ούτε ψέματα λέω. Λέω ό,τι νοιώθω με σιγουριά.

#### Θα μάς πείτε ένα τελευταίο λόγο;

Άξιώθηκα να δώ πως ένας άπλος άνθρωπος γίνεται μεγάλος Άγιος. Να εύχεστε να άξιωθώ κι εγώ, τουλάχιστον του παραδείσου. Την εύχή της να έχετε.



Πρέπει να γίνης γενναιότερος. Να παραταχθής στήθος προς στήθος προς αυτούς τους άσαρκους. Μὴν τους φοβῆσαι. Έσύ δεν βλέπεις με κάθε ευχήν, όπου λέγεις, πόσοι πίπτουν, πόσοι στρέφουν τα νώτα. Σὺ μόνον βλέπεις πόσον έσύ πληγώνεσαι. Άλλα και αυτοί δέρονται. Και αυτοί φεύγουν. Είς κάθε ύπομονήν, όπου κάμνομεν, φεύγουν άλματωδώς, και είς κάθε εύχήν πληγώνονται σοβαρῶς. Λοιπόν μὴ θέλῃς έν καιρῶ πολέμου να ρίπτῃς έσύ σφαίρες και βόλια και αυτοί να σοῦ ρίχνουν λουκοῦμια και σοκολάτες.

**Όσιος Ίωσήφ ο Ήσυχαστής και Σπηλαιώτης**

## Κύριε, Ἐλέησον!

**«Ζοῦμε σέ άμετανοησία, γι' αυτό φοβεροί και χαλεποί καιροί έρχονται...»**

Πηγή: Από τό βιβλίό «Τι θα Μᾶς Σώση», του Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης πρ. Αύγουστίνου Καντιώτου.



Τί χρειαζόμεθα; Ένα δάκρυ μετανοίας. Αυτό να ζητήσουμε από τό Θεό. Μ' αυτό σώθηκαν και άγίασαν οί άγιοι, και ό ύμνωδός τους λέγει

«*Ταῖς τῶν δακρῶν σου ῥοαῖς τῆς ἐρήμου τό ἄγονον ἐγεώργησας...*». Τα δάκρυα και την κατάνυξι καλλιουργεί ή γνώσις του έαυτοῦ μας και ή επίγνωσις του προορισμοῦ μας με τη βοήθεια της πνευματικῆς

μελέτης πατερικῶν λόγων.

Σᾶς παρακαλῶ πολύ λοιπόν, να διαβάσετε καλά τον «Άόρατο πόλεμο» και τα «Πνευματικά γυμνάσματα» του άγίου Νικοδήμου του Άγιορείτου, ό όποίος αυτό άκριβῶς λέει, ότι τό πρώτο όπλο εἶνε ή αυτογνωσία, τό «*γνώθῃ σαυτόν*». Να πιστέψῃ ό καθένας από έμάς, όπως λέει ό άγιος Νικόδημος, ότι εἴμεθα ένα τίποτα, ένα μηδέν, και να μὴ φρονοῦμε ότι εἴμεθα «κάποιον τι». Αυτό πρέπει να φύγῃ μέσα από την καρδιά μας και να ποῦμε, ότι δεν εἴμεθα άπολύτως τίποτα, ότι εἴμεθα «*ὡς ῥάκος ἀποκαθημένης*» (Ήσ. 64:6), έλεινοί και τρισάθλιοι, άξιοι να ῥίξῃ ό ούρανός πάνω μας φωτιά και ή γῆ ν' άνοιξῃ να μάς καταπιῇ. Ένα τέτοιο βαθύ συναίσθημα ταπεινώσεως να έχουμε.

Έπίσης να διαβάσετε μέσα στον «Προορισμό του ανθρώπου», τον όποιο έγραψε ό άγιος εκείνος αρχιμανδρίτης Εὐσέβιος Ματθόπουλος, τό «Περὶ αυτογνωσίας».

Αὐτά συνιστῶ προς μελέτη, διότι φοβᾶμαι, μήπως δεν έχουμε άκόμη μετανοήσει ή, εάν έχουμε μετανοήσει, μήπως ή μετάνοιά μας εἶνε λειψή.

Σε όλους μας άνεξαιρέτως ό Κύριος να δώση μετάνοια, να συναισθανθοῦμε την άμαρτωλότητά μας και τότε θα έρθουν «*καιροί άναψύξεως*» (Πράξ. 3:20) και σωτηρίας.

Και ειδικώτερα, εάν αυτοί που λέγονται θρησκευτικοί άνθρωποι δεν έχουν άκόμη μετανοήσει, φαντάσου τί γίνεται με τον άλλο κόσμο, που ζῆ σε άμετανοησία. Έρχεται στην εκκλησία, άκούει τους ψάλτες, κοιτάζει τον πολυέλεο, κοιτάζει τις εικόνες, κοιτάζει τό ένα, κοιτάζει τό άλλο. Τί ώραία, λέει,

εἶνε ἡ εἰκόνα, τί καλὴ φωνὴ ἔχει ὁ ψάλτης! Πέραν αὐτῶν ὅμως, οὐδεμία συνείδησις καὶ συναίσθησις τῆς ἁμαρτωλότητος ὑπάρχει.

Ζοῦμε σὲ μεγάλη ἀμετανοησία. Σήμερα θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ σηκωθοῦν οἱ μεγάλοι πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ νὰ κηρύξουν μετάνοια, γιατί ἐμεῖς εἴμεθα ἓνα μηδέν. Αὐτὴ τὴ μετάνοια ὁ Θεὸς κηρύττει διὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καθημερινῶς, μὲ τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου. Μᾶς καλεῖ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μετανοήσουμε, καὶ δὲν μετανοοῦμε. Ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς καὶ εἶπε: «Μέχρι τώρα ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς καλεῖ στὴ μετάνοια μὲ τὸ ξύλινο ῥαβδί του. Τώρα, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἀκοῦμε, θὰ ξεκρεμάσῃ τὸ σιδερένιο του ῥαβδί καὶ θὰ μᾶς χτυπήσῃ ἀλύπητα, ὅλους ἀνεξαιρέτως, γιὰ νὰ ἔρθουμε σὲ μετάνοια».

Φοβεροὶ καὶ χαλεποὶ καιροὶ ἔρχονται. Γι' αὐτὸ νὰ ἔρθουμε σὲ μετάνοια πρὶν νὰ εἶνε ἄργά.

Νὰ κάνουμε μίαν ἀναθεώρησι τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς πορείας μας, καὶ ὅλοι νὰ τρεξοῦμε στὸν πνευματικὸ μας πατέρα, καὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ὅλος ὁ ἄλλος κληρὸς καὶ ὁ λαός. Νὰ ξεδιπλώσουμε ἐνώπιον τοῦ πνευματικοῦ πατρὸς τὰ βάρη τῆς καρδίας μας. Καὶ μὴν νομίσουμε ὅτι φτάσαμε στὸ ἄκρον τῆς μετανοίας. Νὰ γίνουμε ταπεινοί, γιὰ ν' ἀποκτήσουμε τὸ κλειδί μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ λύνουμε ὅλα τὰ ζητήματα ποῦ σήμερα μένουν ἄλυτα. Ὅλα τὰ θέματα, τὰ κοινωνικά, τὰ οἰκονομικά, τὰ οἰκογενειακά, τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικά, ποῦ παραμένουν ἄλυτα, θὰ λυθοῦν μόνο ἂν μετανοήσουμε.

Ἐὰν δὲν μετανοήσουμε, τότε, λέει ὁ Κύριος στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, «πᾶν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλεται.» (Ματθ. 3,10). Μᾶς ἀφήνει κ' ἐμᾶς ἓνα διάστημα, γιὰ νὰ μετανοήσουμε· μᾶς δίνει παράτασι, σὰν τὴν ἄκαρπο συκῆ, μήπως καὶ κάνουμε καρποὺς μετανοίας.

Τὸν χρόνον λοιπόν, ποῦ μᾶς δίνει ὁ Θεός, νὰ τὸν χρησιμοποιήσουμε γιὰ ἔργα μετανοίας. Γιατὶ εἴμεθα ἀμετανόητοι. Καὶ ἐὰν πῆγαμε στὸν πνευματικὸ καὶ ἐξομολογηθήκαμε, ἡ μετάνοιά μας εἶνε τόσο μικρὰ καὶ ὀλίγη, ποῦ δὲν εἶνε εἰς θέσιν νὰ δημιουργήσῃ μεγάλα πράγματα. Εἶνε ὅπως ἡ ὀλιγοπιστία. Ὅπως ἡ πίστις χρειάζεται νὰ εἶνε ἀκμαία, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ μετάνοια πρέπει νὰ εἶνε ἀκμαία.

Ἄς μετανοήσουμε λοιπόν, γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦμε. Καὶ ὅταν ἡμεῖς μετανοήσουμε καὶ κλάψουμε γιὰ τ' ἁμαρτήματά μας, τότε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι θὰ μετανοήσουν. Ἐὰν δὲν μετανοήσουμε, τότε οὐαὶ καὶ ἀλλοίμονο στὸν κόσμον. Εἶνε φοβερὰ ἡ κατάστασις.

Ποιὸς ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς σηκώνεται τὴ νύχτα, τὰ μεσάνυχτα, καὶ κάνει τὴν προσευχὴ του; Πές μου τί σκέπτεσαι τὰ μεσάνυχτα, νὰ σοῦ πῶ τί εἶσαι.

Κάποιος ὅμως ἐρωτᾷ: «Ἀκούει ὁ Θεός»;

Βεβαίως ἀκούει ὁ Θεὸς τὴν προσευχὴν μας. Ἀλλὰ πότε; Ὅταν γίνεται καθὼς πρέπει ὅταν γίνεται μὲ

βαθεῖα συναίσθησι τῆς ἁμαρτωλότητός μας· ὅταν ἡ προσευχὴ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὰ ἔγκατα τῆς ψυχῆς μας σὰν πυρακτωμένος μύδρος καὶ ἀπευθύνεται πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν, περᾶ τὰ ἄστρα καὶ ἀγγίζει τὰ κράσπεδα τῆς Θεότητος. Ἀκούει ὁ Θεὸς τὴν προσευχὴν μας, ὅταν οἱ πάντες, μικροὶ καὶ μεγάλοι λέμε θερμῶς τὶς δύο λέξεις «**Κύριε, ἐλέησον**».

Πάντοτε πρέπει νὰ προσευχώμεθα καὶ νὰ παρακαλοῦμε τὸ Θεό, ἰδιαίτερος δὲ τὶς ἔσχατες αὐτῆς ἡμέρες.

### Εὐκολὴ ἡ Σωτηρία μας;

**Τ**ὶ νὰ κάνουμε γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦμε; Ἡ σωτηρία μας εἶνε εὐκολή.

Δὲν σοῦ λέω νὰ πᾶς σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους καὶ νὰ μονάσης· δὲν σοῦ λέω νὰ πάρῃς ἓνα κομποσχοῖνι, σὰν τὴν ἁγία Μαρία τὴν Αἰγυπτία, καὶ νὰ πᾶς στὴν ἔρημο, σὰν ἐκεῖνη, καὶ νὰ ζήσης σκληρὴ ζωὴ· δὲν σοῦ λέω, ν' ἀφήσης τὴ γυναῖκα σου καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ σου· δὲν σοῦ λέω ν' ἀνεβῆς στὰ βουνά, ὄχι. Νὰ μείνης μὲ τὴ γυναῖκα σου καὶ μὲ τὰ παιδιὰ σου μέσα στὴν κοινωνία καὶ νὰ πιστεύης.

Ναί, νὰ πιστεύης μπροστὰ σὲ τόσες ἀποδείξεις, ὅτι ὑπάρχει Θεός. Εὐκόλος εἶνε ἡ σωτηρία.

Νὰ πιστεύσης ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς κατέβηκε κάτω στὴ γῆ, γιὰ νὰ ἄρῃ τὸ φορτίον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν. Νὰ πιστεύσης ὅτι μιὰ σταλαγματιὰ τοῦ αἵματός του εἶνε ἡ λύτρωσις τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος.

Καὶ μετὰ νὰ πλησιάσης μὲ ταπεινώσι, μὲ κατάνυξι, μὲ δάκρυα τὸν Μεγάλον Ἐσταυρωμένον καὶ νὰ πῆς: ὦ Θεέ μου! Νὰ πῆς μιὰ λέξι. Μιὰ λέξι νὰ πῆς καὶ φτάνει. Νὰ πῆς τὸ «Ἕμαρτον». Τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» νὰ πῆ ὁ μικρός, τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» νὰ πῆ καὶ ὁ μέγας, τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» νὰ τὸ ποῦμε ὅλοι μας. Νὰ πῆς τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» ὄχι γελώντας καὶ καγχάζοντας· νὰ πῆς τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» μὲ δάκρυα, ὅπως τὸ εἶπε ἡ Μαρία ἡ Αἰγυπτία στὴν ἔρημο.

Νὰ πῆς τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» ποῦ; Μπροστὰ στὶς εἰκόνας; Ὅχι, ἀλλὰ μπροστὰ στὸν πνευματικὸ, μπροστὰ στὸν ἐξομολόγο. Σ' αὐτὸν νὰ σταθῆς μὲ προσοχὴ καὶ νὰ πῆς «Ἕμαρτον» καὶ ἔκανα αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτὸ καὶ αὐτό. Καὶ τότε ἄγγελοι καὶ ἀρχάγγελοι θὰ σὲ πάρουν στὰ χέρια καὶ θὰ σὲ ὑψώσουν μέχρι τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, γιατί «*χαρὰ γίνεται στὸν οὐρανὸν ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῶ μετανοοῦντι*».

Τὸ «Ἕμαρτον» λοιπόν περιμένουμε. ὦ Θεέ καὶ Δημιουργέ τοῦ παντός, φώτισε τὰ πνεύματα, ἐνστάλαξε πνεῦμα μετανοίας μέσα στὴν καρδιά τους. Εὐχόμαι νὰ πᾶτε στὸν πνευματικὸ πατέρα καὶ νὰ πῆτε τὸ «Ἕμαρτον». Θὰ ἀνοίξουν οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ παράδεισο θὰ αἰσθανθῆτε στὴν καρδιά σας, καὶ χαρὰ καὶ ἀγαλλίασις θὰ ὑπάρχη στὸν κόσμον.

Ἀμήν.

## THE LAST CHAPTER OF TIME AND THE COMING OF ANTICHRIST

Sources: *Apostasy and Antichrist*; Jordanville, 1978; "Antichrist" by Archpriest Boris Molchanoff in *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3 and 4; and a lecture delivered by Hieromonk Alexis Rosentool at the *Orthodox Youth Convention*, New Shamordino, Dec. 26, 1982. From the Archives of "Orthodox America."

Among Protestant groups today there is found a marked interest in the end times. Christian bookstores have entire sections devoted to Scriptural prophecy, displaying such books as *The Late Great Planet Earth* which has sold literally thousands of copies in the past decade. At the same time certain segments of Jews also sense the approach of the fulfillment of ancient prophecies; in Jerusalem's Old City a special seminary seeks to revive the Levitical priesthood in preparation for the day when Solomon's temple is rebuilt. Their efforts are supported by some evangelical Christians who see in the restoration of the Temple the approach of Christ's Second Coming. What is the view of the Orthodox Church concerning the end times?

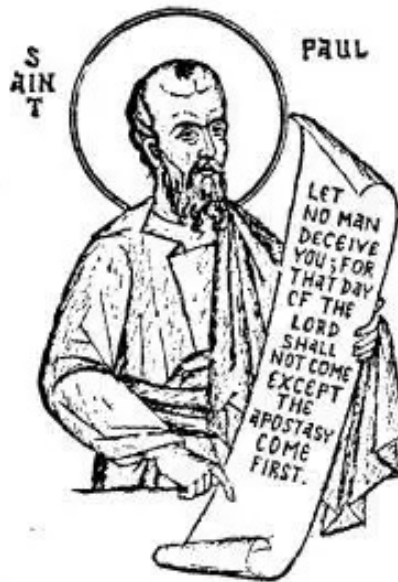
Various periods of history have witnessed outbursts of apocalyptic fervor and messianic expectations. In Russia, for example, many people thought Napoleon was the Antichrist. In this country, in the 1840s, a Baptist minister by the name of William Miller calculated on the basis of prophecies in the book of Daniel that Christ was due to return sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. (In spite of what came to be known as The Great Disappointment of 1844, Miller's followers clung together and formed the Seventh Day Adventist Movement.)

We are certainly not the first to experience *wars and rumors of wars ... famines, pestilences and earthquakes* (Mt 24:6-7) which our Lord said would signal the coming of the end of the world. Nevertheless, without indulging in sensational speculation, too often characteristic of end-time prophecies, the signs of the times clearly indicate that the world apostasy is gathering momentum in anticipation of receiving Antichrist. His reign will be heralded by many false prophets who *shall deceive many*, even, if it were possible, *the very elect*. Already a veil of delusion is being spread over the face of the earth. If we hope to remain faithful to Christ we must seek to discern these signs of the times and prepare ourselves that we *may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*. (Eph 6:13).

*Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.*

[1 Jn 2:18]

We cannot understand what is to happen at the end of the world without understanding the creation of the world and man's purpose in the world. Through Adam, man was created in the image of God. Of all God's creatures, man alone was imbued with the breath of life, the gift of grace which made it possible for him to become God-like. Man was given the ability to love, to have compassion, trust, holy aspirations; he was given the ability freely to communicate with God. As the crown of God's creation, man was made from Love and for love. Love, however, is not mechanical; it is born of a free will and involves a constant choice of action: *If ye love Me, keep My commandments*. (Jn 11:15).



*And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*  
(Matt. 24:11-12)

Adam was given a commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge. In willfully breaking this commandment, he severed the special relationship with God, that bond of perfect love. Since that time God has been calling man back to Himself, and He will do everything to save a soul—if only that soul truly desires to be with Him. This is the choice faced by everyone brought into the world: does he want to belong to God or not? This choice underlies our purpose here on earth.

Our true home is heaven; we do not belong here; the earth is but a testing ground. Life is a battle between God and the devil for man's soul, and in the middle is man, who must exercise his free will to choose his eternal fate. In the process of time, however, evil will reach such proportions as to eliminate any possibility of choice. Then the earth will have lost its purpose and the end will come.

This growth of evil is caused by the apostasy, the falling away from the Truth, which will make possible the godless reign of Antichrist. As St. Paul said: *That day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition*. (2 Thess 2:3). Although the apostasy has been in effect ever since the early history of the Church, this century has seen such a dramatically sharp rise in the influence of evil that even now it is becoming difficult for people to see the light. And things are happening too quickly and in too organized a fashion to be merely incidental.

In the religious sphere, one finds a maze of false prophets, all of them schooling their adherents in the acceptance of delusion; the insecurity on the political and economic fronts

has inspired the New Age movement with its enthusiasm for a one-world government; culturally, the mass media is helping to promote a taste for what is crude, vulgar and grotesque, exemplified by the punk-rock heroes of today's adolescents; crime is rampant: abduction, rape, murder; cable television brings pornography into the home; there is a total erosion of values encouraged by a lifestyle which rejects Christianity as "inconvenient." Through all of this, mankind is being manipulated into a state of spiritual blindness which will allow the coming of Antichrist.

*So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.*

[Mt 24:33]

Once the world has been sufficiently prepared, how shall Antichrist make his appearance? Where will he come from? Who or what will he be, this red beast of the Apocalypse?

To answer these questions we must begin with an understanding of the word "Antichrist." "Anti" means "against" or "in place of." Antichrist will try to imitate Christ for the sake of fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, he will make a pretense of good, claiming to bring "peace on earth, good will toward men." Later, he will show his true colors; he will challenge God and demand worship of himself.

Whereas Christ was perfect man, perfect goodness, Antichrist will demonstrate the perfection of evil in human form; in submitting his will entirely to the devil, he will be completely possessed by him. It is important here to note that Antichrist is not Satan, for God would not allow such a supernatural domination of evil. If Satan were actually to rule over man, man would be left with no choice; he would no longer be able to exercise free will—and this would be a mockery of God's love.

What is tragic is that even now human beings are using this divinely planted free will to choose evil. In the world today we see that of our own free will we are affecting each other to be demonic. We cannot say that the Apostasy is merely the work of the devil: "It can't be helped." No, it is the direct result of man's choice not to follow Christ—and this decision can only lead to Antichrist.

Just as Christ was born of a pure virgin, the crown of humanity, so His opposite, Antichrist, will be born of a harlot. St. John Damascene says that *he becomes man as the offspring of fornication and receiveth all the energy of Satan. For God, foreknowing the strangeness of the choice that he would make, allows the devil to take up his abode in him.* (Exposition of the Orthodox Faith).

Most Holy Fathers agree on the basis of Scripture that Antichrist will be of Jewish descent, from the tribe of Dan. According to the prophecy of the patriarch Jacob, *Dan shall be a serpent in the way* (Gen 49:17; cf Jer 8:16); among the remnants of the tribes of Israel which are sealed unto salva-

tion (Rev 7:4-8), the tribe of Dan is exclusively omitted. It is interesting here to note that the Ethiopian Jews, of whom several thousand were airlifted to Israel in the recently publicized "Operation Moses," are declared to be "undoubtedly of the tribe of Dan" (a statement by the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, "Time," Jan. 14, 1985).

It is also assumed that Antichrist's life will pattern itself after the life of Christ in the sense that it will be divided into three periods. During the first period, which will last about 30 years, he will remain hidden. *Antichrist will be raised secretly* (St. John Damascene), and will be expertly educated.

During the second period of his life, he will come before the attention of the world as one able to solve the world's problems. It is more than likely that his public ministry will begin in a time when tremendous chaos and upheavals will have brought men to the brink of despair. St. Ephraim says: *At the time when the serpent shall come, there will be no calm on the earth; there will be great affliction, consternation, disorder, death and famine unto all the ends of the earth.* Mankind, spiritually blinded, will cry out for a resolution of the world crisis and will gratefully accept Antichrist's plan for establishing a one-world government, a plan which is already in preparation. *A voice of appeal will issue forth in human society, expressing the urgent need for a "genius of geniuses," who would elevate material development and progress to a higher plane and bring about prosperity on earth.* (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov).

Antichrist will first appear as a wolf in sheep's clothing, in order to deceive the people and win their confidence. *He will come as one humble, meek, a hater (as he will say of himself) of unrighteousness, despising idols, giving preference to piety, good, a lover of the poor, beautiful to an extreme degree, constant, gracious to all... He will not accept bribes, speak with anger, show a gloomy countenance, but with a decorous exterior he will take to deceiving the world, until he has become king.* (St. Ephraim). In further imitation of Christ, he will perform signs and wonders: *Being the father of falsehood, he will deceive the imagination by means of false actions so that the multitudes may think that they see a dead man raised and lame men walking or blind men seeing when no cure has been wrought.* (St. Cyril of Jerusalem).

One of Antichrist's first objectives will be to attain popularity among the Jews: *He will succeed in completing the organization of the Jewish government and will set about realizing the age-old dream of the Jews—the restoration of the temple of Solomon.* With the help of mass media and advanced communication technology, Antichrist will rapidly achieve world-wide renown, and his appeal will be irresistible: *When the many classes and the people see such virtues and power, suddenly all will conceive the same thought, and with great joy will proclaim him king, saying among themselves: 'Can another man so good and righteous be found?'* (St. Ephraim the Syrian).

During this second period, when Antichrist will work to consolidate his popularity, God will send two prophets to warn people against the deception encompassing them. This confirms the Saviour's unspeakable love for man, for even at this darkest hour, *He will not leave the human race without His preaching, in order that all will be without answer at the Judgment.* (St. Ephraim). The two prophets understood to be Elias and Enoch who did not taste of death but were received up into heaven. And these prophets *turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.* (Mal 4:6). Blessed Theophylact interprets this to mean that they *shall return to faith in Christ all the Jews who are found to be obedient, remaining faithful, as it were, to the paternal heritage of those who had fallen away there from.*

For three and a half years (Rev 11:3) these two prophets shall work to fulfill their mission without the interference of Antichrist. His power, however, will already be such that many of the Jews will disregard the prophets' warning and will be first to proclaim Antichrist as their ruler, the true Messiah. In imitation of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, Antichrist will reveal himself as the (false) Messiah in his own triumphant entry into Jerusalem, where he will take up his seat in the temple. This will herald the third and final period of his life when he will attain the fulfillment of his three-fold ministry—as Prophet, King, and High Priest.

Having received power and authority from Satan (Rev 13:2) in return for his complete submission to him (the very temptation Christ withstood in the wilderness), Antichrist will secure his position as world ruler. This is described in the prophecy of Daniel which indicates that *kings shall arise.* Of these, seven will readily submit to Antichrist while it will be necessary to subdue another three by means of military force. (Dan 7:24). This explains the portrayal of Antichrist in the book of Revelation as "*a beast...having seven heads [those rulers who submitted voluntarily] and ten horns.* [The Ten Kingdoms]. (Rev 12:3).

At the same time, by reason of his tolerance and false sanctity, Antichrist will be proclaimed the spiritual leader of all religions. He will show partiality towards Christians, *promising them every sort of protection in return for their acknowledgment of his leadership. Those not comprehending true Christianity will see in him a representative and champion of the true religion and will join with him.* (St. Ephraim).

Once he is proclaimed world ruler, Antichrist will begin to demand worship for himself, the man-god, in place of the worship of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Those who remain faithful to Christ will incite his wrath *and then this serpent will become proud in his heart and vomit forth his bitterness.* (St. Ephraim). His first victims will be the two prophets who, by reason of converting many Jews to Christ, will evoke the most intense malice. *And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.* (Rev. 11:7).

Their murder will signal a fierce persecution of Christians. They will be forbidden to serve Divine Liturgy and the Church will hide itself in the catacombs. *And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.* (Dan 9:27). Such will be the tribulation of that time that *all men will call blessed the dead and those already buried before this great sorrow came upon the earth.* (St. Ephraim).

By that time any organized opposition to Antichrist will become impossible. *Do not attempt to stay him with your weak hand. Withdraw, save yourself from him; and this shall be enough for you.* (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov). Then the faithful remnant of Christians *will flee into the wilderness and mountains and caves—praying day and night in great humility.. that they may be delivered from the serpent,.. And this will be granted them from the holy God.* (St. Ephraim).

The world rule of Antichrist will last for three and a half years. (Rev 13:5). Blinded by their own impiety and the delusions of Antichrist, the mass of mankind will join him in his disdain for Christians. *The enemies of Antichrist will be counted as rebels, as enemies of the public good and order.* (Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov). This majority will enjoy a period of relaxation, *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.* Then, suddenly the vessels of wrath will be poured out upon the followers of Antichrist. *Sores and boils will afflict those bearing the mark of the beast, and the waters of the earth will be turned to blood.* All this will happen when least expected and when the departure of man from God has



*The Opening of the Sixth Seal; Manuscript, 1721*  
**And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth...** (Rev. 6:12-13)

reached its extreme limit. Then the Antichrist will assemble his armies from the ends of the earth for a final battle at Armageddon, but God will send a great earthquake which will level mountains and crush the works of man's pride, and the armies will be destroyed. And then shall the Lord come, as He promised, like lightning flashing from heaven—and so shall the end be.

*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

[Matt. 24:37]

Clearly then, the final destruction of the world will ultimately owe itself not to nuclear arms but to a humanity which has become possessed with evil. “*For by permission of the Holy God, [Antichrist] will receive the power to deceive the world, because impiety will have filled the earth, and everywhere every sort of horror will be committed.*” (St. Ephraim.)

Let us not think that because we are members of the true Church we are immune to deception. *A courageous soul will be required, that will be able to keep its life in the midst of these temptations, For if a man is proved to be even a little careless, he will easily be exposed to assault and will be captured by the signs of the evil and cunning beast.* (St. Ephraim). We must begin now to exercise our spiritual faculties and to set ourselves apart from the world in a conscious struggle against the spirit of the times—the spirit of apostasy. Every avoidance of such struggle now, every compromise with evil today, be it even the most insignificant... will only increase the difficulty of struggling with it tomorrow.

**We must saturate ourselves in the sources of holy Orthodoxy which alone will preserve to the end the fullness of the truth.** Through careful reading of Scripture and other spiritual books; through prayer and conscious attendance at church services; through daily, determined warfare with our passions and thoughts—we shall develop a sense for what is truth and, amidst all the chaos and confusion of the end times, we shall be able to discern the voice of the Chief Shepherd Who will be calling everywhere for His sheep. Then we shall have no cause to fear what is to come; rather, made bold through steadfast faith, we shall cry out from our hearts:

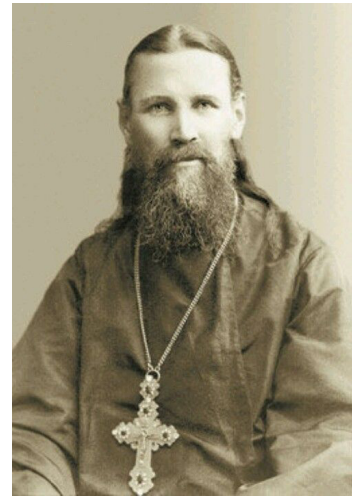
*Maranatha! Come, O Lord Jesus!*

The lamentable condition of people today is due on one hand to the lack of virtuous, wise, discerning, God-fearing, pious, and experienced spiritual fathers, and on the other hand to the existence of spiritual fathers lacking fear of God and every virtue, ignorant, inexperienced, and in some cases impious, unbelieving and corrupt. One should not expect anything other than the mercy of the all-good God to send out capable and chosen men into His mystical vineyard or the coming sword to cleanse the earth from her iniquities.

**St. Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)**

## THY WILL BE DONE

*By St. John of Kronstadt, from his book “My Life in Christ.”*



It is never so difficult to say from the heart, *Thy Will be done, Father*, as when we are in sore affliction or grievous sickness, and especially when we are subjected to the injustice of men, or the assaults and wiles of the enemy. It is also difficult to say from the heart *Thy Will be done* when we ourselves were the cause of some misfortune, for then we think that it is not God's Will, but our

own will, that has placed us in such a position, although nothing can happen without the Will of God.

In general, it is difficult to sincerely believe that it is the Will of God that we should suffer, when the heart knows both by faith and experience that God is our blessedness; and therefore it is difficult to say in misfortune, *Thy Will be done*. We think, “Is it possible that this is the Will of God? Why does God torment us? Why are others quiet and happy? What have we done? Will there be an end to our torments?” And so on. But when it is difficult for our corrupt nature to acknowledge the Will of God over us, that Will of God without which nothing happens, and to humbly submit to it, then is the very time for us to humbly submit to this Will, and to offer to the Lord our most precious sacrifice—that is, heartfelt devotion to Him, not only in the time of ease and happiness, but also in suffering and misfortune; it is then that we must submit our vain erring wisdom to the perfect Wisdom of God, for our thoughts are as far from the thoughts of God as the heavens are higher than the earth...

*Thy Will be done.* For instance, when you wish and by every means endeavour to be well and healthy, and yet remain ill, then say: *Thy Will be done*. When you undertake something and your undertaking does not succeed, say: *Thy Will be done*. When you do good to others, and they repay you by evil, say: *Thy Will be done*. Or when you would like to sleep and are overtaken by sleeplessness, say: *Thy Will be done*.

In general, do not become irritated when anything is not done in accordance with your will, but learn to submit in everything to the Will of the Heavenly Father. You would like not to experience any temptations, and yet the enemy daily harasses you by them; provokes and annoys you by every means. Do not become irritated and angered, but always say: *Thy Will be done!*



## ORTHODOX MONASTICISM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE OR A FORGOTTEN IDEAL?

*By Mother Ephrosynia of the Convent of Lesna, France.*

*Mortals, escape with me from a false world!  
Christ calls. Away! Life be our voyage fair,  
Safe riding o'er the surge of cares and lies!  
One quest alone employs the lonely Monk,  
How he may reach the Haven of true peace,  
Where never comes the strain of breaking hearts.  
O happy life, all music, free from sorrow!  
Where is the prudent seeker of true gain  
Will part with all the world and choose the Cross?*

[St. Theodore the Studite]

† † †

A brother went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, “Abba, as far as I can, I say my prayer rule, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?” Then the elder stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, “If you will, you can become all aflame.”

This is what monasticism is: a longing for God that knows no limits. It is the beginning of the age to come, of the Kingdom of Heaven still here on earth. The Church calls monasticism the “angelic life.” According to Holy Tradition, in the fourth century an angel appeared to St. Pachomius—the first of the monks struggling out in the Egyptian desert—to establish a monastic community, and gave him a bronze tablet, inscribed with a Rule for his monks to follow. From Apostolic times to the present day, thousands, hundreds of thousands, probably millions of people have left everything they had, and scorned everything that this world has to offer, in order to follow Christ and to live the Gospels more fully.

At times this impulse has been stronger, at times weaker, and the Holy Fathers speak of monasticism as a barometer of spiritual life in the Church. When monastic life flourishes, the faithful are really striving spiritually; and conversely, when few people find inspiration in the monastic ideal, monasteries diminish and are ignored, spiritual life amongst the faithful is on the decline.

Is monasticism completely a lost cause today? True, to modern eyes, the monk is increasingly a figure of yesterday, someone silly and eccentric. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the lives of the founders of monasticism abound with dire warnings that monasticism, especially the strict asceticism of past centuries, will be just about impossible in the latter days. Once, when the Holy Fathers were making

predictions about the last generation, they said, “What have we ourselves done?” One of them, the great Abba Ischyrion replied, “We ourselves have fulfilled the commandments of God.” The others replied, “And those who come after us, what will they do?” He said, “They will struggle to achieve half our works.” They said, “And to those that come after them, what will happen?” He said, “The men of that generation will not accomplish any works at all and temptation will come upon them; and those who will persevere in that day will be greater than either us or our fathers.”

### What is Monasticism

In spite of the hardships and the off-putting advice of even the most authoritative Orthodox sources, many people still do choose to leave everything and everyone behind, to take up the cross of monastic struggles and to follow our Saviour. I do not think that it is too optimistic to speak of a sort of revival of monasticism in our times.

What is it that continues to draw people to this way of life that is essentially a mystery, something that even the holiest monks speak of with awe and trembling?

Above all, monasticism is the way of repentance. Not the sort of repentance when we stop to sigh and feel sorry about the bad things we have done and then quickly move on to the next item on our list of things to do, or mumble a list of sins at confession so we can go to Communion, but the sort that means a complete turn-about, a conversion, a profound change of lifestyle. This is the repentance of the Prodigal Son of the Gospels, who comes to realize that his entire way of life has been very wrong, and who leaves it all behind to go home to his father to ask forgiveness.

The service of monastic tonsure begins with a *stichera* paraphrasing this parable: *Make haste to open unto me Thy fatherly embrace, for as the Prodigal I have wasted my life. In the unfailing wealth of Thy mercy, O Saviour, reject not my heart in its poverty. For with compunction I cry to Thee, O Lord: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee.* It is this longing for our Heavenly Father’s embrace, for His forgiveness, and for a home with Him that still makes people turn their backs on everything and trudge along this rocky road.

The first step along this road is renunciation of the world, leaving it behind. This does not mean simply quitting school or your job, closing your bank account, moving to a monastery, putting on black and saying your prayers. According to the Holy Fathers the term “world” means the sum total of all our passions, attachments, opinions, petty likes and dislikes; everything that distances us from God and prevents us from discerning His Will. *No one can draw nigh to God save the man who has separated himself from the world. But I call separation not the departure of the body, but departure from the world’s affairs,* says St. Isaac the Syrian, one of the greatest monastic fathers of all time. *No one who has com-*

*munion with the world can have communion with God, and no one who has concern for the world can have concern for God, he continues. "If you truly love God, begins St. John of the Ladder, another monastic guide, and long to reach the Kingdom that is to come, if you are pained by your failings and are mindful of punishment and of the eternal judgment, if you are truly afraid to die, then it will not be possible to have an attachment, or anxiety, or concern for money, possessions, for family relationships, for worldly glory, for love and brotherhood, indeed, for anything of earth... Stripped of all thought of these, caring nothing about them, one will turn freely to Christ..."*

#### **"How do I know?"**

At this point the most common question is "How do I know?" How do I know that I am called to the particular form of renunciation of the world that monasticism represents? All of us have to leave the world in the sense of struggling to overcome our passions in one way or another; there is no question about that. But how can a person be sure that the Lord means for him to do it by embracing the monastic life? How can we discern the will of God in this case? It is very true that there is no specific "monastic type" or particular character trait that defines someone as a candidate. But all, at some point become convinced of the necessity of dropping everything and starting along the road home to their Heavenly Father.

People often talk of vocations and callings, assuming that there has to be some sort of mystical experience to convince you to become a monastic. It is true that a lot of monastics can look back to a particular event that was the turning point in their lives. Nine times out of ten there is nothing really otherworldly about it. If you hear voices or see angels, probably the last place where you belong is a monastery!

Even if there is such a moment, the choice and decision to follow a monastic path is almost always a period of real struggle, of doubts, fears and temptations. A lot of the monastics I know, when the thought first came to them, wanted nothing to do with it and were quite shocked by the idea. The Holy Fathers emphasize that there is nothing that the evil one hates as much as monasticism and he will do everything possible to turn someone away from this path. If one is at all spiritually alert, you can practically see and hear him at work at this point.

I have known people to get incredible job offers, receive huge amounts of money, marriage proposals from tall, dark,

handsome and rich men. An older nun I knew had her husband, missing for twenty years, turn up on her doorstep the day before she left. In spite of the trials, there is a growing conviction that there is nothing else that you can do, that no matter what, the monastic life is the only viable alternative. And this nags at you until there's just no other way out.

#### **Entering Monastic Life**

Once a monk escapes from the world, he begins to try to finally think clearly and to concentrate on the things that will determine his eternal fate. He begins to really understand and to feel that we, wretched sinners, really are perishing, that we desperately need a Redeemer and Someone to heal our souls, and that in Him alone is life, that everything besides is empty and senseless. He begins to really feel and experience this, not just to say the words. Only when a person stops listening to the noise and clatter of the world, turns his eyes away from its wild, psychedelic colors, and when he gets over the hangover that the world leaves you with, does he begin to see himself clearly and to discern the meaning

and aim of life on this earth and to struggle against his enemy, the evil one.

St. John of the Ladder tells us, *All who enter upon the good fight, the monastic life, which is tough and painful, but also easy, must realize that they must leap into the fire, if they ... expect the heavenly fire to dwell within them... Let everyone test himself, and then eat the bread of the monastic life with its bitter herbs*

*... and drink the cup of it with its tears...* Yes, it is true. The monastic life is not "fun." Most of us, especially those that had to go through a severe trial to leave the world, experience a "honeymoon" period, when you finally take the plunge, make the break with the world and get to a monastery. It is such a relief to have all that behind you, and to have finally started out on the way. Everything and everyone seems wonderful, you are so full of zeal, and you can practically see the grace, it is so abundant.

#### **The Struggle**

For some monastics this stage can go on for years. But sooner or later "reality" strikes and you see that everything that has been written about the hardships of monastic life is not just fancy words or symbolic phrases or allegory. It is not the physical side that is hard. With some effort and discipline anyone can learn to get up early and to stand through long church services, to make prostrations and to work, and work hard, at jobs that you do not necessarily like. A lot of people in the world have a much more difficult life in that sense.



It is the encounter with yourself and who you really are and the struggle to change; that is the slow but painful, day by day, minute by minute work of the monk. The work is done largely through our contacts and conflicts with other people. St. John of the Ladder is very blunt about this: *Derided, mocked, jeered, you must accept the denial of your will. You must patiently endure opposition, suffer neglect without complaint, put up with violent arrogance. You must be ready for injustice, and not grieve when you are slandered; you must not be angered by contempt and you must show humility when you have been condemned.* For most of us the most difficult element in all this is giving up your own will. One of the most quoted monastic sayings, that of Abba Dorotheos—another great teacher of the monastic life—says: *I know of no fall that happens to a monk that does not come from trusting his own will and his own judgment... Do you know someone who has fallen? Be sure that he directed himself... Nothing is more grievous... nothing is more pernicious.*

### The Blessedness of Monasticism

When I was a young novice, I would get really annoyed at the writings of the Holy Fathers and the constant repetition that in the latter days monks will not be able to perform any great spiritual feats, but will work out their salvation through patience and long-suffering. “How boring!” I would think, “Surely if we set our minds and spirits to it, we can do it too? How come all we are allowed is to sit around and be patient?”

The secret here is that this is truly a great mercy of the Lord. Today we are not only unchristian in our approach to life, in our thoughts, words and actions, we are outright anti-Christian. Were the Lord to grant us the grace and give us the strength to perform even just one tenth of the ascetic feasts of previous times, we would not only not profit, but the resulting pride and vainglory would lead us straight to perdition. This is especially true in monasticism, where, for the inexperienced, the intense work on oneself is very easy to confuse with the self-analysis that so many self-help/feel-good-about-yourself guides teach today.

Take, for example, the concept of “moods.” This is not an Orthodox concept; we do not have moods, we are inflicted by passions and we strive to acquire virtues. “Being in a bad mood” can never excuse your behavior in a monastery. This can be very hard for a novice to accept. Likewise, we do not have any “rights”; we have obligations and obediences, and we owe it to the Lord Himself to fulfill them, but no one owes us anything. Similarly, we cannot expect to be “happy” and “fulfilled”; we come to a monastery to weep for our sins.

I remember Metropolitan Philaret, paraphrasing St. John of the Ladder, saying, *If everyone knew how hard it was in*

*monasteries, no one would ever go. But if they knew the joys and rewards of monastic life, they would all come running.* And it is true, the rewards and the blessings really are there. One of the Optina Elders, St. Barsanuphius, taught, *True blessedness can only be acquired in a monastery. You can be saved in the world, but it is impossible to be completely purified... or to rise up and live like the angels and live a creative spiritual life in the world. All the ways of the world... destroy or at least slow down the development of the soul. And that is why people can attain the angelic life only in monasteries... Monasticism is blessedness; the most blessed state that is possible for a person on this earth. There is nothing higher than this blessedness, because monasticism hands you the key to spiritual life.*

In what do we find this blessedness? There is the knowledge that every day of your life and every minute of your day are sanctified and significant before God. Even your “bad” days and your really low days have meaning before Him. As long as you live the life consciously there is no wasted time. There is the solemnity and beauty of the Divine Services of our Church, which is truly the beginning of the life of Heaven still here on earth.

***Monasticism supports the entire world. And when there will be no more monasticism the Dread Judgment will be upon us.***

**Elder St. Anatoly of Optina Monastery**

In the world our attendance in church is always time stolen away from the world’s affairs, a welcome respite, a sort of spiritual treat. In the monastery the services determine the very patterns of life, and they are the real life; everything else is time stolen away from them. They nourish us, instruct us, and in a certain sense

even entertain us.

When I was entering the monastery, one of my greatest fears was that eventually I would find the services boring—the same thing, year in, and year out, forever. Instead I find that they contain such vast wealth and so many levels, each more profound than the one before it, that a lifetime is nowhere near enough to begin to appreciate them.

There is nothing more beautiful than the way monastics die. Most of our sisters die having received Holy Communion, surrounded by the community, with prayers and chanting and tears. Not the desperate tears of the world, but tears of parting with a friend and sisters, even if just for a while. The funeral service of a monk, which is quite different than that of a lay person, is a lesson on the monastic life and the solidly grounded hope of eternal life that it represents rather than a meditation on death. For those that spend their life on the threshold of the age to come, death is merely stepping into the next room.

*Monasticism*, one of the Optina Elders said, *supports the entire world. And when there will be no more monasticism the Dread Judgment will be upon us.* And for those of us that are drawn to this way of life there simply is no other way to live.

One writer described it like this: "Some people are very single-minded by nature. And there are ideas that permeate the lives of such people down to the very last detail. Everything is beautiful, joyous and of consolation, but this life is overshadowed for them by the memory of one thing, by a single thought: that of Christ Crucified. No matter how bright the sun might be, how beautiful nature, God's creation is, how tempting far-away places might seem, they remember that Christ was crucified, and everything is dim in comparison. We might hear the most beautiful music, the most inspired speeches, but these souls hear one thing: Christ was crucified, and what can ever drown out the sound of the nails being hammered into His flesh? Describe to them the happiness of a family life, of a beloved husband or wife, of children, but Christ was crucified, and how can we not show the Lord that He is not alone, we have not deserted Him. There are those that are willing to forget everything in the world so as to stand by His Cross, suffer His suffering and wonder at His Sacrifice. For them the world is empty, and only Christ Crucified speaks to their hearts. And only they know what sweetness they taste still on this earth by sharing in the eternal mystery of the Cross, and only they hear what He says to them when they come to Him after a life full of incomprehensible hardships and inexplicable joy."



Without trials and disasters human life does not pass and salvation of the soul does not happen. Trials are sent for sins with the purpose of edification, they must be lived through with courage and patience.

**St. Sergius of Radonezh**

Thus did the Most Holy Virgin submit herself to God: 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word.' And were we to say likewise—'Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word'—then the Lord's words written in the Gospels by the Holy Spirit would live in our souls, and the whole world would be filled with the love of God, and how beautiful would life be on earth! And although the words of God have been heard the length and breadth of the universe for so many centuries, people do not understand and will not accept them. But the man who lives according to the will of God will be glorified in heaven and on earth.

**St. Silouan of Holy Mountain**

## ESTABLISHING GOOD HABITS

Source: "Orthodox Christina Information Center," from <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/habits.aspx>.

*Habit is a difficult thing, and it is hard to break and hard to avoid.... Therefore, the more you understand the power of a habit, the more should you endeavor to be rid of a bad habit and change yourself over to a good one.*

[St. John Chrysostom]

† † †

“One of the main characteristics of blessed spiritual warriors was their strictness in keeping their rule of life. We could see this also in our own Elder, and he demanded the same of us. He told us that the beginning of acquiring character and personhood lies in insistence on following an ordered and systematic way of life. By making the decision to maintain an invariable regime, man acquires resolve and bravery, something very important and essential in our life since our contest is a struggle and, indeed, a fierce one.... No other human factor is such an aid to success as our firm and steady resolve and a carefully worked-out regime.... It is incontrovertible proof that regulation in life is the main factor in spiritual progress.” (From "Elder Joseph the Hesychast," by Elder Joseph of Vatopedi, pp. 174-177).

It is heartening when we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century find that contemporary experts discover, using scientific methods, what the Church has known and practiced all along. One such recent discovery is that it takes about six weeks, or forty days, to make a certain practice into a habit. The period of forty days has since Old Testament times been that amount of time necessary to prepare for something significant or purge oneself of something negative. Today, the Church invites us to a forty-day fast twice a year: once before the Nativity of our Lord and the other before our Lord's Passion and Resurrection.

Keep in mind, that when we speak of habits, we may either mean something good or something bad. In the case of the Christian life, we are often speaking of replacing bad habits with good ones. This process is called repentance, since the bad or sinful habits lead to death and away from God, whereas the good habits or virtues lead to God and eternal life.

We often emphasize changing our ways at the beginning of the New Year or during one of the prolonged fast periods of the Church, but any time is a good time to begin forming a good habit. In fact, the best time to root out the bad and institute the good is always in the present moment. *Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor 6:2).

Motivation is an essential element for a person to be successful at instituting a new and virtuous habit. We must

realize that not all is right in our lives; something needs to change. Once we realize what that something is then we become increasingly sensitive to it, until we become motivated enough to want to do something positive about it. This is the moment when we are most ripe for change. For example, the Prodigal Son was wasting away his life in a foreign land with his father's money, thinking everything was great. It wasn't until life got ugly and uncomfortable that this lost son began to realize something was wrong. He looked around him, seeing the mud, the husks and the swine, and he began to remember his former life with his family. His nakedness, hunger and loneliness in contrast to his former life of bliss and fulfillment brought him to his senses. He had a moment of realization that he needed to change, to get up out of the mud and return to his father with a humble, contrite and repentant heart. This is the first step toward developing a good habit.

The second step is to realize that change does not happen without struggle and effort. Sometimes that struggle is the adjustment of our schedule or lifestyle to incorporate whatever habit we are trying to establish. We should also realize that there are forces working against our efforts towards the good and virtuous. The holy Fathers of the Church have typically listed three such negative forces. First, we must contend against our own sinful inclinations and passions, our weaknesses of the flesh and our mortality. Secondly, we must be aware of the Evil One and his demons, who ceaselessly wage spiritual war against us and our noble purposes. Finally, we must remember that we live in a fallen world whose values oppose those of God. To forget any of these aspects of the spiritual war and not be willing and ready to struggle against them with the help of God is to not be serious in our goal of establishing a good habit.

Continually keeping our motivation fresh in our minds can help us overcome the forces against us. For example, if the habit we are trying to form is to be more diligent in saying our daily prayers, perhaps a helpful thought is to remember how beneficial these prayers are in keeping us in communication with God. As Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain put it, it is vital for the spiritual soldier to remain in communication with his "base." If we firmly keep our goal before us, it will help us to remain committed to our purpose.

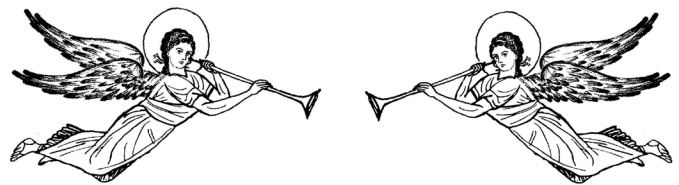
A third principle to keep in mind in establishing a good and virtuous habit is that much force of will and effort will be necessary, especially at the beginning. This good beginning is vital to sustain our effort. St. John of Sinai, the author of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, taught: To lag in the fight at the very outset of the struggle and thereby to furnish a token of our coming slaughter is a very hateful and dangerous thing. A firm beginning will certainly be useful for us when we later grow slack. A soul that is strong

at first, but then relaxes, is spurred on by the memory of its former zeal. And in this way new wings are often obtained.

It is important to remember that we may be either fighting against momentum in the wrong direction or are faced with no momentum at all, but inertia. Either way, physics provides the principle that teaches us that much force and energy are required to move our hearts, minds and bodies in the right direction.

Finally, the last step is to put our good intentions into action. This should go without saying, but unfortunately it is where we most often fall short. We need to actually begin the process of repentance and establish whatever virtue or good practice we are trying to make into a habit. Most people have good intentions, but not all have active prayer lives, healthy bodies, organized finances or clean homes. The first three steps are important to understand and keep in mind during the struggle, but ultimately all is naught if we do not move from contemplation to action. Furthermore, it is vitally important to remember that an action not sustained profits us nothing. How many health clubs grow rich on people who take initial action and join their clubs, but do not sustain their use of their membership for longer than a couple of weeks.

There is no substitute for self-discipline when it comes to forming good habits. Having a realistic expectation of the resistance that we will face, will help us to set up the correct routine and stick with it. If we run with patience the race that is set before us, God will give us the strength and grace to continue. John of Sinai also wrote, "All who enter upon the good fight, which is hard and close, but also easy, must realize that they must leap into the fire, if they expect the celestial fire to dwell in them."



The fact that someone has helped to bring a child into the world does not make him a father/mother. He must bring the child up properly.

Properly has nothing to do with worldly success. It is dependent on one thing alone, preparing a child for the heavenly kingdom. Instilling spiritual roots that will withstand the mighty storms that the world hurls at them. Patience, meekness, humility, a spirit of peace, repentance, love. These are the things that matter and they are taught not by words, but by example. If we are to instill these virtues in our children, we must first cultivate them within ourselves.

St. John Chrysostom

## THE GIFT OF PENTECOST

By Hieromonk Alexios Karakallinos.



Each human soul is unique with her own thoughts and desires, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. Everyone of us needs individualized care especially when we are confused, when we don't know what to believe, and when we feel alone. And the Lord Christ offers us that personal solicitude in the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Eternal Son came into this darkened world that our thoughts might be holy, our desires pure, our hopes golden and our fears as a cloud of smoke dispersed by the wind. And on the fiftieth day after His Resurrection, that wind came through which He provides most graciously the wherewithal for each unique soul to find her special path to Him. He does this by sending down His All-Holy Spirit on the Feast we still call with the original Greek name, Pentecost, the fiftieth day.

On that first Pentecost, there was a sound like a rushing wind and tongues like fire, powerful metaphors for the grace of the Holy Spirit that filled the Apostles with a holy peace, a peace in which pure thoughts become clear, in which holy desires are given wings, and in which our greatest hope is already fulfilled: the human soul need never feel alone, for God is not just with us, He is in us, if we but prepare Him room.

Pentecost takes us beyond therapies and human constructions about the relationships between thought and behavior. And Pentecost is certainly not about emotion. Pentecost is about the Uncreated God Who is beyond our every notion, our every feeling, our every sensation, anything we have ever seen and anything we could ever imagine. And Pentecost is about how when His Spirit touches us we are made anew and we come to understand who we are meant to be and where we are meant to be: sons and daughters of light ever in the presence of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

And yet if all of this seems so impossibly far from where we are now, it simply indicates that we are far from where the Apostles were in the upper room, far in terms of spiritual maturity, far in terms of purification from the passions, far in terms of the illumination of the Holy Spirit. But we shouldn't let this discourage us, since even the Apostles living with Christ daily had a spiritually long path until they reached that upper room. During the period of the Lord Jesus' sojourn on earth, the Apostles experienced the slow and arduous process of purification and illumination. In my

earlier book, *In Peace Let Us Pray to the Lord*, I note, "If one desires to be convinced that the Apostles were in fact both prepared and purified by their way of life and belief, one need only observe the veritable transfiguration that gradually took place in the Apostles' very way of understanding the world and those around them, a transformation that can vividly be seen by comparing the behavior of the Apostles when they were following Christ before His Crucifixion (in the process of purification) and their behavior on the very day of Pentecost (in a state of deification). While Christ was still purifying the Sons of thunder, they coveted positions of prominence, but at Pentecost they readily yielded before Peter allowing him to speak publicly and considering it to be the same honor."

What does this mean for us in our daily lives? If we take the Apostles as our guide we may notice that their focus turned from the acquisition of power, honor, and glory to their humble submission to making Christ's teachings the center of their existence and in so doing entering the fire of repentance that purifies the heart and the light of truth that illumines the soul. They came to know that Christ is everything and that knowledge became a permanent possession of their humble, Christ-loving hearts. The only one of the original Twelve who stubbornly refused to make this transition wasn't present at Pentecost, because he continued to focus on those things that are illusory and fleeting.

The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost and appeared as flames of fire. This is a splendid truth of the divine economy. Yet our focus must remain on the fact that at the time of Pentecost the Apostles had entered the Upper Room of their hearts and were prepared through repentance to receive the gift of the Spirit. In my previous book, I write, "This significant process points to a basic law of the spiritual life: in order for the believer to become a vessel of the Holy Spirit, he must first cleanse the vessel of his soul 'from all pollution of the flesh and spirit' (St. Nikitas Stithatos, "On Spiritual Knowledge") through a life of self-denial. Saint Peter of Damascus expresses this teaching as follows: 'In this life, all things go in pairs: practice and spiritual knowledge, free will and grace, fear and hope, struggle and reward'."

Pentecost is the great gift to humanity, the gift of God's love directly to each human soul. But to receive it, we must seek to acquire the gift of the Holy Spirit at all times by trying to repent, by getting on our knees, by calling out to our Sweetest Lord Jesus, and continuing to call on His Name till our last breath. Pentecost teaches us that if we are to experience "the glorious freedom of the children of God" we must follow the path of the Apostles, Martyrs, and all God's Saints, a path which purifies, illumines, and even deifies. This is the good tidings of the Spirit who reigns in the hearts of the friends of God and wills to reign in our hearts as well if we but humbly let Him. This is the most precious of gifts, the pearl of great price, the salvation of our souls.

## DEIFICATION AND ORTHODOXY

By Archmandrite George, Abbott of the Holy Monastery of Saint Gregory at Mount Athos.

In the Orthodox Church, man can achieve *theosis* (deification) because the Grace of God, according to the teaching of the Holy Bible and of the Church Fathers, is uncreated. God is not only essence, as the Westerners believe, but also energy. If God was only essence, we would not be able to join, to commune with Him, because **the essence of God is awe-inspiring and inaccessible to man**, according to *You can not see My face; for there shall no man see Me, and live.* (Ex 33:20).

Let us mention some specific example from our life. If we touch a live bare cable, we would die. However, if we connect a light bulb to the cable, we are illuminated. The energy of the electric current helps us. Its “essence” we are unable to hold. Something similar, we might say, happens with the uncreated energy of God.

If we could be connected with the essence of God, we as well as everything could become gods; there would be confusion and in reality nothing would essentially be god. Sadly, this is what the eastern religions, such as Hinduism, preach: their god does not personally exist, but is a vague power, scattered all over the world, on people, animals, material, etc. i.e., Pantheism. If again God had only incommunicable divine essence without His energies, He would have remained a self-sufficient God, closed into Himself and non-communing with His creation.

It is with His uncreated energies that God created the world and continues to sustain it. He gives essence and existence to our world with His essence creating energies. He is present in nature and sustains the universe with His sustaining energies. He enlightens man with His enlightening energies. He sanctifies him with His sanctifying energies. And finally He makes him god with His Godly energies. Thus, with His uncreated energies, God enters nature, in the world, in history, in the lives of people.

The energies of God are divine energies. They are also God without being His essence. They are God and this is why they make man god. If the energies of God were not divine, uncreated energies, they would not be able to join us with God. There would have been an unbridgeable distance between God and people. However, by God having divine energies and with these energies joining with us, we can communicate with Him and join with His Grace, without equating with Him.

We therefore join with God through His uncreated energies, and not through His essence. This is the mystery of the Orthodox Faith, the mystery of our spiritual life.

The Western Fallacy cannot accept the Orthodox position; they are rationalists, unable to differentiate between essence and energies of God and thus maintain that God is only es-

sence. Thus, they are unable to comprehend the true *theosis* of man. For how could man be made god since they postulate that the divine energies are created? How can something created namely, outside of God Himself make god of the created man?

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there occurred a great disturbance in the [Orthodox] Church, which was instigated by a western monk, Varlaam. He heard that the Agiorite [=from Holy Mountain] monks were speaking about *theosis*. He was informed that they became worthy, after a great struggle, cleansing themselves from the passions and with a lot of prayer, to join with God, to receive experience of God, to “see” God. He heard that they could see the uncreated light, which was seen by the Apostles at the Transfiguration of the Saviour at mount Tabor.

However, Varlaam having the western, rationalist spirit could not perceive the genuine divine experiences of these humble monks, so he started to accuse the Agiorites that they were deceived, that they were heretics and idolaters. He would say, for example that it was impossible for anyone to see the Grace of God; Varlaam did not know anything about the difference of essence and uncreated energies of God.

God brought forth a great and enlightened teacher of our Church, the Agiorite Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki. With great wisdom and divine enlightenment, but also from personal experience, he wrote, taught and clarified Holy Scriptures and the Church’s Holy Tradition: the uncreated light of God’s Grace is indeed divine energy; that those who became godly men (through *theosis*), they actually see this light as the highest, and paramount experience of *theosis*. This is the glory of God, the brilliance, the Taborian light, the light of Resurrection of Christ and of the Pentecost and the illumined cloud of the Old Testament. Actual uncreated light of God and not symbolic as Varlaam and his likes falsely believed.

The Orthodox Church, with three great Synods in Constantinople, justified Saint Gregory Palamas and declared that a life in Christ is not simply intended to “moralize” man but to also enable his *theosis*, which means participation in the glory of God, vision of God, of His Grace and of His uncreated light.

Sadly, until today, the Westerners continue to consider the divine Grace as created. This is one of our many differences, which must be taken seriously into consideration in the theological dialogue with them. It is not only the “Filioque,” the primacy of jurisdiction and the “infallibility” of the Pope, that create a chasm between Orthodoxy and the Latins. It is also the above. If the Roman Catholics do not accept that the Grace of God is uncreated, we cannot join with them, even if they accept everything else. For who will “operate” the *theosis*, if the divine Grace is created and not an uncreated energy of the Most Holy Spirit?

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



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POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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## THE EPIDEMIC OF APATHY

*"Death to the World," June 21, 2015.*

Too often do we become diverted in the cares of mass and social media, teleporting through computers and cellular devices to a land sadistically bent on self-worship. It seems these days that at birth we are plugged into a digital grid of ever-distracting chaos, gazing on a vacant throne only occupied by phantoms of our own fantasies. We are losing ourselves in distraction, letting our hearts beat with the sound of incoming notifications and "likes." As of late, we have seen the media frenzy over the decision of so many people to mutilate themselves. Social norms change masculine nouns to feminine ones (or neutral), forcing people not just to tolerate the issue, but bow their knees to it. Those who dare not prostrate before the abundant icons of post-birth sexual assignments, they refuse at their own demise, excommunicated from a new social norm. Such is the state of today.

The world is getting worse and it might keep going that direction, but too often do we swallow the pill of the media, even if it is in the negative. The worship of social icons such as Caitlyn Jenner and the treatment of those who do not bow down is a reality, however it is only another blindfold to the true epidemic of our times. There is something more sinister happening other than Jenner that is eating at the very core of our beings and the fabric of humanity. Nietzsche began to sing a lullaby that has been blasted into our ears across time, sending a dramatic wave of slumber and apathy down to our very age. In this dream world,

lethargy exists so profound that seeking has been put to death and replaced with dispiritedness.

Just a few years ago, there was spiritual unrest, rebellion, and disgust with the material core of our society. Now, there is nothing. Lack of movement exists and triviality has become the norm. Today, there is just complete obedience to the media machine that seeks to stamp God out of every last one of us, that seeks to break the legs of the resistant in order to force obeisance. We cannot serve two masters. God is not updated like the IOS software; He does not change with the times. The concrete universal truth of His Church, built on the blood of martyrs, should not just be referenced like a Google search or a Wiki article. It is not to be rationalized by an every changing swarm of modern ideals and opinion. It is for transformation and renewal, for both crucifixion and resurrection of the mind. Saints of our times did not attain Christ through educated hypothesis or book learning, but through crucifixion of the mind and a renewal of self in the image of Christ. They woke up and refused to slumber.

**Sleeper, Christ is calling you.** Arise from the apathy epidemic and open your eyes to a cause for life and give up your senseless world. Refuse the dreamland of this age and drift from the pools of the lukewarm. Rise and fight, for the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by the violent and the violent take it by force. We do not receive life without shedding sweat and blood. Let us rise from the smoggy clouds of sloth, regard our comfort as chains, and embrace crucifixion for renewal and resurrection. Awake and die to thyself.



# 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]

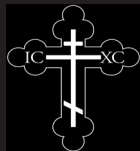
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Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## A TRANSITION TO LIFE: THE DORMITION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

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

Every time we celebrate the Dormition of the Mother of God, it is as if we are having Pascha—the Pascha of the summer. Our Lady the Mother of God prepares a Pascha for us. A glorious crossing *from death to life*. A second Pascha, holy spotless, life-giving for the human race, because today *the laws of nature are overcome*.

*How the source of life goes towards life, passing through death*, says Saint John the Damascene. The death of the life-giving Mother of the Lord transcends the concept of death, so that it is not even called death, but a “dormition,” a “divine transition” and an emigration and immigration towards the Lord. And even if it is called death, it is a life-bringing death, since it transports to a celestial and immortal life.

The transition of the Mother of God, as an indisputable fact preserved by sacred Tradition, has been incorporated into the teaching of the Orthodox Church and has nothing to do with the pietistic beliefs of the westerners concerning the conception without seed and life without death of the Virgin Mary.

The Virgin was the particular creation of God who surpassed all people and the angels. She is the only mortal

ever to have lived a spotless life and to have become what is beyond the understanding of all reasoning beings—the Mother of God. Because she never sinned, never gave in to sensuous thoughts, it was proper that she lived on earth without the pains of the flesh, or illnesses. Even though she had a life-giving body, still, as a human being she was subject to the sickness of death and she did, in fact, die. But her body and soul were not separated from God. For a short time, the connection binding them together was loosed, as was the case with Christ.

After her death, her soul was united immediately with Christ. Because at the time of the Dormition of His Mother, attended by the celestial ranks of the angels and the saints, He took her holy soul, not merely to heaven, but *to His royal throne, to the heavenly Holy of Holies*, as St. John the Damascene tells us.

And the life-giving and God-receiving\* body of Our Most Holy Lady, after three days, was transported to the celestial realms, uncorrupted, to her Only-Begotten and beloved Son. In other words, we can speak of the resurrection of the Mother of God in the flesh. But this resurrection was not activated by Our Lady herself, but by her Son and God.

One witness of this resurrection/transportation of the Mother of God was the Apostle Thomas, who had not been present at her interment. He arrived late, as usual—three days late, in fact—and requested the other apostles



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POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
USA

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

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to open the grave, only to find that the God-glorified body was not there. They did, however, see the Mother of God ascending into the heavens and giving the Apostle Thomas her Precious and Holy Belt, as proof of her ascension, rather in the same way as Christ allowed the same apostle to touch His wounds after the Resurrection.

The body of Our Lady—like that of her Son—did not undergo any corruption in the grave, that is it was not altered, it did not decompose into the material elements that constituted it. In any case, since Christ’s resurrection, the bodies of many of His saints have not decayed and have become, in part, undecomposed relics. How much more reasonable it is that the God-receiving body of the Mother of God would not decay.

Saint Andrew of Crete says that the fact that the Mother of God did not lose her virginity at Christ’s birth had, as its natural concomitant, that her body did not decompose at the time of death. *The birth avoided despoilment and the grave did not accept decomposition.*

After her Dormition, Our Lady the Mother of God became the mother of the new creation, the Church of Christ. Because she had the central position in the dispensation of salvation, since it was from her that the Head of the

Church, the Lord, took His human flesh. Now, in the celestial Church, she has the fullness of grace and glory and boldness. She has become the benefactress of the whole of nature and creation, which is why all creation venerates her as Lady and Maiden and Queen and Mother of God.

Through the Mother of God and because of her, the history

of the whole world entered another orbit, incomparably more magnificent and superior to what had existed before her. No creature could have or could ever be more perfect than her, nor could she have been more perfect than she was. According to the Fathers, there are three things that Almighty God could not have made more perfect: the incarnation of the Divine Word, the Virgin Mother of God and the bliss that the saved will enjoy.

After the resurrection of Christ, Our Lady was the

support of the apostles and of the newly-founded Church of Christ. She taught the new Christians, guided them and consoled them in their sorrows. In the expanded version of her Life, we read that the Archangel Gabriel visited her three days before her Dormition, as he had done at the Annunciation, and told her of her glorious transition from death to life. The Holy Spirit, in miraculous wise, then gathered all the apostles in Gethsemane, in the house of the Mother



of God, so that they could be present at her interment and take her blessing. After they had lauded the greatly-praised Mother of God, they asked her to pass on to them a final teaching, as a legacy. The Mother of God then told them a parable, in which this world was compared with a trade fair at which whoever does best at trading will be the one who gains the greatest profit. She went on to explain that so it is also in matters of the spirit. Whoever observes Christ's commandments with the greatest zeal and heed will gain the greatest profit and will be glorified more greatly in the kingdom of heaven. And she urged them to persist in the "good fight."

And, indeed, how greatly pleased Our Lady is when she sees us struggling for our salvation. What satisfaction this brings her! And she herself, while on earth, how hard she struggled in her quiet way—though, since she was sinless, there was no need for her to do so—so as to leave us with an example of perfect asceticism. After her dormition, they found in Gethsemane where she lived, slabs where she had preformed her prostrations and they were deeply indented from all the wear and tear she had subjected them to.

Let us also imitate her direct obedience, her endearing humility, her secret, internal, spiritual effort, her ardent prayer, the constant watchfulness which she showed, her divine love, and the spiritual pain she felt as a knife at the Cross of her Son.

To those who struggle, she becomes a "supportive ally," even if they have previously lived prodigal lives. Let us remember that the Mother of God "stood bail" for St. Mary of Egypt after the latter's repentance. And when Saint Mary retreated into the desert to take on her relentless struggle, Our Lady herself consoled her with her divine appearances.

