

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

SIN, VIRTUE, AND MAN'S FREE WILL

By St. Philaret (Voznesensky), Metropolitan of New York (+1985), from "Moral Theology."

We, Christians, know from the Holy Bible and believe that God created Man in His own image and likeness. Thus, upon creation, man received sinless nature. But even the first man, Adam, did not remain sinless, losing his initially created purity in the first sinful fall in Paradise. The poison of this sinfulness infected all of mankind, originating in sinful progenitors, resembling a poisoned spring oozing fetid water.

A person adds his personal sin to the predisposition towards sin, inherited from our progenitors. There is nothing surprising in what the Holy Bible says about each one of us, *there is no man who lives one day and does not sin*. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely pure from any sin. Even the virtuous, God's saints, had sin within themselves and although they struggled with it, with God's help, they nonetheless humbly recognized themselves as sinners. All people, without exception, are sinfully infected by sin.

Sin is spiritual leprosy, illness, an ulcer having struck all of human nature, both its soul and body. Sin has damaged all three basic capabilities or powers of the soul: the mind, the emotions (heart) and the will. The human mind has darkened and become disposed towards error (the Romans had a saying, *Errare humanum est* (To err is human), and man continuously errs, in the sciences, in philosophy, and in his daily life.

The human Heart, the center of his suffering's feelings of goodness and evil, sadness and happiness, is damaged even more by sin. We see that our heart, which has been covered with the slime and mold of sin, has spent its capabilities of pure, spiritual, and ennobling Christian feeling. Instead of this, it has

become inclined towards sensual pleasure and earthly ties, infected also with vanity, amazing in its complete lack love and well-wishing for its neighbor.

Of course, our will is damaged the most in our capability to act and realize our human intentions. Man's will seems especially powerless when he needs to accomplish genuine Christian good the most, even when he wants this goodness. Apostle Paul said about this sad powerlessness of the will, *For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*. (Rom 7:19). And therefore, Christ the Savior says about man, the sinner, *Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*. (Jn 8:34). Tragically, it often seems to the sinner himself, that serving sin is freedom and struggling with the snares of sin, slavery.

How does sin develop in a person's soul? The Holy Fathers of Christian asceticism and devotion, better than all the learned psychiatrists who claim to know the sinful human soul, differentiate the following levels of sin: The first moment of sin is its introduction, when temptation has only become outlined in a person's consciousness as a sinful impression, an impure thought, and so on. If during this first moment a person decisively and immediately rejects sin, he will not sin, but will defeat it, and will have a plus, not a minus, for his soul. It is easiest to overcome sin in the beginning.

If the beginning is not rejected, it transforms gradually into an unclear striving and then into a conscious, clear desire to sin. Here a person already begins to be drawn towards a particular kind of sin. He can at this moment, without an especially difficult struggle resist succumbing to it and not sin, in which he will be helped by the clear voice of his conscience—and with God's help if he seeks it.

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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Man has fallen into sin. The reproaches of the conscience sound loud and clear, eliciting in an as yet unspoiled person simply extreme disgust toward this sin. As previous self-assurance disappears, the person becomes humbled. Look at Apostle Peter before and after his denial. But even here, the triumph over sin is not so difficult, as is indicated by numerous examples of the same Apostle Peter, holy King and Prophet David and other repentant sinners.

It is most difficult to struggle against sin when it becomes a habit, because it recurs frequently. That means generally, when any habits acquired the habitual actions are performed almost automatically, unnoticeable by a person. The struggle with a sin that has become habitual is very difficult because it is hard not only to overcome oneself but also to watch and notice sin approaching.

An even more dangerous stage of sin is a vice. In this case sin controls a person so much that it shackles his will as if by chains. A person is almost powerless to struggle against himself in this and becomes a slave of sin, although he recognizes its harmfulness and in moments of clarity, perhaps even hates it with all his heart. That is, for example, the vice of drinking, drug addiction and the like. In that case, without special mercy and help from God, a person is already unable to control himself and stands in need of prayer and spiritual support from others. One must remember that even any petty sin, like loquaciousness, love of clothing, empty entertainment, etc. can become a vice if it completely overpowers and fills one's soul.

The highest stage of sin, completely enslaving someone, is the passion towards one or another type of sin. In this condition, a person does not hate his sin, as in a vice (this is the difference between them), but submits all his experiences, actions, and moods to the sin. Compare Pliushkin in Dead

Souls or Feodor Karamazov from Brothers Karamazov to the money-lover Judas of Iscariot. In this case, a person clearly and literally admits satan into his heart; as is said about Judas in the Holy Gospel. Once a man is in this condition, nothing can help but grace-giving church prayer and influence.

There is one more special, horrible, and perishing type of sin. This is a deadly sin. Even church prayer, will not help a person in the condition of such a sin. Apostle John the Divine, calling us to pray for our sinning brother, clearly; indicates the uselessness of praying for an unforgiven sinner. *If any man sees his brother sin a sin which is not unto death he shall ask and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.* (1 Jn 5:16). Our Lord Jesus Christ says that this sin is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and is not forgiven people in this world nor in the future.

He spoke these terrible words against the pharisees, who clearly saw that He did everything according to God's will and by God's power. However, they obdurately perverted the truth, slanderously insisting that He acted with the power of an evil, unclean spirit. They perished in their blasphemy, and this example is instructive and terrible for all those who commit that deadly sin, stubbornly and consciously opposing undoubted Truth, blaspheming the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God.

It is necessary to note that even blasphemy of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself can be forgiven a person (according to His own words), because it may occur from complete ignorance or temporary blindness. Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit can, according to the teaching of St. Athanasius the Great, be forgiven only when a person has ceased and repented; but this usually does not occur, because the very type, the very character of this sin makes it almost impossible to return to the truth. The blinded one may see again and love the Truth

revealed to him; soiled by vices and passions; he can wash himself clean with repentance and become a confessor of Truth. But who and what can change the blasphemer, who although he sees and knows the Truth he stubbornly rejects and hates it? This terrible condition resembles satan's state, who believes in God and trembles, but hates Him, slanders and opposes Him.

When the temptation of sin appears before a person, it usually comes from three sources: from the flesh, from the world, and from the devil.

Assuredly, a person's body is, in many instances, the nest, the source of immoral predispositions, strivings, and tendencies. Ancestral sin is our sad, general inclination towards sin, inherited from the sins of our ancestors and our own-personal sinful falls, which accumulate and mutually strengthen each other, creating a source of temptation, sinful tendencies, and actions in our bodies.

Even more frequently, the surrounding world, which according to the word of Apostle John the Divine, *lies in sin* (1 Jn 5:19), is a source of temptation for us. *And we know we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.* Friendship with the world is, according to the word of another apostle, animosity towards God. *Ye adulterers, and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* (Jas 4:4). The surrounding milieu and people tempt us. There are many intentional, conscious tempters and perverters of youth about whom Our Lord said, *If someone tempts one of these small ones, it is better for him if a millstone be around his neck and he be drowned in the sea depths.* (Mt 18:6). External tempters are plenty—wealth, comfort, immoral dances, dirty literature, and brazen clothes. All these are the fetid sources of sin and temptation.

The most important and rooted source of sin is, of course, the devil, about whom Apostle John, the Divine, said, *He that committeth sin is of the Devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.* (1 Jn 3:8). Struggling with God and His truth, the devil fights also with people, striving to destroy every one of us. Evil is especially obvious when it is struggling with the saints (even daring to tempt the very Lord Jesus Christ), as can be seen in the Holy Gospel and in the Lives of the Saints. The Lord protects us, the feeble and weak, with His strength from those cruel temptations to which God's saints, strong in spirit, were exposed. However, the devil does not leave us without his attention, acting through the temptations of the world and the flesh, making them stronger and more seductive, and also tempting by various kinds of sinful thoughts.

In the last years, his evil influence, along with all the others, is evident especially in epidemics of different kinds of suicide. That is why Apostle Peter compares the devil with a growling lion, stalking us, *seeking whom he may devour: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil; as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Pet 5:8).

Virtues

The opposite of sin is virtue. The beginnings of virtue are found in every person, as the remnants of that natural good, which was placed into human nature by its Creator. Purity and perfection of the form of virtue can only be possible in Christianity. Christ, the Savior, said *Without Me, ye can do nothing* (Jn 15:5), without Me you can do nothing truly good.

Christianity teaches us that life on earth is a time of trial, a time of preparation for a future, eternal life. Consequently, the problem of our life on earth is to properly prepare ourselves for the coming eternity. Earthly life is short and does not repeat itself, for man lives only once on earth. He must thus work hard in this earthly life, doing good, if he does not wish to destroy his soul. It is precisely these kind deeds which shall be demanded from him by God's Truth on the threshold of eternity. Every Christian, with God's help, is the creator of his own earthly life in the sense of directing it towards virtue. But to become good, he must do good unto others and work with himself, struggling with his deficiencies and vices, developing good Christian values within himself.

This struggle and work with himself, this test during his earthly life, is a necessity for every Christian; Our Lord Himself said that *"The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence* (that is, is reached through effort) and the violent (i.e., those who exert effort) *take it by force.* In this kind of self-testing, every man develops his moral character and creates his moral image. Of course, a Christian must be a Christian first of all, a person with an established, firm moral character, who should strive to improve this character. In other words, he should strive towards improving himself, he should strive towards moral perfection.

Life therefore, from a Christian point of view, is a test, a path of continuous seeking of goodness and perfection. There can be no stopping on this path according to the law of spiritual life. A person, having ceased to struggle with himself, will not remain as he was, but inevitably become worse, resembling a stone which is thrown up and having stopped ascending, does not remain hanging in the air, but certainly falls down.

We already know that our sins commonly arise from three sources: from the devil, from the world, lying in evil, and from our own sinful body. Since sin is the main enemy of and obstacle to virtue, it is clear that a Christian striving towards good must, with God's help and grace, struggle against sin in all its forms. In part, it is necessary to remember at this point the words of our Savior to the Apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane, *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.* (Mk 14:38). With these words, our Lord points out to all of us, not only to the Apostles, that a battle with sinful temptation is possible only for a person who is vigilant and prays, standing guard over his experiences.

Free Will

We already know that a person is responsible for his actions only while he is free when performing them. Does he

have such a spiritual freedom, the freedom of will which is assumed here?

Lately, a theory called Determinism has spread widely. The followers of this teaching, Determinists, do not acknowledge that man has a free will. They assert that in each separate action, a person is motivated to act only by external causes. According to their teaching, a person's actions are always influenced by motivations and impulses not dependent upon him and ordinarily submits to the strongest of these motivations. These scholars say that "it only seems to us that we are acting freely, but this is self-delusion." The famous sixteenth century philosopher, Spinoza, defended this view. Illustrating his position, he spoke about a stone, which, having been thrown, would, if it could think and speak, say that it was flying and falling where it chose. In reality, it flew only because someone had thrown it and fell because of the force of gravity.

We shall return to this illustration later. At present, let us note the following. The teaching opposed to Determinism is Indeterminism. This concept is accepted by Christianity. But we should keep in mind that **extreme indeterminists exist, whose teaching is one-sided and false.** They say that a person's freedom is his absolute power to act as he wishes. In this way, according to their ideas, individual freedom is practiced at a person's arbitrary discretion, acting completely by his own desires or whims. With this false decoy of "freedom," socialists and communists enticed and seized the unhappy and deceived Russian people (holy Apostle Peter speaks of such "freedom" in 1 Peter 2:15-16; 2 Peter 2:19.). Of course, this is not freedom. This is the abuse of freedom, its perversion. A person does not have absolute, unconditional freedom. Only Almighty God possesses such high, creative freedom.

In contrast to this false indeterminism, genuine indeterminism's ideas are different. It teaches that a person is undoubtedly influenced by external motivations and impulses of the most varied sort. In such a manner, for example, he is influenced by the surrounding milieu, conditions of life, the political setting, his educational level, his cultural development, etc. and all this is reflected in the traits of his moral character. Indeterminists agree with determinists that various external motivations and influences act, often very strongly upon, an individual. But further there is a radical difference between the two concepts.

While Determinists say that a person behaves in a particular manner only through the influence of the strongest motivation, not having any freedom, the Indeterminists assert that he is free to choose any of these motivations (towards good or evil). This motive may not be the strongest, besides, a person may even prefer an action which to other people seems to be clearly disadvantageous. An illustration of this is the struggle of martyrs, who seemed to be consciously, mindlessly destroy-

ing themselves to the pagan torturers. In such a manner, from the point of view of Indeterminists, individual freedom is not an unconditional-creative freedom, but a freedom of choice, the freedom of our will to decide whether to act in a particular way or not.

Christianity accepts precisely this kind of concept of human freedom, in accord with indeterminism. Applying this concept to morality, to the question of the struggle between good and evil, between virtue and sin, Christianity says that individual freedom is the freedom to choose between good and evil. According to scholarly theological definition, **freedom of will is our ability, independent, of anyone and anything towards self-determination in good and evil.**

Now, we can appraise Spinoza's illustration of the falling stone. We have been convinced that a person has free will in the sense of choosing to act in a specific, way. Spinoza considers the flight of the stone to be analogous to human behavior. But this can be possible only if the stone has the freedom to choose whether to fly or not to fly, to fall or not to fall. But a stone obviously does not possess such freedom of choice and so this illustration is not at all convincing.

The bankruptcy of Determinism, rejecting free will, is also evident in the following. First, not one Determinist actualizes his own teachings in his practical life. It is clear why this is so. If one looks upon life from the Determinist point of view, then no one should be punished, neither a lazy student for his laziness, nor a thief for his theft, nor a murderer, and so forth, since they did not act freely, but are only slaves, mindlessly will-lessly fulfilling the dictates of their motivations, influenced by them externally. An absurd, but completely logical conclusion which may be drawn from Determinism.

Secondly, the proof of free will is the spiritual experience called repentance. a fact known to everyone through their own personal experience. What is this feeling of repentance based upon? Apparently, the repenting person returns in his mind to the moment of his wrong action and weeps over his sin, clearly realizing that he could have behaved differently, could have not done this evil, but good instead. Apparently, this repentance could not be possible, if a person did not possess free will, if he were a slave of external influences, deprived of a will. In such a case, he would not be held responsible for his actions.

We, Christians, recognize an individual as morally free, governing his own will, and behavior. This kind of freedom is the greatest gift to Man from God, Who does not seek mechanical obedience from man, but a free, filial obedience of love. Our Lord Himself confirmed this freedom, *if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* (Mt 16:24). *See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil... therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.* (Deut 30:15, 19).

ON THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

By St. Luke, Archbishop of Crimea.

O Lord and Master of my life! The spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition, and vain thoughts give me not! But rather a spirit of chastity, humble-mindedness, patience, and love bestow upon me Thy servant. Yea, O Lord King, grant me to see my failings and not condemn my brother, for Thou art holy unto the ages of ages. Amen!

† † †

The prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian occupies a special place in the services of the Holy Church. It is repeated many times during the services of Great Lent.

This prayer penetrates the heart like none other, mysteriously acts upon it, and you feel a special, exceptional divine power in it. Why is that so? Because it was poured from a heart that was perfectly purified and holy, and from a mind that was enlightened by divine grace and had become a participant in the mind of Christ. It is short, but it nevertheless contains an enormous wealth of thoughts and feelings. Extraordinarily important is the very fact that St. Ephraim asks God to deliver him from everything unholy and repugnant to Him, and to vouchsafe him great virtues. Why does he ask for this?

There are people—and there were especially many during pagan times—who rely entirely upon themselves and think that everything is achievable through the powers of their minds and feelings. They do not understand that many things, in fact the most important, precious and cherished things, are not accessible to our minds and feelings. Whoever understands this understands what the apostle Paul said: *For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.* (Rom 7:15). Thus spoke the greatest and chief apostle, recognizing his powerlessness to walk the path of goodness, profoundly understanding that his flesh, which drags him down and hinders his heart's ascent on high to God, has enormous power over him. He pined and suffered because he did not do the good that his soul desired, but did the evil that he did not want.

Deeply aware of this, St. Ephraim the Syrian prayed to God that He would deliver him from wickedness, that He would give him the strength to do good. The strength to do good works, like the strength to be freed from vices, is something we receive only from God. The soul of every Christian

is vaguely aware of this, and that is why the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian so touches it.

Every man has his own spirit—in his soul are the traces left by those vices in which he sins, as well as by the good that he does. It is much easier to be freed from individual vices than from the spirit of these vices. The latter is possible only gradually, with God's help.

And so St. Ephraim the Syrian asks God not only to give him the spirit of virtues and deliver him from the spirit of his faults, but he asks that his soul would become fragrant with Christ.

Idleness—The Mother of Sin

O Lord and Master of my life! The spirit of idleness give me not! Why does St. Ephraim the Syrian begin his prayer with a request about idleness, as if there are no worse faults?

In observing idleness from the ordinary, everyday point of view we see that idleness is contemptible, and deserves all condemnation. Idleness is a very dangerous vice, because it is the mother of many other vices. Idle people do not concentrate their thoughts on the profound seriousness of life, the huge responsibility that lies on them not only before people, but also before God Himself.

The idle person is a harmful member of society and state. Out of their laziness idle people are incapable of working, and fall into poverty. Because they are needy they demand not only what is necessary for life, but even pleasures that exceed the limits of what is necessary—luxuries, and so forth. And in order to get money they invent various other sinful means and become capable of every low thing: shadowy business, lies, deceit, and bribe-taking.

But even more destructive is idleness in spiritual life. We know that any of our abilities left without practice are eventually lost. If a musician who has achieved perfection in his playing abandons his music for many years he will lose that perfection. Without exercise, each organ of our body comes to a flaccid state and cannot operate. A person who always lies around loses the ability to walk. Whoever does not work with his hands brings his arm muscles to a state of flabbiness. The body's strength wanes when physically inactive. The same can be said of the soul's abilities. If a person does not pray he loses the ability to pray. Whoever does not watch after his spirit and heart will become dissolute in the spiritual sense.

The soul left without exercise becomes like a field that has not been cultivated for several years, overgrown with tall, useless weeds, thorns and thistles, and very hard to make fertile.



Idleness of the soul, lack of practice in good deeds leads to the soul's destruction, to an overgrowth in it of the weeds of sin.

Just the same, no matter how hard it may be, this is not the worst problem. A much greater problem is that we lose days of spiritual activity—the short days of this life, given to us by God so that we might achieve a great and holy goal—to prepare ourselves for the Last Judgment. We must become worthy in God's eyes so that He would not place us on His left side, saying, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* (Mt 25:41).

Life is given to us so that we would hasten to do the great deed of purifying our hearts, following after our Lord Jesus Christ. And this following is after all intense, often difficult labor, and not idleness. This is the bearing of suffering for our Lord Jesus Christ, while idleness runs away from suffering.

Do you know that all the saints who, it would seem, did not need labors and dedicated the whole time of their lives to spiritual podvigs, divided the day into three parts: one part was given to prayer, another to reading the Word of God, and another to work. They were all foreigners to idleness, considering it a great and destructive evil.

They chose various labors: weaving baskets and mats, gardening, chopping wood, and building cells, churches, and whole monasteries. They sold their handiwork in the nearby town, and fed both themselves and the poor. The holy apostle Paul preached the whole day through, and at night he made tents. He labored diligently by the light of the moon or lamps, considering labor to be mandatory for him. His main striving was to hasten as much as his strength allowed toward the mark—the Kingdom of God. He has these remarkable words: *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* (Phil 3:13–14). This is an example of life contrary to the lives of idle people.

You cannot find a trace of idleness in the life of Apostle Paul, in the lives of the eremitic fasters, in monastic life, in the lives of great saints. They were all foreign to it, considering it a great and destructive evil. Remember that life is short, and we have to hurry like the apostle Paul to work for the Lord.

Terrible is the Spirit of Despondency

O Lord and Master of my life! The spirit of despondency give me not! What is the spirit of despondency? It is what they call falling in spirit. People who have no understanding of Christianity look at monks wearing black clothing and with lowered heads, fingering their prayer ropes, and think that all religion is depressing. But that is not how it is at all. That would contradict the spirit with which all of Christianity is permeated; for, tell me, can a depressed person possess the spiritual strength and energy needed to walk the narrow path, indefatigably warring with the sinfulness of life and ascending from strength to strength?

Of course not! Our religion is not the religion of depression, but cheerfulness, energy, strength of will and character, which has as its fruit not depression but something absolutely opposite—what the holy apostle Paul spoke of: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.* (Gal 5:22–23). This is the true spirit and essence of our religion—not depression, but righteousness and peaceful joy in the Holy Spirit. Could anyone who possesses this joy be depressed? Of course not!

People are often mistaken when they evaluate a person's appearance. The true Christian does not have an appearance that would betray his joy of life. He is always peaceful, often apparently deeply immersed in thought, betraying his contemplation. His thoughts are concentrated on the eternal, on the Kingdom of God, turned to the Lord Jesus Christ—and therefore he is always serious.

It can happen that a Christian [ascetic] becomes despondent from time to time. This happens to those who, having travelled far on the path to Christ, the path of renouncing the temptations of the world, sometimes return to their former path; it seems to them that they were wrong to leave that path, the path that most people follow. Then they fall into despondency. The devil tempts them, legions of demons stop their movement and hinder them along their path of Christ, presenting them pictures of family happiness and blessed friendships, and pull them back from this great path to that former path. And not rarely do the demons succeed in their aim—the ascetic falls in spirit and loses his zeal for the Lord Jesus Christ. Despondency is a great danger that waylays a Christian on his path to Christ. It is a diabolical temptation.

All the saints were subjected to these attacks from the spirits of darkness, and in the vast majority of cases, by prayer, fasting, and vigils Christians have conquered the spirit of despondency brought on by the devil.

But there were also those in whose souls the spirit of despondency simply grew, and they departed from the path of Christ. And when they left it, they felt abandoned by God, the emptiness and heaviness of life became unbearable to them and they often ended their own lives with suicide. This is why all the saints considered despondency to be a great danger and misfortune, and directed all their forces to battle against the spirit of despondency.

Sometimes, when a person has attained to a lofty life, he can get a high opinion of himself—and then God's grace leaves him for a time. Then he falls into a heavy, unbearable state of spirit—his heart immediately becomes empty. Instead of warmth and joy there is deep despondency. The Lord does this in order to remind the ascetic that he walks the path of Christ not through his own strength but by the grace of God. This is one source of despondency.

What other sources of despondency are there? Idleness is one of the mothers of despondency. Idle people who do not

work and yet are materially well off, who are satiated with the good things of this life and drowning in luxury, lose the taste for life. They become jaded, everything becomes uninteresting and boring, nothing brings them joy, and their hearts become filled with despondency—the terrible and dangerous enemy of our salvation.

Yet another source of despondency is pessimism. Pessimists tend to see everything in a murky light, to concentrate on the dark and sinful. If a person notices only the dark and the bad in life the despondency that has taken over the mind grows to the point where the person doesn't see anything good, and ends his life in suicide. That is how strong the spirit of despondency is.

The most often-encountered source of despondency is bitterness and sorrowful events that people experience in life. A close one dies, a husband or son, and the mother falls into serious depression. This mother sees nothing good in the world. She thinks only about the deceased one, wanders in thought around his grave, imagines him lying in the coffin, and her depression spirals ever deeper.

How can one be freed of this? One must not remember the past and keep shedding tears. The deceased is very, very far away. His soul is standing before God and the angels, rejoicing over his freedom. One has to exert every effort to be carried in thought to that place where the dearly beloved now is. If we concentrate not on the dark and corruptible but on the eternal, the spirit of despondency will go away.

Sometimes serious illnesses can throw one into despondency. There are many people who do not patiently endure illnesses. But there were saints who were sick and bedridden all their lives, and yet they praised God for it. We have to remember such people and know how to accept the illnesses sent by God. We should not refuse the help of a doctor, for the wise son of Sirach says, Honour a physician with the honour due unto him for the uses which ye may have of him: for the Lord hath created him. (Sir 38:1). A doctor is God's servant, who can relieve suffering and thereby drive away the spirit of despondency.

Such are the sources and causes of despondency. The main means for struggling with them, tested many years by all the saints, is prayer. There is nothing more effective than prayer, the constant asking for help from God. When you begin to converse with God, He consoles you, and routes the spirit of despondency. And if you open your heart before a pastor of the Church at confession and then receive the Body and Blood of Christ, you will feel relief and joy, and the spirit of despondency will be driven away from you in disgrace.

Do not concentrate on the dark, sinful, and heavy; ascending on high in spirit, in your heart abide with God, in the heavenly chambers, where the dark spirits have no access.

And what is there to be said about people who practically do not know Christ, who seek the worldly path, who seek joy and consolation from the world? Outwardly they often seem

satisfied, cheerful, and happy, as if they have no despondency. Do not think that this is true. In the depths of their souls their consciences do not cease to reprove them, and no one can completely lull his conscience. This is the constant suffering of those who chase after worldly prosperity. The apostle Paul says, *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* (2 Cor 7:10).

If you do not turn from sorrow for the world to sorrow for God, you will perish! Remember the seriousness of despondency. Remember that the heart of a Christian should be filled with the joy of reaching for the light; it should be foreign to the sadness that fills the hearts of sinners.

The Passion of Ambition (Lust for Power)

O Lord and Master of My Life! The spirit of ambition give me not! What is the spirit of ambition (lust for power)? It is the desire to be always first, to have authority over others. It destroyed the archangel, the chief of all angels, making him satan and casting him down from heaven; it destroyed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who envied the glory of Moses when he led the people of Israel through the desert to the land of Canaan. Ambition motivated all the heretics, who wanted to install their own teachings in place of the teachings of the Church and become the leaders of the Church. There have also been writers with depraved thoughts, who have corrupted whole generations.