As novice-mistress of monastics, the Mother of God is also the provider of divine gifts to them, especially those on the Holy Mountain. It was she who gave the gift of the prayer of the heart to Sts. Maximos Kavsoskalivitis, Gregory Palamas, Silouan the Athonite and also to the late Elder Joseph the Hesychast, who is directly linked to our brotherhood. Another reason why today is of particular importance to us who are the spiritual grandchildren of Elder Joseph the Hesychast is that it was on this day, in 1959, he fell asleep in the Lord.

Elder Joseph loved Our Lady very much, our sweet little mother—as he called her—and he received so many insights, divine appearances and gifts from her. And, indeed, one particular characteristic of the blessed Athonite Fathers is their love of the Mother of God. At the sound of her name, they were unable to restrain their tears which came from pure love for the Virgin Mother. Merely on hearing her name, a soul that loves God is moved to wonder, gratitude and thankfulness. So even the recollection of the Mother of God, that is recalling the person of Our Lady to the mind,

sanctifies the person who does this. The late Fr. Athanasios Iviritis used to say that love of the Mother of God saved people, even if they did not have any works to show.

People today have to use the mediation of the Mother of God, which is for our salvation. In every one of our sorrows and problems we must not forget *the help of the saddened, the protectress, defender, comfort of the faint-hearted*, to whom we can have recourse and find consolation, immediate release and response.

We pray that Our Lady the Mother of God, who has been *transported to Life*, will always give her blessing to all of us, so that we may spend the present life as safe and sound as possible from the deceits and wiles of the Evil One, and that she will make us worthy of the heavenly kingdom of her Son. Amen.

† † †

*In birth, you preserved your virginity; in death, you did not abandon the world, O Theotokos. As mother of life, you departed to the source of life, delivering our souls from death by your intercessions.*

[*Apolytikion* of Dormition of the Theotokos]

† † †

\* The first Friday after Pascha, a feast of the Mother of God, is often referred to in English, as that of the Life-Giving Spring. In fact this should be, *Life-Receiving Spring*. The most likely explanation, perhaps is a *lapsus calami* (a slip of the pen, a miswriting, *Ed.*) on the part of a translator, who read ζωοδότος for ζωοδόχος.



#### A PRAYER TO THE ALL-PURE THEOTOKOS

*By St. Nektarios the new Wonderworker (+1920).*

Take away from me, O Virgin, the fetters of sin, of my lusts and the other transgressions: the terrible carelessness and the overcaring, the evil curiosity and the talkativeness, the useless incontinence and the haughtiness, the negligence, the drunkenness and the lack of mercy, the bad desires, the terrible impurity, the extravagance, the darkness, the great insensitivity. Take away the tendency to tell jokes, the enjoyment, the prodigality, the laughter of immorality and every evil. Give me, O Maiden, chastity, give me continence, fasting, carefulness, vigilance and perfect obedience. Give me carefulness in all and acute discernment, silence, order and holy patience. Grant to me, O Lady, eagerness to work and to attain my perfection, and zeal for virtues and exercise. Keep, O Most-Holy One, my soul, my heart and my mind in holiness and guard it in virginity. Amen.

## ATTAINING HIS GRACE

By St. Joseph the Hesychast.

My child, if you pay attention to everything I write to you and compel yourself, you will find great benefit. All these things are happening to you because you are not forcing yourself to say the prayer (the Jesus Prayer). So force yourself to say the prayer unceasingly; do not let your mouth stop at all. In this way you will grow accustomed to it within yourself, and then the nous will take over. Do not become overconfident with your thoughts for you will be weakened and defiled. If you pray and continuously force yourself to pray, you will see how much grace you will receive.

My child, man's life is full of sorrow because he is in exile. Do not seek perfect rest. Since our Christ bore His Cross, we shall bear ours, too. If we endure all afflictions, we shall receive grace from the Lord. The Lord allows us to be tempted, so that He can test the zeal and love we have for Him. Therefore, patience is needed. Without patience a person does not obtain experience, acquire spiritual knowledge, or attain any measure of virtue and perfection.

Love Jesus and say the prayer unceasingly, and it will enlighten you on His path.

Be careful not to judge, because then God will allow grace to withdraw and will let you fall and be humbled so that you can see your own faults.

Everything that you wrote about is good. The first things that you are feeling are due to God's grace; when it comes, it makes a man spiritual and makes everything seem fine and beautiful. Then he loves everyone and has compunction, tears, and a fervent soul. However, when grace withdraws to test a man, everything becomes carnal and the soul falls. Do not lose your eagerness at this point, but force yourself to cry out the prayer continuously with distress, with might and main, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!*

Say the same thing continually, over and over again. And as if you were noetically gazing at Christ, say to Him, *I thank Thee, my dear Christ, for all the good things which Thou hast given me and for all the hardships that I suffer. Glory to Thee, glory to Thee my God.* And if you are patient, grace and joy will come once more. However, temptations, sorrow, agitation, and irritability will come again; then struggle, victory, and thanksgiving follow. This recurs until little by little you are cleansed from the passions and become spiritual. With time, as you grow older, you attain dispassion.

However, you must struggle. Do not expect good things to come by themselves. One does not become a monk through luxury and comforts. A monk must be insulted, derided, tested. He must fall and then get up so that he can become a true person. He must not be cuddled in his mother's arms. Who ever heard of someone becoming a monk by his mother's side? As soon as he cries out, "Oh!" she would say, "Eat, so you do not get sick!"

Ascesis, my son, requires deprivation. You cannot obtain virtues through luxury and the easy life. It takes a struggle and much labor. It takes crying out to Christ day and night. It takes patience in all temptations and afflictions. It takes suppressing your anger and desires.

You will fatigue greatly until you realize that prayer without attention and watchfulness is a waste of time; work without pay. You must set attention as a vigilant guard over all your inner and outer senses. Without attention, both the nous and the powers of the soul are diffused in vain and ordinary things, like useless water running down the streets. No one has ever found prayer without attention and watchfulness. No one was ever counted worthy to ascend



to the things above without having despised the things below. Many times you pray and your mind wanders here and there, wherever it pleases, to everything that attracts it out of habit. It takes considerable force and a struggle to break the mind away from there so that it pays attention to the words of the prayer.

Many times the enemy craftily creeps into your thoughts, your words, your hearing, your eyes, and you are unaware of it. When you do realize it later on, you need to struggle greatly to be cleansed. However, do not give up fighting against the evil spirits. By the grace of God, you will be victorious, and then you will rejoice for all you had suffered.

In addition, be careful—and tell the others, too—not to compliment one another in each other's presence, for if compliments harm the perfect, how much more harmful they will be to you who are still weak.

There was once a saint who had a visitor. Three times he told the saint that he was doing his handicraft well. After the third time, the saint replied, "Since you came here, you have driven God away from me!"

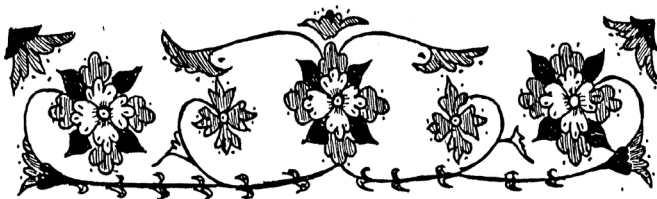
Do you see how precise the saints were? For this reason, great caution is necessary in everything. Only reproaches and insults benefit a man spiritually, because they give birth

to humility. He gains crowns, and by enduring, he crushes his egotism and vainglory. Therefore, when they insult you, “You arrogant egotist, you impatient hypocrite,” etc., it is a time for patience. If you respond, you lose.

So always have the fear of God. Have love for everyone and be careful not to sadden or hurt anyone in any way, because your brother’s grief will serve as an obstacle when you pray. Be a good example to everyone in word and deed, and divine grace will always help you and protect you.

And be careful, my child; do not ever forget throughout your entire life that a monk must be a good example to lay people and not behave scandalously, just as angels are an example to him. Therefore, it is his duty to be very careful lest Satan cheat him.

If it is necessary for a monk to go out into the world, let him go. However, he must be all eyes and all light: he must see very clearly, so that he does not suffer any harm while trying to benefit others. Young monks and nuns, who are still in the prime of life, are particularly endangered when they go out into the world, since they are walking in the midst of many snares. As for those who have somewhat matured in age and have become withered through asceticism, there is not so much danger. They are not harmed so much as they benefit others, if they have experience and knowledge. But in general, a monk does not obtain any benefit from the world—only praises and glory, which clean him out and leave him bare. And woe to him, if divine grace does not protect him according to the need and purpose for which he went out.



The Devil cunningly induces us—instead of irritating us against himself—to notice our neighbors’ sins, to make us spiteful and angry with others, and to awaken our contempt towards them, thus keeping us in enmity with our neighbors, and with the Lord God Himself. Therefore, we must despise the sins, the faults themselves, and not our brother who commits them at the devil’s instigation, through infirmity and habit; we must pity him, and gently and lovingly instruct him, as one who forgets himself, or who is sick, as a prisoner and the slave of his sin.

Our animosity, our anger towards the sinner only increases his sickness, oblivion, and spiritual bondage, instead of lessening them; besides this, it makes us ourselves like madmen, or sick men, the prisoners of our own passions, and of the Devil, who is the author of them.

**St. John of Kronstadt**  
From “My Life in Christ”

## REGARDING THE DEMONICALLY POSSESSED

*By St. Paisios the Athonite, from the book “Words of the Elder Paisios - Vol.3.” Over the last few years, we have received questions on this subject from some of our readers. It is best we allow this most wonderful saint of our days address these questions.*

- Elder, how many demons lived inside the demon possessed at Gadarenes? (Lk 8:26-39).

- Many demons, according to the Gospel. (Lk 8:30). That is why the possessed man said that his name was “legion” (a Roman military unit comprised of three to six thousand soldiers). And you should note that, just as a whole lot of demons can dwell inside a possessed person, in the same way, all the saints can fit inside a faithful’s heart. If Christ can fit in there, then the saints most certainly can! Such huge mysteries! One time, when I was at the hut of the Precious Cross, someone rang the doorbell outside. I looked through the window, and what did I see? A man that was being trailed by an entire column of demons, a black swarm of them! It was the first time that I have ever seen a man possessed by so many demons. He was a medium: he had combined benedictions of the Church with invocations to demons; Christian books with books of magic spells; this was the reason he was under the power of the demons. Terrible!! I was greatly sorrowed...

Some psychiatrists regard the demon-possessed as psychopaths. But then, some priests also claim that certain psychopaths are demon-possessed. The fact remains, that a psychopath should go elsewhere to be helped and a demon-possessed person elsewhere. But can a psychiatrist help the demon-possessed? (The Elder would often say that the psychopath needs medical help by a good and faithful psychiatrist and the spiritual help of a spiritual father, whereas the demon-possessed who has his wits about him needs to discover what he has done that brought on the possession, then repent and confess in order to be rid of the demon.)

- Elder, is a demon-possessed person in a position to understand what he was guilty of, that rendered him demon-possessed?

-Yes, he can. Unless his brain was affected also, in which case it is very difficult to help him. If he is only demon-possessed, it is much easier to communicate with him and help him, but he must obey; otherwise how will he be helped?

One time, a person from southern Greece visited me at my hut; he had been to India and had become demon-possessed. He spouted all kinds of swear words and foamed at the mouth. His eyes were wide open, with a wild gaze. I kept telling him “stop swearing, because that is how you invite the demons” but he would not listen. And yet, he had come to me for help. He kept saying “help me, only you can help me.” So I told him “How do you expect me to help? You want me to pray so that you can be released with the grace of Jesus Christ, but

you keep inviting the demons. Go and confess, ask for the exorcisms to be read over you, then come to me to discuss the matter.” But he replied “I will not go.” So I said “Come inside, and let me dab some oil from the icon lamp on you.” “I do not want that, I want you to help me.” Then he went off and began to talk to someone else. Then after a short period of time, while I was telling another group of visitors that God permits trials for our salvation, that person shouted from a distance “Hey, you! Why do you say that God works so that people might be saved? We have a father in heaven, and one on earth, and further up there’s a lord (i.e., the devil himself).” “Enough with the demonology!” I said to him, and inside me I was reciting the Prayer. “Now you’ve confused me,” he said. “Go away!” I said to him, and brushed him away from me. He curled up into a ball. “Whose side are you on?” he asked me. “Christ’s,” I replied. “You are lying, you are not on Christ’s side, since I am Christ and you are attacking me.” ... See how the devil had presented things in reverse?

- **Elder, is that what the devil says?**

- Yes, the devil, but you see God gave him the courage to come as far as the Holy Mountain. For him to have set off from the other end of Greece to come to the Mountain in such a state is a huge thing! Unfortunately however, he would not listen and so became worse. If he had shown obedience, he would have received help.

Man can become demonically possessed, through diabolical pride. He who has a whole lot of pride is in the dark. His mind is in turmoil, as though it is overcome by exhaust fumes. He will make clumsy mistakes and not realize it. His perception will have reached such a degree of darkness that, no matter what you tell him to help him, he will not understand. He will say that you are pressuring him! He calls that pressuring? Try taking that thought out of his head... No, he is not insane, since his brain is still working. He needs to understand that what he says is a denial, a blaspheming.

That is how they gradually get to the point of Satan-worship. If you observe Satan-worshippers, you can tell they are possessed by the devil. You can discern a certain state of possession about them. And they lure poor unsuspecting children wherever they want, with their compelling music. They go as far as actually invoking Satan. They even have glorifications of Satan: “I dedicate myself to you, Satan.” Terrible!

- **Elder, do you mean that pride can lead to demonic possession?**

- Yes. Let us suppose that someone makes a mistake and then strives to justify himself. If someone attempts to say a word or two to help him, he will say that they are being unfair; he will believe he is better than them and will censure them. Then he will gradually begin to judge the saints—first the recent ones, then the older ones: “He did not perform miracles, the other one did this and that.” Then he will go even further and begin to judge the Holy Synods: “...even the Synods, the way

they reached their decisions...,” so that even the Synods in his opinion do not have precision. Finally, he will even go as far as to say: “And why did God do things that way?” Well, when a person reaches that point, he has not become insane; he has become demon-possessed.

A demon-possessed young man had come to my hut with his father, claiming that he was a god. He had gone to a spiritual father-confessor in the world, but the priest, out of fear that the devil might pounce on him, said to the young man: “Then you bless me” (!!!) What can you say?... Anyway, he kept telling his father: “You’ll see, even Father Paisios will acknowledge that I’m a god.” So he placed a bet with his father, with all the money that they had on them, that I would recognize him as a god. As soon as I began to “work” my prayer-rope, he sprang up from his seat. “What are you doing with that?” he shouted. “I have committed every kind of sin. I have the devil inside me and have become deified. You have to admit that I am a god! You, old man, have done nothing at all,” he continued. “All you do is keep fiddling around with that (the prayer-rope)!” He went on, blurting out some very heavy accusations! I became exasperated. “Go on, get out of here, you loser!” I said to him. I gave him a thorough brush-off. He went berserk, turned into a wild animal. He took out the money that he had in his pocket, and tossed it towards his father, saying: “Here, take it! I lost the bet” ...

The demonically possessed react towards whatever is sacred.

- **Elder, how does one understand if a person is demon possessed and not a psychopath?**

- That can be discerned by any ordinary doctor—a pious doctor will perceive it immediately. When those who suffer from demon possession approach anything sacred, they flinch. That makes it perfectly obvious they are demon-possessed. If you give them a little holy water or make the sign of the Cross over them with a holy relic, they will react vigorously, because the demons inside them are being “cornered” (whereas if they are psychopaths, they will not react at all). Even if you are wearing a Cross and you approach them, they become disturbed and are shaken.

Once, during a night-vigil on the Holy Mountain, the fathers told me that they could sense that one of the laity present was demon-possessed. I sat in the pew next to his, and touched him with my cross, which had a small sliver of the Precious Cross inside it. He sprang up from his seat, then went and sat at the other end. When the churchgoers began to leave, I went and stood near him very discreetly. The same thing happened. I realized that he was indeed demon-possessed.

When they bring little children to me at my hut and tell me that they might be demon-possessed, I sometimes take a segment of the holy relic of Saint Arsenios and clasp it in my fist, in order to verify if it is indeed a case of demon possession. And you should see, if a child is demon-possessed, it

will stare in terror at the hand that has the holy relic (secretly) clasped in it. But if the child is not possessed, and is suffering from—say—a cerebral problem, it will not react at all.

In other cases, I may offer a drink of water which I have previously blessed (secretly) with a segment of a holy relic; if they are demon-possessed, they will not accept it; they will actually back away. In the case of a little boy, I had given it some sweets first—to get him thirsty—then I brought him some of the blessed water. “To Johnny—I said—I will give the best kind of water.” As soon as the boy swallowed the first sip, he began to shout: “This water is burning me up! What’s in it?” “Nothing,” I said to him. “What are you doing to me? It’s burning me up,” he screamed. “It’s not burning you; it’s burning someone else,” I said. I then crossed the boy on his head, and his arms and legs flinched spasmodically... He went into a demonic fit... The demon had made a mess of him...

Do you also remember that student who had come here in the past? “I have a demon inside me,” he had told me, “and it’s tormenting me a lot. I am going through torture thanks to the demon, because it’s also forcing me to utter profanities. I have reached the point of desperation. I feel it pushing against me from the inside; gripping me sometimes here and sometimes there,” and the poor man would point to his abdomen, his chest, his ribs, his arms... Well, seeing how sensitive he was, and in order to not hurt his feelings and only to console him, I said: “Look, there is no demon inside you; it’s only an external demonic influence that’s upon you.”

When we went to the church, I instructed the nuns who were there to pray for the unfortunate creature of God, while I went and took a segment of Saint Arsenius’ holy relic from the Sanctum. I approached him, and asked him again: “Where is the spot that the demon is pressuring you and tormenting you? Where do you think it is?” and he pointed to his ribs. “Where? Here?” I asked him again, and pressed my fist against that spot, with the holy relic clasped in that palm. He let out such a scream! “You scorched me! You scorched me! I will not go awayyyyyyyyy! I will not leave!” He shouted, he swore, he cursed and uttered various profanities. Then I began to mentally say: “Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ, drive out the unclean spirit from Your creature,” and continued to make the sign of the Cross on him with the segment of the holy relic. This continued for about twenty minutes. After that, the demon threw him down and he began to flounder; he tumbled around in every direction; his suit became thoroughly dusty. We lifted him to an upright position. He was shaking all over and making various spasmodic movements. He grabbed onto the iconostasis for support. Sweat was pouring from his hands—it was like dew on grass. The demon left him after a while, and he calmed down. He recovered, and is now just fine.

### Do Not Pay Attention to the Words of the Demon-Possessed

- Elder, what should one pay attention to, when talking to a demon-possessed person?

- He should repeat the Prayer, and treat him with kindness.

- Elder, do the demon-possessed remember what they had said during their crisis?

- Some things they remember and other things they do not. We do not know how God works. Sometimes He allows them to remember, so that they might be humbled and repent. Then again, when a demon-possessed person asks for something, it is not easy for one to perceive when the request is by the devil or if that person truly needs it. I had once met a demon-possessed young woman. She had read Kazantzakis’ books and came to believe certain blasphemous things, and finally ended up possessed. The demon suddenly took hold of her and she began to scream “I’m burning up! I’m burning up!” Her folks held her down for me to sign her with the Cross. Then she screamed “Water! Water!” So I said “Bring her some water.” “No, no” her folks replied, “because someone told us not to obey what the demon says.” “But the poor girl is thirsty now” I said; “bring her some water.” I could tell when burning is attributed to the devil and when it is genuine thirst. The poor soul gulped down a couple of glasses of water... “Burning coals...” she said. “That’s the kind of burning that I felt. Even if I were to drink a whole bucket of water, it would not put out the fire inside me.” That is how intense the burning sensation felt!

- Elder, when a demon-possessed person begins to shout, how can we tell when it is the demon speaking through that person, and when it is actually the person himself?

- When it is the demon speaking, the person’s lips do not move normally; they move somehow mechanically. Whereas when a person is speaking, his lips move in a normal manner. When a demon-possessed person is shouting while exorcisms are being read or when others are praying for him, sometimes the soul itself is tormented, and it will say—for example—to the demon “go away; why are you still here?” and at other times the demon will curse the possessed person, or the priest, or it will blaspheme Christ, the Holy Mother, the saints... It will sometimes utter lies, or, sometimes will be pressured by the truth. Then again, the demon-possessed person might utter things that come from spiritual material that he has read.

These things are so complicated. That is why, when you do talk to a person like that, you should be careful... very careful. Do not pay attention to his words. He might utter—for example—“you are burning me.” If one indeed feels that they are “burning” the demon and they say to themselves “I’ve burnt the demon,” then they are doomed. If they are not “burning” the demon but believe that they

are, then they are doubly doomed. It may also cry out “you are filthy,” but to a specific person it may say “you are clean.” If that person believes those utterings, woe betide! That person is doomed! That is why you should not experiment with the devil.

A demon-possessed person was taken to a monastery, and the abbot there instructed the fathers to go to the chapel and pray for him with their prayer-ropes. In that monastery, they also had as a holy relic the head of Saint Parthenios (commemorated on February 7<sup>th</sup>), bishop of Lampsacus; this had the demon “cornered” quite a bit. At the same time, the abbot assigned the reading of exorcisms to a certain priest-monk. This monk was pious outwardly, but inside he was secretly arrogant. He was a fighter and a stickler in everything he did. He used to counsel the others, because he was also scholarly. He himself however would not receive help from anyone, because out of respect, they would hesitate to tell him whenever they saw him doing something incorrectly. He had created illusions inside himself that he was the most virtuous one in the monastery etc., so the evil one grabbed the opportunity that day to harm him.

The demon implemented its wickedness and made him think that he was driving it out of the demon-possessed person. So, as soon as he began to read the exorcisms, the demon began to cry out “You are burning me! Why are you sending me away, you cruel one?”—which made him believe that the demon was being burnt by his exorcisms—when it was the praying by the other brethren that was pressuring the demon. So, he replied to the demon “Come to me.” These words had been uttered by Saint Parthenios to a demon, but he was a saint: once, when a demon was crying out “I’m burning, I’m burning, where should I go?” the Saint replied “Come to me.” But during that incident, the demon replied to the Saint: “your name alone burns me, Parthenios!” and immediately departed from the possessed person.

Well, that monk attempted to act like Saint Parthenios, but became possessed himself. From that moment on, the demon controlled him for years on end, and he could not find rest anywhere. He was constantly on the move—sometimes outside, in the world, and other times on the Holy Mountain. How that poor soul was tormented! That terrible state had caused weariness to his soul, as well as physical fatigue accompanied by tremors. And you know, even though he used to be a good priest, he could no longer minister. See what the devil can do!

**- Elder, does coffee drinking have anything to do with the reactions of a possessed person?**

- When the nervous system is upset and one has too much coffee, the nerves become weakened and the little imp exploits that state. It is not that coffee itself is something demonic. The little imp makes use of that reaction to the nerves and the possessed person’s reaction becomes even worse.

### Helping the Demon-Possessed

**- Elder, it says somewhere that the devil lurks inside the heart of the demonically-possessed, but does not want that person to be aware of it, for fear of being cast out by the Prayer. Is that so?**

- Yes, because the demon is given the right to remain inside the possessed person for a time and is therefore able to lurk there, whereas with the Prayer, it is pressured, it revolts and can flee. The Prayer is “heavy artillery” towards the devil. They had brought a demon-possessed young man to my hut, who repeated the Prayer continuously. His father was a monk, but had discarded his monastic habit and got married, so the poor lad was born with a demon. That was how God’s providence allowed matters—so that the young man reap a reward, his father be saved, and we monks have as a brake such examples of monks leaving their calling and thereafter being tormented. Anyway, the demon in him was suddenly roused and the young man began to cluck like a hen. “What’s the matter?” I asked him (while I was mentally saying *In the name of Jesus Christ, come out you unclean spirit from this creature of God!*) “I want to depart” shouted the demon “because he is tormenting me so much by constantly repeating the Prayer... I want to get away to Pakistan, to find some peace and quiet!”

**- Elder, why did not the demon leave the young man, if he was saying the Prayer?**

- It must have been because the young man had also given the demon certain rights, but the demon had its own boss from who it was receiving instructions.

**- Elder, when one prays for a demon-possessed person, what should one say?**

- First of all, one should glorify God: “Thank You my God” he should say “for helping me so that I am in this state when I could have been in this person’s situation, with not only five or six demons, but thousands. I beg You, please help Your servant who is in so much suffering.” In other words, one should first say a prayer from the heart and then continue with the Prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on Your servant*. Sometimes, we who pray can become the cause for the demon to not depart from the possessed person, because we pray with arrogance. For instance, even if we make the slightest arrogant thought “ah, my prayer will help to drive out the demon,” divine assistance is immediately hindered and we instead help the demon to remain in place.

We should always pray for the demon-possessed with humility, with heartache and with love.

There was this demon-possessed woman who really made my soul ache. The poor thing, she showed condescension to the devil by saying “yes” to it, and it has been plaguing her for years. It has been burning her flesh. She and her husband go from monastery to monastery—and they even drag their 16-year old daughter with them—and they sit all night in



church during night-vigils. If she were a man, I would hug her tightly—the demon suffers terribly, when you embrace the possessed person with divine love... When you do not aggravate the demon-possessed person and do not go against him/her but instead feel compassion, the demon will depart, for a short or a long while.

Humility is the worst kind of “shock” for the devil. In a monastery, during the time that the pilgrims were venerating the holy relics, one of the visitors (who was possessed) suddenly burst out, saying to the abbot in an angry voice: “Are we forced to do this?” . The abbot responded with kindness, saying “No, not forced. With your own will.” Then the man replied “I will go and do it, by force!” and rushed towards the holy relics and venerated them. See? The demon was pressured by the abbot’s humble attitude and kindness. That is what demons are afraid of...

**- Elder, are the demon-possessed helped any by the grace of the saints, when they go on a pilgrimage on the day the saint is commemorated?**

- It is best if the demon-possessed do not go to the fairs on feast-days, because they distract the others from their prayers. They become the cause for unruliness. It is better if they go on the following day. And even if their relatives know that there is someone there who can help him, it is best if they do not take him to that person on that day, from within the crowd. What? Are we concerned about advertising? Likewise, it is not proper for people to gather around when a demon-possessed person is crying out. There was this little child that was possessed, poor thing, who said to me the other day “I became an embarrassment.” The crowd had flocked around it like seagulls. They do not realize that when someone has an obvious issue and it becomes apparent in front of people, they make that person feel embarrassed.

**- Elder, does Holy Communion help the demon-possessed?**

- For those who were born possessed—and because they were not to blame for it—frequent Holy Communion is the most drastic medicine. They are in for a huge reward if they do not moan about it until they are released through the grace of God. They are martyrs, if they remain patient, which is why it is recommended that they receive Holy Communion frequently. However, if one becomes possessed through his own carelessness, he must first repent, then confess, and then fight to be healed and receive Holy Communion—with his spiritual father’s permission of course, when the time is appropriate. If he receives Communion without repenting and without confession, he will become even more possessed. A demon-possessed man who was taken to receive Holy Communion, spat it out! Christ sacrificed Himself, He condescended to give him His Body and His Blood, and he was spitting it out! Monstrous! You see, the devil does not accept any help...

**- Elder, can we give their names to be read during the Proskomide?**

- Yes, of course. The demon-possessed are greatly helped when priests read out their names during the Proskomide with a pained heart.

**- Elder, when someone who was possessed and has repented, has confessed and has received Communion but is not rid of the demonic influence, what has happened?**

- The demon has not left him, because his spiritual condition is not yet stable. If God helps him immediately to be rid of the demonic influence, he will immediately get off track again. That is why God—out of His immeasurable love—allows the evil influence to depart gradually. That way, the person both “pays the price” and also stabilizes his spiritual state. The more he perseveres, the more that evil will recede. It will depend on him, just how quickly he will be rid of the evil influence.

Once, a father approached me, whose child was demon possessed: “When will my child get well?” he asked me. “When you stabilize your own spiritual state, it too will be helped” I replied. The poor child—even though it was living spiritually, its father reacted inappropriately and kept telling the child that it would become insane if it did not change its ways. The father himself began to take the boy to brothels, after which, the child drifted away and became possessed. Whenever the demon overcame him, he would attack his mother with a savage predisposition. The poor mother was forced to flee to an island to save herself. The father had repented eventually and struggled to live spiritually, but the boy would not get well. After taking his son to all the pilgrimages and having learnt all the lives of Saints by heart and stabilized his condition, only then did the boy recover.

#### Regarding Exorcisms

**- Elder, they brought a demon-possessed woman here and they asked us to tell the priest to read exorcisms over her. What should we have done?**

- In a case like that, it would have been better if you had suggested that her spiritual father take care of the matter. For the devil to be inside her, it means that she must have committed a serious sin—or her parents did—thus giving rights to the devil, because sin is what brings the devil. If they do not repent and confess, the sin will not go away, and consequently neither will the devil.

**- Elder, are the demon-possessed helped by exorcisms?**

- It depends. Exorcisms help, when they are read over a little child that is possessed, which has not given any rights itself (to the devil) and has no idea about confession; or, when they are read over an adult who has lost his mind and is unable to confess. When a possessed person’s senses are intact, he must first be helped to discover what he did to bring on the demon possession; he must repent, confess, and then—if necessary—exorcisms can be read over him, because even with only the blessing of absolution (during Confession), the demon can be driven out.

Some priests put together both those who are demon-possessed and others who have a certain disability and they read exorcisms over all of them. One of them had Parkinson's and yet, they were reading exorcisms over him... Even today, they brought an elderly man whom they claimed was demonically possessed. His left arm moved to and fro, and he also suffered fits. "How long have you been like that?" I asked him. "Since I was a child" he replied. I was stumped. I then noticed that the left side of his head was slightly compressed. Most likely something happened at birth, which later gave him problems.

Imagine, having personal woes and others telling him he is demon-possessed and reading exorcisms over him: "Depart, you unclean spirit..." and making him a laughing-stock to the world! Unacceptable! How many children that are regarded as possessed when they are not! They brought a youngster—twenty-five years old—whom they said was possessed. I gave him some holy water to drink and the poor lad did not react against it in the least. "What does the lad do?" I asked the father. "When did this happen to him?" "Since he was six" he replied. "They had brought his dead grandfather to our shop and as soon as the boy saw him, he was shocked." The poor boy had suffered a nervous breakdown. I mean, this could happen to an adult—how much more so to a child? Imagine, claiming it to be demon-possessed!

- **Elder, can exorcisms be read silently?**

- It is better if they are read inside us. Basically, exorcisms should be read with pain, with humility, not with pride. When priests proudly and vocally utter the words "depart, you unclean spirit!," the devil becomes infuriated, angry... he then exploits the possessed person's ego and might probably say to him "just look at how this priest is making you look ridiculous! You should beat him up!"... So the possessed person pounces on the priest. That will not dispose of the demon. It will dispose of the priest, along with his book of exorcisms. Once, there was a priest who shouted out to a possessed person "I **Command** you, unclean spirit, to depart from this man!" only to hear the demon reply—through the possessed person's mouth—"which is why I will not depart!" That is why I tell priests: When reading exorcisms, never shout out the words "depart, unclean spirit".... as if the demons are deaf!

But, there is also no need for the relatives of the possessed person to tell others that they intend to invite a priest to read exorcisms. It would be better to tell them that the priest will be reading a Paraklesis, and let him read the exorcisms silently.

#### **The Demonically-Possessed Suffer!**

- To tell the truth, the demon-possessed are terribly tormented because they not only are humiliated but are also tortured by the devil!

I had met a young lad of twenty-three at the Stavronikitas Monastery, who was demon-possessed. He was all skin

and bones. It was freezing cold outside, inside the church a wood stove was burning, and yet he was wearing a flimsy, short-sleeved shirt and was seated at the rear of the church. I could not bear to see him like that, so I went and gave him a woolen garment to put on. "Put this on"—I told him—"are you not cold?" "What cold, father?" he replied. "I'm burning up." Well, that is exactly what hell is.

In fact, in certain possessed people who by nature are sensitive, the little imp tells them that they will not be saved, and it leads them to suicide. How terrible! This is no mere matter! I once knew a demon-possessed man who had become a nuisance, even to the priests. He would go to them to have exorcisms read, and they would send him away. Then the devil would tell him about me also: "Do not go to him too—he will not accept you either" and this had made him fall into despair.

Another case was of a person who had recovered by the grace of Saint Arsenius. Look what the devil did to him! He had come here to venerate the relics of Saint Arsenius, but the Monastery was closed. So the devil appeared to him in the form of Saint Arsenius at the door downstairs and said to him: "Do not ever set foot here again—I do not want you, and neither does Paisios!" And he sent him away. See what happened? That man then began to spout abuse about the Saint, and also about me.... Ok, I deserve abuse, but the Saint? Anyway, the poor wretch became demon-possessed all over again.

Needless to say, if one merely behaves disrespectfully, God's grace becomes distant; imagine how much more so, when saints are abused. He also came to my hut and shouted "What have I done to you, so that you do not want to see me? Why will you not help me? Do you want me to be tormented?" So I said to him: "Dear man, it was the devil that sent you away; it was not the Saint. The Saint does not send anyone away." But he would not listen. He had more faith in his own conviction. Have you any idea what kind of torture these people suffer every day?

But there are many demon-possessed people who suffer in order for certain others to come to their senses. Because, when they see just how much they suffer, they become concerned, they come to a realization and repent. So, do not imagine that those who become possessed are the only ones with more sins. It is just that God allows them to be possessed, in which case, they are degraded, they are humbled, they pay for their sins, they receive wages, but on the other hand, others who see them suffer are also helped.

Of course one might say that there are people who commit a whole pile of sins and do not become demon-possessed; how can this be? Well, when a person has reached the point of total corruption, then he is not attacked by a demon, because God can see that he will not be helped. We need to know that even an offensive by a demonic energy is—in a fashion—a gift of God to a sinning person, so that he might be humbled, repent and be saved.

## PRESERVING ONE'S PURITY OF THE FLESH

Excerpted from "How a Youth Can Guard His Path in Purity," Moscow, 1910. Translated by "Orthodox America," issue no. 97, February 1990.

*Guard the purity of thy flesh in the Lord, as a precious pearl.*  
[St. Ephraim the Syrian]

† † †

The lust of the flesh is very seductive; it easily catches the one who is careless and makes his soul a prisoner of the devil. According to the word of the Lord, *whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). This means that one can defile oneself without having any physical contact with another person—simply through one's eyes, through one's imagination and the desires of the heart.

When lustful thoughts enter the heart, they already defile a man (cf. Mt 15:18, 20). For this reason Scripture says, *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* (Prov 4:23). Inasmuch as the desires of the heart are often aroused in us through external impressions, one must also strive to guard one's bodily senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch. Referring to these, Scripture tells us: *death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.* (Jer 9:21). Through the senses the seductions of the world penetrate the heart and, even if it is full of good thoughts, they make of it a desolation, as it is said: *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.* (1 Cor 15:33).

Of all the external senses, sight serves as the most convenient transmitter of deceptions, and for this reason it poses the greatest danger to virginity. The lust of the eyes, which catch beguiling objects, easily and quickly joins them with the lust of the flesh, and the man, without regard for time or place, commits adultery with whomever he so desires. Deliberately gazing at beautiful faces, this adulterer always and everywhere carries and feeds within himself the indomitable beast of unclean desire. What could be worse than such a state? This is the same as a raging fever in which the afflicted, no matter how much he drinks, cannot slake his thirst.

The Scripture says: *Turn away thine eye from a beautiful woman, and look not upon another's beauty; for many have*

*been deceived by the beauty of a woman; for herewith love is kindled as a fire.* (Sir 9:8). And what kind of pleasure can there be in the lust of the eyes? Here there is no real pleasure, just a shadow, a surrogate, a deception. Those who enjoy peace of heart are not those who give themselves over to the lust of the eyes, but those who do not give themselves over. No matter how much the lustful man tries to capture pleasures for himself, he cannot retain them and make them last. Not so is the consolation of the chaste: one can say that his whole life is spent in enjoyment because his conscience is at peace and nothing agitates his heart; it is always calm and looks joyously up to heaven, as if winged with the desire of eternal good things.

Well, you might say, what harm is there if I look and am not carried away by passion? The first time you may not notice any harm to yourself, and if, as you say, you look once, twice,



three times like this, perhaps you will still be able to overcome passion; but if you begin to do this often then you will surely be vanquished. For you are not greater than the Prophet David who, we know, subjected himself to dangers from admiring the beauty of the female sex. If you come close to a fire and burn yourself you will jump away at once; but once your soul is weakened by a woman's flattery, you will not turn away from her soon. In the Old Testament it is said: *Turn away thine eye from a beautiful woman... for many have been deceived by the beauty of a woman.* (Sir 9:8).

In order to keep one's eyes from beguilement, one should lower them more often, recalling the words revealed by God to St. Ephraim: *From the earth thou art taken, look therefore to the earth.*

One should be similarly careful in guarding one's ears from hearing lewd conversation, worldly songs, music which is pleasurable and weakens the soul, because all this arouses in the soul impure love and carnal desire.

One must be particularly careful in one's acquaintance with the female sex. Just as a soldier who finds himself in the midst of the enemy receives multiple wounds, so a man who has frequent contact with women subjects his soul to many injuries. In the Old Testament we read: *Sit not at all with another man's wife, nor sit down with her in thine arms, and spend not thy money with her at the wine; lest thine heart incline unto her, and so through thy desire thou fall into destruction.* (Eccles 9:9).

The sense of taste poses great danger to chastity, and therefore one should avoid taking pleasure in food and drink. Who has not noticed what ruinous consequences come from indulging in sweet delicacies. Not without reason does the Apostle say that the widow *that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth*. (1 Tim 5:6). Strict guardians of virginity rarely ate sweet food but nourished themselves chiefly with bread and water.

The sense of touch, although less subject to temptation, even so is extremely dangerous to virginity. For this reason, avoid physical contact not only with the opposite sex but likewise refrain from touching those parts of your own body which lead to the arousal of passion.

Of all the physical senses, smell poses the least danger to chastity; nevertheless, one should avoid perfumes which draw the soul towards effeminacy and dispose it towards sensuality.

Besides all this, one must be very wary of impure thoughts or imaginings; these subject a man to spiritual decay much more than fulfilling the desire of the flesh within the lawful bonds of marriage. For this reason the Apostle says *it is better to marry than to burn*. (1 Cor 7:9).

Those who live in virginity must inevitably engage in warfare against carnal passion; and those who are inexperienced or untried in this warfare are threatened with being overpowered and falling; sometimes it even results in spiritual death, for, as Apostle Paul says, *to be carnally minded is death*. (Rom 8:6). All the more so, then, are deeds born of lust considered deadly sins; it is said that *no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God* (Eph 5:5) if he does not repent, if he does not in his mind and heart turn away from his sin.

† † †

*Every man that striveth for mastery is temperate in all things.*

[1 Cor. 9:25]

† † †

Although abstinence from carnality is a difficult virtue, it is nevertheless possible, and in return it rewards its practitioner with an inexhaustible well-spring of consolation in God. If a man desires to delight in spiritual blessings, he should strive to destroy within himself the desires of this sin-loving flesh, to exhaust his “old man”; here, let him imitate St. Ephraim the Syrian who said, *I torment him who torments me*.

All ascetic strugglers, as Apostle Paul writes, are temperate in all things. Imitating them, you, too, should not only refrain from eating anything that weighs down the body; you should not even drink water beyond moderation, so as not to burden the heart with a surfeit of drink and draw yourself away from the *podvig* of prayer and vigilance. For, more than anything else, keeping vigil with prayer aids in all that is good: it uproots passions of the flesh, it motivates one to guard purity of virginity, and it plants in the heart hope in God and love for God. *He who loves God*, writes St. Maximus the Confes-

or, *will live an angelic life on earth, fasting and keeping vigil, chanting and praying*.

It is rightly said in Scripture that *neither fornicators, ... nor adulterers ... will inherit the Kingdom of God*. (1 Cor 6:9). Apostle Paul counsels us not to communicate with adulterers, placing them in the same category with idolaters; one should *not even eat* together with such people (1 Cor 5:11). And this is given not without reason, as we can see from the following example.

Around the year 1140, there lived in the Kiev Caves Lavra a hieromonk by the name of Onesiphoros. He had a spiritual son and friend, a monk who gave every appearance of being a faster, although he freely indulged in the sins of the flesh—a fact he kept secret from his spiritual father. He was in good health when suddenly he died. His body gave off such a stench that no one could come close to it. The monks had to stand at a distance and even so they were barely able to conduct the burial service. Covering their noses, they carried him away and placed him in the caves.

Many times the monks heard shrieks, as though someone were being tormented. One night, St. Anthony appeared to Onesiphoros and said to him sternly, “Why have you put here such an abominable man of iniquity? He defamed a holy place.” The next night Onesiphoros again heard a voice: “Quickly throw him out of here; give him to the dogs. He’s not worthy of being here.”

This shows how offensive to God and His saints is the secret sin of one who indulges the flesh. Not only his soul but even his lifeless corpse is intolerable for them. Justly does the Apostle write: *Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body*. (1 Cor 6:18).

One must also be aware that without God’s grace, no one can preserve the purity of virginity; nor is it granted to the negligent. One must have ardent love for the study of God’s wisdom, eat and drink in moderation, and keep the body under subjection by vigils, labors and prayer. Without this, one inevitably faces a battle with the lust of the flesh, is overmastered by it and falls into sinful impurity.

The saints have observed that for pride and judging others, a man is also allowed to suffer fall from the despoiler of the flesh, and that to guard one’s purity it is very beneficial to frequently have confession and partake of the Body and Blood of Christ.



Let no-one believe that there will be no recognition of one another on that terrible gathering (Final Judgment). Yes, indeed, each one will recognize the one near him—not by the form of his body, but by the discerning eye of the soul.

St. John of Damascus

## Ἡ Ἀγιότητα καὶ ἡ Ἀναμαρτησία τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Θεοδώρου Ζήση.

**Μ**ᾶς ἀξίωσε ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἐφέτος νὰ ἀκούσουμε τὸν θαυμάσιον αὐτὸν ὕμνον ποὺ ὀνομάστηκε «Ἀκάθιστος Ὑμνος», τὸ ὑπέροχο αὐτὸ φιλολογικὸ καὶ λογοτεχνικὸ δημιούργημα. Εἶναι ἓνα ἔξοχο λογοτεχνικὸ κατασκευάσμα, τὸ ὁποῖο θαυμάζουν ὅλοι οἱ εἰδικοί. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας μὲ σοφία καὶ σύνεση ἔθεσε αὐτὴν τὴν ἀκολουθία μέσα στὴν Ἁγία καὶ μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή, ὥστε μαζὶ μὲ τὶς κατανυκτικὲς λειτουργίες τῶν Προηγιασμένων, τὰ μεγάλα ἀπόδειπνα κ.ἄ. νὰ ὑπάρχει καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνοιξιὰτικὴ νότα. Αὐτὴ ἡ χαρούμενη νότα μὲ τὰ πολλὰ χαίρε, γιὰ νὰ γεμίσει τὶς καρδιές μας ἀπὸ χαρὰ, σὰν ἓνα προανάκρουσμα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως.

Δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἀναφεροῦμε στὸ περιεχόμενο αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ὑμνου καὶ νὰ ἀναλύσουμε τὶς βασικὲς γραμμὲς καὶ κατευθύνσεις του, ὅπως κάναμε σὲ προηγούμενα χρόνια, οὔτε ἐπίσης πρόκειται νὰ ἀναφεροῦμε στὸν θαυμάσιον κανόνα τοῦ ὕμνογράφου Ἰωσήφ, τὰ θαυμάσια τροπάρια τοῦ ὁποίου πέρυσι ἀναλύσαμε.

Ἐφέτος θὰ ἐκμεταλλευθῶ αὐτὴν τὴν εὐκαιρία, τὴν ἀφιερωμένη στὴν Παναγία μας, καὶ θὰ προσπαθῶ νὰ σᾶς παρουσιάσω, ποιά εἶναι ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας γιὰ τὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, τί πιστεύει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, καὶ ποιά εἶναι ἡ ἀπάντηση σὲ ὀρισμένες ἄλλες διδασκαλίες καὶ παρεκκλίσεις, οἱ ὁποῖες παρερμηνεύουν τὴν παράδοση καὶ τὴν πίστη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ βασικὰ θέματα τὸ ὁποῖο ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς προβάλλει γιὰ τὸ σεπτὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου εἶναι ὅτι χαρακτηρίζεται ὡς Παναγία. «Χαίρε Ἁγία, Ἁγίων μείζων». Εἶναι κατὰ πάντα Ἁγία, σὲ ὅλα εἶναι Ἁγία. Δὲν ὑπάρχει τίποτε τὸ μεμπτὸν στὴ ζωὴ της, στὶς σκέψεις της, στὶς ἐπιθυμίες της, στὶς πράξεις της, στὶς θελήσεις της, στὰ ἔργα της, στὶς κινήσεις καὶ στὴν ἐμφάνισή της, στὸ παρουσιαστικὸ της, ὅλα εἶναι ἅγια καὶ ὅλα εἶναι ἀγνά, «Ἀγνείας θησαύρισμα», καθ' ὅλα Ἁγία, Παναγία.

### Φυσικὴ ἢ Γέννηση τῆς Θεοτόκου

Ποῦ ὅμως ὀφείλεται αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγιότης τῆς Παναγίας μας; Μποροῦμε ἄραγε ἐμεῖς οἱ θνητοὶ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ

ἀπλοὶ πιστοὶ νὰ ἀποκτήσουμε αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγιότητα; Κι ἂν δὲν γίνουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς πανάγιοι, κ' ἂν δὲν γίνουμε παναγίες, μποροῦμε τουλάχιστον νὰ γίνουμε ἅγιοι ἢ νὰ ἀκολουθήσουμε ἓνα δρόμο ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ πρὸς τὴν ἀγιότητα; Τί τὸ ἐξαιρετικὸ εἶχε ἡ Παναγία καὶ κατόρθωσε καὶ ἀπέκτησε αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγιότητα;

### Καρπὸς Προσευχῆς ἢ Γέννησή της

Ἡ Παναγία ὡς γνωστὸν ἦταν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος καθ' ὅλα ὅμοιος πρὸς ἐμᾶς, γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ ἓνα γεροντικὸ ἅγιο ζευγάρι, τὸν Ἰωακεῖμ καὶ τὴν Ἄννα ὡς καρπὸς προσευχῆς. Σὲ μεγάλη ἡλικία, ὄρμιοι, ἄτεκνοι παρακάλεσαν τὸν Θεὸ νὰ τοὺς χαρίσει ἓνα παιδί. Κάποια φορὰ μάλιστα, λέγει ἡ παράδοση, ὅτι ὁ Ἰωακεῖμ ἐξεδιώχθη ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Σολομῶντος, διότι πῆγε νὰ προσφέρει δῶρα. Ἐπειδὴ στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη ἡ ἀτεκνία ἐθεωρεῖτο ὄνειδος, ὁποῖος δὲν εἶχε παιδιὰ ἐθεωρεῖτο ἀτιμασμένος, πὼς δὲν ἦταν εὐλογημένος ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ (δὲν ἰσχύει

αὐτὸ γιὰ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, γιὰτὶ ἀνατράπηκε αὐτό, σημασία ἔχουν οἱ πράξεις, ὄχι τὰ παιδιὰ) ἐπειδὴ λοιπὸν ἔτσι ἐπιστεῦτο, ὅτι ὁποῖος δὲν ἔχει παιδιὰ δὲν εἶναι εὐλογημένος ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ, ἐδίωξαν οἱ ἱερεῖς τὸν γέροντα Ἰωακεῖμ ἀπὸ τὸν ναό· ἐκεῖνος, μὲ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια, πῆγε στὴν ἔρημο ἐπὶ 40 ἡμέρες καὶ παρακαλοῦσε θερμὰ τὸ Θεὸ ἐν προσευχῇ καὶ νηστεία νὰ τοῦ δώσει παιδί. Τὸ ἴδιο ἔκαμε καὶ ἡ μητέρα τῆς Παναγίας, ἡ Ἄννα, στὸ σπῆτι της.

Ὁ Θεὸς ἄκουσε τὶς προσευχῆς τοὺς καὶ τοὺς χάρισε ὄχι ἀπλῶς ἓνα παιδί σὰν ὅλα τα ἄλλα· τοὺς χάρισε ἐκεῖνο τὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἐπρόκειτο νὰ λυτρωθεῖ ὁ κόσμος, νὰ γεννηθεῖ ὁ λυτρωτὴς τοῦ κόσμου. Δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἄλλοι γονεῖς οἱ ὁποῖοι νὰ ἔχουν αὐτὸ τὸ

προνόμιο ποὺ εἶχαν οἱ ἅγιοι Ἰωακεῖμ καὶ ἡ Ἄννα, νὰ γεννήσουν μία κόρη, νὰ ἀποκτήσουν ἓνα παιδί ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἐπρόκειτο νὰ γεννηθεῖ ὁ Θεός.

Ἦταν λοιπὸν καρπὸς προσευχῆς ἢ γέννηση τῆς Παναγίας μας. Κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα ὅμως ἡ Παναγία ἦταν ἓνας συνηθισμένος ἄνθρωπος σὰν ὅλους ἐμᾶς. Καὶ κάνω αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπισήμανση ὅτι ἡ Παναγία προῆλθε ἀπὸ συζυγία φυσιολογικὴ δύο ἀνθρώπων, τοῦ Ἰωακεῖμ καὶ τῆς Ἄννας, ἀπὸ μία ἐμπαθὴ θὰ ἔλεγα γέννηση, ἀφοῦ στὴν συνάντηση ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικός, ὅσο ἅγιοι καὶ ἂν εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὑπάρχει ἡ ἐπιθυμία, ὑπάρχει



ή ήδονή, και υπάρχει πάθος: «*Ἴδὸν γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήφθην, καὶ ἐν ἁμαρτίαις ἐκίσσῃσθε με ἡ μήτηρ μου*» λέγει ὁ ψαλμὸς. Ἡ Παναγία λοιπὸν γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν συνηθισμένη ἀνθρώπινη συνάντηση, ἀπὸ τὴν συνηθισμένη συζυγία τοῦ Ἰωακείμ καὶ τῆς Ἄννας, δὲν εἶχε τίποτε διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους. Τὸ τονίζουμε αὐτό, διότι τὸν περασμένο αἰῶνα ὁ πάπας διετύπωσε ἓνα δόγμα ἀντιπαραδοσιακὸ, ἐναντίον αὐτῶν ποὺ διδάσκει ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ ἡ Παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, τὸ δόγμα τῆς «ἀσπίλου συλλήψεως τῆς Θεοτόκου».

### Ἡ «Ἄσπιλη Σύλληψη» τῆς Θεοτόκου

Τὸ δόγμα αὐτό, τὸ ὁποῖο διετύπωσε τὸ 1854 ὁ Πάπας Πίος ὁ 9<sup>ος</sup>, σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ Παναγία γεννήθηκε ἄσπιλη, ἀναμάρτητη, δὲν εἶχε τὸ προπατορικὸ ἁμάρτημα, ὅπως τὸ ἔχουμε ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Ἡ διδασκαλία αὐτὴ βέβαια περὶ τῆς ἀσπίλου συλλήψεως δὲν στηρίζεται πουθενά, οὔτε στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, οὔτε στὴν διδασκαλία τῶν Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἔχει ἐπίσης πολλὰ τρωτὰ σημεῖα.

Ἐνα τρωτὸ σημεῖο αὐτῆς τῆς διδασκαλίας εἶναι ὅτι προσβάλλει τὴν μοναδικότητα τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μόνον ὁ Χριστὸς γεννήθηκε ἀναμάρτητος ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου, εἶναι ἡ μοναδικὴ περίπτωση κατὰ τὴν ὁποία δὲν μεσολάβησε σὰρκα καὶ αἷμα. Ὁ Χριστὸς μας γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο Μαρία, ἄνευ συναφείας ἀνδρός. Δὲν ἦλθε σὲ σαρκικὴ ἔνωση ἡ Παναγία μετ' ἀνδρα. Τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἐπεσκέασε τὴν Παναγία καὶ δι' Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐγεννήθηκε ὁ Κύριός μας ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς γεννήθηκε ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο Μαρία, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ εἶναι ἀναμάρτητος.

Ἡ Παναγία ὁμως δὲν γεννήθηκε ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου. Γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ γονεῖς φυσιολογικά, κανονικά, ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωακείμ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἄννα. Προσβάλλει ἐπομένως ἡ διδασκαλία αὐτὴ τὴν μοναδικότητα τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ μοναδικὴ γέννηση, ἡ ὁποία ἐγένετο ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ εἶναι γι' αὐτὸ ἄσπιλη, εἶναι ἡ γέννηση τοῦ Κυρίου μᾶς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

### Οἱ Ἀκρότητες τῆς Μαριολατρείας καὶ τοῦ Ἀντιδικομαριανισμοῦ

Τὸ δεύτερο στοιχεῖο γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο αὐτὴ ἡ διδασκαλία δὲν εἶναι ὀρθὴ εἶναι ὅτι οὐσιαστικῶς δὲν ἀνεβάξει τὴν Παναγία, τὴν μειώνει, ἐνῶ οἱ Παπικοὶ θέλουν νὰ ὑψώσουν τὴν Παναγία, ὑπερβολικὰ μάλιστα. Ὑπάρχουν ἐδῶ ἀκρότητες, καὶ ἅς πῶ γιὰ τίς δύο αὐτὲς ἀκρότητες καὶ θὰ συνεχίσω τίς σκέψεις ποὺ ἔκανα προηγουμένως. Στὴν διδασκαλία γιὰ τὴν Θεοτόκο λοιπὸν ὑπάρχουν δύο ἀκρότητες. Ποιὲς εἶναι οἱ δύο αὐτὲς ἀκρότητες;

Ἡ μία ἀκρότητα εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ ὁποία ὑπερεξαίρει τὴν Παναγία, κάνει τὴν Παναγία Θεά, θεοποιεῖ τὴν

Παναγία, εἶναι ἡ Μαριολατρεία. Διδάσκει ὅτι ἡ Παναγία εἶναι Θεός, καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν τάση ὑπηρετεῖ ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς ἐκκλησίας, τῆς Παπικῆς ἐκκλησίας, περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἡ Παναγία εἶναι ἄσπιλη, τὴν ἐξισώνει μετ' ὃν Χριστό, ἓνα πρόσωπο τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος.

Στὸ ἄλλο ἄκρο εἶναι ὁ λεγόμενος Ἀντιδικομαριανισμὸς, οἱ ἀντίθετοι, οἱ ἀντίδικοι τῆς Μαρίας, οἱ ἐχθροὶ τῆς Μαρίας, στὴν ἐποχὴ μας οἱ Προτεστάντες.

Ἀπὸ τὴν μία πλευρὰ οἱ παπικοὶ, οἱ Ρωμαιοκαθολικοὶ ἔχουν τὴν Μαριολατρεία, κάνουν τὴν Θεοτόκο θεό, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ στὴ Δύση καὶ πάλι, στὴν Εὐρώπη, ὑπάρχει τελείως ἀντίθετη τάση, τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς Παναγίας.

Ἄς ἀναφέρουμε ἐδῶ, αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶπαμε καὶ ἄλλη φορὰ, ὅτι ὁ πατὴρ Θεόκλητος ὁ Διονυσιάτης σ' ἓνα βιβλίον τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει γράψει γιὰ τὴν Παναγία δημοσιεύει ἓνα γράμμα τοῦ γέροντός του, Ἀθανασίου τοῦ Ἰβηρίτη, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀναφερόταν σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐχθρότητα ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ Προτεστάντες ἐναντίον τῆς Παναγίας. Ἐὰν πᾶτε σ' ἓναν ναὸ προτεσταντικὸ-εὐαγγελικὸ, δὲν θὰ δεῖτε πουθενὰ εἰκόνες, δὲν ἔχουν καμμία τιμὴ, κανένα σεβασμὸ πρὸς τὴν Παναγία. Ἀντίθετα ἐκφράζονται ὑποτιμητικὰ γι' Αὐτήν.

Ἐχοντας λοιπὸν κατὰ νοῦν ὁ Γέρον Ἀθανάσιος ὁ Ἰβηρίτης τὴν ἀσέβεια πρὸς τὴν Παναγία, ἐκφράζεται στὸ γράμμα αὐτὸ πολὺ σκληρὰ γιὰ τοὺς Προτεστάντες καὶ τοὺς προτεσταντίζοντες. Δὲν διστάζουν οἱ Ἅγιοι νὰ χρησιμοποιήσουν σκληρὰς λέξεις, ὅταν ὑβρίζονται ἅγια πρόσωπα. Γιὰ μᾶς αὐτὸ θὰ φαινόταν βαρὺ, τοὺς δῆθεν εὐγενεῖς, τοὺς δῆθεν προοδευμένους, τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῶν σαλονιῶν. Μπορεῖ νὰ ὑβρίζουμε ἁγίους, ἀλλὰ θέλουμε μία ἐκλεπτυσμένη γλῶσσα στὶς μεταξὺ μας σχέσεις.

Ἀνάμεσα λοιπὸν στὶς δύο αὐτὲς τάσεις, ἀπὸ τὴν μία πλευρὰ τῆς Μαριολατρείας τοῦ Παπισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐχθρότητος πρὸς τὴν Παναγία, τῆς μειώσεως τῆς Παναγίας, τῶν Προτεσταντῶν εἶναι ἡ δική μας ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὁποία σέβεται καὶ τιμᾷ καὶ ὑμνεῖ τὴν Θεοτόκο μετ' ὅσους ὕμνους, ὅπως ἀκούσαμε, δὲν κάνει ὁμως τὴν Παναγία θεά. Τὴν τοποθετεῖ μετὰ τῆς Θεότητος. «*Τὰ δευτερεία τῆς Τριάδος ἡ ἔχουσα*». Οἱ ἱερεῖς μνημονεύουμε πρῶτα τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ μετὰ τὴν Παναγία.

Ἄς ἐπανέλθουμε ὁμως στὸ δεύτερο τρωτὸ σημεῖο τῆς «ἄσπιλης σύλληψης». Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν νομίζουν ὅτι μετ' ἄσπιλη σύλληψη ὑπερψώνουν τὴν Παναγία, οὐσιαστικῶς τὴν μειώνουν. Γιατί ἡ Παναγία ἐξυψώνεται πῶς πολὺ ἂν παρουσιασθεῖ ὅτι αὐτὰ ποὺ κατόρθωσε, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγιότης τὴν ὁποία κατόρθωσε, δὲν τὰ κατόρθωσε γιατί ἦταν ἀναμάρτητη ἐκ φύσεως. Τὰ κατόρθωσε γιατί, ἐνῶ ἦταν ἄνθρωπος σὰν ἐμᾶς,

γεννήθηκε από φυσικούς γονείς, ενώ ήταν άνθρωπος καθόλα φυσιολογικός, είχε αυτήν την δική μας τη φύση, ή όποια ρέπει προς την άμαρτία, κατόρθωσε εν τούτοις να καλλιεργήσει τις αρετές με πολλή άσκηση, με προσευχή, με νηστείες, με έγκράτεια, με άγνότητα ιδιαίτερος, και να φθάσει στα ύψη αυτά της αγιότητας, συνεργώντας και κοπιάζοντας ή ίδια.

Ἐμεῖς ἀγαπητοί μου, ποῦ ζοῦμε στὸν χῶρο αὐτὸ τὸν εὐλογημένο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, θὰ πρέπει νὰ τὴν ἔχουμε ὡς παράδειγμα καὶ ὡς δίδαγμα καὶ ὡς στόχο. Ἐκείνη κατόρθωσε νὰ φθάσει σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγιότητα καὶ νὰ ὑμνεῖται δι' ὄλων τῶν αἰῶνων: «Ἴδου γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσί με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλεῖα ὁ δυνατὸς καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ». (Λουκ 1:48-49). Εκείνη ήταν σκευὸς ἐκλογῆς, καὶ λόγω τῆς ἀγιότητός της κατόρθωσε καὶ εἰλκυσε τὴν προσοχὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔγινε ἡ ἀγαπητὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ: «Χαῖρε κεχαριστομένη Μαρία, ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ, εὐλογημένη, σὺ ἐν γυναιξί». Ἔδειξε μὲ τὴν ἀγία ζωὴ της, τὴν ἀφθαστὴ ὑπακοή της, τὴν πολλὴ ταπεινώση, τὴν ἀνυπερβλητὴ ἀγνότητα, μέχρι ποῦ μπορεῖ νὰ ὑψωθεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Δὲν πρόκειται βέβαια ἔμεῖς νὰ φθάσουμε αὐτὸ τὸ μοναδικὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς Παναγίας μας. Μποροῦμε ὅμως νὰ μποῦμε σ' ἓνα δρομὸ ἀγιότητος, νὰ ὑψωθοῦμε καὶ ἔμεῖς ἀναλογικὰ, νὰ καταπολεμήσουμε τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς κακίες μας, ὥστε ὅταν ψάλλουμε στὴν Ἵπεραγία Θεοτόκο, νὰ ψάλλουμε μέσα ἀπὸ ἀγνὲς καρδιὲς καὶ ἅγια χεῖλη.

### Ἡ Καθαρὴ καὶ Ἀσκητικὴ ἡ Ζωὴ της

Θὰ ἐπιμείνουμε λίγο στὸ θέμα τῆς ἀγιότητος τῆς Παναγίας καὶ θὰ παρουσιάσουμε μερικὲς πτυχεὲς τῆς ἀγίας καὶ ἀσκητικῆς ζωῆς της, θὰ δοῦμε πῶς πέρασε τὴ ζωὴ της στὰ 60 περίπου χρόνια ποῦ ἔζησε (59 ἐτῶν ἐκοιμήθη ἡ Παναγία). Πῶς λοιπὸν πέρασε ἡ Παναγία μας τὴν ἀγία καὶ ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ της;

Τὰ Εὐαγγέλια παραλαμβάνουν τὴ ζωὴ τῆς Παναγίας ἀπὸ τὸν Εὐαγγελισμό, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀγγέλου Γαβριὴλ στὴν Παναγία. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία βέβαια δὲν στηρίζεται μόνο στὰ Εὐαγγέλια, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν παράδοση τὴν προφορικὴ, σ' αὐτὰ ποῦ προφορικὰ ἄφησαν ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι δὲν ὑπάρχουν ὅλα μέσα στὰ Εὐαγγέλια. Βάσει λοιπὸν αὐτῆς τῆς

παραδόσεως, ἡ Ἐκκλησία διδάσκει ὅτι ἡ Παναγία σὲ ἡλικία τριῶν ἐτῶν παραδόθηκε, ἀφιερώθηκε, ἀπὸ τοὺς γονεῖς τῆς τὸν Ἰωακεὶμ καὶ τὴν Ἄννα στὸν Ναό. Τί φοβερὸ μυστήριό αὐτό! Μία ζωὴ παρακαλοῦσαν ὁ Ἰωακεὶμ καὶ ἡ Ἄννα νὰ ἀποκτήσουν παιδί, καὶ σὲ γεροντικὴ ἡλικία ἀπέκτησαν αὐτὸ τὸ παιδί, τὸ ὁποῖο τοὺς ἔκανε νὰ πλεονεκτοῦν σὲ σχέση μὲ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα ζεύγη. Γιατί κανένα ἄλλο παιδί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ συγκριθεῖ μὲ τὸ παιδί αὐτό, τὴν Παναγία μας. Καὶ ὅμως τὸ παιδί αὐτό σὲ ἡλικία τριῶν ἐτῶν ἔρχονται καὶ τὸ παραδίδουν στὸ Ναό, τὸ ἀφιερώνουν, τὸ παραδίδουν στοὺς ἱερεῖς. Χάνουν τὰ παιδικὰ χαμόγελα, τὶς φωνές, τὶς χαρὲς αὐτῆς τῆς παιδικῆς ἡλικίας.

Ἡ Παναγία παραδίδεται, ὅπως γιορτάζουμε στὰ εἰσόδια τῆς Θεοτόκου, εἰσέρχεται στὰ Ἅγια τῶν Ἁγίων καὶ ἐκεῖ μέσα στὸ Ναό, ὅπως διδάσκει πάλι ἡ παράδοση, φυτεύεται ὡς ἐλαία, λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός. Σὰν ἐλιά φυτευμένη μέσα στὸ Ναὸ ἡ Παναγία μὲς γίνεται κατακαρπὸς, φορτωμένη ἀπὸ καρποὺς ἀρετῆς καὶ ἀγιότητος. Τὰ ἔργα της, οἱ σκέψεις της καὶ οἱ ἐπιθυμίες της ἀποκόπτονται πλέον ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιθυμίες τοῦ κόσμου, ἀπὸ αὐτῆς τὶς μικροχαρὲς καὶ τὶς τρέλλες τῆς παιδικῆς ἡλικίας. Αὐτὴ ἡ παιδοῦλα τῶν τριῶν ἐτῶν μέχρι τῆς ἡλικίας τῶν δέκα πέντε ἐτῶν, δώδεκα ὀλόκληρα χρόνια, γίνεται μέσα στὸ Ναὸ ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἀσκήτρια, ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἡσυχάστρια, ὅπως λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς. Γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Παναγία εἶναι πρότυπο τῶν μοναχῶν καὶ τὴν σέβονται τόσο πολὺ οἱ μοναχοί, διότι ἀπὸ βρεφικῆς ἡλικίας ἐμόνασε, ἔγινε μοναχὴ, ἀσκήτρια καὶ ἡσυχάστρια μέσα εἰς τὸν Ναό.

Δώδεκα ὀλόκληρα χρόνια μέσα στὸ Ναὸ συντροφιά μόνο μὲ ἱερεῖς, μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ, μὲ τοὺς ὕμνους, μὲ τὶς σκέψεις της καὶ τὶς ἐπιθυμίες ὅλες στραμμένες στὸ Θεό, μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον.

Ἔτσι λοιπὸν αὐτὴ ἡ φυτευμένη μέσα εἰς τὸν Ναὸ ἐλαία κατέκτησε αὐτοὺς τοὺς καρποὺς τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς ἀγιότητος, τῆς ἀσκήσεως καὶ τῆς καθαρότητος, τῆς ἀγιότητος καὶ τῆς ταπεινώσεως. Σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν ἡλικία τῶν 15 ἐτῶν τὴν ἐπισκέφθηκε ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριὴλ («Ἄγγελος Πρωτοστάτης» ἀκούσαμε τὴν προηγουμένη Παρασκευὴ) γιὰ νὰ τῆς μεταφέρει τὸ χαρμόσυνο



μήνυμα, να την ονομάσει «κεχαριτωμένη»—«Χαίρε, κεχαριτωμένη».

Παλαιά στην αρχή του κόσμου, μία άλλη γυναίκα, η Εύα, έφερε την κατάρρα σ' όλο το ανθρώπινο γένος με την παρακοή της τώρα ή Παναγία με την αγία ζωή της, με την άσκηση, επισύρει την εύλογία και την χαρά και γίνεται ή κεχαριτωμένη. Πόσο θαυμαστές είναι αυτές οι σκηνές του Εὐαγγελισμού, όπως τις περιγράφει ο εὐαγγελιστής Λουκάς, της μεταφέρει το μήνυμα ο Ἀρχάγγελος πώς θα αποκτήσει Υἱόν, θα γεννήσει.

Ἡ Παναγία ταράχθηκε. «*Πώς ἔσται μοι τοῦτο, ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω*» (Λουκ. 1:34). Ἐγὼ ὅλη μου τὴ ζωὴ τὴν πέρασα, παιδούλα, ἀπὸ τὰ μικρά μου χρόνια μέσα στὸ Ναὸ καὶ ἄνδρα δὲν ἐγνώρισα, γιὰ νὰ ἀκούσει τὴν ἀπάντηση τοῦ Ἀγγέλου. «*Πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σέ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι*». (Λουκ. 1:35). Δύναμις θεϊκὴ θὰ σὲ ἐπισκιάσει, τὸ παιδί τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ γεννηθεῖ ἀπὸ σένα δὲν θὰ εἶναι ὅπως τὰ συνηθισμένα παιδιά, θὰ γεννηθεῖ ὁ Θεός, θὰ γίνεις Θεοτόκος, θὰ ἔλθει τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα καὶ ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος θὰ κυφορήσεις, θὰ ἐγκυμονήσεις, καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου θὰ σὲ ἐπισκιάσει.

#### **Ἡ Ταπείνωση καὶ ἡ Ὑπακοή της**

Ἄς φαντασθῶν οἱ παριστάμενες ἐδῶ γυναῖκες μητέρες καὶ ἀδελφές, πὼς θὰ ἀντιδρούσαν σὲ μία παρόμοια περίπτωση. Τί παράξενα ρήματα, τί μυστήριο εἶναι αὐτὸ ποῦ ἐξαγγέλλει ὁ Ἄγγελος, ἀπίστευτα πράγματα, πὼς θὰ γίνῃ αὐτό; Καὶ ὁμως, ἡ Παναγία μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν πρώτη ἐπιφύλαξη «*πὼς ἔσται μοι τοῦτο*» καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν διαβεβαίωση τοῦ Ἀγγέλου γιὰ τὸ θαῦμα ἐπιδεικνύει τώρα καὶ μία ἄλλη μεγάλη ἀρετὴ. Μέχρι τότε ἐπέδειξε τὴν ἀγνότητα, τὴν καθαρότητα, τὴν ἄσκηση, τώρα ἐπιδεικνύει καὶ τὴν μεγάλη της ταπείνωση: «*ιδού ἡ δούλη Κυρίου, γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ρῆμα σου*». (Λουκ. 1:38). Εἶμαι μπροστά σου Κύριε, στὸν ἀπεσταλμένο Σου τὸν Ἄγγελο, καὶ ἀφοῦ ἐσὺ ἔτσι προστάξεις, νὰ γίνῃ τὸ μεγάλο αὐτὸ θαῦμα, νὰ γεννήσει μία γυναῖκα χωρὶς συνάφεια ἄνδρός, ἀφοῦ τὸ θέλημα Κυρίου εἶναι ἔτσι, «*ιδού ἡ δούλη Κυρίου, γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ρῆμα σου*». Καὶ ἐπεσκίασε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ ὀλοκλήρωσε τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς Παναγίας μας.

Διδάσκουν οἱ Πατέρες τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὅτι μέχρι τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη ἡ καθαρότητα, ἡ ἀγνότητα ἦταν δικὴ της κατάκτηση, δικὴ της ἔργο. Τώρα ἔρχεται τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ ὀλοκληρώνει αὐτὴ τὴ καθαρότητα καὶ ὀλοκληρώνει αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγνότητα. Ἀφαιρεῖ τὸν προπατορικὸ ρύπο, γιὰτὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ μέσα ἐπρόκειτο νὰ γεννηθεῖ ὁ Θεός, ὡς ἐπιβράβευση τῆς ὑπακοῆς, τῆς ἀγνότητος καὶ τῆς καθαρότητος.

Ἡ Παναγία, ὡς γνωστόν, ἐγέννησε τὸν Κύριόν μας Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, καὶ πέρασε μαζί του ὅλα τα παιδικὰ

τοῦ χρόνια μέχρι τῆς ἀνδρικής ἡλικίας, μέχρι τῆς ὠριμάνσεώς Του καὶ τῆς δημόσιας δράσης Του. Πὼς συμπεριφέρθηκε ἡ Παναγία κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια ποῦ ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς πραγματοποιοῦσε τὸ κοσμοσωτήριο ἔργο του; Ἔμεινε διακριτικὰ στὸ περιθώριο, με ταπείνωση καὶ πάλι. Ἐνθυμείσθε ἀπὸ τὸν γάμο τῆς Κανὰ ὅτι, ὅταν ἐκεῖ ἡ Παναγία τοῦ εἶπε «*οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσι*», ἤρθαμε σὲ γάμο ἐδῶ καὶ δὲν ἔχουν κρασί, τῆς μίλησε αὐστηρὰ ὁ Χριστός. «*Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι*» (Ἰωαν. 2:5) Μὴ ἀναμειγνύεσαι σὲ θέματα τὰ ὁποῖα ἐγὼ κατευθύνω, νὰ κρατήσεις τὴ θέση σου. Καὶ ἐκείνη ταπεινὰ καὶ ὑπάκουα ἀντέδρασε. Εἶπε σ' αὐτοὺς ποῦ διακονοῦσαν «*ὅ,τι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν, ποιήσατε*» (Ἰωαν. 2:5). Κάντε ὅ,τι σὰς πεῖ. Δὲν διεμαρτυρήθη, δὲν θύμωσε: «*ποιήσατε ὅ,τι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν*».

Σὲ μία ἄλλη περίπτωση ἐπίσης, ἐνῶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐδίδασκε, κάποια γυναῖκα ἀπὸ τὸν ὄχλο «*ἐπάρασα τὴν φωνήν*», εἶπε: «*Μακαρία ἡ κοιλία ἡ βαστάσασά σε καὶ μαστοὶ οὓς ἐθήλασας*». (Λουκ. 11:27). Ἐπηρεασμένη ἀπὸ τὴν διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ—ποῖος δὲν θὰ ἠθελε νὰ ἀκούσει αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια σωτηρίας ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Κυρίου μας—ἐνθουσιάστηκε ἡ γυναῖκα αὐτὴ καὶ εἶπε: *Μακαρία ἡ μάνα σου, εὐτυχισμένη ἡ μάνα σου ἡ ὁποία σὲ γέννησε καὶ οἱ μαστοὶ τοὺς ὁποίους ἐθήλασες*.

Ἐδῶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπαινεῖ τὴν μητέρα του, ἀλλὰ συγχρόνως δίδει καὶ σὲ μᾶς τὸ κίνητρο τῆς μιμήσεως τῆς Παναγίας μας. Εἶναι συγκλονιστικὴ αὐτὴ ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ἂν τὴν προσέξει κανεὶς. Ἀπαντᾷ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐκφώνηση τῆς γυναίκας καὶ λέγει: «*Μενοῦνγε μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες αὐτόν*». (Λουκ. 11:28). Τὸ «*μενοῦνγε*» εἶναι βεβαιωτικό. σωστὰ εἶπες γυναῖκα: εἶναι μακαρία ἡ μητέρα μου, δίκαιο ἔχεις, γιὰτὶ σ' ὅλη της τὴν ζωὴ ἔκανε ὑπακοή, ἐτήρησε τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μποροῦν νὰ γίνουν ὅλοι μακάριοι, πάντες οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τηροῦντες αὐτόν.

Στὸ τέλος νὰ θυμόμαστε πόσο διακριτικὰ ἡ Παναγία στάθηκε στὸ πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ στὸ κήρυγμα τῶν Ἀποστόλων. Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι ἐκήρυτταν ἐδῶ καὶ ἐκεῖ. Ἡ Παναγία ὑπὸ τὴν προστασία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου, δὲν ἀναμειγνύεται στὸ ἔργο, ποῦ δὲν εἶναι δικὴ της διακονία, ὅπως σήμερα ἐπιχειροῦν πολλὲς γυναῖκες νὰ ἀνατρέψουν τὸ σύμπαν, δὲν ἀνέχονται νὰ εἶναι στὸ περιθώριο τῶν ἀνδρικών δραστηριοτήτων ξεσηκωμένες ἀπὸ τὰ φεμινιστικὰ κινήματα προσπαθοῦν ἀκόμα καὶ μέσα στὸ ἱερὸ νὰ εἰσέλθουν, καὶ ἰέρειες νὰ γίνουν, καὶ τὴν Ἰερωσύνη νὰ κατακτήσουν. Ἡ Παναγία ταπεινὰ καὶ διακριτικὰ μένει στὸ περιθώριο καὶ ἐπιδεικνύει σ' ὅλη της τὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ τὴν ταπείνωση καὶ τὴν ἀγιότητα, τὴν καλωσύνη καὶ ἐπιείκεια.



### Ζωγραφισμένες Όλες οι Άρετες

Γι' αυτό και λέγει ο Άγιος Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς και τελειώνω μ' αυτό: Στο πρόσωπο της Παναγίας ο Θεός ζωγράφισε μία εικόνα, έκανε ένα πίνακα, επάνω στον οποίο ζωγράφισε ό,τι ωραιότερο υπήρχε, όποια άρετη υπάρχει, όποια καλωσύνη υπάρχει, όποιο κάλλος πνευματικό και υλικό υπάρχει, γιατί και σωματικά η Παναγία ήταν σεμνή και όμορφη. Όλα τα κάλλη, πνευματικά και σωματικά ζωγράφισε ο Θεός στο πρόσωπο της Παναγίας. Η Παναγία διέσωσε το «κατ' εικόνα» του ανθρώπου, είναι η πραγματική εικόνα του ανθρώπου.

Και ο Άγιος Νικόδημος ο Άγιορείτης λέγει, ότι αν συνέβαινε ποτέ, μία υπόθεση κάνει, αν συνέβαινε ποτέ τα έννέα τάγματα των Άγγέλων να επαναστατήσουν και να γκρεμισθούν από τον ούρανό και να γίνουν δαίμονες, αν συνέβαινε όλοι οι άνθρωποι να γίνουν κακοί, και αν συνέβαινε να επαναστατήσει όλοκληρη η κτίσις, ο ούρανός, η γη, τ' άστέρια. Όλα αυτά, λέγει, αν συνέβαιναν, άρκουσε η αγιότητα της Παναγίας μας για να είναι ευχαριστημένος ο Θεός. Όλα ως έλλειπαν, φτάνει η αγιότης της Παναγίας.

Αυτήν λοιπόν την αγιότητα της Παναγίας μας, μπορούμε και έμεις αγαπητοί μου να την μιμηθούμε, άρκει όχι μόνο να άκούμε αλλά και να πράττουμε το θέλημα του Θεού: **«Μακάριοι οι άκούοντες τον λόγον του Θεού και φυλάσσοντες αυτόν».**



### Κανών του Μεγάλου Βασιλείου περί των Έκτρώσεων

Ο β' κανών του Μεγάλου Βασιλείου αναφέρει:

«Η φθείρασα κατ' επιτήδευσιν, φόνου δίκην υπέχει, ακριβολογία δέ έκμεμορφωμένου και άνέξεικονίστου παρ' ήμιν ούκ έστιν. Ένταύθα γάρ εκδικείται ού μόνον το γεννηθησόμενον, αλλά και αυτή ή εαυτή επιβουλεύσασα, διότι ως επί το πολύ έναποθνησκουσι ταίς... τοιαύταις επιχειρήσεσιν αί γυναίκες. Πρόσεστι δέ τούτω και ή φθορά του έμβρύου, έτερος φόνος κατά γε την επίνοιαν των ταυτα τολμώντων. Δει μέντοι μη μέχρι της έξόδου παρατείνειν αυτών την έξομολόγησιν, αλλά δέχσθαι μεν μετά το μέτρον των δέκα έτών, όρίζειν δέ μη χρόνω, αλλά τρόπω της μετανοίας την θεραπείαν».

**Ό έχων ώτα άκούειν άκουέτω!**

### Μεγάλη Όργη θα Έλθει στον Κόσμο!

Από το βιβλίο: «Πατρικές Νουθεσίες» Γέροντος Φιλόθεου Ζερβάκου εκδόσεις «Ορθόδοξος Κυψέλη».

**Α**κράτητοι είναι οι άνθρωποι και λαός και κληρός, σαν τα άχαλίνωτα άλογα, τρέχουν εις την άμαρτία—ούτε συλλογίζονται Θεό, θάνατο, κρίση, ανταπόδοση, τίποτε—τίποτε, μόνο για την ύλη, για το σώμα, για τις ήδονές, για τις τιμές. Για την ψυχή, για τον Θεό, για την άρετή; τίποτε. Πολύ όλίγοι είναι εκείνοι που έχουν άληθινά ενδιαφέροντα και ίσως χάριν αυτών των όλίγων κρατεί ο Θεός τον κόσμο.

Ό Σατανάς κάνει την τελευταία έφοδο και εις αυτά τα χρόνια που ευρισκόμεθα μεγάλη θλίψη και μεγάλη όργη θα έρθει εις τον κόσμο.

Λοιπόν ως είμεθα έτοιμοι, διότι ούκ οίδαμε την ώραν ούδεν την στιγμή του θανάτου. Τώρα τί τιμωρία θα μεταχειρισθεί, Έκείνος ξεύρει. Πάντως όμως ή τιμωρία θα έλθει.

Λοιπόν έγιναν πολλά κακά και γίνονται και εξακολουθούν άλματωδώς να... γίνονται. Υπάρχουν και μερικοί όλίγοι καλοί, οι όποιοι μαζί με τους άλλους, φοβούμαι ότι θα υποφέρουν και αυτοί, αλλά αυτοί άμα φυλάξουν την πίστη τους και την αγάπη τους προς τον Θεό, ο Θεός δέν θα τους αφήσει και όλίγα παιδευθέντες μεγάλα ευεργετηθήσονται—οί άλλοι όμως θα παιδευθούν και έδώ και θα παραπεμφθούν στο πύρ το έξώτερον. Αυτά είναι τα χάλια μας.

Δέν είναι δυνατό ποτέ ο Θεός, ο όποιος πάντοτε την άμαρτία την τιμωρεί, να αφήσει τόσα κακά να γίνονται χωρίς τιμωρίαν. Μόνον να είμεθα έτοιμοι. «Οί πεποιθότες επί Κύριον, εοίκασιν όρει τω άγίω—οί ούδαμώς σαλεύονται, προσβολαίς του Βελίαρ».

Σήμερον οι καλοί εξέλιπον, είναι σπάνιοι, δυσεύρετοι. Πολλοί οι κλητοί, όλίγοι οι εκλεκτοί. Οι πολλοί τρέχουν ως άχαλίνωτοι εις την όδον της άπωλείας: όλίγοι δέ εις την όδον της σωτηρίας

Εις τον Θεόν να έχουμε την πίστη μας, την έλπίδα μας, την αγάπη μας και δέν θα μάς εγκαταλείψει και ως μη μάς χωρίσει τίποτα από την αγάπη του Χριστού.

Ός ψάλλει ή Αγία μας Έκκλησία: «Φώς ο Πατήρ, φώς ο Λόγος, φώς και το Άγιον Πνεύμα, το όποιον έπέμφθη δια πυρίνων γλωσσών εις τους Άποστόλους και δι' αυτών πās ο κόσμος φωταγωγείται Τριάδα σέβειν Αγίαν». Έγώ ειμι το φώς του κόσμου, λέγει ο Χριστός.

Σύ λοιπόν, αγαπητέ μου, που έπλανήθης από τον Άρχοντα του σκότους και τους εργάτας αυτού και κατόπιν σε εφώτισε ο Χριστός και Τον ήκολούθησες άκολούθησε Τον μέχρι τέλους. Να μετανοήσης και έξομολογηθής πάσας τās άμαρτίας σου, δια να καθαρισθής!

## Από την Ίερά Παράδοση

*Μία από τις ωραιότερες ιστορίες για την Παναγία μας, από τις ιστοσελίδες του Ίερου Ναού «Μεγάλης» Παναγίας - Αγίου Δημήτριου Θηβών.*

Σύμφωνα με την παράδοση, όταν η Παναγία σκοιμήθηκε και πριν μεταβεί στον Παράδεισο, την ρώτησε ο Χριστός:

«Τί θα ήθελες πρώτα Μητέρα Μου να δεις;»

Ξέρετε τί ζήτησε η Παναγία; Νά επισκεφθεί τους τόπους της κολάσεως! Παραξενεύτηκαν οι Προφήτες! Παραξενεύτηκαν οι Δίκαιοι! Παραξενεύτηκαν οι Άγγελοι! Το μόνο που ζήτησε να δει, πριν μεταβεί στον Παράδεισο, ήταν τον τόπο που βασανίζονται οι ψυχές εκείνες που δεν φέρθηκαν σωστά στο Θεό και Τον πλήγωσαν βαθιά και με πολλές αμαρτίες στερήθηκαν την αιώνια ζωή.

Δεν της χάλασε το χατίρι ο Χριστός, μόνο που θα την συνόδευαν οι Άγγελοι και οι Άγιοι στην διαδρομή αυτή, στο Βασίλειο του Άδη, εκεί που οι ψυχές είναι θλιμμένες και ταλαιπωρημένες.

Και όταν μπήκε στο Άδη το Βασίλειο, τρώμαξαν οι δαίμονες με το φως που έλαμπε και φοβισμένοι έκαναν στην άκρη. Και Έκείνη προχώρησε να δει όλους τους τόπους της κολάσεως.

Και τον πρώτο που ζήτησε να δει ξέρετε ποιός ήταν; Ήταν να δει τον ταλαίπωρο Ίούδα που πρόδωσε τον Υιόν της και μόλις την είδε την ικέτευε να τον σπλαχνισθεί.

Όταν την είδαν και την άκουσαν όλοι οι άμαρτωλοί μέσα στις φωτιές του Άδη, άνοιξαν τα στόματά τους και με ικετευτική φωνή όλοι φώναζαν και ικέτευαν και παρακαλούσαν: «Μητέρα του Θεού, σώσε μας, τους άμαρτωλούς».

Για πρώτη φορά είδαν όλοι οι Άγγελοι και οι Προφήτες τα μάτια της, τόσο δακρυσιμένα και τόσο κλαμένα. Έκλαιγε άπαρηγόρητα για τις ψυχές που βασανίζονται πολύ. Τους βασάνιζε στη γη ο σατανάς λέγοντάς τους, πώς δεν υπάρχει Θεός και πώς μπορούν να κάνουν οτιδήποτε κακό και είδε τώρα τα αποτελέσματα και έκλαψε γι' αυτές τις ψυχές...

Και ο Χριστός, είδε τα πανέμορφα μάτια της δακρυσιμένα και πόνεσε. Θα ήθελε πολύ να έβγαινε από την κόλαση ή Μητέρα Του και να μην βλέπει αυτά που έβλεπε εκείνη τη στιγμή.

Κι όμως η Μητέρα συνέχισε και από όπου περνούσε άνοιγε την άγκαλιά της και άφηνε τα χέρια της σαν σχήμα εύλογίας. Από όπου περνούσε άφηνε το χέρι της άπλωμένο, όπως μια μάνα, που ανοίγει, τα χέρια της, αναζητώντας το παιδί της, εκείνη την στιγμή δεν άντεχαν οι δαίμονες, αλλά ούτε και ο Άδης πλέον στις τιμωρίες.

Σταματούσαν οι τιμωρίες! Σταματούσε η όργη! Σταματούσε το κακό! Όπου περνούσε η Παναγία, γαλήνευε άμέσως ο Άδης, λες και γινόταν Παράδεισος άμέσως, φωτίστηκαν όλα, πλην ενός σημείου. Έκείνο το σημείο, ήταν τόσο πυκνό το σκοτάδι, που δεν ήθελε να φέξει.

Αυτό έκανε έντύπωση στην Παναγία και ρώτησε πώς λέγεται αυτό το σημείο του Άδη; Και της λένε οι Άγγελοι Κυρίου, ότι φτάσαμε στον πάτο του Άδη, δεν υπάρχει κατώτερο στρώμα και το μέρος αυτό ονομάζεται άφάνεια. Και γονάτισε σε εκείνο το σημείο και ζήτησε να δει ποιοι άνθρωποι και για ποιούς λόγους βρίσκονταν εκεί.

Η προσευχή της Παναγίας εισακούστηκε και οι Άγγελοι της αποκάλυψαν, ότι σε εκείνο το μέρος κολάζονται οι μοναχοί και οι κληρικοί, αλλά και οι πρεσβύτερες που δεν κράτησαν τη θέση τους πορνεύοντας και όλοι οι αίρεσιάρχες, διότι έγιναν ή αιτία να κολάζονται συνεχώς, μέχρι Δευτέρας Παρουσίας, πολλοί άνθρωποι. Για παράδειγμα ο Μωάμεθ, έγινε πρόξενος να κολαστούν, αλλά και να κολάζονται έξαιτίας του ισλαμισμού πολλοί άνθρωποι. Η Παναγία πόνεσε τόσο πολύ βλέποντας στον Άδη, όλες εκείνες τις ψυχές, που ζήτησε μία χάρη από το Χριστό, να βρουν όλες αυτές οι ψυχές, κάποια «άνεση» μέχρι την Δευτέρα Παρουσία, διότι η Παναγία είναι φιλόστοργη Μητέρα όλου του κόσμου, σεσωσμένων και μη σεσωσμένων.

Και ο Χριστός ικανοποίησε το αίτημα της Παναγίας λέγοντας, ότι θα δίνει στις ψυχές αυτές, από το Πάσχα μέχρι την Πεντηκοστή, κάποια άνεση και παρηγοριά.

Και τότε παρακάλεσε τον Πατέρα της τον ουράνιο να την αφήσει με όλα τα αδελφάκια της από τον ουράνιο, τους Αγίους, να είναι στη γη για να αγωνίζεται για όλους τους ανθρώπους εδώ και να τους βοηθάει να μην πάει κανένας στην κόλαση, κανένας μὰ κανένα!



Έπιθυμείς τη σωτηρία της ψυχής σου. Καλό έργο έπιθυμείς. Μολονότι η ψυχή μας είναι ό,τι πιο πολύτιμο έχουμε, ή σωτηρία της είναι πολύ εύκολη. Γιατί ο μοναδικός Σωτήρας της είναι πανάγαθος, πάνσοφος και παντοδύναμος. Θέλει και μπορεί όλους να μās σώσει, φτάνει να το έπιζητήσουμε. Έπιζήτηση, έπομένως, της σωτηρίας σημαίνει αναζήτηση του Χριστού. Αλλά ο Χριστός είναι παντού, όπου είμαστε έμεις, όπου είσαι έσύ. Άνοιξέ Του την πόρτα της καρδιάς σου, για να μπει. Του την άνοιξες; Μπήκε. Τον βρήκες. Και μαζί Του βρήκες τη σωτηρία. Γιατί Έκείνος θα σου τα διδάξει όλα.

**Άγιος Θεοφάνης ο Έγκλειστος (+1894)**

## Ὁ Καθένας μας θὰ Δώση Λόγο γιὰ τὸ τί Ἔκανε σ' Αὐτὰ τὰ Δύσκολα Χρόνια

Αγ. Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου, «Λόγοι Β', Πνευματικὴ Ἀφύπνιση».

**Μ**ὴ στενοχωρηθεὶ καθόλου, διότι πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα καὶ ἀπὸ ὅλους εἶναι ὁ Θεός, ποὺ κυβερνᾷ τὰ πάντα καὶ θὰ καθίση τὸν καθέναν στὸ σκαμνί, γιὰ νὰ ἀπολογηθῆ γιὰ τὸ τί ἔπραξε, ὅποτε καὶ θὰ τὸν ἀνταμείψῃ ἀνάλογα. Θὰ ἀμειφθοῦν αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ βοηθήσουν μιὰ κατάσταση καὶ θὰ τιμωρηθῆ αὐτὸς ποὺ κάνει τὸ κακό. Τελικὰ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ βάλῃ τὰ πράγματα στὴν θέση τους, ἀλλὰ ὁ **καθένας μας θὰ δώση λόγο γιὰ τὸ τί ἔκανε σ' αὐτὰ τὰ δύσκολα χρόνια μὲ τὴν προσευχή, μὲ τὴν καλωσύνη.**

Σήμερα προσπαθοῦν νὰ γκρεμίσουν τὴν πίστη, γι' αὐτὸ ἀφαιροῦν σιγά-σιγά ἀπὸ καμμιὰ πέτρα, γιὰ νὰ σωριασθῆ τὸ οἰκοδόμημα τῆς πίστεως. Ὅλοι ὅμως εὐθυνόμαστε γιὰ τὸ γκρέμισμα αὐτό· ὄχι μόνον αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀφαιροῦν τὶς πέτρες καὶ τὸ γκρεμίζουν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσοι βλέπουμε νὰ γκρεμίζεται καὶ δὲν... προσπαθοῦμε νὰ τὸ ὑποστυλώσουμε. Ὅποιος σπρώχνει στὸ κακὸ τὸν ἄλλον θὰ δώση λόγο στὸν Θεὸ γι' αὐτό. Καὶ ὁ διπλανὸς ὅμως θὰ δώση λόγο, γιατί ἔβλεπε ἐκεῖνον νὰ κἀνῃ κακὸ στὸν συνάνθρωπό του καὶ δὲν ἀντιδρῶσε. Ὁ κόσμος εὐκολὰ πιστεύει ἕναν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ ἔχει τὸν τρόπο νὰ πείθῃ.

Μὲ λέτε ὅτι ὁ λαὸς εἶναι σὰν θηρίο. Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὰ θηρία δὲν ἔχω παράπονο. Βλέπεις, τὰ ζῶα δὲν μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν μεγάλο κακό, γιατί δὲν ἔχουν μυαλό, ἐνῶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ φεύγει μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ γίνεται χειρότερος ἀπὸ τὸ μεγαλύτερο θηρίο! Κάνει μεγάλο κακό. Τὸ δυνατὸ ξίδι γίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ χαλασμένο κρασί. Τὰ ἄλλα τὰ τεχνητὰ ξίδια δὲν εἶναι τόσο δυνατὰ.

Πιὸ φοβερὸ εἶναι, ὅταν ὁ διάβολος συμμαχήσῃ μὲ ἕναν ἄνθρωπο διεστραμμένο· τότε κάνει διπλὸ κακὸ στοὺς ἄλλους, ὅπως ὁ σαρκικὸς λογισμὸς, ὅταν συμμαχήσῃ μὲ τὴν σάρκα, τότε κάνει μεγαλύτερο κακὸ στὴν σάρκα. Γιὰ νὰ συνεργασθῆ ὁ διάβολος μὲ ἕναν τέτοιο ἄνθρωπο, πρέπει αὐτὸς νὰ εἶναι ὑπολογισμὸς, νὰ ἔχῃ κακὴ προαίρεση, κακία. **Στὴν συνέχεια, Θεὸς φυλάξοι, αὐτοὶ θὰ φέρουν δυσκολίες, θὰ στριμώξουν ἄνθρώπους, μοναστήρια. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὁ Μοναχισμὸς, θὰ τοὺς κἀνῃ κακό, γιατί θὰ τοὺς ἐμποδίση στὰ σχέδιά τους.**

Μόνον πνευματικὰ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπισθῆ ἡ σημερινὴ κατάσταση, ὄχι κοσμικά. Θὰ σηκωθῆ ἀκόμη λίγη φουρτούνα, θὰ πετάξῃ ἔξω κονσερβοκούτια, σκουπίδια, ὅλα τὰ ἄχρηστα, καὶ μετὰ θὰ ξεκαθαρίσουν τὰ πράγματα. Σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση θὰ δῆτε, ἄλλοι θὰ ἔχουν καθαρὸ μισθὸ καὶ ἄλλοι θὰ ξοφλοῦν χρέη. Θὰ γίνουν ἔτσι τὰ πράγματα, ποὺ δὲν θὰ στενοχωριέται κανεὶς γιὰ τὴν ταλαιπωρία ποὺ θὰ περνᾷνε—δὲν θὰ λέῃ φυσικὰ «δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός».

Πόσο ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς ἀγαπᾷ! Αὐτὰ ποὺ γίνονται σήμερα καὶ αὐτὰ ποὺ σκέφτονται νὰ κάνουν, ἂν γίνονταν πρὶν ἀπὸ εἴκοσι χρόνια ποὺ εἶχε περισσότερη πνευματικὴ ἄγνοια ὁ κόσμος, θὰ ἦταν πολὺ δύσκολα. Τώρα ξέρεῖ ὁ κόσμος· ἡ Ἐκκλησία δυνάμωσε. Ὁ Θεὸς ἀγαπάει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, τὸ πλάσμα Του, καὶ θὰ φροντίσῃ γι' αὐτὰ ποὺ τοῦ χρειάζονται, φθάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ πιστεῦῃ καὶ νὰ τηρῆ τὶς ἐντολές Του. «Ἐπικατάρατος ὁ ποιῶντὰ ἔργα Κυρίου ἀμελῶς».

Παλιὰ, ἂν ἕνας εὐλαβῆς ἀσχολεῖτο μὲ τὴν κατάσταση στὸν κόσμο, δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἦταν καλὰ· ἦταν γιὰ κλείσιμο στὸν Πύργο. Σήμερα ἀντίθετα, ἂν ἕνας εὐλαβῆς δὲν ἐνδιαφέρεται καὶ δὲν πονᾷ γιὰ τὴν κατάσταση ποὺ ἐπικρατεῖ στὸν κόσμο, εἶναι γιὰ κλείσιμο στὸν Πύργο. Γιατὶ τότε αὐτοὶ ποὺ κυβερνοῦσαν εἶχαν Θεὸ μέσα τους, ἐνῶ σήμερα πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ποὺ κυβερνοῦν δὲν πιστεύουν. Εἶναι πολλοὶ τώρα ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ τὰ διαλύσουν ὅλα, οἰκογένεια, νεολαία, Ἐκκλησία.

Ἔχουμε εὐθύνη νὰ διατηρήσουμε τὴν μεγάλη χριστιανικὴ παράδοση μὲ τὶς Ἐκκλησίες, τὰ μοναστήρια, τὴν τέχνη, τὸ τυπικὸ τῆς λατρείας κ.λπ. καὶ νὰ μὴν ἀφήσουμε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας νὰ τὰ διαλύσουν. Ἔχω ἀκούσει καὶ Πνευματικὸς νὰ λένε: «Ἔσεῖς μὴν ἀσχολῆσθε μ' αὐτά!» Ἄν εἶχαν μεγάλη ἀγιότητα καὶ ἔφθαναν μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ σὲ τέτοια κατάσταση, ποὺ νὰ μὴν τοὺς ἐνδιαφέρῃ τίποτε, νὰ τοὺς φιλοῦσα καὶ τὰ πόδια. Ἀλλὰ τώρα ἀδιαφοροῦν, γιατί θέλουν νὰ τὰ ἔχουν καλὰ μὲ ὅλους καὶ νὰ καλοπερνοῦν. Ἡ ἀδιαφορία δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται οὔτε στοὺς κοσμικοὺς, πόσο μᾶλλον στοὺς πνευματικοὺς ἄνθρώπους. Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος τίμιος, πνευματικὸς, δὲν πρέπει νὰ κἀνῃ τίποτε μὲ ἀδιαφορία. «Ἐπικατάρατος ὁ ποιῶν τὰ ἔργα Κυρίου ἀμελῶς», λέει ὁ Προφήτης Ἰερεμίας.



**Κ**αλὰ εὐλογημένοι δὲν καταλαβαίνετε τί γίνεται; Τόσο παρασύρεστε ἀπὸ τὰ ἄνομα χρήματα τῶν Εὐρωπαίων; Δὲν καταλαβαίνετε ὅτι ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ κάνουν γιὰ νὰ κυριεύσουν τὴ συνείδηση τῶν Ἑλλήνων; Δὲν βλέπετε ὅτι ἀλώνεται ἡ Πατρίδα μας;

Μὲ τὸ τρόπο αὐτὸ πάνε νὰ ἀλώσουν τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Θὰ μᾶς ὑποχρεώσουν μετὰ νὰ κάνουμε ὅτι θέλουν καὶ μέχρι καὶ γυναῖκες θὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν νὰ μποῦν μέσα! Μὴ παρασύρεστε Πατέρες. Εἶναι Δούρειος Ἴππος ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰ τὴν Πατρίδα μας!

**Γέροντας Ἰσαάκ Ἀττάλα (+1998)**

**Μαθητὴς τοῦ Ἁγ. Παΐσιου**

**(Προφητικοὶ Λόγοι του τὸ 1983 γιὰ τὴν Ε.Ε.)**

## Ὁ Ἀμερικῆς Ἐλπιδοφόρος: Ἐνας ὄντως Ἀνάξιος Ἱεράρχης

*Ὁ πρῶην Καλαβρῦτων Ἀμβροσιος γιὰ Ἐλπιδοφόρο.*

Δυσπερίγραπτος εἶναι ὁ πόνος, ὁ ὁποῖος κυριαρχεῖ εἰς τὴν ταλαίπωρον ψυχὴν μου, ἔπειτα ἀπὸ τὴν εἶδησιν, ὅτι ὁ Σεβασμιώτατος Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀμερικῆς κ.κ. Ἐλπιδοφόρος «ἔκανε τὴν πρώτη βάπτισι υιοθετημένων παιδιῶν gay ζευγαριοῦ στη Αθήνα».

Ἐπειδὴ διὰ τῆς πράξεως ταύτης ἀνευθυνότατος καταπατεῖται ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Διδασκαλία καὶ Παράδοσις, νομοθετεῖται δὲ καὶ ἀμνηστεύεται ἡ πορνεία, δηλ. ἡ παράνομος συζυγικὴ ἔνωσις δύο προσώπων τοῦ αὐτοῦ φύλου, διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτὸν καταμηνύω καὶ

ΚΑΤΑΓΓΕΛΛΩ ἐνώπιον Ὑμῶν τὸν Σεβασμιώτατον Ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Ἀμερικῆς κ.κ. Ἐλπιδοφόρον

α) ἐπὶ προδοσίᾳ τῆς ἀμωμότητος ἡμῶν Πίστεως,

β) ἐπὶ καταπατῆσει τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, καὶ

γ) ἐπὶ σκανδαλισμῷ τῆς συνειδήσεως τῶν πιστῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τέκνων

καὶ παρακαλῶ διὰ τὰ καθ' Ὑμᾶς.

α) Ἡ πράξις του, ἐμμέσως πλὴν σαφῶς, νομιμοποιεῖ τὴν πορνείαν καὶ τὴν συμβίωσιν δύο προσώπων τοῦ ἰδίου φύλου, τοῦθ' ὅπερ ὁ Νομοθέτης Θεὸς κατεδίκασε διὰ τοῦ ἐξ Οὐρανοῦ πεμφθέντος πυρός, διὰ τοῦ ὁποῖου καὶ κατέκαυσε τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορρα!

Εἶναι γνωστὸν ἤδη τὸ Παγκόσμιον Κίνημα τῶν ΛΟΑΤΚΙ, ἧτοι τῶν Ὀμοφυλοφίλων!

Ἄκομη καὶ ἡ Νομοθετοῦσα κοσμικὴ Ἐξουσία, ἡ Πολιτεία, δὲν ἔχει εἰσέτι νομοθετήσῃ τὴν υἰοθεσίαν τέκνων ἐκ μέρους τῶν Gays!

Εἰς τὴν πρὸς τὸν οἰκεῖον Ἱεράρχην σχετικὴν ἐπιστολὴν του ὁ Σεβ. Ἀμερικῆς αἰτεῖται τὴν εὐλογίαν τοῦ Σεβ. Γλυφάδος κ. Ἀντωνίου καὶ ἀναφέρει ἐπὶ λέξει τὰ ἑξῆς: «...ὅπως τελέσω τὴν βάπτισιν τῶν δύο τέκνων τῆς ἐκ Σικάγου ὀρμωμένης ὁμογενειακῆς οἰκογενείας Μπούση!» (βλ. Ἐφημερίδα Espresso, 13.07.2022, σελ. 5).

Ἄρα διὰ τῆς χρήσεως τοῦ ὄρου «οἰκογένεια Μπούση», ὁ Σεβ. κ. Ἐλπιδοφορος ἐμμέσως πλὴν σαφῶς ἀναγνωρίζει καὶ νομιμοποιεῖ τὴν ἀναίσχυντον καὶ ἀφύσικον συζυγικὴν σχέσιν καὶ τὴν παρά φύσιν σαρκικὴν μίξιν δύο προσώπων τοῦ αὐτοῦ φύλου, σχέσιν τὴν ὁποῖαν ὁ Δημιουργὸς Θεὸς κατεδίκασεν ἀπεριφράστως!

Ὡστε, λοιπόν, ὁ Σεβ. Ἀμερικῆς κ.κ. Ἐλπιδοφόρος καὶ διὰ τῆς ὡς ἄνω ἐπιστολῆς του, κυρίως δὲ διὰ τῆς συμμετοχῆς του εἰς τὸ ἱερόν Μυστήριον τοῦ Βαπτίσματος δύο υιοθετημένων βρεφῶν ὑπὸ «ζεύγους» ὁμοφυλοφίλων, τῶν συγκροτούντων τὴν «οἰκογένειαν Μπούση», κατεπάτησε καὶ τὸν θεῖον Νόμον καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον Δίκαιον!

β) Διὰ τῆς ἀποδοχῆς ὡς ἀναδόχων εἰς τὴν Βάπτισιν ὀκτώ προσώπων, μεταξύ τῶν ὁποίων συμπεριλαμβάνονται καὶ δύο τοῦλάχιστον ἑτεροδόξοι γυναῖκες, ἧτοι ἡ κυρία Εὐγενία Νιάρχου καὶ ἡ κυρία Bianca Bartolini, ὁ Σεβ. κ. Ἐλπιδοφόρος ὄχι μόνον κατεπάτησε καὶ κατεφρόνησε τοὺς Ἱεροὺς Κανόνας τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου ἡμῶν Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ΕΝΕΠΑΙΞΕΝ ΤΟΝ ΘΕΟΝ, καθ' ὅσον αἰ ὡς ἄνω δύο Ἀνάδοχοι, μὴ ἀνήκουσαι εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν, ΔΕΝ ΕΞΕΦΩΝΗΣΑΝ ΤΟ ΣΥΜΒΟΛΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΤΩΝ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΩΝ, διότι ἡ μία ἐξ αὐτῶν τυγχάνει Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ καὶ ἡ ἑτέρα Προτεστάντισσα!!! Ὅθεν πρέπει νὰ δικασθῇ καὶ ἐπὶ καταφρονησῇ τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μας.

γ) Τέλος, ἡ ἀσύνητος αὕτη συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ Σεβ. Ἀρχιεπισκόπου κ. Ἐλπιδοφόρου συνετάραξε τὸ πλῆρωμα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου ἡμῶν Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὸ κατεσκανδάλισε, καθ' ὅσον ἡ ἀνίερος αὕτη ἐνέργειά του ἔλαβε μεγάλην δημοσιότητα τόσο εἰς τὸν ἡμερήσιον Τύπον, ὅσον καὶ εἰς τὰ Διαδικτυακά Μέσα Ἐνημερώσεως.

Διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτὸν πρέπει νὰ δικασθῇ οὗτος καὶ ἐπὶ σκανδαλισμῷ τῆς συνειδήσεως τῶν πιστῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τέκνων.

Μάρτυρας προτείνω:

Τὸν Σεβ. Μητροπολίτην Πειραιῶς κ.κ. Σεραφεῖμ, Τὸν Σεβ. Μητροπολίτην Γλυφάδος κ.κ. Ἀντώνιον, καὶ 3) Τὸν Δημοσιογράφον κ. Νικόλαον Σταματάκη, ἀρθρογράφον τῆς τῆς Ἐφημερίδος «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος». (βλ. κύριον ἄρθρον εἰς τὸ ὑπ' ἀριθμ. 2409 φ. τῆς 15.07.2022 μετ' ἴτιλον: «Ὁ Ἀρχ. Ἐλπιδοφόρος Ἐνομιμοποίησε τοὺς "Γαμους" Ὀμοφυλοφίλων!»).

Ὅθεν ταῦτα καταγγέλλοντες πρὸς Ὑμᾶς, παρακαλοῦμεν διὰ τὰ καθ' Ὑμᾶς.

Ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις, διατελοῦμεν

Ἐλάχιστος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἀδελφός

+ Ὁ πρ. Καλαβρῦτων καὶ Αἰγιαλείας Ἀμβρόσιος



Ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς λέει στὸν Νόμο «θὰ σὰς δώσω ἄρχοντες, ὅπως τοὺς θέλει ἡ καρδιά σας», εἶναι φανερό, ὅτι ἄλλοι μὲν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄρχοντες καὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς ἀναδεικνύονται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, καὶ ἄλλοι πάλι, ὄντας ἀνάξιοι, ἀναδεικνύονται κατὰ παραχώρησιν ἢ θέλησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀντίστοιχα πρὸς τὸν ἀνάξιο λαόν.

**Ἅγιος Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Σιναΐτης**

## PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE PEOPLE!

*By the blessed Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotes of Florina, Greece (+2010), from the book "Sparks From The Apostles," translated by Asterios Gerostergios.*

*Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life*  
[Acts 5:20]

† † †



Who should expect it, beloved! People who were uneducated and who did not attend schools and universities—people to whom the world paid no attention—how does it happen that these people, poor and powerless, the Apostles, who hid in fear on Holy Friday and did not dare come out to visit the tomb of Christ, now appeared in public and preached Christ with power? How did the timid become brave and fearless? How did these illiterate people become orators and wise men? How did this change take place?

It cannot be explained unless we accept the fact that two great happenings affected their lives. One was the resurrection of Christ, the other was the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles saw Christ, Who arose from the grave, with their own eyes. They believed in Christ absolutely. There was no doubt whatsoever in their souls. Then, in fulfillment of Christ's promise, they received *power from on high*, or the Holy Spirit, and the rabbits became lions. *Such is the change at the right hand of God.*

We see today in the excerpt that was read how successfully the Apostles preached the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel has never had as much success as it had during the days of the Apostles. Do you not see? Those base and unbelieving people—the people who hated Christ and who got together on Holy Friday and shouted: *Crucify, crucify him*—they heard the Apostles who were preaching, they repented and were baptized by the hundreds and thousands.

The growth of the first Church is another miraculous event. To what, we wonder, is the astonishing growth of the first Church attributed? It is attributed to the preaching of the Apostles, the preaching that came out of their mouths like fire, illuminating and warming frozen hearts. Those who heard them understood that the Apostles believed what they preached and were ready to shed their last drop of blood for Christ. Without the Apostle's preaching, would the Church have grown? Preaching is the life of the

Church—not just any kind of preaching but the kind of preaching that the true preachers of the Gospel, people who believe and are ready to make every sacrifice, do.

So now we know that the major reason that the first Church was able to progress and grow was the preaching of the Apostles. But something else contributed to the growth and progress of the Church, and that was the miracles of the Apostles. As today's Epistle lesson says: *By the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.* (Acts 5:12). What miracles? Wherever the Apostles happened to pass in Jerusalem, the people brought the sick in their beds and waited in the streets and squares of the city. They waited for the Apostles to pass. The Apostles had so much power to cure the sick that it was only enough for Peter's shadow to fall on them and they became well. Even the sick who came from the neighboring cities and villages, and even those possessed by demons, were cured by the miraculous power of the Apostles. Thus, the preaching of the Apostles, in combination with the miracles they performed, took on an unprecedented brilliance and made the people believe and repent. Oh, if only today's preachers had the power to perform miracles!

The progress of the Gospel and the rapid expansion of the Church did cause considerable anxiety. The Jewish authorities certainly were not pleased. They had killed Christ, thinking that by doing so the troublesome preaching would stop. But after Christ's death, the preaching did not stop, but rather continued with great success. The Jewish authorities did not expect this, and they became enraged. They arrested the Apostles and threw them in jail. They thought this action would silence the name of Christ. But again they were mistaken. A new miracle took place: God intervened. An angel unlocked the door of the jail at night and told the Apostles: *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.* (Acts 5:20). That is to say, the angel told them: "Go and stand there where you preached. Stand fearlessly and courageously and preach the words that bring life to dead souls. Preach to the people."

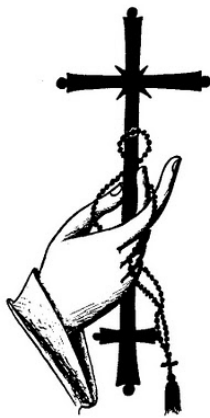
Yes, to the people, the angel emphasizes, which means that, if the leaders who have the power and are full of egotism and pride do not want to hear the preaching, do not be influenced by their denial or be afraid of their persecutions. Talk to the people, women and men, young and old people. There are people out there who are not egotistical and who want to hear the preaching. The preaching of Christ, which the greatest of all the preaching of the world, cannot help but motivate people who are tired of hearing the dull preaching of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

*Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.* This voice of the angel crosses the centuries and reaches us. It is also directed to today's preachers and

apostles of Christ because preaching can never stop. No one can stop it, just as no one can stop the rushing waters of a river with fences. The river will knock down the fences and continue on its way. The purpose of the river is to run. The word of God also has its purpose to run. Yes, the word of God will run; it will be preached in all times and in all centuries. It will bring divine blessings everywhere, and it will perform the greatest of miracles. Spiritually uncultivated and waterless places will change into exceptional gardens of God's grace.

Oh bishops, priests, theologians, and preachers of Orthodoxy: listen to the voice of the angel and with heroic conviction preach the Gospel to our people.

Amen.



If a poor man comes to you asking for bread, there is no end of complaints and reproaches and charges of idleness; you upbraid him, insult him, jeer at him. You fail to realize that you too are idle and yet God grants you gifts.

Now do not tell me that you actually work hard. If you call earning money, making business deals, and caring for your possessions “work,” I say, “No, that is not work. But alms, prayers, the protection of the injured and the like—these are genuine work.” You charge the poor with idleness; I charge you with corrupt behavior.

Do you not realize that, as the poor man withdraws silently, sighing and in tears, you actually thrust a sword into yourself, that it is you who received the more serious wound?

Let us learn that as often as we have not given alms, we shall be punished like those who have plundered. For what we possess is not personal property; it belongs to all.

God generously gives all things that are much more necessary than money, such as air, water, fire, the sun—all such things. All these things are to be distributed equally to all.

“Mine” and “thine”—these chilling words which introduce innumerable wars into the world—should be eliminated from the church. Then the poor would not envy the rich, because there would be no rich. Neither would the poor be despised by the rich, for there would be no poor. All things would be in common.

St. John Chrysostomos (347–407 AD)

## THE ALL-HOLY VIRGIN

*By the blessed Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotes of Florina, Greece (+2010), from the book “On the Divine Liturgy, vol.II,” translated by Asterios Gerostergios.*

*Who for us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became Man.*

† † †



Dear friends, humanity is the summit of earthly creation, and if God created nothing else, mankind would be enough to testify that there is a God, an all-wise God, omnipotent and benevolent. What an excellent creation man is! We see a beautiful statue and admire it, and no one dares to say the statue created itself without the sculptor. But, when compared to a human, what is a statue, even

the most perfect one kept in a museum and considered a treasure of infinitive value? The statue is dead, inanimate, idle. It has eyes but does not see, ears but does not hear, feet but cannot walk. Man, however, is alive, with soul, and active and creative statue, which when studied more and more gains more and more admiration. Common sense says that, just as every statue was made by an artist, man was created by God.

Man is a marvelous creation of God, a little bit less than the angels, and is divided into man and woman. Man and woman are equal. They have the basic characteristics of human personality, reason, conscience, will and the rest. They do possess differences, but the differences between man and woman does not reduce, but rather enhance the admiration due to humanity. They add beauty and charm, making human life a pleasant thing. Since the first man until now, billions of people have been born. Of these billions of people, men and women, there have been some who have tried to destroy the grandeur of humanity by their criminal acts, they tried to degrade the human personality and put the human race to shame. Mankind fell from the lofty height of honor and dignity into the slime of dishonorable passions, and became like the wild beasts. Reading history and seeing contemporary reality, one shudders and is ashamed of mankind's horrible crimes and shameful acts. Among billions of people, however, there are still some who, by their acts and virtues, have honored and continue to honor humanity, demonstrating that we were created for a higher

purpose, making us aspire for heaven, for the blessed life which man lived in Paradise before the Fall.

If someone should ask which human being of all the billions of human beings who have lived on earth reached the highest point of moral grandeur, in other words, who is the greatest of all Saints, we would answer not on our own authority, but would give the answer to the Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth (II Tim.3:15). Our Church, having the Holy Scriptures as a foundation, answers that, after Christ, who is not a mere man, but the God-Man and a Saint in the absolute sense, comes a woman. She is the All-Holy Virgin Mary.

The Virgin Mary, by God's grace and through her virtues, came to such a high state of holiness that she surpassed not only every human being, but even the angels and the archangels. The spiritual height and depth of the Virgin, to use the word of the Akathist Hymn, are unattainable: "Hail Height insurmountable for the human mind; Hail Depth inexorable to angelic eye."

The Virgin, as our Church praises her, is 'more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim'. If mankind is a miracle of divine creation then the Virgin Mary is the most exceptional miracle of divine grace.

From the moment when the first woman, Eve, sinned and carried mankind along with her into the abyss of calamity, centuries and millennia had passed. In the midst of this terrible darkness, one hope warmed souls, namely, that the situation would one day be radically different. The ancient prophecy, the first prophecy after the Fall of the First Man and First Woman, the First Gospel as it was called, spoke about a woman, a woman whose son would fight and defeat satan, and would give the world new life. From careful study of this prophecy, it is apparent that this woman would not give birth in the usual way women give birth. This woman would give birth without knowing man. She would bear as a virgin. This prophecy about the virgin is repeated more precisely and with different symbols in the Old Testament. The Book of Isaiah gives the clearest prophecy: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Eight hundred years before the star of Bethlehem shone, Isaiah saw the Virgin and her son Emmanuel.

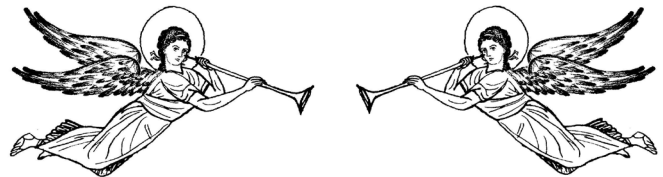
The Virgin gave birth to her only-begotten son, our Lord Jesus Christ. But how did the Virgin give birth? Unbelievers of every century have argued against this and will continue to do so. What do we answer? We say: "which is a greater miracle – a Virgin to give birth or the world to be created from nothing?" Certainly, the greater is the creation of the universe from nothing, and if this greater one took place, why not a lesser miracle, the Virgin Birth?

The all-holy Mother of God was a virgin before giving birth, during birth, and remained a virgin after giving birth. Our holy Lady is ever-virgin. Our Church preaches this as a revealed truth, and we proclaim this truth each time we recite the Symbol of Faith, saying: "and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became man."

We Orthodox do not deify the Virgin, as some heretics like Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses accuse us. We do not believe that the Virgin is a Goddess, but we say that the Virgin is superior to the angels, and that is why we call her Most Holy – that God selected the Most holy Mother in order to take flesh and be born. For this reason we call her Theotokos, God-birthgiver. Because of her exceptional virtues she is the perfect example of Woman.

But while the Holy Scripture and the Church in its teaching elevate the Virgin to ineffable heights, and angels and archangels bow before her, we have in our own country many nominal Christians who open their foul mouths and blaspheme her worse than heretics and unbelievers!

Dear Christians, let us all fight to stop this blasphemy and save ourselves from God's wrath.



The present age is rich not in ascetical feats of piety and confession of faith, but in cheating, lies, and deceits. It is noteworthy that several hierarchs and their flocks have already fallen away from Ecumenical unity, and to the question: *What dost thou believe?* reply with references to self-proclaimed heads of all sorts of schisms in Moscow, America, and western Europe. It is clear that they have ceased to believe in the unity of the Church throughout the whole world and do not wish to admit it, attempting to bear calmly the refusal of the true Church to have relations with them, and imagining that one can supposedly save one's soul even without communion with Her. Those who have cut themselves off from Her deprive themselves of the hope of salvation, as the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council teach concerning this, having recognized the renegades as being totally devoid of grace, according to the word of Christ: *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* (Mt 18:17).

Unfortunately, some Orthodox laymen, even, alas, many priests (and hierarchs) have subjected themselves to this state of gracelessness, although still retaining the outward appearance of the Church services and the apparent performance of the Mysteries.

Vladyka Anthony (Khrapovitsky)  
Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia (1934)

## ORTHODOXY AS THERAPY

By Protopresbyter George Metallinos, Dean of the Athens University School of Theology.

If we wished to conventionally define Christianity, as Orthodoxy, we would say it is the experiencing of the presence of the Uncreated (=of God) throughout history, and the potential of creation (=mankind) becoming God *by Grace*.

Given the perpetual presence of God in Christ, in historical reality, Christianity offers mankind the possibility of *theosis*, just as medical science offers mankind the possibility of preserving or restoring his health through a specific therapeutic procedure and a specific way of life.

The writer is in a position to appreciate the coincidence between the medical and ecclesiastic *poemantic* sciences, because, as a diabetic and a Christian, he is aware that in both cases, he has to faithfully abide by the rules that have been set out, in order to attain both of these two goals.

The unique and absolute goal of life in Christ is *theosis*, in other words, our union with God, so that man—through his participation in God’s uncreated energy—may become *by the Grace of God* that which God is by nature (=without beginning and without end). This is what “salvation” means, in Christianity. It is not the moral improvement of man, but a re-creation, a reconstruction in Christ, of man and of society, through an existing and an existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate manifestation of God in History. This is what the Apostle Paul’s words imply, in 2 Cor 5:17: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* Whoever is united with Christ is a new creation.

That is why *Christianically*, the incarnation of God-Logos—this redemptory “intrusion” of the Eternal and the Beyond-time God into Historical time—represents the commencement of a new world, of a (literally) “New Age,” which continues throughout the passing centuries, in the persons of authentic Christians: the Saints. The Church exists in this world, both as the *body of Christ* as well as *in Christ*, in order to offer salvation, through one’s embodiment in this regenerative procedure. This redemptory task of the Church is fulfilled by means of a specific therapeutic method, whereby throughout history, the Church essentially acts as a universal infirmary. “Spiritual Infirmary” (spiritual hospital) is the characterization given to the Church by the blessed Chrysostom.



Further along, we shall examine the answers given to the following questions:

- (1) What is the sickness that Christian Orthodoxy cures?
- (2) What is the therapeutic method it implements?
- (3) What is the identity of authentic Christianity, which radically separates it from all of its heretical deviations, and from every other form of religion?

### The Sickness Cured by Orthodoxy

The sickness of human nature is the fallen state of mankind, along with all of creation, which likewise suffers (*sighs and groans together*, Rom 8:22) together with mankind. This diagnosis applies to every single person (regardless whether they are Christian or not, or whether they believe or not), on account of the overall unity of mankind. Christian Orthodoxy does not confine itself within the narrow boundaries of one religion—which cares only for its own followers—but, just like God, *wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the realization of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4), since God is *the Saviour of all persons* (1

Tim 4:10). Thus, the sickness that Christianity refers to pertains to all of mankind; *Death has come upon all people, since all of them have sinned* (=they have veered away from their path towards *theosis*, Rom 5:12). Just as the fall (i.e., sickness) is a pan-human issue, so is salvation-therapy directly dependent on the inner functions of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is (patristically) defined by the functioning inside him of three mnemonic systems; two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is something handled by *poemantic* therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, brain function, which regulates our association with our self and our environment. Both these systems are familiar to medical science, whose work it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the Saints is familiar with one other mnemonic system: that of the *heart*, or *noetic memory*, which functions inside the heart. In Orthodox tradition, the heart does not only have a natural operation, as a mere pump that circulates the blood. Furthermore, according to patristic teaching, neither the brain nor the central nervous system is the center of our self-awareness; again, it is the *heart*, because, beyond its natural function, it also has a supernatural function. Under certain circumstances, it becomes **the place of our communion with God**, or, His uncreated energy. This is of course perceived through the experience of the Saints, and



not through any logical function or through an intellectual theologizing.

Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (+1809), in recapitulating the overall patristic tradition in his work “Hortative Manual,” calls the *heart* a natural and supernatural center, but also a paranormal center, whenever its supernatural faculty becomes idle on account of the *heart* being dominated by passions. The *heart*’s supernatural faculty is the ultimate prerequisite for perfection, for man’s fulfillment, in other words, his *theosis*, for a complete embodiment in the communion in Christ.

In its supernatural faculty, the *heart* becomes the space where the mind can be activated. In the Orthodox terminology codex, the mind (νοῦς—appearing in the New Testament as *the spirit of man* and *the eye of the soul*) is an energy of the soul, by means of which man can know God, and can reach the state of *seeing* God. We must of course clarify that *knowledge of God* does not imply knowledge of His incomprehensible and unapproachable Divine Essence. This distinction between *essence* and *energy* in God is the crucial difference between Orthodoxy and all other versions of Christianity. The energy of the mind inside the *heart* is called the *noetic faculty* of the *heart*. We again stress that according to Orthodoxy, the mind (νοῦς) and logic (λογικὴ) are not the same thing, because logic functions within the brain, whereas the mind functions within the *heart*.

The *noetic faculty* is manifested as the *incessant prayer* (ref. 1 Thess 5:17) of the Holy Spirit inside the *heart* (ref. Gal 4:6, Rom 8:26, 1 Thess 5:19) and is named by our Holy Fathers as *the memory of God*. When man has in his *heart* the *memory of God*, in other words, when he hears in his *heart* the *voice* (1 Cor 14:2, Gal 4:6, etc.), he can sense God *dwelling* inside him (Rom 8:11). Saint Basil the Great in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle says that the memory of God remains incessant when it is not interrupted by mundane cares, and the mind *departs towards God*; in other words, when it is in communion with God. But this does not mean that the faithful who has been activated by this Divine Energy withdraws from the needs of everyday life, by remaining motionless or in some kind of ecstasy; it means that **his mind is liberated** from these cares, which are items that **preoccupy only his logic**.

To use an example that we can relate to: A scientist, who has re-acquired his *noetic faculty*, will use his logic to tackle his problems, while his mind inside his *heart* will preserve the memory of God incessantly. The person who preserves all three mnemonic systems is the Saint. To Orthodoxy, he is a healthy (normal) person. This is why Orthodoxy’s therapy is linked to man’s course towards holiness.

The non-function or the below-par function of man’s *noetic faculty* is the essence of his fall. The much-debated *ancestral sin* was precisely man’s mishandling—from that very early moment of his historical presence—of the preservation of God’s

memory (=his communion with God) inside his *heart*. This is the morbid state that all of the ancestral descendants participate in; because it was no moral or personal sin, but a sickness of man’s nature; *our nature has become ill of this sin*, observes Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), which is transmitted from person to person, exactly like the sickness that a tree transmits to all the other trees that originate from it.

The inactivating of the *noetic faculty* or the memory of God, and confusing it with the function of the brain (which happens to all of us), subjugates man to stress and to his natural environment; it further leads him to the quest for bliss through individualism and an anti-social stance. While ill because of his fallen state, man then uses God and his fellow man to secure his personal security and happiness. Personal use of God is found in “religion” (=the attempt to elicit strength from the divine), which can degenerate into a self-deification of man (*I became a self-idol* says Saint Andrew of Crete, in his “Major Canon”). The use of fellow man—and subsequently creation in general—is achieved by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure, by becoming fully incorporated in the *spiritual hospital* of the Church.

#### Orthodoxy’s Therapeutic Methods

The purpose of the Church’s presence in the world—as a communion in Christ—is man’s cure; the restoration of his *heart-centred* communion with God; in other words, of his *noetic faculty*. According to the professor Fr. John Romanides, *the patristic tradition is neither a social philosophy, nor a system of morals, nor a religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic method. In this context, it is very similar to medicine and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul that prays mentally and incessantly inside the heart is a natural instrument, which everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy, nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this instrument. This is why the incurable cases are not even aware of this instrument’s existence.*

The need for man to be cured is a pan-human issue, related firstly to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence, through the reactivation of the third mnemonic faculty. However, it also extends to man’s social presence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest (which in the long run acts as self-love) must be transformed into selflessness: *Love... does not ask for reciprocation.* (1 Cor 13:8). Selfless love exists; it is the love of the Triadic God (Rom 5:8, 1 Jn 4:7), which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange. That is why Christian Orthodoxy’s social ideal is not “common possessions” but the “lack of possessions,” as a willed resignation from any sort of demand. Only then can justice be possible.

The therapeutic method that is offered by the Church is the spiritual life; the life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as an exercise (*ascesis*) and a participation in the

Uncreated Grace, through the Holy Sacraments. *Ascesis* is the violation of our self-ruled and inanimate through sin nature, which is coursing headlong into a spiritual or eternal death, i.e., the eternal separation from the Grace of God. *Ascesis* aspires to victory over our passions, with the intention of conquering the inner subservience to those pestiferous focal points of man and participating in Christ's Cross and His Resurrection.

The Christian, who is practicing such restraint under the guidance of his therapist-spiritual father, becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the sacramental life of the ecclesiastic corpus. There cannot be any un-exercising Christian, just as there cannot be a cured person who does not follow the therapeutic advice that the doctor prescribed for him.

### The Authenticity of Orthodoxy

The above points lead us to certain constants, which verify the identity of Christian Orthodoxy:

(a) The Church, as the body of Christ, functions as a therapy center-hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a "religion." The Clergy are initially selected by the cured, in order to function as therapists. **The therapeutic function of the Church is preserved today, mostly in monasteries which, having survived secularism, continue the Church of the Apostolic times.**

(b) The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy are the already cured persons. Those who have not had the experience of therapy cannot be therapists. That is the essential difference between the poemantic therapeutic science and medical science. The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy (spiritual fathers and mothers) bring forth other therapists, just as the professors of medicine bring forth their successors.

(c) The Church's confining itself to a simple forgiveness of sins so that a place in Paradise may be secured constitutes alienation and is tantamount to medical science forgiving the patient, so that he might be healed after death! The Church cannot send someone to Paradise or to Hell. Besides, Paradise and Hell are not places, they are ways of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares the person so that he might eternally look upon Christ in His uncreated light as a view of Paradise, and not as a view of Hell, or as *an all-consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29). And this of course concerns every single person, because ALL people shall look eternally upon Christ, as *the Judge* of the whole world.

(d) The validity of science is verified by the achievement of its goals (i.e., in medicine, it is the curing of the patient). It is the way that authentic scientific medicine is distinguished from charlatany. The criterion of *poemantic* therapy by the Church is also the achievement of spiritual healing, by opening the way towards *theosis*. Therapy is not transferred to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here, in this world (*hinc et nunc*, here and now). This can be seen in the un-deteriorated relics of the Saints that have overcome biological deterioration,

such as the relics of the *Eptanisos* (seven Greek islands in the Ionian sea, *Ed.*) saints: Spyridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios and Theodora Augusta. Un-deteriorated relics are, in our tradition, the indisputable evidence of *theosis*, or in other words the fulfillment of the Church's ascetic therapy.

I would like to ask the medical scientists of our country to pay special attention to the issue of the non-deterioration of holy relics, given that they haven't been scientifically interfered with, but, in them is manifest the energy of Divine Grace; because it has been observed that, at the moment when the cellular system should begin to disintegrate, it automatically ceases to, and instead of emanating any malodor of decay, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I limit this comment to the medical symptoms, and will not venture into the aspect of miraculous phenomena as evidence of *theosis*, because that aspect belongs to another sphere of discussion.

(e) Lastly, the Divine texts of the Church (Holy Bible, Synodic and Patristic texts) do not constitute coding systems of any Christian ideology; they bear a therapeutic character and function in the same way that university dissertations function in medical science. The same applies to the liturgical texts, as for example the Benedictions. The simple reading of a Benediction (prayer), without the combined effort of the faithful in the therapeutic procedure of the Church, would be no different to the instance where a patient resorts to the doctor for his excruciating pains, and, instead of an immediate intervention by the doctor, he is limited to being placed on an operating table, and being read the chapter that pertains to his specific ailment.

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It does not matter whether one accepts it or not. However, with regard to scientists, I have tried—as a colleague in science myself—to scientifically respond to the question "what is Orthodoxy." **Any other version of Christianity constitutes a counterfeiting and a perversion of it, even if it aspires to presenting itself as something Orthodox.**



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

**St. Paisios the Athonite**

**I**want to forgive beyond every logic, beyond every bitterness. My Christ, let me commune Thine irrational love for people. I cannot, but Thou canst grab my soul and resurrect it. I surrender myself into Thy hands.

**St. Nektarios of Pentapolis**

## I ANTICIPATE THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD...

By Archbishop of Athens and all Greece Christodoulos (+2008).

The common resurrection of the dead comprises a dogma of our faith. We confirm it, in the Symbol of our Faith: *I anticipate the resurrection of the dead and the life of the aeon to come.*

Our life has four stages. The first is our terrestrial life. It is the life that we live on Earth. The second stage is the one after our physical death, the so-called “interim-state.” The third stage is life after the resurrection of bodies and the fourth is the life of the aeon to come. That is when the mystery of the *eighth day* begins.

If someone does have doubts regarding the bodily resurrection, we need to emphatically state that this resurrection shall take place, as it was uttered by the unerring mouth of our Lord. In John’s Gospel, these words of the Lord appear: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.* (Jn 5:25). The voice of Christ will be heard and everyone will live; everyone will be resurrected. Immediately after, the Lord Himself completed His phrase, saying: *Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:28-29). It is very clear, that these words of our Lord are referring to bodily resurrection, which will be taking place when the voice of Jesus Christ is heard.

The holy Apostle Paul likewise addresses this when expressing the same truth. He tells us: *...for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.* (1 Cor 15:52). The Apostle was referring to the trumpet sounded by the Angel, thereby announcing the resurrection of the dead bodies, after which, the dead would arise, in incorruptible form. As for those who have doubts about those bodies coming alive—and especially all the deceased of the distant past—there is the vision of the prophet Ezekiel, where the holy prophet, having received the command by God to preach to the bared bones, he indeed proceeds to preach and immediately after, the bones re-acquire flesh and soul: they come alive and they stand upright. (Ezek 37).

Furthermore, it is only proper and fair for the bodily resurrection to take place before the Second Coming, inasmuch as the bodies—along with their souls—will appear together

before the Throne of the unyielding Judge, in order to obtain His response to the way of life that they jointly lived. And that is why Man is not only a soul. St. Paul clearly informs us that we shall present ourselves before the Judge, with our body, in order that each of us may receive the appropriate judgment for all the things we have done. Body and soul have lived together, and will therefore either enjoy Paradise together, or be together in “Hell.”

There are some who wonder how this resurrection can be possible when the physical body has disintegrated a long time ago. This body will also be resurrected, because Christ’s Body was resurrected. The Holy Bible refers to Him as *the firstborn of every creature* (Col 1:15) and as the One who is *the firstborn from the dead*. (Col 1:18). This means that whatever took place with Christ will also be taking place with us, because Christ is the recapitulation and the summation of our entire life. Our Lord is the Head of our body and we are the members. Subsequently, since the Head was resurrected, the entire body will be resurrected also. But we shall not be resurrected on our own as was the case with the Lord’s Resurrection; instead, we shall be resurrected, when the voice of the Lord is heard.

The blessed Chrysostom says the following: *If the body is not resurrected, then Man is not resurrected. Because Man is not just a soul. Man is body and soul. Therefore, if only the soul is resurrected, then Man is resurrected in half, and not in whole. Besides, we are not speaking literally when referring to the “resurrection of the soul,” because only the body is resurrected, since only the body is subject to deterioration.*

The bodily resurrection is a miracle. It will be the miracle of the power of God. And just as a seed is sown in the earth unto deterioration and rises up undeteriorated, so is our body sown in a state of deterioration, it is buried and disintegrates in the earth, to be resurrected and risen in incorruptibility.

This resurrection, according to St. Clement of Rome, will take place, regardless where we may be scattered—either in the sea, or on land, or even if devoured by wild beasts or by vultures—God will resurrect us with His power, because the entire world is in His hand.

### What the “New” Bodies Will Be Like

Justifiably, one may ask what our bodies will be like after our resurrection. Will they look like they did before death, or not? The answer is that our bodies will basically be the same as before, but with different characteristics. In reply to this question, the blessed Chrysostom says that the body will be the same one, but it will also not be the same. The blessed Makarios says that our body will have preserved its nature



after the resurrection in the same manner as iron, which, when subjected to heat will turn glowing red, but without ceasing to be iron. St. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) gives us another image—that of sand and glass. As we all know, glass is composed of sand. However, when it is turned into glass, it is no longer sand. Therefore, between our pre-resurrection body and the one that we shall have after the resurrection, there will be a sameness as well as a difference.