The Lord Jesus Christ condemned love of power—the passion of the scribes and Pharisees to be first, their desire to sit at the head of the table at feasts, to receive greetings appropriate for rulers of the people. The Lord said to His disciples and through them to us, *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.* (Mk 9:35). Love of power is against the spirit of the Gospel, against the spirit of humility. Nevertheless, this passion has a grip on everyone, and there is no one who is not infected with it—even little children. Everyone tries to attain a high position, thirsts for promotions, desires honor. Many parents raise their children to be ambitious, to have the passion for being first, and corrupt them this way.

Is it so hard to understand that top positions are for the few? Everyone cannot be first. Essentially this is the destiny of exclusive people, marked by God. An extraordinarily large number of people strive to occupy high positions in society, and are not beneath any means in order to attain this goal; they will use connections, curry favor, or become lackies only so that they can get their aim. Very often the Lord punishes them; their wretched passion ends in failure. They become embittered, refuse to do any community work, retreat into family life and close themselves up in it. But love of power torments them even there, and they torment their family members. There is no peace in their souls.

This is why St. Ephraim the Syrian in his great prayer asks God to save him from the corrupting spirit of ambition so contradictory to humility.

We have all been shown the path to honor, an honor above all honors, with which no earthly achievements can compare. It is the path to the Kingdom of God, where we can become friends, children of God. We will achieve this goal only by striving to fulfill all the commandments of Christ.

We have to remember that the Lord can bring us out to the broad path when we do not seek it, when we do not aim for earthly glory. He often gives us this glory aside from our own strivings and will. True glory flees from those who chase after and thirst for it, and finds those who run from it.

Without thinking about authority over other people, we need to delve into how we can develop our abilities and talents given to us by God, to further the development of our abilities quietly, unknown to the world. And it can turn out the way it has turned out many times, that the Lord raises such a person up to an unreachable pinnacle of glory. Remember that the Lord knows how to indicate people, to distinguish human works done according to Christ's commandments. If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Forbidden Fruit

O Lord and Master of My Life! Give me the spirit of chastity! St. Ephraim prayed that the Lord give him the spirit of chastity. Could it really be that he had need of that prayer? He considered that he needed to pray for this, and all the saints prayed for this. Why? They knew that the Lord requires of them, as from all Christians, total, unconditional chastity not only of the flesh, but also of the spirit.

We do not and should not dare to violate chastity even in our thoughts, for the Lord Himself said, *that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). And no one can escape unclean thoughts; even the saints painstakingly struggled for many years with these thoughts. St. Martinian, a young man, struggled desperately with this passion. When a profligate woman managed to get into his cell and tempt him, he stood on hot coals in order to overcome fleshly passion in himself.

So the saints struggled; they struggled stubbornly, for decades, and the main means for their struggle were fasting, humility, and prayer; for all the holy fathers say that there is no greater defense from fleshly desires than humility. If a person acquires humility he is freed of those desires, while those who are proud and foreign to humility are wholly overcome by this low passion.

How many Christians there are among us who do not consider this sin to be serious. "After all, I am pious," they say, "I try with all my strength to fulfill the commandments of Christ and do works of mercy. Won't the Lord forgive me this slight weakness?"

Those who talk like that are deeply mistaken, for what they call a "slight weakness" the apostle Paul calls something entirely different. He is so strict in this regard that in his Epistle to the Ephesians he says, *But fornication, and all uncleanness,*

or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. (Eph 5:3). We must not even think about them or talk about them, *as becometh saints.*

He says that *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind . . . will enter the kingdom of God.* (cf. 1 Cor 6:9, 10). Is the apostle not pointing out that a sin against the seventh commandment is not just a weakness that God will forgive?

And where will the adulterers and fornicators be? Of course, in a place of darkness and eternal torments. Do not think that this passion is natural. Man's nature is structured so that people would give birth to children, and not so that they would defile their own selves. For, as the apostle Paul says, *Every sin . . . is without the body* (1 Cor 6:18): pride, ambition, love of honor, envy, or anger, because these are passions of the soul; but fornication and adultery are in the body itself and defile not only the soul but also the body.

Did he not say that *our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit* (cf. 1 Cor 6:19)? And if it is a temple, then it should be pure. To destroy the temple of the Holy Spirit, *to make our bodies the members of a harlot*, as the apostle exclaims, God forbid! (cf. 1 Cor 6:15). How many people there are among those who turn their fleshly passion into continual gratification, which makes them equal to the animals, who are distinguished by particular lustfulness. It is shameful for a Christian to be the same as a peacock.

For, says the apostle Paul in his Epistle, *this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.* (1 Thess 4:3-5). *For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.* (1 Thess 4:7). He said, *And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.* (Gal 5:24). If you want, remember this: You should crucify, mortify your flesh along with the passions and lusts. Needed is an enormous, daily struggle with all the flesh.

Those who have fallen into sin against the seventh commandment have to climb out of the abyss of that fall, calling for help from the One Who gave the commandment of chastity (cf. Ex. 20:14; Matt. 5:27-28); fervently pray and constantly remember what the apostle himself says: And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess (Eph. 5:18). In wine is fornication, for nothing so arouses our lusts as drunkenness—after getting drunk, a person becomes a plaything in the hands of the demon of fornication.

Whoever eats a lot, is always idle, does not want to work, is occupied only with entertainments, dancing, going to theatres and movies, and sleeps like a pampered woman till eleven in the morning will of course become a fornicator, for he is doing everything to make fleshly lust take him down its own path. But if a person is busy constantly with physical or intellectual labor, he has no time to be distracted from his work. Having

finished his work, in the evening he will only long for rest; he has no interest in lusts or debauchery. Therefore, the means for being freed from the rule of the demon of fornication are humility, fasting, intense labor, and constant prayer.

How infinitely many wretched people there are, especially among the young, who read with great relish passionate novels and stories or watch films in which there are dirty scenes of debauchery. What a poison and igniting of lust this is!

We should do otherwise—we should not ignite lust with pornographic descriptions and scenes, but strive to check it. As soon as we notice that lustful images have appeared in our thoughts we have to try to grab the snake by the neck and smash its head, for if we do not do it immediately it will imperceptibly creep into our hearts and turn them to the passion of fornication. We have to remember what the prophet David said in Psalm 136: *Blessed is he who takes the infants and dashes them against the rock.* (cf. Pss 136:9). The infants are our lusts and passions, and we have to war with them right away, before they have grown strong, before they have taken over our hearts. Only when you have corrected yourself and received forgiveness of this sin in the Sacrament of confession will you be able to have access to the Holy Chalice.

This is a serious matter. Now you can understand why St. Ephraim the Syrian prays to God that the Lord would give him the spirit of chastity. Let all of us who are guilty of this sin also pray to God for salvation and call out like St. Ephraim: Help us, help us in this struggle. We are weak, and You are strong!

Humility is the Root of Everything

O Lord, give the spirit of humility to thy servant! The commandment of humility is the first commandment of the Beatitudes, and that means it is the most important one. Remember the word of God pronounced by the prophet Isaiah: *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* (Isa 57:15).

Do you not want God to live with you? He Himself says that He lives in the hearts of the humble and revives them; and we so badly need our hearts to be revived! God looks down on the humble of heart. Remember the words of the holy apostle James: *Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.* (Jas 4:6). Do you not want to receive grace? And if you want it, then remember what humility is, that it is a sacred virtue very pleasing to God, and for which God lives with us and looks down upon us. Humility is the opposite of pride.

The humble are the poor in spirit, who while remembering their failings turn their gaze to the depths of their hearts, constantly watching after every movement of the heart, watching every impurity that has penetrated it. The saints, who always fulfilled the commandments of Christ, before whose mental

gaze the Lord always stood, constantly remembered humility and prayed for it.

Christ says, *Learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.* (Mt 11:29). The Lord commands us to learn humility from Him, and humility was shown through His entire earthly life. Human lips dare not speak of the humility that He manifested at the trial against Him, and later when He was led to Golgotha and crucified on the Cross—so great it was. This is the humility of the Savior.

Humility is a quality of the human soul that the proud stigmatize contemptuously, for such people do not believe in Christ and have chosen other ideals in life. They call humility slavery, and the humble—slaves deprived of the most required and necessary quality: the spirit of protest, of forceful opposition to mankind's serious misfortunes. They contemptuously stigmatize humility, and exalt the energy of rebellion and protest.

However the humble are not slaves submitting to force, but spiritual victors over evil. Only they lead a true struggle with evil, for they uproot the very sources of it in their own hearts and the hearts of others. They do not believe that the cause of evil lies solely in the imperfection of social relationships. The humble man is a true warrior of Christ, and not a slave. But truly humble people are very hard to find these days—no one thinks about humility; it is practically forgotten.

Only those who walk the path of Christ and who learn from Him spiritual lowliness think about humility. Only the saints are truly humble. The basis of their sanctity consists in the fact that they never exalt themselves over others, but judge only their own hearts.

Proud and arrogant people judge and discuss everything without giving it a thought, even what is most lofty and sacred, while the humble are bereft of all arrogance; they are modest and quiet. There are many examples to prove this in the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints. Righteous Abraham was great before God, he heard the great commandments and was called a friend of God, but he never ceased to call himself dust and ashes; the prophet and king David sincerely said of himself, *I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men.* (Pss 21:7); the apostle Paul called himself the chief among sinners, was alien to arrogance and self-aggrandizement, and was not afraid to admit his weaknesses: *I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.* (1 Cor 2:3). Such profound humility is an example to all of us, who are infinitely far from it.

We need to think all the time about it and ardently ask God about it. We cannot acquire this virtue through any of our own efforts. Humility is a great gift of God. And every step along the path of Christ brings us closer to it. When a man's heart is humble, the Holy Spirit comes to abide in it. What great happiness it is to be humble, and how difficult this is.

The Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall ex-*

alt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Mt 23:11-12). How often these words of Christ's come true! How many proud people there have been who try to be above everyone else later fall lower than everyone; and how many humble, insignificant, poverty-born people who began their lives in hardships and suffering, who later became great people. This is the story of many saints.

The Lord says: *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.* (Mt 19:30). That is how it is in life, and that is how it will be at the Last Judgment: The first proud and impudent will be the last, while the last—the insignificant and despised—will be the first.

We should remember the words of the holy apostle Peter: *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* (1 Pet 5:5). God gives grace to the humble. We have to strive towards humility, and constantly ask God for it.

O Lord and Master of my life, the spirit of humble-mindedness give me Thy servant! If a person will continually have these holy words in his memory, he will receive from God the profound virtue of humility.

Salvation is in Patience

O Lord and Master of my life! Give me the spirit of patience! Oh, how we need to ask for the spirit of patience! After all, the Lord said: *In your patience possess ye your souls.* (Lk 21:19). Why is that so? Because, says Jesus Christ, *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:14). The path of Christian life is the path of sufferings and sorrows. The Lord warns that *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33). Only through patience can we save our souls.

The holy apostle James says in his Epistle: *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* (Jas 1:2-4). Do you hear? Patience makes us perfect, without any inadequacies. And the holy apostle Paul writes, *For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.* (Heb 10:36)—eternal life, the Kingdom of God.

All the apostles, besides St. John the Theologian, endured many great sorrows, persecutions, harassments, and finally martyr death (only the apostle John died a natural death). *The signs of an apostle,* says the apostle Paul, *were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.* (2 Cor 12:12). *But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses.* (2 Cor 6:4). With these words the great apostle showed all of us his apostolic character in great patience. And to his disciple, Bishop Timothy, the apostle enjoined, *But thou, O man of God... follow after righteousness, godliness,*

faith, love, patience, meekness. (1 Tim 6:11). And if the bishop was enjoined to follow after patience, then how could we weak Christians reject this virtue? After all, without patience it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of God.

How can we acquire patience? We need to get used to enduring, trying not to complain, and of course, asking God for help. If we will ask God persistently, then it will happen with us according to Christ's words: *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?* (Mt 7:11).

It is pleasing to God for us to ask for patience, and God will help every Christian who calls out to Him from under the weight of his own cross. But evil people seeking the sinful path also ask for help. God will not grant them any help, but the Lord will help good Christians who humbly walk the path of Christ; after all, in the words of the apostle, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* (1 Cor 10:13).

Our woes are nothing compared to what our Lord Jesus Christ endured for us. Therefore we must endure, seeking comfort and *looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.* (Heb 12:2-3).

This is what we have to strengthen ourselves in, and from which we can endlessly draw patience. Gaze more often at the Holy Cross, the Savior crucified on it, and pray together with St. Ephraim the Syrian: *O Lord and Master of my life, grant the spirit of patience to me Thy servant.*

God is Love

O Lord and Master of my life! The spirit of love give to me, Thy servant! We ask for love, which is the fulfillment of the whole law; *for if we do not have love,* then according to the words of the apostle Paul *we are as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal.* (1 Cor. 13:1).

Even if we have the gift of prophecy, great knowledge and faith that can move mountains, but don't have love—we are nothing. The greatest example of love for us is our Lord Jesus Christ. What He said and did throughout the days of His earthly life, and then manifested on Golgotha, is an unceasing sermon on love.

This means that acquiring love is the greatest and most important task of our lives, about which we should be asking always, persistently and ceaselessly—for our goal is to become closer to God and to become perfect, like our Heavenly Father. Without love we are infinitely far from God.

Love is what all the saints cultivated in their hearts, what is given from God as His supremely great gift of grace for fulfilling the commandments of Christ.

Even if a person was born with a meek heart, he has to endure very much and pass through the path of the cross of suffering so that an ever greater flame of Christlike love might burn in his heart; so that the love he was given from his birth would ever multiply. Especially abundantly were people's hearts overflowing with Christ's love during the time of the apostles, when people loved one another like brothers, fulfilling the commandment of Christ. The Lord could say of them, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* (Jn 13:35).

But now has come the terrible time about which the Lord spoke, indicating the signs of His Second Coming: *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.* (Mt 24:10). This is what torments and rends our hearts.

It is unbearably hard to live and see that instead of Christ's love, mutual hatred rages. What an unspeakable horror we experienced not long ago, when the German people, who confess Christianity, in conjunction with other Christian peoples committed such evil acts and mockery of the law of love as we have never seen. And what was left of the law of love in those evildoers who buried children and old people alive, crushed the heads of newborn babes with stones, and wiped out tens of millions of people?

What can we do, how should we look at this? The Love of Christ should be preserved in the hearts of Christ's little flock until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those horrors of life, unrighteousness and violation of love that we see every day and every hour should stir us to warm up this great feeling in our hearts.

Love is only given to those who fulfill the commandments of Christ, who walk without turning back upon the narrow path of suffering, no matter what threatens. And if we steadfastly and unceasingly walk toward the light of love, then we shall reach it.

But can we love people who hate us? It is possible, at least in some small measure. Pity is one form of holy love. Should we not pity with our whole hearts those who have rejected Christ and walk the path of destruction? It is hard to love them with a pure, full love. But it is possible to pity them, with contrition of heart that these unfortunate people are on the path of destruction.

The great St. Seraphim of Sarov was attacked by robbers who beat him nearly to death, broke his skull and ribs, so that he

lost consciousness and lay several months in the monastery hospital until the Most Holy Mother of God came and healed him. How did he relate to his offenders? They were apprehended, handed over to the judge, but St. Seraphim begged with tears that they not be punished, that they be set free. He pitied them, and that means he loved them.

Many saints have shown such love. So does God Himself pity and have patience with sinners. Here is one example of God's long-suffering. There once lived a terrible robber named Varvar, who murdered over 300 people. But later he brought such repentance to God that he was not only forgiven and beloved of the Lord, he also received from Him the gift of working miracles.

Let no one say, "How can I love those who poison our lives and shame our people?" We have to not curse but pity those people, and then Christ's love will gradually and imperceptibly penetrate into our hearts. The man who always

strives to please God, prays, humbles his flesh, and tries to help people around him, will without fail acquire this great feeling and love of Christ, and it will be poured to overflowing into his heart, as it did into St. Seraphim of Sarov for all the thousands of sinners to come to him.

Pray for such love to God with the words of St. Ephraim the Syrian: *O Lord and Master of my life, the spirit of love give to me, Thy servant!* And God will give you the spirit of love!



Look Into Your Own Heart

O Lord and Master of my life! Grant me to see my own failings, and not condemn my brother, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages! Condemning our brothers is our most deeply rooted habit, and the most important of our vices. We do not have the habit of concerning ourselves with observing our own vices. We do not have the habit of concerning ourselves with the observation of our own sins. No one concerns themselves with this other than a small number of people who have completely dedicated themselves to God. For them, the most important and main occupation is to look for the impurity and sin in their own hearts. And when they find it, they make every effort to be freed from it.

Those who condemn other people consider themselves undeserving of condemnation and watch only after other people's sins. We are all like flies, which settle in clusters onto festering wounds, focusing all our attention on our neighbor's sinful wounds while forgetting about our own.

Judge not, and that ye be not judged. (Mt 7:1), said the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not judge anyone, *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.* (Mt 7:2). More often than not we judge people incorrectly, unfairly, for we do not know their hearts. Perhaps they have already repented of what we have judged them for, and God has set aright their sin. For this we ourselves are subject to God's condemnation.

With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Mt 7:2). If we mete out a full measure, with kindness, relating with condescension to the sins of our neighbors, that is the measure that the Lord will mete to us and cover our sins. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* (Mt 7:3). We do not notice our own great sins, but we see the tiny sins of our brother!

Remember the words of the apostle Paul: *But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.* (Rom 14:10). When we judge others, we do not remember and do not notice that we ourselves are guilty of the same thing. After all, we know that the Lord judges not only for crimes committed, for which we judge our neighbors, but also for the judgment itself: *And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?* (Rom 2:3).

The Lord commanded us to repent, and not to judge others. Remember how the Lord was brought to the woman caught in adultery and asked, *Rabbi, Moses commanded that such sinners be stoned. What do You say?* The Lord Jesus Christ did not answer right away. He sat in the courtyard of the temple and wrote something in the sand with His finger. And only when they asked Him a second time did He give an answer that only He could give: *Whoever of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone.* With great shame, heads lowered, the Scribes and Pharisees who considered themselves righteous began to disperse one after the other. And Jesus finally raised His head and asked, *Where are they who have condemned you?* The woman answered, *No one has condemned me. Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.* (cf. Jn 8:4-11).

What an amazing ban on judging! How clearly the Lord said that we must think first of all and most of all about our own sins. Whoever is without sin, let him cast the first stone. We are not without sin; that means that we do not dare throw stones of condemnation at others.

We have to remember the words of the apostle Paul: *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.* (Rom 14:4). We will all stand before Christ's Judgment. We have to think about this Judgment over us, and not concern ourselves with other people's sins.

Sacred and important is the law of love. But what should we do if we see a person who has obviously sinned and deserves condemnation? We should call out to God with the words of the psalmist: *Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth, and a door of enclosure round about my lips.* (Pss 140:3) and ask the Most High with our whole soul for that person: *Lord forgive him.* And then the demon of condemnation will depart from us, for demons always flee from prayer. If we judge, the demon will remain, and then it will be very hard to get rid of that sin.

Where does the demon of condemnation come from? From pride; from the fact that many consider themselves higher and better than others. We often judge out of envy, attacking those who have received spiritual gifts and live piously, or have received material gifts and live comfortably. We judge also out of anger, or hatred—because we have very little love in our hearts. We judge simply due to the deeply rooted habit of constantly judging people.

We have to uproot this habit, and not allow it to grow in us; we have to catch ourselves at every judgment. After stopping ourselves once or twice, we will learn to refrain from judging others and stop it, having focused our spiritual gaze on our own hearts.

Thus, let us strive to fulfill what we ask for in the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian: *O Lord and Master of my life! Grant me to see my own failings, and not condemn my brother, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.*



The three most comprehensive virtues of the soul are prayer, silence and fasting. Thus you should refresh yourself with the contemplation of created realities when you relax from prayer; with conversation about the life of virtue when you relax from silence; and with such food as is permitted when you relax from fasting.

Ilias the Presbyter

Like the sun which shines on all alike, vainglory beams on every occupation. What I mean is this. I fast, and turn vainglorious. I stop fasting so that I will draw no attention to myself, and I become vainglorious over my prudence. I dress well or badly, and am vainglorious in either case. I talk or I hold my peace, and each time I am defeated. No matter how I shed this prickly thing, a spike remains to stand up against me.

St. John Climacus

Just as a basic concern is to be careful of anything that might be harmful to our physical health, so our spiritual concern should watch out for anything that might harm our spiritual life and the work of faith and salvation. Therefore, carefully and attentively assess your inner impulses: are they from God or from the spirit of evil?

St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco

Ἄς νηστέψουμε, Ἀδελφοί!

Ἐπισκόπου Φλωρίνης Ἀύγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ», 26 Φεβρουαρίου, 2017, ἀριθ. φύλλου 1996, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεία Ἱερά Μονὴ Ἁγίου Ἀύγουστίνου Φλωρίνης, imaaflo@yahoo.gr.

Ἡ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή, ἀγαπητοί μου, στὴν ὁποία μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ μπαίνομε ἀπὸ αὐριό, εἶνε περίοδος ἱερῶν ἀσκήσεων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Ἡ ἄσκησι εἶνε μία τακτικὴ ποὺ ἐπὶ αἰῶνες τώρα ἐφαρμόζεται σὲ πολλοὺς τομεῖς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς, διότι ἔχει ἀποδειχθῆ χρησίμη, βοηθητικὴ καὶ σωτήριος. Ἡ ἄσκησι λέγεται καὶ γυμνασία ἢ γυμναστική. Ἡ ἄσκησι ἀποβλέπει ὄχι μόνον στὴν διατήρησι μιᾶς καλῆς καταστάσεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴ βελτίωσί της ὅσο τὸ δυνατὸν περισσότερο, καθὼς καὶ στὴν ἐτοιμότητα τῶν δυνάμεων τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὥστε νὰ μπορῆ νὰ τὶς χρησιμοποιήσῃ σὲ κάθε ἀνάγκη ποὺ θὰ παρουσιαστῆ.

Ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶνε καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴ - πνεῦμα, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ ἄσκησι διακρίνεται σὲ σωματικὴ καὶ σὲ ψυχικὴ - πνευματικὴ. Μὲ τὴν σωματικὴ ἄσκησι, τὸ σῶμα διατηρεῖ τὴν υἰεῖα καὶ τὴν εὐεξία του, οἱ μῦς καὶ τὰ μέλη δυναμώνουν, ὥστε νὰ μπορῆ νὰ ἐργάζεται ἀποδοτικῶς. Μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ ἄσκησι τὸ μυαλὸ «ἀκονίζεται», ἀποκτᾷ εὐστροφία καὶ πλουτίζεται σὲ γνώσεις.

Σπουδαιότερη ὅμως καὶ πιὸ ἀναγκαία εἶνε ἡ ψυχικὴ ἄσκησι, μὲ τὴν ὁποία ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀγωνίζεται νὰ καταταγῆ στὴν στρατιὰ τοῦ οὐρανίου βασιλέως Χριστοῦ, νὰ ὑπακούῃ καὶ νὰ τηρῆ τὸ θέλημά του, ν' ἀποκτήσῃ καὶ νὰ διατηρῆ τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς καρδιάς ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, νὰ ἀπεκδυθῆ τὸν παλαιὸ ἀνθρώπο καὶ νὰ ἐνδυθῆ τὸν νέο, νὰ μιμηθῆ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τέλος νὰ ἐνωθῆ μαζί του αἰωνίως. Αὐτὰ δὲν εἶνε εὐκόλα ἀσφαλῶς μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία ὅμως μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Κυρίου γίνονται κατορθωτὰ καὶ καθιερώνονται ἰσοβίως ὡς ἓνα καθημερινὸ πρόγραμμα ζωῆς.

Ὅπως στὸ σχολεῖο ὁ μαθητὴς ὅλο τὸ χρόνο μελετᾷ, ἀλλὰ ἰδιαίτερος κοπιᾷ σὲ τὶς ἡμέρες τῶν ἐξετάσεων, ἔτσι καὶ στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ. Καὶ ὅπως στὸν ἀθλητισμὸ οἱ ἀθληταὶ πάντοτε προσπαθοῦν νὰ διατηροῦνται σὲ «φόρμα», ἀλλὰ ἰδιαίτερος προπονοῦνται ὅταν ἔχουν

ἀγῶνες, κάτι παρόμοιο ἔχουμε καὶ στὴν πνευματικὴ μας ἄθλησι. Καὶ ὅπως στὸ στρατὸ οἱ στρατιῶτες πάντοτε βέβαια γυμνάζονται σὲ διάφορες μονάδες, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἰδιαίτερες ἡμέρες ἐκτεταμένων γυμνασίων καὶ ἀσκήσεων, κατὰ τὶς ὁποῖες συμμετέχουν στὰ γυμνάσια ὅλες οἱ δυνάμεις, καὶ τῶν τριῶν ὄπλων, κατὰ παρόμοιο τρόπο καὶ οἱ Χριστιανοί, ποὺ ἀποτελοῦν τὴν πνευματικὴ στρατιὰ τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀσκοῦνται βέβαια καὶ γυμνάζονται ὅλες τὶς ἡμέρες τῆς ζωῆς τους καὶ ὅλες τὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ ἔτους, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν καὶ ὠρισμένες περιόδους κατὰ τὶς ὁποῖες ὅλα τὰ γυμνάσματα ἐντείνονται καὶ ὅλες οἱ ἀσκήσεις συντονίζονται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μὲ σκοπὸ τὸν τελειότερο καταρτισμὸ τῶν πιστῶν.