One difference that we must state is that the old body is cloaked with deterioration, whereas the new one with incorruptibility. This body, after the common resurrection, will be immortal. The image used by the Apostle Paul is a very characteristic one. The seed is buried in the soil, it then deteriorates, and eventually a new plant will sprout from that seed, which comes alive and develops. Of course it is of the same nature as the seed that was sown. That is to say, if one sows a seed of wheat, wheat will sprout from it, however, it will be better than the one that was sown. Furthermore, one seed is sown, but multiple seeds will sprout from it. From all this, we can surmise the attributes that our post-resurrection body will have—the first one being incorruptibility.

In his attempt to approach this mystery, St. Cyril of Jerusalem resorts to the example of water. Water, he says, has other characteristics when it is in a liquid state, other ones when it solidifies, and yet others when it is vaporous. We shall likewise undergo a change. Thus, since our body will possess the characteristic of incorruptibility, it means that it will not suffer illnesses or feel pain, nor will it grow old—we will all have the “same age,” according to the tradition of our Church, which we encounter in our hymnological texts. In other words, we will no longer have the handicaps that we had in this lifetime or the various illnesses, nor will we have the so-called “natural” passions such as hunger, thirst, becoming tired and needing to rest, hurting, etc.

The second characteristic of immortality indicates that we no longer die, and that we shall be eternal. Our model will be the Body of the Resurrected Christ.

A third characteristic of ours will be the transformation of our body. The new body will be far better and superior to the previous one. It will not consist of matter, it will be weightless, it will mass-less and will not take up space, in the manner that our Lord had a body which His disciples had seen after the Resurrection, yet without that Body hindering Him from entering the room where His disciples were “sequestered,” nor hindering Him from being simultaneously in different places—as verified by His various post-resurrection appearances.

The qualities that our new body will have will be new qualities. That body will partake of the glory of the Resurrected and Ascended Jesus Christ. The Lord was not resurrected only as the firstborn of all Creation; He also brought His resurrected Body into the heavens, on the day of His Ascension.

And it is for this reason that the Feast of the Ascension is of such importance to us; it signifies the eternal glorification of our body, next to the Body of the Resurrected Christ, in the glory of Heaven. Our body will be beautiful, with its former characteristics.

Our physical remembrances will become spiritual ones. That is why yet another characteristic will be spirituality. We will no longer be preoccupied with material or sensual matters. Being spiritual, our body will no longer have any need for maintenance or sustenance.

On the basis of all that we said regarding our resurrected body, we must reach the conclusion that our “just reward”—that is, the inheritance of Paradise or our exclusion from it (i.e., Hell), will be of a spiritual, not material character. There will be conditions that will fill us with joy, if we are together with God and savor His presence, otherwise, they will fill our souls with sorrow and sadness.

We will be “justly rewarded” accordingly, if we are far away from God; we will not enjoy His presence within us. That would be the worst kind of torture, because our conscience—according to the dogmatic theologians of our Church—*then being extremely refined and sensitized, will check us in a tortuous and painful manner*; our conscience will no longer experience the laziness with which it was burdened during the present lifetime.

People—say the Fathers of the Church—will shine, according to the measure of their virtue. That is why the Lord had said *in my Father's house are many mansions*. (Jn 14:2). This indicates that Paradise will also have certain gradations. Saints who have pleased God will be in a different state than certain other Christians. Nevertheless, everyone who will be in Paradise will feel the utmost joy. In fact, the Fathers use a charming parallel, in order to describe that everyone will feel satisfied: Each person will be holding a vessel in his hands. In some, the vessel will be a small one, while in others, the vessel will be larger. However, everyone's vessel will be full to the brim.

Following the resurrection, a general judgment will take place. It will be the Final Judgment. We shall appear with our resurrected bodies and souls united, as they are now, before the Throne of the unyielding God.



One who merely knows these truths in the mind will be helpless to resist the temptations of those times, and many who recognize the Antichrist when he comes will nonetheless worship him—only the power of Christ given to the heart will have strength to resist him.

Fr. Seraphim Rose

## SUFFERING IN FAMILY LIFE

By Archpriest Peter Perekrestov, priest at the "Joy of All Who Sorrow" Cathedral in San Francisco. This article is adapted from a talk in Russian, given at the Orthodox Youth Conference in Munich, December, 1989. Originally published in "Orthodox America," issue no. 101, July 1990.

Over the years considerable material has appeared in periodicals concerning the upbringing of children and youth. The authors not only provide rules and guidelines, but they try to penetrate to the essence of the matter, into the very soul of the growing generation, into the psychology of parenting and youth. They examine the spiritual and emotional needs of children, emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual, and the manifold difficulties which parents, teachers and children encounter as they interact during the wondrous process of a child's development.

The word "difficulty" is closely associated with another word: "suffering," and this is what I will address here: Suffering and its role in Orthodox family life.

Suffering is an integral element of our existence here on earth. It is woven through every aspect of our life. One should speak about it, one should anticipate it, one should be prepared for it as much as possible, and one must not run away from it. Nowadays, sufferings, sorrows, misfortunes are regarded as some kind of evil to be resisted and avoided at all cost. People fear suffering, and such fear at times exceeds suffering itself!

Life, we are told, should proceed smoothly, unhindered. Suffering and sorrows interfere with a life of well-being; they bother us. They are considered to be anomalies, injustices, not the result but the cause of man's wrongs. How could a good God allow it? This way of thinking is instilled in our minds and hearts through the schools and mass media, especially here in the affluent west.

As Orthodox Christians, our best defense against unconsciously assimilating this attitude is to understand the true meaning of suffering, as it is presented in the Orthodox Church and Her teachings.

In the fourth article of our Symbol of Faith, we read that our Lord Jesus Christ *suffered, and was buried. And arose on the third day according to the Scriptures.* As Christians we are called to follow Christ, to take up our cross—sufferings and sorrows. St. Paul writes that *if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with Him* (2 Tim 2:12), and *whosoever dies with Christ will rise with Him.* (2 Tim 2:11). Without suffering, without dying to this world, there is no resurrection. In taking the path of suffering, the Orthodox Christian comes into contact with Christ; he participates in Christ's suffering and answers his call as a Christian. There is no saint who did not endure some form of suffering. Indeed, the most widespread form of sanctity is martyrdom—witnessing to Christ with one's life, even unto death.

While not all Christians are called to martyrdom in this literal sense of physical death, by taking up our cross and following the path of suffering, we, too, experience a form of martyrdom. Monasticism—a voluntary, conscious and deliberate embrace of deprivation and self-denial—is a supreme example of spiritual martyrdom. Living in the world also presents many opportunities for this kind of martyrdom, inasmuch as suffering—whether physical, spiritual or psychological—is unavoidable in this sin-infested world. Of course, if someone being led to martyrdom suddenly denies his faith and is killed, his martyrdom will not bring him salvation. Likewise, if we want our sufferings to bear a redemptive character, we must accept them willingly and try to make sense of them, as far as this is possible to the human mind and heart.

From the history of the Church we see that it was precisely during periods of persecution that the Faith spread most readily. *The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church*, according to Tertullian. Suffering can also bring forth much fruit in our personal lives. It is part of God's plan, a test for us, to be utilized for the salvation of our souls. In the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov, *Where there are no sorrows, there is no salvation.*

Sufferings cleanse a person; they help to uproot sin. In our sufferings we turn to God, asking not only to be delivered from suffering, but to be given strength to bear them, to benefit from them. According to St. Seraphim, *All our sufferings—these are valuable merchandise which we must make haste to trade for eternal riches.* Similarly, Fr. Alexander Elchaninov writes in his diary: *All spiritual effort, all voluntary (and even involuntary) deprivation, denial, sacrifice, suffering—are soon traded for spiritual riches within us. The more you lose, the more you gain. The courageous soul instinctively seeks sacrifice, occasions to suffer, and spiritually strengthens itself through trials.*

It is good for us to bring to mind the innocent sufferings of the righteous. We have the example of St. John of Kronstadt who endured a grievous and prolonged illness before he died, and St. Ambrose of Optina, who was unable to serve Divine Liturgy because he was so weakened by his physical infirmity; he used to receive people lying in bed. At the same time, how strong they were in spirit!

Suffering takes various forms. **The most evident is suffering from sickness or physical infirmity.** (In meeting someone, usually the first thing we do is to ask about their health.) This kind of suffering can sometimes be relieved by medicines and external means. It manifests itself in physical pains, in discomfort and limitation of movement; associating with others is difficult, and consequently it is often accompanied by loneliness; sometimes illness causes physical disfigurement which can also result in suffering. This form of suffering is probably the most obvious.

The second type of suffering relates to the realm of man's spirit and soul. It is not caused by direct physical pain, but usually by some external affairs: unhappy family life; difficulties at work and in society; an attachment to alcohol or drugs, to money, material goods; poverty, slander, offenses, failure in love, difficulties in school and among friends, a seemingly hopeless situation or dead end, fruitlessness, disappointment in someone, a transition in life, or, what happens frequently, the illness or death of a member of the family or someone close to us.

A third form of suffering relates to the purely spiritual realm, and is unique to Orthodox Christians. Let us call it "suffering of the heart." This is that feeling which we experience when we are unable to lift ourselves to a desired spiritual level; when we are aware of our sinfulness and remoteness from the Creator; when people close to us are perishing spiritually; when we experience a crisis of faith; when we are spiritually sensitive to what is going on around us. All of this, regardless of how good and favorable the external circumstances of our life, causes us spiritual pain, suffering. This can also be the result of the incompatibility of the Orthodox way of life with the surrounding world. For two thousand years Christians have had difficulty living in this world, but in our time of turning away from God, a time of grave and refined deceptions, immorality and frightful diseases, it is all the more difficult. We try to adapt to our surroundings, we seek tranquility, our "niche," but we cannot find it, and this causes us pain of heart.

When sufferings are absent, then, according to a spiritual law, the soul grows weak and starts going downhill; it loses its armor and becomes vulnerable. This does not mean that sufferings are good in and of themselves, or that it is necessary to suffer all the time. There are times of joy, peace, times when we sense the strength of God's grace. Ironically perhaps, these times are precisely the result of the acceptance of suffering. Pascha, for example, is preceded by Passion Week. One is reminded here of the Gospel passage: *A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.* (Jn 16:21).

### The Place of Suffering in the Family

As we said earlier, every Christian living in the world comes in contact with suffering. When Christians live together in a family, this suffering is sometimes even magnified. In getting married; most young people today expect only happiness and a peaceful life of well-being. The Holy Church forewarns us about the essence of Christian marriage: it places crowns upon our heads—symbols of both victory and martyrdom, joy and sorrow. But we pay no heed to this. The world around us, with its false and unchristian pronouncements about the evil of sorrow and sufferings, does not prepare one for the inevitable, and when a person is faced with suffering and misfortune, he

is totally unprepared to accept them, to cope with them. All too often, people seek to escape the difficulties of married life by divorce. Martyrs knew they would be tried and tortured, and they went to their martyrdom with joy, with the singing of psalms and a firm confession of Christ. In the same way, **one should enter Christian marriage with a readiness to endure and to suffer, knowing that this is what is required, and that here lies a ready path to salvation.**

The fact that there are difficulties in a marriage is not to say that the spouses do not love one another. But love has its price suffering. The holy Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, teaches that love *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.* (1 Cor 13:7). This is true love. The ancient Stoic philosophers recognized the interrelation of love and suffering, and for this reason they advised not to love anyone, otherwise one would inevitably meet with suffering. Epictetus formulated a rule: "Kiss your wife and children, demonstrate affection; however, do not love them! If you love them, you will become distressed if they die."

Sadly, today's couples are not prepared to accept the everyday shortcomings and weaknesses which they notice in each other: laziness, vain talking, criticism, all kinds of habits, tastes, offenses, rudeness. They annoy one another. In society one can conceal one's weaknesses, one can hide behind a facade of propriety, but where is there to hide in a family? Husband and wife cannot isolate themselves from one another. They have to put up with one another, to endure suffering, to bear one another's burdens. Constant effort is required in order to deal with the myriads of irritations and difficulties which husband and wife encounter almost daily through many years of Christian marriage. This is what might be called the asceticism of family life. In bearing these trials, these sufferings, in developing strength of will, patience and meekness, in placing one's trust in the Lord and not in one's own strength, husband and wife grow closer to God and to one another. This in turn serves as a lesson for the children.

Suffering is a spiritual school in which both parents and children are educated. In the words of one religious writer: "Religion cannot be learned, like a science; it is grasped not by the mind but by the heart, through action, through direct personal experience. It is a spring, flowing into eternal life, and no reasoning about the water, no knowledge about it can satisfy a man's thirst if he himself does not drink from the spring." Fr. Sergei Chetverikov likewise emphasizes that knowledge about God must be distinguished from knowing God. Fr. Sergei recalls how, like every child, he came to know God in his early childhood not through external experience and not through any rationalization, but through direct inner perception. Suffering provides an inner experience by means of which members of a family grow strong spiritually.

In early childhood, a solid foundation is laid for the future spiritual life. Fr. Sergei writes: “Why is it that some people preserve in their souls a steady and unshakable faith to the end of their lives, while others lose it, sometimes definitively and sometimes returning to it with great difficulty and effort? It seems to me that this depends on what direction a man’s inner life takes in early childhood. If a person is able, consciously or instinctively, to preserve the correct relationship between himself and God, he will not fall away from faith.”

Parents create an atmosphere for spiritual growth not only by means of rules and instructions, but primarily through faith and example. A child’s soul, which finds itself in a salutary atmosphere of active religious faith, love for God, piety and endurance of suffering, is involuntarily kindled with the flame of faith and love, like a candle which is lit from an already burning candle. When growing children see that, for the sake of eternal life, parents uncomplainingly accept trials—whether sent by God or voluntarily taken upon themselves—children develop a sense of a higher Power, a higher reality.

Not long ago I had a conversation with an experienced priest who has a large family. In raising his grandchildren, he asked himself what mistakes he had made in raising his own children. He recalled that at home he had only two dictates—may and mustn’t. If “may” then it was good, but “mustn’t” meant it was bad and God would punish the child and he would go to hell. This priest advised me and other young parents not to place the emphasis on God’s punishment, but to give more attention to talking about God’s love, God’s merciful kindness. **Even suffering should be regarded not as God’s punishment but as a manifestation of God’s love for us.**

Within the family there are also sufferings caused by children. This is most frequently observed in times of illness. It is noticeable that the sickness of an innocent child—suffering—draws the family together; everything earthly becomes secondary, unnecessary and vain in the face of the child’s illness. When a family member becomes ill and suffers, it does not mean that he is the one who is most disturbed. Usually the sick person is so engrossed in his physical sufferings that he directs all his remaining strength towards spiritual activity, but those around him, especially if they feel helpless, co-suffer with the sick one and pass the time in anguish.

Here, everything is interconnected: the physical sufferings of the sick one are interwoven with the spiritual sufferings of those near him. Relief for both the former and the latter lies in hope in God and His Holy Church. We thus see how suffering educates both parents and children. In times of illness, misfortune, adversity.., the family is drawn together, offenses are forgiven; sincerity and simplicity are restored, I have seen how parents who normally pay little attention to their children, devote themselves wholly to a child when he becomes ill, sparing neither time, nor strength, nor resources. Blessed Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) has observed

how, during a child’s illness, a mother’s identity changes from “I” to “we.” When a Christian mother labors, goes hungry, spends sleepless nights and, in general, endures grief on account of her child, her children, she is rarely conscious of an inner warfare, she is oblivious to her *podvig*, as she would if she were concerned with her own self.

As children grow into the teen years, parents are faced with new anxieties—the children’s behavior, their actions, the absence of the desired result of their upbringing. They ask themselves, Why didn’t things turn out as we had envisioned? Where did we go wrong with our children? This, too, causes suffering. And here again we place our hope in the Lord, and soon we notice that God is bringing a certain equilibrium into our lives, and that we will never perish from trials in this world, if He is with us. He is like an island in the midst of an ocean of suffering, giving us salvation and rest.

Most of us do not take advantage of the many opportunities that family life provides for our spiritual advancement. By sharing, caring, serving one another, loving, forgiving—and all the suffering this entails—we are purified like gold in a furnace. Righteous Juliana of Lazarevo had thirteen children, six of whom died in childhood. She wanted to go off to a convent, but her husband convinced her to remain in the world and raise the children: “Black garments will not save us if we don’t live as we should; even in white garments [i.e., living in the world] we can be saved—if we do God’s will.”

St. Theophan the Recluse writes: *Martyrs were cleansed and prepared for the Kingdom of God by fire, by being sawn asunder... We, however, are given a different cleansing. Each person is given his own: to one, a rough scouring; to another, a milder form of cleansing...* God knows what is best for us. Let us trust ourselves to His holy will, knowing that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with.



**We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 (which we have kept the same since our inaugural issue in January 2003) to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.**

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## THE SECRET TO OBTAINING THE GRACE OF GOD

*Abba Zosimas, from the "Evergetinos."*

The grace of God always follows close on our intentions and that with the help of grace we succeed in accomplishing every good thing; yet we do not seek to make a start on doing good, nor do we display a great and eager intention to attract the grace of God to help us. If we ever do manifest some intention to do good, this intention is paltry and sluggish and does not make us worthy to receive any good from God.

Do we not know that all of our spiritual endeavours are reminiscent of a seed and the fruit that it bears? It is like the farmer who sows seeds on his land, but later awaits the mercy of God; God then proceeds to send His bounty with rains and favorable winds at the appropriate time, so that the seeds which the farmer threw into the earth may sprout, grow, and come to perfection. In this way, God helps him to gain many crops from a few seeds.

The same thing happens to us, too. Insofar as we sow an intention that is rich and generous in good deeds, then we shall find the grace from God whereby we will henceforth be able to accomplish all good things without difficulty and toil. We see the same thing happen in the case of skills. He who comes to learn a skill toils at the beginning and experiences failure, and often comes close to despair; in spite of all this, however, he does not lose his resolve, nor is he discouraged, but he tries

once more. However often he fails, at least as often he also seeks to correct himself, showing his good intention to the expert. For if he loses heart and withdraws, he will not learn anything; on the contrary, he will only become accustomed gradually to the skill and learn it perfectly when he displays patience and works with exertion and persistence, being corrected by the expert whenever he makes a mistake. After he has learned the skill well, then he performs his work with ease, so as to gain his livelihood from it.

He who wishes to attain some virtue should act in this way; that is, at the outset he should arm himself with bravery and show great resolve, and then should continue patiently doing what is good, ever calling on God to help and defend him. He should not be indifferent when he fails, or despair and abandon the attempt, because in that case he will never be able to accomplish anything good. He should get up, whenever he happens to fall, and increase his zeal through hope, awaiting God's mercy with patience.

This is what Abba Moses had to say: "The strength of those who wish to acquire the virtues is as follows: if they fall, let them not lose their courage, but let them be sure to make a new beginning at their endeavor. Insofar, then, as we put all our energy into practicing the virtues, let us await the Lord, showing Him a generous resolve and calling on His aid; and without fail He will strengthen us with His mercy and bestow His grace on us in abundance, in which case we will accomplish every good easily and without exertion."



# 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]

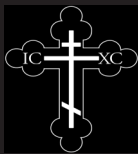
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Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## ORTHODOXY AS THERAPY

By *Protopresbyter George Metallinos* (+2019), *Dean of the Athens University School of Theology.*

If we wished to conventionally define Christianity, as Orthodoxy, we would say it is the experiencing of the presence of the Uncreated (=of God) throughout history, and the potential of creation (=mankind) becoming God *by Grace*.

Given the perpetual presence of God in Christ, in historical reality, Christianity offers mankind the possibility of *theosis*, just as medical science offers mankind the possibility of preserving or restoring his health through a specific therapeutic procedure and a specific way of life.

The writer is in a position to appreciate the coincidence between the medical and ecclesiastic *poemantic* sciences, because, as a diabetic and a Christian, he is aware that in both cases, he has to faithfully abide by the rules that have been set out, in order to attain both of these two goals.

The unique and absolute goal of life in Christ is *theosis*, in other words, our union with God, so that man—through his participation in God's uncreated energy—may become *by the Grace of God* that which God is by nature (=without beginning and without end). This is what "salvation" means, in Christianity. It is not the moral improvement of man, but a re-creation, a re-construction in Christ, of man and of society, through an existing and an existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate manifestation of God in History. This is what the Apostle Paul's words imply, in 2 Cor 5:17: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed*

*away; behold, all things are become new.* Whoever is united with Christ is a new creation.

That is why *Christianically*, the incarnation of God-Logos—this redemptory "intrusion" of the Eternal and the Beyond-time God into Historical time—represents the commencement of a new world, of a (literally) "New Age," which continues throughout the passing centuries, in the persons of authentic Christians: the Saints. The Church exists in this world, both as the *body of Christ* as well as *in Christ*, in order to offer salvation, through one's embodiment in this regenerative procedure. This redemptory task of the Church is fulfilled by means of a specific therapeutic method, whereby throughout history, the Church essentially acts as a universal infirmary. "Spiritual Infirmary" (spiritual hospital) is the characterization given to the Church by the blessed Chrysostom.

Further along, we shall examine the answers given to the following questions:

(1) What is the sickness that Christian Orthodoxy cures?

(2) What is the therapeutic method it implements?

(3) What is the identity of authentic Christianity, which radically separates it from all of its heretical deviations, and from every other form of religion? The Sickness Cured by Orthodoxy

The sickness of human nature is the fallen state of mankind, along with all of creation, which likewise suffers (*sighs and groans together*, Rom 8:22) together with mankind. This diagnosis applies to every single person (regardless whether they are Christian or not, or whether they believe or not), on account of the overall unity of mankind. Christian Orthodoxy does not confine itself within the narrow boundaries of

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PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20<sup>th</sup> century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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one religion—which cares only for its own followers—but, just like God, *wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the realization of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4), since God is *the Saviour of all persons* (1 Tim 4:10). Thus, the sickness that Christianity refers to pertains to all of mankind; *Death has come upon all people, since all of them have sinned* (=they have veered away from their path towards *theosis*, Rom 5:12). Just as the fall (i.e., sickness) is a pan-human issue, so is salvation—therapy directly dependent on the inner functions of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is (patristically) defined by the functioning inside him of three mnemonic systems; two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is something handled by *poemantic* therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, brain function, which regulates our association with our self and our environment. Both these systems are familiar to medical science, whose work it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the Saints is familiar with one other mnemonic system: that of the *heart*, or *noetic memory*, which functions inside the heart. In Orthodox tradition, the heart does not only have a natural operation, as a mere pump that circulates the blood. Furthermore, according to patristic teaching, neither the brain nor the central nervous system is the center of our self-awareness; again, it is the *heart*, because, beyond its natural function, it also has a supernatural function. Under certain circumstances, it becomes **the place of our communion with God**, or, His uncreated energy. This is of course perceived through the experience of the Saints, and not through any logical function or through an intellectual theologizing.

Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (+1809), in recapitulating the overall patristic tradition in his work “Hortative Manual,” calls the *heart* a natural and supernatural center, but also a paranormal center, whenever its supernatural faculty becomes idle on account of the *heart* being dominated by passions. The *heart's* supernatural faculty is the ultimate prerequisite for perfection, for man’s fulfillment, in other words, his *theosis*, for a complete embodiment in the communion in Christ.

In its supernatural faculty, the *heart* becomes the space where the mind can be activated. In the Orthodox terminology codex, the mind (*νοῦς*—appearing in the New Testament as *the spirit of man* and *the eye of the soul*) is an energy of the soul, by means of which man can know God, and can reach the state of *seeing* God. We must of course clarify that *knowledge of God* does not imply knowledge of His incomprehensible and unapproachable Divine Essence. This distinction between *essence* and *energy* in God is the crucial difference between Orthodoxy and all other versions of Christianity. The energy of the mind inside the *heart* is called the *noetic faculty* of the *heart*. We again stress that according to Orthodoxy, the mind (*νοῦς*) and logic (*λογικὴ*) are not the same thing, because logic functions within the brain, whereas the mind functions within the *heart*.

The *noetic faculty* is manifested as the *incessant prayer* (ref. 1 Thess 5:17) of the Holy Spirit inside the *heart* (ref. Gal 4:6, Rom 8:26, 1 Thess 5:19) and is named by our Holy Fathers as *the memory of God*. When man has in his *heart* the *memory of God*, in other words, when he hears in his *heart* *the voice* (1 Cor 14:2, Gal 4:6, etc.), he can sense God *dwelling* inside him (Rom 8:11). Saint Basil the Great in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle says that the memory of God remains incessant when it is not

interrupted by mundane cares, and the mind *departs towards God*; in other words, when it is in communion with God. But this does not mean that the faithful who has been activated by this Divine Energy withdraws from the needs of everyday life, by remaining motionless or in some kind of ecstasy; it means that **his mind is liberated** from these cares, which are items that **preoccupy only his logic**.

To use an example that we can relate to: A scientist, who has re-acquired his *noetic faculty*, will use his logic to tackle his problems, while his mind inside his *heart* will preserve the memory of God incessantly. The person who preserves all three mnemonic systems is the Saint. To Orthodoxy, he is a healthy (normal) person. This is why Orthodoxy's therapy is linked to man's course towards holiness.

The non-function or the below-par function of man's *noetic faculty* is the essence of his fall. The much-debated *ancestral sin* was precisely man's mishandling—from that very early moment of his historical presence—of the preservation of God's memory (=his communion with God) inside his *heart*.

This is the morbid state that all of the ancestral descendants participate in; because it was no moral or personal sin, but a sickness of man's nature; *our nature has become ill of this sin*, observes Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), which is transmitted from person to person, exactly like the sickness that a tree transmits to all the other trees that originate from it.

The inactivating of the *noetic faculty* or the memory of God, and confusing it with the function of the brain (which happens to all of us), subjugates man to stress and to his natural environment; it further leads him to the quest for bliss through individualism and an anti-social stance. While ill because of his fallen state, man then uses God and his fellow man to secure his personal security and happiness. Personal use of God is found in "religion" (=the attempt to elicit strength from the divine), which can degenerate into a self-deification of man (*I became a self-idol* says Saint Andrew of Crete, in his "Major Canon"). The use of fellow man—and subsequently creation in general—is achieved by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure, by becoming fully incorporated in the *spiritual hospital* of the Church.

#### Orthodoxy's Therapeutic Methods

The purpose of the Church's presence in the world—as a communion in Christ—is man's cure; the restoration of his *heart-centred* communion with God; in other words, of his *noetic faculty*. According to the professor Fr. John Ro-

manides, *the patristic tradition is neither a social philosophy, nor a system of morals, nor a religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic method. In this context, it is very similar to medicine and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul that prays mentally and incessantly inside the heart is a natural instrument, which everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy, nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this instrument. This is why the incurable cases are not even aware of this instrument's existence.*

The need for man to be cured is a pan-human issue, related firstly to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence, through the reactivation of the third mnemonic faculty. However, it also extends to man's social presence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest (which in the long run acts as self-love) must be transformed into selflessness: *Love... does not ask for reciprocation.* (1 Cor 13:8). Selfless love exists; it is the love of the Triadic God (Rom 5:8, 1 Jn 4:7), which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange. That is why Christian

Orthodoxy's social ideal is not "common possessions" but the "lack of possessions," as a willed resignation from any sort of demand. Only then can justice be possible.

The therapeutic method that is offered by the Church is the spiritual life; the life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as an exercise (*ascesis*) and a participation in the Uncreated Grace,

through the Holy Sacraments. *Ascesis* is the violation of our self-ruled and inanimate through sin nature, which is coursing headlong into a spiritual or eternal death, i.e., the eternal separation from the Grace of God. *Ascesis* aspires to victory over our passions, with the intention of conquering the inner subservience to those pestiferous focal points of man and participating in Christ's Cross and His Resurrection.

The Christian, who is practicing such restraint under the guidance of his therapist-spiritual father, becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the sacramental life of the ecclesiastic corpus. There cannot be any un-exercising Christian, just as there cannot be a cured person who does not follow the therapeutic advice that the doctor prescribed for him.

#### The Authenticity of Orthodoxy

The above points lead us to certain constants, which verify the identity of Christian Orthodoxy:

(a) The Church, as the body of Christ, functions as a therapy center-hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a "religion." The Clergy are initially selected by the cured,



in order to function as therapists. **The therapeutic function of the Church is preserved today, mostly in monasteries which, having survived secularism, continue the Church of the Apostolic times.**

(b) The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy are the already cured persons. Those who have not had the experience of therapy cannot be therapists. That is the essential difference between the poemantic therapeutic science and medical science. The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy (spiritual fathers and mothers) bring forth other therapists, just as the professors of medicine bring forth their successors.

(c) The Church's confining itself to a simple forgiveness of sins so that a place in Paradise may be secured constitutes alienation and is tantamount to medical science forgiving the patient, so that he might be healed after death! The Church cannot send someone to Paradise or to Hell. Besides, Paradise and Hell are not places, they are ways of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares the person so that he might eternally look upon Christ in His uncreated light as a view of Paradise, and not as a view of Hell, or as *an all-consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29). And this of course concerns every single person, because ALL people shall look eternally upon Christ, as *the Judge* of the whole world.

(d) The validity of science is verified by the achievement of its goals (i.e., in medicine, it is the curing of the patient). It is the way that authentic scientific medicine is distinguished from charlatany. The criterion of *poemantic* therapy by the Church is also the achievement of spiritual healing, by opening the way towards *theosis*. Therapy is not transferred to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here, in this world (*hinc et nunc*, here and now). This can be seen in the un-deteriorated relics of the Saints that have overcome biological deterioration, such as the relics of the *Eptanisos* (seven Greek islands in the Ionian sea, *Ed.*) saints: Spyridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios and Theodora Augusta. Un-deteriorated relics are, in our tradition, the indisputable evidence of *theosis*, or in other words the fulfilment of the Church's ascetic therapy.

I would like to ask the medical scientists of our country to pay special attention to the issue of the non-deterioration of holy relics, given that they haven't been scientifically interfered with, but, in them is manifest the energy of Divine Grace; because it has been observed that, at the moment when the cellular system should begin to disintegrate, it automatically ceases to, and instead of emanating any malodor of decay, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I limit this comment to the medical symptoms, and will not venture into the aspect of miraculous phenomena as evidence of *theosis*, because that aspect belongs to another sphere of discussion.

(e) Lastly, the Divine texts of the Church (Holy Bible, Synodic and Patristic texts) do not constitute coding systems

of any Christian ideology; they bear a therapeutic character and function in the same way that university dissertations function in medical science. The same applies to the liturgical texts, as for example the Benedictions. The simple reading of a Benediction (prayer), without the combined effort of the faithful in the therapeutic procedure of the Church, would be no different to the instance where a patient resorts to the doctor for his excruciating pains, and, instead of an immediate intervention by the doctor, he is limited to being placed on an operating table, and being read the chapter that pertains to his specific ailment.

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It does not matter whether one accepts it or not. However, with regard to scientists, I have tried—as a colleague in science myself—to scientifically respond to the question “what is Orthodoxy.” **Any other version of Christianity constitutes a counterfeiting and a perversion of it, even if it aspires to presenting itself as something Orthodox.**



When I was the *archontaris* (monk in charge of hospitality) at Koutloumousiou Monastery, Father Paisios came one night for a vigil service. When he arrived, I took him to his cell. I gave him the best one located close to the bishop's room. As soon as I opened the door and the Elder saw the tidy, clean and carpeted room, he said:

- Don't you have another room, not as nice, to take me to, because I don't feel comfortable in this one.

Since I really wanted to take good care of him, I lied and said:

- No, Father, this is the only room available.

Then, he said to me:

- Once I had gone to Athens and stayed at a friend's house. They gave me a nice room, with clean white bed sheets. I suffered all night in that room.

- Why? I asked him.

- It was difficult for me to lie down on the clean bed sheets, as I was afraid I would dirty them. As a result, all night long I slept sitting on a chair. It was very tiring for me, and I also made my friends unhappy when they saw the bed intact next morning. So, do you have another room to give me?

- Alright, Father, come along with me.

I took him to a simple, plain room where he felt comfortable.

From “Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain”

## THE MUTUAL LINK BETWEEN PLEASURE AND PAIN

*His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and St. Vlassios.*

I read a significant book titled “Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants” [by Dr Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *Ed.*]; the book sets out the value of pain in human life.

The author of this book is Paul Brand, a doctor, who was born in India in 1914 to missionary parents. He studied in England and worked as a doctor in India among lepers. He was a pioneer in treating leprosy in India and demonstrated that the lack of a sensation of pain was what caused the characteristic deformities of leprosy. Later in the USA he confirmed his findings on diabetes and other illnesses. This important discovery led him to the conclusion that not only should pain not be silenced, but it also constitutes one of the body’s most effective ways of communication.

One of the chapters in his book is titled “Pleasure and Pain,” and it records many of his interesting ideas about pleasure and pains as twins.

At the beginning of this chapter he refers to the opinion expressed by Jeremy Bentham, the founder of University College London: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do,

as well as to determine what we shall do.” Afterwards he notes: “I have critiqued modern society for misunderstanding pain, for muffling it rather than listening to its message. I wonder whether we have also misunderstood pleasure.”

Analyzing this subject, Paul Brand writes: “By medical instinct, I tend to consider first the body’s point of view when I analyze a sensation. Freud stressed the *pleasure principle* as a prime motivator of human behavior; the anatomist sees that the body gives far more emphasis to pain. Each square inch of skin contains thousands of nerves for pain and cold and heat and touch, but not a single pleasure cell. Nature is not so profligate. Pleasure emerges as a by-product, a mutual effort by many different cells working together in what I call *the ecstasy of community*.”

Finally, he emphasizes that pleasure and pain are twins, but they differ from one another. They take place within our mind, and are partly dependent on “reports from the sense organs.”

He cites a definition from the Oxford English Dictionary relating to pain and pleasure, according to which pleasure is “induced by the enjoyment or anticipation of what is felt or viewed as good or desirable... the opposite of pain.” He states that for much of his life he would have classified “pleasure as the opposite of pain,” in accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary. Due to his later research, however, he reached the conclusion that the truth about the relationship between pleasure and pain is better expressed by the Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci, who saw things differently.

This famous painter actually sketched in his notebooks a solitary male figure splitting into two, about belly height: two torsos, two bearded heads, and four arms, like Siamese twins joined at the waist. He titles his study sketch *Allegory of Pleasure and Pain*, commenting: “Pleasure and Pain are represented as twins, as though they were joined together, for there is never the one without the other... They are made with their backs turned to each other because they

are contrary the one to the other. They are made growing out of the same trunk because they have one and the same foundation, for the foundation of pleasure is labor with pain, and the foundations of pain are vain and lascivious pleasures.”

Pleasure and pain, therefore, have the same root and alternate in our life. Paul Brand uses various examples from medical science to illustrate this



Leonardo da Vinci’s “Allegory of Pleasure and Pain”

mutual link between pain and pleasure, including the results of consuming refined sugar, which does not exist in nature and is an industrial product processed in concentrated form, and which opens “a Pandora’s box of medical problems.”

The same can be observed in society, as various forms of enjoyment create a number of problems for the body. This also happens to those who sit slouched in plush theater seats watching a movie. These false adventures do not satisfy, although they produce side effects that doctors can observe, such as sweaty palms, a racing heartbeat, tensed muscles, an adrenaline high.

This is also evident in the use of narcotics. Paul Brand writes: “Drug abuse shows the logical conclusion of a misdirected sense of pleasure, for illicit drugs grant direct access to the seat of pleasure in the brain. Not surprisingly, the short-term pleasure that comes from such direct access produces long-term misery.” He refers to the opinion of the writer Dan Wakefield, who said: “I used drugs the way

I think most people really do, not primarily and habitually for ‘kicks’ or glamor but for blotting out pain, the pain of that interior or psychic void... The irony is that the very substances—the drugs or alcohol—that one uses to numb the pain in this chemical, artificial way have the real effect of enlarging the very void they are seeking to fill, so that more and more booze and drugs are always needed in the never-ending quest to stuff the hole that is inevitably made larger by the increasing efforts to eliminate it.”

This mutual link between pleasure and pain is familiar to the Fathers of our Church, and is the basis of Orthodox asceticism. We can find this in all the Fathers, but here I shall emphasise in particular the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, a saint of the seventh century, who played a major role in the issues of his time, but also in every age.

In various texts on Theology, the Divine Economy, and Virtue and Vice, St. Maximus alludes, among other things, to the mutual link between pleasure and pain. We shall now refer briefly to this, so that we can see that the Fathers of the Church are very modern with regard to this subject, because they touch upon the timeless existential problems of human beings.

St. Maximus begins by referring to the fact that, when God created human nature, *He did not make the senses susceptible either to pleasure or to pain; instead, He implanted in it a certain noetic capacity through which human beings could enjoy Him in an inexpressible way.* This is *the natural longing of the nous for God.* However, man did not follow this natural movement of the *nous* towards God, but the opposite tendency. He transferred this natural movement of the *nous* towards God to the senses and acquired an initial impulse, namely, *pleasure that acts upon him through the senses in a way that is contrary to nature.* Then God, Who is concerned for our salvation, *implanted pain next to pleasure as a kind of chastising force.* He rooted *the law of death in the body, thus setting limits to the manic longing of the nous, directed, in a manner contrary to nature, towards sensible objects.* [St. Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassion*, Philokalia, vol. 2].

Thus, *pleasure and pain were not created simultaneously with the flesh. On the contrary, it was the Fall that invented pleasure to corrupt man’s power of choice (freedom), and that also brought upon him, by way of chastisement, the pain that leads to the dissolution of his nature. Thus, because of pleasure, sin became the freely chosen death of the soul; and pain, by means of this dissolution, brought about the disintegration of the flesh.*

This means that, after meaningless pleasure... a purposive pain, in the form of multiple sufferings also gained entrance. It is in and from these sufferings that death takes its origin. Such pain drives out unnatural pleasure. In this way, *the invention of voluntary sufferings (which is asceticism) and the onslaught of those that come unsought (in other words, ill-*

*ness and death) drive out pleasure and allay its impetus, but without destroying the capacity for pleasure which resides in human nature like a natural law.* Every “unnatural” pleasure is followed by “natural suffering.”

We see this in the way in which human beings are born, as pleasure comes first and pain follows. After the Fall, everyone’s birth was naturally preceded by pleasure, and absolutely no one was naturally free from impassioned and pleasurable generation. On the contrary, as if discharging a natural debt, all underwent sufferings and the death that comes from this birth.

Unjust pleasure and the justly deserved sufferings consequent upon it pitifully brought about man’s disintegration, since his life originates in the corruption that comes from his generation through pleasure and ends in the corruption that comes from death. Because Adam *introduced this unjust pleasure-provoked form of generation, he deservedly brought on himself, and on all those born in the flesh from him, the doom of death through suffering.* After the Fall, human life was generated by means of pleasure-provoked conception and birth through a father’s sperm; and it ended in painful death through corruption.

Human beings could not free themselves from the link between pleasure and pain, and they suffered greatly. Christ brought about the cure through the way in which He was born as a man, and by His death. Christ accepted *a birth which did not originate in pleasure (without seed and intervention by a human father) to liberate the human race from the birth that came from condemnation.* In His love, He deliberately accepted the painful death which, because of pleasure, terminates human life, so that by suffering unjustly He might abolish the pleasure-provoked and unjust origin by which this life is dominated. With the incarnation of Christ everything changed, for, just as Adam’s life of pleasure gave birth to death and corruption, so the Lord’s death on account of Adam, being free from the pleasure that originated in Adam, was the father of eternal life.

On account of our birth, we are naturally subject to suffering and death, and for that reason, pleasure is linked with pain in our nature. For the dominion of pleasure and pain clearly applies to what is passible in human nature. And when the natural penalty of pain intensifies, we seek to console ourselves to some extent through pleasure. For in our desire to escape pain we seek refuge in pleasure, and so try to bring relief to our nature, hard pressed as it is by the torment of pain.

The example of a wound makes this clear. The pain of the wound prompts us to scratch it, which brings us pleasure, but the pain increases. The same can be seen in the case of drink and drugs. We drink to soothe the pain, but this new pleasure brings new pain. Through trying in this way to blunt

pain with pleasure, we simply increase our sum of debts, for we cannot enjoy pleasure free from pain and suffering.

Since Christ's birth was not associated with pleasure, and He voluntarily took pain upon Himself in order to defeat it, he gave human beings power to be victorious over both pleasure and pain. We see this in the saints who are united with Christ. *The pleasure of generation inherited from Adam is no longer active within them, but only the pain that arose because of Adam, which brings about death in them, not as a debt payable for sin, but according to the economy of salvation, because of their natural condition, for the purpose of destroying sin. For when death is not born of that pleasure whose chastisement is its natural function, it begets eternal life. For just as Adam's life of pleasure gave birth to death and corruption, so the Lord's death on account of Adam, being free from the pleasure that originated in Adam, is the father of eternal life.*

It is clear that, since the Fall, human beings move between these two realities, pleasure and pain. Pleasure causes sin and distances them from God, and afterwards come remorse, guilty feelings, and sometimes physical illnesses. Subsequently, in order to escape from pain and suffering, they sample pleasure again, but this new pleasure gives rise new unbearable pain, and in order to deal with this, they are led to new pleasure. This situation continues, creating a vicious circle. Through His incarnation, Christ made it possible for us to be delivered from this vicious circle of pleasure and pain. He assumed a mortal and passible body, without sin or pleasure, in order to cure both pleasure and pain.

The tradition of the Church consists in this transcendence of the mutual link between pleasure and pain. This is not a matter of prohibitions and deprivations, but of setting people free from these Siamese twins. According to the patristic tradition, as expressed by St. Maximus the Confessor, purification of the heart overcomes pleasure and pain. There is a passage in which he writes that someone who has liberated his flesh from pleasure and pain has achieved practical virtue; someone who has banished forgetfulness and ignorance from his soul has properly attained natural *theoria* (vision); and someone who has freed his nous of many impressions, in other words, images and fantasies, has acquired the mystery of theology.

Within the Church it is possible for us, through theology, the Sacraments and asceticism, to break the link between pleasure and pain, to cure pleasure and to bear trials, suffering, illnesses and the fear of death, but also to reach exalted spiritual states that liberate someone from all ties and make him free.

St. Maximus, interpreting the Lord's Prayer, and specifically the petition *And lead us not into temptation*, says that there are two kinds of temptation, one pleasurable and the other painful. The first kind of temptation, which is pleasurable, is the result of our deliberate choice and our

freedom. It is voluntary, as we want to enjoy it. The other kind of temptation, which is painful and linked with illnesses and death, is involuntary, as we do not want it, but it comes into our life. Pleasurable temptation gives birth to sin, whereas painful temptation, when we patiently endure it, cures us of sin.

I shall finish where I began, with the title of Paul Brand's book, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*. Physical, psychological and existential pain is a gift of God to human beings. It is God's gift to the fallen state in which we find ourselves. It is associated with the "garments of skin", which have a two-fold function: they are part of our fallen state, but they have been blessed by God, and we can overcome them with His help. Every kind of suffering brings the possibility of rebirth. Just as a woman suffers pain while giving birth, but this leads to the birth of a new life, so every kind of pain leads to a birth, if we are able to make good use of it.

This is how we should interpret the classic phrase from Dostoyevsky "I suffer, therefore I am", which can be linked with the quotation from St. Silouan the Athonite, "I love, therefore I am." And both can be contrasted with the phrase from Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." Human existence is not identified absolutely with reason, but is expressed by overcoming pain and experiencing love. Our attitude towards these three sayings indicates the level of culture and lifestyle that prevails in us.



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

Something similar takes place with women who are contemplating abortion. Such women frequently seek advice from a friend: "What should I do?" Their friend replies: "Why do you want to keep it? You have so many children. Why don't you have an abortion?" This gentle push was all she needed. She had already made up her mind halfway; the other lady added the remaining half with her advice, and so the pregnant woman proceeds to abort the child and to commit murder. Unquestionably, the other woman is responsible for half the murder as well.

**Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona (+2019)**

## THE MYSTERY AND THE PROCESS OF DEATH

*An interview with Pavel Chirila, Professor and Doctor at St. Irene's Hospital Bucharest (Romania).*

**Question:** Tell us something about death, something that comes spontaneously to you, something you consider extremely important.

**Answer:** What comes spontaneously to mind is that death is a terrible mystery, as we chant in the funeral service, which is a poem by St. John Damascene. This is related to the fact that the soul is violently detached from the harmony of its union with the body. It is also a sad event, because it is related to man's corruptibility and mortality which is manifested in all life.

In addition, it brings to my memory the Service of the Resurrection of Christ, which we Orthodox celebrate with splendor. We hold lit candles in our hands and sing triumphantly the paean of victory: *Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has trampled down death, and on those in the tombs He has bestowed life.* This beautiful image shows our attitude towards life and death. We are corruptible and mortal, but we possess the *medicine of immortality*, which is the resurrected Christ. Employing modern terminology, we may say that by the incarnation of the Son and the union of human with the divine nature in the person of Logos, a "spiritual cloning" has taken place, our mortal nature has been united with the life of God. This is why death has changed its name and is now called dormition (falling asleep) and the places where the departed ones are buried are called cemeteries ("dormitories" in Greek), not burial grounds.

So, when I see people holding a lit candle and chanting *Christ is Risen* on the night of the Resurrection of Christ, I understand better that we should regard death as a process of passing from the *land of Egypt* to the *land of Promise*, from death to life, which takes place in Christ, and as a hope for our resurrection which again takes place in Christ. It would be very fortunate if we were to anticipate death in this position, holding the candle of the Resurrection and chanting *Christ is Risen*. After all, we are "strangers and pilgrims" in this life, our true country is elsewhere. I am always impressed by the words of St. Nikolaos Cavasilas (14<sup>th</sup> century) that while we live here on earth we are like an embryo in his mother's womb, and at the moment of death we are born, we get out of that womb. This is why in the Orthodox Church the saints are celebrated on the day of their dormition or their martyrdom, not on the day of their physical birth.

**Question:** We understand from the Holy Scripture that there are two kinds of fear: a holy fear, which is fear of God and the beginning of wisdom according to the psalmist, and another kind of fear inspired by demons, which is pathological fear. To what category does the fear of death belong?

**Answer:** Indeed, there is a fear of God which is an energy of the grace of God and the beginning of salvation, that is, man fears/respects God and starts obeying His commandments, and there is a fear inspired by demons which causes anxiety and anguish. However, besides these two fears there is also another fear, so-called psychological fear, which is related to a person's insecurity and emotional inadequacy. The fear of death means something different for each person. For secular and atheist people it is related to the course to "nothingness," that is, they think that they leave the only existing world and end up in the nothingness of non-existence. This is something that does not exist for us Orthodox.

For Christians, the fear of death is related to the soul's departure from the world they know, the friends and relatives, and its entry into another world they do not know yet. They do not know how they are going to live, what will happen with God's judgment which follows death. This is why hope and proper preparation is needed. Of course, those Christians who have reached the illumination of the *nous* and deification and have been united with Christ transcend the fear of death, as exemplified by the life of the Apostles, the Martyrs and in general the saints of the Church. In reading the Synaxaria, we see phrases like: *on this day saint (so and so) is perfected in peace or is perfected by the sword*, etc.

It has to be underlined that in Greek the verb "teleioutai" means "is perfected," is led to perfection, and differs from the verb "teleionei," which means "ceases to exist." We may also say that the life of the senses ("vios") is terminated by death, while life ("zoe") is perfected but not terminated. What is important is that, with the spiritual life we live, we should defeat the fear of death and feel death as a path towards an encounter with Christ, the All holy Virgin and the saints.

**Question:** We know from the Holy Tradition that at a person's death angels, saints as well as demons are present. What can you tell us about this?

**Answer:** From the teaching of Christ and the whole tradition of the Church we know that both angels and demons exist, and they are not personifications of good or evil, but individual beings created by God. Demons were angels who lost communion with God. Many saints proved worthy to see angels, as well as demons of temptation, while in this life.

According to the teaching of our Fathers, angels and saints, often even Christ and the All holy Virgin, appear to those about to die in order to support them, to strengthen them to avoid the fear caused by death. The demons also appear, especially when they are able to influence certain people because of their passions, and they demand power over their souls. We are reminded of this in the prayer to the All holy Virgin in the service of the Compline ("Apodeipnon"): *At the hour of my death, care for my miserable soul and drive the dark faces of evil spirits far from it.*



From the teaching of the church it is well known that each person has a “guardian angel” protecting him, and this is why there is a special prayer to the guardian angel in the service of the Apodeipnon. Fr. Paisios, a monk on the Holy Mountain, used to tell me that he would often see his guardian angel beside him and embrace him. He used to say that we must strive to reach salvation, so that our guardian angel, who has been to so many pains to protect us and help us in our life, may not go empty-handed to God, if we are not saved due to our indifference.

I remember with emotion that my father, when he entered the Church, would go to the northern gate of the holy Altar and kiss the icon of Archangel Michael and ask him to receive his soul in due time, when he had repented, protect it from evil demons, and lead it to God. Perhaps this prayer, among everything else, helped him have a good dormition and a happy, smiling face in the coffin.

**Question: We read in the Holy Scripture that mercy has exceeded judgment. Does this mean that almsgiving absolves a multitude of sins?**

**Answer:** We have to see what mercy means. In reality, mercy is the feeling of divine grace, the love of God. When we pray saying *Lord have mercy*, we ask God’s mercy, God’s grace. He who experiences divine grace is generous to his brothers with all sorts of charity, expressed by prayer, theological words, material contributions, and thus puts into practice the beatitude *blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy*. (Mt 5:7). In this sense, it can be said that the feeling of God’s mercy and almsgiving transcends judgment.

He who has been transformed spiritually and has been united with God does not fear judgment, for what Christ said applies to him: *I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life*. (Jn 5:24). According to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, there are three judgments. The first occurs throughout our life, when we are faced with the dilemma of whether to follow the will of God or to reject it, when we have to choose between a good and an evil thought. The second judgment takes place when the soul exits the body, according to St. Paul’s words *people are appointed to die once, and then to face judgment*. (Heb 9:27). The third and final judgment will be at the Second Coming of Christ.

The first judgment is important. St. Symeon the New Theologian says that, when a person is united with Christ in this life and sees the uncreated Light, then the judgment has already taken place for him and he does not wait for it at the Second Coming of Christ. This reminds us of the words of Christ I mentioned above.

At this point I would like to repeat the saying by St. Basil the Great and other Fathers of the Church that there are three categories of those who are saved: The **slaves**, who follow

the will of God in order to avoid hell, the **wage-earners** who struggle to earn Paradise as a reward, and the **sons who obey** God’s will out of love for God. So, throughout our life we must advance spiritually and pass from the state of the slave to the state of the wage-earner and from there to the mentality of the son. This means to pass from fear and recompense to love. To love Christ, because He is our Father, our mother, our friend, our brother, our bridegroom and our bride. This way we transcend the judgment.

**Question: Tell us something about sudden death.**

**Answer:** The assessment of sudden death depends on each one’s viewpoint. For secular people, sudden death is good, accepted and desirable, because they will not suffer and they will not be tormented by illnesses and old age. For believing Christians, though, sudden death is bad, because they are not given the possibility to prepare better for their encounter with Christ and the heavenly Church. When someone visits a high-ranking official, he prepares accordingly. We should do the same with respect to our encounter with Christ.

Preparation, by repentance, is essential. This is why Elder Paisios of everlasting memory used to say that cancer is a saintly illness because it has filled Paradise with saints, meaning that a long illness prepares people with prayer and repentance. According to the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, pain cures pleasure. In any case, death is the most certain event. We see it around us, everything dies, all living creatures, our friends, our relatives.

What is not certain and is unknown to us is the hour of death, when death will come. It may happen while sleeping, while walking, while travelling, while working, while entertaining ourselves, etc. This is why we should pray to God daily, as the Church does: *For the completion of our lives in peace and repentance, let us ask the Lord and For a Christian end to our lives, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord*. In the teaching of the holy Fathers we come across the truth that one of the greatest gifts a person can have is the daily **memory of death**. When this is maintained with the grace of God it leads man not to despair, hopelessness, and psychological fear, but rather to inspiration, to prayer, creativity, even in human affairs, because he tries to finish his tasks and prepare properly. When we live each day as if it were the last day in our life, then even sudden death will find us ready.

**Question: Which is the correct expression: the hour of death or the moment of death?**

**Answer:** This depends on how one interprets the words “hour” and “moment.” In speech we often use the word “hour” meaning the moment. But I understand that your question refers to whether death is a process or a moment.

What can be said is that there is a process of death, that is, long illnesses lead man gradually to death, but the separa-

tion of soul and body takes place at a specific moment by the will of God.

This moment is important, because man's mode of existence changes and we cannot know how it will be from then on. We know the state where the soul is attached to our body, which communicates with the creation through the senses. We do not know by experience what is going to happen then and how we will be. At present we usually see the world created by God, people, friends, the beauty of earth, not angels and demons. Then, however, the soul will not see through the senses of the body but will see what is presently invisible. This is why the saints want to be conscious and pray during the process of death, in order to leave this world with prayer and to have the strength and grace of God accompanying them.

We have to say that the privilege of being able to pray during these hours and receive communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, in order to be surrounded by the grace of God when the soul leaves the body, is eliminated in our days with so-called life support equipment in Intensive Care Units. From a Christian viewpoint, the hour and moment of death requires an appropriate preparation, that is, confession, holy Communion, holy unction, prayer by family and friends and our own prayer. However, in Intensive Care Units it is impossible to such an ecclesial-pastoral ministry. Thus, because of modern techniques and drugs, in our days more and more people die not being conscious of what goes on at that hour and moment. This is an important problem. Modern medical methods pose a dilemma. "Prolongation of life or obstruction of death?" With everything that is offered by medical science, the question remains: is our life prolonged so that we repent and devote it to God or is death obstructed, which creates a lot of pain, physical and existential?

In any case, it is a great blessing from God for someone to die surrounded by his beloved ones who pray and, above all, to die living in the Church, with holy Communion, prayer, the blessing of his Spiritual Father, the grace of God and the prayers of the saints. Our permanent wish should be a death like the one depicted in the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, with her in the middle surrounded by the love of Christ, the Apostles, the hierarchs.

**Question: Some people die unexpectedly. Is it true that God takes someone when his probability of salvation is at the maximum?**

**Answer:** We Christians absolutely believe that we have been created by the God of love and that God directs our life, He gives life to us and He takes it when He considers it to be the right moment. We also know that God loves man whom He created and wants his salvation. Therefore, it is certain that God allows each man's death to occur at the most appropriate moment. Of course, God's love does not abolish the freedom of man. Man has the ability to act positively or negatively, to respond to the love of God or to reject Him.

Since you said that some people die unexpectedly, I would like to remind you, that we should remember death continuously, we should not feel that we are going to live eternally on earth, because this is a spiritual sickness. There is an alternation between life and death, similar to the alternation between day and night.

Modern molecular biology stresses that death is inextricably linked with life, because among the genes there are the genes of aging, which are found in the *mitochondria*. So, from the moment of our conception, death exists in the DNA, and we see death in our body with the death of cells and, generally, with aging, the passing of years, wrinkles, illnesses, everything which theologically is called corruptibility and mortality. We should not be myopic and behave like an ostrich. In this process we should know that God did not create us to die, that death is a consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve, and that God loves us and cares for us. He is our affectionate father. It is not correct on the one hand to pray with the *Lord's Prayer*, the well-known *Our Father*, and call God *Father*, and on the other hand to live as orphans.

**Question: Orthodox faith attaches particular importance to repentance. We thank you Lord for giving repentance to us. Can repentance on the time of death be so great that a man is saved, even though he is burdened by great sins?**

**Answer:** In our Orthodox Tradition it is known that sin is not something moralistic; it is ontological, namely, the course of life contrary to nature. Thus, repentance is man's return from life contrary to nature to a life according to nature. With sin man lost his communion with God, with his brother and with the creation. With repentance he acquires this communion once again. So, repentance is associated with a progression in man's liberation from everything enslaving him. The Fathers described this progression in three words: purification, illumination, deification and this is what is called therapy. This happens throughout life. Therefore, salvation is related to therapy. The physician of the body examines us, makes a diagnosis and recommends an appropriate therapeutic method which we should apply. The same holds true for the illness of the soul.

A confession at the time of death opens for man the way to salvation. If he did not have time to be cured spiritually, then the Church with its prayers helps man to salvation, bearing in mind that perfection is endless, it is a dynamic, not a static state. Throughout our life we must have this *spirit of repentance*. We should consider how we were created by God and the point we have reached because of sin. If we read carefully the book of Genesis, according to the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and see how Adam and Eve lived and what they became afterwards because of sin, then repentance will develop inside us.

So, someone who has the "spirit" of repentance throughout his life feels this repentance at the hour of death, and actually

he feels it to a great degree. On the contrary, when he lives his life without repentance it is difficult to show repentance at the last moment.

My Geronda of everlasting memory, Metropolitan of Edessa Kallinikos lived continuously with the memory of death. When he was told by the doctors that he has a tumor in the brain, he confessed right away, he wrote his will, he prayed and had absolute faith to God, saying: Perhaps God said to me *stop. I don't need you any more.* He would pray continuously saying *your will be done.* He gave himself up to God and had a peaceful and saintly end, similar to his whole life.

Therefore, even though there is a possibility for someone who had some spark of love for God in him to repent at the hour of death, we should repent when we are healthy, so as to have the ability to be cured, that is, to proceed from self-love to the love of God and love of men, to reach selfless love out of selfish love.

**Question: After man's death, what are the links between the soul and this world?**

**Answer:** Although the soul is separated from the body, man's hypostasis still exists. As we see in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is conscious of his state, of his relatives who are still alive and he cares for them. Thus, after death, men care for their beloved ones and ask God for their salvation. All our prayers to the saints are based on this truth. Of course, this link between the soul and living persons is spiritual, not material.

In the book of the Revelation of St. John which describes the celestial Divine Liturgy, one can see these relations of the saints with us and their prayer for all people living on earth. This is why our Fathers depicted in the Divine Liturgy this uncreated Divine Liturgy which takes place in the Heavens, in the uncreated Temple. In the Divine Liturgy we live the atmosphere of the heavenly Liturgy and we anticipate it.

We ourselves often feel the love and protection of the saints, as well as of those close to us who have departed from this world, and wish to meet them. A spiritual child of mine was very happy at the hour of death, because, as she said, she would meet this heavenly Church.

Therefore, the soul continues to live after its exit from the body, it is not led to non-existence. If a person lived in repentance during his life, then his soul after exiting the body will enter this heavenly Divine Liturgy and will pray, like a spiritual priest, for the whole world, and will wait for the resurrection of the body. Then the soul will enter the body so that the body too participates in this heavenly Easter celebration.

**Question: What advice should we give to those close to us regarding our attitude to a person about to die on the day, or at the hour or the moment of death?**

**Answer:** The process of death is very important for each man, because in front of him is the road to salvation or the road to eternal perdition. Unfortunately, in these circum-

stances, many people look only after the physical health of their relatives and friends without regard for their eternal course. This is why we should take care that a person who is about to die confesses, receives holy Communion, receives the grace of God through the sacrament of Unction and does everything that our Church has available. In particular, we should live the last moments of the life of our beloved one in prayer. We should consider not simply that we are losing our relative, our friend, but that he is moving from one way of existence (with body and senses) to a different way of existence, without body. So, intense prayer is what is needed at that time.

I remember the last moments of my Geronda; I was beside his bed and could not offer anything else, I just prayed to God for his soul to be received by angels. An aunt of mine who was present thought that I was sad, as I concentrated and prayed. But I was just praying, because that moment is holy and crucial.

Overall, we must experience daily, as St. John Chrysostom says, that the present life is an *inn*. We entered this inn, we live, but we must take care to depart in good hope, without leaving anything here in order not to lose what is there. Furthermore, all of us Christians should realize that death has been defeated by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ; that communion with Christ is a continuous transcendence of death and of the fear of death; that the exit of the soul from the body is a course towards the heavenly Church and the encounter with Christ, the All holy Virgin and the saints; that the soul will return to the body, and the body will be resurrected and live eternally, according to the way it lived on this earth. St. Maximus the Confessor writes that from the moment of death, and especially after the last Judgment, there are two possibilities: those who are in communion with Christ will live in *eternal well-being* and the rest in *eternal woeful being*. So, everyone will enjoy *eternal being*. The difference is between *well* and *woeful*.

Therefore, our advice to the relatives and friends of those about to die is to have faith in Christ and confidence that we are not just citizens of this world, but we are travellers guided to our true country, which is heaven. Our citizenship is above in heaven. The desire for the heavenly land should overwhelm us.



Since our sweet Jesus is so good, compassionate, and kind, why should you despair? We seek one small thing from Him, and He gives us so much! We ask for one beam of light, and He gives us Himself as all Light, Truth, and Love. So humble yourself and rest all your hope in Him.

St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

## HAPPY ECCLESIASTICAL NEW YEAR: WHY ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR IN SEPTEMBER?

*From the "Catalogue of Good Deeds," a publication by St. Elisabeth's Monastery, Minsk, Belarus.*

The first day of September is celebrated as the Ecclesiastical or Church New Year by Orthodox Christians. It is also a day marked by prayers for the environment, reminding us to be good stewards of the world around us.

The old Roman term for this day is *Indictio*, meaning "definition" or "order." This was a day established as the beginning of a fifteen year cycle, marking the re-definition of tax obligations for Roman citizens (especially since Roman soldiers served fifteen-year terms), likely from the time of Caesar Augustus.

Emperor St. Justinian's *novellas* (AD 537) decreed that all official documents of the Empire should include the indiction reference. When attempting to date manuscripts from this era, it can be helpful to know the year of the indiction (I–15), as exact dates or years are less commonly found. And when a date is found, it usually corresponds to *Anno Mundi* or "the year of the world" since the date of Creation. *Anno Mundi* (AM) served as the beginning point for calendars until the modern era in many parts of the world, and is still a liturgical point of reference for both modern Judaism and Christians. (Jews also mark the New Year in September, but on a floating date.)

The date of the creation of the world—as discerned by a literal reading of the Patriarchal histories of the Greek Septuagint—was determined to be around 5500 BC on our modern calendar, with variations here and there. On the Julian calendar, the date of creation was said to be September 1, 5509 (BC), with the birth of Jesus Christ taking place in 5509 AM—that is, 5,509 years from the creation of the world.

In 1597, Patriarch Theophanes I Karykes of Constantinople first utilized a date based on the Christian era. Instead of marking dates based on the foundation of the world, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ became the crux of human history—and thus the distinction between BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini or "in the year of our Lord").

This became official in Constantinople in 1728 and in Russia (by Peter the Great) in 1700, with the Julian calendar still serving as the underlying reckoning of days and months.

While the *Anno Mundi* calendar is no longer mainstream (or part of the civil calendars of predominately Orthodox nations), it still serves as the basis of our liturgical calendar.

### Harvest, Thanksgiving, and Sowing

By marking the start of a new year in September, the Empire—and later, the Orthodox Church—was associating the new year with harvesting crops. As preparations for winter were being made, so too were preparations for the upcoming year. For Christians, it was a time of thanksgiving, remembering the good weather and abundant rain the Lord provided for that year's harvest—something we pray for at every Divine Liturgy.

This draws close parallels with the Feast of Trumpets for the pre-Incarnation people of God (Lev. 23:23–25): *And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. Ye shall do no servile work therein; but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.* As the Synaxarion notes, this was also the day Christ entered a synagogue and read from the scroll of Isaiah (cf. Luke 4:16–30).

By marking the new year at harvest time, we remind ourselves annually of our dependence on both hard work and the blessings

of God. Going beyond material blessings and healthy crops, this applied (as do many of our hymns) to Imperial concerns, including prayers for protection from our enemies.

† † †

*Creator of the universe, setting times and seasons by Your sole authority, bless the cycle of the year of Your grace, O Lord, guarding our rulers and Your nation in peace, at the intercession of the Theotokos, and save us.*

### Apolytikion (Second Tone)

*You who created all things in Your infinite wisdom, and set the times by Your own authority, grant Your Christian people victories. Blessing our comings and goings throughout this year, guide our works according to Your divine will.*

### Kontakion (Fourth Tone)

Happy New Year!



## Άγιο Όρος: Διαφωνείς με τὸν Πατριάρχη Βαρθολομαῖο... Διώκεσαι Διωγμοὶ Μοναχῶν με Ὁρθόδοξο Φρόνημα

Ιστότοπος «Ὁρθοδοξία» & Ἐφημερίδα «Στύλος Ὁρθοδοξίας», <https://orthodoxia.gr/>.

Εἶναι γνωστὸς στὸ Πανελλήνιο ὁ ἀγῶνας τοῦ γέροντα Γαβριήλ κατὰ τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ Παπισμοῦ! Ἡγεῖται μίας προσπάθειας νὰ εὐαισθητοποιήσει καὶ νὰ ἐνημερώσει τοὺς Χριστιανούς γιὰ τοὺς κινδύνους πού καιροφυλαχτοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ οἰκουμενιστικὰ ἀνοίγματα τοῦ Πατριαρχείου. Κι γι' αὐτὸ χαίρει τῆς ἐκτίμησης ἑκατομμυρίων ὀρθοδόξων στὴν Ἑλλάδα ἀλλὰ καὶ σ' ὅλο τὸν ὀρθόδοξο κῶρο. Αὐτὸ φυσικὰ δὲν πέρασε ἀπαρατήρητο ἀπὸ τὸ Φανάρι, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐπιδιώκει διώκοντας τοὺς μοναχοὺς πού βρίσκονται δίπλα του νὰ τὸν ἀποκόψει καὶ ἐμμέσως νὰ τὸν ἐξαναγκάσει νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Όρος. Μέσα στὸ πλαίσιο αὐτὸ ἡ Ἱερά Μονὴ Κουτλουμουσίου καὶ ὁ ἡγούμενος αὐτῆς πιεζόμενοι ἀπὸ τὸ Φανάρι ἐπέβαλλε ἀργία στὸν μοναδικὸ ἱερομόναχο πού λειτουργοῦσε στὸ κελλί τοῦ γέροντος Γαβριήλ ἐξ οὐ καὶ ἡ ἀντίδραση τοῦ γέροντα.

† † †

**Μοναχὸς Γαβριήλ**

**Ἱερὸν Κελλίον Ὁσίων Χριστοδούλου τοῦ ἐν Πάτμῳ καὶ Ἀρσενίου Καππαδόκου Ἱερῆς Μονῆς Κουτλουμουσίου Ἁγ. Ὁρους Ἄθω**

**Ἐν Ἀγίῳ Ὁρει τῇ 25-6-2022**

**Πανασιολογιώτατον Καθηγούμενον Ἀρχιμανδρίτην π. Νικόλαον καὶ σεβαστὴν Γεροντίαν Ἰ. Μ. Κουτλουμουσίου**

Σεβαστοὶ πατέρες Εὐλογεῖτε.

Μὲ τὸν ἀρμόζοντα σεβασμὸ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ὡς μοναστηριακὴν ἀρχὴν ὄλων τῶν ἐξαρθρηματικῶν ἀδελφῶν τῆς Μονῆς μας, θὰ ἤθελα νὰ σᾶς ἀπασχολήσω γιὰ ἓνα σοβαρότατο θέμα, τὸ ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπισθεῖ μὲ φιλάδελφα αἰσθήματα καὶ μὲ βάση τὴν ὑποχρέωση ὄλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα ἡμῶν τῶν Μοναχῶν, νὰ μὴν ὑποχωροῦμε σὲ θέματα Πίστεως καὶ Ἀληθείας.

Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν ἀδικαιολόγητο ἀφιλάδελφο καὶ ἐξοντωτικὸ διωγμὸ πού ὑφίσταται ἐδῶ καὶ χρόνια ὁ ἀδελφός μας Γέρων Κοσμάς Ἱερομόναχος, τῆς Καλύβης τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀθανασίου Ἀλεξανδρείας, πού ἀνήκει εἰς τὴν ὑφ' ὑμᾶς Σκήτην τοῦ Ἁγίου Παντελεήμονος. Ὁ ἐν λόγῳ ἱερομόναχος ζεῖ στὸ Ἅγιον Όρος ἐδῶ καὶ τριάντα δύο (32) χρόνια, ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων τὰ τελευταῖα εἴκοσι (20) ὡς Κουτλουμουσιανὸς ἐξαρθρηματικὸς μοναχὸς στὴν Καλύβη πού ἐμνημονεύσαμε.

Οἱ λόγοι πού μὲ ὄθησαν νὰ σᾶς ἀπευθύνω ἀδελφικὰ τὴν παρούσα ἐπιστολὴ εἶναι οἱ ἐξῆς: Ὁ ἱερομόναχος Κοσμάς εἶναι πνευματικόν μου τέκνον, καὶ λόγῳ αὐτοῦ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ δεσμοῦ γνωρίζω τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἰδιαίτερος τις κατηγορίες πού τοῦ προσάπτουν οἱ διοικήσεις τῆς Ἱερῆς Μονῆς καὶ τῆς Σκήτης, οἱ ὁποῖες εἶναι ἄδικες καὶ ἀνυπόστατες παντελῶς.

Ἡ ἀπόφασί του νὰ μὴ μετέχει τῆς κοινῆς λατρείας στὸ Καθολικὸ τῆς Σκήτης, ὡς καὶ ἡ ἀποφυγὴ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς κοινωνίας μὲ τοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Σκήτης, ἔχουν δογματικὸ καὶ ἱεροκανονικὸ ὑπόβαθρο. Δὲν θέλει νὰ μνημονεύει τὸν αἰρετίζοντα πατριάρχη Βαρθολομαῖο, πρωτεργάτη καὶ στύλο τῆς παναίρεσης τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, διότι μνημονεύοντάς τον δηλώνει ὅτι πιστεύει καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ ἴδια.

Ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἀποφυγὴ κοινωνίας πρὸς τοὺς πατέρες τῆς Σκήτης πράττει ὀρθῶς, διότι ἔχουν κοινωνία μὲ τοὺς σχισματικούς καὶ ἀχειροτόνητους τῆς Οὐκρανίας, τοὺς ὁποίους δὲν ἀναγνωρίζουν οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς μισοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους, οἱ δέκα ἀπὸ τις δεκατέσσερις αὐτοκέφαλες ἐκκλησίες. Θὰ σκεπτόσασταν ποτὲ νὰ συστήσετε στοὺς κληρικούς καὶ μοναχοὺς αὐτῶν τῶν δέκα ἐκκλησιῶν νὰ ἔχουν κοινωνία μὲ τοὺς σχισματικούς, ὅπως ἔπραξαν δυστυχῶς καὶ κάποιοι Ἄγιορεῖτες ἡγούμενοι, ἱερομόναχοι καὶ μοναχοί; Μήπως ἀντὶ νὰ διώκετε τὸν π. Κοσμά, ἔπρεπε ὡς Ἱερά Μονὴ νὰ ζητήσετε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἱερά Κοινότητα νὰ μὴ ἀναγνωρισθεῖ ὁ νέος ἀντικανονικὸς μητροπολίτης Κιέβου Ἐπιφάνιος, καὶ νὰ μὴν ἐπιτραπῆ στοὺς κληρικούς τῆς νέας ψευδοαυτοκέφαλῆς ἐκκλησίας νὰ ἐνεργοῦν ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι κληρικοί, ὅταν ἐπισκέπτονται τὸ Ἅγιον Όρος;

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ βασικὴ αἰτία τῆς, καθ' ὑμᾶς, ἀπαράδεκτης καὶ δῆθεν ἀντι-μοναχικῆς συμπεριφορᾶς τοῦ καλοῦ ἱερομονάχου, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀλλάξετε γνώμη μετὰ τις ἀπαρκέστατες ἐξηγήσεις πού σᾶς ἔδωσε γραπτῶς μὲ τὴν ἀπὸ 31.8.2021/13.9.2021 ἐπιστολὴ του, τὸ περιεχόμενο τῆς ὁποίας γνωστοποίησε καὶ σὲ ἐμένα ὡς πνευματικὸ του πατέρα, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο συμφωνῶ ἀπολύτως.

Ὁ μοναχὸς πρέπει βέβαια νὰ σέβεται τις μοναστηριακὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ νὰ τηρεῖ τὰ ὑπεσχημένα, τις συνάξεις, τὰ ὁμόλογα, τις κοινὲς πρὸς τὴν Μονὴ καὶ πρὸς τὴν Σκήτη ὑποχρεώσεις. Πάνω ὅμως ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτά, ἀπὸ τὴν πολυπροβαλλόμενη ἀδιάκριτη ὑπακοὴ στοὺς ἡγουμένους καὶ στοὺς ἐπισκόπους, ἀπὸ τὸν παπικῆς ἔμπνευσης ἐπισκοποκεντρισμὸ, ἀκόμη καὶ πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν κοινὴ προσευχὴ καὶ λατρεία εἶναι ἡ ὁμολογία τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, τῆς σώζουσας Ἀλήθειας, ἡ ἀπουσία τῆς ὁποίας καθιστᾶ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα ἄχρηστα. Αὐτὸ δὲν λέγει ὁ μέγας μοναστικὸς ἡγέτης Ὁσίου Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης ἐπικρίνοντας ὄσους μοναχοὺς τῆς ἐποχῆς

του δικαιολογοῦσαν τὶς καινοτομίες καὶ τῆς αἱρέσεις; «Ἐὰν λοιπὸν μοναχοὶ εἰσὶ τινὲς ἐν τοῖς νῦν καιροῖς δειξάτωσαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων. Ἔργον δὲ μοναχοῦ μὴδὲ τὸ τυχὸν ἀνέχεσθαι καινοτομεῖσθαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἵνα μὴ ὑπόδειγμα τοῖς λαϊκοῖς προτιθέμενοι αἱρέσεως καὶ αἰρετικῆς συγκοινωνίας τῆς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀπωλείας λόγον ὑφέξωσιν.» (PG 99, 1049).

Τὸ νὰ μὴ ἐπικοινωνοῦμε μὲ αἰρετικούς καὶ σχισματικούς εἶναι σταθερὸ δίδαγμα τῆς Ἀποστολικῆς καὶ Πατερικῆς Παραδόσεως, καὶ εἶναι ἀναρτίμητες οἱ εὐαγγελικὲς καὶ πατερικὲς θέσεις. Περιορίζομαι νὰ ὑπενθυμίσω ἀπλῶς δύο παραδείγματα, ἐνὸς μεγάλου ἀσκητοῦ ποὺ ἐθεμελίωσε τὸν Μοναχισμό καὶ ἀποκαλεῖται καθηγητῆς τῆς ἐρήμου, καὶ τοῦ μεγίστου τῶν θεολόγων τῆς δευτέρας χιλιετίας, ποὺ ἐλάμπρυνε ὡς Ἁγιορείτης καὶ ἐδόξασε ὀλόκληρη τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Ἀναφέρομαι στὸν Μέγα Ἀντώνιο καὶ στὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο Παλαμᾶ,

Γιὰ τὸν πρῶτο μᾶς διηγεῖται ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος, ὅτι ἦταν θαυμαστὸς καὶ εὐσεβῆς σὲ θέματα πίστεως. Δὲν ἐπικοινωνῆσε ποτὲ μὲ τοὺς σχισματικούς Μελιτιανούς, οὔτε μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς Μανιχαίους καὶ τοὺς Ἀρειανούς, ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων κάποιους τοὺς ἔδιωξε ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι του, ὅταν ἀπὸ τὴν συζήτηση ἔμαθε πὼς πλανῶνται. Εἶπε μάλιστα πὼς οἱ λόγοι

τους εἶναι χειρότεροι ἀπὸ τὸ δηλητήριο τοῦ φιδιοῦ: «Καὶ τὰ πίστει δὲ πάνυ θαυμαστοὺς ἦν καὶ εὐσεβῆς. Οὔτε γὰρ Μελιτιανοῖς τοῖς σχισματικοῖς ποτε κεκοινωνήκεν εἰδὼς αὐτῶν τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς πονηρίαν καὶ ἀποστασίαν οὔτε Μονιχαίους ἢ ἄλλοις τισὶν αἰρετικοῖς ὠμίλησε φιλικά, ἢ μόνον ἄχρι νουθεσίας τῆς εἰς εὐσέβειαν μεταβολῆς, ἠγούμενος καὶ παραγγέλλων τὴν τούτων φιλίαν καὶ ὁμιλίαν βλάβην καὶ ἀπώλειαν εἶναι ψυχῆς. Οὕτω γοῦν καὶ τὴν τῶν Ἀρειανῶν αἵρεσιν ἐβδελύσσετο, παρήγγελλέ τε πᾶσι μῆτε ἐγγίζειν αὐτοῖς μῆτε τὴν κακοπιστίαν αὐτῶν ἔχειν. Ἀπελθόντας γοῦν ποτέ τινος πρὸς αὐτὸν τῶν Ἀρειομανιτῶν, ἀνακρίνας καὶ μαθὼν ἀσεβοῦντας, ἐδίωξεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους λέγων ὄφρων ἰοῦ χείρονας εἶναι τοὺς λόγους αὐτῶν» (Βίος 68).

Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, ὡς Ἁγιορείτης ἱερομόναχος, διέκοψε τὴν μνημόνευση τοῦ αἰρετιζόντος Πατριάρχου Ἰωάννου Καλέκα. Σὲ ἐπιστολῇ του «Πρὸς

τὸν εὐλαβέστατον ἐν Μοναχοῖς κὺρ Διονύσιον» ἐξ ἀρχῆς σημειώνει ὅτι ὑπάρχουν τρία εἶδη ἀθείας. Στὸ πρῶτο εἶδος ἀνήκουν οἱ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ἄθεοι, ὅσοι δηλαδὴ ἀρνοῦνται τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Στὸ δεύτερο εἶδος ἀθείας ἀνήκουν οἱ αἰρετικοί, ποὺ διαστρεβλώνουν τὴν περὶ Θεοῦ διδασκαλία, καὶ στὸ τρίτο εἶδος ἀθείας ἀνήκουν ὅσοι σιωποῦν καὶ δὲν ἐλέγχουν τοὺς ἄθεους τοῦ πρῶτου εἶδους καὶ τοὺς αἰρετικούς τοῦ δευτέρου. Ὅπως καὶ σήμερα ὑπῆρχαν καὶ τότε Ἁγιορείτες ποὺ δὲν ἤθελαν νὰ ἔλθουν σὲ σύγκρουση μὲ τὸν αἰρετιζόντα πατριάρχη. Ἐπέκριναν μάλιστα τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο, διότι, ἀντὶ νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ νὰ ἀσκεῖ τὴν ὑπακοή, ὅπως συμβουλεύουν καὶ οἱ σημερινοὶ αἰρετιζόντες πατριάρχες, ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ἠγούμενοι, ἀναλώθηκε στὸν ἔλεγχο τῆς πλάνης τοῦ Βαρλαάμ.

Δὲν διστάζει ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος, ἐνῶ ἦταν ἀκόμη ἱερομόναχος, νὰ ἐλέγξει τὸν Βαρλααμίτη πατριάρχη Ἀντιοχείας Ἰγνατίο μὲ αὐστηρὴ γλώσσα καὶ νὰ γράψει ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑπάρχει ἐκεῖ ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἡ Ἀλήθεια. Ἡ πλάνη καὶ ἡ αἵρεση σὲ βγάζουν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Τώρα οἱ πλανημένοι καὶ οἱ αἰρετιζόντες διαδίδουν στοὺς ἀκατήχητους πιστοὺς ὅτι τὸ νὰ μὴ μνημονεύεις τὸν πατριάρχη ἢ τὸν ἐπίσκοπο, ἢ ἱεροκανονικὴ δηλαδὴ Ἀποτείχιση, σὲ θέτει



**Γέροντας Γαβριήλ  
Ἰερὸν Κελλίον Ὁσίων Χριστοδούλου τοῦ ἐν Πάτμῳ  
καὶ Ἀρσενίου Καππαδόκου  
Ἰερᾶς Μονῆς Κουτλουμουσίου, Ἁγ. Ὁρους Ἄθω**

ἐκτὸς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐνῶ μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία εἶναι οἱ αἰρετικοὶ οἰκουμενιστές.

Ἦταν λοιπὸν ἐκτὸς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς ποὺ δὲν μνημόνευε τὸν πατριάρχη; Καὶ ἦσαν ἐκτὸς Ἐκκλησίας οἱ τρεῖς ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ὀλόκληρο τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, μεταξὺ αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος, ποὺ διέκοψαν τὸ μνημόσυνο τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἀθηνᾶγορα ἐπὶ τρία ἔτη (1969-1972). Λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος: «Καὶ γὰρ οἱ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἀληθείας εἰσὶ καὶ οἱ μὴ τῆς ἀληθείας ὄντες οὐδὲ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκκλησίας εἰσὶ, καὶ τοσοῦτο μᾶλλον, ὅσον ἂν καὶ σφῶν αὐτῶν καταψεύδοιντο, ποιμένας καὶ ἀρχιποίμενας ἱεροὺς ἑαυτούς καλοῦντες καὶ ὑπ' ἀλλήλων καλούμενοι μὴδὲ γὰρ προσώποις τὸν χριστιανισμόν, ἀλλ' ἀληθεία καὶ ἀκριβεῖα πίστεως χαρακτηρίζεσθαι μεμνήμεθα.» (Ἀναίρεσις γράμματος Ἰγνατίου 3).

Ὁ δεύτερος λόγος πού με παρακίνησε νὰ γράψω αὐτήν τὴν ἐπιστολή, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ δηλώσω τὴν συμφωνία μου γιὰ τὴν ὁμολογητικὴ καὶ ἄξια ἐπαίνων στάση τοῦ ἱερομονάχου Γέροντος Κοσμᾶ, πού στηρίζεται στὴν διαχρονικὴ διδασκαλία καὶ πράξη τῶν Ἁγίων, ἦταν ἡ ἐκτίμησή μου, καὶ τὸ ἐκφράζω αὐτὸ με βαθύτατη θλίψη καὶ πικρία, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ χρόνιος καὶ ἀπάνθρωπος διωγμὸς ἐναντίον του οὐσιαστικὰ στρέφεται καὶ πάλιν πρὸς τὸ ταπεινὸ μου πρόσωπο. Ὁ ἱερομόναχος Κοσμᾶς ταυτίζεται ἀπολύτως πρὸς τὶς θέσεις καὶ ἀπόψεις μου γιὰ ὅσα συνταράσσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία τὸν τελευταῖο καιρὸ καὶ ἐκθεμελιώνουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησιολογία, καὶ γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸ εἶναι ὁ μόνος ἱερεὺς τῆς περὶ τὸ Κελλίον μου περιοχῆς, στὸν ὁποῖο μπορῶ νὰ λειτουργοῦμαι καὶ νὰ κοινωῶ τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων. Μὲ τὴν ἐπιβολή λοιπὸν εἰς αὐτόν, χωρὶς σοβαροῦς λόγους, χωρὶς συγκεκριμένα παραπτώματα, τῆς ποινῆς τῆς ἀργίας, ἡ ὁποία κατὰ τὸ Κανονικὸ Δίκαιο ἐπιβάλλεται μὲ συγκεκριμένο κατηγορητήριον καὶ συγκεκριμένη διαδικασία, οὐσιαστικὰ ἐπιδιώκετε νὰ μᾶς ἀφήσετε ἀλειτούργητους καὶ ἀκοινωνήτους, ἐμένα καὶ τοὺς περὶ ἐμὲ πατέρες, ὅπως ἐπράξατε ἐνωρίτερα διώκοντας τὸν παπα-Εἰρηναῖο ἐντελῶς ἄδικα.

Ὁ τρίτος λόγος γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο σᾶς γράφω αὐτὴν τὴν ἐπιστολή εἶναι ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἀποφευχθεῖ ὁ σκανδαλισμὸς τῶν πιστῶν, πού σέβονται καὶ τιμοῦν τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, ὅταν πληροφορηθοῦν τὰ ἀπάνθρωπα καὶ πρωτάκουστα ἢ ἀνήκουστα μέτρα πού πήρατε ἐναντίον τοῦ ἱερομονάχου Κοσμᾶ, γιὰ νὰ κάμψετε τὶς ὀρθόδοξες ἀντιστάσεις του. Σᾶς εἶναι γνωστὰ καὶ δὲν θὰ τὰ ἀπαριθμήσω. Δὲν τὸν ἐκάμψατε οὔτε μὲ τὴν ἀπειλή τῆς ἐκδίωξης ἀπὸ τὸ Κελλί του, οὔτε μὲ τὴν διακοπὴ παροχῆς νεροῦ ἐπὶ ἐννέα (9) μῆνες. **Οἱ μοναχοὶ διώκονται, δὲν διώκουν.** Δὲν θὰ ἐπιχειρηματολογήσω περισσότερο, διότι γνωρίζω ὅτι θὰ σᾶς παροργίσω, ἂν ἤδη δὲν σᾶς παρῶργισα, ὑποστηρίζοντας ἕναν ἀδίκως διωκόμενο, συκοφαντούμενο καὶ ἐκβιαζόμενο ἀδελφὸ μας. Ἡ πατρικὴ καὶ ποιμαντικὴ σας μέριμνα ἔπρεπε νὰ στραφεῖ πρὸς ἄλλους ἐξαρτηματικούς ἀδελφούς τῆς Μονῆς μας, πού ἔχουν ξεφύγει τελείως ἀπὸ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς μοναχικῆς ζωῆς καὶ τελείωσης, καὶ αὐτοὺς ἔπρεπε νὰ νουθετήσετε καὶ νὰ συνεισέτε, καὶ ὄχι τὸν παπα-Κοσμᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος μὲ τὴν δική μου καθοδήγηση καὶ ἄλλων Γερόντων πράττει τὰ αὐτονόητα, τὰ εὐάρεστα εἰς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ ὄχι εἰς τοὺς ἰσχυροὺς καὶ ἐξουσιαστὲς τῶν τοῦ κόσμου.

Οἱ ἀδίκως καὶ ἀντικανονικῶς ἐπιβαλλόμενες ποινές, ὅταν προέρχονται ὄχι ἀπὸ ἀδελφικὴ καὶ πατρικὴ μέριμνα, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ προσπάθεια ἐκβιασμοῦ καὶ ἐκφοβισμοῦ πρὸς ἐπιτυχίαν ἀντορθόδοξων στόχων, δὲν

ἐπικυρώνονται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλοίμονον ἂν ὁ Θεὸς ἐνέκρινε τοὺς διωγμοὺς αἰρετικῶν καὶ αἰρετιζόντων ἐναντίον τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων.

Εὐχόμαι ὁ Θεὸς ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῶν ὁμολογητῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων καὶ ἰδιαιτέρως τῶν Ἁγιορειτῶν Πατέρων νὰ ἐνισχύσει περαιτέρω τὸν παπα-Κοσμᾶν εἰς τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πορεία καὶ νὰ φωτίσει καὶ ὑμᾶς νὰ σταματήσετε νὰ τὸν διώκετε ἀδίκως. Ἡ ποινὴ τῆς ἀργίας πού τοῦ ἐπιβάλατε ὡς πρὸς τὸ ἱεροπρατεῖν ἐπὶ ἕξι μῆνες δὲν εἶναι «ἀφυπνιστικὴ», ὅπως νομίζετε, ἀλλὰ ἄδικη καὶ ἐκδικητικὴ! Ἄλλοι πρέπει νὰ ἀφυπνισθοῦν καὶ νὰ κατανοήσουν τὰ διὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς αὐτονόητα. Κατὰ ἰδική μου συμβουλή καὶ προτροπή, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλων Γερόντων, δὲν θὰ τηρήσει τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀργίας, διότι δὲν εἶναι σύμφωνος οὔτε μὲ τὸ γράμμα οὔτε μὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, καὶ συνεπῶς οὔτε μὲ τὸν Καταστατικὸ Χάρτη τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ τὸν Ἑσωτερικὸ Κανονισμό τῆς Μονῆς.

Μὲ σεβασμὸ καὶ ἐλπίζοντας στὴν παύση τοῦ διωγμοῦ ἐναντίον μας.

Μοναχὸς Γαβριήλ



## Ἡ Κιβωτὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

**Ἡ** Κωνσταντινούπολις ἦταν ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, δηλαδὴ τῆς ἀληθινῆς πίστεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ κ' οἱ στρατιῶτες πού τὴν φυλάγανε ἦταν «θηγόροι ὀπλίται παρατάξεως Κυρίου». Πολλοὶ βασιλιάδες τῆς θεολογούσανε καὶ συνθέτανε ὕμνους καὶ τροπάρια, καὶ κάμποσοι ἀπ' αὐτοὺς καλογερέσανε, καὶ πεθάνανε ἐν μετανοίᾳ στὰ μοναστήρια.

Τὸ ἴδιο κάνανε καὶ πολλοὶ στρατηγοί, καὶ πλῆθος ἀμέτρητο στρατιῶτες γινόντανε καλόγεροι κ' ἀσκητάδες, καὶ κρεμάζανε τὸ σπαθὶ καὶ τὸ κοντάρι τους στὸ κελλί τους σὰν ἄρματα ἁγιασμένα πού διαφεντέσανε τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἀληθινά, ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ πιάσουνε ἄρματα στὰ χέρια τους ὅσοι σηκώσανε τὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ τὸν ἀκολουθήσανε. Μὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἀδύνατος, κ' οἱ περιστάσεις τῆς ζωῆς τὸν κάνουνε νὰ συνταιριάζει μ' αὐτὲς τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπ' ἐκείνους τοὺς πολεμιστὲς δὲν ἦτανε αἰμοβόροι, κ' οὔτε θέλανε νὰ σκοτώσουν εἴτε ν' ἀρπάξουνε τὰ πράγματα τῶν ἄλλων, ἀλλὰ πολεμοῦσανε γιὰ νὰ μὴν μποῦνε στὸ βασιλείο τους οἱ ἀλλόθρησκοι καὶ καταλύσουνε τὴν ἀληθινὴν πίστη.

Το παράδοξο είναι πώς οι Βυζαντινοί θεωρούσαν πιδ επικίνδυνους για την θρησκεία τους τους φράγκους που ήταν «Χριστιανοί», παρὰ τους τούρκους που ήταν αλλόθρησκοι. Οί φράγκοι είχαν ρημάξει την Πόλη κι' όλόκληρο τὸ βασίλειο στὸν καιρὸ τῶν Σταυροφόρων, κ' ὕστερα οἱ Καταλανοὶ τὸ φάγανε σὰν τὴν ἀκρίδα, ἔχοντας γιὰ σημαία τὸν σταυρὸ.

Ὅποιος θέλει νὰ δεῖ τί ἀντίχριστοι ἦταν αὐτοὶ οἱ τυχοδιῶκτες, οἱ Καταλανοί, ἄς διαβάσει τὴν ἱστορία ποὺ ἔγραψε ἓνας Μουντάνερ, ποὺ ἦταν ὁ γραμματισμένος τους καὶ θὰ ἀνατριχιάσει ἀπὸ τίς παληανθρωπιές ποὺ κάνανε οἱ πατριῶτες του γιὰ νὰ πνίξουνε τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία· τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία ποὺ τοὺς εἶχε δώσει τὴ θρησκεία τὴν ὁποία λέγανε τάχα πὼς εἶχανε, σκοτώνοντας καὶ ληστεύοντας τοὺς Γραικοὺς ποὺ τοὺς λέγανε αἰρετικούς, αὐτοὶ οἱ «ἀληθινοὶ» μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὅλοι οἱ ὑπῆκοοι τοῦ Πάπα ἐρχόντανε στὴν Ἀνατολὴ ντυμένοι μὲ προβατοπροβιά, ἐνῶ ἦταν ἀπὸ μέσα

**λῦκοι. Ἡ ὑποκρισία καὶ τὸ κρυφοδάγκωμα ἦταν τὸ μεγαλύτερο ὄπλο τους.**

Πονηροί, δίβουλοι, φανατικοί. Ἐνῶ οἱ τούρκοι κ' οἱ ἄλλοι μωχαμετάνοι, μπορεῖ νάχανε τὴ σκληρότητα ποὺ ἔχουνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ πολέμου, μὰ εἶχανε καὶ καλωσύνη, πολλὰ γενναῖα αἰ-



σθήματα, ἀγάπη στὴ δικαιοσύνη, φόβο Θεοῦ, ἐπειδὴ ἦταν πιδ ἀπλοὶ καὶ ζούσανε πιδ φυσικὴ ζωὴ.

Γιὰ τοῦτο οἱ Πολῖτες λέγανε: «Καλύτερα νὰ δοῦμε στὴν Πόλη σαρίκι τούρκικο, παρὰ παπικὴ μίτρα». Ὁ ἐπίσκοπος Ἐφέσου, ὁ Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, στάθηκε πύργος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καταπάνω στὴν πανουργία τῆς Ρώμης, καθὼς κ' ὁ μαθητὴς του Γεννάδιος ὁ Σχολάριος, ὁ πρῶτος πατριάρχης ὕστερ' ἀπὸ τὴν Ἄλωση Ἑλλήνας ὀρθοδοξότατος καὶ σοφώτατος, ποὺ ἀξιώθηκε, ὅπως πρόβλεψε, νὰ πάρει ἀπὸ τὸν σουλτὰν Μωάμεθ τὴ θρησκευτικὴ διοίκηση τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ νὰ γίνεῖ γενάρχης τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Γραικῶν.

Αὐτοὶ οἱ μακάριοι κ' ἄλλοι ὅμοιοί τους ἐσώσανε τὴν φυλὴ μας, ὅπως ἀποδείχθηκε ἀπὸ ὅσα ἀκολουθήσανε ἕως σήμερα. Οἱ τούρκοι πήραν τὴν ἐπικράτεια, μὰ ἡ θρησκεία μας, καὶ μαζί της κ' ἡ φυλὴ μας, φυλάχθηκε καὶ δὲν χάθηκε. Ἐνῶ ἂν παίρνανε τὴν Πόλη οἱ φράγκοι, σύντομα θὰ σβύνανε καὶ τὰ δυό, κ' ἡ πίστη μας κ' ἡ φυλὴ μας.

Καὶ γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ αὐτὸ καλά, θὰ ἀναφέρω λίγα λόγια τοῦ σοφοῦ Κοραῆ ποὺ λέγει: «Δια τὴν δεισιδαμονίαν ταύτην μᾶς ὀνειδίζουν (οἱ Δυτικοί),

καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν ἀποδίδουν τὸ πείσμα τοῦ κοινοῦ λαοῦ νὰ μὴν ἐνωθεῖ μὲ τοὺς Παπιστάς, καὶ τὴν σταθερὰν αὐτοῦ ἀντίστασιν εἰς τοὺς ἐπιθυμοῦντας νὰ τὸν ἐνώσωσιν αὐτοκράτορας. Εἰς τὴν δεισιδαμονίαν ὅμως ταύτην (ἂν ἐγέννησε ποτὲ τί καλὸν ἢ δεισιδαμονία) χρεωστοῦμεν οἱ σημερινοὶ Γραικοὶ τὴν ὑπαρξίν μας, χωρὶς τὸ εὐτυχέστατον τοῦτο πείσμα των πρὸ ἡμῶν, καὶ ἡ δεισιδαμονία ἤθελεν ἀυξηθῆ ἐπὶ πλεόν, καὶ τὰ πολυπληθῆ τάγματα τῶν Δυτικῶν μοναχῶν ἐμελλον νὰ καταβρωμίσωσι τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς τάλαιπώρου Ἑλλάδος, καὶ τὰ Νερωνικὰ τῆς Ἱερᾶς Ἐξετάσεως κριτήρια νὰ φλογίζωσι τοὺς Ἑλληνας, ὡς κατέφλεξαν πολλὰς μυριάδας Δυτικῶν, καὶ ἡ Ἀνατολικὴ Ἐκκλησία νὰ ὑποταχθῆ ὡς εἰς κεφαλὴν τὸν Πάπαν».

Ἄς τὰ προσέξουνε καλὰ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς δικούς μας δυτικολάτρεις, καὶ μάλιστα θεολόγοι, καθηγηταὶ καὶ κληρικοί...

Μετὰ τὸ πάρσιμο τῆς Πόλης, μ' ὄλο ποὺ ὁ τούρκος μᾶς διοίκησε φρόνιμα, καὶ μὲ τὸ φέρεσιμό του, ἀκόμα

καὶ μὲ τὴ θεοσέβειά του, μᾶς ἔκανε νὰ φυλάξουμε καλύτερα καὶ μὲ περισσότερο ζῆλο τὴν πίστη μας, δὲν ἔπαψαν οἱ Γραικοὶ νὰ ὀνειρεύονται τὴν ἀνάστασι τοῦ γένους καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴ ἐλευθερία τους, πρὸ πάντων στὰ μέρη ποὺ κυβερνοῦσανε σκληροὶ

πασάδες. Πολλοὶ ἄρματωλοὶ ζούσανε στὰ βουνὰ σὰν θηρία, μὲ τ' ἄρματα στὰ χέρια μέρα-νύχτα, θρεμμένοι μὲ τίς ἱστορίες τοῦ Παλαιολόγου καὶ τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας, ἔχοντας γιὰ φυλαχτὸ τὴν Παναγία, τὸν Ἅγιο Γιώργη καὶ τὸν Ἅγιο Δημήτρη, μὴν παρατώντας τὴν προσευχὴ, πιστεύοντας πὼς ὁ Χριστὸς ἦτανε μαζί τους, καὶ στοχαζόμενοι πὼς βρισκότανε κοντὰ ἡ μέρα τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὲ τὴν Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ γένους ποὺ ἐστερέωσε τὴ θρησκεία του. Αὐτοὶ οἱ καπιτανεοὶ δὲν ἦτανε γιὰ τὸν λαὸ μοναχὰ πολεμιστὰ τῆς πατρίδας τους, μὰ καὶ ὑπερασπιστὰ τῆς πίστες μας, οἱ ἴδιοι ποὺ πολεμήσανε στὴν Πόλη «ὑπὲρ πίστεως καὶ πατρίδος».

Ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς του Εἰκοσιένα Κασομούλης λέγει πὼς «ἡ καταγωγὴ των εἶναι ἀρχαιότατη καὶ κατεβαίνει ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Βασιλείας» δηλαδὴ τοῦ Βυζαντίου. «Τὰ λείψανα ταῦτα τοῦ στρατοῦ», λέγει, «ἢ μὲ ἄλλους λόγους οἱ Ἄρματωλοὶ παρὰ τῶν ἐντοπίων Ἑλλήνων καλούμενοι καὶ χαϊδούτ (κλέπται) παρὰ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν, ἐχαίροντο κάποια προνόμια ἀνεξαρτησίας κληρονόμοι τοῦ ἀνεξαρτήτου πνεύματος τῶν προκατόχων των». **Αὐτοὶ ἦταν ἡ ἐλπίδα τοῦ ἔθνους.**



## Τηλεόραση... Ο Άμβωνας της Νέας Έποχής

ΠΗΓΗ: «Ψύγματα Ορθοδοξίας», 13-11-2021.



Όταν κάποιος παρακολουθεί τηλεόραση, δέχεται μια ακτινοβολία που τον βάζει σε μια κατάσταση όμοια με αυτήν που πετυχαίνουν οι ύπνωτιστές. Δεν πρόκειται για μια ακόμη θεωρία συνωμοσίας, αφού το παραπάνω έχει αποδειχθεί επιστημονικά. Μέσα σε μόλις 30 δευτερόλεπτα τηλεοπτικής παρακολούθησης, ο ανθρώπινος εγκέφαλος μπαίνει σε μια σταθερή φάση, όπου παράγει μόνο χαμηλά κύματα άλφα, που αποτυπώνονται και σε εγκεφαλογράφημα.

Σε ένα πείραμα, όπου συνέδεσαν μερικά παιδιά σε μηχανήματα EEG, οι τηλεοράσεις ήταν προγραμματισμένες να σβήσουν μόλις οι εγκέφαλοι των παιδιών έπιαναν τα κύματα άλφα. Παρά τις οδηγίες που τους είχαν δοθεί, για να αυτοσυνγεντρωθούν, κανένα από αυτά δεν μπόρεσε να κρατήσει την τηλεόραση άναμμένη περισσότερο από 30 δευτερόλεπτα.

Η εγκεφαλική αυτή κατάσταση είναι ίδια με αυτήν που χρησιμοποιούν οι ύπνωτιστές και οι θεραπευτές, για να βοηθήσουν ανθρώπους να κόψουν το κάπνισμα, να μειώσουν το φαγητό, κλπ. Πρόκειται για μια κατάσταση όπου παύει σχεδόν τελείως η συνειδητότητα, και στην ουσία παρακάμπτεται, έτσι ώστε οι όποιες οδηγίες δίνονται, να πηγαίνουν κατευθείαν στο υποσυνείδητο. Στη συνέχεια, το υποσυνείδητο μυστικά και σιωπηλά, κατευθύνει τις συνειδητές δραστηριότητες σύμφωνα με τις οδηγίες που του δίνονται. Σε αυτή τη κατάσταση συνειδησης, όπως επιβεβαιώνουν οι ύπνωτιστές, οποιαδήποτε προφορική ή οπτική οδηγία δίνεται, εκλαμβάνεται από τον εγκέφαλο ως έντολη.

Στην αρχή, ο εγκέφαλος ξμπαινε σε αυτή τη διαδικασία εξαιτίας των λάμπων της αναλογικής τηλεόρασης που όφειλονταν στην τεχνολογία των καθοδικών ακτίνων που χρησιμοποιούνταν. Κανονικά, η μετάβαση στην ψηφιακή τηλεόραση θα έπρεπε να είχε αλλάξει τα πράγματα. Στην πραγματικότητα όμως, η ψηφιακή τεχνολογία επιτρέπει έναν πιο λεπτό χειρισμό και έλεγχο του ρυθμού των λάμπων, με αποτέλεσμα ένα πιο βέλτιστο ύπνωτικό αποτέλεσμα. Η πολλή τηλεόραση οδηγεί σε μια έσσει κατάσταση χαμηλών κυμάτων άλφα, με αποτέλεσμα την δημιουργία μιας επιδεκτικής συνειδητότητας, όπου τα «εικονικά ζόμπι» κάνουν ότι τους υποδειχθεί.

Δεν είναι μόνο οι επιχειρήσεις που εκμεταλλεύονται αυτό το φαινόμενο για να κερδίσουν. Το τηλεοπτικό δίκτυο Fox έχει παραδεχτεί πως χρησιμοποιεί αυτή

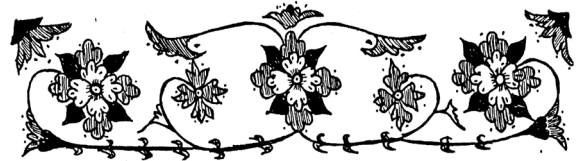
τη μέθοδο συνειδητά, με σκοπό να επιβάλλει την ιδέα της παγκόσμιας υπερθέρμανσης του πλανήτη, καθώς και την ιδέα περί της ανάγκης μείωσης των εκπομπών άνθρακα στην Αμερική. Και το πέτυχαν μια χαρά, αφού η φράση carbon footprint, που είναι μια σαχλαμάρα, έχει αποτυπωθεί στους εγκεφάλους των Αμερικανών και συζητιέται εύρως, άνευ λόγου και αιτίας. Όχι μόνο η Fox, αλλά όλα τα αμερικανικά ΜΜΕ έχουν πείσει τους Αμερικανούς ότι το μέλλον του πλανήτη εξαρτάται από την μείωση ή μη των εκπομπών άνθρακα.

Εξίσου άνησυχητικό είναι και το γεγονός ότι ο πληθυσμός αυτός των ζόμπι, πείθεται καθημερινά ότι η κυβέρνηση είναι καλή και έχει καλές προθέσεις, και ότι πάντα κοιτάζει το συμφέρον του λαού...

Ποιό είναι το αποτέλεσμα όλης αυτής της χειραγώγησης; Ότι κάθε μέρα που περνάει, το κράτος κερδίζει όλο και πιο πολλές εξουσίες επάνω στις ζωές μας, και σιγά σιγά πειθόμαστε ότι θα πρέπει να του παραχωρήσουμε τον απόλυτο έλεγχο, χωρίς να εμποδίζεται από άχρηστους θεσμούς όπως είναι η δικονομία, και το σύνταγμα.

Έτσι, ακόμη και αν ποτέ τα ΜΜΕ μεταδώσουν την είδηση ότι με βάση τον νόμο S.1867 που ισχύει πλέον, ο αμερικανικός στρατός έχει το δικαίωμα να συλλάβει τον οποιοδήποτε και να τον φυλακίσει ισόβια χωρίς δίκη(!), αυτό θα εκληφθεί από τους ύπνωτισμένους πολίτες ως κάτι το απόλυτα σοφό και απαραίτητο. Πρόκειται για αυτό που φοβόταν ο πρόεδρος Jefferson για την δημοκρατία. Την τυραννία των πολλών επί των λίγων.

Σήμερα βλέπουμε μια τυραννία των πολλών ζαλισμένων ζόμπι, επί των ελάχιστων ακόμη ξύπνιων, και ουσιαστικά ζωντανών.



Μεγάλο αγαθό να έχεις άνθρωπο που σε παρασύρει στα ανώτερα, στα πνευματικά, στα θεία και όχι στα επίγεια, στα μάταια και κοσμικά. Μεγάλο αγαθό να έχεις άνθρωπο που η ζωή του είναι παράδειγμα για σένα και για τον καθένα.

Μακάριοι αυτοί που είναι τέτοιοι άνθρωποι, άνθρωποι άπαλοί, διακριτικοί, πρόσχαροι, ειρηνικοί. Και εύλογημένοι όσοι τους έχουνε στην ζωή τους.

Μην ψάχνεις απλά έναν οποιοδήποτε άνθρωπο στην ζωή σου που σου προσφέρει πρόσκαιρη χαρά. Να ψάχνεις άνθρωπο που να σε βοηθά να προοδεύεις πνευματικά.

Άγιος Γέροντας Εφραίμ Αριζόνας (+2019)

## Ὁ Βασιλιάς Μαζάνθρωπος!

Νίκος Ταμουρίδης, Άντρος (ε.α.)-Επίτιμος Α' Ὑπαρχηγός ΓΕΣ.

Κάνοντας απλές λογικές σκέψεις, με όσα άπίστευτα συμβαίνουν σε αυτή τη μοναδική εποχή του κόβιντ-19, προκύπτει τὸ ἐξῆς ἐρώτημα: «Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ πιστέψουμε ὅτι οἱ ἰσχυροὶ τῆς γῆς μας λάτρεψαν ξαφνικά καὶ θέλουν με τὴν βία καὶ τὸν ἐξαναγκασμὸ νὰ μᾶς σώσουν με ἓνα μοναδικὸ ἐργαλεῖο, ἓνα πειραματικὸ ἐμβόλιο νέου τύπου;».

Αὐτὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα θὰ μπορούσε λογικὰ νὰ ἀπαντηθεῖ με ἓνα τεράστιο ΟΧΙ, ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς λογικὰ σκεπτόμενους ἀνθρώπους.

Παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτό, τὴ σημερινὴ ἐποχή, οἱ προαναφερόμενοι ἰσχυροὶ ἢ μᾶλλον οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους, με τὸν κατακλυσμιαῖο ἔλεγχο τῶν ΜΜΕ καὶ τῶν σχετικῶν διεθνῶν ὀργανισμῶν, κατόρθωσαν σὲ μέγιστο βαθμὸ νὰ παραπλανήσουν τὸν γενικὸ πληθυσμὸ, νὰ ὑποβάλουν καὶ νὰ μαζοποιήσουν τοὺς ἐλεύθερους ἀνθρώπους καὶ τελικὰ νὰ ἐπιβάλλουν τὴν βασιλεία τοῦ Μαζάνθρωπου!

Πρὶν ὀρίσουμε τί εἶναι Μαζάνθρωπος, ἄς δοῦμε τί εἶναι ἡ μᾶζα καὶ πὼς χειραγωγεῖται, πὼς καθοδηγεῖται.

Μᾶζα εἶναι ἡ συσσώρευση ἀτόμων, κάτω ἀπὸ δεδομένες συνθήκες, ὅπου οἱ συνειδητὲς προσωπικότητες ἐξαφανίζονται καὶ τὰ αἰσθήματα καὶ οἱ ιδέες ὄλων τῶν ἀτόμων προσανατολίζονται ὅλα στὴν ἴδια κατεύθυνση. Αὐτὸ ἐπιτυγχάνεται με τὴν Προπαγάνδα, καὶ εἰδικότερα με τὴν Ὑποβολή, ἢ ὅποια εἶναι ἡ διεΐσδυση μιᾶς ιδέας στὸ ὑποσυνειδητὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἄν στὸ ὑποσυνειδητὸ καρφωθεῖ μιὰ ιδέα, μιὰ τάση, γίνεται χίλιες φορές πιδ ἰσχυρὴ ἀπὸ ὅτι ἡ πειθὼ στὸ συνειδητό. Ἔτσι μετατρέπεται σὲ αὐταπόδεικτη ἀλήθεια καὶ ὀδηγεῖ ἀσυναίσθητα, ἀσυνειδητα καὶ ἀθόρυγα σὲ ἐνέργειες.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι χάνουν τὴν ἐλεύθερη βούληση, παύουν νὰ εἶναι ἐλεύθερα ἄτομα, ἀποκοτῶν τὴν ψυχολογία τῶν μαζῶν καὶ ἔτσι ὑποτάσσονται τυφλὰ σὲ αὐτὸν ποὺ ἀνακηρύσσεται «ἀφεντικὸ» τους.

Ἐπιπλέον, εἶναι ἀποδεδειγμένο ὅτι οἱ μᾶζες δὲν ἔχουν μνήμη. Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ ἀπαιτεῖται ἢ συνεχῆς ἐπανάληψη τῆς προπαγανδιστικῆς ιδέας. Ἡ ἐπανάληψη εἶναι ἰκανὴ νὰ μετατρέψει καὶ ἓνα ψέμα σὲ ἀλήθεια. Ἐπιπλέον, ἐπιτυγχάνεται ὁ «Μιθριδατισμὸς» τῶν μαζῶν, δηλ. ἓνα εἶδος ἀνοσίας ἀπέναντι σὲ ἄλλες ιδέες καὶ λογικὰ ἐπιχειρήματα, ἔστω κι ἂν αὐτὰ περιέχουν λογικὴ καὶ ἀλήθεια.

Βλέπουμε λοιπὸν πὼς γίνεται εὐκόλα ἢ χειραγώγηση καὶ καθοδήγηση ἐνὸς λαοῦ, ὅταν κάτω ἀπὸ συνθήκες φόβου ἀπώλειας τῆς ζωῆς, με τὴν ἀπειλὴ καὶ τὰ μέσα προπαγάνδας τὸν μεταμορφώνεις σὲ μᾶζα, περιορίζοντας τὴν ὀπτικὴ του μόνο σὲ μιὰ κατεύθυνση!

## Τί Εἶναι Μαζάνθρωπος;

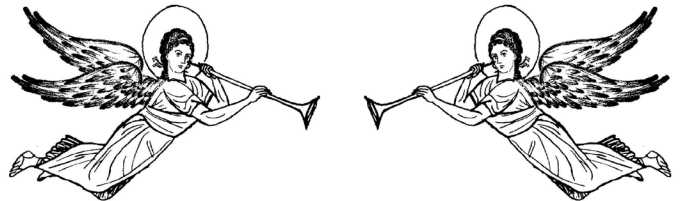
Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ὑποβάλλονται με μιὰ ιδέα καὶ τὴν ἀκολουθοῦν, υἰοθετώντας τὴν ὡς αὐταπόδεικτη ἀλήθεια, χάνουν ἐντελῶς τὴν αὐτοτέλειά τους καὶ γίνονται τμήματα μιᾶς ἐνιαίας συλλογικῆς ψυχῆς, τῆς Μαζοψυχῆς. Οἱ δὲ ἴδιοι εἶναι οἱ λεγόμενοι Μαζάνθρωποι!

**Μαζάνθρωπος εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ στερεῖται ἐλεύθερης βούλησης.** Ἡ ψυχὴ του ἔχει βυθιστεῖ σὲ ἓνα ὠκεανὸ ὀμαδικότητος. Εἶναι ὁ ἀγελαῖος ἄνθρωπος ἢ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο ζῶο. Κυριαρχεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ ἐνστικτο τῆς ἀγέλης καὶ βασικὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ του εἶναι ἢ ὀλοσχερῆς ἔλλειψη κριτικῆς σκέψης, ὁ μιμητισμὸς, ἢ τυφλὴ ὑπακοὴ σὲ ἓνα ἀρχηγό, ἢ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν ὑπερβολή, ὁ δογματισμὸς καὶ ἢ ἀνευθυνότητα. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνήκει σὲ ὀποιαδήποτε κοινωνικὴ τάξη, σὲ ὀποιοδήποτε ἔθνος, σὲ ὀποιαδήποτε ἰδεολογία. Δὲν τὸν ἐνδιαφέρει ἢ ἀλήθεια. Ἔχει τὴν αὐταπάτη ὅτι συμμετέχει στὴν ἐξουσία, τὴν ὀποία ὑποστηρίζει με πάθος, ἐνῶ εἶναι πειθήνιο ὄργανο αὐτῆς.

Τί συμβαίνει λοιπὸν σήμερα;

Σήμερα, δυστυχῶς, με τὴν συντριπτικὰ καταλυτικὴ καθοδήγηση τῶν ΜΜΕ, ζοῦμε μιὰ ἰδιότυπη κατάσταση, ὅπου βασιλεύει ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῶν μέσων ἐνημέρωσης, χωρὶς ιδέα, χωρὶς κρίση, χωρὶς δική του σκέψη, χωρὶς δική του γνώση. Βασιλεύει ὁ καθοδηγούμενος μόνο ἀπὸ τὸ ὑποβολιμαῖο ἐνστικτο καὶ ὄχι ἀπὸ τὴν λογικὴ. Βασιλεύει ὁ ὀπαδὸς τῆς ἄκριτης ἀγελαίας συμπεριφορᾶς.

Ζοῦμε τὴν βασιλεία τοῦ Μαζάνθρώπου!



Ὁ Χριστόφορος ὁ Καλύβας, ἓνας ἐπιστήθιος φίλος μου, σπουδαία φυσιογνωμία, ἰστορικὴ φυσιογνωμία, μοῦ ἔλεγε πρὸ ἐτῶν ποὺ συζητούσαμε:

«Αὐγουστίνε, δὲν κατάλαβες τί θὰ γίνε; Ὁ Σατανᾶς θὰ μεταχειριστεῖ ὅλα τὰ μέσα γιὰ νὰ διαλύσει τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Θὰ μεταχειριστεῖ εἰς τοὺς ἔσχατους καιροὺς καὶ ἓνα τελευταῖο ὄπλο. Θὰ ντύσει παπάδες καὶ δεσποτᾶδες πρόσωπα τῆς ἐξουσίας του, θὰ τοὺς φορέσει ἐγκόλπια καὶ θὰ τοὺς δώσει πατερίτσες. Καὶ δια μέσου αὐτῶν τῶν ἀρχιερέων θὰ διαλύσει τὴν Ἐκκλησία.»

Ὁ Σατανᾶς θὰ ἐμφανισθεῖ με ρᾶσα, με ἄμφια, με πατερίτσες καὶ μπαστούνες!

**Μακαριστὸς Μητροπολίτης Φλωρίνης  
Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης (+2010)**

## Άγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός: ὁ Πνευματικός τοῦ Εἰκοσιένα

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

*«Ρώτησαν κάποιον 100χρονίτη, εὐσεβὴ γέρο Ἡπειρώτη, πὸν ξεψυχοῦσε στὸ Γηροκομεῖο τῶν Ἰωαννίνων, τὸ 1872, τί χαράχτηκε βαθύτερα στὴν ψυχὴ του ἀπ' ὅσα ἔζησε. Ἀπάντησε ὁ πολὺς γέροντας: Ὅταν μικρὸς ἄκουσα τὴ διδαχὴ τοῦ πάτερ-Κοσμᾶ καὶ φίλησα τὸ χέρι του».*

[Φ. Μιχαλόπουλος, «Άγιο-Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός», 1940]

† † †

Μὲ τὸ στόμα του νομίζω μιλοῦσε ὅλη ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη, ἐκφραζόταν ἡ εὐγνωμοσύνη τοῦ Γένους στὸν μεγάλο ἐθναπόστολο.

Ἄς μὴν τὸ ξεχνοῦμε αὐτό, τὰ λιοντάρια τοῦ 1821 ἦταν, μὲ τὸν ἕναν ἢ τὸν ἄλλο τρόπο, πνευματικοπαιδία τοῦ Ἁγίου. Ὁ ἀθάνατος Κατσαντώνης μαρτύρησε ἔχοντας τὸ ὄνομά του στὰ χεῖλη του. Ὁ καλόγερος Σαμουήλ, ὁ μπουρλοτιέρης τοῦ Σουλίου, ὑπῆρξε μαθητὴς του. Ἀλλὰ καὶ Νεομάρτυρες, τὸ καινὸν καύχημα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεως, μαθήτευσαν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Δασκάλου τοῦ Γένους, ὅπως ὁ ἐκ Σαμαρίνης νεομάρτυς Δημήτριος, τὸν ὁποῖο οἱ Τοῦρκοι ἔκτισαν ζωντανό. Ὁ ἅγιος στάθηκε «ὁ χρίστης τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης», ὅπως πολὺ ὠραία ὀνομάζεται σ' ἓνα ποίημα τοῦ 1960, γραμμένο ἀπὸ τὸν Γεώργιο Ἀθάνα. Τὸ διαβάζω:

*Στὸ Μέγα Λένδρο ξεκινᾷ  
στὸ Καλοντάει ἀγιάζει  
χτίζει σχολειά, χτίζει ἐκκλησιᾶς  
χτίζει τὴν Ρωμηοσύνη.  
Πάτερ Κοσμᾶ, σὰ νὰ ἴταν χθὲς  
τὸ κήρυγμά σου ἀχάζει (=βροντάει)  
στὴν Ρούμελη, στὴν Ἡπειρο  
στὴν ἀπεραντοσύνη.*

Χτίζει, λέει ὁ ποιητὴς, πρώτα σχολειὰ καὶ κατόπιν χτίζει καὶ ἐκκλησιᾶς γιατί; Διότι «καλύτερον, ἀδελφέ μου, νὰ ἔχης ἑλληνικὸν σχολεῖον εἰς τὴν χώραν σου, παρὰ νὰ ἔχης βρῦσες καὶ ποτάμια, καὶ ὡσάν μάθης τὸ παιδί σου γράμματα, τότε λέγεται ἄνθρωπος. Τὸ σχολεῖον ἀνοίγει τὰς ἐκκλησιᾶς, τὸ σχολεῖον ἀνοίγει τὰ μοναστήρια».

Ναί, ἐκεῖνα τὰ σχολειὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου ἄνοιγαν ἐκκλησιᾶς, τὰ τωρινὰ κλείνουν τὶς ἐκκλησιᾶς καὶ γκρεμίζουν μοναστήρια. Τὰ σχολειὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου δὲν ἦταν ἀπλῶς «τόποι προσκλήσεως γνώσεων, ἀλλὰ

κυρίως φροντιστήρια ἠθικῆς, χριστιανικῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς ἀγωγῆς», ὅπως γράφει σὲ μία ἐπιστολὴ του ὁ Ἰωάννης Καποδίστριας, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος κυβερνήτης τῆς Πατρίδας μας. Τὸν διαδέχτηκαν πρωθυπουργοί, ἐλάχιστοι κατέλειπαν καλὸ ὄνομα, οἱ περισσότεροι ὑπῆρξαν φιλήκοοι τῶν ξένων καὶ «ὁ φιλήκοος τῶν ξένων εἶναι προδότης» μᾶς λέει καὶ πάλι ὁ ἀδικοχαμένος Κυβερνήτης.

Βλέποντας αὐτὰ πὸν γίνονται σήμερα στὸν τόπο μας, τὶς ἀναθυμιάσεις πὸν μᾶς πνίγουν, μοῦ ἔρχεται στὸ νοῦ ἡ παροιμία πὸν ἔλεγε καὶ ὁ Πατροκοσμᾶς: «Ἐκεῖ πὸν κρεμοῦν τώρα οἱ καπεταναῖοι τὰ καριοφίλια, θὰ ἔρθη καιρὸς πὸν θὰ κρεμοῦν οἱ γύφτοι τὰ νταούλια».

Λίγο πιὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν γενετείρά μου, στὴν Ἄνω Μηλιὰ Πιερίας, ὑπάρχει ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου. σὲ μία διχάλα ἐνὸς δέντρου, πὸν δὲν ψηλώνει, εἶναι καρφωμένος ἓνας σιδερένιος σταυρὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Πατροκοσμᾶ. Ἐκεῖ χτίστηκε ἡ ἐκκλησιά. Καμάρωναν οἱ παπποῦδες μας: «Πέρασε κι ἀπ' τὰ μέρη μας ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμάς», ἦταν εὐλογία, εὐδία μεγάλη τὸ πέρασμά του. Κι ἀπ' ὅπου δίδασκε ὁ Πατροκοσμᾶς, ὅπου ἔστηνε τὸ ταπεινὸ σκαμνί του, πὸν ἦταν ὁ τάφος του ὅπως ἔλεγε, τὸ ἀντίχριστο Ἰσλάμ ἐκεῖ δὲν στέριωνε.

Σὲ ἐποχὴ πὸν οἱ κατακτητὲς μᾶς ἀφανίζουν, πού, οἱ «ἀλώ-πεκες τοῦ σκότους», οἱ παπικοὶ μισιονάριοι προσηλυτίζουν, οἱ ραγιαῖδες ὑποκύπτουν καὶ κατὰ ἐπαρχίες ἀλλαξοπιστοῦν, ὁ Ἅγιος παίρνει στοὺς ἰσχνούς ὤμους του τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ χτίζει σχολεῖα γὰ νὰ μαθαίνουν τὰ σκλαβόπουλα «τί εἶναι Θεός, τί εἶναι Ἁγία Τριάς, τί εἶναι ἄγγελοι, ἀρχάγγελοι, τί εἶναι καταραμένοι οἱ δαίμονες, τί εἶναι Παράδεισος, τί εἶναι κόλασις, τί εἶναι ἁμαρτία καὶ ἀρετή».

Στὰ σημερινὰ σχολεῖα τῶν ἄθεων γραμμμάτων, δὲν μαθαίνουν οἱ μαθητὲς μας τί εἶναι οἱ καταραμένοι οἱ δαίμονες καὶ ἡ ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ καλοῦνται νὰ μιμηθοῦν τοὺς δαίμονες. (Θυμίζω στὸ βιβλίον Θεατρικῆς Ἀγωγῆς Ε' -Στ' Δημοτικοῦ, τὴν παρότρυνση τοῦ βιβλίου, σελ. 81, «εἶσαι δαιμόνιο», νὰ ὑποδυθοῦν, δηλαδή, οἱ μαθητὲς, τὸ δαιμόνιο). «Τὸ κακό», ἔλεγε ὁ ἅγιος σὲ μία προφητεία του, «θὰ σᾶς ἔρθει ἀπὸ τοὺς διαβασμένους».

Δέν εἶπε μορφωμένους. Ὁ λαός μας τοὺς μορφωμένους τοὺς ὀνομάζει γνωστικούς, ἐνῶ τοὺς διαβασμένους πολὺξερους. Πολύξεροι εἶναι οἱ ἡμιμαθεῖς πὸν μεταρρυθμίζουν, ἀναγεννοῦν, ἀναπτερόνουν τὴν Παιδεία, γιὰ νὰ καταλήξουμε σήμερα, ἀντὶ νὰ



έχουμε σχολεία ρωμαίικα, με «ψυχή και Χριστό», να κατακτήσουν μάνδρες εκκλησιομαχίας, ἀφιλοπατρίας και γλωσσικής σύγχυσης.

Διδάσκω πάντοτε στους μαθητές μου, την ώρα των Θρησκευτικών, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τῆς Κυριακῆς. Δὲν προβλέπεται αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τὸ ἀναλυτικὸ πρόγραμμα, ὅμως—καὶ τὸ λέω χωρὶς ἴχνος ἔπαρσης, ἐν οἴδᾳ ὅτι οὐδὲν εἰμί—δὲν σκύβω τὸ κεφάλι στὸ ψευτορωμαίικο, γιατί «ὅταν μοῦ πειράζουν πατρίδα καὶ θρησκεία μου, θὰ μιλήσω, θὰ ἐνεργήσω καὶ ὅ,τι θέλουν ἄς μοῦ κάμουν», ὅπως μᾶς κανοναρχεῖ ὁ πατριδοφύλακας στρατηγὸς Μακρουγιάννης. Μοῦ λέει ἓνας μαθητῆς μου. «Γιατί, κύριε, τὴν ὥρα ποῦ μᾶς διαβάζετε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἐπικρατεῖ ἀπόλυτη ἡσυχία;» Τί νὰ τοῦ πῶ τοῦ παιδιοῦ; Οὐμήθηκα τὰ λόγια τοῦ Ἁγίου: «Δὲν βλέπετε ὅτι ἀγρίευσε τὸ Γένος μας ἀπὸ τὴν ἀμάθεια καὶ ἐγίναμεν ὡσὰν τὰ θηρία»;

Καὶ πῶς νὰ μὴν ἀγριέψουν τὰ παιδιά, νὰ μὴν γίνουν ὡσὰν τὰ γουρουνόπουλα, ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Ἅγιος στους γονεῖς τους, ποῦ τ' ἄφηναν χωρὶς «τὰ γράμματα ποῦ διαβάζουνε/οἱ ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἀγιάζουνε» (Ἐλύτης). Τὰ γράμματα αὐτὰ εἶναι ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ ὁ λόγος, ὁ ὀρμητικὸς αὐτὸς σπόρος, δὲν φτάνει εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν ἀγαθὴν, τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν παιδιῶν μας, γιατί τὸν πνίγουν τὰ ζιζάνια. καὶ τὰ δηλητηριώδη ἀγκάθια τῆς ἀφιλοπατρίας καὶ τῆς εκκλησιομαχίας. Τὰ γράμματα αὐτὰ φωλιάζουν στὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία γλώσσας, τὰ παλιὰ ἀναγνωστικά. Καὶ τὰ λέγαμε ἀναγνωστικά, διότι μέσῳ τῶν βιβλίων «διάβαζε» ὁ μαθητῆς τὸν πολιτισμὸ μας, περιεῖχαν γνώσεις ἱστορίας, λαογραφίας, θεολογίας, γεωγραφίας, μ' ἓνα λόγο, βιβλία, νὰ πῶ μία λέξη ποῦ ποινικοποιήθηκε, πατριδογνωσίας. σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὰ νέα-περιοδικὰ ποικίλης ὕλης, ὅπως ἀπροκάλυπτα τὰ ὀνομάζω, ποῦ γελοιοποιοῦν τὸν δάσκαλο καὶ ὑπονομεύουν τὴν ἴδια τὴν ὑπόσταση τοῦ σχολείου.

Ἀγρίεψαν, τὰ παιδιά μας, γιατί τὰ καταδικάσαμε μὲ τὴν μεγαλύτερη τιμωρία ποῦ ὑπάρχει: νὰ τὰ ἔχουν ὅλα, νὰ μὴν τοὺς λείπει τίποτε, χωρὶς ποτὲ νὰ ὀρθώνουμε καὶ τὸ εὐλογημένο ΟΧΙ. τὰ ἔχουν ὅλα μπουκώσαν ἀπὸ τὶς προσφορὲς καὶ τοὺς στερήσαμε τὸ ἀνθρωποποιὸ λίπασμα τῆς ἀνατροφῆς: τὴν ἀγάπη, τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ νοθεσία, διότι «ὄσω πλεονάζεις τῷ πλούτῳ τουσοῦτω ἐλλείπεις τῇ ἀγάπῃ». (Μέγας Βασίλειος).

«Ὅταν τὰ μῆλα εἶναι ξινά, δὲν φταῖνε τὰ μῆλα, φταῖνε οἱ μηλιῆς» μᾶς διδάσκει καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς. καὶ μηλιῆς εἶναι οἱ γονεῖς καὶ οἱ δάσκαλοι. Σήμερα τὰ παιδιά μας ἀντιμετωπίζουν σοβαρὸ πρόβλημα στὴν γλώσσα, ἀδυνατοῦν νὰ ἐκφραστοῦν! Γιατί; Γιατί ἡ ἐλληνικὴ γλώσσα εἶναι πρῶτα δουλειὰ τῆς μάνας. Οἱ μαστοὶ τῆς εἶναι τρεῖς. Οἱ δύο γιὰ τὸ γάλα καὶ ὁ τρίτος τὸ

στόμα τῆς, ἡ λαλιά τῆς. Μὲ τὴν περιφρόνηση ὅμως τῆς παράδοσής μας, τὴν ἐκφράγκευσή μας ὁ τρίτος αὐτὸς μαστός, ἀποξεράθηκε. (Καὶ παράδοση σημαίνει «φωνὴ κεκοιμημένων διδάσκουσα τοὺς ζῶντας». δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸ ποῦ παραλαμβάνεις, θὰ λεγόταν παραλαβή, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ποῦ παραδίδεις).

Ἐνῶ εἶναι γεμᾶτο τὸ κελάρι τοῦ πατρογονικοῦ μας σπιτιοῦ μὲ καλούδια καὶ μὲ τὰ τιμαλφῆ τοῦ Γένους καὶ τῆς ἡλιόλουστης Ὁρθοδοξίας μας, ἀντὶ νὰ εὐφραίνονται τὰ παιδιά, ποῦ εἶναι Ἑλληνας καὶ Χριστιανοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι, ἐμεῖς τὰ καταδικάσαμε σὲ λιμοκτονία, τὰ «ταΐζουμε» ξυλοκέρατα.

Μόνο μὲ τό... ἀναλυτικὸ πρόγραμμα ποῦ ὀνομάζεται «Διδαχὲς τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ», θὰ ἀναστηθεῖ ἡ Πονεμένη Ρωμηοσύνη!



**Κ**αταλαβαίνετε τί πάει νὰ γίνῃ; ἔλεγε. Θὰ φύγῃ ἡ παράδοση καὶ θὰ μείνει ἡ παράβαση! Καταλαβαίνετε πόσο σοβαρὸ εἶναι αὐτό; Εἶναι σὰν νὰ βγάζουμε ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι ἓνα τοῦβλο. Ἐκεῖν τὴν στιγμή φαίνεται ὅτι δὲν παθαίνει τίποτε τὸ σπίτι, ἀλλὰ σιγὰ-σιγὰ μπαίνουν νερά, βγαίνει καὶ ἄλλο τοῦβλο, καὶ ἄλλο, καὶ στὸ τέλος τὸ σπίτι γίνεται ἐρείπιο.

**Ἄ**ν κάποιος εἶναι ἄρρωστος καὶ δὲν μπορῇ νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν νηστεία, αὐτὸς εἶναι δικαιολογημένος ἂν φάῃ. Ἄν δὲν εἶναι ἄρρωστος, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ ἀδυναμία ἔφαγε, νὰ μετανοήσῃ, νὰ πῇ: «Ἡμαρτον». Δὲν θὰ τὸν κρεμάσῃ ὁ Χριστός. Ἄν μπορῇ νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν νηστεία, νὰ τὴν κρατήσῃ. Ἄν ὅμως οἱ περισσότεροι δὲν κρατᾶνε τὶς νηστεῖες, κι ἐμεῖς πᾶμε νὰ τὶς καταργήσουμε, γιὰ νὰ ἀναπαύσουμε τοὺς περισσότερους, εἶναι σὰν νὰ εὐλογοῦμε τὶς ἀδυναμίες τους, τὶς πτώσεις τους. Μὲ ποῖο δικαίωμα νὰ τὰ καταργήσουμε ὅλα αὐτά; Καὶ ποῦ ξέρουμε; Μπορεῖ ἡ ἐπόμενη γενεὰ νὰ εἶναι πιὸ καλὴ καὶ νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν ἀκριβεία.

**Ο**ἱ ἄνθρωποι εὐκόλα ἐπηρεάζονται στὸ κακό. Ἐνῶ στὸ βάθος ἀναγνωρίζουν καὶ παραδέχονται τὸ καλό, ἐντούτοις πιὸ εὐκόλα ἐπηρεάζονται καὶ παρασύρονται ἀπὸ τὸ κακό, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖ κανοναρχεῖ τὸ ταγκαλάκι. Τὸν γλυκὸ κατήφορο εὐκόλα τὸν βρῖσκει κανεῖς, ἐπειδὴ ὁ πειρασμὸς δὲν ἔχει ἄλλο τυπικὸ, παρὰ νὰ σπρώχνει στὸν γλυκὸ κατήφορο τὰ πλάσματα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Μεσσίας ἔχει ἀρχοντιά. Σοῦ λέει: «Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ καλό», «**Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν**». Δὲν λέει: «Μὲ τὸ ζόρι ἔλα μαζί μου!».

Ὁ σατανᾶς ἔχει γυφτιά. Ἀπὸ δῶ-ἀπὸ κεῖ τὸν τυλίγει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ νὰ τὸν πάει ἐκεῖ ποῦ θέλει.

**Ἅγιος Παΐσιος Ἀγιορείτης**

## HOW TO FIGHT FOR LIFE IN THE POST-ROE WORLD

**DO YOU WANT TO FIGHT AGAINST BABY KILLING? FIGHT WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY!**

*Source: "Orthodox Reflections, Looking at Life in the Orthodox Christian Faith," August 12, 2022.*

We have to be honest about where we are concerning abortion and the fight to save unborn life. Overturning Roe in the United States was a great step forward for life, but not the step many people believed it was. **Roe's overturn did not outlaw abortion, but merely restored abortion to the political process.** There the new fight begins. Well, at least in those states in which activist state courts have not found a Roe-like "right" to abortion hiding in their state constitutions. That was the real issue in Kansas, which recently held a vote on an amendment to get around a court ruling that the Kansas state constitution provides a "right" to abortion. The amendment failed, leaving the court ruling in place.

Had the amendment passed, it would have offered the GOP-controlled state legislature a path to restricting or banning abortion, continuing a pattern seen in other conservative areas of the country. Kansas law currently allows most abortions to take place up to 22 weeks in a pregnancy.

There is much work to do in Kansas as well as in many other states to overcome pro-abortion state courts.

There is much work to be done in many states (perhaps most of them) to get laws banning, or at least significantly restricting, abortion through legislatures. Sadly, after decades of pro-abortion propaganda, many voters in even the reddest states will not necessarily be of much help in protecting life. At the U.S. federal level, there will an ongoing battle of executive orders and Democratic legislation to "protect" the right to unfettered baby killing. In many blue states, and our neighbor Canada, the major-

ity of voters are tragically in favor of expansive abortion "rights," so legislative success in banning abortion will not be soon in coming.

Congratulations on the overturn of Roe. Congratulations on the many U.S. states that have either banned or severely curtailed baby killing. Congratulations on the closed abortion mills and the doctors leaving the bloody trade to pursue "other opportunities". All that is wonderful, but the fight ahead of us is at least as hard as the fight we just won. As we embark on that new campaign, here are some suggestions for those who care about souls, our culture, and the lives of the unborn.