Τέσσερις εἶνε οἱ ἐποχὲς τοῦ ἔτους (χειμῶνας, ἄνοιξι, καλοκαίρι, φθινόπωρο), τέσσερις εἶνε καὶ οἱ περίοδοι αὐτῆς τῶν ἐντατικῶν πνευματικῶν γυμνασμάτων - ἀντιστοιχοῦν δηλαδὴ περίπου μία σὲ κάθε ἐποχῇ. Ἡ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή πρὸ τοῦ Πάσχα, μεταξὺ χειμῶνος καὶ ἀνοιξέως. Ἡ νηστεία πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων, μεταξὺ ἀνοιξέως καὶ θέρους. Ἡ νηστεία τοῦ Δεκαπενταυγούστου πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ ἐν ὄψει τοῦ φθινοπώρου. Καὶ τέλος ἡ περίοδος τοῦ Σαρανταήμερου πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ στὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ χειμῶνος.

Μία τέτοια περίοδος, πρώτη μεταξὺ ὄλων τῶν ἄλλων, εἶνε ἡ περίοδος αὐτῆς τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς. Κατ' αὐτήν, ὅπως ψάλλει ὠραία ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, «*Τὸ στάδιον τῶν ἀρετῶν ἠνέφωκται*» (ἔχει ἀνοίξει τὸ στάδιο τῶν ἀρετῶν - αἶνοι Κυρ. Τυριν.) καὶ «*Ἐφθασε καιρὸς, ἡ τῶν πνευματικῶν ἀγῶνων ἀρχή, ἡ κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων νίκη*» (ἦρθε ὁ καιρὸς ποὺ ἀρχίζουνοί πνευματικοὶ ἀγῶνες, ἡ νίκη ἐναντίον τῶν δαιμόνων - δοξ. αἶν. Κυρ. Τυριν.).

Χαρακτηριστικὸ γνώρισμα τῆς περιόδου αὐτῆς εἶνε ἡ νηστεία, ἡ αὐστηρὴ νηστεία. Εἶνε τὸ ἀρχαιότερο καὶ τὸ γνωστότερο εἶδος ἀσκήσεως. Τὴν περίοδο αὐτῆ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς καλεῖ νὰ νηστέψουμε ὅλοι, ἐκτὸς μόνου ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ γιὰ κάποια σωματικὴ ἀσθένεια ἐμποδίζονται νὰ λάβουν μέρος στὸ ἱερὸ αὐτὸ ἀγώνισμα.

Ἀλλὰ νηστεύουν σήμερα οἱ Χριστιανοί;

Ἀλλοίμονο! Τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἡ νηστεία, τὸ ἱερὸ αὐτὸ κειμήλιο τῆς φυλῆς μας, περιφρονεῖται ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλούς, τοὺς περισσότερους μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε



Χριστιανούς. Μὲ διάφορες προφάσεις, σχεδὸν πάντα ἁμαρτωλές, ἀποφεύγουν τὴ νηστεία. Οἱ κάτοικοι ἰδίως τῶν πόλεων στὴν μεγίστη πλειονότητα ἔχουν ἐξορίσει ἀπὸ τὰ σπίτια τους τὴ νηστεία· καὶ αὐτή, σὰν διωγμένη καὶ περιλυπη δέσποινα, βρῆκε καταφύγιο στὰ μικρὰ χωριά καὶ στὶς κωμοπόλεις τῆς πατρίδος μας.

Ἀλλὰ τελευταία παρατηρεῖται κ' ἐκεῖ τάσις νὰ ἐκδιωχθῆ ὡς ἀνεπιθύμητη! Οἱ χωρικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἀγράμματοι, ποὺ σέβονται καὶ ἔχουν σὲ μεγάλη ὑπόληψι τὸν ἅγιο θεσμὸ τῆς νηστείας, καὶ ἴσως μάλιστα γιὰ πολλοὺς ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶνε ἡ μόνη κλωστή, ἀπ' τὴν ὁποία κρέμεται ἡ θρησκευτικὴ τους ζωὴ, αὐτοί, πρὸς μεγάλο σκανδαλισμὸ τους, βλέπουν τοὺς λίγους ἐγγράμματους(;) τοῦ χωριοῦ τους, ἢ καὶ τοὺς τυχὸν διερχομένους ἀπὸ τὸ χωριὸ τους δημοσίους ὑπαλλήλους, νὰ καταλύουν μπροστὰ σὲ ὅλους τὴ νηστεία, καὶ πολλὲς φορὲς τοὺς ἀκοῦνε νὰ ἐκφράζονται γιὰ τὴ νηστεία μὲ τέτοιο τρόπο, ὥστε μέσα στὴ συνείδησι τοῦ χωρικοῦ νὰ γκρεμίζεται ὁ σεβασμὸς στὶς ἅγιες παραδόσεις τῆς θρησκείας μας, μία ἀπ' τὶς ὁποῖες εἶνε καὶ ἡ νηστεία.

Καὶ νὰ σκεφτῆ κανεὶς ὅτι ἡ νηστεία εἶνε θεσμὸς τόσο ἀρχαῖος ὅσο καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀφοῦ νομοθετήθηκε μέσα στὸν παράδεισο μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ μὴ γευθοῦν οἱ πρωτόπλαστοι τὸν ἀπηγορευμένο καρπὸ· καὶ γι' αὐτὸ οἱ πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὴν χαρακτηρίζουν συνηλικιωτίν, συνομήλικη δηλαδή, τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (Μ. Βασ. Migne 31,168Α).

Δυστυχῶς ἡ γενεά μας, ὑλόφρων καθὼς εἶνε, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ δῆ μὲ βλέμμα συμπαθείας καὶ βαθειᾶς ἐκτιμήσεως τὴ νηστεία, ὅπως τὴν ἔβλεπαν αἱ προηγούμενες γενεές, ὅπως τὴν εἶδαν οἱ σοφοὶ τῆς ἀρχαιότητος καὶ οἱ ἁγιώτατοι πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὄχι μόνον εἶπαν καὶ ἔγραψαν τὰ ὠραιότερα λόγια καὶ ἐγκώμια γιὰ τὴ νηστεία, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴν ἴδια τὴ ζωὴ τους ἔδωσαν σὲ ὅλους τοὺς Χριστιανούς τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς πραγματικῆς νηστείας. Ναί, ὅλων τῶν ἁγίων σύντροφος καὶ φίλη ἀχώριστη ὑπῆρξε ἡ νηστεία, ἡ «πάνοπλος ἐγκράτεια, ἡ τῶν ἀγγέλων εὐπρέπεια, ἡ πρὸς Θεὸν παρηγοσία» (ἡ ἐγκράτεια ποὺ εἶνε ἐφωδιασμένη μὲ ὅλα τὰ ὄπλα, ποὺ μμεῖται τὴν ἀγγελικὴ εὐπρέπεια, ποὺ χαρίζει θάρρος νὰ σταθῆ κανεὶς ἐμπρὸς στὸ Θεό - δοξ. αἰν. Κυρ. Τυριν.).

Ἄν ἦταν δυνατὸν καὶ σ' ἐμᾶς νὰ δοῦμε τὴ νηστεία μὲ τὸ μάτι τῆς καθαρῆς διανοίας τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων, θὰ τὴ βλέπαμε ὄχι σὰν μία ἀνεπιθύμητη κυρία ἀλλὰ σὰν μία βασίλισσα, ποὺ εἶνε ἔτοιμη νὰ δώσῃ στοὺς πιστοὺς ἀκολούθους της δῶρα, τὰ πολύτιμα δῶρα της. Γιατὶ ἡ νηστεία, ὅπως λέει γι' αὐτὴν μὲ ἐνθουσιασμὸ ὄχι κάποιος μικρὸς κήρυκας ἢ θεολόγος ἀπ' τοὺς σημερινούς, ἀλλὰ ἕνας μεγάλος πατὴρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ φιλόσοφος βαθύς, ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος,

ἡ νηστεία εἶνε «οἴκων αὔξησις, ὑγείας μήτηρ, νεότητος παιδαγωγός, κόσμος πρεσβύταις, ἀγαθὴ συνέμπορος ὁδοιπόροις, ἀσφαλὴς ὁμόσκηνος τοῖς συνοίκοις»· καὶ ἄλλου: «Πόλεως εὐσχημοσύνη, ἀγορᾶς εὐστάθεια, οἴκων εἰρήνη, σωτηρία τῶν ὑπαρχόντων»· καὶ ἄλλου: «*Νηστεία προφήτας γεννᾷ, δυνατοὺς ῥώννυσι (=ἐνδυναμώνει)· νηστεία νομοθέτας σοφίζει, ψυχῆς ἀγαθὸν φυλακτήριον, σῶματι σύννοικος ἀσφαλῆς, ὄπλον ἀριστεύουσιν, ἀθληταῖς γυμνάσιον... σωφροσύνης δημιουργός. Ἐν πολέμοις ἀνδραγαθεῖ, ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἡσυχίαν διδάσκει.*» (Μ. Βασ., Περὶ νηστείας Λόγ. Α'· Migne 31,173C, 183B, 172B).

Ὅσοι λοιπὸν ἐπιθυμοῦμε ν' ἀποκτήσουμε καὶ ν' ἀπολαύσουμε ἕνα ἀπ' τὰ πολλὰ δῶρα καὶ ἀγαθὰ, ποὺ προσφέρει στοὺς Χριστιανούς ἡ νηστεία, ἃς τηρήσουμε τὴν χριστιανικὴ καὶ ἁγία νηστεία. Ἄς φράξουμε τὰ αὐτιά μας νὰ μὴν ἀκοῦμε τῶν ἀπίστων, τῶν ὑλόφρων καὶ ἀδιαφόρων τὶς εἰρωνεῖες, τὶς ἀντιρροήσεις καὶ τὶς «προφάσεις ἐν ἁμαρτίαις» (Ψαλμ. 140,4) κατὰ τοῦ ἁγίου θεσμοῦ τῆς νηστείας. Κι ἃς ἀκούσουμε τὴ φωνὴ τῆς μητέρας μας Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ὁποία μελωδικὰ ψάλλει: «*Προκαθάρωμεν ἑαυτοὺς, ἀδελφοί, τῇ βασιλίδι τῶν ἀρετῶν ἰδοὺ γὰρ παραγένονε πλοῦτον ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν κομίζουσα τῶν παθῶν κατευνάζει τὰ οἰδήματα καὶ τῷ Δεσπότη καταλλάττει τοὺς πταίσαντας διὸ μετ' εὐφροσύνης ταύτην ὑποδεξώμεθα, βοῶντες Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ. Ὁ ἀναστὰς ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἀκατα κρὶ τοὺς ἡμᾶς διαφύλαξον, δοξολογοῦντάς σε, τὸν μόνον ἀναμάρτητον.*» (δοξ. αἰν. Κυρ. Ἀπόκρ.).

(†) ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



Ἄκόμα πιὸ δύσκολη θὰ κάνει τότε τὴ θεάρεστη ζωὴ καὶ ἡ γενικὴ ἀποστασία. Οἱ ἀποστάτες, ποὺ ὄλο καὶ θ' αὐξάνονται, θὰ αὐτο-ἀποκαλοῦνται καὶ θὰ παρουσιάζονται στοὺς ἄλλους ὡς χριστιανοί. Ὡστόσο, θὰ καταδιώκουν τοὺς ἀληθινούς χριστιανούς καὶ θὰ τοὺς ἐπιβουλεύονται ἀκατάπανστα, βάζοντας ἀναρίθμητα ἐμπόδια στὴν καλὴ τους ἐπιθυμία νὰ ὑπηρετοῦν τὸν Κύριο καὶ νὰ σωθοῦν, ὅπως ἐπισημαίνει ὁ ἅγιος Τύχων τοῦ Ζαντόνσκ.

Θὰ κάνουν πολλὰ ἐναντίον τῶν δούλων τοῦ Θεοῦ. Θὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν καὶ τὴ βία τῆς ἐξουσίας καὶ τὴ συκοφαντία καὶ τὶς καλοστημένες σκευωρίες καὶ τὶς πολύμορφες ἀπάτες καὶ τοὺς σκληροὺς διωγμούς.

Ἄγιος Ἰγνάτιος Μπριαντιανίνωφ

Οι Μύγες της Ευρωπαϊκής Αγοράς...

Δημήτρης Νατσιός, δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

Κάποτε υπήρχε το ήθικo δίλημμα: Νά κλέψω ή νά μὴν κλέψω; Ἀπὸ τὴν «μαύρη δεκαετία» τοῦ 1980 καὶ ἔντεῦθεν ὁ Ρωμιός, ὁ Ἑλληνας, ὁ Γραικός— καὶ τὰ τρία ἐθωνύμια καλὰ καὶ τιμημένα εἶναι— ὑποκορίστηκε σέ... «γραικύλο» τῆς σήμερον, ποὺ θὰ ἔλεγε καὶ ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, τὸ δίλημμα πλέον περιορίστηκε στὸ ἔξις: Θὰ μὲ πιάσουν ἢ δὲν θὰ μὲ πιάσουν;

Κάποιοι «νοσοῦντες βαρύτατα ἐξ ἐλαφρότητας καὶ ρεκλαμομανίας», οἱ ἀνόητα ἀλαζόνες καὶ μεγαλαυχεῖς, πιάνονται ἀπὸ τὸ δίχτυ το νόμου. Τὸ ζήσαμε. Ἐνα σύνθημα δονοῦσε τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν φρουρῶν τῆς ἐξουσίας. Τὰ λίγα βγαίνουν μὲ κόπο, τὰ πολλὰ βγαίνουν μέ... κόλλο. Μπήκαν στὸ πολιτικὸ παιχνίδι φτωχοὶ γιατί ὄνειρεύονταν πλοῦτη καὶ μεγαλεῖα καὶ βγαίνουν (ἢ διαβαίνουν τῆς φυλακῆς τὰ σίδερα), δυὸ φορὲς φτωχότεροι: καὶ κατὰ τὸ ὄνειρο καὶ κατὰ τὰ πλούτη. Καὶ μὲ τὴν ὑπόληψη τσαλακωμένη, διὰ βίου.

Μᾶλλον εἶχε κατὰ νοῦ τὸν Αἴσωπο ὁ Ἑλύτης, ὅταν ἔγραφε «σιμὰ ἢ μέρα ὅπου τὸ κάλλος θὰ παραδοθεῖ στὶς μύγες τῆς Ἀγοράς». (Ἄξιον ἔστι, προφητικόν). Σὲ ἕναν ὠραῖο του μῦθο μὲ τίτλο «μυῖαι», ἀφηγεῖται ὁ Αἴσωπος τὸ πάθημα τοῦ κακοποιοῦ καὶ ρυπαροῦ ἐντόμου, τῆς μύγας. Τὸν παραθέτω:

«Ἐν τινι ταμείῳ μέλιτος ἐκχυθέντος μυῖαι προσπτάσαι κατήσθιον, διὰ δὲ τὴν γλυκύτητα τοῦ καρποῦ οὐκ ἀφίσταντο. Ἐμπαγόντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῶν ποδῶν ὡς οὐκ ἠδύναντο ἀναπτήναι, ἀποπνιγόμεναι ἔφασαν: Ἄθλαι ἡμεῖς, αἶ διὰ βραχεῖα ἠδονὴν ἀπολλύμεθα» (Στὸ μονοτονικὸ εἶναι ἀγνώριστη ἢ ἀναφορικὴ ἀντωνυμία «αἶ». Στολιζόταν μὲ δασεῖα καὶ ὀξεῖα καὶ εἶχε ταυτότητα. Χωρὶς τὰ τονικὰ κάλλη τῆς μοιάζει μὲ βέλασμα). Βρῆκαν μέλι χυμένο σὲ ἕνα κελάρι οἱ μύγες, τὸ ἀπολαμβάνουν, ἀλλὰ κόλλησαν τὰ πόδια τους. Καθὼς πνίγονταν, φώναζαν. Εἶμαστε ἄθλιες, διότι χανόμαστε γιὰ μιὰ σύντομη ἠδονή. Ἔτσι εἶναι.

Τὸ κακὸ εἶναι ὅτι ἄνθρωποι σὰν τὴν προφυλακισμένη εὐρωβουλευτὴ ἐξευτελίζουν καὶ τὴν χώρα. Δὲν καταλαβαίνουν ὅτι τὸ ἀξίωμά τους δὲν εἶναι δικό τους, ἀνήκει στὸν λαὸ ποὺ τοὺς τὸ παραχώρησε. Ὅλα τὰ δημόσια ἀξιώματα καὶ ἐτυμολογικῶς παραπέμπουν σὲ διακονία τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἡ λέξη ὑπουργός, γιὰ παράδειγμα, εἶναι σύνθετη ἀπὸ τὸ ὑπό+ἔργον. Δηλώνει τὴν προσφορὰ ὑπηρεσίας ἢ τὴν βοήθεια σὲ κάποιον. Στὸν Ἡρόδοτο ἐντοπίζουμε τὴν φράση «χρηστὰ ὑπουργέω», παρέχω καλὴ ὑπηρεσία, εἶμαι ὠφέλιμος στὸν λαό. Βουλευτής, ἀπὸ τὸ

«βουλευώ», σκέπτομαι, ἀποφασίζω στὴν «ἐκκλησία τοῦ δήμου» γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῆς πόλεως.

Στὴν πατρίδα ἀνήκουσε, δὲν μᾶς ἀνήκει. Ἡ ἰθαγένεια εἶναι δάνειο, ποὺ ὅσο τὸ ὑπηρετεῖς καὶ τὸ ἀποπληρώνεις, κάθε στιγμὴ τῆς ζωῆς σου, συμβάλλεις στὴν «τεκνογονία τῆς ἀρετῆς». Εἶναι «ζυγὸς χρηστὸς καὶ φορτίον ἐλαφρὸν» ἢ διακονία τῆς πατρίδας.

Ποῦ νὰ τὰ σκεφτοῦν αὐτὰ οἱ μύγες τῆς πολιτικῆς, ποῦ ἀναξιοκρατικῶ δικαιοῦματι καὶ κομματικῆ προωθήσει ἀναρριχῶνται ραγδαίως καὶ ὀρμιοῦν στὸ «ταμείον τοῦ μέλιτος»; Ρεζίλι τῶν σκυλιῶν ἢ πολλὰ ὑποσχόμενη πολιτικὸς, συμπαρασύροντας καὶ κηλιδώνοντας τὴν ὅποια ὑπόληψη τῆς πατρίδας. Δὲν μᾶς φτάνουν τὰ ἐντὸς τῆς ἐπικρατείας αἴσχη τύπου Πάτση, μετακομίζουν καὶ εἰς τὰς Εὐρώπας «οἱ λαγοὶ τῆς φιλοχρηματίας». Τί ἀκριβῶς προσφέρουν οἱ εὐρωβουλευτές; Γύρω στὶς 30.000 εὐρὼ τὸν μῆνα παίρνουν, κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσημη μισθοδοσία. Εἶναι πολὺ περισσότερα. Δικαιοῦνται «ἕνα σκασμὸ» ἐπίδομα, ἀποζημιώσεις, διευκολύνσεις καὶ λοιπὰ καλούδια, μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα ζοῦν σὰν τοὺς λεγόμενους πρίγκιπες τῆς Ἀγγλίας. Ὅταν ἀποχωροῦν, λήγει ἢ θητεία τους, λαμβάνει ἕκαστος, διαβάζουμε σὲ ἄρθρο τῆς ἐφ. «ΕΘΝΟΣ», 5/5/20, ἕνα ἐπίδομα μετάβασης, «χρυσὸ ἀλεξίπτωτο» τὸ λένε, ὕψους 210.000 εὐρὼ. (Ἀξίζει νὰ διαβαστεῖ τὸ ἄρθρο μὲ τίτλο «ἐπάγγελμα εὐρωβουλευτῆς» τῆς προαναφερομένης ἐφημερίδας).

Γι' αὐτὸ λουφάζουν πειθήνια καὶ δὲν ἐνοχλοῦν τὸ ἀφεντικὸ οὔτε ὑπερασπίζονται τὰ ἐθνικὰ δίκαια, φοβούμενοι μὴν παρεκκλίνουν πατριωτικῶς καὶ δὲν τοὺς ξαναβάλλει στὴν ἐπόμενη λίστα τοῦ χρυσοφόρου εὐρωψηφοδελτίου. Γιὰ τόσα χρήματα ποιά εἶναι ἡ ἐθνικὴ τους ὑπηρεσία; Τί διαβάζουμε γιὰ τὴν κ. Καϊλὴ; Σακοῦλες μὲ χρήματα στὰ σπῖτια, μεγάλη ζωὴ, καταθέσεις ἀσύλληπτες σὲ τράπεζες ἢ καλοπληρωμένη μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τοῦ λαοῦ «εὐρωβουλευτριά», καταπῶς τίς ἀποκαλεῖ ἢ γλωσσικὴ προσοδομανία.

Νὰ κλείσω μὲ κάτι νόστιμο, γιὰ τὴν μᾶς ἔπνιξαν οἱ ἀναθυμιάσεις. Μιᾶς καὶ εἶμαστε στὴν περίοδο τῆς νηστείας, νὰ διαφημίσω καὶ μιὰ ἱστορικὴ τράπεζα. «Μὴ ταρασέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδιά». Δὲν ἀναφέρομαι στὰ ἀδηφάγα καταστήματα ποὺ βύθισαν τὸν κόσμον στὴν οἰκονομικὴ φρίκη καὶ εἶναι θεμελιωμένα μὲ τὰ δάκρυα καὶ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ προδομένου λαοῦ μας. Ὅχι. Ἀναφέρομαι σὲ μιὰ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πολὺ σπουδαίου, λόγιου Κωνσταντίνου Δαπόντε, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀργότερα ἔγινε μοναχὸς μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Καισάριος. Ἐξεσησε καὶ ἐκοιμήθη στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Διαβάσω λίγες εἰσαγωγικὲς γραμμὲς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιστολὴ, ποὺ τὴν ἀπέστειλε σὲ κάποιον Πούρβουλο, τὸ 1760,

ἀπαντῶντας, μᾶλλον, σὲ πρόσκληση γιὰ τράπεζα, γιὰ γεῦμα λίγο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὰ Χριστούγεννα.

«Ἐπιθυμίαν ἐπεθύμησα τούτην τὴν ἑβδομάδα φαγεῖν μετὰ τῆς εὐγενείας σου· εἰς τὸ τραπέζι δὲν θέλω νὰ εἶναι ἄρτος ἀρπαγῆς, πρόβατον ἀδικίας, ὄρνιθα ἀσελγείας οὔτε δορκὰς ὑπερηφανείας οὔτε ὀρτύκι μνησικακίας οὔτε λαγὸς φιλοχρηματίας, ἀλλ' οὔτε χοῖρος ἀκαθαρσίας. Θέλω δὲ καὶ παρακαλῶ νὰ εἶναι ἄρτος ἰδρωτός, φακὲς ταπεινοφροσύνης, φασούλια σωφροσύνης, ρεβίθια ἐλεημοσύνης, ἰχθύες ἀπλότητος, ἐλιῆς ἰλαρότητος καὶ λάχανα εὐλαβείας...» Τί ὠραία, ὠραία λόγια.

Στὰ «δὲν θέλω», στὰ ἀνεπιθύμητα ἐδέσματα τοῦ ἀγιορείτη Καισάρου, περιγράφεται ἡ Ἑλλάδα τῆς παρακμῆς, τοῦ χρηματιστηρίου, τῶν μνημονίων, τῆς προδοσίας τῆς Μακεδονίας, τοῦ ναυαγίου τῆς πάλαι ποτὲ ἐθνικῆς παιδείας, τῆς σεξουαλικῆς διαπαιδαγώγησης καὶ λοιπῶν πτωμάτων τυμπανιαίας ἀποφορᾶς. Οἱ προσκυνημένοι γραικύλοι, οἱ ἀνάξιοι νὰ φέρουν τὸ ὄνομα Ἑλλήνας καὶ Ἑλληνίδα.

Στὰ «θέλω» εἶναι ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη τῆς νηστείας, τοῦ φιλότιμου, τοῦ καθαροῦ μετώπου, τῆς οἰκογένειας, ποῦ γιορτάζει ἐνωμένη τίς χρονιαῖρες μέρες καὶ δὲν «δραπετεύει» στοὺς κατασκότεινους δρυμοὺς τῆς ἄθνης Εὐρώπης, γιὰ νὰ διασκεδάσει τὴν ἀπληστία τῆς καὶ νὰ ἐπισωρεύσει κι ἄλλα μπάζα στὴν ἀχόρταγη ψυχὴ τῆς, ὅπως ἔπραττε ἡ χαριτόβρυτος κ. Εὐα.

Τὰ καλομαθημένα παιδιά μας σήμερα ἀπεχθάνονται τὰ ὄσπρια, ὅμως οἱ φακὲς, τὰ φασούλια καὶ τὰ ρεβίθια, τὰ συνοδεύει μὲ ἀρετὲς ὁ εὐφυέστατος Καισάριος Δαπόντε. Μὲ τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη, τὴν σωφροσύνη καὶ τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη. Καὶ πάντα ὁ ἄρτος. Ἀπὸ τὸ ρῆμα «αἶρω», ποῦ σημαίνει σηκώνω ψηλά, ἀνυψώνομαι, ἐξοῦ καὶ ἀέρας. Τὸ πρόσφορο, θυμίζω, τὸ λένε καὶ «ὑψωμα».