### Get Your Own Soul Right with God

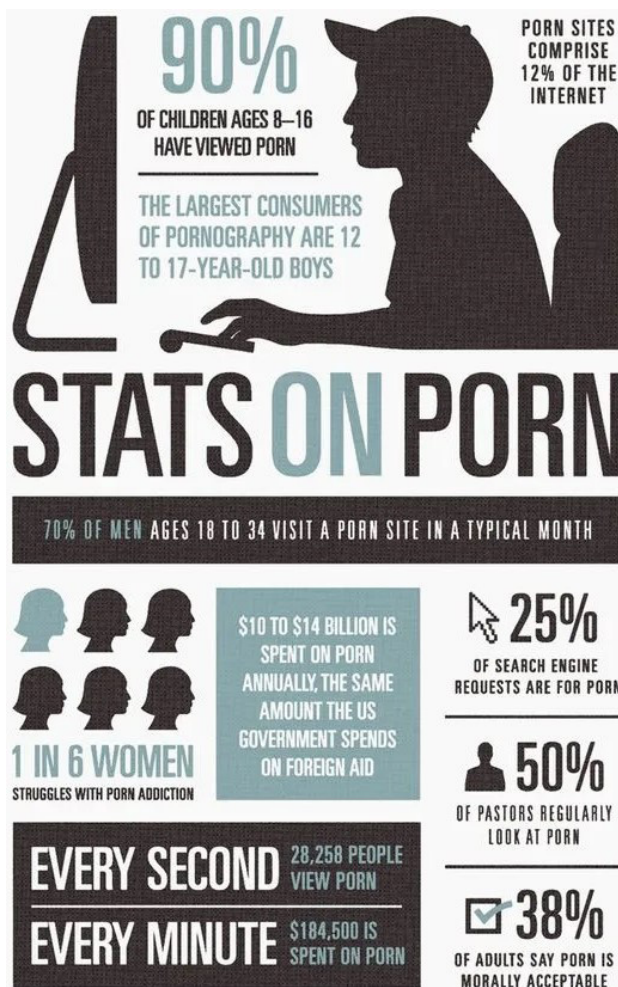
Archpriest Geoffrey Korz, in a recent article on resisting political tyrants, wrote the following: "If you are not confessing your sins every couple weeks before God, and receiving Holy Communion properly prepared to do so, why on earth would you imagine you would be able to make a change in our country?"

If we want to change the world, we have to start with ourselves first. As Fr. Geoffrey recommends—pray daily, confess regularly, repent, forgive and receive forgiveness. We could add to these reading the scriptures, studying the lives of the saints, and spending time with fellow Orthodox Christians. These are all essential spiritual tools for our development that even faithful Orthodox Christians too often neglect.

In an article full of timely wise advice, one thing that Fr. Geoffrey said stands out above all others: "Firstly, within each

of our homes, we must begin to drive away the influence of the evil one. Asking forgiveness, offering forgiveness, watching the words we use and the music and videos we play sets the spiritual tone for our home. We invite in the grace of God, or we chase it away. We invite in demonic influences, or we chase them away."

If we are to bring light to a dark and fallen world, we must first stop attracting darkness into our hearts, homes, and families. Above all, in the modern era, that means avoiding Porn and perverse TV programming.



The figure on the previous page exemplifies the crisis our world faces; these statistics are found in “Real Marriage Brief,” [pastormark.tv/campaigns/real-marriage](http://pastormark.tv/campaigns/real-marriage). (Ed.)

Did you ever wonder why abortion is so important to the powers of this world? There are multiple reasons, of course. It is a form of human sacrifice that is pleasing to the demons. Abortion has been supported by eugenicists who wished to rid the world of “sub-humans.” Abortion is a form of population control, making it an important tool for those who fear overpopulation. Feminists believe abortion is essential to female empowerment. If “burdened” by babies, women will not necessarily go out and work for soulless corporations. They might stay home in “comfortable concentration camps” instead and raise healthy offspring. Not surprisingly, that is exactly why soulless corporations support abortion to the point they are willing to pay for them. Feminism is good for corporate bottom lines. Sadly for both the feminists and the corporations, the younger generation of women seems to be figuring out how badly they were played.

All those reasons are important, but there is one that matters more than any other. **Without abortion, the Sexual Revolution would have been impossible.** Abortion was essential as a backup to contraception failure. Without baby killing, the Sexual Revolution would have ended almost as soon as it began. Sexual libertines would have been quickly forced to settle down to the business of raising the children their irresponsibility had brought into the world.

**But along came Roe, and the party was just getting started!**

The Sexual Revolution was a deliberate strategy employed by Cultural Marxists to destroy the family, Western Culture, and weaken the Christian Faith, to foster conditions for a Communist Revolution. “If it feels good, do it! If you get pregnant, abort it! Live for today!”

Porn was an integral part of mainstreaming the Sexual Revolution. Porn dehumanizes. Porn creates an image that “recreational sex” is normal, while monogamy is abnormal. Childless hedonism is normal, having children is an abnormality to be avoided. Porn stunts emotional development, and deranges relationship expectations. Porn wrecks children exposed to it. Porn exploits women and children in its production. Porn alters the brains of frequent users. Porn makes men weak, impotent, and full of shame. They cower when they should lead.

**Porn, as Blessed Seraphim Rose said, is the Devil’s Iconography.**

Porn conditions the souls of people to find perversions pleasurable and acceptable. The pernicious influence of porn is necessary to prop up support for abortion. In turn, abortion makes “hook up” culture possible. The two go hand-in-hand. While you may not be “hooking up,” if you are consuming porn then you are still attracting demonic influence into

your life, home, and family. You are losing your soul and driving away the Holy Spirit. Anything you try to do for the cause of life, or for the Kingdom of God in general, will be compromised and less effective.

Whether it is porn, racy TV, casual sex, or whatever else that has a hold on you—**fix yourself first before trying to fix anything else.**

† † †

*“Let thine eyes behold the thing which is right,” orders Wisdom, “and keep thine heart with all care.” For the bodily senses easily bring their own impressions into the soul. Therefore we order that henceforth there shall in no way be made pictures, whether they are in paintings or in what way so ever, which attract the eye and corrupt the mind, and incite it to the enkindling of base pleasures. And if any one shall attempt to do this he is to be cut off.*

[100<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council in Trullo in 692]



**A** lie is a delusion of the mind, while evil is a delusion of the will. The sign by which one is distinguished from the other is the judgement of God Himself ... that which he teaches a man: Truth is that which leads a man to will the good. But whatever contradicts this is entirely false, entirely evil.

**St. Nicholas Cabasilas**

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

**St. Justin Popovich**

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

**St. Maximus the Confessor**

**G**od and the devil are found at opposite poles. No one can turn his face to God who has not first turned his back on sin. When a man turns his face to God, all of his paths lead to God. When a man turns his face away from God, all of his paths lead to perdition. When a man finally rejects God by word and in his heart, he is no longer fit to do anything that does not serve for his complete destruction, both of his soul and of his body.

**St. Nicholas of Serbia**

## CANADA'S SPIRITUAL CRISIS A REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINES

By Archpriest Geoffrey Korz, All Saints of North America Church (OCA), Hamilton, Ontario. An article that stands as a stern warning to the US and most of the western world. The events in Canada addressed by Fr. Geoffrey may and some have been repeated elsewhere.

It is normal in the Church year to speak about the spiritual preparation for the Lenten Fast. This is not a normal time, however. This year, for the first time in history, Canada fell under the dark cloud of martial law.

Any Church leader would be remiss if he were to remain silent in the face of this evil.

You will recall in the Book of Exodus, we read that there arose in Egypt a king—a new pharaoh—and he said unto his people, *Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens.* (Exod 1:9-11).

The Lord raised up spokesmen—Moses and Aaron—to speak to Pharaoh. They were not warriors. They were not rebels. They had one message: *Let my people go.*

What happened? We read in the scriptures that the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.

These spokesmen for God's people went to Pharaoh with miracles (Exod 7:13)—but Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

These spokesmen for God's people turned the River Nile into blood, by the power of God (Exod 7:22)—never lifting a hand against the Egyptians—but Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

These spokesmen for God's people even went to Pharaoh when there was a break—a pause in one of the plagues sent by God (Exod 8:15)—but when Pharaoh saw God's mercy toward him, Pharaoh's heart was hardened toward the people of God.

We read in the book of Exodus, fifteen times—**fifteen!**—Pharaoh hardened his heart against the people of God, and he refused to listen to the spokesmen of the Lord—as the Lord had said Pharaoh would do!

Even when Pharaoh's own magicians—his own cabinet members—warned him, he would not listen: *Then the ma-*

*gicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.* (Exod 8:19).

Brothers and sisters: this has always been the experience of the people of God with demonic dictators. In a dictatorship, the only real crime is opposing the regime.

Our holy saints have faced such demonically-inspired attacks by dictators many times.

In 1925, Patriarch St. Tikhon stood against the Bolsheviks when they took away land from the people of Russia. The Communists smothered him to death with a pillow.

In 2022, our dictatorship freezes bank accounts, and when people oppose this, they trample them with horses.

In 1943, Saint Alexander Schmorell was arrested for the crime of spreading leaflets denouncing the Nazi regime in Germany. His family appealed his death sentence to the authorities for two months until a letter came back to the prison. It read: "I reject all petitions for mercy." It was signed "Adolf Hitler."

In 2022, our dictator says of his enemies that they take up space. That they hold unacceptable views. That we have to make a choice: do we tolerate "those people"?

Why has such evil been visited upon us, dear brothers and sisters? Why has such a demonic stench come

to sit over a land we once thought of as safe, and strong, and free?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian dissident who suffered terribly under the Soviet dictatorship of the last century, described what happened in his country—an Orthodox Christian country, full of well-educated people, who often spoke many languages, and who considered themselves worldly, modern, and cultured—until they turned to communist totalitarianism:

"Orthodox churches were stripped of their valuables in 1922 at the instigation of Lenin and Trotsky. In subsequent years, including both the Stalin and the Khrushchev periods, tens of thousands of churches were torn down or desecrated, leaving behind a disfigured wasteland that bore no resemblance to Russia such as it had stood for centuries. Entire districts and cities of half a million inhabitants were left without a single church. Our people were condemned to live in this dark and mute wilderness for decades, groping their way to God and keeping to this course by trial and error."

While under house arrest, Patriarch Tikhon was brought as a witness for the defense in a Soviet trial: "Do you consider the state's laws obligatory or not?" he was asked.

St. Tikhon replied, "Yes, I recognize them, to the extent that they do not contradict the rules of piety."



What lesson can we take from Russia, from Nazi Germany, from the enslavement of the ancient Israelites—and from every society that has slipped into the darkness of dictatorship, and asks itself the question, why is this happening to us?

Solzhenitsyn—a devout Orthodox Christian—gives us the answer. He said:

“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.**”

Dear brethren: nothing different has happened today. Nothing different has led to the darkness that has overtaken our country in this moment of crisis. Men have forgotten God; that is why all this has happened.

The solution to our crisis is found in those prophetic words, just as it is in the lives of our saints.

When the people of Israel repented and returned to God, the Lord led them out of Egypt—but only after decades and decades of great sorrows.

When the people of Europe repented and returned to God, the Lord delivered them from the yoke of Soviet Communism, and the wrath of Nazi Germany—but only after years of great sorrows.

Brothers and sisters, we are at the threshold of another season of repentance. As our country languishes under this cloud of darkness, let us use this time of repentance to return to God, to begin to escape this great evil.

Firstly, within each of our homes, we must begin to drive away the influence of the evil one.

Asking forgiveness, offering forgiveness, watching the words we use and the music and videos we play sets the spiritual tone for our home. We invite in the grace of God, or we chase it away. We invite in demonic influences, or we chase them away.

Starting today, each faithful person, before going to bed, should take holy water and bless their home, using the prayer of the Holy Cross, *Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered.* This is a faithful Orthodox Christian practice, on top of an annual house blessing by the priest.

Secondly, if you do not already pray each day, and confess your sins each month before a priest, make it your habit now to do so. Nothing will be accomplished to free our country from evil without our repentance.

If we want to banish evil from our nation, the place we start is not under the Peace Tower of our national Parliament, and not the dictator’s residence at Sussex Drive—it must start in our hearts, through the Holy Mystery of Confession.

If you are not confessing your sins every couple weeks before God, and receiving Holy Communion properly prepared to do so, why on earth would you imagine you would be able to make a change in our country?

Dear brothers and sisters: we are indeed living under a dark and evil cloud in our country. But the Lord has not allowed this cloud to come upon us by accident.

Many thousands of people have already stood righteously, peacefully, prayerfully, and with repentance against this dictatorship, and have felt its wrath. That is always the way in which the evil one responds to those who bring the peace of Christ. If we ever hope to see this darkness be lifted from our land, however, we will only accomplish it by banishing the evil one from our own hearts, and our own homes.

When we do so, the grace and power of God will return to the Canadian House of Commons, and the Lord will again bless us with leaders who honour and worship Him.



Every Christian should find for himself the imperative and incentive to become holy. If you live without struggle and without hope of becoming holy, then you are Christians only in name and not in essence. But without holiness, no one shall see the Lord, that is to say they will not attain eternal blessedness. It is a trustworthy saying that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. But we deceive ourselves if we think that we are saved while remaining sinners. Christ saves those sinners by giving them the means to become saints.

#### St. Philaret of Moscow

Just as people do not enter a war in order to enjoy war, but in order to be saved from war, so we do not enter this world in order to enjoy this world, but in order to be saved from it. People go to war for the sake of something greater than war. So we also enter this temporal life for the sake of something greater: for eternal life. And as soldiers think with joy about returning home, so also Christians constantly remember the end of their lives and their return to their heavenly fatherland.

#### St. Nicholas of Serbia

The chief end of our life is to live in communion with God. To this end the Son of God became incarnate, in order to return us to this divine communion, which was lost by the fall into sin. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we enter into communion with the Father and thus attain our purpose.

#### St. Theophan the Recluse

The acquisition of holiness is not the exclusive business of monks, as certain people think. People with families are also called to holiness, as are those in all kinds of professions, who live in the world, since the commandment about perfection and holiness is given not only to monks, but to all people.

**Hieromartyr Onuphry Galaluk**



## ORTHODOX BAPTISM

### IGNORANT PARENTS, IRRESPONSIBLE PASTORS

*By Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Attica and Boeotia (of the Old Calendar Greek Church).*

From the Editor: Since he was enthroned (and even before he was), AB Elpithoforos made a conscious and calculated choice to depart from most traditions, even some of the most sacred ones of our Church. Most recently, he created a great amount of “political noise” and scandal amongst many Orthodox circles; he took an “unannounced” trip to Greece and proceeded to indirectly legitimize gay marriage by baptizing the children of a famous gay couple (born by surrogate mother)! Concurrently, he misled the Metropolitan of Glyfada Antonios, the hierarch in whose jurisdiction AB Elpithoforos performed the aforementioned baptism.

We shall refrain from any personal analysis of the wrongful actions of the COARCH AB; we instead present a concise article on the sacrament Orthodox Baptism and the responsibilities of the participants. At the end, we present an excerpt of an interview with Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia (Greece), a well-respected hierarch known not just for his Harvard and MIT degrees and his collaboration with NASA, but most importantly his exceptional ministry in Greece.

† † †

Baptism is a basic condition for salvation, in combination with the right faith and, of course, with the right experience. The naturalization of a new Christian into the body of the Church implies that he will remain faithful to its teaching and will struggle in the future to preserve what Baptism offered him, holiness. And since in our days infant baptisms take place, the responsibility of the commitment for a continuous and unceasing effort to preserve the holiness of the newly baptized is assumed by the sponsor, the mother, and the father through the provision of Orthodox education. However, a basic condition for assuming the sacred responsibility that follows the Sacrament of Baptism is for the godparent, the mother and the father to come consciously to the Sacrament and to be **true members of the Body of Christ**.

Since, therefore, these apply to Baptism, it is a great blessing that Baptisms take place, because, correspondingly new members of the Church arise who put on Christ with the perspective of preserving holiness and transmitting it to human society. This is the Orthodox view, but rather utopian

in our days, because most uneducated parents and guardians, unfortunately, ignore it.

Baptism, like other holy Sacraments (“Mysteria”) of our Church, has been established in the consciousness of a large part of the Greek people as a beautiful custom. This could possibly be characterized as something good, because the majority of the Greek people do not renounce the faith that fermented generations and generations of Greeks, since the time of the Apostles. On the other hand, however, it is very problematic. Baptism in today’s time has taken on the dimensions of a social event that is shaped according to the social and economic situation, the education, but also the moods for celebrations, projection and demonstration of the parents of the newly enlightened. The world is unaware of the sacredness of the Mystery. Most parents probably consider Baptism as a pleasant, spectacular way to name their child. With such beliefs, it is likely that the Mystery does not receive the due treatment most of the times.

We see Baptisms taking place, for example, on Friday, and after the Sacrament, so-called Orthodox Christians in the entertainment centers are thrown into a frenzy. Is this how we honor the event of Baptism? We observe within the most sacred space of the Temple, the supreme place of worship of the Triune God, people behaving with great disrespect, which is not justified by their unjustified ignorance. They talk constantly,



they are indecently dressed, they even go so far as to try to smoke. Prayer does not even cross their mind, as they do not know what prayer is.

However, what has become dominant in the last decade is the tragic phenomenon of the couple’s wedding and the Baptism of their child taking place consecutively, one after the other! The phenomenon has reached such proportions giving a clear impression that the Church has no problem with premarital relations since it does almost nothing to discourage it, to censure it.

The Church is pastorally called to provide a solution; as such, a good way to solve this tragic issue with due seriousness (and for everyone to understand that “marriage” before marriage is problematic), is to perform the two Sacraments/ Mysteria on separate dates, even if that is “inconvenient” for the participants and their guests. Herein, however, lies the other issue. “They will not marry and baptize us here. We will go to another priest.” If there was a unified position in the Church, the corresponding order would exist and each pass-

erby would not be allowed to exercise their will by spreading new “teachings” and customs within the Church.

Equally tragic is to observe parents and godparents approaching the Sacrament without first confessing and fasting. Of course, since this is just another “social spectacle” for them, why should they confess and fast? We see godparent couples applying the oil upon the child together, because “it is more spectacular,” not realizing that they thus become brother and sister in spirit with what the Sacrament entails. We also see the baptismal font decorated with various ornaments. If this is permissible, what is next? The decoration of the Holy Cup? Just as decorating the Holy Cup is improper, it is equally prohibited to decorate any baptismal font. Finally, we often come across of another travesty: people who have no connection with the Church become godparents, even if they are heterodox or atheists, just because they are good friends with the infant’s parents.

We must know that after the baptized infant, the next key person of the Sacrament of Baptism is not the father, nor the mother, (male husband and female wife emphasized) but the godparent. He is considered by the Church as the spiritual parent of the baptized. His role is very important. During infant baptism, the child is unable to confess Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Trinity, One Essence and Inseparable; this confession is being made by the godparent. First he pronounces the Creed and then the Baptism follows.

After Baptism, the goal is the preservation of holiness. This demands that the choice of a godparent be such so as to help achieve this goal. The godparent is not only there to take the candle or the gifts to the child, but to admonish him, to teach him the right faith and to cultivate the virtues in the soil of his soul until at least he reaches adulthood. The godparent must be a saint, as exaggerated as this may sound.

The parents as well must step firmly onto Christian foundations. Evaluating them fall upon us, the Clergy; we accordingly bear a huge responsibility for the Baptisms we perform. It goes without saying that all infants are pure and innocent. When, however, the parents do not guarantee that the child will be raised in Christian manner, within His blessed flock, and under a blessed marriage family, how can we possibly proceed to perform the Mystery of Baptism? Would we proceed for reasons of conscience? But such conscience is absent from the parents themselves. Would we do it to strengthen the work of the Church? Which work? Is it the work of the Church to baptize thousands of children and have them come and partake of Holy Communion only on the first three Sundays following their baptismal, and then disappear and be left at the mercy of today’s chaotic society? Is it perhaps for financial reasons? If yes, fire will fall to burn us, because we received Grace freely and we give it freely to those who accept Grace. To the one who is not receptive, woe to us if we “market” His Grace.

I referred to the pre-condition of a blessed marriage communion; this is not by chance. For twenty-one centuries, the Church has accepted in marriage union the persons who, by the Grace of God, can bear fruit: a man and a woman. These twenty-one centuries stand as a clear proof that we do not need to suddenly become supposedly smarter, more progressive, more hope-bearing, and thus “bless” a different form of a union that, of course, cannot possibly constitute a family. Unless a clergyman is guided to perform such an act because he abides “somehow” to accept and consequently legislate “new holy customs and traditions.” If that is the case, *he is a thief and a robber and he cares not about the sheep*. He does not care about the souls of innocent children, who, deprived of the possibility to taste fatherhood from their father, and motherhood from their mother, grow up in a psychologically sick environment. He does not care about the souls of those who wanted to transcend nature, because, with his “blessing,” he deprives them from reflecting “are we making a mistake?” Sadly, Christ’s words *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) should have been the goal and fruit of the struggle of every Clergyman and Christian; however, it finds no dominion, no clout, no weight by so many. **Who is “their light” today?**

As pastors, we are called by God to guard the Thermopylae of our faith. Thus, we cannot turn a blind eye to the bad texts and the new “gospel” that some supposedly progressive clergy wish to introduce. It is rather clear: either we remain with Christ, or we follow the world. *No man can serve two masters. ... Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* (Mt 6:24). Every Orthodox Christian and Clergyman has an imposed duty to live, to exist, to breathe, to walk evangelically and according to the Holy Tradition of the Church.

Our society today is in complete decline; this is greatly due to us, the pastors, who are inattentive to the foundations of Marriage and Baptism. If we do not build the house properly from the foundation, let us be certain that, when it is raised and it is cracked, we will not be able to fix it. If we attempt to indiscriminately attempt its repair, it will fall upon us and crush us!

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**MET. MESOGAIAS NIKOLAOS SLAPS  
ELPITHOFOROS: “HE ARBITRARILY AND  
FRAUDULENTLY IMPLEMENTED HIS VIEWS”**

*An interview with the newspaper ESTIA and with Ms. Maria Kornarou was granted by Rev. Metropolitan of Mesogaia Nikolaos. His Eminence, in this interview, also referred to the baptism performed in Vouliagmeni by the Archbishop of America Elpithoforos, which caused the reaction of Rev. Metropolitan of Glyfada Antonios. The following is an excerpt from His Eminence’s interview:*

**Q:** Archbishop Elpithoforos, after the baptism of a child of a same-sex couple, stated that there is a need for an “honest discussion” about sexuality and gender in the Church. Do

you agree with this, and if so, what is the right way to have such a discussion?

**A:** Unfortunately, the particular ecclesiastical person who talks about an “honest discussion” was not honest with the Metropolitan of Glyfada, and before the “discussion” had opened, he arbitrarily and fraudulently implemented his views, even on foreign soil.

I don't think the intention for such “honest ... discussions” is that sincere. Usually, “honest discussions” of this type are requested by those who are not honest and avoid discussions! Before anything else, we need a sincere discussion about repentance and the consistency between actual practice and big declarations, between substance and image within the Church. The Church is called to promote as an inspiration what she lived and taught for centuries, the beauty and sanctity of gender and the institution of the family.

The Church does not discuss the truth and its experience because it does not seek it, but owns it, bears witness to it, and confesses it. It does not question its treasure, it does not waiver on its truth; it prophesies. When she discusses, she does so to make her wealth understandable, not to adapt her teaching to the demands of the irrational modern world, which is diverted to sin and confusion.

**Q:** Are you worried about the distance that appears on the issues of family, gender and sexuality between church views and the views of the youth? How can church positions be convincingly presented to this social group?

**A:** It certainly saddens me, and a lot, in fact, but above all, the inability of the Church to inspire. The new children have been left unprotected in the torrent of disrespect and absurdity. Our speech is dry, our manner is conservative, our voice is tiresome, our life is dull.

I ask you, if we as a Church lived the power of God's piety, holiness and grace, then wouldn't our word be more convincing? Now we speak, and they don't understand us; they see us and turn their faces away, they hear us and laugh contemptuously, they think of us and grin. We do not inspire.

This, of course, does not mean that if we were OK (more inspirational), society would change. And they called Christ a *demagogue*, his sermon was heard as a *hard word... and they did not walk with him*. But they also fought the saints and did not want to see the righteous in their eyes. However, when the word is true, and our life is genuine, it has power by itself.

Blessed AB Christodoulos used to say that the ears closest to our mouths are our own. The first ones who have to hear and believe in our preaching are ourselves. Then comes the youth. We try to speak the same language, but in the wrong way, and we don't get along. I'll say it again: we do not inspire. That is why we are not convincing. However, whatever happens, the Church is the hope of the world. Nothing else.

**Q:** Can science (psychology or sociology) give answers to these questions, consistent with a critical approach?

**A:** Every science has its value and deserves our respect. Surely they could help and contribute to healthier morals and the advancement of man. But when they are also directed and without spirit, then they can only do damage.

In Plato's *Menexenus* we read: “Every science separated from justice and the other virtues, appears more as craftiness and not as wisdom.”

The terms “soul” and “society” that are included in the sciences you mentioned, are terms that are also used and highlighted by the Church and theology. One—the soul—indicates the immortal part of human existence, and the second—the society—the mutual respect of people in love and their unity.

However, when these terms do not have God in them, they do not have a spirit; they are like organisms that do not have blood, then they lose their meaning and degenerate into instruments that strip man of his sanctity and relationships of their authenticity, then they are used as a tool for deconstructing human value, dragging down the institution of the family and the legacy of gender.

I will close by saying that our era is an era that thirsts for truth and demands a genuine, free and living Church.

This is much more modern than modern currents, much smarter than the brains of artificial intelligence and of course much ahead of the discoveries of science.

It validates man, because it incorporates God. Faith is the greatest investment!



**W**e recently visited Mount Athos and talked with one of the elders there about today's problems and trials.

He suddenly interrupts us and says: “Well, has the Lord died? The Lord is alive! This is what you need to keep in mind. We are called to live with the Lord.”

And he added: “Rejoice that you know the Lord. Rejoice that you know the path to salvation. And rejoice in the circumstances that compel you to involuntarily turn to Christ in prayer.”

He is alive! He is always the same forever!

We must live with joy and the hope of being with Christ forever; and in the earthly life, and in the eternal. And then we will have such a joy that no one can take away from us.

Therefore, any fears are a separation from Christ, an attempt to weaken the faith. This is an enemy's trick. For we do not fear your terror, and we are not troubled, for God is with us!

**Metropolitan Sergius of Ternopil and Kremenets**  
(Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate)

## ON THE HETERODOX

*Here are presented various articles of value on this ever-important subject, as most of the faithful have loved ones who are non-Orthodox.*

### WILL THE HETERODOX BE SAVED?

*By Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory (+1985), from a pamphlet by Fr. Nektarios Serfes, Boise, ID (originally published in "Orthodox Life," Vol. 34, No. 6, Nov.-Dec., 1984, pp. 33-36)*

**Question:** "If the Orthodox faith is the only true faith, can Christians of other confessions be saved? May a person who has led a perfectly righteous life on earth be saved on the strength of his ancestry, while not being baptized as Christian?"

**Answer:** *For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth [struggleth], but of God that showeth mercy. (Rom 9:15-16).* In the Orthodox Church we have the path of salvation indicated to us and we are given the means by which a person may be morally purified and have a direct promise of salvation. In this sense, St. Cyprian of Carthage says that *outside the Church there is no salvation.*

In the Church is given that of which Apostle Peter writes to Christians (and only Christians): *According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-8).*

And what should one say of those outside the Church, who do not belong to her? Another apostle provides us with an idea: *For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. (1 Cor 5:12-13).* God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. (Rom 9:18). It is necessary to mention only one thing: that to "lead a perfectly righteous life," as the questioner expressed it, means to live according to the commandments of the Beatitudes—which is beyond the power of one, outside the Orthodox Church, without the help of grace which is concealed within it.

The question: Can the heterodox, i.e., those who do not belong to Orthodoxy—the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—be saved, has become particularly painful and acute in our days.

In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary, first of all, to recall that in His Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mentions but one state of the human soul which unfaillingly leads to perdition, i.e., *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.* (Mt 12:1-32). The Holy Spirit is, above all, the Spirit of Truth, as the Saviour loved to refer to Him. Accordingly, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is blasphemy against the Truth, conscious and persistent opposition to it. The same text makes it clear that even blasphemy against the Son of Man, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Himself may be forgiven, as it may be uttered in error or in ignorance and, subsequently may be covered by conversion and repentance (an example of such a converted and repentant blasphemer is the Apostle Paul—see Acts 26:11 and 1 Tim 1:13).

If, however, a man opposes the Truth which he clearly apprehends by his reason and conscience, he becomes blind and commits spiritual suicide, for he thereby likens himself to the devil, who believes in God and dreads Him, yet hates, blasphemes, and opposes Him.

Thus, man's refusal to accept the Divine Truth and his opposition thereto makes him a son of damnation. Accordingly, in sending His disciples to preach, the Lord told them: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mk 16:16),* for the latter heard the Lord's Truth and was called upon to accept it, yet refused, thereby inheriting the damnation of those who *believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thes 2:12).

The Holy Orthodox Church is the repository of the divinely revealed Truth in all its fullness and fidelity to apostolic Tradition. Hence, he who leaves the Church, who intentionally and consciously falls away from it, joins the ranks of its opponents and becomes a renegade as regards apostolic Tradition. The Church dreadfully anathematized such renegades, in accordance with the words of the Saviour Himself (Mt 18:17) and of the Apostle Paul (Gal 1:8-9), threatening them with eternal damnation and calling them to return to the Orthodox fold. It is self-evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members, of other non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be termed renegades or heretics—i.e., those who knowingly pervert the truth.\* They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy. The Lord, *Who will have all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4)* and *Who enlightens every man born into the world (Jn 1.43),* undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way.

With reference to the above question, it is particularly instructive to recall the answer once given to an inquirer by the Blessed Theophan the Recluse. The blessed one replied more or less thus: "You ask, will the heterodox be saved?... Why do

you worry about them? They have a Saviour Who desires the salvation of every human being. He will take care of them. You and I should not be burdened with such a concern. Study yourself and your own sins... I will tell you one thing, however: should you, being Orthodox and possessing the Truth in its fullness, betray Orthodoxy, and enter a different faith, you will lose your soul forever.”

† † †

(\*) The Greek word for “heresy” is derived from the word for “choice” and hence inherently implies conscious, willful rejection or opposition to the Divine Truth manifest in the Orthodox Church.

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### OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS NON-ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS: WHAT SHOULD IT BE?

*From “Pastoral Guidance,” chapter 84 of Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works.*

A few years before he died, Fr. Seraphim received a letter from an African-American woman who, as a catechumen learning about Orthodoxy, was struggling to understand the uncharitable attitude that some Orthodox Christians showed to those outside the Church, an attitude which reminded her of how her own people had been treated. “I am deeply troubled,” this woman wrote, “as to how Orthodoxy views what the world would call Western Christians, i.e., Protestants and Roman Catholics. I have read many articles by many Orthodox writers, and a few use words like ‘Papists,’ etc., which I find deeply disturbing and quite offensive. I find them offensive because as a person of a race which has been subjected to much name-calling I despise and do not wish to adopt the habit of name-calling myself. Even ‘heretic’ disturbs me....”

“Where do I stand with my friends and relatives? They do not know about Orthodoxy or they do not understand it. Yet they believe in and worship Christ. Am I to treat my friends and relatives as if they have no God, no Christ? Or can I call them Christians, but just ones who do not know the true Church?”

“When I ask this question, I cannot help but think of St. Innocent of Alaska as he visited the Franciscan monasteries in California. He remained thoroughly Orthodox yet he treated the priests he met there with kindness and charity and not name-calling. This, I hope, is what Orthodoxy says about how one should treat other Christians.”

This woman’s quandary was actually fairly common to people coming into the Orthodox Faith. Now, nearing the end of his short life and having thrown off his youthful bitterness, Fr. Seraphim answered as follows:

I was happy to receive your letter—happy not because you are confused about the question that troubles you, but because your attitude reveals that in the truth of Orthodoxy to which

you are drawn you wish to find room also for a loving, compassionate attitude to those outside the Orthodox Faith. I firmly believe that this is indeed what Orthodoxy teaches.

I will set forth briefly what I believe to be the proper Orthodox attitude towards non-Orthodox Christians.

1. Orthodoxy is the Church founded by Christ for the salvation of mankind, and therefore we should guard with our life the purity of its teaching and our own faithfulness to it. In the Orthodox Church alone is grace given through the sacraments (most other churches do not even claim to have sacraments in any serious sense). The Orthodox Church alone is the Body of Christ, and if salvation is difficult enough within the Orthodox Church, how much more difficult must it be outside the Church!

2. However, it is not for us to define the state of those who are outside the Orthodox Church. If God wishes to grant salvation to some who are Christians in the best way they know, but without ever knowing the Orthodox Church—that is up to Him, not us. But when He does this, it is outside the normal way that He established for salvation—which is in the Church, as a part of the Body of Christ.

I myself can accept the experience of Protestants being “born-again” in Christ; I have met people who have changed their lives entirely through meeting Christ, and I cannot deny their experience just because they are not Orthodox. I call these people “subjective” or “beginning” Christians. But until they are united to the Orthodox Church, they cannot have the fullness of Christianity, they cannot be objectively Christian as belonging to the Body of Christ and receiving the grace of the sacraments. I think this is why there are so many sects among them—they begin the Christian life with a genuine conversion to Christ, but they cannot continue the Christian life in the right way until they are united to the Orthodox Church, and they therefore substitute their own opinions and subjective experiences for the Church’s teaching and sacraments.

About those Christians who are outside the Orthodox Church, therefore, I would say: they do not yet have the full truth—perhaps it just has not been revealed to them yet, or perhaps it is our fault for not living and teaching the Orthodox Faith in a way they can understand. With such people we cannot be one in the Faith, but there is no reason why we should regard them as totally estranged or as equal to pagans (although we should not be hostile to pagans either—they also have not yet seen the truth!).

It is true that many of the non-Orthodox hymns contain a teaching or at least an emphasis that is wrong—especially the idea that when one is “saved” he does not need to do anything more because Christ has done it all. This idea prevents people from seeing the truth of Orthodoxy which emphasizes the idea of struggling for one’s salvation even after Christ has given it to us, as St. Paul says: *Work out your own salvation*

*with fear and trembling.* (Phil 2:12). But almost all of the religious Christmas carols are all right, and they are sung by Orthodox Christians in America (some of them in even the strictest monasteries).

The word “heretic” (as we say in our article on Fr. Dimitry Dudko) is indeed used too frequently nowadays. It has a definite meaning and function, to distinguish new teachings from the Orthodox teaching; but few of the non-Orthodox Christians today are consciously “heretics,” and it really does no good to call them that.

In the end, I think, Fr. Dimitry Dudko’s attitude is the correct one: We should view the non-Orthodox as people to whom Orthodoxy has not yet been revealed, as people who are potentially Orthodox (if only we ourselves would give them a better example!). There is no reason why we cannot call them Christians and be on good terms with them, recognize that we have at least our faith in Christ in common, and live in peace especially with our own families. St. Innocent’s attitude to the Roman Catholics in California is a good example for us. A harsh, polemical attitude is called for only when the non-Orthodox are trying to take away our flocks or change our teaching.

As for prejudices—these belong to people, not the Church. Orthodoxy does not require you to accept any prejudices or opinions about other races, nations, etc.

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### **WE MUST NOT CONDEMN ANY HETERODOX!**

*From Saint Silouan the Athonite, by Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov) (Essex, England: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991), pp. 63-65.*

Saint Silouan’s attitude towards those who differed from him was characterized by a sincere desire to see what was good in them, and not to offend them in anything they held sacred. He always remained himself, he was utterly convinced that *salvation lies in Christ-like humility*, and by virtue of this humility he strove with his whole soul to interpret every man at his best. He found his way to the heart of everyone to his capacity for loving Christ.

I remember a conversation he had with a certain Archimandrite who was engaged in missionary work. This Archimandrite thought highly of the Staretz and many a time went to see him during his visits to the Holy Mountain. The Staretz asked him what sort of sermons he preached to people.

The Archimandrite, who was still young and inexperienced gesticulated with his hands and swayed his whole body, and replied excitedly, “I tell them, Your faith is all wrong, perverted. There is nothing right, and if you do not repent, there will be no salvation for you.”

The Staretz heard him out, then asked:

‘Tell me, Father Archimandrite, do they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is the true God?’

‘Yes, that they do believe.’

‘And do they revere the Mother of God?’

‘Yes, but they are not taught properly about her.’

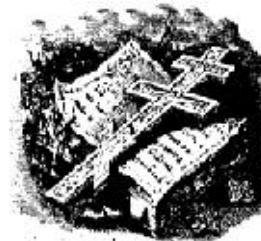
‘And what of the saints?’

‘Yes, they honour them but since they have fallen away from the Church, what saints can they have?’

‘Do they celebrate the Divine Office in their churches? Do they read the Gospels?’

‘Yes, they do have churches and services but if you were to compare their services with ours—how cold and lifeless theirs are!’

‘Father Archimandrite, people feel in their souls when they are doing the proper thing, believing in Jesus Christ, revering the Mother of God and the saints, whom they call upon in prayer, so if you condemn their faith they will not listen to you ... But if you were to confirm that they were doing well to believe in God and honour the Mother of God and the saints; that they are right to go to church, and say their prayers at home, read the Divine word, and so on; and then gently point out their mistakes and show them what they ought to amend, then they would listen to you, and the Lord would rejoice over them. And this way by God’s mercy we shall all find salvation. God is love, and therefore the preaching of His word must always proceed from love. Then both preacher and listener will profit. But if you do nothing but condemn, the soul of the people will not heed you, and no good will come of it.’



Man stands at the crossroads between righteousness and sin, and chooses whichever path he wishes. But after that the path he has chosen to follow, and the guides assigned to it, whether angels and saints or demons and sinners, will lead him to the end of it, even if he has no wish to go there. The good guides lead him toward God and the kingdom of heaven, the evil guides toward the devil and age long punishment.

But nothing and no one is to blame for his destruction except his own free will. For God is the God of salvation, bestowing on us, along with being and well-being, the knowledge and strength that we cannot have without the grace of God. Not even the devil can destroy a man, compelling him to choose wrongly, or reducing him to impotence or enforced ignorance, or anything else: he can only suggest evil to him.

St. Peter of Damaskos  
The Philokalia vol. 3

## ON HALLOWEEN

*By Saint Nikolai Velimirovic.*

As Orthodox Christians we must carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world, its activities, holidays and festivals, to be certain whether or not these involvements are compatible with our Holy Orthodox Faith.

For a while now everything in the outside world is reminding us that Halloween is near: at school our children are busy painting pumpkins, cutting and pasting bats, ghosts and witches and planning the ideal costume in which to go trick-or-treating. Most of our schools, local community organizations and entertainment on television, radio and press will share in and capitalize upon the festival of Halloween. Many of us will participate in this festival by going to costume parties, or by taking our children trick-or-treating in our neighborhood after dark on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

Most of us will take part in the Halloween festivities believing that it has no deeper meaning than fun and excitement for the children. Most of us do not know the historical background of the festival of Halloween and its customs.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Britain, Ireland and Northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall, on the eve of October 31<sup>st</sup> and into the day of November 1<sup>st</sup>, when, as they believed the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began.

Instructed by their priests, the Druids, the people extinguished all hearth fires and lights, and darkness prevailed. According to pagan Celtic tradition, the souls of the dead had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death and made total communion with Samhain, the Lord of death, who could be appeased and cajoled by burnt offerings to allow the souls of the dead to return home for a festal visit on this day. The belief led to the ritual practice of wandering about in the dark dressed in costumes indicating witches, hobgoblins, fairies and demons. The living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by this ritual act of imitation, through costume and the wandering about in the darkness. They also believed that the souls of the dead bore the affliction of great hunger on this festal visit. This belief brought about the practice of begging as another ritual imitation of the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. The implication was that any souls of the dead and their imitators who are not appeased with "treats", i.e., offerings, will provoke the wrath of Samhain, whose angels and servants could retaliate through a system of "tricks", or curses.

In the strictly Orthodox early Celtic Church, the Holy Fathers tried to counteract this pagan new year festival by establishing the feast of All Saints on that same day (in the

East, this feast is celebrated on another day). The night before the feast (on "All Hallows Eve"), a vigil service was held and a morning celebration of the Eucharist. This custom created the term Halloween. But the remaining pagan and therefore anti-Christian people reacted to the Church's attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening, so that the night before the Christian feast of All Saints became a night of sorcery, witchcraft and other occult practices, many of which involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs.

Costumes of skeletons, for example, developed as a mockery of the Church's reverence for holy relics. Holy things were stolen and used in sacrilegious rituals. The practice of begging became a system of persecution of Christians who refused to take part in these festivities. And so the Church's attempt to counteract this unholy festival failed.

This is just a brief explanation of the history and meaning of the festival of Halloween. It is clear that we, as Orthodox Christians, cannot participate in this event at any level (even if we only label it as "fun"), and that our involvement in it is an idolatrous betrayal of our God and our Holy Faith. For if we imitate the dead by dressing up or wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose Lord is not a Celtic Samhain, but satan, the evil one, who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of "trick or treat," our offering does not go to innocent children, but rather to satan himself.

Let us remember our ancestors, the Holy Christian Martyrs of the early Church, as well as our Serbian New Martyrs, who refused, despite painful penalties and horrendous persecution, to worship, venerate or pay obeisance in any way to idols who are angels of satan. The foundation of our Holy Church is built upon their very blood.



The cause and origin of the passions is the misuse of things. Such misuse results from perversion of our character. Perversion expresses the bias of the will, and the state of the will is tested by demonic provocation. The demons thus are permitted by divine providence to demonstrate to us the specific state of our will.

**St. Gregory of Sinai**

Where humility is combined with the remembrance of God that is established through watchfulness and attention, and also with recurrent prayer inflexible in its resistance to the enemy, there is the place of God, the heaven of the heart in which because of God's presence no demonic army dares to make a stand.

**St. Philotheos of Sinai**

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



A 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION  
HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG  
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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## THE BLUE ROSE

*By Reader Joseph, a simple but inspirational story.*

Having four visiting family members, the wife was very busy, so I offered to go to the store for her to get some needed items. I scurried around the store, gathered up my goodies, and headed for the checkout counter, only to be blocked in the narrow aisle by a young man who appeared to be about sixteen-years-old. I was not in a hurry, so I patiently waited for the boy to realize that I was there. This was when he waved his hands excitedly in the air and declared in a loud voice, “Mommy, I’m over here.”

It was obvious now, he was mentally challenged, and also startled as he turned and saw me standing so close to him, waiting to squeeze by. His eyes widened and surprise exploded on his face as I said, “Hey Buddy, what’s your name?” “My name is Denny and I’m shopping with my mother,” he responded proudly. “Wow,” I said, “that’s a cool name; I wish my name was Denny, but my name is Steve.”

“Steve, like Stevarino?” he asked. “Yes,” I answered. “How old are you Denny?”

“How old am I now, Mommy?” He asked his mother as she slowly came over from the next aisle. “You’re fifteen-years-old Denny; now be a good boy and let the man pass by.”

I acknowledged her and continued to talk to Denny for several more minutes about summer, bicycles, and school. I watched his brown eyes dance with excitement because he was the center of someone’s attention. He then abruptly turned and headed toward

the toy section. Denny’s mom had a puzzled look on her face and thanked me for taking the time to talk with her son. She told me that most people wouldn’t even look at him, much less talk to him. I told her that it was my pleasure and then I said something I have no idea where it came from, other than by the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

I told her that there are plenty of red, yellow, and pink roses in God’s Garden; however, “Blue Roses” are very rare and should be appreciated for their beauty and distinctiveness. You see, Denny is a Blue Rose and if someone does not stop and smell that rose with their heart and touch that rose with their kindness, then they have missed a blessing from God.

She was silent for a second, then with a tear in her eye she asked, “Who are you?”

Without thinking I said, “Oh, I’m probably just a dandelion but I sure love living in God’s garden.”

She reached out, squeezed my hand, and said, “God bless you!” and then I had tears in my eyes.

May I suggest that the next time you see a “Blue Rose,” do not turn your head and walk off. Take the time to smile and say Hello. Why? Because, by the grace of God, this mother or father could be you. This could be your child, grandchild, niece, or nephew. What a difference a moment can mean to that person or their family. From an old dandelion!

Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

*People will forget what you said, People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*



# 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]

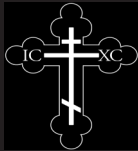
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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

## ARE WE READY FOR CHRISTMAS?

*By the blessed late Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotes (+2010), from the book «Ἐμπνευσμένα Κηρύγματα Ὁρθοδόξου Ὁμολογίας καὶ Ἀγιοπατερικῆς Πνοῆς» (Orthodoxos Kypseli: Thessaloniki, 2011), pp. 27-31. Translated by Rev Dr. John Palmer.*

Beloved in Christ, I would like to ask you a question; I ask it of myself and I ask it of you. Are we prepared to celebrate the great feast of Christmas?

There are two kinds of preparation; material and spiritual. Our material preparation is more or less finished. Housewives have cleaned their houses, husbands have finished—or have almost finished—their shopping, and children await their presents. Everyone has written their Christmas cards, signing them with the customary “Merry Christmas” and “Happy New Year.”

This is worldly preparation; I am not interested in this. What I am interested in is spiritual preparation, the kind of preparation which makes us ready to celebrate the great event of the Incarnation of the Divine Word as is proper. Only a small number have properly prepared themselves. Of one thousand Christians, I doubt if even one celebrates Christmas truly. Does my estimate seem exaggerated? Let us see.

How is Christmas celebrated today? A portion of Christians will celebrate it “typically,” let us say. Hearing the bells on Christmas Eve, they will go and take

part in the service out of habit. This is certainly better than being absent altogether; it is something at least.

Others will imitate foreign customs and practices, forgetting the ecclesiastical celebration altogether; in other words, they will pass Christmas Eve without the scent of Christ. For Orthodox Christians, Christmas is meaningless if it is celebrated without church services, without prayer, without confession, without Holy Communion, without forgiveness, without almsgiving. Indeed, the devil has sown a new seed in our homeland, and it is sprouting up everywhere like mushrooms grow in manure.

On Christmas Eve people put on these *réveillon* (a foreign custom and a foreign word, French; it is a long dinner held in the evening preceding Christmas Day and New Year's Eve; its name descends from the word *réveil* (meaning “waking”), because participation involves staying awake until morning, as the meal finishes. Anyway, they put on parties in luxurious hotels and other such places, far from the Church, far from hymns, far from the Divine Liturgy, where people gather and amuse themselves with worldly music, with food, with drink and whatever follows from these things. Such a practice is a thorn in the field of our homeland. If it continues to spread, the spirit of secularization will overtake the Christian feast altogether.

Some, then, celebrate Christmas “typically,” others put on these *réveillon* and trade in the Church feast for something

*The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2023. We completed our twentieth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2023 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.*

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN  
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN  
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688  
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688  
USA

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

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

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altogether worldly. And still others, what do they do? They leave. They are not satisfied here. Greece is not enough for them. They have money to spare so they take trips and go on tours. On Christmas Eve when the bells are ringing, these people will be far from their homes in different places, and not only in our country. They are not satisfied here, so they hop on an airplane and go celebrate Christmas in Rome, in London, in Paris, in different places.

These, beloved, and anyone else who has openly denied the faith, have cast Christmas out of their hearts. For a large number of people, then, Christmas is nothing but another chance to dull their boredom; the actual content of the feast holds no appeal for them.

Yes! That day you will have it all! You will have your great salons, your ornate rugs, your curtains, your fancy cutlery, your luxurious hotel rooms, your drinks, your meals, your music, your trips. You will have everything! You will be missing one thing, however. You will be missing the most valuable thing; the thing which gives the feast meaning! Lacking this thing, what kind of Christmas can you expect to have? **Your Christmas will be a Christmas without Christ!**

But why? How did this happen? How did things get to this point?

This is the age which the Prophet Isaiah foresaw. There will come a day, he said, when men will be drunk without wine. This day has arrived. Contemporary *man is drunk, but not with wine. He staggers but not with strong drink.* (Isa 29:9).

For one to be drunk with wine during these days is undoubtedly a sin, for, *drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* (1 Cor 6:10) There is, however, a worse kind of drunkenness: woe to those who are drunk without wine, says Isaiah.

What, then, is contemporary man drunk on?

One is drunk on the love of glory. Another is drunk on the love of money; another is drunk on women and indecent sights; another is drunk on card playing, on games of chance; another on an obsession with sports teams; another on plays and films;

another on enjoyments and luxuries.

I have particularly noticed that a good many are drunk on politics, something which has become a passion only for us in Greece alone. I say this as one who keeps himself out of party politics. Were you to open my heart you would find nothing but my homeland and my Christ. Here



**A silver 14-pointed star, embedded into the marble floor, (referred to as "The Star of David) is the exact site of the birth of Jesus in a grotto underneath Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.**

in Greece there is a pathological attachment to politics. Even on Christmas Eve, the feast will be overshadowed by discussions of politics. Nowhere else can one find such a phenomenon.

I have also noticed of late that many have become drunk on that strong wine described in the Apocalypse; that wine which the noetic Babylon will give the rulers and the people to drink. This wine, the commentators say, is the pagan spirit, the moral depravity of the world. This wine is so strong that if you were to drink just a few drops, it will cause you to lose your faith, you will forget everything.

The strongest wine, then, is not money, or women, or shameful lusts, or other sensual pleasures; it is the cosmopolitan spirit of modern life, it is the emancipation from devotion, knowledge infused with pride, the science of the atheist, the atheistic rebellion, the denial of God and the divinization of man. It is this wine which has made many in our age drunk.

Men are drunk, then, on various wines offered to him by the ruler of this age in his golden cup. Do you know what these men are like? I will show you by means of an example.

I try, with God's help, to be a teacher. So I travel to a village where I find someone and try to teach him something about Christ, about the faith, about the mysteries. He listens, but the others tell me, "Don't waste your time, he's drunk! Don't bother sitting with him and talking to him!" This is how the world is today...it is drunk without wine! Is it worth speaking to such men?

But I appeal to you, my brothers. I am not speaking to drunks, to those made dizzy by the idols. It is my hope that I speak to the faithful who know but one kind of drunkenness, that holy drunkenness described by the Psalmist who exhorts us to taste and see that the Lord is good, and *the earth is full of His goodness.* (Pss 33:5). I hope that you have your ears open for blessed is *he that speaketh in the ears of them that will hear.* (Sir 25:9).

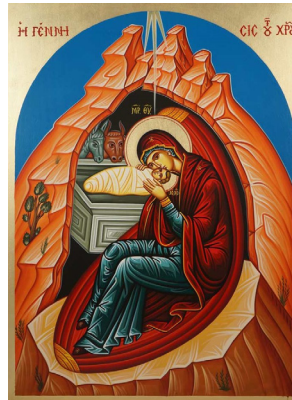


Having come to a new life in the regeneration of Baptism, we once again put ourselves to death by a carnal life—by a life of sin for earthly pleasures and gain. The Holy Apostle Paul said: *So then, brethren, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh... They that are in the flesh are not able to please God... For the mind of the flesh is death...* [Rom 8:12, 8, 6]. The grace of Baptism remains without effect, like a bright sun covered by clouds, like a precious treasure buried underground. Sin begins to act within us with its full power, even more strongly than before our Baptism, depending on the degree to which we abandon ourselves to a sinful way of life.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

By His Eminence Metropolitan Panteleimon of Antinoes, retired archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa.



With special skills and grace the hymn-writers of our Holy Orthodox Church exalt the event of the Divine Economy through the sacred hymns of today's great feast, that of the Incarnation of the Word and Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The event of the Incarnation of God the Word consisted of a unique and unrepeated event.

For it proclaimed not only the beginning of the salvation of mankind, but, simultaneously, it expressed the infinite Love of the One and Only True God, the Holy Trinity, towards His creation, man.

The Angels in Heaven rejoice; they glorify together with the shepherds of the humble village of Bethlehem. The whole Universe leaps with joy. The Earth offers the Cave; the desert the Manger; the heavens the Star; the Magi the presents; and we, the logical creatures of God the Creator, Who as an Infant is born today and is wrapped in swaddling-clothes and is placed in a Manger of the horses, offer ourselves, our hearts and souls to the Divine Infant.

Man, from the beginning of his creation, was gifted with many *charismata* and wisdom. God honoured man to be the king of all and became the crown jewel of all Creation. Unfortunately, Satan envied this honour and glory with which God vested man, so that through deception and craftiness he deceived the first-created.

The disobedience of the Divine Commandment became the starting point of mankind's sufferings. Adam and Eve in their desperate situation, they attempted to cover their nakedness. This nakedness does not just refer to the nakedness of their body, but to the spiritual nakedness of being deprived from God's Divine Grace; for His Grace abandoned them at the moment when they had abandoned God and gave their trust to the serpent.

Man's mind and conscience were darkened. The first-created remained unrepentant. They did not take advantage of the three opportunities which God offered them for forgiveness. The one throws the responsibilities to the other, and the worst of all was that Adam, who benefited more than any other creature, throws the blame of his fall to God Himself.

This ungratefulness of Adam and the insult against God is what is called as the Original Sin. Henceforth, this sin is

inherited by all men, as being Adam's offspring. This sin is forgiven only through the Holy Sacrament of Baptism.

The Fall of the first-created was great, as great as were the benefits which they had received from God. God granted them all Nature and placed only one rule to keep. They had everything and, yet, they wanted to steel deification; they attempted illegally to become 'gods' as their Creator, but without the Grace of their Creator. God wanted them to become perfect through obedience to His Divine Will, but they wanted to achieve this perfection and deification without struggling. The result was catastrophic not only for Adam, but for all his descendants. Fear, cowardice, accusing of one another, lies, slander, hatred, envy, murder, physical ailments and finally death replaced man's conditions which he had in Paradise.

Man, from king of all Creation, became a slave to sin and death. Any attempt to restore his relationship with God was in vain. His mind was darkened so much that instead of worshipping the True God, he turned and worshipped the elements of nature. Idols replaced the Holy Trinity and man was led from one error to another.

But, the Love of God did not abandon the creation of His Hands deserted and unprotected. As a caring Father, He prepared the path of salvation. God, through His Prophets, proclaimed the Good News concerning the mission of His Elect, His Son and Word. The Messiah, the Saviour of the world, will come from the Virgin Mary, who through her holiness pleased God and proved that man is capable to conquer sin and to become a chosen vessel. God the Word will be born from the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and will become Man similar to us, but without sin. His mission will be one to save His people from the slavery of sin and the tyranny of death.

Moses, in the Holy Spirit, sees the flaming but not burning Bush. Jacob dreams about the Ladder which united Heaven and earth. Jezekeil sees the Eastern Gate through which the Lord God shall pass and it will remain shut. Isaiah sees the Virgin Mary from whom Jesus was born, the one Who is called Christ, which in Greek is translated Emmanuel and means that God is with us.

Truthfully, when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, Who is born from the Virgin Mary and as an Infant was wrapped in swaddling-clothes and circumcised. As an Infant, He is persecuted by the insane Herod. As a perfect man, He dwelt amongst men and taught the people. He is falsely accused by the Jews as a seductive person. He is arrested and condemned unjustly as a Thief. He is crucified as Criminal and faced death; and on the third day, as God Almighty, He rose from the dead. He suffered all these things in order to restore Adam and all his descendants.

The Nativity of the Son and Word of God is the fulfillment of Divine Promise given in the Garden of Delight concerning

man's salvation, and which begins with the birth at Bethlehem and leads to the Crucifixion on Golgotha, the glorious Resurrection, the Ascension in Heaven and the Enthronement on the right hand of God the Father. Through this Divine Economia, the Son and Word of God ended the rule of Satan who held mankind under the bondage and tyranny of death. Christ grants to all those who will believe in Him eternal Life.

Christ's Nativity gave to mankind the Light of the True Knowledge of God. Man, free from the darkness of not knowing God, can know the True God through the Light of the Holy Gospel and His Holy Orthodox Church. Freed from the falsehood of idolatry, man is able to worship the One and Only True God, the Holy Trinity. He knows the way, which leads him to conquer virtues and holiness. As a free person, man can walk on the path of salvation.

God leaves Heaven and comes down on earth. He becomes a perfect Man, in order to raise man to the heights of the Deity. The One Who is without flesh, takes up flesh. The One Who is Bodiless, receives body. He, Who cannot be contended by the Universe, is restricted in the boundaries of human nature, and simultaneously fills all things with His Presence.

God and Man. Two Natures and two Wills, which remain unmixed and unconfused, united in the One Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

*And the Word became flesh*, not that man became god, neither that man ascended into Heaven, but that God the Word out of love towards man took up all the human nature in order to sanctify and save it. God the Word, with His birth, overcame sin and freed mankind from mortality and death. Without this Divine Economia, no one could have inherited the eternal Kingdom of God.

God the Word reveals Himself to man and invites everyone to become a member of His Kingdom. He invites all men to enter through the narrow path. He does not want anyone to be lost. Everyone can become "sons" of God by adoption and Grace and co-heirs of Christ.

The Nativity of our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ, the Incarnated Son and Word of God the Father, addresses us today and sends us an important message and one special invitation:

Let us follow the Star, which guides us to Bethlehem of Judaea. Let us kneel with the humble shepherds before the Creator of all. Let us become co-travelers with the three Magi and let us offer to the Divine Infant our tears of repentance. Let us open our hearts and souls in order to welcome within us the Divine Infant which was born by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. Let us abandon the sinful pleasures of this world of vanity. Let us receive with the simplicity of our hearts the angelic message, that *today a Saviour has been born, who is the Lord Christ* and let us sing *glory to God in the highest and on earth peace amongst men according to God's Good Will*. Amen.

## THE NATIVITY AND BAPTISM-THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

*By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Empirical Dogmatics," vol. 2; from the lectures of Fr. John Romanides of blessed memory. Text in quotes is from Fr. John's lectures, with commentary by his Eminence.*

When we talk about the birth of Christ we are speaking of two births. One is the pre-eternal birth of the Logos from the Father, according to the divine nature, and the other is the birth in time from the All-Holy Virgin, according to the human nature. This refers to Christ's two natures: the divine and the human.

"The important thing is that this Logos, before His birth in the flesh, is like the Father in every respect. He does not come from nothing. The Logos has two births. One birth was before all ages and the other birth was in time, which is the birth as a man, the incarnation."

This theological fact is revelational and above all it is empirical, as the glorified flesh of Christ becomes a source of life for the members of the Church, particularly the saints.

"It is not only the Old and New Testaments that clearly teach the fact that the Logos, the Lord of Glory, Who is God by nature and co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father, truly took flesh and was born in His own normal and separate humanity of the Virgin Mary—who is literally, really and truly the Theotokos or Mother of God. Thus He became man by nature, not just by indwelling, and, as the Logos in flesh, He became co-essential with us through His humanity. This truth is clearly revealed to all who have reached glorification, from which they learn empirically that Christ is the Logos, that He is God by nature and man by nature, and also by nature the source of glory. He passes on to His human nature the existence of the source of glory, by means of which the actual flesh of the Logos becomes the source of our life and life-giving; this is the result of the Logos Himself being incarnate, and on account of the union and exchange of natural properties between the divine and human natures of the Logos."

In the Old Testament there was the tabernacle of witness, where the pot of manna, the tablets of the covenant and Aaron's rod were kept in the Holy of Holies. Now, in the New Covenant, the tabernacle is the flesh that He took from the All-Holy Virgin.

"This is why the statement that *the Logos became flesh and dwelt* (literally: 'tabernacled') *among us* (Jn 1:14) is so important. This dwelling is the tabernacle. God 'tabernacled' among us. How? He became flesh and dwelt among us."

"The tabernacle of witness is the created form of the uncreated Temple, because the uncreated Temple is Christ Himself, the Logos, this Angel of the Lord. For that reason Christ says, *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:10-11) and so on. That Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ

means, in Hebrew terms, that Christ is the Temple of God. So we have the uncreated Temple, as we have the uncreated Law, which is Christ; and we have a created temple, which is the tabernacle of witness, which they later enclosed in Solomon's temple. **This is why the created temple, the temple of Solomon, has been abolished and replaced by the created Temple, the human nature of Christ.**"

Christ as God-man is like God the Father and the Holy Spirit in every respect according to His divinity, and like man in every respect according to His human nature. The phrase that Christ is *the image of the invisible God* (Col 1:15), refers to His uncreated divine nature.

"This is what the Apostle Paul says: *the image of the invisible God*, Christ, that is. When he says *image* he does not mean something created, because there cannot be a created image of God. It is different if we speak about an image of Christ; in that case we have an image of something created, because Christ is man and we have an icon of Christ the man, not of Christ's divinity. But when we say that Christ is the image of God, as God is not incarnate, how can God have a created icon? He is the image of the invisible God as an uncreated reality, not as a created reality."

The incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was in the pre-eternal plan of God, because through the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Logos, the glorification of every human being could come about. From this perspective, the Theotokos was in God's pre-eternal plan. St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote a specific text About our Lady the Theotokos, in which, by quoting the Fathers' words, he asserts that *All the intelligible and perceptible world came into being for this end*, that is, on account of the Lady Theotokos, but the Lady Theotokos came into being on account of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"The All-Holy Virgin is in the pre-eternal plan of God, as the *troparia* and the Fathers of the Church say. This is a matter of description. It is not a philosophical question about whether or not the All-Holy Virgin is necessary for the incarnation. It is a fact that the All-Holy Mother of God is ever-virgin. We cannot philosophize about something that is a fact and say that the incarnation could have come about even without the All-Holy Virgin, or from a Mother of God who was not a virgin."

The All-Holy Virgin was the greatest gift of the creation and humanity to Christ. The successive purifications of her forebears, her own struggle and, most of all, the grace of God, made her worthy to become the Mother of the Son and Logos of God. She experienced glorification in the Holy of Holies.

"We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She

also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God.”

Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father according to His divine nature and co-essential with us according to His human nature. Some people in the early Church claimed that Christ was co-essential with the Father and with His Mother.

“Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with His mother. That means that Christ is co-essential with us. He cannot be co-essential with His mother and His mother co-essential with us, without Christ being co-essential with us.”

The Church ruled at the Third Ecumenical Council that the All-Holy Virgin was to be called Theotokos, because she did not give birth to a mere man, but to the Logos of God. The teaching about the Theotokos is therefore included in the infallible teaching of the Church.

The Theotokos has an important place in the Church.

“In the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church the whole catholic Church is present: Christ with the Theotokos, the Prophets, the Apostles and the saints.”

The faithful have a spiritual relationship with the Church. Anyone who loves Christ also loves the All-Holy Virgin, who assisted in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Logos of God and from whom Christ took human nature and glorified it. The relationship of the faithful with the All-Holy Virgin is not, therefore, simply sentimental but spiritual.

The glory of the Theotokos is not a theoretical teaching, but empirical, as many saints have seen the glory of the Theotokos.

In any case, the human nature that was assumed by the Logos and united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the divine nature, was glorified *at the same time as it was assumed* in the womb of the Theotokos. Christ was not gradually perfected, as human beings are. Christ is God according to essence, whereas man is glorified according to participation. Also, according to the Fathers of the Church, Christ brings about glorification: He is Himself the source of man’s glorification and does not “undergo” glorification. Christ is God and glorifies others, like the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas man is glorified. Christ revealed this glorified human nature to human beings by stages.

“There is no question of Christ having passed through the stages of perfection, purification and illumination in order to reach glorification or *theoria*. There was no progress towards perfection in Christ, since He had glorification or *theoria* or participation in the union of uncreated glory from the

very conception of His human nature in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin.

He did not possess this by the grace of God, but naturally, seeing that He was God by nature and the actual hypostasis of the Logos, Who was the only one of the Holy Trinity to become man by nature, uniting Himself with His own normal human nature, with all its natural properties, including the will and energy that are common to human nature in general.

Christ gradually revealed the stages of perfection in Himself (in other words, the glorification of human nature in Himself) to set an example to those who are on the way to perfection. He assumed everything that was common to human nature (except sin) not in external appearance, as the Docetists claimed, in order to delude those observing His human life, but in reality.”

“After the incarnation of the Logos, exactly the same method of revelation and glorification that took place with the Prophets



is repeated with the Apostles. The difference now is that the Logos reveals Himself in the natural and uncreated glory of His nature, which is shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit, by means of His own humanity. This humanity did not advance towards the continuous vision of divine glory, but was glorified through its union—not by grace but by nature—with the Logos from the beginning of its existence

in the womb of the Theotokos.

Christ did not progress as a human being towards glorification, but was conceived as a glorified man, not by virtue of the union that the saints experience with the divine nature, but by virtue of the one unique natural or hypostatic union with the divine nature and energy.

Thus Christ, as man, participates by nature in the divine glory and is the natural source of this glory. The glorification of the Prophets, Apostles and saints is a union by grace with the natural glory and energy of the divine nature, but the glorification of the human nature of the Logos is its hypostatic union with God the Logos and the resultant union with the divine nature. All glorified creatures see the divine glory and share in it. Only Christ, because He is the Logos by nature, sees and participates by nature in the divine essence.”

The saints understand this from their experience. When they reach glorification, the *theoria* of Christ’s glory in His human nature, they realize that Christ is the source of the uncreated Light, whereas they themselves are participants in the Light.

The fact that Christ was perfect from the beginning was made clear on many occasions, even during His struggle with the devil.

“In Christ this state of perfection was natural and not acquired. For that reason **His struggle with the devil in the wilderness and His forty-day fast were not an achievement but a manifestation of perfection.** At the same time it was a real fight with temptations, not from within but from the devil.”

Christ voluntarily assumed the passible and corruptible aspects of human nature because He really took flesh. However, the so-called “blameless” or natural passions — hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep — did not act in Christ by compulsion. Christ’s divine nature had authority over them. So Christ was hungry when He wished to be, thirsty when He wished to be, slept or rested when He wished to.

The saints understand this to some extent from their experience. They too, when they reach glorification according to grace, observe a suspension of the natural and blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and so on. In Christ this happened naturally because He was true God, and the human nature followed the divine nature.

“The incarnate Logos not only possesses the state of *theoria* naturally, not by grace, but even as man He Himself is the natural source of glorification and glory. If some of the natural and blameless passions are suspended in those who by grace are in a temporary state of glorification, how much more must those passions have no natural place in Christ, Who is glorified by nature and the source of glorification as man.

So one can see why it is a basic doctrine of the Orthodox Church that the Logos as man wants to have the natural and blameless human passions, and really to share in them, transforming them into a source of our salvation and a means by which we ourselves can overcome the devil and pass through the stages of purification and illumination on our way to glorification. On the one hand these passions are a result of the Fall, but at the same time, through the glory of the Cross, they become the source of our salvation, perfection and glorification, and the means by which the devil is defeated and destroyed.

Paradoxically, the devil is destroyed by means of the very passions by which he attempts to destroy man. The most basic weapon with which Satan tries to destroy human beings is death, but through death Christ and the saints destroy the devil.”



It should be noted at this point that the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is present everywhere in the world according to energy but not according to essence. The God-man Christ, however, is absent from the world according to His essence as Logos, but “the human nature of Christ is everywhere present according to essence,” by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. This issue is linked with the teaching about the essence and energy of God, but also about the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

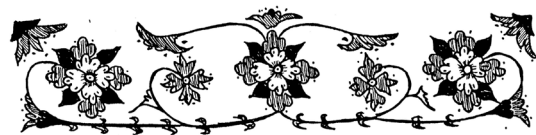
“The foundation of this teaching is the actual experience of glorification. These distinctions that the Fathers of the Church make are not the outcome of philosophical speculation. They know from the experience itself that in the experience of glorification the one who is glorified is united with God according to energy.”

At Christ’s Baptism in the River Jordan, John the Forerunner was accounted worthy to experience the Triune God. *It came*

*to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.” (Mk 1:9-11).*

“For the Forerunner, at least for the day of the

Baptism, this is the experience of glorification. When he saw the heavens opened and so on, this means that he had a revelation of the uncreated glory of Christ. That is also why we chant in the *troparion* of the Feast of Theophany that the Holy Trinity was revealed in the Baptism. How is the Holy Trinity revealed in the Baptism? Through the manifestation of the glory of God, which is the experience of glorification for John the Baptist.”



David’s Lord was made David’s Son, and from the fruit of the promised branch sprang One without fault, the two-fold nature coming together in one Person, that by one and the same conception and birth might spring our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom was present both true Godhead for the performance of mighty works and true Manhood for the endurance of sufferings.