Στὴν περίπτωσή της μᾶς ἔρχεται στὸ νοῦ ἡ εὐθύβολη λαϊκὴ θυμοσοφία: **ὅπως στρώνει καθένas ἔτσι κοιμάται...**



Μακριὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς ἡ ἐξυπηρέτηση τοῦ κακοῦ. Μακριὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς ἡ καταπολέμηση τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔργων. Μακριὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς τὸ πολυμερές, τὸ πολύμορφο, τὸ πολυώνυμο ψεῦδος. Μακριὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς ἡ ἀδικία τοῦ πλησίον, τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, γενικὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἡ ἀδικία καὶ τὸ ψέμα, ἀναστατώνουν τίς κοινωνίες, ταράζουν τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ προκαλοῦν παντὸς εἶδους μεγάλες καταστροφές.

Ἅγιος Νεκτάριος

Ὁ Πόνος καὶ αἱ Θλίψεις εἰς τὴν Ζωὴ μας

Ἀγίου Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Ἀριζόνας, προηγουμένου Ἱ. Μονῆς Φιλοθέου (+2019), ἀπὸ «Ὁρθόδοξα Μνημόματα», ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη».

Τὸ μονοπάτι τῆς ζωῆς εἶναι ὅλο πόνος καὶ δάκρυ· ὅλο ἀγκάθια καὶ καρφιά· παντοῦ φυτρωμένοι σταυροὶ παντοῦ ἀγωνία καὶ θλίψη. Κάθε βῆμα καὶ μία Γεθσημανῆ. Κάθε ἀνηφορία καὶ ἓνας Γολγοθᾶς. Κάθε στιγμή καὶ μία λόγχη. Ἄν μπορούσαμε νὰ στίψουμε τὴν γῆ σὰν τὸ σφουγγάρι θὰ ἔσταζε αἷμα καὶ δάκρυα.

«Ἄνθρωπος ὡσεὶ χόρτος αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ, ὡσεὶ ἄνθος τοῦ ἀγροῦ οὕτως ἐξανθήσει», λέγει ὁ ψαλμωδός.

Τὸ τριαντάφυλλο βγάζει ἀγκάθια καὶ τὸ ἀγκάθια τριαντάφυλλο. Τὰ ὠραία συνοδεύονται μὲ πόνο, ἀλλὰ κι ὁ πόνος βγάζει στὴ χαρὰ. Συνήθως τὸ οὐράνιο τόξο ὑψώνεται ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὴν μπόρα. Πρέπει νὰ προηγηθοῦν οἱ καταιγίδες γιὰ νὰ ξαστερώσει ὁ οὐρανός.

Ἡ διάκριση—φωτισμένη ἀπὸ τὴν χριστιανικὴ πίστη καὶ φιλοσοφία—βλέπει. Ἔχει τὴν ἱκανότητα μὲ τὴν ἐνόραση νὰ βλέπει πολὺ βαθιὰ ἀπ' τὰ φαινόμενα. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο βλέπει τὴν χαρὰ καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα, ὅπως ὁ θρίαμβος τοῦ Χριστοῦ βγήκε μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο τοῦ Πάθους καὶ τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Τὰ πιὸ θαυμάσια ἀγάλματα ἔχουν τὰ περισσότερα κτυπήματα. Οἱ μεγάλες ψυχὲς ὀφείλουν τὴν μεγαλοσύνη τους στὰ κτυπήματα τοῦ πόνου. Τὰ χρυσὰ καὶ βαρύτεμα κοσμήματα περνοῦν πρῶτα ἀπ' τὴν φωτιά.

Συγκλονίζει τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ὑπαρξὴ ὁ πόνος. Εἶναι φωτιά καμίνι ποὺ καίει καὶ κατακαίει. Εἶναι καταιγίδα καὶ τρικυμία. «*Τὰ σπλάχνα μου καὶ ἡ θάλασσα ποτὲ δὲν ἤσυχάζουν*», λέει ὁ Σολωμός.

Εἶναι στιγμὲς ποὺ οἱ δοκιμασίες ἔρχονται ἀπανωτές, ἢ μία μετὰ τὴν ἄλλην ἢ καὶ ὅλες μαζί. Πολὺ βαρὺς τότε ὁ σταυρός. Ἡ ἀγωνία κορυφώνεται. Ἡ ψυχὴ φορτίζεται τόσο, ὥστε εἶναι ἔτοιμη νὰ λυγίσει. Ὅλα φαίνονται μαῦρα. Παντοῦ σκοτεινά. Παντοῦ ἀδιέξοδα. Λέει ὁ ἀγ. Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος: «*Τὰ καλὰ φύγανε, τὰ δεινὰ εἶναι γυμνὰ καὶ προκλητικά, τὸ ταξίδι γίνεται μέσα στὴ νύχτα, φάρος δὲν φαίνεται πουθενὰ καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς φαίνεται νὰ κοιμάται*».

Καρφιά καὶ μαχαίρια εἶναι τῆς ζωῆς οἱ θλίψεις. Μαχαίρια καὶ καρφιά ποὺ σκίζουν ἀνελέητα καὶ τρυποῦν τίς καρδιές. Τίς πυρακτώνουν καὶ τίς παραλύουν ἐξουθενωτικά.

Τὸ μόνο ποὺ ἀπομένει σὲ τοῦτες τίς στιγμὲς εἶναι ἡ κραυγὴ ποὺ σὰν παράπονο ἰκεσίας ἀπευθύνεται στὸ Θεό. «*Ἐλέησόν με Κύριε... ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐταράχθη σφόδρα... ἐκοπίασα ἐν τῷ στεναγμῷ μου... ἐγενήθη ἡ καρδιά μου ὡσεὶ κηρὸς τηκόμενος... Ἐλέησόν με Κύριε ὅτι θλίβομαι... ἐξέλιπεν ἐν ὀδύνῃ ἡ ζωὴ μου*

καὶ τὰ ἔτη μου ἔν στεναγμοῖς... ἐπελήσθην ὡσεὶ νεκρός... ἐγενήθη τὰ δάκρυά μου ἄρτος ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός... ἵνα τί περίλυπος εἶ, ἢ ψυχὴ, καὶ ἵνα τί συνταράσσεις με;»

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς δημιουργίας, ἀλλὰ τὸ στεφάνι του εἶναι ἀπὸ ἀγκάθια. Ἡ πορεία του εἶναι ἄλλοτε τραγοῦδι καὶ συμφωνία χαρᾶς, τίς περισσότερες ὁμως φορὲς εἶναι ἓνα θλιβερὸ καὶ ἀσταμάτητο πένθιμο ἔμβατήριον.

Μεγάλο καὶ αἰώνιο τὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ πόνου. Τὸ μελέτησαν φιλόσοφοι καὶ κοινωνιολόγοι καὶ ψυχολόγοι καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί. Τὴν αὐθεντικότερη ὡστόσο ἀπάντηση τὴ δίνει ὁ χριστιανισμός, ἡ πίστις, ὁ νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ ἡ ἀπάντηση εἶναι διπλή. Θεολογικὰ εἶναι συνέπεια τῆς πτώσεως, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ κακά. Εἶναι ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς κακῆς χρήσεως τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Εἶναι καρπὸς τῆς παρακοῆς. Ἠθικὰ εἶναι εὐκαιρία καὶ μέσον ἀρετῆς καὶ τελειώσεως.

Θὰ σέβομαι πάντα τὸν Θεὸ—λέγει ὁ Θεολόγος. Γρηγόριος—ὅσα ἐναντία καὶ ἂν ἐπιτρέπη νὰ μὲ βροῦν. Ὁ πόνος γιὰ μένα εἶναι φάρμακο σωτηρίας. Ὁ δὲ μέγας Βασίλειος λέγει: «*Ἐφ' ὅσον μᾶς ἐτοιμάζει ὁ Θεὸς τὸ στεφάνι τῆς βασιλείας Του, ἀφορμὴ γιὰ ἀρετὴ ἅς γίνει ἢ ἀσθένεια*». Οἱ θλίψεις θὰ πῆ καὶ ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος μᾶς φέρνουν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. Καὶ ὅταν σκεφτόμαστε τὸ αἰώνιο κέρδος τῶν θλίψεων δὲν θὰ στεναχωριόμαστε.

Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὁ ὅσο διωγμένος καὶ πονεμένος καὶ κατάστικτος ἀπὸ τὰ «*στίγματα τοῦ Κυρίου*», διδάσκει ὅτι, ὁ Θεὸς ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ πονέσει μὲ τίς θλίψεις, «*ἐπὶ τὸ συμφέρον, εἰς τὸ μεταλαβεῖν τῆς ἀγιότητος αὐτοῦ*».

Χιλιάδες τρόπους ἔχει ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ νὰ σὲ κάμει νὰ ἰδεῖς τὴν ἀγάπη Του. Ὁ Χριστὸς μπορεῖ νὰ μετατρέψει τὴν δυστυχία, σὲ μελωδικὸ δοξολογητικὸ τραγοῦδι. «*Ἡ λύπη ὑμῶν εἰς χαρὰν γενήσεται*» εἶπε ὁ Κύριος.

Τέτοια μάχη, τέτοια νίκη. **Στὴν ἀγορὰ τ' οὐρανοῦ δὲν ὑπάρχουν φτηνὰ πράγματα.** Οἱ στιγμὲς τοῦ πόνου καὶ τῆς θυσίας εἶναι στιγμὲς εὐλογίας. Κοντὰ σὲ κάθε σταυρὸ, εἶναι καὶ μιὰ ἀνάσταση. Τί κι' ἂν τώρα πονᾶμε καὶ κλαῖμε ἀσταμάτητα; «*Τὸ γὰρ παραντίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρους δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν*», λέει ὁ Παῦλος.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ πόνου εἶναι ὁ ἄριστος ἀθλητῆς τῆς ζωῆς μὲ τίς ἔνδοξες νίκες. Ὁ ἀκριβοπληρωθεὶς μὲ τὰ αἰώνια βραβεῖα, «*ἂ ὀφθαλμὸς οὐκ εἶδε καὶ οὐς οὐκ ἤκουσε καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη, ἂ ἠτοίμασεν ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν*», λέει πρὸς Κορινθίους ὁ Παῦλος.

Ὅποιοι ἀτενίζουν καὶ ἀντιμετωπίζουν τὸν πόνον μὲ τὸ πρῶμα τῆς αἰωνιότητος, εἶναι ἤδη ἀπὸ τώρα νικητῆς.

Εἶναι ὁ ἐκλεκτὸς ποὺ μὲ τὴν ἀκατάβλητη πίστις στὸ Θεὸ ἔφθασε στὴν χαρὰ. Γεύτηκε τὴν χρηστότητα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ εἶναι ὑποψήφιος στεφανηφόρος. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπαναλάβει τοῦ Ἀπ. Παύλου τὴν νικηφόρα κραυγή: «*Τὸν ἀγῶνα τὸν καλὸν ἠγωνίσαι, τὸν δρόμον τετέλεκα, τὴν πίστιν τετήρηκα, λοιπὸν ἀπόκειται μοι ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης στέφανος, ὃν ἀποδώσει μοι ὁ Κύριος ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ*».

Μὲ τέτοιες μεταφυσικὲς διαστάσεις ἢ ὑπέρβαση τοῦ πόνου καὶ ἡ μεταμόρφωση τοῦ σὲ χαρὰ λυτρωτικὴ, εἶναι πραγματικότητα, εἶναι ἀλλοίωση ποὺ ὀφείλεται στὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εἶναι μετακαίνωση—παράλογο γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τοῦ ὀρθοῦ λόγου—φυσικὴ συνέπεια τῆς χριστιανικῆς πίστεως. Εἶναι γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τῆς πίστεως τὸ μέγα θαῦμα τῆς ἀλλοίωσης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ μεταφυσικὴ βίωση τοῦ πόνου ὀδηγεῖ στὴ λύση τοῦ μεγάλου προβλήματος. Ὅδηγεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ σκοτάδι στὸ φῶς.

Ὅφειλουμε λοιπὸν, ν' ἀποδεχόμαστε τὸν πόνον ποῦ μᾶς ἐπισκέπτεται, σὰν μιὰ εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸ σιτάρι συμπιέζεται καὶ λιώνει μέσα στὴ γῆ, ἀλλὰ τότε καρποφορεῖ τὴν ζωὴ. Πλούσια καὶ εὐλογημένη τοῦ πόνου ἢ συγκομιδὴ. Μεγάλῃ ἢ εὐλογίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἀγρὸ τῶν δακρῶν. Εὐλογία ποῦ τὴν βιώνουν ὅσοι μὲ τὸ χάρισμα τῆς διακρίσεως ἀληθινὰ πιστεύουν.

Εὐλογία Θεοῦ καὶ ἔλεος ὅσοι διήλθαν τὸ καμίνι τοῦ ποικίλου πόνου μὲ θεϊκὴ δύναμη καὶ ἐπίγνωση. Τοὺς περιμένει ἡ αἰώνια, ἡ ἀθάνατη, ἡ πανευτυχὴς ἀνάπαυσις ἐν τῷ Θεῷ. Ἀμήν.



Κάποιοι γέροντας πέθαινε καὶ μαζεύτηκαν πολλοὶ στὸ κρεβάτι του. Ἀνάμεσα σὲ αὐτοὺς ἦταν καὶ ἓνας ὁ ὁποῖος μία ὀλόκληρη ζωὴ δὲν δούλευε καὶ τοῦ ἔκλεβε τίς οἰκονομίες ἀπὸ τὰ ἐργόχειρα καὶ ἔτσι τρέφονταν.

Ὁ γέροντας ἤξερε, ὅτι αὐτὸς τοῦ κλέβει τὸ ψωμάκι καὶ τὸν ἰδρώτα του καὶ ἔλεγε στὸν ἑαυτόν του: «*Βάλε ζόρι, γιὰ νὰ ἐργάζεσαι γιὰ δύο!*».

Σὲ μία στιγμὴ ζήτησε ὁ γέροντας νὰ βγοῦνε ὅλοι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ δωμάτιό του καὶ κράτησε μόνο αὐτὸν τὸν κλέφτη. Ὁ κλέφτης ντράπηκε καὶ νόμιζε ὅτι θὰ τὸν ἀποκαλύψει καὶ θὰ τὸν ἐπιπλήξει. Ἐκπληκτὸς ὁμως βλέπει, νὰ παίρνει ὁ γέροντας τὰ χέρια του καὶ νὰ τὰ φιλάει καὶ νὰ τοῦ λέει:

- Εὐχαριστῶ αὐτὰ τὰ χέρια, νὰ μείνουν ἅγια, διότι μὲ στέλνουν σήμερα στὸν Χριστό!

Καὶ ξεψύχησε!

Ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς τέτοια ἀνεξικακία; Δὲν εἴμαστε ἀκόμα Χριστιανοί...

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος ὁ Ἱεροκῆρυξ

Οἱ Ἄγγελοι κατὰ τὴν Διδασκαλία τοῦ π. Ἰωάννη Ρωμανίδη

Πηγή: «Εμπειρική Δογματική τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατὰ τὶς προφορικές παραδόσεις τοῦ π. Ι. Ρωμανίδη» Τόμος Β'. Τοῦ σέβ. Μητρ. Ναυπάκτου καὶ ἀγ. Βλασίου Ἱεροθέου.

Οἱ θεοπτες, μετέχοντας τῆς φωτιστικῆς καὶ θεοποιοῦ ἐνεργείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλέπουν τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους Ἁγίους μέσα στὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διακρίνουν μιὰ ἄλλη διάσταση χρόνου.

Αὐτό, τὸ ὑψηλότερο ἐπίπεδο τοῦ χρόνου, τὸ ἀποκάλεσαν «αἰώνα» καὶ τὸ διέκριναν ἀπὸ τὸν αἰσθητὸ χρόνο τῆς δημιουργίας ποὺ ζοῦσαν, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν θεοπτικὴ ἐμπειρία, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ἀπρόσιτο Φῶς, στὸ ὁποῖο κατοικεῖ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποκάλεσαν «*αἶδιον*».

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος λέγει ὅτι αἰώνας εἶναι ὁ χρόνος ποὺ θὰ σταματήσει νὰ κινῆται, καὶ χρόνος εἶναι ὁ αἰώνας ποὺ μετράται κινούμενος.

Πάντως, ὁ αἰώνας εἶναι ἄλλο ἐπίπεδο τοῦ χρόνου, καὶ διακρίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ *αἶδιο*, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποδίδεται στὸν Θεό.

Μέσα στοὺς αἰώνες ζοῦν καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι, τὰ νοερά πνεύματα ποὺ δημιουργήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι καλοῦνται καὶ αὐτοὶ αἰώνες. Εἶναι



χαρακτηριστικὸ το χωρίο τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου: «*Ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκε κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰώνας ἐποίησεν*». (Ἐβρ. 1:2).

«Εἰς τοὺς αἰώνες εἶναι καὶ ὁ χρόνος τῶν ἀγγέλων, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι περιορισμένος ὁ Ἄγγελος ἀπὸ τὴν ὕλη. Ὅποτε, κινεῖται μέσα σὲ χρονικὰ διαστήματα, τὰ ὁποῖα δὲν ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὰ δικά μας».

«Ὁ ἄνθρωπος κάτι ὀλίγον συλλαμβάνει ἀπὸ τὸν χρόνο. Ἀπὸ τὸν αἰώνα τίποτε περίπου, ἐκτὸς ἂν φθάνη στὴν θέωση καὶ ἔχη διορατικότητα καὶ ὁ ἴδιος βλέπη ἕναν Ἄγγελο, ὅποτε ἔχει μιὰ ἐμπειρία τοῦ Ἀγγέλου».

Ἐφ' ὅσον οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἤλθαν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος στὸ εἶναι, σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουν ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶναι κτιστοί. Παράλληλα, στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὸν ἄκτιστο Ἄγγελο, τὸν Μεγάλῃς Βουλῆς Ἄγγελο, ποὺ εἶναι ὁ Λόγος, καὶ γιὰ τοὺς κτιστοὺς ἀγγέλους, τὰ δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

«Καὶ ὑπάρχει ἕνας ἐρμηνευτικὸς κανόνας, ποὺ τὸν ἐκφράζει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος σαφέστατα, ὅπου ὁ Ἄγγελος στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη λέγεται Θεὸς—διότι ὑπάρχουν ἄγγελοι καὶ ἄγγελοι, ὑπάρχουν καὶ κτιστοὶ ἄγγελοι. Ὅπου ὁ Ἄγγελος ποὺ ἐμφανίζεται στοὺς Προφῆτες λέγεται Θεός, αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός».

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος παρουσιάζει τὴν διαφορὰ μεταξὺ ἄκτιστου Λόγου καὶ κτιστῶν ἀγγέλων:

«Τίνι γὰρ εἶπε ποτὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων Υἱός μου εἰ σὺ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε, καὶ πάλιν ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν, ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν Οἰκουμένην, λέγει· καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι Θεοῦ, καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα, καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα· πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱὸν ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ Θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος· ράβδος εὐθύτητος, ἢ ράβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου· ἡγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέ σε ὁ Θεός, ὁ Θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιάσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου». (Ἐβρ. 1:5-9).

Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ κάθετα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρός, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι λειτουργικὰ καὶ διακονικὰ πνεύματα: «*πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἰρηκὲ ποτέ κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς*

σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου; οὐχὶ πάντες εἰσὶ λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν;» (Ἐβρ. 1:13-14).

Ὡς δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὕλικοι, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν λεπτότερη ὕλη ἀπὸ τὴν δική μας. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν λέγονται ἄϋλα ὄντα, γιατί ἄϋλος—Πνεῦμα εἶναι ὁ Θεός, ἀλλὰ χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰθέρια ὄντα».

«Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας λένε ὅτι ὄχι μόνο ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι σῶμα—ὕλικη ἢ ψυχὴ—ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι. Θυμάστε ἐκεῖνο τὸ περίφημο χωρίο τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, ποὺ λέει ὅτι ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὰ ὄρατὰ οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι ἀσώματοι; Γιατί λέμε ἀσώματος τοὺς ἀγγέλους; Διότι εἶναι ἀόρατοι, δηλαδή· ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὸν Θεὸ εἶναι παχεῖα ὕλη.

Λοιπόν, δὲν δέχονται οἱ Πατέρες ὅτι ὑπάρχουν ἄϋλα πράγματα· ὁ μόνος ἄϋλος καὶ φύσει ἀθάνατος εἶναι ὁ Θεός· οὔτε οἱ ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἡ ψυχὴ».

Ἡ κτιστότητα συνδέεται μὲ τὴν ὕλη καὶ τὸ θνητό. Μόνος κατὰ φύση ἄκτιστος, ἄϋλος καὶ ἀθάνατος εἶναι

ὁ Θεός, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι κατὰ φύσιν κτιστοί, ὑλικοὶ καὶ θνητοί.

«Οἱ Πατέρες ἐξηγοῦν ὅτι φύσει ἀθάνατος εἶναι μόνον ὁ Θεός, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι δὲν εἶναι φύσει ἀθάνατοι.

Ὅποτε, στοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὑπάρχει ἡ διδασκαλία ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὑλικά ὄντα τουλάχιστον συγκρινόμενοι μὲ τὸν Θεό, δὲν εἶναι καθαρὰ ἄυλα πνεύματα. Καὶ αὐτὸ βέβαια βασιζέται στὴν πατερικὴ διάκριση μεταξὺ κτιστοῦ καὶ ἀκτίστου. Τὸ μόνο φύσει ἀθάνατον εἶναι τὸ ἀκτιστό, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς ποὺ εἶναι ἀκτιστός».

Ἔτσι, οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι «φύσει θνητοὶ ἀλλὰ χάριτι ἀθάνατοι. Γιατί κάθε τί ποὺ ἔχει ἀρχὴ ἔχει καὶ τέλος. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι κάποτε οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ παύσουν νὰ ὑπάρχουν, ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς θέλησε νὰ παραμένουν ἀθάνατοι.

Ἀκόμη, οἱ ἄγγελοι λέγονται «νόες», γιατί ἔχουν νοερά ἐνέργεια, ὄχι ὅμως λογική. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει καὶ νοερά καὶ λογικὴ ἐνέργεια, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄγγελοι μόνον νοερά ἐνέργεια. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ περιλήψη τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ τὸ τελειότερο δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ προκειμένου νὰ σώσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ νὰ ἀγιάσῃ τὴν κτίση, προσέλαβε τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση καὶ ὄχι τὴν ἀγγελική.

«Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν λογικὴ ἐνέργεια, οἱ Πατέρες μιλοῦν γιὰ μιὰ νοερά ἐνέργεια. Καὶ ἔκαναν σαφὴ διάκριση καὶ λένε ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι μὲν εἶναι νόες, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν λόγους. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει λόγο καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι ἔχουν νόες. Ὅποτε, ἄλλο εἶναι ἡ νοερά ἐνέργεια, ἄλλο εἶναι ἡ λογικὴ ἐνέργεια. Γίνεται αὐτὴ ἡ συνεχῆς διαφοροποίηση στοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Ἄν θέλετε νὰ διητε, ἔτσι ἀπὸ κοντά, τὸ θέμα αὐτό, θὰ πρέπει νὰ διαβάσετε τὸν Διονύσιο τὸν Ἀρεοπαγίτη, ὁ ὁποῖος, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κάθε φορὰ ποὺ λέει «λόγο», λέει καὶ «νοῦ» καὶ κάθε φορὰ ποὺ λέει «νοῦ» λέει καὶ «λόγο». Βλέπει κανεὶς λόγο καὶ νοῦ νὰ συμβαδίζουν, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, τοὺς ὀνομάζει συνήθως νόες. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ νόες, νοερὲς δυνάμεις κ.ο.κ. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε λογικά ὄντα, ἀλλὰ εἴμεθα καὶ νοερά ὄντα, γιατί ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ δύο ἐμεῖς, ἐνῶ οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι μονοκόμματοι νόες».

Ἔπειτα, βασικὴ ἀρχὴ τῆς πατερικῆς διδασκαλίας εἶναι ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἀμετάβλητα ὄντα, γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τα ὄντα βρῖσκονται σὲ μιὰ κίνηση. Οὔτε στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ θὰ ὑπάρξῃ στασιμότητα.

«Ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος πιστεύει στὴν αἰώνια κίνηση, ὅτι ἡ τελειότητα εἶναι ἡ αἰώνια κίνηση. Τὴν στασιμότητα τὴν ἀποβάλλει. Πιστεύει στὴν τελειότητα, ποὺ ἀκόμα καὶ τὰ Χερουβεὶμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφεὶμ καὶ οἱ Κυριότητες καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄγγελοι, πάντα ἀπὸ δόξα σὲ δόξα καὶ

διαρκῶς εὐρίσκονται σὲ διαρκῆ ἀνοδικὴ πορεία, παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι εἶναι Θεοῦμενοι καὶ βλέπουν τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ γιὰ τὴν πλατωνικὴ παράδοση ἡ τελείωση εἶναι ἡ ἀκίνησις καὶ τὸ ἀμετάβλητο.

Ὅποτε, ἔχουμε τὸ ἀμετάβλητο στοὺς Ἑλληνες φιλοσόφους, ὡς τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τελειότητος. Ἐνῶ, στὸν κατ' ἐξοχὴν Ἑλληνίζοντα, διήθεν, φιλόσοφο Πατέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔχουμε τὴν ἀκίνησις, ὡς τὸ θεμέλιό τῆς Θεώσεως».

Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι, παρὰ τὴν συνεχῆ κίνηση, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ φθάσουν στὴν γνώση τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ γίνουν ἀκτιστοί. Τὴν οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ «οὔτε οἱ ἄγγελοι γνωρίζουν».



Φροντίστε νὰ Σωθεῖτε!

Μακαριστοῦ πατρὸς Ἀθανασίου Μυτιληναίου (+2006).

Βλέπει δὲ κανεὶς, τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια, συστηματικὰ νὰ ὑπάρχει αὐτὴ ἡ προσπάθεια νὰ προσβληθεῖ ἡ Ἐκκλησία!

Ἔσεῖς θὰ πιστεύατε ἀγαπητοί μου, ὅτι τυχαῖα μπαίνουν ἐπίσκοποι, οἱ ὁποῖοι προδίδουν τὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία; Ἐγὼ θὰ σᾶς ἔλεγα ὅτι δὲν μπαίνουν τυχαῖα, παρὰ σκοπίμως.

Εὐοδώνουν καὶ Πατριάρχες ἀκόμα αὐτὲς οἱ σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις γιὰ νὰ ἐξωθήσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, νὰ τὴν ἀλώσουν! Naί, οὔτε καινούργια πράγματα λέω, οὔτε πρωτοφανή. Λίγο πολὺ θὰ ἔχετε διαβάσει καὶ θὰ ξέρετε. Προωθοῦν σὲ μεγάλες θέσεις ἱερατικές, ἀνθρώπους ποὺ ξέρουν ὅτι θὰ τοὺς ἐπιβάλουν οἱ σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις τὴ θέλησή τους τελικὰ γιὰ νὰ προσβάλουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἡ μασονία ἔχει δουλέψει πάνω στὸ τομέα αὐτὸν φοβερὰ! Φοβερὰ ἔχει δουλέψει! Προσέβαλαν τὴν Ἐκκλησία ἐκ τῶν ἔσω. Ἔβαλαν ἀνθρώπους κατὰ καιροὺς νὰ διοικοῦν τὴν Ἐκκλησία ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν καμία σχέση μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία! Ἐδῶ εἶναι τὸ μέγα δυστύχημα καὶ σὰν συμπέρασμα θὰ σᾶς ἔλεγα αὐτό: Αὐτὴ τὴν στιγμὴ ὁ λαὸς ἂς φροντίσει νὰ ποιμαίνει τὸν ἑαυτό του, γιατί ἐμεῖς δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ σᾶς ποιμάνουμε! Λυποῦμαι ποὺ τὸ λέγω.

Φροντίστε νὰ σωθεῖτε! Φροντίστε νὰ σωθεῖτε!

Ἄρνησις τῆς Θείας Μοναδικότητος!

Διαπ' ἀνέχονται οἱ ἡγέται τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας τὰς βλασφημίας Πατρ. Βαρθολομαίου;

«Χριστιανική ΣΠΙΘΑ» ἀρ. φύλ. 777 Σεπτέμβριος – Ὀκτώβριος 2022, καὶ «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 30 Ἰανουαρίου, 2023.

Οἰκουμενικὸς πατριάρχης κ. Βαρθολομαῖος— ἀπὸ τὸ 1998 καὶ γυμνῆ τῇ κεφαλῇ—ἐξισώνει ἄνευ φόβου τὴν ἄμωμον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ Ἀλήθειαν καὶ Χάριν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ τὶς ἐπινοήσεις ἀνθρωπίνων διανοιῶν, τὶς δαιμονικῆς συμπιλήσεις τοῦ Μωάμεθ καὶ τὶς σατανικῆς ἐμ μονές καὶ παρερμηνεῖες τῶν καμπαλιστῶν Ἰουδαίων.

Πολλὰ θὰ μπορούσε κανεὶς νὰ σχολιάσῃ στὸ κείμενο αὐτό, ἀλλὰ θὰ χρειαζόταν ἄρθρο ὁλόκληρο. Τὴν τρομερὴ εὐθύνη τῶν δηλώσεων αὐτῶν ἀντιλαμβάνεται κάθε βαπτισμένος στὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος καὶ φωτιζόμενος ἀπὸ τὸ πανάγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἄρκει νὰ σκεφθῆ, ὅτι γιὰ τὴν ἀποκάλυψι καὶ προσφορὰ στὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος τῆς ἁμωμῆτου αὐτῆς Πίστεώς μας ἐνανθρώπησε καὶ ἐσταυρώθη ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ γιὰ τὴν παράδοσί της—ἀκεραίας καὶ ἀνοθεύτου—οἱ ἅγιοι ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ σεπτοὶ πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θυσίασαν τὰ πάντα. Γιὰ τὶς δηλώσεις αὐτῆς ἀναρτήθηκαν στὸ διαδίκτυο καὶ σχόλια ὅπως αὐτά: **«Μόνο ἓνας μασόνος ὑποστηρίζει τὴν σχετικότητα μὲ τόσο ἐκκωφαντικὸ τρόπο. Τί δὲν καταλαβαίνει, φίλε ἀναγνώστη».**

Τὴν ἀρχικὴ φρίκη, ποὺ δημιουργεῖται στὶς ψυχῆς τῶν πιστῶν μὲ αἰτία τὶς δαιμονόπνευστες αὐτῆς δηλώσεις, τὴ διαδέχεται ταχέως ἡ ἀγανάκτηση. Ναι, ἡ ἀγανάκτηση! Ἀγανάκτηση γιατί ἓνας κορυφαῖος ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἀξιωματοῦχος μὲ τὶς θέσεις ποὺ ἀνερευθρίαστα ὑποστηρίζει, ἐξυπηρετεῖ τὴ στοχοθεσία τοῦ σατανᾶ. Ἀγανάκτηση γιὰ τὴ στάση τῶν ἄλλων «προκαθημένων» ποὺ τὸν ἔχουν ἀφήσει ἀσύδοτο νὰ κακοποιεῖ βάνουσα τὴν ἀλήθεια ἀντὶ νὰ τὸν καταστήσουν κανονικῶς ὑπόδικο, ὅπως ἐπιβάλλεται ἀπὸ τὶς ἱεροκανονικῆς ἐπιταγές. Ἀγανάκτηση γιὰ τὴ στάση τῶν «νεοχωριτῶν», Ἑλλαδιτῶν μητροπολιτῶν ποὺ τὸν ὑποδέχονται μὲ τιμῆς καὶ τὸν ἐπαινοῦν σκανδαλωδῶς. Ἀγανάκτηση καὶ γιὰ κάποιες μονές τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους ποὺ ἔχουν καταστῆ ὑποχείρια τοῦ Φαναρίου.

Τί δὲ νὰ ποῦμε καὶ γιὰ κάποια ἱστολόγια καὶ «πρακτορεῖα ἐκκλησιαστικῶν εἰδήσεων» ποὺ τὸν λιβανίζουν μέρα-νύκτα; Ποῦ καταντήσαμε ἀλήθεια; Ποῦ μᾶς ἔχει ὀδηγήσει ἡ ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο Δόγμα καὶ ἡ ἐπάρατη σκοπιμότητα;

Νὰ ἀναφέρουμε πὼς κακόδοξοι μεγαλόσχημοι κληρικοὶ ὑπῆρχαν πάντα καὶ μάλιστα μεγάλοι αἰρεσιάρχες, ἀλλὰ ὅμως λειτουργοῦσε ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ αὐτοσυνειδησία. Ὑπῆρχαν ὁμολογητῆς ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ

ἡγέτες, οἱ ὅποιοι κινητοποιοῦνταν, ἤλεγχαν τοὺς αἰρετίζοντες ἐκκλησιαστικοὺς ἄνδρες καὶ ὅταν αὐτοὶ ἐνέμεναν στὴν αἵρεσή τους, τοὺς καθαιροῦσαν. Δυστυχῶς στὶς μέρες μας ἐξέλειπε αὐτὴ ἡ πρακτικὴ. Πατριάρχες, Ἀρχιεπίσκοποι, Ἐπίσκοποι καὶ λοιποὶ κληρικοὶ κακοδοξοῦν καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐνδιαφέρεται νὰ τοὺς ἐλέγξει, νὰ τοὺς συνφέρει καὶ νὰ τοὺς παραπέμψει γιὰ συνοδικὸ ἔλεγχο, πολλῶ δὲ μᾶλλον γιὰ καθαίρεση! Δυστυχῶς!



Ἡ Ἀπίστευτος Ὑποκρισία τοῦ Πατρ. Βαρθολομαίου

ΠΗΓΗ: «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 12 Φεβρουαρίου, 2023.

Εἶναι γνωστὸ πὼς ὁ νομιζόμενος «Πρῶτος ἄνευ ἰσῶν τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας» καὶ αἰσθανόμενος καὶ συμπεριφερόμενος ὡς «Πάπας τῆς Ἀνατολῆς», Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος, ὅπου πατεῖ καὶ ὅπου σταθεῖ «κατακεραυνώνει» τὴν εἰσβολὴ τῶν Ρώσων στὴν Οὐκρανία. Ἀλλὰ ὅμως, μιμούμενος τὴν ὑποκρισία τοῦ «ἀγαπητοῦ ἀδελφοῦ του» Φραγκίσκου, «ληημονεῖ» πὼς ὁ ἴδιος «εὐλόγησε» ἀνάλογη φονικὴ εἰσβολὴ τῶν Τούρκων στὴν Συρία, ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ τὰ χιλιάδες θύματα Σύρων, ποὺ προκάλεσαν οἱ «εἰρημιστῆς» τουρκαλάδες!

Ὁ διακεκριμένος Κύπριος διπλωμάτης κ. Σταῦρος Χατζηγιάννης ἔγραψε τὰ ἐξῆς ἐπ' αὐτοῦ: «Τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς παραδίδει μαθήματα διεθνoῦς δικαίου γιὰ τὴ ρωσικὴ εἰσβολὴ στὴν Οὐκρανία, θὰ θυμᾶστε, σίγουρα, ὅτι ὁ Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος εἶχε προκαλέσει θύελλα ἀντιδράσεων τῶν ἀπανταχοῦ Ἑλλήνων καὶ τὴν ἀπογοήτευση τῶν ὀρθόδοξων χριστιανῶν, ὅταν ὑποχρεώθηκε νὰ εὐλογήσῃ τὸν Πρόεδρο Erdogan καὶ τὸν τουρκικὸ στρατὸ πρὶν τὴν στρατιωτικὴ εἰσβολὴ τῆς Τουρκίας στὸ Afrin τῆς Συρίας, “προσευχόμενος νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦν σὲ ἐπιτυχία, καὶ ἡ “ἐπιχείρηση [δῆθεν] Κλάδος Ἐλαιᾶς” νὰ φέρει εἰρήνη στὴν περιοχὴ”, ὅπως ἔγραφε ὁ ἡμερήσιος Τύπος στὰ τέλη Ἰανουαρίου 2018» (Ἰστ. Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος)!

Γιὰ τὸν «εἰρημιστῆ» Βαρθολομαῖο, μόνον τὰ κανόνια τοῦ Πούτιν σκοτώνουν, ἐνῶ τὰ κανόνια τοῦ νεοσοιτᾶνου Ἐρντογάν ἐκπυρσοκροτοῦν ...εἰρήνη! Μόνον τὰ παιδιά τῶν Οὐκρανῶν «σκίζονται τὴν καρδιά» του, ὄχι ὅμως καὶ τὰ παιδιά τῶν δυστυχισμένων Σύρων καὶ Κούρδων, τὰ ὁποῖα διαμελίζονται ἀπὸ τὶς «εἰρημιστικῆς» βόμβες τῶν εἰσβολέων Τούρκων!

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH IN UKRAINE: HAVE WE LOST OUR COURAGE?

By Fr. Geoffrey Korz. Fr. Geoffrey is the priest at the All Saints of North America Church, OCA Archdiocese of Canada.

The world has witnessed over the last year a shocking military collision between Russia and Ukraine. Yet behind the military conflict is a spiritual conflict between the historic Orthodox Church which has existed in Ukraine for over a thousand years, and a new nationalist sect created by the patriarch of Constantinople in 2018.

The true shepherds of the Orthodox Church have always stood faithfully to defend the faithful, whether they were persecuted by pagan Rome, oppressed by the Ottoman Turks, or martyred by the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

Yet the same temptation—the temptation to silence because of fear, or a desire to maintain a position of prestige when faced with intimidation from enemies of Christ’s Church—remains the evil one’s greatest tool against the Church today as much as it was in centuries past.

Perhaps the last few years have softened up our will, making it harder for Orthodox Christians to stand during times of persecution. Perhaps one should not be surprised when state-sponsored soldiers in the Ukrainian capital seize churches and monasteries, assault priests and monks of the canonical Orthodox Church, and forcibly install the members of the new nationalist sect in the holy places. Perhaps nothing should surprise us in a time of war.

Yet for those Orthodox Christians blessed to live outside the war zone, who say they seek to preserve the communion of the Orthodox Church from the safety of their homelands, silence is uncharacteristic of a Christian.

A few years of forced silence under state-imposed restrictions on basic liberties has made too many Orthodox Christian laity and bishops willing to forget the lessons of totalitarianism. The temptation to popularity with our elites is too great for many in the Church, and it makes some do things they should not do.

Over the last three years, we have seen bishops who would stand with Marxists, in order to gain praise as leaders in racial reconciliation—knowing all the time these same activists are attacking our faith and its teachings, and burning our neighborhoods.

This is the price of popularity with the world, when we sacrifice our brethren in Christ.

We have seen bishops who have forbidden their priests from defending the jobs of their faithful—instead siding with state medical authorities, and costing thousands of Orthodox Christians their livelihoods.

This is the price of popularity with the world, when we sacrifice our brethren in Christ.

We have even seen an Orthodox bishop—may God spare him—publicly defend the right of a mother to kill her unborn child, putting to death his own conscience in the process, and leading to the abyss the consciences of those in his spiritual care.

This is the price of popularity with the world, when we sacrifice our brethren in Christ.

Now, should it surprise us, when confronted with the persecuted canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine, that such compromised consciences might be faced with a dilemma? It is at times such as these that Christ is calling us to shake off our silence, even in the light of past mistakes, and to raise our voices—in person or in writing—in defense of those in the Church in Ukraine, who are being oppressed by fraudsters disguised as clergy, by a fraudulent sect

created by an ambitious patriarch with papal ambitions.

What can our bishops and priests do at a time like this?

Firstly, they can direct each parish to serve formal prayers at each Liturgy for the deliverance of the canonical Church—not merely euphemistic “prayers for peace,” which any stranger could utter, but the prayers of true Orthodox brethren, for the deliverance of the suffering flock of Christ in the canonical Church in Ukraine now being torn apart by wolves clothed as sheep.

Secondly, they can make pilgrimage—personally, and prepared to make their case—to the halls of political power, and lay the case for the religious freedom of the Orthodox Christians in Ukraine before those who now support the



regime that is persecuting the Church, as well as those who have the power to call publicly to help them. This carries with it many risks—not unlike the risks faces by the saints of the early Church. Those who are real men will decide if they will stand, with God’s help, or run away.

Thirdly, they can cease commemoration and liturgical co-celebration with those sectarians in the West who aid the wolves persecuting the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, who channel funds to them, or who commune with them at the Holy Table. Well must we remember the words of the Apostle Paul, who reminds us to *be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?* (2 Cor 6:14).

The land war in Eastern Europe is the business of politicians and generals: it is a battle that is not the primary responsibility of the Church, for which we **must minister to all involved**. The spiritual war against the canonical Orthodox Church—the attacks on priests and faithful, the ransacking of holy monasteries, the introduction of laws banning our Orthodox Christian faith—these are the business of the Church and its shepherds. The shepherds must see to this business, and not be cowed into further silence.

Our bishops and priests can find their voices for all sorts of matters which appeal to the chattering classes. It is time for us to find our courage to be men, even when the chattering classes might be against us, just as they are against Our Lord.

It is the business of the bishops (and by extension, the priests)—indeed, the very calling of the clergy by God—to say to the wolves surrounding the Church as did the new bishop of the Diocese of Kirovograd did in recent days, Look at the icon of Christ, and tell Him that you are banning His Church.

The shepherd’s staff is carried by each bishop to defend the flock—the Church Fathers remind us that this is the symbol of the authority to fight off the wolves attacking the Church. Such responsibility also extends to each member of the priesthood, to be exercised against the falsehoods spoken by those who would draw the faithful out of the canonical Orthodox Church.

Saint Gregory Palamas reminds us that the silence of the clergy is atheism. The bishops and the priests in the rest of the world must now speak for the persecuted Orthodox Church in Ukraine, now suffering at the hands of the Ukrainian state at the behest of a schismatic sect. It is a failure of our vocation in the priesthood to do any less.



When someone wishes to render evil for evil, he can injure his brother’s soul even by a single nod of the head.

Abba Isaiah

A HUMBLE MONK EXPLAINED THE UNCREATED LIGHT TO ME

By the blessed Metropolitan Neophytos of Morfou (Cyprus).



Even today there are God’s people—holy people. They feel and see God, and hear the voice of Christ in their hearts. Of course, this is only when their hearts are cleansed by the Holy Spirit.

By the grace of God, I was vouchsafed to meet some of these saints, in Cyprus and other places. I will tell you about one of them.

He is a monk. A humble monk. A crucified monk. I knew him before I became a monk myself. We are the same age, but he showed diligence and spiritually blossomed. I ascended to the episcopal throne, but he descended to Christ’s humility, to extreme humility. Only there does the Lord reveal Himself. And he described to me how he saw the Uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity. But I was ignorant then and could not understand him, so he said to me:

“Despota, to understand what the Light of Christ is like, imagine some people diving in the water, or rather, swimming and diving there, in the depths of the sea. They feel the waters of the depths embracing them, engulfing them, and enveloping them. They feel like they are swimming in the boundless waters of the sea. This is similar to the Divine Light, when a man is accounted worthy to enter into it. It is an endless, infinite light, having no beginning. As the Lord has neither beginning nor end, so His Light. When a man enters into this Light, he feels with his entire body how the Light embraces and envelops him.”

But how can you swim in this light?! How can you enter into it and move around in it?!

And he answered:

“This Light is filled with information. You can ask this Light different questions and it will answer them—questions of an experiential, scientific, ethical, religious, spiritual nature. And you will be filled with such answers that your mind cannot comprehend, that your mouth cannot speak; your mouth cannot pronounce them. But little by little, they are felt, understood, and perceived by the heart....

I was impressed by what he said; he added:

“Both knowing God and beholding the Light happen gradually.”

Likewise, there is no end to spiritual growth, neither in this life nor in life after death. That is why the Creed says *Whose Kingdom shall have no end*.

THE HOLY LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

Adapted from a series of various Orthodox articles.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the most beautiful and meaningful liturgies in the Orthodox Church. It may be characterized, without exaggeration, as the heart, the center of the Great Lent services. In some ancient manuscripts of the service books, it is known as the “Liturgy of the Great Quadragesima.” [*Quadragesima* is the term utilized by the Orthodox Christians of the pre-Schism West to denote the 40-day pre-Paschal season of preparation by fasting and prayer, i.e., the Great Lent, *Ed.*] In fact, it is the service which best typifies this sacred time of the year.

The essence of this service is revealed in its very name: It is the *Liturgy of Gifts Presanctified*. This distinguishes it from the liturgies of St. Basil the Great and of St. John Chrysostom, in which the Eucharist, the offering and sanctification of the Gifts, takes place during the liturgy itself.

During this *Liturgy of the Great Quadragesima* we are offered the Holy Gifts “presanctified,” i.e. already sanctified at a liturgy served on a previous day. These Holy Gifts are offered to us that we might have the opportunity to commune of them and be sanctified by them. In other words, the Liturgy



of the Presanctified Gifts is essentially not a “liturgy” in the sense of the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom or St. Basil the Great, but is rather a special rite of Communion.

The joyousness which accompanies the performance of the divine liturgies of St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom was regarded by the early Church as not suitable for the penitential season of the Great Fast. For this reason, the Synod in Laodicea (363 AD) forbade the performance of the divine liturgies during the Great Lent, except on Saturday, Sunday, the Feast of the Annunciation, and Holy Thursday.

In order to understand why a rite of Communion of presanctified Holy Gifts came into being, one must consider its history. Its roots lie in the ancient practice of the Church. In the early centuries of Christian history, the faithful approached to receive the Holy Gifts at each liturgy. It was even a practice among the faithful, when there was no weekday liturgy, that they would privately commune of the Holy Gifts left over from the Sunday liturgy.

As St. Basil the Great states, the faithful of that time were used to receiving Communion not only on Saturdays and Sundays, but also at least twice during the week—on Wednesdays and Fridays. Therefore, the question arose: How could they commune outside the liturgy? The answer had already been provided: They could commune of the Holy Gifts sanctified at one of the earlier liturgies.

In those days, fasting meant complete abstinence from food until sunset, and Communion of the Holy Gifts was the crown, the end, of the Lenten day. For this reason, on those weekdays, it took place after Vespers.

On this foundation, a special rite of prayer crystallized within the monasteries: All of the monastics would pray together before Communion, and afterwards, together they would thank God, Who had enabled them to be Communicants of the Holy Mysteries. This would be done either after Vespers or after the ninth hour (about 3:00 pm).

In time, this rule of prayer took on the form of a short service, somewhat similar to the rite of the liturgy. Thus developed what we now call the *Order of the Typica*, in contemporary practice served after the Sixth and Ninth Hours. The very name *Typica* points to the fact that, in some measure, this short service typifies the liturgy. It is in this sense a precursor to our Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

The full rite of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts consists of Vespers, at the conclusion of which the Holy, Presanctified Gifts are offered, and the prayers before Communion are read. Communion itself takes place, and is followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

The service’s connection to Great Lent is reflected in its special “mournful” character. The Altar Table and sacred vessels containing the Holy Gifts are covered with dark-colored vestments. Prayers are read with a sense of humility and tenderness. Overall, the entire service is marked by a special sense of mystery.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was first documented by St. Gregory Dialogos of Rome, a sixth-century pope. At one time it was supposed that he alone had composed the liturgy himself, but now it is generally supposed that he simply recorded what was otherwise being practiced at Constantinople. In the Presanctified liturgy itself, he is still commemorated as its traditional author. The present service, however, is likely the inspired liturgical creation of Christian Byzantium.

This liturgy is also mentioned in the Canons of the Quinisext Council, of 692: *On all days of the holy fast of Great Lent, except on the Sabbath (i.e. Saturday), and the Lord's Day (i.e. Sunday) and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is to be served.* (Canon 52, Quinisext Council, 692 AD).

In parishes, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is usually served on Wednesday and Friday evenings (although some parishes may celebrate it on only one of these days). It comes in the evening after a day of spiritual preparation and total abstinence. The faithful who are unable to make the effort of total fasting because of weakness or work, however, normally eat a light Lenten meal in the early morning.

As aforementioned, the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts consists of Vespers, with special prayers together with a portion of the divine liturgy, omitting its most important part, the consecration of the Holy Gifts; and the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours (with the typical psalms) are used in a particular manner at the beginning.

The Sacred Elements, consecrated at the divine liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays, are preserved on the holy Altar in the tabernacle. During the psalms of Vespers, the Presanctified Gifts are prepared for communion. The priest places the Gifts on the *diskos* with prayer and incensing after the Great Litany, during the chanting of the psalms (*kathisma*). He carries them in solemn procession around the back of the Altar, and to the Table of Oblation.

The evening psalm, *Lord I call upon You*, is then chanted with the special hymns for the day. This is followed with the evening entrance, the hymn *Gladsome Light*, and two Biblical readings; from Genesis and from Proverbs. The Bible readings are punctuated by the priest blessing the faithful with the censer and a lighted candle proclaiming *The Light of Christ illumines all*. This blessing symbolizes the light of Christ's Resurrection, which illumines the Old Testament Scriptures and the entire life of mankind. This is the very Light with which Christians are illuminated in the life of the Church through Holy Baptism.

The Prayer of St. Ephraim is read after the chanting of the evening psalm *Let my prayer rise in Your sight as incense*. The augmented litany is chanted, and the Presanctified Gifts are brought solemnly to the altar table. This is when the following special entrance hymn is chanted: *Now the powers of heaven do serve invisibly with us... Lo the King of Glory enters... Lo, the mystical sacrifice is upborne, fulfilled... Let us draw near in faith and love, and become communicants of life eternal... Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.*

The Prayer of St. Ephraim is read again, accompanied with a litany and a special prayer before Holy Communion. *Our Father Who art in heaven ...* is chanted and the faithful receive Holy Communion to the chanting of: *O taste and see that the Lord is good. Alleluia.*

The communicants *depart in peace* with thanksgiving to God for His Coming. The special dismissal prayer asks God for a successful fulfillment of Lent and to worthily celebrate the Great Feast of Pascha—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Almighty Lord ... Who has brought us to these all-holy days for the purification of the soul and body, for the controlling of carnal passions ... and the hope of the Resurrection ... enable us to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the Fast, to preserve inviolate the Faith ... to be accounted victors over sin ... and uncondemned, to attain unto and to adore Thy Holy Resurrection...