St. Leo the Great

## THE ECUMENISTS ULTIMATE GOAL: TO MIX UP THE FAITHFUL

*“Orthodox Witness,” Nov. 3, 2021.*

The devotees of the pan-heresy of ecumenism have literally gone wild in our day. Until yesterday, they pretended to be pious and traditional. Today, however, they have thrown off their sheepskin disguise and let their real intentions be seen clearly. We cannot even keep up with counting their demonic innovations! They hardly give themselves a rest, thinking up some new way to confuse the consciences of the faithful even more.

Most of our woefully uninstructed people are, unfortunately, unable to distinguish factual truth from the pseudo-truths of the ecumenists, and thus they very easily fall victim to the traps set by these antichrists.

To be sure, the ecumenists often talk about love, but not in the language of the Disciple of Love, John, who forbade even saying *good morning* to heretics. (2 Jn 1:10).

The ecumenists also talk about peaceful co-existence with heretics and non-Christians. However, they insultingly despise our holy Fathers, who applied the condemnations of defrocking and excommunication even for simply entering a synagogue or a mosque. The ecumenists also talk about synodal decisions. They express more, however, the decisions of the so-called WCC [World Council of “Churches”], than the decrees of our Ecumenical Councils and the Tradition of our Holy Fathers.

Our beloved Saint Paisios used to say: “When all sorts of unrelated people—sorcerers, fire-worshippers, cultic religious types of all persuasions—enter into the mix and attempt to work together, how can there be a common purpose or a common ground for peace? God forgive me, but such things are the devil’s rags. Can peace be achieved through sinful association? How can there be peace when people are not reconciled with God? Only when man is reconciled with God can inward and outward peace come.”

Ecumenists refer to “churches,” but not the Church as defined by the Creed and the teachings of our Holy Fathers. They recognize the heretics as “churches” and, with their signatures, mock the uniqueness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is our Church, the Orthodox Church.

Ecumenists also talk about majestic con-celebrations and fervent prayers. Their minds, however, are on con-celebrations with heretics, and their daily practice of praying

together with the deceived—and even with people of other religions.

Their ultimate goal is to mix-up the faithful: They assure us that “all religions are ways to salvation”; they light candles in synagogues; and they describe the Koran as a “sacred book.” They mix-up the dogmas, alter the fundamental values of the Orthodox, and in the end change our Faith!

And we, baptized Orthodox Christians, in the face of this unprecedented apostasy, what do we do? Or, to say it better, What should we do, what is our duty and our obligation as members of our Church?

Father Athanasios Mytilineos of blessed memory used to say in such a case: Woe to him who does not react.

However, what is observed today is generally the complete opposite: The majority of the clergy advise their spiritual children that all we need to do is pray. Yes, “pray;” however prayer does not go by itself. It goes with *be watchful* (1 Cor. 16:13, 1 Pet 5:8, Rev. 3:2), and *watch and pray*. (Mt. 26:41, Mk. 14:38, Lk. 21:36).



Is it a coincidence that one of the last admonitions of Saint Porphyrios to his spiritual children related to the danger of losing their souls by the demonic heresies? (Testimony of his disciple, Mrs. Sideris.) Or perhaps the exhortation of Saint Theo-

dore the Studite to resist the deceptions of the heretics is just a coincidence, and is he, in teaching us that *the instruction of the Lord is not to keep silent in times of endangered Faith* (Eph 5:11), old-fashioned and obsolete?

The unsurpassed worker of the anti-heretical struggle, Fr. Charalambos Vasilopoulos, thundered: “If we want to be with Christ, we must expose the antichristian ecumenism! For every action, every move, and every work which is not in line with the Orthodox Faith, it is necessary to raise our voice of protest and denounce it!”

Also, in a letter addressed to then ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, Blessed Fr. Epiphanius Theodoropoulos wrote: “When did our Church include in her numbers together with the Orthodox Bishops the bishops of the heretics? Do you speak the language of dogmatic and canonical accuracy or that of the flexible diplomatic hypocrisy? Are you a bishop or a diplomat?”

And to close this short address about our ecclesiological and spiritual obligation to vigorously watch and resist the calamity of the pan-heresy of ecumenism, we will appeal to the unrepeatable guide whom we follow, St. Kosmas the Aetolian: *All [other] faiths are false, counterfeit; they all are of the Devil. Only the faith of Orthodox Christians is good and holy.*



## I CONFESS ONE BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

By Fr. Alexis of Karakallou Monastery (Holy Mountain).

The Nicene Creed contains a treasure of precious beliefs about God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and about Christ’s Holy Church prefaced by the words “I believe.” At this point in the Symbol of Faith, however, the verb changes to “I confess” (ὁμολογῶ) meaning I declare that there is one baptism for the remission of sin. Belief may remain sheltered in the heart, but confession sets forth fearlessly in the open air. After the Apostles, the first distinct ranks of Saints were composed of martyrs who shed their blood for Christ and confessors who faced every torture and still confessed the truth of Christ. With such boldness, Christians are called upon to confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

The ecumenical fathers who set forth the Creed note that there is one baptism, reminiscent of Saint Paul’s *one Lord, one faith, one baptism* (Eph 4:5) uniting them all in Christ. That one baptism is the unique baptism of Christ that sanctifies the waters making them into a passage through His Death and Resurrection. As Saint Paul reminds the faithful of Rome, *Know ye not that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by our baptism into death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* (Rom 6:3-4). Into that one baptism of Christ’s Death and Resurrection are Christians baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and in so doing, they become a part of the Body of Christ, partakers of the grace of the Holy Trinity, and children of the Most High, who through their compassion and selfless love become the salt of the earth and light of the world. This wonderful transformation from “glory to glory” begins with one baptism, our one divine birth (θεογενεσία) into newness of life and an abundance of light.

The one baptism is for a new life that brings freedom from the old life, the new Adam brings freedom from the old Adam, a new journey along the straight way leading to the Kingdom of God brings freedom from compulsive wanderings in old crooked paths of sin that have no destination other than emptiness.

The Fathers wrote eloquently about what is meant by the one baptism of the Church. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem told those preparing for the mystery: *For although you now stand outside the door, may God grant that you may say, “the King hath brought me into His chamber. Let my soul rejoice in the Lord: for He hath clothed me with a garment of salvation, and a robe of gladness. He hath crowned me with a garland as a bridegroom, and decked me with ornaments as a bride.” May the soul of every one of you be found without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. I do not mean before you have received the grace, for how could*

*that be since it is for remission of sins that you have been called? Rather, when the grace is given to you, may your conscience be found uncondemned and concur with the grace... Each one of you is about to be presented to God before tens of thousands of the Angelic Hosts: the Holy Spirit is about to seal your souls: you are to be enrolled in the army of the Great King. Therefore prepare yourselves and equip yourselves, not by putting on bright apparel, but by piety of soul with a good conscience. Regard not the baptismal waters as simple water, but rather regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water. For just as the offerings brought to the heathen altars, though simple in their nature, become defiled by the invocation of the idols, so the simple water having received the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and of Christ, and of the Father, acquires a new power of holiness.*

Baptism is the gateway to eternal life and the new life in Christ, but to confess the one baptism means to walk and live in accord with that baptism, so that being in the image of God, we may draw nigh unto His likeness. Saint Diadochos the God-Bearer writes: *Baptism renews the image of God in us, effacing the wrinkles of sin, but it is only with our cooperation, through prayer, that grace will lay the “colours” of the likeness on this sketch, making one virtue after the other come into flower and exalting the beauty of the soul from “glory to glory” in the intimate sense of God’s sweetness. The invocation of this glorious Name will lead the lover of divine things to the perfection of this ‘likeness,’ which is known only by illumination and the rapture of the intellect in perfect love.*

To confess one baptism for the remission of sins means to cultivate and foster this new direction in life, so that our lives blossom with all the beauty, all the joy, and all the sweetness that our victorious, risen Lord richly gives us. Confessing one baptism for the remission of sins, we become bold for virtue and base our decisions in life and our reactions to others on something more lasting than the ever shifting situations we find ourselves in. We make the criterion for our hopes and our dreams the reality that Christ has died and risen again and we have been baptized into that very mystery.

We are reminded of that wonderful mystery concerning the dying and rising of Christ in our own lives through holy baptism, every time we make the sign of the Cross. We re-enter that mystery every time, we are moved by the love of One who first loved us. We continue that mystery when we forgive as the risen Lord forgave, bring peace as the Prince of Peace still does, and live our lives as ones already risen from the dead and living in Christ. Saint Paul describes what it means to confess one baptism for the remission of sins when he exclaims, *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

May this be the exclamation of all those who confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

## THE MOTHER OF GOD IS OUR TRUE MOTHER

By Elder Cleopas Ilie of Sihastria Monastery, from the book, *Predici la Sărbătorile de peste an (Feast-day Homilies)*. Editura Christiana, 2001. Translated by Jesse Dominick.

God would have destroyed the world long ago, as the divine Fathers say, for the many sins with which men anger Him, but as the Mother of God wrapped Jesus Christ and swaddled Him in the manger, so now she binds the anger of God and stops Him from destroying mankind. For the Mother of mercy and grace does not want God to destroy the souls of men, for she knows that were the anger of God to wax hot, it would destroy the entire world that has become the abode of so much sin and evil.

We have a kind and merciful Mother there in Heaven. She has gone there to ever look upon the needs of the poor, the prayers of widows, upon beggars, the imprisoned, the per-

and who venerate her as the Mother of God the Word, and how close she is to those who believe in her and ever call upon her for help.

There was a woman, a widow, whose husband died when she was still young, leaving her alone with two small children. The poor woman also had a farm. But she revered God and the Most Holy Theotokos, with an icon of her with the God-Child in her embrace. And she taught her children from an early age to bow before the icon, to pray the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and at least the shortest prayers to the Mother of God for a start. And the children would ask like babes—which they were:

“Mama, who is that on the icon?”

And she would tell them:

“It's your Mama, your true Mama.”

“Aren't you our mama?”

She would say:

“No, your true Mother is in Heaven, and she is called the



secuted, the suffering, the sick. There she became a Mother helping everyone in trouble—all who are oppressed and all who love her and call upon her help with their whole hearts. We have a most blessed Mother in Heaven, the Mother of mercy and grace, who ever prays for the entire Church of Christ and every child of the Church of Christ individually.

Blessed and thrice blessed is every Christian who keeps an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos in their house and reads an akathist, moleben, and other prayers to the Mother of God every day. There is none in Heaven nor on Earth more powerful, save the Holy Trinity, than the Mother of God, who is mighty in helping us.

Blessed are those Christians who, after the Holy Trinity, honor the Mother of God with all their hearts, and wherever they go, say: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the prayers of Thy Most Pure Mother and all Thy saints, have mercy upon me, a sinner.*

I will tell you one story so you see what a speedy helper the Mother of God is for those who have her as Mother

Mother of God.”

“And Who is this Child she is holding in her arms?” they would ask.

“That is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who created us and was carried in the womb of the Mother of God. She gave birth to Him by the Holy Spirit, and He was both God and perfect man.”

Thus this poor mother taught her children who the Mother of God is, and she taught them with her whole heart that the Mother of God is their true Mother. Therefore, the children, rising in the morning, even before speaking with their mother, would run to the Mother of God, make several prostrations, pray the Lord's Prayer and prayers to the Mother of God, honoring her according to the strength of their childish understanding.

One day this poor woman had to go work the harvest in the field, and there was no one to leave the children with. It was her custom to lock the children up in the house when

she left them. She called the children, left them something to eat, and said:

“You stay home alone. I’m going to work—I have a lot to reap.”

And the children asked:

“Who are we staying with?”

“You’ll stay with our Mother,” she said, pointing to the icon of the Mother of God, before which a *lampada* was burning.

Then she said:

“Your Mother will be with you and protect you, and you be smart and pray if you get in trouble. Call out to her, for she will protect you!”

The children believed their mother that they would not be left alone, but with their Heavenly Mother, and the poor woman hastened off to her work in the field. The children prayed, but their minds went from one thing to another, without stopping on a single thought.

So they forgot their mother’s advice. They prayed for a while, then started playing games and started playing with fire. As I said, the mother locked them in the house so they wouldn’t go outside and get lost, knowing that she probably wouldn’t be home for at least half a day.

And when the children started playing with fire, the house itself caught fire. Seeing their household items catch fire—rugs and whatever else they had—and when they saw that the whole house was burning and that there was no one to come to put it out, since it was summer time and everyone was at work, they ran to the icon of the Mother of God, picked it up with their little hands, and shouted:

“Mama, don’t leave us!”

And—O, thy wonders, O Mother of God!—the entire house burned down, but the fire did not touch the wall where the icon of the Most Holy Theotokos was hanging, with the children clinging to it!

Someone brought the woman news of it in the field.

“Oh, woman, your house has burned down!”

And this poor thing said:

“Oh, woe is me, I left my children at home!”

The one who told her did not elaborate on the fire’s details.

“Mother of God, how could you leave my children? I left them with you!”

Sobbing and wailing, she ran like a madwoman. When she arrived, she saw people standing and looking at the glorious miracle: The entire house had burned down, but the wall with the icon of the Theotokos stood untouched, and the children were holding the icon and crying, “Mama, Mama!”

Seeing this, the poor woman dashed through the fire to the icon of the Mother of God and fervently thanked the Mother of God that her babies, whom she had entrusted to her, were kept alive and healthy.

I have told you this to show you that whoever venerates the Theotokos as their Mother and patroness enjoys her

protection, as well as their children, and cattle, and all their possessions. Have this faith always, and may the Akathist and prayers to the Mother of God never cease in your home, and no matter what sorrows or misfortunes befall you, call upon the Mother of God with all your heart, and she will surely come with her speedy help, with her most holy and most powerful prayers.

Know that there is not a soul under Heaven that could place its hope in the Mother of God and be thoroughly put to shame. By her prayers, it will have peace, comfort, shelter, and refuge in this age, and at the moment of death, the mercy of the Mother of God will not leave it. And on the day of the Judgment, the Most Holy Mother will kneel before her Most Holy and Sweetest Son, our God Jesus Christ and say: “My Lord God and Son, this tormented soul, even if it has sinned, has always entreated me to pray to Thee. Forgive it, have mercy, and show it mercy.”

Thus, by the prayers of the Most Holy Theotokos, we will find mercy in this age, and at the hour of death, and on the day of the Judgment.

Amen!



When the soul of a man departs from the body, the Angels go along with it. However, all of the powers of darkness then hasten to meet it; and seek to take hold of it, thereby to examine it carefully and learn whether or not it was engaged in any of their own works. Now, it is not the Angels who struggle with the demons to protect the soul; but the deeds of the soul surround and defend it, so that the demons cannot touch it. And if the good deeds of the soul defeat the demons, then the holy Angels sing on its behalf; until the soul - with joy and gladness - meets God. At that time, the soul completely forgets all of its good deeds in this vain world, as well as the labors it knew.

Blessed, indeed, is he against whom the leaders of darkness can find nothing. He will find joy, honor and rest beyond all measure. Therefore, let us weep before God with the whole power of our soul; so that, in His goodness, He will take pity on us and send us aid from on high, by which we might do all to conquer the leaders of evil, who obstruct our path [towards Paradise]. Thus, let us - disengaged from the many other pursuits of life - take care with resoluteness of heart to fulfill the Will of God, which will save us from the hands of the demons when they shall come to meet us there above.

St. Abba Isaiah  
[From The Evergetinos]

## CONSERVATIVE VS. LIBERAL CLERGY?

By Archpriest Geoffrey Korz.

A well-known and esteemed American priest recently spoke on the topic of the use of appropriate terminology for describing Orthodox clergy, both priests and bishops. Since many issues from secular society present themselves in the life of the Church, it has also become common to use secular labels (all too familiar in political discourse) to describe views expressed by the clergy. This priest was pointing out, quite wisely, that while it is certainly appropriate and necessary for the Church and Her clergy to speak to many political issues which face Orthodox faithful, the political labels of “conservative” and “liberal” do not in fact have any meaning in the Orthodox Church.

Here is the reason:

Any priest or bishop who expresses the teaching of the Church, as it is outlined in the Scriptures, the Canons, the Church Fathers, and all of Holy Tradition, is not “conservative”—he is simply Orthodox, following the holy traditions of the Church.

Any priest or bishop who does otherwise is not Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who teaches that *God created them male and female* (Gen 5:2), that the gender and sex of the body correspond to that of the soul is not “conservative”—he is simply Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who writes articles or speaks at conferences advocating for various aspects of the LGBT agenda is not “liberal”—he is simply not Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who affirms the unity of all races through the Body and Blood of Christ in the Church, that there is a single Orthodox Church regardless of nation, in which all share Communion within the Canonical order is not “conservative”—he is simply Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who pits one nation against another, who advocates for racialist politics or advances the idea that the concept of race is fundamental to human identity is not a “liberal”—he is simply not Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who advocates that human life begins at conception, exhorts his faithful to work to preserve life in the womb, to donate their time and their money to helping mothers and their children who are at risk of abortion, and to vote for candidates who oppose abortion in law is not a “conservative”—he is simply Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who supports the killing of unborn children in the womb, **either overtly or with veiled terms**, or who launches an assault on the Image of God through deceptive language about “respecting the autonomy of women”, which confuses the faithful and allows the Lord’s innocent ones to stumble unwittingly into grievous sins—

these are not “liberal” clergy or bishops—they are simply not Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who affirms and teaches that all sexual sins including same-sex attraction arose from the Fall and require struggle and repentance is not “conservative”—he is simply Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who goes to the trouble of traveling hundreds or thousands of miles to attend a conference to brainstorm ways in which the Orthodox Church might be “enlightened” to the “new psychology” of contemporary sexuality is not “liberal”—he is simply not Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who draws his teaching for moral, medical, psychological, and family decisions strictly from the Holy Tradition of the Church—the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers—is not “conservative”: he is simply Orthodox.

Any priest or bishop who gives weight in teaching on these areas to the “enlightened” teachings of the human intellect, believing them to be much more progressed than the Holy Tradition of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers is not “liberal”—he is simply not Orthodox.

The wise priest who made this important distinction has done all our clergy and faithful a great service. We might use these terms—“liberal” and “conservative”—in our informal conversations, but this Father is correct: there are not “parties” within the Church, only those who hold the Mind of the Church, the Mind of the Fathers, and those who would attack it, and try to redefine it—because they are outside it.

Inevitably, every Orthodox Christian will come across such people. Some of them will even be wearing cassocks. If and when you do, the best strategy might be to turn and run from their churches and their schools, and to warn others to do the same.



A person whose mouth always thanks God will by no means lack the blessings of God, but a person whose mouth grumbles and wounds his great Benefactor shall certainly be chastened by God.

He gave us our being; He gives us life; He preserves us in various ways with His divine providence. Through the death of His Son, He reconciled us who were previously His enemies and made us sons and heirs of His kingdom! He purifies us and sanctifies us through His holy Mysteries! He gives us the heavenly, most holy food and drink, that is, His All-holy Body and Precious Blood! He has also given us a guardian for our whole life! He will receive our soul and guide it to the eternal inheritance! But what am I saying? Time would fail me to recount everything; I would be laboring in vain, trying to count the sand in the sea—the infinite benefactions of our good God!

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain”  
The Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim

## Γιατί Νύχτα, σ' Ένα Στάβλο, κι από Μιά Φτωχή Κόρη;

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικό «Κυριακή», 25 Δεκεμβρίου 2019, γράφει ο Σεβασμ. Μητροπολίτης πρώην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Αύγουστίνος (+2010).

**Α**νέτειλε, αδελφοί μου, και πάλι η έορτή των Χριστουγέννων σαν ήλιος που φωτίζει τις ψυχές μας. Άς ευχαριστήσουμε τον ουράνιο Πατέρα που μās αξιώνει να έορτάσουμε την άγια αυτή ημέρα και να ξαναπούμε κ' εμείς το «Δόξα εν ύψίστοις...» (Λουκ. 2,14).

Δέν αρκεί όμως μόνο αυτό. Πρέπει η έορτή αυτή, όπως και κάθε άλλη, να γίνη άφορητή για βαθεία σκέψη και και πνευματική έξαρση.

«Χριστός επί γης, ύψώθητε» ψάλλει σήμερα η Έκκλησία μας (καν. Χριστουγ. φδ. α'). Ύψωθήτε! μās προτρέπει. Άς αφήσουμε λοιπόν, έστω για λίγο, κάθε τι που έχει σχέση με την υλική ζωή, και άς ύψωθούμε υπεράνω των παθών μας, του έγωισμού, για να πλησιάσουμε το μυστήριο της Γεννήσεως του Σωτήρος του κόσμου. Ταπεινοί κ' εμείς προσκυνηταί του τεχθέντος Σωτήρος, «Δεύτε ίδωμεν, πιστοί», «που ο Χριστός γεννάται». (Κάθισμα: Ματθ. 2:4).

Δέν μπορούμε βέβαια να μελετήσουμε όλο το μυστήριο. Άς αρκεσθούμε σε τρία μόνο σημεία: πρώτον, γιατί ο Χριστός προτίμησε να γεννηθή εν καιρῷ νυκτός: δεύτερον, γιατί γεννήθηκε σε ένα στάβλο: και τρίτον, γιατί προτίμησε ως μητέρα του μία φτωχή κόρη. Σ' αυτά τα έρωτήματα θα δώσουμε μία άπλη και σύντομη άπάντησι, ώστε να ώφεληθοῦμε όλοι μας.

**Ο Χριστός γεννήθηκε εν καιρῷ νυκτός.** (Γι' αυτό και από άρχαιοτάτης εποχής η λειτουργία των Χριστουγέννων τελείται πολὺ νωρίς, προτού να φέξη). Νύχτα γεννήθηκε ο Χριστός, όχι ημέρα, γιατί η νύχτα με το σκοτάδι της εικονίζει το βαθύ πνευματικό και θρησκευτικό σκοτάδι, στο οποίο ζούσε ο κόσμος τις παραμονές της Γεννήσεως του Σωτήρος.

Ο κόσμος είχε άγνοια επάνω στα σπουδαιότερα ζητήματα της ζωής, όπως γιατί ήρθαμε στον κόσμο; ποιός εἶνε ο προορισμός μας; από ποῦ ήρθαμε και ποῦ πηγαίνουμε; ποιός εἶνε η άρχή μας και ποιό το τέλος μας; ποιός εἶνε ο άληθινός Θεός;... Όρίστε ζητήματα θεμελιώδη, σπουδαία, για τα οποία όμως ο άρχαῖος κόσμος είχε σκοτάδι, μεσάνυχτα.

Η ψυχή των ανθρώπων ζητούσε φῶς, και φῶς δέν έβλεπε. Εἶνε άλήθεια ότι παρουσιάστηκαν δια μέσου των αἰώνων φιλόσοφοι και ιδρυταί θρησκειῶν, αλλά δέν κατώρθωσαν να φωτίσουν το έρεβος της ανθρώπινης ψυχής. Έρριξαν λίγο φῶς, μα το φῶς τους ήταν άσθενικό και άνεπρακές. Οἱ

ώραῖες διδασκαλίες τους ήταν άπλῶς φωτοβολίδες του αἰώνιου Πνεύματος: φώτιζαν για λίγο κ' έπειτα έσβηναν, λησιμονούσαν, για ν' αφήσουν τον κόσμο πάλι στο σκοτάδι. Κι ο δύστηχος ο άνθρωπος περιεπλανάτο και παραπατούσε στα σκοτεινά.

Νά λοιπόν γιατί ο Χριστός γεννήθηκε νύχτα. Το σκοτάδι εκείνης της νύχτας ήταν σύμβολο του άλλου εκείνου σκοτός που βασίλευε παντού. Και το σκοτάδι εκείνο το δέλυσε ο Χριστός. Ανέτειλε σαν ήλιος, κι από τότε επί 20 αἰῶνες φωτίζει όσους τουλάχιστον θέλουν να δούν το φῶς και να δεχτούν την άλήθεια.

Ο Χριστός γεννήθηκε στο σκοτάδι για να διδάξη ότι όσο μένουμε μακριά του, θα ζούμε σαν τυφλοπόντικτες στα αἰώνια σκοτάδια. Γιατί αυτός εἶνε, κατά την μαρτυρία της Ιστορίας και της Γραφής, «**το Φῶς του κόσμου**». (Ίω. 8:12).

Ο Χριστός όμως γεννήθηκε όχι μόνο εν καιρῷ νυκτός, αλλά και **μέσα σ' ένα στάβλο**: γιατί το σπήλαιο εκείνο, μέσα στο οποίο κοιμήθηκε τις πρώτες μέρες της ζωής του ο Ίησους, οἱ κάτοικοι το χρησιμοποιούσαν ως στάβλο. Προτίμησε λοιπόν τον στάβλο, γιατί ο στάβλος ήταν το άριστο σύμβολο της ήθικης άκαθαρσίας του κόσμου. Από την ήθικη σκοπιά έξεταζόμενος ο άρχαῖος κόσμος παρουσίαζε το φαινόμενο ενός βρώμικου στάβλου με σταβλάρχη—ποιόν άλλον—τον σατανά.

Η άμαρτία σαν κοπριά εἶχε μολύνει τα πάντα. Εἶχε μολύνει τα ανάκτορα των βασιλέων: εκεί, μέσα σε μαρμάρινες αίθουσες, γίνονταν τα φοβερά εκείνα έγκλήματα που περιγράφει η Ιστορία. Η άμαρτία εἶχε μολύνει τα άμιθέατρα: εκεί μέσα, μπροστά στα μάτια αυτοκρατόρων και άλλων επισήμων, θηρία κατασπάραζαν τις σάρκες δυστυχημένων δούλων, που άφηναν έτσι την τελευταία τους πνοή, για να διασκεδάξη το Ρωμαῖκό πλῆθος που ζητούσε «άρτον και θεάματα». Η άμαρτία εἶχε μολύνει και τους ναούς: η σαρκική άκαθαρσία έτελείτο επισήμως μέσα στα ιερά των ειδωλολατρῶν, όπως π.χ. στην Κόρινθο. Έκει ο ναός της Άφροδίτης δέν συντηρούσε χήρες, όρφανὰ η φτωχούς, όχι συντηρούσε 1.000 ίερείς της άκολασίας. Η πορνεία, η βαρεία αυτή άμαρτία, ήταν υπό την προστασία της θεάς. Η άμαρτία δέν άφησε τίποτα καθρό: εἶχε μολύνει και την οἰκογένεια: τιμή γυναίκα, έγκράτεια άνδρός, άγάπη παιδιοῦ, στοργή γονέων, ήταν λέξεις άγνωστες στην προχριστιανική ανθρωπότητα.

Με στάβλο λοιπόν έμοιαζε ο άρχαῖος κόσμος: στάβλο, όπου επί αἰῶνες ο σατανάς συσώρευε άκαθαρσίες—όλα τ' άμαρτήματα: στάβλο χειρότερο από τους στάβλους του μυθικοῦ Αύγειου. Και όπως εκείνο το στάβλο μόνο ο νοῦς και η τέχνη του

Ἡρακλέους κατώρθωσαν νὰ τὸν καθαρίσουν, ἔτσι καὶ τὸν στάβλο αὐτόν, τὴν ἐξαχρειωμένη ἀπὸ τὶς ἁμαρτίες ἀνθρωπότητα, ἡ θεία δύναμις τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κατώρθωσε νὰ τὴν καθαρίσῃ ἀπὸ τὰ αἵσχη πού τὴν ἐμόλυναν.

Νὰ λοιπὸν γιατί γεννήθηκε σὲ στάβλο· γιὰ νὰ μᾶς διδάξῃ ὅτι στάβλος θά 'νε καὶ ἡ καρδιά μας, στάβλος θά 'νε καὶ ἡ οἰκογένειά μας, στάβλος θά 'νε καὶ ἡ κατοικία μας, ὅσο μένουμε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Σωτῆρα μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστό.

Εἶδαμε ἕως ἐδῶ, ἀγαπητοί μου, γιατί ὁ Κύριός μας γεννήθηκε ἐν καιρῷ νυκτός, εἶδαμε ἐπίσης γιατί ὡς χῶρο τῆς γεννήσεώς του διάλεξε ὄχι ἓνα καθαρὸ οἶκημα, ἀλλὰ ἓνα σπήλαιο, ἓνα βρώμικο στάβλο ζώων. Ἄς δοῦμε τέλος μὲ λίγες λέξεις καὶ γιατί προτίμησε νὰ γεννηθῇ ἀπὸ **μία φτωχὴ κόρη**, τὴν Παρθένο Μαρία.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μποροῦσε νὰ ἐκλέξῃ ὡς μητέρα του μία βασίλισσα, μία πλούσια πριγκίπισσα, μία γυναῖκα φιλόσοφο, κάποια ἀρχόντισσα. Ἀπ' ὅλες αὐτὲς προτίμησε μία καὶ μόνο. Γιατί; Τί βρῆκε σ' αὐτήν; Ἡ Παρθένος Μαρία ἦταν μὲν φτωχὴ καὶ ἄσημη, εἶχε ὅμως ἓνα πολύτιμο θησαυρὸ, πού δὲν τὸν εἶχαν οἱ πλούσιες καὶ ἀρχόντισσες τοῦ κόσμου· θησαυρὸ, στὸν ὁποῖο δὲν ἔδιναν καμμιά σημασία τὰ μάτια τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἔβλεπαν τὰ μάτια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ θαύμαζαν τὰ μάτια τῶν ἀγγέλων. Αὐτὸ τὸν θησαυρὸ ἐζήλωσε αὐτὴ ἡ ἁγία Τριάδα! Ὁ θησαυρὸς αὐτὸς ἦταν ἡ ἀρετὴ τῆς πλοῦτο τῆς εἶχε τὴν ἀγάπη στὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸν πλησίον, στέμμα τῆς τὴν παρθενία, πέπλο τὴν ταπεινῶσι, κοσμήματα τὴ νῆψι καὶ τὴν προσοχή, διαμάντια πού λαμποκοποῦσαν τὶς προσευχῆς, ζώνη χρυσῆ τὴν ἐγκράτεια.

Γι' αὐτὸ αὐτὴν ἔκανε Μητέρα Του. Ἐτσι, ἀπ' τὴν πρώτη στιγμή τῆς ἐμφανίσεώς Του στὸν κόσμο, ὁ Χριστὸς διδάσκει ὅλους, ὅτι τὸ μεγαλεῖο δὲν τὸ θέτει οὔτε στοὺς θρόνους τῶν καισάρων, οὔτε στὰ πλούτη τοῦ Μίδα καὶ τοῦ Κροίσου, οὔτε στὶς δόξες τῶν κατακτητῶν· τὸ θέτει στὴν ἀρετὴ, ἔστω καὶ ἂν αὐτὴ σκεπάζεται μὲ τὰ ῥάκη καὶ ζῆ μέσα σὲ ὑγρὰ ὑπόγεια.

Δὲν θὰ πῶ περισσότερα, ἀγαπητοί μου· οὔτε ἡ ὥρα ἄλλως τε τὸ ἐπιτρέπει. Ἀρκετὰ αὐτά, γιὰ νὰ πειστοῦμε ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε ὁ ἥλιος τῶν ψυχῶν μας, πού ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη ἐφάνισί του ἐκπέμπει παντοῦ δέσμες φωτὸς καὶ τὸ μήνυμα τῆς εἰρήνης πού ἔφερε στὴ γῆ.

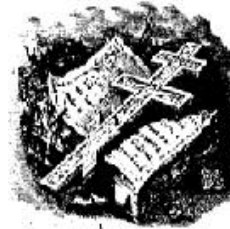
Ὁ ἥλιος - Χριστὸς ἀνατέλλει καὶ πάλι στὸν κόσμο, μολονότι τὰ δελτία εἰδήσεων προκαλοῦν θλίψι· κάθε τόσο πληροφοροῦν γιὰ ἀψιμαχίες καὶ θύματα πότε ἐδῶ καὶ πότε ἐκεῖ, κι ὁ ὀρίζοντας εἶνε σκεπασμένος μὲ μαῦρα σύννεφα μίσους καὶ ἔχθρας. Οἱ ἄπιστοι μᾶς περιγελοῦν λέγοντας: ἐσεῖς ψάλλετε *«καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς*

*εἰρήνη»* μὰ ἡ φωτιὰ τοῦ πολέμου δὲν σταμάτησε νὰ καίῃ· πού εἶνε λοιπὸν ἡ εἰρήνη, τὰ ὠραῖα διδάγματα τοῦ Ναζωραίου σας;...

Ἀδελφοί μου, δὲν εὐθύνεται ὁ Χριστὸς, ἂν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀρνοῦνται τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν εἰρήνη Του καὶ προτιμοῦν τὴν κακία καὶ ἐχθρότητα. Γι' αὐτὸ μὴν ἀπελπιζώσατε. Τὰ τέκνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *«τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον»* (Λουκ. 12:32), ζοῦν τὴν εἰρήνη Του. Ὅσο γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, ὅταν μετανοήσῃ, τότε θὰ δῆ καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ σύννεφα τοῦ μίσους νὰ διαλύονται. Γιατὶ ὅσο θὰ ὑπάρχῃ κόσμος καὶ ψυχῆς πού ζητοῦν τὴν κάθαρσι καὶ τὴν λύτρωσι, ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ εἶνε ἀπαραίτητος. Ὅ,τι εἶνε ὁ ἀέρας γιὰ τὰ πνευμόνια καὶ τὸ φῶς γιὰ τὰ μάτια, αὐτὸ εἶνε ὁ Χριστὸς γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ. Χωρὶς Χριστὸ ἡ ψυχὴ θὰ πάθῃ ἀσφυξία καὶ θὰ ζῆ στὸ σκοτάδι.

Μὲ τὴν πίστι καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ὁ Σωτῆρας ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, ἂς ἐνώσουμε θεομὰ τὶς προσευχῆς μας μὲ τὸν ὕμνο *«Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις Θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη, ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία»* (Λουκ. 2:14). Ἀμήν

(†) ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστῖνος



Λοιπὸν, ἐλεύθερος κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὁποῖος βρῖσκεται σὲ κατάστασι φωτισμοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία *«Εἰρήνην πᾶσι»*, διότι ἔτσι ἔχει τὴν εἰρήνη. *«Εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν»* (Ἰω 14:27). Καὶ ὅταν λέει ὅτι σᾶς δίδω εἰρήνη, σημαίνει ὅτι σᾶς δίδω Πνεῦμα ἅγιον, προσευχὴ στὴν καρδιά, καὶ ἔτσι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰρηνεύει, ἔχει τὴν δικαίωσι. Ἔχει τὴν καταλλαγὴ μὲ τὸν Θεό. Ἀρχίζει νὰ γίνετα φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὸν φωτισμὸ καὶ μετὰ στὴν θέωσι εἶναι 100% πλέον φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐλεύθερος.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅταν φθάνει στὸ νὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ, ὄχι μόνο ἀπὸ τὴν συμφεροντολογία, ὅπως στὴν κατάστασι τοῦ φωτισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν κατάστασι τῆς θεώσεως ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὴν δουλεία καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσεως, διότι τρέφεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιον Θεὸ καὶ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάστασι ἐὰν συνεχίσει μπορεῖ νὰ πάει καὶ χρόνια καὶ μῆνες κ.ο.κ. Ὅποτε ἡ καλύτερη μελέτη εἶναι νὰ ἐπανέλθουμε στοὺς βίους τῶν Ἁγίων νὰ τὰ δοῦμε ἐκεῖ καὶ νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι ἁμαρτία εἶναι ἔλλειψη φωτισμοῦ, καὶ ἐλευθερία εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν φωτισμὸ στὴν θέωσι.

Πρ. Ἰωάννης Ρωμανίδης

## Τὰ Δῶρα τῶν Μάγων

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος, Τεροκήρυκας (+1982).



**Τ**ὰ δῶρα πού πῆγαν στοὺς Χριστὸ οἱ 3 Μάγοι συμβόλιζαν:

α) Ἡ σιμύρνα (κολλητική οὐσία πού ἄλοιφαν τοὺς νεκρούς), ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ πεθάνει,

β) τὸ λιβάνι συμβόλιζε ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Θεὸς, καί

γ) ὁ χρυσός, ὅτι ἡ θυσία Του θὰ εἶναι εὐσομος στὸν Θεὸ Πατέρα, γιατί θὰ ἀποκαταστοῦσε τὴ σχέση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Τὰ δῶρα αὐτὰ βρίσκονται στὴν μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Παύλου, στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος.

Ὅταν πρωτοπῆγα στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, βρέθηκα καὶ στὴ Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Παύλου. Ἐγὼ δὲν γνώριζα τί κεμῖλια φυλάσσονταν ἐκεῖ.

Σὲ κάποια στιγμή εἰδοποιηθήκαμε νὰ πᾶμε στὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς μονῆς, γιὰ νὰ προσκυνούσαμε Ἅγια Λείψανα, πού εἶχαν προβάλλει οἱ μοναχοὶ ἐκεῖ. Μέσα στὰ ἄλλα κεμῖλια, εἶδα καὶ ἓνα «περιδέριο» (σὰν ἓνα τύπο δαμασκῆνου) γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μᾶς εἶπε ὁ μοναχός:

- Αὐτὰ εἶναι ἓνα μέρος ἀπὸ τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα τῶν μάγων στὸ Χριστό!

Ὅταν το ἄκουσα αὐτό, μὲ κατέλαβε ἓνα δέος! Πῆρα ἓνα κερὶ καὶ τὰ περιεργάστηκα ἀπὸ κοντά, γιὰ νὰ δῶ πῶς εἶναι. Τὰ προσκύνησα καὶ τὰ ἀσπάστηκα μὲ μεγάλη εὐλάβεια. Εὐχαριστήσαμε τοὺς μοναχοὺς καὶ φύγαμε ἀπὸ τὸν ναό. Ὡστόσο ἐκεῖνο τὸ δέος πού εἶχα αἰσθανθεῖ, ἀποτυπώθηκε βαθιὰ μέσα μου.

Στὴ συνέχεια πῆγαμὲ στὸ ἀρχονταρῖκι. Ἐκεῖ μᾶς προσφέρανε τὸ καθιερωμένο κέρασμα καὶ περιμέναμε νὰ μᾶς ποῦνε σὲ ποῖο δωμάτιο θὰ μᾶς τακτοποιούσανε. Ξαφνικὰ ἔρχεται ἓνας καλόγερος καὶ μοῦ λέει:

- Σᾶς θέλει ὁ πάτερ στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Πῆγα στὸ ναὸ καὶ ἐκεῖ ὁ πάτερ μοῦ εἶπε:

- Κύριε Παναγόπουλε, ὅταν προσκυνούσατε ὅλοι σας τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα, ἐγὼ ὅπως εἶδατε, καθόμουν δίπλα. Καὶ τὴ στιγμή πού ἐσεῖς ἀσπαστήκατε τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα, ἀπεκόπη ἓνα μικρὸ κομμάτι (σὲ μέγεθος ὅσο τὰ κεφάλια 3 καρφισῶν) ἀπὸ τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα καὶ ἔπεσε ἐκεῖ ἐπάνω. Ἐγὼ τὸ πρόσεξα αὐτό. Τὸ συνέλεξα καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ἀνήκει σὲ ἐσᾶς!

Ἐγὼ τὰ ἔχασα!!! Νὰ σημειώσω, ὅτι τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα, λόγω τοῦ χρυσοῦ, εἶναι σὰν σίδηρο καὶ δὲν κόβεται αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα, οὔτε μὲ πριόνι!

Καὶ λέω μὲ ἔκπληξη στὸν πάτερ:

- Πῶς ἀπεκόπη αὐτὸ τὸ κομμάτι, ἀφοῦ εἶναι στερεό!

- Τί στερεό;, μου ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος. Γρανίτης εἶναι! Καὶ ὅμως ἀπεκόπη, τὴν ὥρα πού τὰ προσκυνούσατε. Δὲν

γνωρίζω τὸ γιατί... Μπορεῖτε νὰ τὸ πάρετε!

Τὸ δέχτηκα μὲ δέος, τὸν εὐχαρίστησα καὶ τὸ ἔβαλα μέσα σὲ ἓνα ξύλινο σταυρὸ πού φέρω πάνω μου.

Χριστὸς ἐτέχθη! Βοήθειά μας!



## Ὁ Γέρον Ἀββακοῦμ ὁ Ἀνυπόδητος (+1978)

**Ο** πατέρας Ἀββακοῦμ ἦταν καλὸς ἐργάτης τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῆς ἐγκράτειας.

Στὸ ἀσκηταριό του στὴν Βίγλα εἶχε σύντροφο τοῦ τὴν ἐγκράτεια. Λίγο βρασιμένο ρυζάκι, καὶ πολλάκις ἀνάλαδο, ἦταν ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ συνηθισμένα γεύματα.

Γέροντα, θέλει πλύσιμο τοῦ εἶπε κάποτε ἓνας ἀδελφός τῆς Λαύρας, ὅταν τὸν εἶδε νὰ ρίχνει τὸ ρύζι στὴν κατσαρόλα, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ πλύνει προηγουμένως.

Ὅλα ἅγια μὲ τὴν προσευχή, ἦταν ἡ ἀπάντηση τοῦ π. Ἀββακοῦμ ὁ ὁποῖος ἐφάρμοσε καὶ σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο τὸν λόγο τῆς Γραφῆς: «*Πάν κτίσμα Θεοῦ καλὸν καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον, ἀγιάζεται γὰρ διὰ λόγου Θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως*».

Τὸ κελλάκι τοῦ ἦταν πτωχὸ καὶ ἀπέριττο, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς τὸ ὀνόμαζε παλάτι.

Ἡ σύντροφος κακοπάθεια τοῦ βίου του τὸν εἶχε κάνει νὰ ἀρκεῖται στὰ ἐλάχιστα, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς εὐγνωμοσύνης τὸν δίδασκε νὰ τὰ θεωρεῖ καὶ αὐτὰ πολλὰ καὶ τὸν ἑαυτὸ τοῦ ἀνάξιο γιὰ τόσες εὐλογίες.

Παντοῦ κυκλοφοροῦσε ἀνυπόδητος, παρεκτὸς τῶν περιπτώσεων πού εἰσερχόταν στὴν ἐκκλησία ἢ πῆγαινε στὸ Συνοδικό, ὅπου γινόντουσαν οἱ συνάξεις τῶν Γερόντων.

Ἡ πίστη του ἦταν μεγάλη. Τὰ πάντα ἐγκατέλειπε στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς κυρίας Θεοτόκου καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Φανουρίου.

Φάρμακα δὲν χρησιμοποίησε ποτέ του.

Ὅταν τελευταία πάτησε ἓνα καρφὶ καὶ πρήσθηκε τὸ πόδι του, καὶ στὴν συνέχεια μαύρισε μὲ συνεχῆ ἄνοδο τοῦ πρηξίματος στὸ γόνατό του ἀρνήθηκε νὰ χρησιμοποίησι φάρμακα πού τοῦ ἔδωσαν.

Ἐχομε τὴν Παναγία ἔλεγε, Αὐτὴ μᾶς ὑποσχέθηκε ὅτι εἶναι θὰ εἶναι ἡ γιαιτρός μας.

Καὶ πράγματι! Ἐνῶ τὸ πρηξίμο εἶχε περάσει τὸ γόνατό του, μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο ἄρχισε νὰ ὑποχωρεῖ γιὰ νὰ ἐξαφανισθεῖ τελειῶς μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες.

Ἄν καὶ ἦταν ἀγράμματος ὁ π. Ἀββακοῦμ, εἶχε ἐκπληκτικὴ γνώση τῶν Γραφῶν. Μποροῦσε νὰ ἀπαγγέλλει ἀπὸ τὴν μνήμη του ταχέως καὶ ἀκριβῶς σελίδα-σελίδα τὴν Παλαιὰ καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη.

## Τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ κυρ-Μανώλη στὴν Πόλη

Διήγημα τοῦ π. Κων. Στρατηγόπουλου. Απόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Τὸ σταυροδρόμι τῆς Καρδιάς μου», σελ. 85, ἐκδόσεις «Φιλοκαλία».

Τὰ Χριστούγεννα στὴν Πόλη γιορτάζονται ταπεινά. Καὶ ὅταν λέμε ταπεινά, ἐννοοῦμε τὴν ἀφαίρεση τῆς ἐξωτερικῆς λαμπρότητας καὶ τὴν καλλιέργεια τοῦ ἐσωτερικοῦ κάλλους. Κάτι, τὸ μὴ χριστιανικὸ περιβάλλον, κάτι, ἡ βαριά κληρονομιά τῆς λειτουργικῆς παραδόσεως, ὀδηγοῦν σ' αὐτὸ τὸ κατασκευτικὸ ἦθος.

Ἔτσι θὰ περνοῦσαν καὶ τὰ Χριστούγεννα ἐκεῖνα γιὰ τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη τὸ λουστραδόρο. Μάστορας στὴ δουλειά του. Δούλευε μὲ μεράκι τὰ ἔπιπλα, σὰν καλλιτέχνης πραγματικός, χωρὶς νὰ βιάζεται καὶ χωρὶς νὰ λογαριάζει τὸ κέρδος ἢ τὴ ζημιά. Ὅ,τι περνοῦσε ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι του ἔπρεπε νὰ λάμπει «ἡλίου φαεινότερον», ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ ἴδιος. Καὶ προσέθετε:

- Προπάντων, ὅμως, προσοχὴ στὸ βάθος τῆς λάμπης, μιᾶς καὶ εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ λάμπει ἢ ἐπιφάνεια, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἐπιτυχία βρῖσκεται στὸ πῶς θὰ ῥοχεται τὸ φῶς.

Τὸ «βάθος τῆς λάμπης». Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ ἰδεολογία τοῦ κυρ-Μανώλη. Μπορεῖ καὶ νὰ μὴν ἦταν ἡ ἰδεολογία μόνο δική του. Μπορεῖ καὶ νὰ μετέφερε πάνω του μία χιλιόχρονη παράδοση ποὺ ἔπλασε τὸ φῶς στὸ βάθος κι ἄφησε τὴν ἐπιφάνεια στὸ περιθώριο. Ἡ γυναῖκα του, βέβαια, ἡ Πολυξένη, διαφωνοῦσε μ' ὅλα αὐτά.

- Τὸ μεροκάματο δὲν βγαίνει μὲ φιλοσοφίες, τοῦ ἔλεγε. Αὐτὸ ποῦ κάνεις οὔτε ὁ Θεὸς δὲν τὸ θέλει. Ὁ Πανάγαθος ὄρισε νὰ κερδίζουμε τὸ ψωμί μας μὲ τὸν ἰδρώτα τοῦ προσώπου μας κι ὄχι μὲ τὸν ἰδρώτα τριῶν προσώπων. Ἐκεῖνος θὰ τὸ θελε ἀλλιῶς γιατί ξέρε πιὸ καλά ἀπὸ σένα.

Ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης ὅμως δὲν καταλάβαινε ἀπὸ τέτοια. Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα ἦταν ἡ λάμψη. Ἀλλὰ τὸ παράπονο τῆς Πολυξένης τῆς «πολύπαθης», ὅπως ἔλεγε μόνη της γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ της, ἦταν κι ἄλλο. Ὁ ἄντρας της, ὁ προκομμένος, εἶχε τὸ ἐργαστήρι κάτω στὸ Γαλατά, κοντὰ στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο. Τὸ σπίτι του βρισκόταν στοὺς πρόποδες τοῦ λόφου τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου, στὸ Σταυροδρόμι. Ἦταν μία ἀπόσταση ποὺ δὲν ἐπέτρεπε στὴν πληθωρικὴ Πολυξένη νὰ ἐλέγχει τὰ συμβαίνοντα στὸ ἐργαστήρι.

Καθὼς ἦταν ἀνοικτὴ καρδιά ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης, εἶχε πολλὲς κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις μὲ ἄλλους μαστόρους τῆς περιοχῆς τοῦ Γαλατᾶ. Τὰ κουτσόλεγαν στὸ ἐργαστήρι του, ποῦ εἶχε γίνει χώρος συζητήσεων, φιλοσοφικῶν καὶ κοινωνικῶν. Ἦταν σὰν ἓνα μικρὸ καφενεῖο, ὅπου οἱ συζητήσεις γιὰ τὰ τρέχοντα θέματα ἦταν στὴν ἡμερησία διάταξη. Ποιὸς ψάλτης εἶπε πιὸ κατασκευτικὰ τὸ δοξαστικὸ τῆς Κυριακῆς; Ποιὸς δεσπότης τηροῦσε τὸ περίφημο πολιτικὸ τυπικὸ; Ποιὰ παράδοση ἔφερε νὰ ψάλλονται δύο καταβασίες τὰ Χριστούγεννα; Κι ἄλλα πολλὰ ποῦ ἔβγαζαν πάντοτε τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸν ρυθμὸ τῆς δουλειᾶς του. Ἀναγκαζόταν, τότε, νὰ δουλέψει ὡς τὰ μεσάνυχτα γιὰ νὰ προλάβει τὸ χαμένο χρόνο καὶ μερικὲς φορὲς κοιμόταν καὶ μέσα στὸ ἐργαστήρι, ἐπειδὴ ἦταν δύσκολο νὰ πάει στὸ σπίτι του, λόγω τοῦ προχωρημένου τῆς ὥρας. Τότε ἦταν ποῦ ἡ Πολυξένη ἔχανε τ' αὐγὰ καὶ τὰ καλάθια ἀπὸ τὰ νεῦρα της. Καὶ μεροκάματο δὲν ἔβγαине καὶ ἄντρα δὲν εἶχε. Ἔστηνε στὴν πόρτα τὸν ἄντρα της λέγοντας:

- Θὰ σὲ ξετινάξουν ὅλοι αὐτοί, στὴν ψάθα θὰ πεθάνεις.

Καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἀπαντοῦσε:

- Μὰ εἶναι καλὰ παιδιὰ καὶ γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ μιλάμε. Καὶ μὴν ξεχνᾶς πῶς οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν μέσα τους φῶς, πολὺ φῶς. Λίγο νὰ σταθεῖς μπροστά τους, λίγο νὰ τοὺς καλομιλήσεις καὶ θὰ βρεθεῖς κατάματα μὲ τὸ Χριστό. Ἔχουν κι οἱ



ἄνθρωποι λάμψη, Πολυξένη μου.

Ἡ Πολυξένη, ὅμως, δὲν καταλάβαινε ἀπὸ τέτοια. Ἔβλεπε τὰ παιδιὰ της, καὶ τὴν ἴδια, νὰ ζοῦνε φτωχικά. Ὅλα τ' ἄλλα ἦταν δεύτερα.

Ἦταν παραμονὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ἡ Πολυξένη εἶχε ἀπὸ τὸ πρωὶ δώσει τίς ὀδηγίες καὶ τὰ διαγγέλματά της στὸν ἄνδρα της.

- Τὸ ἀργότερο στίς ὀκτῶ θὰ βράδν θὰ εἶσαι στὸ σπίτι, οὔτε λεπτὸ καθυστέρηση. Ὅπως γυρνᾶς ἀπὸ τὸ Πέρα, ψώνισέ μου κουνουνάρια γιὰ τὴ γαλοπούλα, παστοურμά, σουτζοῦκι, τυρί, κασέρι, καὶ δύο κιασέδες γιαοῦρτι γιὰ νὰ νιώσουμε κι ἐμεῖς οἱ φτωχοὶ τὴ χροιάρα μέρα.

Ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης ἄκουγε τὰ διαγγέλματα. Δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ κάνει καὶ κάτι ἄλλο.

- Κρίμα ποῦ ἡ Πολυξένη δὲν εἶχε γίνει συνταγματάρχης, σκεπτόταν, θὰ εἶχε τὴν πιὸ δυναμικὴ στρατιωτικὴ μονάδα, κρίμα στὴ γυναῖκα, πηγαίνει χαμένη μὲ μένα τὸν κακομοῖρο.

Ἀπαντοῦσε ὅμως σταρᾶτα:



- Ναὶ Πολυξένη μου, ὅλα θὰ γίνουν ὅπως θέλεις.

Καὶ πράγματι, ὅλα ἔγιναν ὅπως ἤθελε ἡ Πολυξένη. Στὶς 8 ἢ ὡρα ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης κατηφόριζε τὴ μεγάλη κατηφόρα τοῦ ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου. Στὸ βάθος, στὸ τέλος τοῦ μεγάλου δρόμου, φαινόταν ἤδη τὸ σπίτι του. Τότε συνέβη τὸ ἔκτακτο.

Ἐκεῖ, σὲ κάποιο ἀριστερὸ στενάκι ὑπῆρχε τὸ μικρὸ ταβερνάκι τοῦ Φώτη τοῦ Κάβουρα. Κάβουρα τὸν ἔλεξαν λόγω τῶν ἀργῶν κινήσεων μὲ τίς ὁποῖες περπατοῦσε. Καλὴ καὶ ἄδολη καρδιά ὁ Φώτης, διατηροῦσε αὐτὸ τὸ μικρὸ κατάστημα, ὅπου μαζεύονταν οἱ ἄντρες τῆς γειτονιάς καὶ τὰ κουτσόπιναν τὰ βραδάκια. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ βράδυ, λόγω τῆς παραμονῆς, πελατεία δὲν ὑπῆρχε, μόνο ἓνας, κι ὁ Φώτης ποῦ περιδιάβαινε μὲ τὴ ματιὰ του τοὺς διαβάτες τῆς κατηφόρας. Τότε εἶδε τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη.

- Γεῖά σου, Μανώλη, σπάνια σὲ βλέπουμε πιά.

- Ναί, ἀπάντησε ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης, οἱ δουλειὲς βλέπεις.

- Ἔλα νὰ τὰ ποῦμε γιὰ λίγο μέσα.

Ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης κοντοστάθηκε. Ἡ Πολυξένη περιμένε στὸ σπίτι, ἀλλὰ κι ἡ πρόσκληση ἦταν πρόκληση. Τὸ σκέφτηκε. Θὰ καθόταν δέκα λεπτά καὶ μετὰ θὰ συνέχιζε. Δέκα λεπτά δὲν ἦταν τίποτε.

Μπήκαν μέσα καὶ κάθισαν σὲ μία γωνιά, μιλῶντας γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Γιὰ τὴν πρωινὴ λειτουργία. Γιὰ τὰ τροπάρια ποῦ θὰ εἶχε τὸ τυπικὸ καὶ ἄλλα παρόμοια. Εἶχαν σχεδὸν ξεχάσει πῶς στὸ κατάστημα ὑπῆρχε κι ἓνας, ὁ μοναδικός, πελάτης. Τὸν θυμήθηκαν ὅταν ξερόβηξε, λίγο, λέγοντας σὲ σπασμένα ἑλληνικά:

- Θέλω ἓνα ποτήρι ἀπ' τὸ γλυκὸ κρασί.

Καὶ σὰν νὰ ἤθελε νὰ ἀρπάξει τὴν εὐκαιρία εἶπε:

- Αὔριο ἔσεῖς οἱ ρωμηοί, ἔχετε μεγάλη γιορτή.

Οἱ δύο μας φίλοι στάθηκαν ἀμήχανοι, μ' ἓναν τοῦρκο πάντα πρέπει νὰ εἶσαι κουμπωμένος. Ἐκεῖνος, σὰν νὰ κατάλαβε, εἶπε:

- Μὲ λένε Τζεμίλ, μεγάλωσα σὲ ρωμαϊκὸ μαχαλὰ καὶ ξέρω κάτι λίγα ἑλληνικά. Εἶμαι μόνος, χωρὶς οἰκογένεια, ξωμάχος τῆς ζωῆς. Σὰς ρώτησα γιὰ τὴ γιορτή σας. Τί γιορτάζετε αὔριο;

Φαινόταν τίμιος καὶ εἶχε καθαρὴ ματιὰ. Ἐνιωθες ἐμπιστοσύνη. Ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης πῆρε θάρρος.

- Νά, πῶς νὰ στὸ πῶ, αὔριο γεννήθηκε ἡ ἀγάπη.

Ὁ Τζεμίλ σοβάρωσε πολὺ.

- Πῶς γεννιέται ἡ ἀγάπη; ἔχει πρόσωπο;

- Γι' αὐτὸ γεννήθηκε ἀκριβῶς, ἐπειδὴ ἔχει πρόσωπο καὶ θέλει νὰ μᾶς δεῖ κατὰ πρόσωπο, ἀπάντησε ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης.

Καὶ συνέχισε:

- Ξέρεις; Ἡ ἀγάπη ποῦ γεννήθηκε εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός. Ὁ Τζεμίλ ἀντέδρασε.

- Ὁ Θεὸς οὔτε γεννιέται, οὔτε ἔχει πρόσωπο.

- Φίλε μου Τζεμίλ, εἶπε ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης, γι' αὐτὸ

ἀκριβῶς εἶναι ἀγάπη, ἐπειδὴ καταδέχτηκε νὰ γεννηθεῖ καὶ νὰ μᾶς δεῖ στὸ πρόσωπό μας, μέσα μας, βαθιά μας. Θέλει νὰ βρεῖ τὴ λάμψη ποῦ ἔχουμε μέσα μας καὶ νὰ τὴν κάνει φωτιά.

Ὁ Τζεμίλ σώπασε. Ἄκουγε μὲ προσοχὴ τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη. ὁ Μανώλης, ὁ λουστραδόρος, εἶχε γίνει ὀλόκληρος μιὰ φωτιά ποῦ ἔλαμπε. Σώπασαν καὶ οἱ δύο. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὡρα ψιθύρισε ὁ Τζεμίλ:

- Κι ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς σας εἶναι ἀγάπη, ἐσὺ πῶς θὰ μοῦ τὸ ἀποδείξεις;

Ὁ Μανώλης μάζεψε τὰ φρύδια καὶ εἶπε, ψιθυρίζοντας:

- Νὰ τ' ἀποδείξω δὲν μπορῶ μὲ λόγια, ἀλλὰ μόνο ἂν χρειαστεῖ νὰ κάνω μιὰ θυσία γιὰ σένα, τότε θὰ τὸ καταλάβεις.

Ὁ Τζεμίλ εἶπε φωναχτά:

- Κάνε μιὰ θυσία γιὰ μένα. Θέλω νὰ καταλάβω τὴν ἀγάπη ποῦ γίνεται ἄνθρωπος ἢ μᾶλλον νὰ καταλάβω πῶς εἶναι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὅταν ἔχει τὴν ἀγάπη;

Ὁ κυρ-Μανώλης δὲν σκέφτηκε καὶ πολὺ. Οἱ θυσίες δὲν προγραμματίζονται, ἔρχονται ξαφνικά, ἀρκεῖ νὰ τίς ἀξιοποιήσεις. Κάθισε, ἐκεῖ, στὸ ταβερνάκι, ὅλη τὴ νύχτα μὲ τὸν Τζεμίλ. Δὲν ἦταν δὲ καὶ τόσο δύσκολο. Κάθε μέρα ξενυχτοῦσε γιὰ νὰ φτάσει στὴ «λάμψη τὴν ἐσωτέρα», γιὰ νὰ βρεῖ τὴν κοινωνία μὲ τὸν ἄλλο.

Ἔτσι πέρασε ὅλη τὴ νύχτα καὶ τὸ πρωὶ τράβηξε γιὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Κωνσταντῖνο γιὰ ν' ἀκούσει: «*Δεῦτε ἴδωμεν πιστοὶ ποῦ ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστός*».

Ἔνα ἦταν σίγουρο. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ βράδυ μέσα στὸ καπηλεῖο τοῦ Φώτη ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστός. Πάντοτε ἔτσι γεννιέται, στὰ ταπεινὰ καὶ στὰ μοναχικά. Γεννιέται ἐκεῖ ποῦ ἡ λάμψη δὲν εἶναι ἐξωτερική.

Ἔτσι γιόρτασαν τὰ Χριστούγεννα ἐκεῖνα στὴν Πόλη. Ἔτσι πάντα τὰ γιορτάζουν. Μὲ τὴ φωταυγὴ ἀχτίδα τοῦ ἐσωτέρου φωτός. Καὶ μετὰ ἔρχονται πάντα οἱ Ἡρώδες. Καὶ στὴ διήγησή μας αὐτή, τὸ μαρτύριο γιὰ τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη ἦρθε ἀπὸ τὴν Πολυξένη, τὴν πολύπαθη καὶ κουρασμένη, ποῦ ξεχνοῦσε ὅμως νὰ καταλάβει τὴ λάμψη ποῦ εἶχε κοντά της, τὸν κυρ-Μανώλη, ἓνα ἀκόμη σημεῖο τῆς φανέρωσης τοῦ Κυρίου πάνω στὴ γῆ.



**Μ**ὴν φοβάστε παιδί μου τὸν σατανᾶ. Δὲν ἔχει τόση δύναμη. Εἶναι πολὺ ἀδύνατος. Σκόνη εἶναι καὶ δυσωδία. Αὐτὸς δουλεύει γιὰ ἐμᾶς. Ὅταν ἔρχεται νὰ σὲ πειράξει νὰ μὴν στεναχωριέσαι. Ὁ Θεὸς τὸν στέλνει γιὰ νὰ στεφανωθεῖς ἐσύ. Αὐτὸς πλανᾷ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, προπάντων τοὺς ἐγωιστὲς καὶ τοὺς ὑπερήφανους, καὶ φοβᾶται τὴν καθαρὴ ἐξομολόγηση, τὴν ταπείνωση τὴν ἀγάπη. Ἐκεῖ μόνο δὲν χωράει νὰ μπεῖ.

**Παπα-Δημήτρης Γκαγκαστάθης (+1975)**

## Οἱ Ἀμαρτίες ἔχουν τὸν Δικό τους «θεὸ»

*Ἀγίου Ἰουστίνου Πόποβιτς, «Πρὸς Ἐφραίμους Ἐπιστολὴ Ἀπ. Παύλου», ἐκδ. Βασ. Ρηγόπουλου, Θεσσαλονίκη, σ.76-78 (Ἰωάν. 12,31, 14,30).*

**Ο**ἱ ἁμαρτίες ἔχουν τὸν δικό τους θεὸ καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ διάβολος. Αὐτὸς εἶναι καὶ ὁ κύριος δημιουργός τους. Καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὅταν κάνουν τίς ἁμαρτίες γίνονται συνεργοὶ τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ὄχι μόνον αὐτό, ἀλλὰ καὶ δούλοι καὶ ὑπηρέτες του. Οἱ ἁμαρτίες ἔχουν τὸ βασίλειό τους, τὸν κόσμον τους καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ κόλαση.

Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ γήινος κόσμος μας, μὲ τὴν θεληματική, ἐκούσια διαβίωσή μας στὶς ἁμαρτίες, γίνεται καὶ εἶναι δικός τους κόσμος. Καὶ τόσο εἶναι δικός τους, ὅσο ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ εὐχαρίστηση κάνουμε τίς ἁμαρτίες. Ὁ διάβολος ἔρχεται μὲ τὴν ἁμαρτία στὸν γήινο κόσμον μας καὶ τὸν κατακτᾷ ὀλοκληρωτικὰ μὲ τίς ἁμαρτίες ποὺ κάνουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

Καὶ μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ὁ διάβολος κυβερνᾷ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ κυριαρχεῖ σ' αὐτοὺς μὲ το θάνατο. Καὶ κάνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους «ἀβοήθητους δούλους» καὶ γίνεται θεὸς αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, «θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου». (Β' Κορ. 4:4).

Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο, ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὀνομάζει τὸν διάβολο κύριο αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, «ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται» (Α' Ἰωάν. 5:19) καὶ ὀνομάζεται κακός, «πονηρὸς κόσμος». (Γαλ. 1:4). Καὶ αὐτὸ μέχρι τὸν ἐρχομὸ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν κόσμον μας, μέχρι τὴν «ἐνσάρκωσή Του» καὶ τὴν θαυμαστή «οἰκονομία» τῆς σωτηρίας. Καὶ ἡ σωτηρία «συνίσταται» στὴ νίκη τοῦ Σωτῆρα κατὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας, νίκη κατὰ τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τῆς δύναμής του, νίκη κατὰ τῆς παν-δύναμης αὐτοῦ δηλαδὴ τοῦ θανάτου.

Μέχρι τὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ χωρὶς Αὐτὸν καὶ ἔξω ἀπ' Αὐτόν, οἱ ἄνθρωποι «ζοῦσαν καὶ ζοῦν» στὶς ἁμαρτίες καὶ στοὺς θανάτους. «Περπατοῦν» μέσα στὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ στὸ θάνατο μέρα καὶ νύκτα, ἢ ἀκόμη περισσότερο ζοῦν μέσα στὸ βασίλειο αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, ἀφοῦ περπατοῦν μέσα στὶς ἄπειρες νύχτες τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου. Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος, τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ διάβολος κυβερνᾷ, διαμέσου τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἔχει τὸ δικό του τρόπο ζωῆς, τὸ δικό του περπάτημα, τὴ δική του ροή, τὸ δικό του δρόμο. Ἡ ἁμαρτία πέτυχε νὰ γίνει τρόπος ζωῆς «Modus vivendi», γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου.

Ὅσο αὐτὴ (ἡ ἁμαρτία) ἀπέκτησε δικαιώματα στὸν κόσμον αὐτό, τόσο πολὺ ἐγίνε οἰκεία, τόσο ἐγίνε ἓνα μὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Καὶ τόσο ἐγίνε ἓνα, τόσο βαθιὰ διεῖδεν στὸν κόσμον αὐτό, τόσο προσεταιρίσθηκε τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση, ἀπὸ τὴν πανάρχαια ἐποχή,

ὥστε νὰ μὴν παρουσιάζει κάτι τὸ στιγμιαῖο, κάτι τὸ σύντομο, ἀλλὰ κάτι τὸ βαθύ, τὸ διαρκές, τὸ αἰώνιο, καὶ «ὄλος ὁ αἰῶνας», ὅλη ἡ «καιρικὴ» αἰωνιότητα νὰ εἶναι διαποτισμένη ἀπὸ αὐτή. Σὲ κάθε περίπτωση ἡ ἁμαρτία θέλει καὶ ἐπιθυμεῖ νὰ γίνει σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμον κάτι τὸ αἰώνιο, νὰ γίνει πραγματικὰ ἡ αἰωνιότητά του. Γιατί αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος «βλέπει» στὴν ἁμαρτία τὴ ζωὴ του, τὴν «ἀθανασία» του, τὴν «αἰωνιότητά» του.

Ἔτσι ὁ ἄνθρωπος «περιπατεῖ κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου» καὶ αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἀφοῦ ζεῖ μὲ οἰκεία καὶ διαρκὴ τὴν φιλαμαρτησία, **βλέπει τὴν ἁμαρτία σὰν κάτι τὸ «φυσικό», κάτι τὸ λογικό, κάτι τὸ ἀπαραίτητο** καὶ ἀκόμη περισσότερο, σὰν κάτι τὸ «σύν-αἰώνιο» στὸν κόσμον αὐτό. Στὴν πραγματικότητα, ζώντας μὲ τὴν ἁμαρτία ὁ ἄνθρωπος θανατῶνει τὸν ἑαυτό του, θανατῶνει κάθε τί τὸ ἀνώτερο, τὸ ἅγιο, τὸ ἔνθεο, τὸ ἀθάνατο, τὸ αἰώνιο καὶ γίνεται ψυχικὰ νεκρός.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ περιπατεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος «κατὰ τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου» σημαίνει καὶ κάτι ἀκόμη, ὅτι περιπατεῖ «κατὰ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος», ὅτι περιπατεῖ σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ διαβόλου. Ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ἁμαρτία δὲν εἶναι «αὐτοδημιουργητὴ» ἀλλὰ ἐξάγεται, προέρχεται ὀλοκληρῶς ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο καὶ ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ αὐτόν. Ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶναι καθαρὴ ἐπινόηση τοῦ διαβόλου. Καὶ προσεταιριζόμενοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὴν ἁμαρτία, «κοινωνοῦν» μὲ τὸν διάβολο, γίνονται «θεληματικὰ» συνεργοὶ του.