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the great masterpieces of Orthodox piety and liturgical creativity. It reveals the central Christian doctrine and experience in its form and content; namely that our life must be spent in prayer and fasting in order to be in communion with Christ who will come like 'a thief in the night'.

It tells us that all of our life, and not only on fast periods, is completed with the Presence of the Victorious Christ who is risen from the dead. It witnesses to the fact that Christ will come at the end of the ages to judge the living and the dead, and to establish God's Kingdom *of which there shall be no end*. It tells us that we must be ready for His arrival, and to be found watching and serving; in order to be worthy to *enter into the joy of the Lord*.



Since we have pride—whether apparent or hidden without realizing it—God, desiring to purify us from this stinking condition, raises a storm in order to cast out all the “dregs” which have accumulated mainly in a time of spiritual negligence.

All kinds of rubbish and refuse are thrown into the sea, especially in the harbor, and if there were no storms, the sea would become a source of pestilence. But the fact that the sea is pure and wholesome is due to the occasional storms.

Spiritually, the same thing happens with our soul: with the sea of our soul. Refuse accumulates little by little from our various passions and careless deeds, and the devil throws in his own trash, too. We do not see how much refuse has accumulated. God knows, however, and since He wants to purify us, He stirs up storms in proportion to the accumulation of refuse, and thus He purifies the sea of our soul. Sometimes, after we pass through a temptation with patience, we see that our soul is calmed, joyful, and light as air. On our part, we must be careful not to accumulate refuse, so that storms of corresponding magnitude do not become necessary.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

THE CHALLENGES OF MODERN CHILDRAISING

By Irina Medvedeva.

One needs not be a child psychologist to see how many hardships modern parents have and what a deplorable state modern children are in; how messed up, aggressive and irresponsible they are; how outright disrespectful to their elders they are; how, while displaying utter indifference to masterpieces of art and literature, they avidly devour the youth subculture, which in the West is dubbed “the rock-sex-and-drugs culture”; how they sometimes absurdly combine Neanderthal ignorance with peremptoriness and aplomb; how they are preoccupied with money, financial security and the attributes of material success. But perhaps the most deplorable thing is the sense of fatality and doom that, due to the abnormalities of the younger generation, adults are seized with. They say, “Nothing can be done about it—such are the times, the circumstances and our children... We strain every nerve to provide them with a decent living. Where can we get the energy to bring them up?”

Sixteen centuries ago, St. John Chrysostom instructed parents who were preoccupied with their children’s material well-being: “Many fathers often do everything in their power to enable their sons to have a good horse, a splendid house or an expensive estate, but they do not take any care at all so that he would have a good soul. This upsets the whole universe.”

Note that the great teacher of the Church was not afraid to give the issue of poor upbringing universal scope. And by no means for the sake of a witty remark! Will the universe be able to exist normally, will “life” be able to “reign” (using an expression from his Paschal sermon) if hundreds of millions of promiscuous children grow up and become dehumanized, animal-like adults?

“Thus, you should not be concerned about making your children rich in silver and gold and the like, but that they should be richer than all in piety, love of wisdom and other virtues, and that they would not need much,” he says in the same talk.

These words (as Christian ethics in general) clearly refute the current ideology of consumerism, which least of

all contributes to the cultivation of virtue and is aimed at ensuring that people from the most tender age should have many needs and as they grow older they will have more and more—that is, the thirst for material blessings, pleasures and comfort should flare up so that tomorrow they would crave what they did not even think about today—and so on ad infinitum. Or, rather, till death.

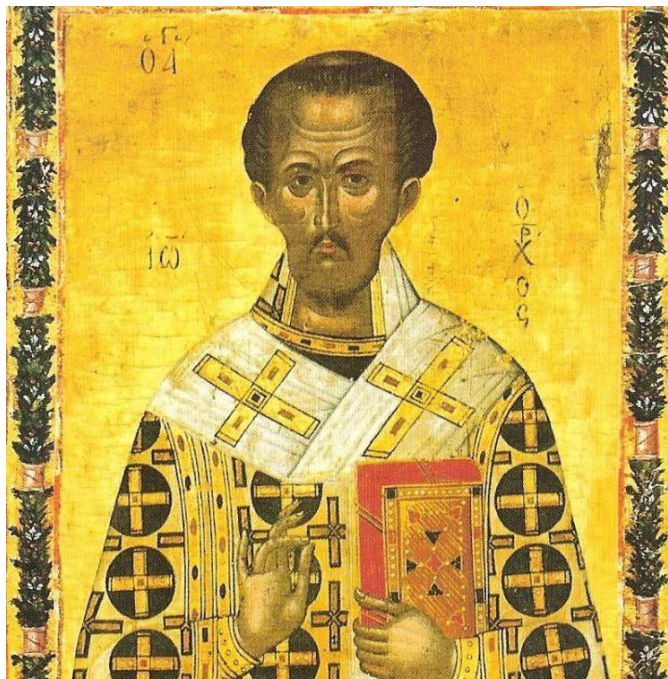
But no matter what pernicious ideology dominated in this or that period of history, St. John Chrysostom argues that parents are first and foremost responsible for the upbringing of their children: “God will say: ‘Didn’t I give you your son from the very beginning? Didn’t I assign you to him as a teacher, a guide, a care-giver and a leader? Didn’t I entrust you with all power over him? What excuse will you have if

you ignore his disobedience? What will you say? That he is unruly and stubborn? But this should have been taken care of at the beginning, when he was capable of being restrained and very young; and you should have restrained him thoroughly, inculcating proper things in him, reforming him and punishing his mental digressions. That is why the Book of Sirach says: *Hast thou children? Instruct them, and bow down their neck from their youth.* (Sir 7:23).”

Further, St. John Chrysostom cites an example from the Old Testament—about Eli the priest, whom the Lord

punished for insufficient strictness with his adult (!) sons. This instruction is very relevant for modern parents who are afraid of bringing up even very young children strictly because the so-called “non-directive parenting” is now in vogue.

“This priest had two sons who had given themselves over to every vice. The father did not concern himself with this and paid little attention, or if their depravity, having reached the limit, forced him to reproach them, he did it without the necessary fervor and authority. He should have punished them severely, thrown them out of his presence... But he limited himself to giving them a form of admonition... No, this demanded not an admonition, but a strong lesson, severe torments, a treatment as strong as the evil. He should have used fear to root their young hearts out of this blindness. **The fathers who do not take care to give their children a Christian upbringing are murderers of their own children.** Who should Eli blame for his son’s death? Himself.



True, the enemy's sword slew them, but the neglect of their false father directed the blow. Abandoned by heavenly help, they appeared naked against the arrows of the Philistines. The father destroyed himself and them.

“Meanwhile, we see the same thing before ourselves daily. How many parents there are who do not want to take upon themselves this labor of correcting their unsubmitive and unruly children! They are as if afraid to upset their children by reigning in with stern words the vicious tendencies to which they have submitted themselves. What is the outcome? Their disorder increases; their impunity leads them to criminal offenses; they are brought to trial; and the wretches die at the hands of the executioner. You refused your personal rights over them and committed them to the severity of civil punishment, and human justice wielded its harsh rights over them. You are afraid to humiliate them with some light punishment in your presence; but what horrible dishonor shall befall you when your son is no longer around... Since we do not take care of our children, we expose them to great disasters and often plunge them into the abyss.”

There is nothing new under the sun! From the above quotation it becomes clear that there were supporters of “non-directive parenting” in the fourth century as well.

Judging by the following quotation, there were also such parents who, just like modern ones, declined all responsibility for bringing up their children, referring to the senselessness and futility of child raising efforts.

“Do not tell me that you cannot restrain youth... All vices come from our neglect, because we do not teach piety to our children from the very beginning or from an early age. We often allow them to attend spectacles, but we care little whether they go to church.”

Now we often hear from Orthodox parents that they are afraid to make their children go to church, saying that thus they can turn them away from church forever. But if you do not accustom your children to go to church, will they come themselves? Who knows whether they will come or not. And if they do not come, what force in today's reality will protect them from moral corruption? St. John Chrysostom was especially harsh towards fathers who neglected the upbringing of their sons. It is hard to imagine what accusations he would have brought down on modern fathers!

“How dare you call yourself a father, betraying your son and disregarding him being corrupted with all vices?”

And then he gives a strong and harsh metaphor: “If you saw some runaway slave beating your child, wouldn't you get annoyed, angry and indignant, beating the attacker more ferociously than a wild beast does? And seeing the devil strike him every day and the demons luring him into sin, you do not worry and take your son away from the most ferocious beast.”

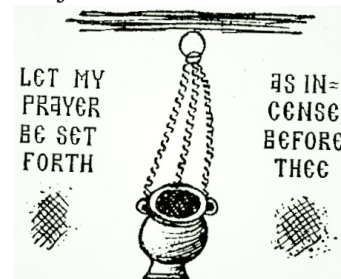
Nowadays raising children in fear is very unpopular. They say that in no case should children be frightened by any punishment, and even more so by Divine punishment. St. John Chrysostom adhered to the opposite opinion.

“If fear were not a blessing, fathers would not appoint supervisors for their children, nor legislators—chiefs for cities. Nothing destroys sin and makes virtue grow and flourish as much as incessant fear. Therefore, if you do not live in fear, it is impossible for you to be virtuous... If fear were not good, Christ would not have given many and lengthy instructions about the punishment and torment in the afterworld. Fear is nothing but a rampart and a protection.”

I hope that these few quotes from talks by St. John Chrysostom concerning child raising show the enduring relevance of his clear, figurative, and most importantly, truthful instructions. After all, we have no idea what to do with our children because we ourselves are more entangled in various educational “innovations” than the children. So is it worth buying yet another handbook on “how to raise a child properly?” Would it not be better to get wise and read what the great father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, said about childraising?

St. Philaret of Moscow, who incidentally was called the “Russian Chrysostom,” had a brilliant saying: “Christ is eternal news.” The same can be said about the wondrous Holy Hierarch of Constantinople.

In conclusion, there is one more call to us, parents of the twenty-first century: *“Even if our whole lives are prosperous, we will be punished severely unless we care about the salvation of our children. Children are not a random acquisition. We are responsible for their salvation.”*



If you love God genuinely and you also persevere in His love (cf. Jn. 15:9-10), you will never be dominated by any passion, nor will you be reduced to subjection by any necessity of the body. For since the body cannot be moved to anything apart from the soul, so the soul that is united to God by love cannot be led astray to the pleasures and cravings of the body, nor indeed to any other desires of anything visible or invisible, whether desire or passion. For by the sweet love of God the impulse of its heart or, rather, the whole inclination of its will is bound. When once it has been bound to its Maker, how can it be inflamed by the body or in any way fulfill its own desires? In no way!

St. Symeon the New Theologian

A STORY ABOUT HOLINESS

By Elena Kucherenko.

A lot of us assume that holiness is something that happened long ago, in the distant past. Frankly, I also happen to think this way. Anytime I read about the lives of the saints, sure, I do believe everything I am reading, but once in a while, a passing thought would cross my mind: “Of course... People lived differently at the time. They weren’t exposed to all that filth, all-encompassing sin, and that consumerism. That’s why the earth was still able to produce such great ascetics. They were lucky... As for us, the people of modernity... What about us? We’ve got nothing but a load of indecencies. There’s nothing good left to generate saints.”

And then I go back to reading. But I also regret that we happened to be born in time when there is no longer room left for holiness.

Yet, *the Spirit bloweth where it listeth*. A well-worn phrase, but true. And Christ is always One and the Same. Born in the manger, He walks the earth and dies on the Cross. In our times! He touches the people’s hearts, and they in become open up to Him. And then suddenly a faint spark of holiness lights up the horizon in the midst of complete darkness. Or it could even be a fire! And then you understand that everything depends on us, not the times. And so, you send thanks to God...

† † †

I heard this story not long ago...

I stopped by a church to see someone who works there and against all odds, I happened to sit at a table in the refectory with the church’s rector, a well-known and respected priest.

I felt somewhat ill at ease, being out of my element, but batiushka happened to be kind and unfussy. As a result, I finally felt at ease, and we ended up talking about one thing and another. The current political situation, the people we both knew here and there, about believers in general. It just so happened that our conversation smoothly segued to the topic of holiness in the modern world.

“I was still a very young priest at the time,” the rector began his story. “I ended up at some monastery. Soon enough, one monk caught my interest. It looked as if he exuded light. Advanced in years, he would always try to help others, doing simple assignments or warmly talking to people. You instantly sensed his warmth and longed to stay next to him for a while.

The future rector, once he had the chance, asked the abbot who this man was.

“Oh! This is a man of a wondrous and truly complicated fate,” was the answer. “He is no longer serving, in retirement... But long ago...”

Long ago, he was a simple hieromonk. At least, that is what everyone thought of him, a simple hieromonk. He served, heard confessions, gave communion, and probably sermons, too. Until one day, a woman carrying a nursing daughter came

to see his ecclesiastical superiors. She announced that this young hieromonk had fathered her baby, that he had seduced her and he should now “come and take his offspring.”

They sent for that monk... He was very surprised and tried to vindicate himself saying that he bears no relation to this woman or her daughter. But she kept insisting. And at some point, the accused said: “Alright. If the Lord sends me this cross, I will take it up. She’s my daughter!”

Naturally he was defrocked and forced to leave the monastery; he found some secular job... He took care of the girl, nurturing and loving her. And the child loved him in return. She grew up a devout Christian and upon reaching adulthood she entered a monastery herself. While he kept on living as before...

But then, many years later, the church authorities found him and summoned him again. As it turned out, that woman who had given up her child visited them one more time. She had grown old and weak. Suffering from cancer, she was to die soon. So, she came to repent and announced that she maligned an innocent man. He was not her child’s father!

He was restored in his priestly rank. But he went into retirement soon afterwards. He spent the latter years of his life in peace and all humility, living in his monastery, giving thanks to God and bestowing all his love and faith upon people. He had so much love and faith that he was able to forgive the slander, accept that woman’s child and bring her up as if she were his own. He consented and made peace with everything that the Lord handed down to him. He accepted it all as His holy will, like Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his own son to God. But he offered up his ministry and his own life as a sacrifice to Him.

† † †

The rector finished. We sat there in silence. What else can you add? The saints walk in our midst, even though this happened some time ago. Quite possibly this monk is no longer alive. But he is up there, in Heaven. And I believe that there are others who are like him, and they still live today. And such hearts as his still go on beating.



Oh my soul, fear the passions of the Sanhedrin! No matter how terribly criminal they are, they are not far from the weak human heart. If you are not attentive to yourself, if you do not begin to watch over your feelings and desires, if you do not set the fear of God as a watch over your heart— you will not notice how the light of Truth grows dim in you, how the oil of sacred love for God and neighbor begins to grow scant in the vessel of your heart, and how the waves of the passions drag the boat of your life into the sea of vanity, into the abyss of sins and Hell.

St. Philaret of Chernigov

EVE OF DESTRUCTION: PRESERVING THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH

By John Lee, from "Orthodox Reflections," September 28, 2021. This is an older article yet extremely applicable to events we observe today.

The Shouting Signs of the Times

Having been aware of the effort for a one world government for well over forty years, it's disconcerting—down right disturbing—to actually see the things predicted for decades starting to take shape. During the 1970's, one of the most respected Protestant missionaries at the time, Willard Cantalon, pioneered the use of film making for promoting world missions. He filmed missions in action and brought the footage to the donors. As a film producer with wide experience, it was probably inevitable for him to investigate what has now been dubbed "the New World Order." His work introduced me to the men behind the curtain.

His book, "The Day the Dollar Dies," still sits on my bookshelf, the spine disintegrated, most pages loose (Copyright 1973: the year I graduated from high school). In the denomination I was in, Cantalon often made the preaching circuit. The few times I heard him speak in person, I was very impressed with the quality of his character, the sincerity of his delivery, and his stories of world missions. He was truly a missionary at heart. But he always spoke on the subject of the world banking system and its final goal of world control on every level. Most of the intricacies of the world banking system blew past me, simple-minded as I am. But his overall warning was very clear. Using Economics, the primordial evil was seeking to overthrow everything of God on Earth. A day was coming when no one could buy or sell without the mark.

With Cantalon's portends always in the back of my head, the growth of global organizations (EU, NAFTA, WTO, global charities / NGOs, United Nations, etc.) seemed to demonstrate the ongoing development of this one-world paradigm. Every step of the way, I could see these hidden powers increasing their control of individual nations using money as a means to enslave. The Greek debt crisis is just one example of how a nation in economic distress can be transformed politically. This is happening everywhere now in a post-lockdown world plunged into poverty and dependent on subsidies.

Cantalon was not alone in seeing the signs. During that generation, many preachers, authors, and even film makers took note and for a time, eschatology became a fad. Movies were made: *A Thief in the Night*, *A Distant Thunder*, and others. These were very popular. The "Jesus Movement" was salted with warnings about the coming Anti-Christ. While this movement had many excesses, and probably even more than a few grifters, it molded my thinking about world events

in relation to Scripture. In Bible College, I took a class titled, "Daniel and Revelation" exploring the "colossus" of world powers that in the end is destroyed by the "*Stone cut without hands*" that smashes the feet. [In Orthodoxy, the mountain from which the "Stone" was cut without hands (a man's activation) is the Holy Virgin.]

Not only was eschatology in film, it was also in Christian pop music. To this day, I cannot get the words of the song "I wish we'd all been ready" out of my head. [A 1969 Christian song by Larry Norman, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=XiFcTKNXlOo>.] While it does depict "rapture" as a theology—something never heard of in Orthodoxy—its core message was a warning to be ready to escape the wrath to come. [Mt 3:7, Lt 3:7, 1 Thess 1:10, 2:16, Rev 6:17, 11:18, 12:12.] Going back and hearing it now, in light of current events, my blood runs cold. Interestingly, this fad was not just in Christian pop, but in contemporary folk music. Even before the message hit the Christian pop scene, Barry McGuire—who later became a pop Christian artist—created the hit "Eve of Destruction" that totally rocked the music scene. So powerful was the identification of that generation, McGuire's hit song dominated even the Beatles and all pop "greats" of that era. The song was everywhere, seemingly overnight. Everybody knew it was truth.

Perhaps all of that was a warning from God to my generation. A warning of things that would not happen in our youth, but which we would live to see as elders. It was common belief then that the "rapture" would save us all. While this has now proven misinformation, the remaining warnings of impending cataclysmic upheaval are more relevant now than ever before. The globalists I had heard about for decades, now have the tools to force the whole world into a global lockdown; a global concentration camp, a global Auschwitz. Now, we are on the "Eve of Destruction." It is already happening in Australia, Canada and other parts of the world.

Can we step back from the cliff? Or will we plunge headlong into anti-Christ? That may be for the collective "us" to decide.

Historical Perspective

For the Germans, Hitler was an "anti-Christ." For the Russians, Stalin was their "anti-Christ." For the Chinese, Mao was the total embodiment of "anti-Christ." For their respective populations, each of these men was everything—every horror, every evil—ever predicted of "The" anti-Christ. Those peoples, under such despotic leadership, experienced their own "Great Tribulations" with war, death, famine, and the leveling of cities on a scale America has never experienced. For the Germans, for the Russians, for the Chinese, they have already tasted the fruit of anti-Christ in its fullest measure.

But let us consider: each of those cases of an anti-Christ tyrant trying for world dominion (like Lucifer—"I will ascend") ended in failure. "An" anti-Christ never succeeded in becoming "THE" Anti-Christ. Much credit goes to the

United States of America for stopping the expansion of such evil men and their bloody philosophies (fascism and communism). But, will our current America continue to be a check on global tyranny, or will we now have our turn as the home of an anti-Christ, perhaps even facilitating the rise of “THE” Anti-Christ?

While we cannot say for certain that “THE” Anti-Christ is here, we can safely say all the elements are here to facilitate his rise. Big Tech, Big Pharma, and our own government combine to make total control of our lives a real possibility for the first time in history. If you deny this, you are living in an alternate reality.

The question is not whether these forces are trying to control us, but rather will we let them to actually pull it off?

Knowns and Unknowns

Sorting the “signs of the times,” we have knowns and unknowns. What do we know?

[1] The pandemic with its vaccine has created a tool for world domination, whether you believe in its efficacy or not; the “pandemic” is global, and the “vaccine” is global, and with its implementation comes control. It is especially dangerous that the vaccine is spoken of in religious terms by government officials.

[2] Your government cannot be trusted: as more and more vaccines are forced, it demonstrates a pronounced malevolence on the part of government. Now that the vaccine has a track record, it is far worse than any previous vaccine in collateral damage.

[3] Some Orthodox bishops cannot be trusted: whether due to incompetence, or being in the tank with the globalists, we cannot say as each bishop is different. Clearly, however, there are far too many harmful edicts inconsistent with what it means to be Orthodox for only ecclesiastical ignorance to be at work.

[4] Modern medicine cannot be trusted: The long standing faith that your doctor can be trusted is now fantasy. There has been a change. Doctors are saying things, prescribing things, which in the past they never would have. The reason: they are being strong-armed into following protocols never before imagined. The leverage: the fear of “losing their license,” without which they will no longer be doctors.

[5] Many American corporations show an unmistakable aversion for anything “American” in lieu of the Chinese and a one-world paradigm.

[6] Those exercising “emergency” authority (not due process) are unwilling to give up their new powers, the more they have the more they take.

[7] Evil is afoot, we are losing our freedoms, especially Christian freedoms.

[8] If evil is afoot, it is by God’s permission (not man’s) and God will make a plan for His people to escape for those who seek and find it. If evil is afoot, then so is God as where sin

abounds, much more does God’s grace. It will not be automatic, but for those who seek and find the “Secret Place of the Most High.” Do not take refuge in your job, your finances or even wavering bishops. Unlike God, all that will let you down.

What are the things we do not know?

[1] Whether or not, this is the final anti-Christ.

[2] Whether or not the vaccine is the “Mark of the Beast.” It might be, it might not be. Of equal concern, are the vaccine passports paving the way for the Mark of the Beast? Few changes of such size and scope happen all at once.

[3] While we know evil things are coming, how it will affect each area of the country is unknown; it will differ from place to place. This means, we cannot assume what is happening with us is happening with all, even in Orthodox jurisdictions.

Brace for Impact

While we can debate the nature of current trends, clearly evil is advancing and returning to the “old normal” will not happen any time soon. Time to rethink where we are in light of things already in motion, and to put aside the comforting thought, “It can’t happen here.” Most of “it” already has. Consider: we already have experienced church lockdowns, members barred from attending services, and bishops associating with full-fledged apostates as if they were kin.

In the long view, we need to make some plans. Here are some suggestions:

[1] **The preservation of children:** orphanages will make a comeback. Some vaccinated parents (perhaps many) will succumb to early deaths. There will be many orphans. If we as Orthodox want to prepare for the future of the Faith, we must—absolutely must—make provisions for taking care of the children of deceased Orthodox parents. Several young priests have recently succumbed to something (vaccine side effects?) leaving their children fatherless. We must also resist the vaccination of children. The vaccine side effects are more dangerous to children than COVID. There is simply no medical reason for injecting mRNA into children, and much potential harm. As a community, we must redouble our efforts to protect and teach the next generation the authentic beliefs and practices of the Orthodox Faith, no matter how much the world tries to deform both.

[2] As some Orthodox bishops are more for channeling the state over channeling the fathers, additional jurisdictions need to be established or **consolidation of faithful parishes under the care of remaining faithful hierarchs who will stay true to Orthodoxy.** ASAP. As more and more vaccines will be mandated, it could become increasingly difficult to find Orthodox worship without such restrictions. We observed corporations of 100+ to be forcing vaccines. There is a population shift in progress, as Orthodox employees relocate to find work without mandates. As this happens, old ethnic and historical ties will be broken. Orthodox refugees will focus on finding authentic Orthodox worship and faith

in their new homes. **Parishes, dioceses, and jurisdictions offering nothing more than the world will shrink and, perhaps, even die.**

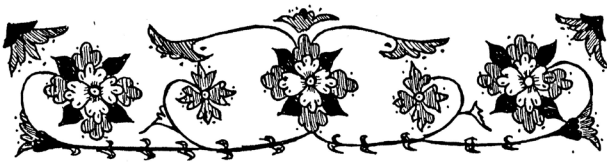
[3] **Should we stocking up food?** Maybe. At this moment, some supply chains are so stretched as to cause shortages. To what extent future events will impact the overall food supply is an unknown. As those who live in flood or hurricane-prone areas know, having back up supplies is never a bad thing. Food supplies are the ultimate insurance policy, and there are many options. But just as you can not buy car insurance after your car is wrecked, so you will not be able to buy emergency food supplies when you actually need them. Like Joseph in Egypt, you must lay up provisions for the famine in advance. It is also good to remember that a parish garden can be an invaluable resource.

[4] **Create Sacred Space** (this is huge): As Orthodox, we have every tool afforded by God to mankind to ward off the influx of evil. When the plagues of judgment hit Egypt, the Hebrew home was marked as sacred space with the covenant Blood of the Lamb, keeping evil at bay and saving the first-born. When plague hit Israel due to David's sin of numbering the people, the plague was stopped precisely at the "threshing floor" (place of sifting) when David and the elders fell on their faces. Consider the Holy Protection of the Theotokos. **Everything** about Orthodoxy is making space sacred to protect it from evil—the heart, the home, the temple, even the entire city via processions and public blessings. I personally take Holy Water to the "high place" of our city and pray over the city to make it sacred space. If you want to save your city, do processions, or at the very least, anoint it as holy ground with Holy Oil and Holy Water. **This spiritual warfare is the birthright of every Orthodox Christian.**

[5] Bottom line: In the world of forced vaccinations, pandemics, and economic upheaval, **this is, for the Orthodox Christians, our finest hour.** We were made for times like these; we were made so the very gates of Hell cannot conquer us. All we have to do is be true to the Faith, build a future generation of Orthodox and, guess what? We win! When it is good, it is good. When it is not good, it is still good (Glory to God for all things).

Build the Future, Now

If we do not start consciously building a future in this troubled world, then the Orthodox will not have one. **Start now.**



Whatever goof you do, whatever good you think of, it is all due to grace. There is nothing good that is not from God and nothing evil that is not for the devil.

St. Joseph the Hesychast

REFLECTIONS ON ICONOGRAPHY AND PORNOGRAPHY

By Andrew Williams, from "Finding the Freedom to Live." 29 June 2015. Some reflections on iconography and pornography based on conversations in the USA with an iconographer, Anne, and two parish priests, Fr Peter and Fr Paul, all from different parts of the country.

The one-hundredth canon of the Council in Trullo in 692 states: "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.*

St. John of Damascus suggests that the tempter-demon would value as nothing successfully tempting a monk to fall into the sin of fornication if he could instead prevent the monk from venerating the icon of Christ and the Theotokos. The Definition of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) says that we value "iconographic representations... for being of an equal benefit to us as the gospel narrative." Every year at the beginning of Lent, the Orthodox Church celebrates the *Triumph of Orthodoxy*, by which we mean the restoration of icons to the Church. Why does the tradition of the Church place such a high importance on the image? What does this teach us about pornographic imagery, and can iconography find a role in combating it?

St. John of Damascus clearly saw the periods of iconoclasm in the Church as a temporary victory for the devil, saying, *Away with you, envious devil, for you are envious of us, when we see the likeness of our Master and are sanctified by him...* It was clear to him that iconography was far more than decoration in the churches, more even than an aid to prayer or a reminder to us of heavenly things; in some sense the icons can actually sanctify us.

Pornography In Modern Experience

There can be no doubt that in particular the technological development of the Internet has led to a massive increase in the use of pornography since the mid-1990s. With most of the early online business successes being in the porn industry, pornography has also been a driver of technological advancement online. Already by 2004 there were between 23 and 60 million unique visitors to pornography websites each day. Moreover, 51 percent of all videos on peer-to-peer (P2P) networks are pornographic, 73 percent of all image searches on P2P network Kazaa are for pornography, and in one survey, 37 percent of Christian Pastors in the US identified internet pornography as a current struggle. The average child nowadays is eleven years old at their first exposure to

pornography, with 90 percent of eight to sixteen year-olds having viewed online porn, and 80 percent of 15-17 year-olds having had multiple exposures to hard-core (meaning violent, group or bestial) online porn. Beyond the Internet, 70 percent of in-room movie revenues in hotels are from pornographic films, as are 25-30 percent of all pay-per-view revenues. All-in-all, pornography in the US alone is estimated to be a more than \$12 billion industry. [Note: these figures date from when this article was originally written, in 2008. The actual statistics of today paint a much grimmer picture.]

Despite the prevailing wind of tolerance for pornography in western societies, notable not only in permissive attitudes towards the use of internet pornography, but also in the degree to which public space has been infiltrated by pornographic images in advertising and media, very little study has been done on the effect of pornography on us since its use became so widespread. This is partly because a 1979-80 study (before the Internet) so effectively demonstrated the ill-effects of pornography (mild pornography by today's standards) that similar studies have not been permitted for ethical reasons.

Both Fr. Peter and Fr. Paul affirm that in their pastoral experience, pornography has become a very widespread issue. Fr. Peter expresses his continuing astonishment at how much this is so, and says that he has come almost to expect that among males of a certain age-range, it will be an issue. While Fr. Peter has never had it raised by a female person in confession, Fr. Paul said that it is also a problem for some Orthodox women. He also explained that there is a subset within society that lives deeply in a pornographic world, as in one case he knows where a "bisexual" couple had constant hard-core pornography playing throughout their house and whose social life revolved exclusively around others in the same totally sexualized culture.

Fr. Peter particularly identified the problem of the constant temptation to pornography the Internet provides, highlighting both the ease in overcoming filters (even when he has himself helped in installing them and keeping the password) and the frequency with which teens have "free reign over the computer." Fr. Paul highlighted some of the negative effects of pornography on the person viewing it, that it interferes with home, work and social life, and particularly with marriage. He also notes that clergy are not exempt either from the problem or its ill effects.

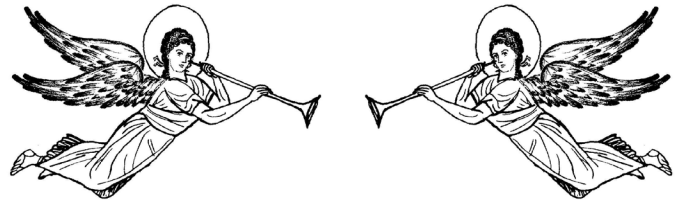
Contrast Between Iconography and Pornography

If imagery in icons can in some way sanctify us and imagery in pornography can negatively affect our lives and our relationships, what is the relationship between iconography and pornography? There was a clear sense in all three interviewees that there is a very direct opposition between iconography and pornography.

Fr. Peter suggests that it is clear to people that the two could not co-exist, so, for example, an icon attached to the computer screen could be a preventative measure for one tempted to view pornography online, or an icon on the television set to prompt the question, "is what I'm watching consonant with the faith?" He has in the past been told by a family that they felt they had to keep their icons in a different room from the television, which he thought really ought to have suggested to them that there is a problem.

While "icons have to do with communion with... the divine," Fr. Peter thinks that in its refusal or inability to invoke communion, pornography is the opposite. Fr. Paul described iconography with the analogy of "windows" (or "doors") into heaven and a channel of divine life, contrasting this with pornography, a "tool to manipulate, disrespect and un-sanctify God's creation and our part in his creation." Anne went on to describe from the artists point of view, the virtue of using the "gift of visual art, of painting, to enhance our worship of God" as opposed to using the "same gift of visual art to enhance our worship of idols—in this case the idol of the physical body and sexuality," where it becomes a vice.

Fr. John Breck, in his book "The Sacred Gift of Life," describes pornography as "demonic iconography," as instead of feeding the mind and soul with heavenly food as iconography does, it **"infests the mind with corrupt images that produce corruption in the depths of the soul."**

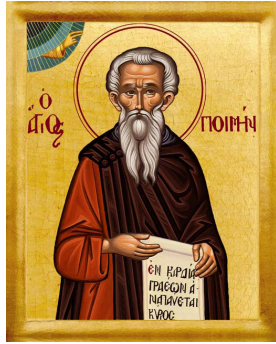


Our holy fathers hearkened to the Lord's words *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, unchastity, thefts, perjuries, blasphemies; these are the things that defile a man.* (Mt 15:19-20); and they also hearkened to Him when He enjoins us to *cleanse the inside of the cup so that the outside may also be clean.* (Mt 23:26). Hence they abandoned all other forms of spiritual labor and concentrated wholly on this one task of guarding the heart, convinced that through this practice they would also possess every other virtue, whereas without it no virtue could be firmly established.

Some of the fathers have called this practice stillness of the heart, others attentiveness, others the guarding of the heart, others watchfulness and rebuttal, and others again the investigation of the thoughts and the guarding of the intellect. But all of them alike worked the earth of their own heart, and in this way they were fed on the divine manna (cf. Exod 16:15).

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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 BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

The doors of repentance are opening, Great Lent is beginning. Every year Great Lent is repeated, and each time it brings us great benefit if we spend it as we should. It is a preparation for the life to come and, more immediately, a preparation for the Bright Resurrection.

Just as a stairway is built into a tall building in order to enable one, by climbing the steps, to easily reach the top, so too, the various days in the year serve as steps for our spiritual ascent. This is especially true of the days of Great Lent and Holy Pascha.

By means of Great Lent we cleanse ourselves of the filth of sin, and at Holy Pascha we experience the blessedness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. In climbing a high mountain, one tries to eliminate all unnecessary weight. The less a person carries, the easier it is for him to climb and the higher he is able to climb. So, too, in order to ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin. This weight is lifted from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive each person whom we consider to be at fault before us. Once cleansed and forgiven by God, we then greet the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

And what a priceless gift of God we receive, at the culmination of our lenten struggle. We already hear about this in the

first hymns of the daily lenten *stichera*: *Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery.* (*Aposticha sticheron*, Sunday of the Last Judgment).

Communing of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, unto life eternal—this is the aim of the holy Quadragesima [Forty Days]. Not only on Pascha do we commune, but during Lent also. On Pascha those people should commune who have fasted, confessed and received the Holy Mysteries during Great Lent. Just before Pascha itself there is little opportunity for a proper and thorough confession; the priests are very busy and most of the time occupied with the Passion services. Rather one must prepare ahead of time.

Each time one receives the Mysteries of Christ, one is united with Christ Himself; each time it is a soul-saving act. Why, then, is such significance attached to receiving Holy Communion on the night of Holy Pascha, and why are we all called to do so?

Then, especially, we are given to experience the Kingdom of Christ. Then, especially, we are illumined with the Eternal Light and strengthened for the spiritual ascent.

This is an irreplaceable gift of Christ, an incomparable good. Let no one deprive himself of this joy and, instead of receiving Holy Communion on Pascha night, hasten to eat meat and other foods. Communing of the Holy Mysteries on that night prepares us for the banquet in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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

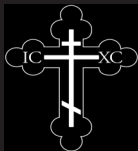
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Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

SENTENCED TO IMMORTALITY

By St. Justin Popovic.

Man sentenced God to death; by His Resurrection, He sentenced man to immortality. In return for a beating, He gives an embrace; for abuse, a blessing; for death, immortality. Man never showed so much hate for God as when he crucified Him; and God never showed more love for man than when He arose. Man even wanted to reduce God to a mortal, but God by His Resurrection made man immortal. The crucified God is Risen and has killed death. Death is no more. Immortality has surrounded man and all the world.

By the Resurrection of the God-Man, human nature has been led irreversibly onto the path of immortality, and has become dreadful to death itself. For before the Resurrection of Christ, death was dreadful to man, but after the Resurrection of Christ, man has become more dreadful to death. When man lives by faith in the Risen God-Man, he lives above death, out of its reach; it is a footstool for his feet:

O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory? (1 Cor 15:55).

When a man belonging to Christ dies, he simply sets aside his body like clothing, in which he will again be vested on the day of Dread Judgement.

Before the Resurrection of the God-Man, death was the second nature of man: life first, death second. But by His Resurrection, the Lord has changed everything: immortality has become the second nature of man, it has become natural for man; and death—unnatural. As before the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be mortal, so after the Resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be immortal.

By sin, man became mortal and transient; by the Resurrection of the God-Man, he became immortal and perpetual. In this is the power, the might, the all-mightiness of the Resurrection of Christ. Without it, there would have been no Christianity. Of all miracles, this is the greatest miracle. All other miracles have it as their source and lead to it. From it grow faith, love, hope, prayer, and love for God. Behold: the fugitive disciples, having run away from Jesus when He died, return to Him because He is risen. Behold: the Centurion confessed Christ as the Son of God when he saw the Resurrection from the grave. Behold: all the first Christians became Christian because the Lord Jesus is risen, because death was vanquished. This is what no other faith has; this is what lifts the Lord Christ above all other gods and men; this is what, in the most undoubted manner, shows and demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the One True God and Lord in all the world.

Because of the Resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, men have become, continue to become, and will continue becoming Christians. The entire history of Christianity is nothing other than the history of a unique miracle, namely, the Resurrection of Christ, which is unbrokenly threaded through the hearts of Christians from one day to the next, from year to year, across the centuries, until the Dread Judgment.

Man is born, in fact, not when his mother bring him into the world, but when he comes to believe in the Risen Christ, for then he is born to life eternal, whereas a mother bears children for death, for the grave. The Resurrection of Christ is the mother of us all, the mother of all Christians, the mother of immortals. By faith in the Resurrection,

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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man is born anew, born for eternity. "That is impossible!" says the skeptic. But you listen to what the Risen God-Man says: *All things are possible to him that believeth!* (Mk 9:23).

The believer is he who lives, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his being, according to the Gospel of the Risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is our victory, by which we conquer death; faith in the Risen Lord Jesus. Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The Lord *has removed the sting of death*. Death is a serpent; sin is its fangs. By sin, death puts its poison into the soul and into the body of man. The more sins a man has, the more bites, through which death puts its poison in him.

When a wasp stings a man, he uses all his strength to remove the sting. But when sin wounds him, this sting of death, what should be done? One must call upon the Risen Lord Jesus in faith and prayer, that He may remove the sting of death from the soul. He, in His great loving-kindness, will do this, for He is overflowing with mercy and love. When many wasps attack a man's body and wound it with many stings, that man is poisoned and dies. The same happens with a man's soul, when many sins wound it with their stings: it is poisoned and dies a death with no resurrection.

Conquering sin in himself through Christ, man overcomes death. If you have lived the day without vanquishing a single sin of yours, know that you have become deadened. Vanquish one, two, or three of your sins, and behold: you have become younger than the youth which does not age, young in immortality and eternity. Never forget that to believe in the Resurrection of the Lord Christ means to carry out a continuous fight with sins, with evil, with death.

If a man fights with sins and passions, this demonstrates that he indeed believes in the Risen Lord; if he fights with them,

he fights for life eternal. If he does not fight, his faith is in vain. If man's faith is not a fight for immortality and eternity, than tell me, what is it? If faith in Christ does not bring us to resurrection and life eternal, than what use is it to us? If Christ is not risen, that meant that neither sin nor death has been vanquished, than why believe in Christ?

For the one who by faith in the Risen Lord fights with each of his sins there will be affirmed in him gradually the feeling that Christ is indeed risen, has indeed vanquished the sting of sin, has indeed vanquished death on all the fronts of combat. Sin gradually diminishes the soul in man, driving it into death, transforming it from immortality to mortality, from incorruption to corruption. The more the sins, the more the mortal man. If man does not feel immortality in himself, know that he is in sins, in bad thoughts, in languid feelings. Christianity is an appeal: Fight with death until the last breath, fight until a final victory has been reached. Every sin is a desertion; every passion is a retreat; every vice is a defeat.

One need not be surprised that Christians also die bodily. This is because the death of the body is sowing. The mortal body is sown, says the Apostle Paul, and it grows, and is raised in an immortal body (I Cor 15:42-44). The body dissolves, like a sown seed, that the Holy Spirit may quicken and perfect it. If the Lord Christ had not been risen in body, what use would it have for Him? He would not have saved the entire man. If His body did not rise, then why was He incarnate?

Why did He take on Himself flesh, if He gave it nothing of His Divinity?

If Christ is not risen, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and had not therefore vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was

killed and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair, for neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is there a greater stupidity than this world without the Resurrection; and there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no being in a single world more miserable than man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have been better for such a man never to have been born.

In our human world, death is the greatest torment and inhumane horror. Freedom from this torment and horror is salvation. Such a salvation was given the race of man by the Vanquisher of death—the Risen God-Man. He related to us all the mystery of salvation by His Resurrection. To be saved means to assure our body and soul of immortality and life eternal. How do we attain this? By no other way than by a theanthropic life, a new life, a life in the Risen Lord, in and by the Lord's Resurrection.

For us Christians, our life on earth is a school in which we learn how to assure ourselves of resurrection and life eternal. For what use is this life if we cannot acquire by it life eternal? But, in order to be resurrected with the Lord Christ, man must first suffer with Him, and live His life as his own. If he does this, then on Pascha he can say with Saint Gregory the Theologian: *Yesterday I was crucified with Him, today I live with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him, today I rise with Him.* (Troparion 2, Ode 3, Matins, Pascha).

Christ's Four Gospels are summed up in only four words. They are: ***Christ is Risen! Indeed He is risen!***

In each of these words is a Gospel, and in the Four Gospels is all the meaning of all God's world, visible and invisible. When all knowledge and all the thoughts of men are concentrated in the cry of the Paschal salutation, *Christ is Risen!*, then immortal joy embraces all beings and in joy responds: *Indeed He is risen!*

† † †

LET US ARISE IN THE DEEP DAWN, AND INSTEAD OF MYRRH OFFER A HYMN TO THE LORD

By St. John Maximovitch, Pascha 1940.

We forestall the rising of the sun, and hasten in the depth of night to meet the Sun of Righteousness.

The present night is not an ordinary night! Brighter than day, it fills our souls with light! The rays of the Sun of the world illumine us and the whole universe, enlightening all who come to His light. The warmth poured out through His rays penetrates all our members, filling our souls with deep peace, even healing our bodily illnesses. This warmth melts away our sorrows, and our passions are burned away as by fire.

Enmity and hatred disappear from us, we forget our bitterness, and we do not feel our impoverishment.

The whole world becomes different in this holy and only night! All nature is changed, and everything is filled with

warmth and light. Just as birds of prey hide at the rising of the sun, and wild beasts disappear into their dens, so does evil flee from every heart illumined today by the Light which radiates from the tomb. Like the morning dew, now are our tears dried away! As blossoms unfold at the onset of day, enlivened by the sun's rays, so do virtues return to us as the Sun rises upon us this morning. Let us strive to be wholly illumined by this wondrous light!

When spring comes, we open all the windows and doors of our homes, that the warmth may enter and dry the dankness within. Now the Divine Light can also enter; but it cannot shine within souls that have closed themselves, and do not want to be illumined by that Light. Let us open our souls and hearts! Let us hasten with the myrrh-bearers, let us come bearing our lamps to Christ, Who has come forth from the tomb! Even if you are burdened by sins, do not turn away; for today even those in the bonds of hell hasten to the Light with joyful feet. Even if you are poor and have not the means to buy candles and myrrh, do not turn away. Let our hearts and souls burn in place of candles. There is no impoverishment in the world!

In these past days, we were all called to bring our material offerings and bodily ascetic labors as myrrh. Now we all are called to partake of spiritual joy. This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Instead of myrrh and material offerings, let us bring a hymn to the Lord. Let us sing the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God!

Let us open now the doors and windows of our souls and hearts, that they might be warmed by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness! *From the outermost border of heaven is His going forth, and His goal is unto the outermost part of heaven, and there shall no man hide himself from His heat.* (Pss 18:6). *Now all things are filled with light: heaven and earth and the nether regions.* (Ode 3 of the Paschal Canon). Only we are impenetrable if we do not want Him!

If you do not feel this radiant joy today, seek the reason within yourself only.

It would be insane for a man to claim that the sun does not exist, only because he does not see it from within his tightly closed and shuttered dwelling. Pitiably is the blind man who keeps telling everyone that there is no such thing as light, only because he does not see it! It would look very foolish for a man to insist that spring has not come, only because no warmth has penetrated into his locked cellar!

We praise the gentle light, the holy glory of the immortal Heavenly Father—the Resurrected Lord, crying out to Him from the depth of our souls, *meet it is for thee at all times to be hymned!*

Then the light of Christ that enlightens all will enlighten even us, and we shall behold Christ the Sun of Righteousness, Who shines upon all life!

Christ is Risen!

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

V. Rev. George Florovsky, D.D. (+1979), from *Saint Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 2 # 3, 1954.

I ascend unto My Father and your Father, and to My God, and Your God.

[Jn 20:17]

† † †



In these words the Risen Christ described to Mary Magdalene the mystery of His Resurrection. She had to carry this mysterious message to His disciples, *as they mourned and wept*. (Mk 16:10). The disciples listened to these glad tidings with fear and amazement, with doubt and mistrust. It was not Thomas alone who doubted among the Eleven. On the contrary, it appears that only one of the Eleven did not doubt—Saint John, the disciple *whom Jesus loved*. He alone grasped the mystery of the empty tomb at once *and he saw, and believed*. (Jn 20:8). Even Peter left the sepulcher in amazement, *wondering at that which was come to pass*. (Lk 24:12).

The disciples did not expect the Resurrection. The women did not, either. They were quite certain that Jesus was dead and rested in the grave, and they went to the place *where He was laid*, with the spices they had prepared, *that they might come and anoint Him*. They had but one thought: *Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher for us?* (Mk 16:1-3; Lk 24:1). And therefore, on not finding the body, Mary Magdalene was sorrowful and complained: *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him*. (Jn 20:13). On hearing the good news from the angel, the women fled from the sepulchre in fear and trembling. *Neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid*. (Mk 16:8). And when they spoke no one believed them, in the same way as no one had believed Mary, who saw the Lord, or the disciples as they walked on their way into the country, (Mk 16:13), and who recognized Him in the breaking of bread. *And afterward He appeared unto the Eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them who had seen Him after He was risen*. (Mk 16:10-14).

From whence comes this “hardness of heart” and hesitation? Why were their eyes so “holden,” why were the disciples so much afraid of the news, and why did the Pascha joy so slowly, and with such difficulty, enter the Apostles’ hearts? Did not they, who were with Him from the beginning, *from the baptism of John*, see all the signs of power which He performed before the face of the whole people?

The lame walked, the blind saw, the dead were raised, and all infirmities were healed. Did they not behold, only a week earlier, how He raised by His word Lazarus from the dead, who had already been in the grave for four days? Why then was it so strange to them that the Master had arisen Himself? How was it that they came to forget that which the Lord used to tell them on many occasions, that after suffering and death He would arise on the third day?

The mystery of the Apostles’ “unbelief” is partly disclosed in the narrative of the Gospel: *But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel*, with disillusionment and complaint said the two disciples to their mysterious Companion on the way to Emmaus (Lk 24:21). They meant: He was betrayed, condemned to death and crucified. The news of the Resurrection brought by the women only *astonished* them. They still wait for an earthly triumph, for an external victory. The same temptation possesses their hearts, which first prevented them from accepting *the preaching of the Cross* and made them argue every time the Saviour tried to reveal His mystery to them. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?* (Lk 24:26). It was still difficult to understand this.

He had the power to arise, why did He allow what that had happened to take place at all? Why did He take upon Himself disgrace, blasphemy and wounds? In the eyes of all Jerusalem, amidst the vast crowds assembled for the Great Feast, He was condemned and suffered a shameful death. And now He enters not into the Holy City, neither to the people which beheld His shame and death, nor to the High Priests and elders, nor to Pilate—so that He might make their crime obvious and smite their pride. Instead, He sends His disciples away to remote Galilee and appears to them there.

Even much earlier the disciples wondered, *How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?* (Jn 14:22). Their wonder continues, and even on the day of His glorious Ascension the Apostles question the Lord, *Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* (Acts 1:6). They still did not comprehend the meaning of His Resurrection, they did not understand what it meant that He was *ascending* to the Father. Their eyes were opened but later, when *the promise of the Father* had been fulfilled.

In the Ascension resides the meaning and the fullness of Christ’s Resurrection.

The Lord did not rise in order to return again to the fleshly order of life, so as to live again and commune with the disciples and the multitudes by means of preaching and miracles. Now he does not even stay with them, but only “appears” to them during the forty days, from time to time, and always in a miraculous and mysterious manner. *He was not always with them now, as He was before the Resurrection*, comments Saint John Chrysostom. *He came and again dis-*

appeared, thus leading them on to higher conceptions. He no longer permitted them to continue in their former relationship toward Him, but took effectual measures to secure these two objects: That the fact of His Resurrection should be believed, and that He Himself should be ever after apprehended to be greater than man. There was something new and unusual in His person (cf. John 21:1-14). As Saint John Chrysostom says, *It was not an open presence, but a certain testimony of the fact that He was present.* That is why the disciples were confused and frightened.

Christ arose not in the same way as those who were restored to life before Him. Theirs was a resurrection for a time, and they returned to life in the same body, which was subject to death and corruption—returned to the previous mode of life. But Christ arose forever, unto eternity. He arose in a body of glory, immortal and incorruptible. He arose, never to die, for *He clothed the mortal in the splendor of incorruption.* His glorified Body was already exempt from the fleshly

order of existence. *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.* (1 Cor 15:42-44).

This mysterious transformation of human bodies, of which Saint Paul was speaking in the case of our Lord, had been accomplished in three days. Christ's work on earth was accomplished. He had suffered, was dead and buried, and now rose to a higher mode of existence. By His Resurrection He abolished and destroyed death, abolished the law of corruption, and raised with Himself the whole race of Adam. Christ has risen, and now *no dead are left in the grave.* (cf. The Paschal sermon of Saint John Chrysostom). And now He ascends to the Father, yet He does not go away, but abides with the faithful forever (cf. The Kontakion of Ascension). For He raises the very earth with Him to heaven, and even higher than any heaven. God's power, in the phrase of Saint John Chrysostom, *manifests itself not only in the Resurrection, but in something much stronger. For He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.* (Mk 16:19).