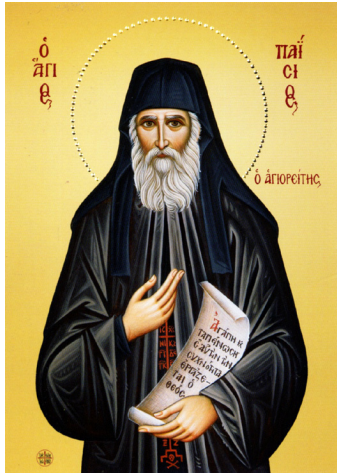


**Γ**ιὰ μᾶς πάλι, τοὺς χριστιανούς, ὁ θάνατος εἶναι ἡ λήξη ἐνὸς σχολείου, τὸ σῆμα τῆς ἀπολύσεως μιᾶς στρατιωτικῆς θητείας, ἡ γέφυρα γιὰ τὴν ἐπιστροφὴ στὴν πατρίδα. Οὐσιαστικά, ὁ θάνατος καθαυτός, εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστὸ ἓνα τίποτα. Ἐκεῖνος εἶπε στὴ Μάρθα: «*Εγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ. Ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, κἂν ἀποθάνῃ, ζήσεται...*» (Ἰω. 11:25-26). Ποιὸν θὰ πιστέψουμε ἂν ὄχι τὸ Χριστό; Στους ἀνθρώπους δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ πιστέψεις οὔτε καὶ ὅταν σοῦ λένε τὸ ὄνομά τους, πολὺ λιγότερο ὅταν λένε: θὰ σὲ πληρώσω αὔριο καὶ ἀκόμα πιδὶ λίγο ὅταν μιλοῦν γιὰ πράγματα βαθιὰ καὶ ὑψηλά.

**Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς**

## Οἱ Ποιμένες πού Ἀγρυπνοῦσαν Εἶδαν τὸν Χριστό

Ἀγίου Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου, «Περὶ προσευχῆς», Λόγοι ΣΤ', ἐκδ. Ἱερὸν Ἡσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος», Σουρωτή Θεσσαλονίκης, σσ. 195-196.



**Ο** Χριστὸς μὲ τὴ μεγάλη Του ἀγάπη καὶ μὲ τὴν μεγάλη Του ἀγαλλίαση πού σκορπάει στὶς ψυχὰς τῶν πιστῶν μὲ ὅλες τὶς ἅγιες γιορτὲς Του, μᾶς ἀνασταίνει ἀληθινὰ ἀφοῦ μᾶς ἀνεβάζει ψηλὰ πνευματικά. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ συμμετέχουμε καὶ νὰ ἔχουμε ὄρεξη πνευματικὴ νὰ τὶς πανηγυρίζουμε πνευματικά. Τότε τὶς γλεντᾶμε πνευματικά καὶ

μεθᾶμε πνευματικά ἀπὸ τὸ παραδεισένιο κρασί πού μᾶς φέρνουν οἱ Ἅγιοι καὶ μᾶς κερνοῦν.

Τὶς γιορτὲς γιὰ νὰ τὶς ζήσουμε, πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὸν νοῦ μας στὶς ἅγιες ἡμέρες καὶ ὄχι στὶς δουλειὲς πού ἔχουμε νὰ κάνουμε γιὰ τὶς ἅγιες ἡμέρες.

Νὰ σκεφτόμαστε τὰ γεγονότα τῆς κάθε ἀγίας ἡμέρας καὶ νὰ λέμε τὴν εὐχὴ δοξολογῶντας τὸν Θεό. Ἔτσι θὰ γιορτάζουμε μὲ πολλὴ εὐλάβεια κάθε γιορτή.

Ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ μᾶς ὀφείλει νὰ μελετᾶει καὶ νὰ ζεῖ τὰ θεῖα γεγονότα συνέχεια. Ὅταν κανεὶς μελετᾶει τὰ γεγονότα τῆς κάθε γιορτῆς, φυσιολογικὰ θὰ συγκινηθεῖ.

Ἔπειτα στὶς Ἀκολουθίες ὁ νοῦς νὰ εἶναι στὰ γεγονότα πού γιορτάζουμε καὶ μὲ εὐλάβεια νὰ παρακολουθοῦμε τὰ τροπάρια πού ψέλνονται. Ὅταν ὁ νοῦς εἶναι στὰ θεῖα νοήματα, ζεῖ τὰ γεγονότα ὁ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἔτσι ἀλλοιώνεται.

-Γέροντα, μετὰ τὴν Ἀγρυπνία τῶν Χριστουγέννων δὲν κοιμόμαστε;

-Χριστούγεννα καὶ νὰ κοιμηθοῦμε! Ἡ μητέρα μου ἔλεγε: «Ἀπόψε μόνον οἱ Ἑβραῖοι κοιμούνται». Βλέπεις, τὴν νύχτα πού γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς οἱ ἄρχοντες κοιμόνταν βαθιά, καὶ οἱ ποιμένες «ἀγρυπνοῦσαν». Φύλαγαν τὰ πρόβατα τὴν νύχτα παίζοντας τὴν φλογέρα. Κατάλαβες; Οἱ ποιμένες πού ἀγρυπνοῦσαν εἶδαν τὸν Χριστό.

-Πῶς ἦταν Γέροντα, τὸ σπήλαιο;

-Ἦταν μία σπηλιά μέσα σὲ ἕναν βράχο καὶ εἶχε μία φάτνη, τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν εἶχε. Ἐκεῖ πῆγαινε κανένας φτωχὸς καὶ ἄφηνε τὰ ζῶα του. Ἡ Παναγία μὲ τὸν Ἰωσήφ, ἐπειδὴ ὅλα τὰ χάνια ἦταν γεμάτα καὶ δὲν εἶχαν πού νὰ μείνουν, κατέληξαν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σπήλαιο. Ἐκεῖ ἦταν τὸ γαῖδουράκι καὶ τὸ βοιδάκι, πού μὲ τὰ

χνώτα τους ζέσταναν τὸν Χριστό! «Ἐγὼ βοῦς τὸν κτησάμενον καὶ ὄνος τὴν φάτνην τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ», δὲν λείει ὁ Προφήτης Ησαΐας;

-Σὲ ἕνα τροπάριο, Γέροντα, λέει ὅτι ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος βλέποντας τὸν νεογέννητο Χριστό, «χαίρουσα ὁμοῦ καὶ δακρύνουσα» ἀναρωτιόταν... Ἐπιδώσω σοὶ μαζόν, τῷ τὰ σύμπαντα τρέφοντι, ἢ ὑμνήσω σε, ὡς Υἱὸν καὶ Θεὸν μου; ποῖαν εὔρω ἐπὶ σοὶ προσηγορίαν;

-Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἢ πολὺ μεγάλη συγκατάβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ὁποία δὲν μποροῦμε ἐμεῖς νὰ συλλάβουμε!

-Γέροντα, πῶς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ζήσουμε τὸ γεγονός τῆς Γεννήσεως, ὅτι δηλαδή ὁ Χριστὸς «Σήμερον γεννᾶται, γεννᾶται ἐκ Παρθένου»;

-Γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε αὐτὰ τὰ θεῖα γεγονότα, πρέπει ὁ νοῦς νὰ εἶναι στὰ θεῖα νοήματα. Τότε ἀλλοιώνεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος. «Μέγα καὶ παράδοξον θαῦμα τετέλεσται σήμερον», ψάλλουμε. Ἄμα ὁ νοῦς μας εἶναι ἐκεῖ, σὲ «παράδοξον», τότε θὰ ζήσουμε καὶ τὸ μεγάλο μυστήριο τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἐγὼ θὰ εὐχομαι ἢ καρδιά σας νὰ γίνῃ Ἁγία Φάτνη καὶ τὸ Πανάγιο Βρέφος τῆς Βηθλεέμ νὰ σᾶς δώσῃ ὅλες τὶς εὐλογίες Του.



**Ο** Θεὸς δὲν θὰ μᾶς ἐγκαταλείψει! Θα μᾶς στείλει ἄρωγους στοὺς ἀγῶνες μας καὶ παρήγορους στὶς θλίψεις μας. Καὶ εἰς τὰς ἐσχάτας καὶ πονηρὰς αὐτὰς ἡμέρας, κατὰ τὰς ὁποίας πάντες ἐξέκλιναν ἅμα ἠχρειώθησαν, οὐκ ἀφήκεν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν Του ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, τὴν ὁποίαν Αὐτὸς μόνος ἴδρυσεν καὶ ἐστερέωσε, ἵνα μὲν ἀσάλευτος εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα αἰῶνα.

Ἀλλὰ καθὼς εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεάς, πολεμουμένη καὶ κινδυνεύουσα ὑπὸ ἀοράτων καὶ ὁρατῶν ἐχθρῶν, ζητούντων ἀφανίσαι Αὐτήν, ἀνεδείξεν ἄνδρας πλήρεις πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης, πλήρεις ζήλου, ἀνδρείας, σοφίας, χάριτος, συνέσεως καὶ λόγου Θεοῦ, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὡς λέοντες κατεδίωξαν μακρὰν τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας πάντα ἐχθρὸν καὶ πολέμιον, οὕτω καὶ νῦν καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας δὲν θὰ παύσῃ νὰ ἀναδεικνύῃ τοιοῦτους ἄνδρας, οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν θὰ κλίνουν γόνυ τῷ νέῳ Βάαλ Πάπα καὶ τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἂν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ πάντες οἱ λαοὶ προσκυνήσουν τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, διὰ νὰ διαφθεῖρη τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν γῆν, οἱ δίκαιοι, οἱ στρατιῶται τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, οἱ θεηγόροι ὀπλίται παρατάξεως Κυρίου θὰ ψάλωσιν «Μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός, γνῶτε ἔθνη καὶ ἠττάσθε, ὅτι μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός...»

**Ὅσιος Φιλόθεος Ζερβάκος (+1980)**

## Οἱ Πολέμιοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση

Υπάρχουν ανάμεσά μας πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν πιστεύουν στὸν Θεὸ καὶ ζοῦν δίχως προσδοκία αἰώνιου ζωῆς. Δὲν κατανοῦν τί θὰ πεῖ σωτηρία, πῶς δηλαδή θὰ πετύχουν στὴν παρούσα ζωὴ καὶ πῶς θὰ ἐξασφαλίσουν τὴ μακαριότητα τῆς αἰωνίας ζωῆς. Καὶ αὐτὸ συμβαίνει εἴκοσι αἰῶνες μετὰ τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ! Μένουν, δυστυχοῦς, ἀσυγκίνητοι ἀπὸ τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ὅπως μένουν ἀσυγκίνητοι καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν πλουσιότατη πνευματικὴ ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Εἶναι βαθὺς ὁ ὕπνος τῆς ἀδιαφορίας τους καὶ ἀπογοητεύει ἐκείνους ποὺ θέλουν νὰ τοὺς ἀφυπνίσουν καὶ νὰ τοὺς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὸν Χριστό.

Ἐντελῶς διαφορετικοὶ εἶναι οἱ συνειδητοὶ χριστιανοί, ποὺ ἔχουν ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους καὶ διψοῦν νὰ συναντήσουν πνευματικὰ τὸν Χριστό. Προετοιμάζονται ἀναλόγως καὶ ὑποβάλλονται σὲ μικρὲς ἢ μεγάλες θυσίες ἀρκεῖ νὰ μάθουν καὶ νὰ ζήσουν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Σωτῆρος. Ἀκολουθοῦν, θὰ ἔλεγα, τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν Μάγων ποὺ πῆγαν νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸν Μεσσία, ἀψηφώντας τὰ ἐμπόδια ποὺ θὰ συναντοῦσαν στὴν πορεία τους. Οἱ σοφοὶ αὐτοὶ ἀστρονόμοι ξεκίνησαν μὲ ὁδηγὸ τὸ ἀστέρι— ποὺ εἶχε δυνατὸ φῶς καὶ φαινόταν καὶ τὴν ἡμέρα— ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ὅσα εἶχαν πεῖ οἱ προφῆτες. Οἱ ἴδιοι ἦταν σίγουροι ὅτι εἶχε γεννηθεῖ ὁ νέος Βασιλιάς, ὁ Μεσσίας ποὺ περιμέναμεν, καὶ ἀποφάσισαν νὰ πάνε νὰ τὸν προσκυνήσουν. Ζήτησαν μάλιστα ἀπὸ τὸν κοσμικὸ βασιλιά τῆς περιοχῆς, τὸν θηριώδη Ἡρώδη, νὰ τοὺς ἐνημερώσει ποῦ ἀκριβῶς εἶχε γεννηθεῖ ὁ νέος Βασιλιάς.

Ἐκεῖνος ρώτησε τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ γραμματεῖς καὶ ἔμαθε τὴν προφητεία ὅτι εἶναι ἡ Βηθλέεμ. Στους Μάγους εἶπε ἐκεῖ νὰ πάνε νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸ βασιλιά, καὶ γυρίζοντας νὰ τὸν ἐνημερώσουν σχετικὰ, γιὰ νὰ πάει καὶ αὐτὸς νὰ προσκυνήσει! Δὲν τοὺς φανέρωσε τὴν ταραχὴ καὶ τὸ φόβο του μήπως ὁ νέος βασιλιάς γίνεῖ ἀντίξηλός του. Ἐμφανίστηκε ὑποκριτικὰ ὡς καλοπροαίρετος, ἐνῶ ἦδη εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ σχεδιάζει τὴν ἐξόντωσή του.

Οἱ Μάγοι ἔφυγαν ἀπὸ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ μὲ ὁδηγὸ τὸ ἀστέρι, ποὺ ξαναφάνηκε στὸν οὐρανό, συνέχισαν τὴν πορεία τους. Ἐφθασαν στὴ Βηθλέεμ, προσκύνησαν τὸν Μεσσία καὶ τοῦ προσέφεραν τὰ δῶρα τους, χρυσό, λίβανι καὶ σμύρνα. Ἡ ἐπιθυμία τους εἶχε πραγματοποιηθεῖ. Μὲ βαθιὰ ἰκανοποίηση πῆραν τὸ δρόμο τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς, χωρὶς νὰ ξαναπεράσουν ἀπὸ τὸ βασιλιά Ἡρώδη, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁδηγία ποὺ τοὺς δόθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ «κατ' ὄναρ». Δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ

διευκολύνουν τὸν αἰμοδιψῆ βασιλιά, ὁ ὁποῖος στὴν ταραχὴ του διέταξε τὴ σφαγὴ χιλιάδων νηπίων τῆς Βηθλέεμ.

Οἱ Μάγοι καὶ ὁ Ἡρώδης ἦταν διαφορετικοὶ χαρακτήρες. Οἱ πρῶτοι ἦταν ἀξιοθαύμαστοι καὶ ἀξιομίμητοι, ἐνῶ ὁ δεῦτερος ἦταν φοβερός, ἀποκρουστικὸς καὶ θηριώδης. Οἱ πρῶτοι προσκύνησαν τὸν ἀναμενόμενο Μεσσία, ἐνῶ ὁ δεῦτερος σχεδίαζε τὴν ἐξόντωσή του!

Οἱ σοφοὶ ἀστρονόμοι τῆς ἀνατολῆς δὲν βρίσκουν πολλοὺς μιμητὲς στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Οἱ σημερινοὶ ἐπιστήμονες, σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τομεῖς, εἶναι συνήθως ὑπερήφανοι καὶ δὲν ἀναζητοῦν τὸν Κύριο. Εἶναι δεδηλωμένοι ἄθεοι. Μερικοὶ εἶναι ἄθεοι χωρὶς νὰ τὸ φανερώσουν, ἀλλὰ φαίνονται ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ καὶ τὴν πρώτη κουβέντα. Τηροῦν ὅμως μερικοὶ προσχήματα, γιὰ νὰ ἀποφεύγουν τὴν ὀργὴ τῶν ἀπλῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἄλλοι πάλι ἀποφεύγουν τὴ λέξη «ἄθεοι» καὶ χρησιμοποιοῦν τὴ λέξη «ἀγνωστικιστής», ποὺ σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος ποὺ δέχεται ὅτι ἡ γνώση τοῦ ἀπολύτου, τῆς πρώτης ἀρχῆς τῶν ὄντων, τοῦ Θεοῦ δηλαδή, εἶναι ἀδύνατη. Τὴ λέξη αὐτὴ πολλοὶ τὴν ἀκοῦν καὶ ἐλάχιστοι τὴν καταλαβαίνουν.

Οἱ ἄθεοι ἐπιστήμονες ἀρνοῦνται τὸ ταπεινὸ φρόνημα καὶ κατακρίνουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία χωρὶς νὰ ἔχουν τὴν ἀναγκαῖα γνώση. Κάποτε οἱ γνώσεις τους δὲν ξεπερνοῦν τὶς στοιχειώδεις γνώσεις ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ μαθητὲς τῆς δευτεροβάθμιας ἐκπαίδευσης. Αὐτοὶ βαδίζουν χωρὶς ὁδηγὸ τὸ φωτεινὸ ἀστέρι τῆς Βηθλέεμ. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι οἱ Μάγοι ἀκολούθησαν τὸ θεόσταλτο ἀστέρι καὶ βρέθηκαν στὴν οἰκία τοῦ Μεσσία, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄθεοι ἐπιστήμονες ἀκολουθοῦν τὶς δικές τους θεωρίες καὶ ἀπομακρύνονται συνεχῶς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό!

Γιὰ τοὺς μιμητὲς τοῦ Ἡρώδη δὲν ἔχω λόγια νὰ τοὺς περιγράψω. Ἄλλοτε γιὰ δεκαετίες καὶ ἄλλοτε γιὰ αἰῶνες πολέμησαν καὶ πολεμοῦν τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ ἔχουν τὰ ἀποτελέσματα ποὺ ἠθέλαν καὶ θέλουν. Ἐκεῖνοι χτυποῦσαν καὶ χτυποῦν καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία πάντα εὐλογεῖ, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀποδεικνύονται ἀνίκανοι καὶ ἄς φαίνονται πολλὲς φορὲς νικητὲς ποὺ θριαμβεύουν...



Γιὰ νὰ διατηρήσεις τὴν ψυχικὴ εἰρήνη πρέπει νὰ διώχνεις ἀπὸ κοντά σου τὴν ἀθυμία, νὰ προσπαθεῖς νὰ ἔχεις τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς χαρᾶς, νὰ ἀποφεύγεις τὴν κατάκριση τῶν ἄλλων καὶ νὰ συγκαταβαίνεις στίς ἀδυναμίες τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.

**Ἅγιος Σεραφεῖμ τοῦ Σάροφ**

## THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHRISTMAS

Source: "The Veil", vol. 12, no. 3 (Nativity Fast, 2005). "The Veil" is a publication of the Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery, Lake George, CO.

**Question:** I hate the secularization of Christmas. How can I and my family keep the Nativity Fast and celebrate Christmas without getting into all the commercialization that surrounds it in society?

**Answer:** Almost all of what can be said in reply to this question is very obvious and simple, but can be difficult to implement. For those with families, it would be advisable to talk over all these points together and to encourage each other in adhering to everything as we draw nearer and nearer to the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. If a beginning in the following suggestions has not already been made, it is never too late to start.

First of all, be sure to keep the fast! In following the fast as we should, many of the intrusions which the world makes into our homes during this time will automatically be eliminated. Remember, a "fasting" day or period is not limited only to food, but includes vain entertainment as well.

With this in mind, we would like to stress that no one should look at "fasting" as something negative: "we can't do..." , "we can't eat..." , "we can't go." Instead we need to redefine the way we see a fasting period, such as this ever-important time before the Nativity of the Lord. This is a preparation period and a time for spiritual growth—and this idea is certainly not something negative!

The world in which we live is constantly intruding into our innermost lives as it attacks all of the bodily senses; this is never more obvious than during this time of the year. We are encouraged to see, hear, taste, touch and smell all sorts of things that take our minds off of traveling the road to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ.

Obviously, for those who are either single, widowed or have no young children in the home, all of what we need to do to make the Nativity Fast a true time of spiritual growth is much easier. The target for so much of the advertising during this period is aimed directly at those who are most vulnerable—the children—and the things which are advertised are usually the very things that we need to avoid. Each household is a unique situation, and this will have to

be kept in mind when trying to implement the suggestions we would like to make.

Those with children at home often find the actual fasting from foods difficult during this time when it seems that so many rich, enticing and definitely non-fasting foods are pushed at us. It often helps to have special Lenten foods that the family enjoys and which are served only during this and other fasting periods. We do not, however, want to dwell only on the culinary aspects of the fast in this article; we assume that all reading this are indeed adhering to this aspect of the fast, since it is not optional.

A fast only from specific foods is certainly not the sum total of our preparation for the Nativity. Fasting includes avoiding entertainment—another thing which abounds during this season. It is possible in almost all circumstances to avoid office parties and other gatherings by truthfully stating that as Orthodox Christians we do not begin to celebrate until the Feast has arrived. If attendance at such an event absolutely cannot be avoided, then it is always possible to find things

to eat that do not break the fast, and also to simply excuse yourself early.

This is certainly a time when we should be intensifying our reading and daily prayers. We find a number of great saints whose feast days fall within this fast: St. Nicholas on December 6, Saint Spiridon on December 12, St. Herman on December 13, St. Ignatius on December 20 to name just a few. Read

their lives and truly pray to them. Also, within the time of this fast there are quite a few of the prophets whose feast days are also commemorated: read their prophecies as well from the Old Testament. The *Katavasia* of the Nativity are chanted beginning on November 21—whether you are a chanter or not, get the words and music from your priest and learn them, chanting them throughout the day when you are alone or with your family. They are extremely beautiful and uplifting.

These are just a few of the things that can be read as a family, as well as individually, and our daily prayers can—and should—include a petition to God to keep us from all which would harm the soul.

Many parishes offer a retreat or seminar during this time. If your own parish is not having something like this, there is a good chance that a surrounding parish is! Speak with your priest and ask him about this. If there is not a retreat or seminar (and even if there is!) it would be a good idea for several people, like yourself, who want to redirect their



priorities during the Nativity Fast to meet together in a reading group. Accountability always tends to make us read and pray more!

The so-called “Christmas specials” on television and the bombardment of commercials that tell us of all the things we absolutely must have or must buy to be a good mother, father, brother, relative, friend, etc., are enough reason for everyone to turn off the television! The “Christmas specials” seem to emphasize that the “true meaning of Christmas” involves being loving, caring, self-giving, etc. (sandwiched in between commercials which appeal to greed), and mention nothing of the fact that God has become flesh in His love for mankind in order to restore us to that image that was lost!

Now we finally come to the most obvious aspect of the secular celebration of Christmas—presents. While it is now too late to implement this suggestion, it is certainly something that can be remembered and acted upon for next year purchase gifts before the Fast begins!

Limit gifts to a minimum. Certainly everyone has said at one point or another that the proverbial “next year” will be different and more simple. Begin now. There are so many ways in which this can be done, and again, every situation is unique. Most people like gift certificates or a donation made to their favorite charity in their name. Within families, it can be as easy or as difficult to limit the frenzy of gift-giving as you decide to make it.

Above everything, remember that we begin to celebrate when the world around us is finished celebrating! On December 25 we hear non-Orthodox people saying, “Well, that was a nice Christmas, but I’m glad it’s over.” For us, having fasted and anticipated the Lord’s birth for forty days, we are just beginning to celebrate, to sing carols and to comfort our weary bodies with richer foods.

Let us celebrate the feast of the Lord’s Incarnation with spiritual joy instead of being so tired and burned out that we echo the sentiments of those outside the Faith who are glad to see these days, which are so holy to us, come to an end.

*Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is come from the heavens, receive Him! Christ on the earth. Rejoice, all the earth, sing to the Lord, for He has covered Himself in glory!*



Sometimes we not only judge, but also degrade a person. It is one thing to judge; and yet another thing to degrade. The latter is when we not only judge somebody, but also destroy him, that is to say, we feel disgusted by our neighbor—we loathe and detest him. This is worse than judgement, and more destructive.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

## JOHN THE BLESSED

By Photios Kontoglou. A well-known and charming short story



The Nativity Feast having passed, St. Basil took his staff and traversed all of the towns, in order to see who would celebrate his Feast Day with purity of heart. He passed through regions of every sort and through villages of prominence, yet regardless of where he knocked, no door opened to him, since they took him for a beggar. And he would depart embittered, for, though he needed nothing from men, he felt how much pain the heart of every impecunious person must have endured at the insensitivity that these people showed him.

One day, as he was leaving such a merciless village, he went by the graveyard, where he saw that the tombs were in ruins, the headstones broken and turned topsy-turvy, and how the newly dug graves had been turned up by jackals. Saint that he was, he heard the dead speaking and saying: “During the time that we were on the earth, we labored, we were heavy-burdened, leaving behind us children and grandchildren to light just a candle, to burn a little incense on our behalf; but we behold nothing, neither a Priest to read over our heads a memorial service nor *kollyva* (boiled wheat offered in commemoration of the dead), as though we had left behind no one.”

Thus, St. Basil was once again disquieted, and he said to himself, “These villagers give aid neither to the living nor to the deceased,” departing from the cemetery and setting out alone in the midst of the freezing snow.

On the eve of the New Year, he came upon a certain hamlet, which was the poorest of the poor villages in all of Greece. The freezing wind howled through the scrub bush and the rocky cliffs, and not a living soul was to be found in the pitch dark night! Then, he beheld in front of him a small knoll, below which there was secreted away a sheepfold. St. Basil went into the pen and, knocking on the door of the hut with his staff, called out: “Have mercy on me, a poor man, for the sake of your deceased relatives, for even Christ lived as a beggar on this earth.”

Awakening, the dogs lunged at him. But as they drew near him and sniffed him, they became gentle, wagged their tails, and lay down at his feet, whimpering imploringly and with joy. Thereupon, a shepherd, a young man of twenty-five or so, with a curly black beard, opened the door and stepped out: John Barbákos—a demure and rugged man, a sheepman. Before taking a good look at who was knocking, he had already said, “Enter, come inside. Good day, Happy New Year!”

Inside the hut, a lamp was suspended overhead from a cradle that was attached to two beams. Next to the hearth was their bedding, and John's wife was sleeping. As soon as St. Basil went inside, John, seeing that the old man was a clergyman, took his hand and kissed it, saying, "Your blessing, Elder," as though he had known him previously and as though he were his father. And the Saint said to him: "May you and all of your household be blessed, together with your sheep, and may the peace of God be upon you." The wife then arose, and she, too, revered the Elder and kissed his hand, and he blessed her.

St. Basil looked like a mendicant monk, with an old *skoufo* (monastic hat), his *rása* (inner and outer cassocks) worn and patched, and his *tsarouchia* (a traditional leather slipper, usually adorned with a pompom at the end of the shoe) full of holes; as well, he had an old empty looking satchel.

John the blessed put wood on the fire. Straightway the hut began to glisten, as though seemingly a palace. The rafters seemed to be gilded with gold, while the hanging cheesecloth bags (filled with curing cheese) looked like vigil lamps, and the wooden containers, cheese presses, and all of the accessories used by John in making cheese became like silver, as though decorated by diamonds, as did all of the other humble things that John the blessed had in his hut. The wood burning in the hearth crackled and sang like the birds that sing in Paradise, giving off a fragrance wholly delightful.

The couple placed St. Basil near the fire, where he sat, and the wife put down pillows on which he could rest. Then the Elder took the satchel from around his neck, placing it next to him, and removed his old *ráson* (outside cassock), remaining in his *zostikó* (inner cassock).

Together with his farmhand, John the blessed went out to milk the sheep and to place the newborn lambs in the lambing pen, and afterwards he separated the ewes that were ready to birth and confined them within the enclosure, while his helper put the other sheep out to graze. His flock was sparse and John was poor; yet, he was blessed. And he was possessed of great joy at all times, day and night, for he was a good man and he had a good wife.

Anyone who happened to pass by their hut they cared for as though he were a brother. And it is thus that St. Basil found lodging in their home and settled in, as if it were his own, blessing it from top to bottom. On that night, he was awaited, in all of the cities and villages of the known world, by rulers, hierarchs, and officials; but he went to none of these. Instead, he went to lodge in the hut of John the blessed.

So, John, after pasturing the sheep, came back in and said to the Saint, "Elder, I am greatly joyful. I wish to have you read to us the writings about St. Basil (i.e., the appointed hymns to the Saint). I am an illiterate man, but I like all of the writings of our religion (once again, the hymns and services of the Church). In fact, I have a small book from an Hagiorite

Abbot (i.e., from Mt. Athos), and whenever someone who can read and write happens to pass by, I get him to read out of the booklet, since we have no Church near us."

In the East, it was dimly dawning. St. Basil rose and stood, facing eastward, making his Cross. He then bent down, took a booklet from his satchel, and said, *Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.* John the blessed went and stood behind him, and his wife, having nursed their baby, also went to stand near him, with her arms crossed (over her chest). St. Basil then said the hymn, *God is the Lord... and the Apolytikion of the Feast of the Circumcision, Without change, Thou hast assumed human form,* omitting his own *Apolytikion*, which states, *Thy sound is gone forth unto all the earth.* His voice was sweet and humble, and John and his wife felt great contrition, even though they did not understand all of the words. St. Basil now said the whole of Matins and the Canon of the Feast, *Come, O ye peoples, and let us chant a song unto Christ God,* without reciting his own canon, which goes, *O Basil, we would that thy voice were present....* Thereafter, he said aloud the entire Liturgy, pronounced the dismissal, and blessed the household.

As they sat at the table, having eaten and finished their food, the wife brought the *Vasilopeta* (a sweet bread or cake baked in honor of St. Basil on the New Year) and placed it on the serving table. Then St. Basil took a knife and with it traced the sign of the Cross on the *Vasilopeta*, saying, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He cut a first piece, saying, "for Christ," a second, afterwards, saying, "for the Panaghia," and then "for the master of the house, John the blessed." John exclaimed, "Elder, you forgot St. Basil!" The Saint replied, "Yes, indeed," and thus said, "And for the servant of God, Basil."

After this, he resumed: "...and for the master of the house," "for the mistress of the house," "for the child," "for the farmhand," "for the animals," and "for the poor." Thereupon, John the blessed said, "Elder, why did you not cut a piece for your reverendship?" And the Saint said, "But I did, O blessed one!" But John, this blissful man, did not understand.

Afterwards, St. Basil stood up and said the prayer, *O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under the roof of the house of my soul.* John the Blessed then said: "I wonder if you can tell me, Elder, since you know many things, to what palaces St. Basil went this evening? And the rulers and monarchs—what sins do they have? We poor people are sinners, since our poverty leads us into sin."

St. Basil said the same prayer, again—with tears—though changing it: *O Lord my God, I have seen that Thy servant John the simple is worthy and that it is meet that Thou shouldst enter into his shelter. He is a babe, and it is to babes that Thy Mysteries are revealed.* And again John the blissful, John the blessed, understood nothing....

## THE FIVE STEPS TO CHRIST AND THE EIGHT SERPENTS

By St. Seraphim (Zvezdinsky) of Dmitrov.



In ancient times, the eastern despots, especially in Persia, had two terrible, disgusting forms of punishment.

One was that a decomposing corpse was tied to the one being punished, and the corpse's arms were tightly wrapped around his neck. The sunken eyes of the dead man constantly gazed into his eyes, and he always smelled the stench of the decomposing body; he went about with this terrible burden on his shoulders; he sat

down with the corpse; he couldn't go to sleep without feeling its terrible embrace.

The other punishment was that the convicted man was placed naked on a board with his hands and feet bound tightly to it; then they placed a rat on his stomach, covered it with a clay pot, and a hot iron was placed on the pot. The pot would heat up, and the rat would begin to gasp from thirst, and not finding a way out, it would gnaw the stomach of the man being punished, climb into his insides, and cause terrible pain.

My friends, in our age of culture and civilization, in this age of great discoveries, both punishments have been preserved. Many of us are carrying a terrible corpse on our backs, this dead man of our times—godlessness. It is also that rat that gnaws at our insides; and people go about with these terrible burdens, because the terrible executioner—the devil—is preparing punishment for them. Oh, what a loathsome, unbearably horrible torture!

If, my friends, you went to the cemetery, and all those buried there would rise up from their graves and surround you, and would wander as pale shadows around you, would your heart not tremble? Would you not want to run away from this sight? But we often walk among the living dead. Are the unbelievers not dead? But we have to look into their souls—are they not also dead? Do not the words of the Revelation of St. John the Theologian apply to us: *You think that you are rich, but I tell you that you are poor and wretched and dead.* (cf. Rev 3:17).

So it sometimes seems to us that we are alive, but in fact our souls are dead from sins, because sin slays the spirit of God within us. That is why we must all cry out: **Risen Jesus, raise up our souls!**

### The Christian's Cross, Nails and Spear

The holy Apostle Paul says in the Epistle to the Galatians: *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.* (Gal 6:14). Every Christian must be crucified to the world, be crucified on the cross. He also has nails—four nails, with which he is nailed to the cross; there is also a spear with which his heart is pierced.

**What kind of cross does a Christian have?** This cross is called renunciation of the world. The world must be rejected—not the world in which the bright sun shines, not the one in which beautiful flowers bloom—no, through this world we can only know and glorify the Creator. We must distance ourselves from the other world, from the one that the Apostle John calls an *adulterous and sinful* world (Mk 8:38).

This world moves on an infernal chariot of three wheels, which the holy Apostle also speaks about. These wheels are *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.* (1 Jn 2:16). With these three wheels, the chariot of the world heads directly into the abyss of hell, into the kingdom of satan.

The first wheel is the **lust of the flesh**: Those who live in impurity, who break the bonds of marriage (and this happens quite often in our times, to our great sorrow), who promised to preserve virginity and then violated it, are those who are carried away by the first wheel of this terrible chariot.

The second wheel is the **lust of the eyes**. This is when we sin with our eyes, when we violate the purity of our souls with our eyes. For example, when we admire the beauty of another, not glorifying God, but gratifying ourselves with impure thoughts and desires. All sorts of spectacles that act on the passionate side of the soul are also considered the lust of the eyes. The doors of the theaters ought to have the inscription: "The lust of the eyes." When we admire dancing, we follow after this wheel.

The **pride of life** is when a man wants to do everything himself, everything his own way, and he is annoyed when others object: "How could they not listen to me? Am I wrong? Impossible!" We often, very often grab ahold of this third wheel.

This is the chariot driving the adulterous and sinful world. And when a man follows the path of renouncing the world, this chariot of hell will certainly come out to meet him, to tempt him, to force him to follow after it; rest assured that it will cut across his path to stop him. The chariot is headed in one direction, and the man who has renounced the world in another. And every Christian must necessarily be crucified on the cross of renunciation of the world; it is not only monastics who renounce the world, but everyone who bears the name of Christian, for they cannot love the world, nor those who are in the world.



Christians also have **four nails** that nail them to the cross.

The first is **self-denial**. This nail pierces the right hand, because it is precisely our right hand that mainly creates and works. It is an image of the active principle, and it is nailed by the nail of self-renunciation.

What does it mean to renounce ourselves? To not pay attention, to not take notice of ourselves; if they berate you—do not get upset; if they praise you—do not rejoice, as if they are talking about someone else.

The second nail is **patience**, which nails the left hand, because the left hand is considered a symbol of the evil inclination and protest.

The Christian's right foot is nailed to the cross by the nail of prayerful vigil, **endurance in prayer**. *Pray without ceasing*, says the word of God (1 Thess 5:17). It is necessary that even when the body is sleeping, when it is resting, the soul should be vigilant, praying.

The fourth nail, which pierces the Christian's left foot, is **the work of prayer**. It is not correct to say that prayer is easy, that prayer is a joy. No, prayer is a labor. The Holy Fathers say that when a man prays easily, with joy, it is not him praying himself, but an angel of God praying with him, and it is good for him. When prayer does not go well, when you are tired and you want to sleep, when you do not want to pray, but you pray all the same, that is when your prayer is dear to God, because you yourself are praying, laboring for God, and He sees this labor and rejoices in your effort, in this work for Him.

Many say: "I didn't pray this morning. I wasn't in the mood." Only an uneducated Christian could speak like that. When you are not in the mood, then go to church and stand in prayer, so your feet would be as if nailed to the cross. A crucified man cannot go anywhere, so let your feet be nailed by standing in prayer and prayerful labor.

There is always a **crown of thorns** resting upon the head of a Christian—this is our thoughts. They constantly make themselves known to a Christian; they painfully pierce us, like a thorn. A man stands in prayer, and his thoughts spring up and perturb him in the church; even before the Life-Giving chalice, these thoughts bother us, and they are often terrible; they frighten a man, and he must uproot them. This is painful.

The **spear** that pierces the heart of a Christian is love for Christ. Whoever has this love always sees the Sweetest Lord before him; whoever has this love always hears in his soul: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me*. Such a man has no time to think about the world, about the mundane—his mind is ever occupied with the image of his Savior; he has no time to judge others, to analyze their actions—he judges only himself so as not to offend His beloved Lord. St. Ignatius the God-Bearer had such love. He exclaimed: "Oh, my love..."

I pray to God that none of you will get on the chariot of the world, that not a single wheel would touch you, that you would ever be nailed to the cross, bearing the wounds of the Savior. *Lord, Jesus Christ, we pray Thee, grant us to be co-crucified and co-buried with Thee, that we might be resurrected unto eternal life with Thee...*

### The Eight Serpents

Our soul can die and become food for worms. The worms that torment our souls are our passions and sins; there are infinitely many of these worms in our souls, because we have many, many sins—in word, and deed, and thought—we sin in all these ways.

As the Psalmist says: *Mine iniquities are gone over mine head* (Pss 37:5)—how many sins we have! But the Holy Fathers count eight main sins, while the rest of the sins are only the tongues of these eight serpents, only their poisonous teeth.

The first serpent is **gluttony**. This is primarily all kinds of excess in food and drink: overeating, drunkenness, and pleasing the palate. This serpent has many tongues and teeth, often very subtle and inconspicuous. Every kind of care for the flesh, self-gratification—these are the tongues of this poisonous snake. But the most important of them is self-love, when a man thinks and cares too much about himself, about his own comfort.

The second serpent is **lust**. According to the Apostle, it is *a shame even to speak* (Eph 5:12) of its teeth, but according to my archpastoral duty, I will name and show you these terrible teeth: One of them is fornication, the violation of chastity; the second is adultery. This tooth breaks the tunic of marriage. When the husband violates his fidelity to his wife, or vice versa, then know that it is the work of a tooth of the second serpent. But it has other teeth as well—the unnatural vices. We will not speak about them, because it is shameful. All of these snake teeth are disgusting.

To those who are given over into their power, the Apostle addresses these words: *Know ye not that you are Christ's, and your body is the temple of God?* (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). Whoever gives himself into the power of the second serpent destroys and desecrates this temple. The second serpent also has more subtle teeth, about which Christ said: *That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already*. (Mt. 5:28). This is how strict Christ is about purity, and there is no harder struggle than with the evil young of this terrible serpent. In this struggle, we have to ask for help from the Most Pure Virgin Mary, more honorable than the Cherubim, more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, and more pure than the radiance of the sun.

The third serpent is **avarice**, love of money, the passion for profit. A man possessed by this passion no longer has space for Christ in his soul; he has no time to think of salvation, because he is always in dismay, in a state of anxiety about how

not to miss out on some treasure. This serpent has one very sharp tooth, which bites quite often now: being overwhelmed with cares. What am I going to do next year? How will I live? How will I live in old age? People do not think that the Lord knows our needs before we entreat Him.

Closely related to the third serpent is the fourth—**anger**. This serpent has many teeth. The first is irritability. People do not agree with us and we get angry, we shout, we reproach, we get more irritated, it forces us to swear, often with evil, disgusting words; we forget then that we will have to give an answer on the day of judgment for every rotten word. Sometimes it is even worse: We not only berate our brother, but we even kill him, either with a word or a look. Yes, my friends, you can kill a man with a look. It is hard when the tooth of this serpent pierces into the soul; the soul becomes gloomy, coldness seizes it; and joy leaves the soul of an angry man.

The fifth serpent is **sadness**. There's godly sadness—the sadness that makes us lament and weep over our sins—the sadness of the saints; but there is another sadness—sadness over the things of this world. This serpent has two sharp teeth—murmuring and melancholy. Everyone is living well—only I am struggling—and here is murmuring and sadness. Do you really not know why you are living like this? Yet more terrible are the teeth of melancholy, which leads to despair in the mercy and power of the Lord. Despair is the sin of Judas Iscariot.

The sixth serpent is **despondency**—it can be called paralysis of the soul. When the body is paralyzed, its individual members lose the ability to act—the eyes do not see, the ears do not hear, the feet do not walk, the hands do not work; in a word—life practically stops. The same happens with the paralysis of the soul: All its vital power grows scant, prayer is out of sorts, you don't want to work on yourself, and the soul seems to fall into a heavy sleep.

The mighty seventh serpent with its many offspring and its surprisingly subtle teeth is called **vainglory**. There is hardly any man on earth who could say of himself: "I'm not vainglorious, because I know I'm worse than all." Vainglory is a futile, baseless glory. Man is vainglorious about his intelligence, his talent, his handsome face, the richness of his clothing and furnishings, his mind, his knowledge, his erudition.

The most terrible thing is that even great ascetics have suffered from this tooth, because one can also be exalted by asceticism. Suddenly, during prayer, he says to himself: "People can see what a man of prayer I am," and he is already been exalted and bitten by the snake of vainglory. I repeat, even great ascetics were not free from thoughts; though it is true, they are only thoughts, as it was with St. Seraphim [of Sarov]. When he refused to leave the Sarov Monastery and accept the rank of abbot, but returned to his squalid

cell in the desert, he felt a vainglorious thought arising in his soul. The great elder, full of humility, punished himself for this thought: For a thousand days and a thousand nights he begged God for forgiveness for this thought.

The vain man forgets that everything he has is not his, but the Creator's. The vain man often treats others with disdain, and greets any resistance with irritation. *See then that you walk circumspectly.* (Eph. 5:15) [Slavonic: *See then, for you walk dangerously.*—*Ed.*].

The eighth serpent is **pride**. This is the sin of Satan himself. Pride leads to many sins, and the most terrible of them is godlessness, followed by the death of the soul.

Having examined the eight serpents of our souls, let us know that all these are mortal sins, because the soul possessed by them dies a slow death.

Though there be serpents in your soul, Heavenly flowers will also grow there, which the serpents fear.

The first serpent—gluttony—fears the flower of **temperance**. Lust is unable to bear even a tiny dewdrop from the flower of chastity, of **purity**. Avarice fears **charity**. Anger is slain by the wonderful flower of **meekness**. Sadness—by an unspeakable **joy of the Holy Spirit**. Despondency—the flowers of **patience**. Vainglory cannot bear the Heavenly beauty of the flower of **humility**.

The last Heavenly flower kills pride and all its young with but the smallest dewdrop, like a terrible poison. The name of this wonderful flower is **love**. Love for Christ is the most wonderful, the most beautiful flower of our soul. Whoever has had this flower bloom within him has eternal joy. Ascetics labor to find this flower, renouncing all worldly blessings; the holy martyrs have poured out their blood for this flower. He who understands how beautiful this flower is will spare nothing to acquire it, will give all the strength of his soul.

One ascetic called out to Christ for thirty years: "Give me a drop of love." And after thirty years of prayer, the Lord heard him. The elder became seriously ill, and during his very difficult trials, a most pure drop from a Heavenly flower fell into his heart, and such blessedness seized his soul that he blessed his sufferings.

*Lord, we beg Thee, send down a drop of love into our souls as well; light a fire in them from Thy Divine flower.*

### The Divine Citadel

Each of us has his own sanctified citadel, the citadel of our soul erected by Divine power. We need this citadel to preserve our inner spirit from enemies. And like everyone else's, our citadel also has **four walls**.

The first wall, directly facing the outside world, is the biggest, the most important—known as **humility**. The second wall is **self-reproach**. If the first teaches us not to be exalted, to esteem ourselves worse than all others, then the second one says: "Whatever happens to you, remember that you alone are to blame for everything." The third wall is the **fear**

of God. Whoever has this wall erected will avoid sin, so as not to offend the Lord. The fourth wall is the **remembrance of God**. When this wall exists, man does not forget for even a minute that he walks before the face of God, Who sees not only his deeds, but also his thoughts.

But besides the walls, the divine citadel is protected by **four guards**—one at each wall.

The guard at the first wall is **attention**. This guard watches those who enter, admitting only those who have the ticket of the virtues—others are not allowed in.

The guard at the second wall, whose lot it is to clear the citadel if the enemies still managed to get in, is **repentance**.

Standing guard at the third wall is **zeal for God**. This formidable guard batters the enemies who still managed to penetrate into the citadel.

And the fourth guard uses a whip to drive out and defeat his enemies who managed to conceal themselves from the first three guards. The name of the fourth guard is the **Jesus Prayer**.

When the citadel is reinforced, no enemies will penetrate into it, because the guards do not allow them. And each of us will check: Are my walls in order? Have they collapsed anywhere? Are the guards in their place? If so, then be calm about the house of your soul—the citadel protects it. Then this house will become the dwelling of God Himself, and the citadel will be like a house built on stone—neither storms nor the waves of everyday life will bring it down.

### The Chain of Gold Rings

I want to give you a gift—a precious chain of gold rings, and may it be worn about your heart, or even better—let it be kept in your heart—this precious chain.

This chain has **seven rings**, seven beautiful golden rings. Here they are—remember them well!

The first ring is the **remembrance of God**. Whoever has this ring constantly remembers God every minute, and sees Him before himself. The second ring is closely related to the first—it is the **fear of God**. Whoever remembers God will not do anything wrong, because he will be afraid, not wanting to offend the Lord, Whom he sees before him.

And if there is fear of God, then there should already be the third ring—**repentance**, because fear of God shows you all the mistakes of your conscience. And closely related to repentance is self-control: **Self-observation** is the fourth ring of this golden chain. Whoever sincerely repents of his sins will always watch over himself, avoiding anything that can offend Christ.

The fifth ring, the most precious, diamond-studded, is the ring of **humility**. Whoever has the first four also has the fifth, because such a man never exalts himself above others, has nothing to be proud of, and is occupied only with his own sins. He carefully observes only himself and his actions. And whoever remembers and fears God repents of his sins and

observes and controls himself; he has humility, has found **peace of conscience, peace of soul**—this is the sixth ring.

You can probably tell me the seventh ring yourself: Whoever has a light and peaceful soul will not get angry or offend others, because he has the seventh ring—**peace with others**. Such a man loves others.

I repeat again: **the remembrance of God, the fear of God, repentance, self-control, humility, peace of conscience and peace with others**. Receive this gift, preserve it, and take it home with you.



With the Sign of the Cross, the old monk Abba Joseph trapped in his cell a dark and miserable demon who had come to tempt him. “Release me, Father, and let me go,” pleaded the demon, “I will not come to tempt you again.” “I will gladly do that, but on one condition,” replied the monk. “You must sing for me the song that you sang before God’s Throne on high, before your fall.”

The demon responded, “You know I cannot do that; it will cause me cruel torture and suffering. And besides, Father, no human ear can hear its ineffable sweetness and live, for you will surely die.” “Then you will have to remain here in my cell,” said the monk, “and bear with me the full struggle of repentance.” “Let me go, do not force me to suffer,” pleaded the demon. “Ah, but then you must sing to me the song you sang on high before your fall with Satan.”

So the dark and miserable demon, seeing that there was no way out, began to sing, haltingly, barely audible at first, groping for words long forgotten. As he sang, the darkness which penetrated and surrounded him began slowly to dissipate. The song grew ever louder and increasingly stronger, and soon the demon was caught up in its sweetness, his voice fully lifted up in worship and praise. Boldly he sang of the power and the honor and the glory of the Triune God on High, Creator of the Universe, Master of Heaven and Earth, of all things visible and invisible.

As the song sung on high before all ages resounded in the fullness of its might, a wondrous and glorious light penetrated the venerable Abba’s humble cell, and the walls which had enclosed it were no more. Ineffable love and joy surged into the very depths of the being of the radiant and glorious angel, as he ever so gently stooped down and covered with his wings the lifeless body of the old hermit who had liberated him from the abyss of hell.

From an ancient Paterikon

## COMMANDMENTS AND ANTI-COMMANDMENTS

By Fr. Zechariah Lynch, St. Michael Church, Pueblo, CO.

*Amen; yes, come, Lord Jesus.*

[Rev 22:20]

† † †

Here is the longing of the true Christian heart. From it is ever welling up (coming up, *Ed.*) a desire for Christ the Lord; a seeking of Him ever more and more. This is both personal and corporate. It is both an ongoing and reoccurring event and simultaneously one of most singular and unrepeatable uniqueness.

The daily cry of the true Christian heart is *come Lord Jesus, come today, this hour and minute and purify me of all impurity, wash me of my sin. Come Lord Jesus.* This is the pulse of the Christian heart. This cry will find its final culmination at the end of time in the Second coming of our Lord Jesus. He returns in answer to the cry of His beloved children—Come!

This eschatological cry is also the heart of the Worship of the Church. It is the most mysterious treasure of the Divine Liturgy. “Remembering this saving commandment and all those which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming.” *Come Lord Jesus.* Remembering—establishing steadfast and deep in the heart as a living reality. The whole Testament of the Divine Liturgy is the longing to receive Christ Jesus, to receive Him in His Body and Blood through Holy Communion and to receive the final manifestation of this mystery—the absolute return of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

*And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment,* proclaims the Theologian John (1 Jn 3:23).

The great Father of our times, Justin Popovich, comments: “Behold, the condensed Gospel of salvation: faith in Christ and divine love. Actually, the two are one commandment, because they combine one feeling with one disposition: he who believes in Christ believes because he loves Him. Love grows through faith, and through love, faith grows. One through the other increases and perfects itself. Faith reveals to man the mystery of the God-man;

the more man knows the Lord Christ, the more he loves Him. The more he loves Him, the more the mystery of Christ is revealed.”

And for the fervent Christian heart these words of divine direction are given: *And he who keeps His commandments dwells in Him, and He in him. And thereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given.* (1 Jn 3:24). The commandments are the very life of God. They are the rays of our Lord’s Divine grace and energy whereby we enter into living communion with Him. By living in the commandments we cry, *Come, Lord Jesus.*

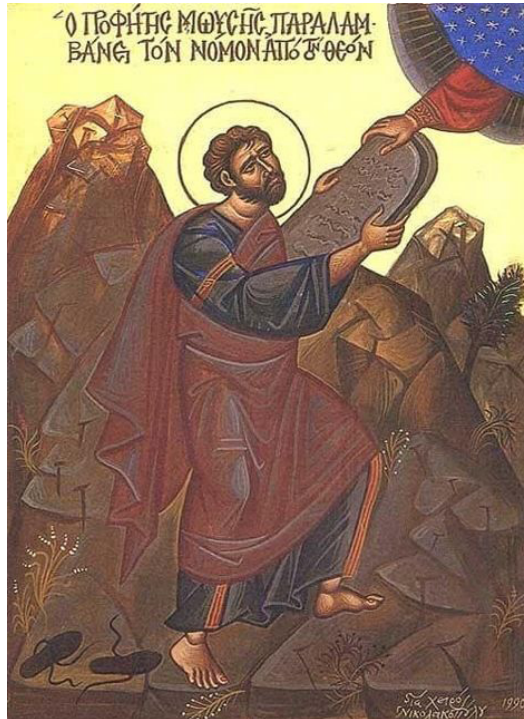
St. Justin exclaims: “For He is present in every commandment through His grace-filled power, and He helps every struggler to keep the commandments. At the same times, the evangelic principle of theanthropic cooperation is kept; the God-man collaborates with man, while man remains an

independent person, even though his entire being is in the Lord Christ, even though he ‘dwells in Him.’ In the same way, the Lord Christ ‘dwells in man,’ and does not lose the fullness of His Person ... Keeping the commandments trinitizes man, because this Christianizes and spiritualizes him.”

The holy Apostle Paul teaches: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.”* (Rom 8:14-15)

The Spirit is in the commandments and the commandments are of the Spirit. It is through being faithful to Christ in His living commandments whereby we then participate in that same One Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Himself told us: “*If you love Me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of Truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells in you and will be in you.* (Jn 14:15-17). It is this same Spirit Whom the Lord Jesus promises will *guide you in all truth.* (cf. Jn 16:13). *He will, the Lord says, glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it unto you.* (ibid 16:14).

The third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of Truth, will manifest in the Body of Christ and in the heart of a true believer. From this eternal and never changing well-spring is Truth then proclaimed. From this inexhaustible font the Saints have lived and spoken.



The imperative to be acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit is essential to true Christian living. Ever renewed in the eternal grace of the Spirit, the Christian cries out, *Come, Lord Jesus*.

For many spirits try to come to mankind. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* (1 Jn 4:1). St. Justin teaches, “The discernment of spirits is, simultaneously, a gift of the Holy Spirit and a struggle on man’s part. It is a complete science in itself... The struggle is simultaneously a work of the grace of God and the free work of man. Long is man trained and instructed in the discernment of spirits; gradually he is perfected; and only the perfect have the gift of discernment of spirits, of completely clear orientation, of completely clear knowledge and observation of the essence of good and evil.”

This is why we are given the sure living testimony of Christ in His Saints. They have been perfected and tested and therefore are true guides on the path of Truth. False prophets are those that will try to undermine and alter the testimony of Christ in His saints. They speak not from the Spirit of God but from other spirits. The problem is that they still at times claim to be speaking for Christ. Those who would seek to sow doubt in the testimony of Christ in His saints are those who, consciously or unconsciously, are seeking to destroy the commandments of Christ. Those who would actively deconstruct the living Traditions of Christ in His Church are but liars.

*“Hereby you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof you have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world.”* (1 Jn 4:2-3).

The goal of the enemy is to destroy Truth. An impossible task, yet he tries all the same. We deny Christ coming in the flesh—His manifestation and revelation to mankind—and His commandments when we attempt, in their stead, to install “improved” commandments. **The spirit of antichrist desires to replace Christ at any cost, warns St. Justin; most of all in the hearts of those who are called Christians.**

The enemy seditiously seeks to undermine and eradicate the true commandments of Christ and in their place establish anti-commandments. He knows that the true commandments are life, and by convincing a Christian to willingly reject them in favor of other commandments he knows that death will ensue.

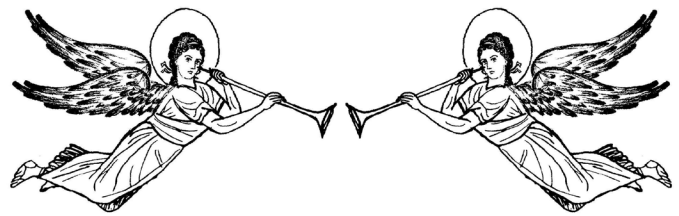
In the place of the unity of the One Holy Church he establishes Ecumenism. In the place of Gospel Love in Truth (for Truth and Love are inseparable) he builds “tolerance and inclusiveness.” In the place of repentance he teaches “acceptance.” In the place of the Kingdom of Heaven he

builds the kingdom of the world. In place of the virtues of male and female being recreated into the image and likeness of God, he institutes an anti-image; one that is set upon destroying all boundaries of the true commandments through the deconstruction of humanity as exemplified in feminist and LGBTQ ideologies.

St. Justin preaches: “The creator of every anti-Christian ideology is the Antichrist, directly or indirectly. In reality, every ideology can be put into categories: those on the side of Christ and those on the side of Antichrist. Man, in actuality, is in the world to solve one problem: is he with Christ or against Him? Every man, whether he wants to or not, solves this problem. He is either a lover of Christ or a fighter against Christ—a third does not exist. A worshipper of Christ or a hater of Christ.”

If the commandments of Christ begin to wither in the Christian heart and are then replaced with anti-commandments, then the cry, so terrible to the Devil, of, *Come, Lord Jesus* begins to wane. Existing in the “improved” anti-commandments a novel cry springs forth from the formerly Christian heart, one not for the Spirit of God but for the spirit of this fallen world—“Stay, Jesus, we are fine as we are...”

The enemy fears few things more than the deep and fervent cry of a Christian heart, established firmly on the commandments of Christ—*Come, Lord Jesus!*



**T**his Virgin is the Mother of God—Mary, the Most Glorious of God, from the womb of Whom the Most Divine issued forth in the flesh and by whom He Himself did arrange a wondrous temple for Himself. She conceived without seed and gave birth without corruption, since her Son was God, though also He was born in the flesh—without mingling and without travail.

This Mother, truly, avoided that which is innate to mothers, but miraculously fed with milk Her Son—begotten without a man. The Virgin, having given birth to the Seedlessly Conceived-One, remained a Pure Virgin, having preserved incorrupt the marks of virginity. And so, in truth, she is named the Mother of God; her virginity is esteemed and her birth-giving is glorified. God, having conjoined with mankind and become manifest in the flesh, has granted her a unique glory. Woman’s nature suddenly is freed from the first curse. And just as the first did bring in sin, so also does the first initiate salvation.

St. Andrew of Crete

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

By St. John of Kronstadt.



Today, my beloved, we read the gospel parable on the sower and the seeds; on the differing qualities of earth upon which the seeds fell, and on the different fates of the seeds. At the end of the gospel reading the Lord Himself explains it at His disciples' request (Lk 8:5-15).

O pitiful man! Poor man! How many obstacles there are in the way of what is most important—the work

of the soul's salvation! Man either himself tramples the saving seed of God's word that is powerful to make him wise for his salvation—trampling it either intentionally, consciously, mockingly, or out of frivolity, carelessness, and ignorance—or the global evil-doer and destroyer of the human race, the devil, snatches away the saving word. Or his stony and cruel heart does not allow him to be saved; or the thorns, various cares, passions and worldly pleasures, or riches throw up an insurmountable barrier to salvation.

Only a few, with kind and good hearts, with true wisdom, can appreciate their own salvation as they should and patiently make use of the means given to them for salvation—and are saved. Many are called, but few are chosen.

A wondrous thing! But what is it in the end? Who is to blame for this absurd situation, for people's willing self-destruction?

Man himself is to blame, for he tramples, even daily tramples upon God's innumerable gifts. The Lord God, Who created man in His own image and likeness, in righteousness and holiness, gave him every possibility, every means and power for life and piety. Man in his laziness and ignorance, his carelessness and stubbornness, his unreasoning attachment to this life that like a shadow passes quickly by, rushes headlong into his own destruction, pushing away the saving right hand of God.

Who is to blame for man's perishing other than man himself? You will say, "It's impossible or at least difficult to be saved! But after all, a numberless multitude of people with passions like ours have nevertheless been saved, and are even today being saved—although few. It is hard to be saved! Well, did you want to receive eternal life in blessed union with God, the Mother of God, the angels and all the saints without work? Can you purify yourself—with the help of grace—without the work of prayer, vigil, almsgiving, without meekness, humility, and temperance?

We do not think it excessive to labor for the acquisition of earthly goods—and so we labor, often with all our strength. But when it comes to acquiring eternal blessedness we just give up. But it is not as if the work of salvation were extremely difficult: *for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light* (Mt 11:30), says the Savior. Yes, with God's help it little-by-little becomes easy, even though it is hard at first due to the head-on struggle with sin.

But in fact, is sin not something extremely hard given that it is unnatural, and alien to our divine nature? Is sin not torturous? If we labor in sinning, then how could we not labor in doing what is right, and saving our souls from sin? The end of the former is death, but the latter is life eternal. *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.* (Rom 6:23).

The present parable on the sower and the seed was told not just in order to encourage listeners with kind and good hearts to a more zealous fulfillment of God's word and a greater self-perfection in the virtues, but in order to make the distracted, careless, hard-hearted people overcome by the passions arise and listen attentively to God's word, and begin to labor with fear for their salvation. God's grace can change any heart for the better; it can work a miracle of salvation for any person, if only that person would believe, want to be saved, seek salvation, come to recognize the abyss of his sins, and understand what an abyss he himself is willingly digging between himself and God. If only he would submit to God's grace that saves him and not push away God's saving right hand. There have been and still are thousands of examples of the salvation of people who were formerly distracted, frivolous, hard-hearted, and affected by all different passions. They heeded God's word, did not resist it, followed it, and were saved—and now enjoy blessedness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

There is nothing impossible for God. He can save even the most hardened sinner; He can bring him up from the bottom of hell to the heights of His Kingdom and eternal blessedness as He did the good thief and St. Mary of Egypt, who was drowning in the abyss of sin. If only the person himself would desire, ask, and zealously strive for salvation; for the Lord does not want to drag him forcibly to salvation, so that salvation itself would not become distasteful to him because he received it against his will. For we only treasure and find pleasant what we have come to love as something worthy of love, something we acquired through our own efforts, with which we have become close and which has become our own treasure, as if our own nature. And this is just what Christian virtue is, this is the Kingdom of God—it must be known, loved with all our hearts, assimilated here on earth, and rooted in our hearts so thoroughly that it completely penetrates the entire soul and leaves no room in our hearts for all-destroying and all-seducing sin.

Christian! Cast away your ruinous distraction, your unbelief, inattention, carelessness, and laziness in salvation; do

not trample the wondrous gifts of grace underfoot; read or listen diligently to the word of God, which opens to you the path of salvation. Fulfill it with the utmost understanding and strength; conquer your hard-heartedness and stoniness; soften your heart like wax with the fire of the grace of the Holy Spirit and tears of repentance; uproot the thorns of sin from your heart, even though this work is sorrowful and painful because they have become your second nature. You cannot do it, you say; but God's grace is all-powerful—it can easily accomplish the whole work of your salvation.

In speaking of the seeds of God's word that nourish man's soul, I also recall the seed that is earthly, corruptible—the seed of wheat, the current bad harvest of wheat, the rising cost of bread, and unprecedented inflation; and the bad harvest happened due to the destruction of wheat seed by pests and worms or from draught.

Where do these catastrophes come from? From our sins. We do not bring to the Lord God our fruits of repentance and correction of our wicked life. The Lord is taking away from us the fruits of the earth, for which we did not know how and did not want to thank Him; we did not want to fulfill His will and have become evil, deceitful, proud, false, intemperate, given to idle talk and cursing, self-interested, cruel, greedy, unmerciful, and filthy. It is obvious that the rod of paternal justice is hanging over us. God punishes us with bad harvests, fires, floods, exhausting wars, epidemics, and sicknesses. But do we come to reason, do we repent, do we correct ourselves? Have our hearts not become even harder, almost entirely hardened?

O God, deliver us! Where can there possibly be the Kingdom of God on earth if it is not in Christians who call themselves Orthodox, on Orthodox lands, where there are so many guarantees of Orthodox sanctity so precious to God; so many relics of holy God-pleasers; so many miracle-working icons, and beautiful churches; where there are such heavenly services on earth? Or will *the Kingdom of God be taken away from us and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* (cf. Mt 21:43)?

O, may we not be forever put to shame; may the Lord correct us with His rod of punishment, and may He not deprive us of His mercy and His Kingdom. Amen.

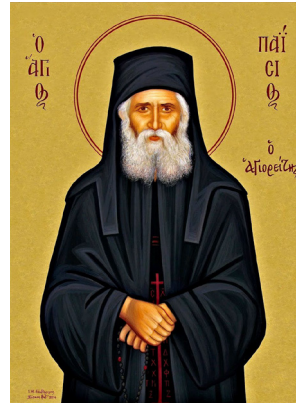


Let us also live in imitation of All the Saints, to have them always as aids and protectors. Let us imitate their struggles and virtues and especially humility, faith, hope and love...

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

## ON THE MOST IMPORTANT AMONG ALL VIRTUES...

By St. Paisios the Athonite.



You must look after the purification of your soul on a daily basis. Do your spiritual work and say the Jesus prayer. Your thoughts, will and desires are where your mind is. The submission of our spirit is the most important thing. In order to acquire a virtue, we must be humble and careful, so we can detect its opposite evil, and then pray to Christ to help us get rid of it. We don't

need to try too hard or be concerned how, when and in what way our heart will be able to acquire this virtue.

- Father, when we read the writings of the Fathers of the Church, we notice the following phenomenon: some saints say that praying is of utmost importance, and others talk about obedience or voluntary poverty. It is hard for someone to understand exactly what Christ is asking from us. When we think we must apply all these virtues at the same time, then we despair, as it is impossible to struggle for all of them at once. Our endeavor becomes a lot easier, when we realize that the acquisition of these virtues is the result of a single struggle. Could you please help me understand what exactly I should do in order to find the way leading to Christ?

The holy Elder responded as follows:

- Purification, divine justice, humility, love, obedience, voluntary poverty, and all virtues are one and the same. Christ wants us to eliminate our will to zero. If you obtain a single one of these virtues, bear in mind, the rest are found in the one you just acquired; the same thing applies to our passions; one passion includes all others. Purification requires the soul to be pure and clean from our own will; divine justice is the abandonment of our own will to the will of God; humility is to humble our will and elevate God's will; obedience means not to have a will and thus obey other people; prayer means to take our mind off our wishes and desires and concentrate on God.

So, you see whichever virtue you apply, you are led to the same result, that is to the elimination and purification of your own will. Man will spiritually progress and be benefited only when he manages to eliminate his will to zero. When the Americans want to send a missile to space, they do the same thing; they count from ten to zero. When they reach zero, the missile is fired. The same applies to our soul; when our wills are eliminated to zero and our soul is cleansed, then it is elevated towards God!

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CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

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

## DEATH IS UNNATURAL

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic.

Death is not natural; rather it is unnatural. And death is not from nature; rather it is against nature. All of nature cries out: “I do not know death! I do not wish death! I am afraid of death! I strive against death!” Death is an uninvited stranger to nature.

All of nature bristles at this uninvited stranger and is afraid of it because it is like a thief in somebody else’s garden who does not just steal and eat the fruit, but also who tramples, spoils, breaks and uproots what is planted and the more it ravages, the more it becomes satisfied. Even when one hundred philosophies declare that “Death is Natural!” all of nature trembles in indignations and shouts: “No! I have no use for death! It is an uninvited stranger!”

And the voice of nature is not sophistry. The protest of nature against death outweighs all excuses thought up to justify death. If there is something that nature struggles to express in its untouched harmony, doing so without expectation in unison of voices, it is this protest against death. It is its unanimous, frantic, and heaven-shaking elegy to death.

If in fact death is unnatural, if it is not natural and against nature, then a question arises: why is it so and whence does death enter nature?

Not a single kingdom of light and life accepts death as its native. It must have sneaked into the world’s life secretly—crawling on its belly and staying out of sight so that it would not be spotted and exposed—from some bottomless abyss where even it was too cold and lonely.

When death was under the stinger of a snake, it was dead for itself and nobody in the world knew about good and evil—only the bliss existed; and nobody heard of knowledge and ignorance—there was only wisdom; and nobody knew of life and death—there was only the state of blissfully wise existence.

But because of an occasion, which is more dreadful than the most horrible nightmare, the mouth of the snake opened and the stinger full of venom appeared out of it—and death entered the first-created nature... This intrusion could be likened to the way a tiny worm penetrates the spine of a man without him even sensing the invasion so that the man continues to blossom and feel merry. He thinks of it as a pleasant itching; he might rub his back, smile and say: “It is nothing.” And this will go on until the moment the worm grows big, multiplies and exhausts the spine so that the man becomes like a hollow cane which mindlessly whistles a hymn of madness and death.

What doctor would say to this madman with a dried up spine when he, in the doctor’s presence, like a hollow cane whistles a triumphal hymn to death: “Go and sin no more, and you will be whole.”? Perhaps only that doctor who is not different than his patient. Why is it that the sickly-sweet upholders of ethics, with their sickly-sweet theories do not depict the devil on the front page? Why do they not say to the sinner: “Go and sin no more”? That is: Go and do not let more worms into your spine!

What a joy must feel the worm that has already burrowed unto one’s spine when it hears such counselors! Truly it rejoices with joy of a hungry one who has enough food for himself and knows that it will not have to be shared with anybody.