And with Christ, man's nature ascends also. *We who seemed unworthy of the earth, are now raised to heaven,* says Saint John Chrysostom. *We who were unworthy of earthly dominion have been raised to the Kingdom on high, have ascended higher than heaven, have come to occupy the King's throne, and the same nature from which the angels guarded Paradise,*

stopped not until it ascended to the throne of the Lord. By His Ascension the Lord not only opened to man the entrance to heaven, not only appeared before the face of God on our behalf and for our sake, but likewise transferred man to the high places. *He honored them He loved by putting them close to the Father.* God quickened and raised us together with Christ, as Saint Paul says, *and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* (Eph 2:6). Heaven received the inhabitants of the earth. *The First fruits of them that slept* sits now on high, and in Him all creation is summed up and bound together. *The earth rejoices in mystery, and the heavens are filled with joy.*

The terrible ascent... Terror-stricken and trembling stand the angelic hosts, contemplating the Ascension of Christ. And trembling they ask each other, *What is this vision? One who is man in appearance ascends in His body higher than the heavens, as God.* Thus the Office for the Feast of the Ascension depicts the mystery in a poetical language. As



on the day of Christ's Nativity the earth was astonished on beholding God in the flesh, so now the Heavens do tremble and cry out. *The Lord of Hosts, Who reigns over all, Who is Himself the head of all, Who is preeminent in all things, Who has re-instated creation in its former order—He is the*

King of Glory. And the heavenly doors are opened: *Open, Oh heavenly gates, and receive God in the flesh.* It is an open allusion to Psalms 24:7-10, now prophetically interpreted. *Lift up your heads, Oh ye gates, and be lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty...*

Saint Chrysostom says, *Now the angels have received that for which they have long waited, the archangels see that for which they have long thirsted. They have seen our nature shining on the King's throne, glistening with glory and eternal beauty... Therefore they descend in order to see the unusual and marvelous vision: Man appearing in heaven.*

The Ascension is the token of Pentecost, the sign of its coming, *The Lord has ascended to heaven and will send the Comforter to the world.*

For the Holy Spirit was not yet in the world, until Jesus was glorified. And the Lord Himself told the disciples, *If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.* (Jn 16:7). The gifts of the Spirit are *gifts of reconciliation*, a seal of an accomplished salvation and of the ultimate reunion of the world with God. And this was accomplished only in the

Ascension. *And one saw miracles follow miracles*, says Saint John Chrysostom, *ten days prior to this our nature ascended to the King's throne, while today the Holy Ghost has descended on to our nature.* The joy of the Ascension lies in the promise of the Spirit. *Thou didst give joy to Thy disciples by a promise of the Holy Spirit.* The victory of Christ is wrought in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

On high is His body, here below with us is His Spirit. And so we have His token on high, that is His body, which He received from us, and here below we have His Spirit with us. Heaven received the Holy Body, and the earth accepted the Holy Spirit. Christ came and sent the Spirit. He ascended, and with Him our body ascended also. (Saint John Chrysostom). The revelation of the Holy Trinity was completed. Now the Spirit Comforter is poured forth on all flesh. *Hence comes foreknowledge of the future, understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, distribution of good gifts, the heavenly citizenship, a place in the chorus of angels, joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, the being made God!* (Saint Basil, On the Holy Spirit, IX).

Beginning with the Apostles, and through communion with them—by an unbroken succession—Grace is spread to all believers. Through renewal and glorification in the Ascended Christ, man's nature became receptive of the spirit. *And unto the world He gives quickening forces through His human body*, says Bishop Theophanes. *He holds it completely in Himself and penetrates it with His strength, out of Himself; and He likewise draws the angels to Himself through the spirit of man, giving them space for action and thus making them blessed.* All this is done through the Church, which is the **Body of Christ**; that is, His *fullness*. (Eph 1:23). *The Church is the fulfillment of Christ*, continues Bishop Theophanes, *perhaps in the same way as the tree is the fulfillment of the seed. That which is contained in the seed in a contracted form receives its development in the tree.*

The very existence of the Church is the fruit of the Ascension. It is in the Church that man's nature is truly ascended to the Divine heights. *And gave Him to be Head over all things.* (Eph 1:22). Saint John Chrysostom comments: *Amazing! Look again, whither He has raised the Church. As though He were lifting it up by some engine, He has raised it up to a vast height, and set it on yonder throne; for where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval of separation between the Head and the body; for were there a separation, then would the one no longer be a body, nor would the other any longer be a Head.*

The whole race of men is to follow Christ, even in His ultimate exaltation, **to follow in His train**. Within the Church, through an acquisition of the Spirit in the fellowship of Sacraments, the Ascension continues still, and will continue until the measure is full. *Only then shall the Head be filled up,*

when the body is rendered perfect, when we are knit together and united, concludes Saint John Chrysostom.

The Ascension is a sign and token of the Second Coming. *This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.* (Acts 1:11).

The mystery of God's Providence will be accomplished in the Return of the Risen Lord. In the fulfillment of time, Christ's kingly power will be revealed and spread over the whole of faithful mankind. Christ bequeaths the Kingdom to the whole of the faithful. *And I appoint unto you a Kingdom as My Father has appointed unto me. That ye may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Lk 22:29-30). Those who followed Him faithfully will sit with Him on their thrones on the day of His coming. *To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.* (Rev 3:21). Salvation will be consummated in the Glory. *Conceive to yourself the throne, the royal throne, conceive the immensity of the privilege. This, at least if we chose, might more avail to startle us, yea, even than hell itself.* (Saint John Chrysostom).

We should tremble more at the thought of that abundant Glory which is appointed unto the redeemed, than at the thought of the eternal darkness. **Think near Whom Thy Head is seated...** Or rather, Who is the Head. In very truth, *wondrous and terrible is Thy divine ascension from the mountain, O Giver of Life.* A terrible and wondrous height is the King's throne. In face of this height all flesh stands silent, in awe and trembling. *He has Himself descended to the lowest depths of humiliation, and raised up man to the height of exaltation.*

What then should we do? *If thou art the body of Christ, bear the Cross, for He bore it.* (Saint John Chrysostom).

† † †

*With the power of Thy Cross, Oh Christ,
establish my thoughts, so that I may sing and glorify
Thy saving Ascension.*



But the day will come—and that day is not far off—when all the righteous men and women who firmly believed in Him throughout their lives will see Him. And around Him in the heaven will gather all those who were baptized on earth in His name—not only with water, but also with the Spirit and Fire. And they will enter into His joy, which the Heavenly Father has prepared for all His chosen, and will inherit a joy that they have never known before.

St. Nikolai Velimirovic

DEGREES OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

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

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

Healing of man's personality is in fact his progress toward perfection which is actually identified as *theosis*, for in patristic theology *theosis* and perfection are synonymous terms. And this therapy is absolutely necessary, because man's fall, effected in the person of Adam, constitutes the sickness of man's nature.

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

or the heart or even an energy of the soul. Yet, the *nous* is mainly the eye of the soul; the purest part of the soul; the highest attention. It is also called noetic energy and it is not identified with reason.]

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

My mind is wounded, my body has grown feeble, my spirit is sick, my speech has lost its power, my life is dead; then end is at the door. What shalt thou do, then, miserable soul, when the Judge comes to examine thy deeds? (Great Canon).

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

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

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

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



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

Therefore man needs to be cured, that is to be purified, to reach the illumination of the nous—Adam’s state before the Fall—and then attain *theosis*. This is achieved precisely through Christ’s incarnation and the entire work of the Divine Economy and of the Church. It is within this frame of reference we must see many liturgical texts according to which Christ is characterized a physician and healer of souls and bodies. Moreover, in the same framework various patristic texts should be studied, where it is apparent that the work of Christ is first and foremost a therapeutic one.

After the Fall man needed a cure. This was effected by the Incarnation of Christ and ever since then it has been the work of the Church. She cures and is curing man; she primarily cures his ailing personality—his *nous* and heart. All the Fathers of the Church exhort men to seek to be cured. Man is cured by the energy of God whose source is uncreated and revealed *in the person of Jesus Christ*. Christ’s energy, from which comes man’s cure, is granted freely, and for this reason is called divine grace. Therefore, whether we say uncreated energy or divine grace makes no difference; we mean the same thing. The Apostle Paul writes: *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God.* (Eph 2:8).

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

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

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

Throughout all patristic tradition, the Fathers allude to the three stages of spiritual perfection as the three degrees

of one’s cure. St. Dionysios the Areopagite makes mention of purification, illumination and perfection. St. Gregory of Nyssa also makes use of the same distinction. St. Maximus the Confessor refers, as well, to practical philosophy (purification), natural *theoria* (illumination) and mystical theology (*theosis*). St. Symeon the New Theologian, in his writings divides certain chapters into practical, gnostic, and theological.

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



A man can know nothing about the judgments of God. He alone is the one who takes account of all and is able to judge the hearts of each one of us, as He alone is our Master.

Truly it happens that a man may do a certain thing which seems to be wrong out of simplicity, and there may be something about it which makes more amends to God than your whole life; how are you going to sit in judgment and constrict your own soul? And should it happen that he has fallen away, how do you know how much and how well he fought? How much blood he sweated before he did it? Perhaps so little fault can be found in him that God can look on his action as if it were just, for God looks on his labor and all the struggle he had before he did it, and has pity on him. And do you know this, and what God has spared him for? Are you going to condemn him for this and ruin your own soul? And how do you know what tears he has shed about it before God? You may well know about the sin but do you not know about the repentance?

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

IF IT LEADS US TO REPENTANCE, IT IS FROM GOD

A WORD ON WORLDLY SORROW, SORROW FOR GOD'S SAKE, AND HUMAN CONSOLATION

By Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus.



How can a man avoid this worldly sorrow? He must live the spiritual life, learn to pray, read the lives of the saints, sincerely confess, and participate in the Sacraments of the

Church; the Sacraments heal a man's soul, save him from worldly sorrow, and give sorrow for God's sake, which leads to salvation. In this way, a man finds consolation. When we confess, we cleanse our soul, the grace of God settles in our heart, and our whole soul and our entire existence are comforted.

Worldly sorrow is a big problem for the whole world today, because people do not have enough strength to endure it and therefore they fall into despondency and suffer greatly. However, I think that a man can gradually change this worldly sorrow into sorrow for God's sake and find peace in his soul. I repeat again, that this is not about medical cases, when someone is diagnosed with depression, because that is different from this sadness that the Apostle Paul is speaking about. Medical depression implies a medical approach to its treatment. But worldly sorrow, which is cured by the Holy Spirit, is from the spiritual realm.

The Apostle Paul says: *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter!* (2 Cor 7:11).

Here the Apostle says that sorrow for God's sake brought the Corinthians good results; that the man who sorrows for God's sake, who is zealous for God, is not overwhelmed by despondency, and he does not say: "I will not do anything. I do not expect anything good, and do not want to see anyone!" but he says: "I will do something for God. I am going to pray more, I am going to labor more, I am going to have zeal in prayer and repentance."

This requires zeal, and if a man acts this way, he will have the grace of God in his heart. So look at what zeal this sorrow, which happens by God's will, has given you, what need for excuses it has caused in you, what indignation, what fear of the consequences, what desire to see me, what zeal, what desire to punish evil—this is how the Apostle Paul addresses the Corinthians. And then he adds: *In all things ye have ap-*

proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Cor 7:11). This case concerned the plight of the Corinthian Christians, which was connected with sins of the flesh, very serious, especially for those times. But when the Corinthians were grieved, then they found more zeal for good. They wanted to see the Apostle, to labor more and change, and their zeal helped them.

Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. (2 Cor 7:12). The Apostle Paul says that he wrote them this epistle and grieved them not because he wanted to grieve them, but because he wanted to show them the trouble that had happened to them, so they would come to the right spiritual state, in which they were now, and so they might have such zeal for good.

If we have a certain state of mind, experience various feelings and see that these feelings lead us to repentance, light, consolation, humility, then that means that it is a state from God. As Christ said: *Ye shall know them by their fruits.* (Mt 7:16). If the tree is good, then its fruits will be good, and if the tree is rotten, then its fruits will be rotten. The internal state of a man can be assessed by its fruits. And so the Corinthians had their fruits of zeal in the spiritual life. It turns out that by his action, the Apostle aroused them to spiritual vigil.

It is important for parents and spiritual guides to know this: When we do something in relation to our children, spiritual children, or disciples, we must always consider whether it will bring good or bad results. Will it help our children become better, more conscious, humbler, and more diligent? Or will it do the opposite? We cannot just say the right words, but we have to also think about what they will lead to, because discernment, as we have already said, is the greatest of all the virtues. Discernment presupposes that even when we do good, we have to do it the right way. Let us say we want to make a remark to someone that will be for his benefit. If we cannot say it kindly, then the whole thing can turn into evil. Therefore, we always have to weigh the results and understand that the other person has his limits.

Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. (2 Cor 7:13). As you can see, the Apostle Paul does not deny that he needed human comfort. So human consolation should also be important for us. If we have it—good; if not—that is better, because then the Lord will comfort us. As Elder Paisios said, when we have no human comfort, this is a difficult state, of course, but then we have the consolation of God. When there is no human presence, there is God's presence. Therefore, the saints preferred not to have human consolation, but to have God present in their lives. However, this is very difficult and demands much patience and labor.

There was one Romanian elder living on Mt. Athos. One day he came to visit us at Koutloumousiou Monastery, where I lived for two years and had the obedience of gatekeeper. He lived in the desert and would always arrive hungry. He was short of stature, hunched over, with a knapsack on his back, and always on foot. One day he came to see us at the monastery, and I asked him: “Geronda Sergei, how are you?” He said: “I want to eat.” To tease him a little bit, I said: “We do not have any food.” And he said to me: “No worries. If I eat, that’s good, and if not, that’s better.” In this way, he wanted to tell us: “If you have food and you can give it to me to eat, you will do well, you will give me human comfort, but if not, and you do not give me anything to eat, and I stay hungry—that is even better, because then the Lord God Himself will comfort me.” Such people had hope in God.

Let us stay mindful that we are simple people, and we need human comfort. Thus, I will repeat this to you again, so we do not deprive our loved ones of the comfort we could give them. Perhaps we can comfort someone by visiting them, supporting them with a kind word, or expressing sympathy and understanding. You have to show a person that you understand them, and not just say something that the person is not ready to accept just then, for example. No matter how spiritual what you say is, if the person does not have the necessary spiritual strength to hear you, it will be hard for him to listen to it. He may reject what you say, or even turn away from God, because he is not ready to hear your spiritual words just then.

I was eighteen when I went to study in Thessaloniki. The climate there is quite different from Cyprus’. It is cold and damp. I have always loved to eat, and in that climate, I especially wanted to eat, and I was always hungry. I met a very good spiritual father there, but he was an ascetic. We all lived in the St. Theodora dormitory together, and I asked him: “Father, what are we having for dinner today?” and he said: “Have some yogurt.” How could one yogurt be enough for me? I needed a whole tub full of food. I told him: “Father, I will not last too long on one yogurt,” and he said: “One yogurt.”

Two weeks later I parted with this spiritual father, because he did not understand that I was hungry all the time. Then I found another spiritual father who was also a doctor by training, a colonel, and generally a very experienced elderly man. And whenever he saw me, he would ask: “My dear, have you eaten today?” “No, Geronda, I have not eaten anything,” I would answer him. “Go eat something,” he would say to me and give me some money for the cafeteria near the church. Or sometimes when we would go and we were waiting in line for confession with him, he would come out, give us some money, and send someone for food so that we could refresh ourselves while we waited.

He understood us. And despite the fact that he was an ascetic, he understood that we were eighteen and wanted

to eat. Conversely, that other elder-ascetic who did not understand us wound up alone, because we all left him. He would complain sometimes that we were not coming to him for confession. But how could we go to him if he did not understand us? When we lived with St. Paisios in Kapsala for a while, he also did not eat anything, but since he knew that I love to eat, he would say to me: “Go to Stavronikita Monastery and then come back here.” Stavronikita was near his kallyva, about a half hour on foot. Since he himself did not have any food for us, he would send us to the neighboring monastery.

Therefore, it is very important to show a person that you understand them. If you want to comfort someone, but instead of showing that you understand his plight you start trying to teach him, then he is unlikely to be comforted by you. We have seen how our holy elders acted. When our brotherhood had some difficulties, we went to see Elder Aemilianos of Simenopetra, and he listened to us very attentively—although our issue was not very serious, as it seems to me now. What impressed us then was the Elder’s reaction. He did not tell our Elder, “Geronda, pray and God will help you. It will all be okay.” Rather, he said: “Geronda, indeed you have a very difficult situation.” And we saw that he truly understood us. Then he told us how to solve the problem.

One day I went to the hospital (here in Limassol), to the Emergency Room, and I saw an old man there, moaning: “It hurts, it hurts.” There was a doctor there, and he said to me: “Do not pay any attention, there is nothing wrong with him.” So I went over to him and asked: “What hurts?” “I feel very bad,” he said. “Do not worry, it will pass,” I told him. “It will pass, you say? When you yourself get sick, then you will see.” At that moment I realized that even if this man was making up his suffering, he was still suffering, and he answered me correctly: When you yourself get sick, you will not talk like that anymore. Therefore, psychologists also use a particular very fashionable term today—empathy, which is nothing other than what our Holy Fathers say: *Love your neighbor as yourself*, i.e., take the place of another, where his pain becomes your pain.

A boy came to the Metropolis yesterday, crying that someone had stolen his bike. For us, this is nothing. For the boy, it was a great tragedy, because he was afraid to go home and confess to his father that someone had stolen his bike. By giving him a new bike, we helped and comforted him. But if we had said to him: “Why are you crying about something so silly? It is just some thing—why are you thinking about material things”—he would have gotten offended and left. He would have said we do not understand him. But the saints understood people very well and did not neglect their problems; they did not say: “What are you telling me all this nonsense for?” “Do not think about it,” and so on, as we usually tell people.

GOD'S PUNISHMENT IS HANGING OVER US

St. John of Kronstadt.



My beloved, we read in 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's 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, with-

out 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 not sin something extremely hard given that it is unnatural, and alien to our divine nature? Is not sin 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 through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (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 not our hearts 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.



Remember that God, during your prayers, is watching for your affirmative answer to the question which He is inwardly asking you: *Do you believe I am able to do this?* To which question you must from the depth of your heart reply, *Yes, Lord!* (Mt 9:28).

St. John of Kronstadt

SEEKING THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.



The angel of God asks the Myrrh-bearing women as though in astonishment: *Why do you seek the living One among the dead?* As though the perceiver of the mystery of God and God's power wanted to say: "How could you have thought for a moment that He is the hostage of death? Do you not know that He is the principal source of life? Do you not know that all life is through Him and that not one living thing can borrow not even a drop of life from any other source? Did He not fully reveal to you His authority over life and death on earth? Who gave life to the lifeless Lazarus? Who took away the life of the barren fig tree?"

O my brethren, let us also cease to look for the living among the dead. If there are some of us who are still seeking Christ among the dead, let them desist from this soul-destroying effort. This is the vain effort of the Jews, pagans and non-Christians. We know that the Lord and Giver of life is not in the tomb but on the Throne of Glory in the heavens. The spirit, not darkened by sin, looks up into heaven and does not see the tomb; and the spirit, darkened by sin, looks into the tomb and does not see heaven. Sin and virtue govern the spiritual vision of man and reveals to each man its own world at cross-purposes with one another. Sin overthrows the vision of the spirit to the earth and reveals to it the corruption of the world. Virtue uplifts the spirit to heaven and reveals to it the eternal world and the resurrected Christ as the King in that world.

O my brethren, let us not seek life among creation, but from the Creator. Let us not commit an even graver sin i.e., let us not seek the Creator in the tomb of creation nor the Illuminating, Immortal One in the darkness of death.

O Lord Jesus, Victor over death, we cry out to You: resurrect us also into life eternal from the corruption and darkness of death.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.



Do not search about for the words to show people you love them. Instead, ask God to show them your love without your having to talk about it. Otherwise you will never have time enough both for loving gestures and for compunction.

St. John Climacus

Ἡ Διδασκαλία τοῦ Ευαγγελίου Εἶναι Μάχαιρα Χειρουργική

Τοῦ ἀειμνήστου Μητρ. Φλωρίνης Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010).

«Οὐκ ἤλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν»
[Ματθ. 10,34]

† † †

Ὁχι εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μαχαίρι ἦρθα νὰ βάλω. Ὅμιλεῖ ὁ Κύριος.

Ὁ Κύριος; Καὶ λέει τέτοια λόγια; Μὰ ἐκεῖνος δὲν εἶνε ὁ «ἄρχων τῆς εἰρήνης» (Ἠσ. 9:6); στὴ γέννησί του δὲν ἔψαλλαν οἱ ἄγγελοι «καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη» (Λουκ. 2:14); ὁ ἴδιος δὲν μακάρισε τοὺς «εἰρηνοποιούς» (Ματθ. 5:9); ἐκεῖνος δὲν χαιρέτισε μετὰ τὴν ἀνάστασί του μὲ τὸ «Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν» (Λουκ. 24:36); Πῶς τώρα λέει «Οὐκ ἤλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν»; Τὰ παιδιὰ του θὰ πιάσουν μαχαίρια, ὅπως οἱ σταυροφόροι τοῦ πάπα; Δὲν εἶνε ἀντίθετα τὸ Σφάζετε μὲ τὸ «Ἀγαπάτε ἀλλήλους» (Ἰω. 13:34), μαχαίρι καὶ κλαδὶ ἐλιᾶς;

Τί μαχαίρι ἐννοεῖ ὁ Κύριος, τὸ γνωστὸ σιδερένιο ὄργανο ποὺ σφάζει τ' ἀρνάκια; Μὰ αὐτὸ θὰ ἔταν τελείως ἀντίθετο μὲ τὸ ὄλο πνεῦμα του. Ἄοπλος ὁ ἴδιος, ἄοπλοι ἠθελε νὰ ἔνε καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι του. Γι' αὐτό, ὅταν ὁ Πέτρος στὴ Γεθσημανῆ χτύπησε τὸ Μάλχο, ὁ Κύριος εἶπε: «Ἀπόστρεψόν σου τὴν μάχαιραν εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς πάντες γὰρ οἱ λαβόντες μάχαιραν ἐν μαχαίρα ἀποθανοῦνται» (Ματθ. 26:52). Ἀθάνατα λόγια! Ὁ ἀργήσουν, φαίνεται, νὰ τὰ νιώσουν οἱ λαοὶ τῆς γῆς.

Κάτι ἄλλο λοιπὸν ἐννοεῖ ὁ Χριστός. Φώτισέ μας, Κύριε, νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε. Ὑπάρχει καὶ μία ἄλλη μάχαιρα; Ποιά; Κατὰ τὸν ἀπόστολο Παῦλο, μάχαιρα εἶνε ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ· αὐτὸς εἶνε «ζῶν καὶ ἐνεργῆς καὶ τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον» (Ἐβρ. 4:12). «Μάχαιρα τοῦ Πνεύματος» εἶνε τὸ «ῥῆμα Θεοῦ» (Ἐφ. 6:17). Αὐτὴ νικᾷ τὰ φονικά ὄπλα καὶ τὰ μεταβάλλει σὲ γεωργικὰ ἐργαλεῖα κατὰ τὸν Ἡσαΐα (βλ. 2:4). Μ' αὐτὴν ἦταν ὀπλισμένοι οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πατέρες. Κρατῶ ξίφος σιδήρου τομώτερον, ἔλεγε ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος.

Ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου εἶνε μάχαιρα χειρουργική κόβει—χωρίζει τὸ ὑγιὲς ἀπὸ τὴ γάγγραινα· γίνεται «χωρισμὸς τοῦ χειρόνος ἀπὸ τοῦ κρείττονος», λένε οἱ πατέρες. Στὸν μέθυσο π.χ. ὁ λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ λέει: «Μέθυσοι βασιλείαν Θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσι» (Α' Κορ. 6:10). Ἄν τὸ δεχτῆ, βάζει μαχαίρι στὸ πάθος,

παύει νὰ πίνη, κόβει τὴ συννααστροφή μὲ θαμῶνες τοῦ Βάκχου σὲ ταβέρνες καὶ κοσμικὰ κέντρα. Πάθος ὀλέθριο, λέει, θὰ σὲ σφάζω! Αὐτὴ εἶνε ἡ ἀπόφασί τοῦ μετανοημένου. Ἀλλὰ ἔως ὅτου νικήσῃ τὸν κακὸ ἑαυτοῦ, τί πόλεμος! Πόλεμος ὅμως εὐλογημένος, ποὺ φέρνει στὸ τέλος τὴν ἀσύλληπτη «εἰρήνην τοῦ Θεοῦ» (Φιλίπ. 4:7).

Ἄπ' τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ πιστεύει στὸν Κύριο ὁ Χριστιανὸς βρίσκεται σὲ ἐμπόλεμη κατάστασι· πρῶτα μὲ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ του—τὰ ἐλαττώματά του, ἔπειτα μὲ τὸ εἰδωλολατρικὸ περιβάλλον, φίλους καὶ συγγενεῖς. Δὲν κάμπτεται, ἔχει πάρεϊ ἀπόφασί. Δὲν γυρίζει πίσω· θυμᾶται τί ἔπαθε ἡ γυναῖκα τοῦ Λώτ. Προτιμᾷ νὰ χωριστῆ κι ἀπ' τὰ πιδ ἀγαπητὰ πρόσωπα παρὰ νὰ χωριστῆ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο, ποὺ ἔδωσε τὸ τίμιο αἷμα του γι' αὐτόν. Λέει στὸν κόσμο ἐκεῖνο ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Ἰωσήφ στὴ γυναῖκα τοῦ Πετεφρῆ: «Πῶς ποιήσω τὸ ῥῆμα τὸ πονηρὸν τοῦτο καὶ ἀμαρτήσομαι ἐναντίον τοῦ Θεοῦ;» (Γέν. 39:9).

Οἱ ἀρχὲς τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ εἶνε ἀσυμβίβαστες· γι' αὐτὸ ὁ κόσμος δὲν ἀγαπᾷ τὸν συνεπῆ Χριστιανό. Ὁ ζωντανὸς ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ἐνοχλεῖ μέσα σὲ ἄδικη καὶ ἄπιστη γενεὰ εἶνε «βαρὺς καὶ βλεπόμενος» κατὰ τὴ Γραφή (Σ. Σολ. 2:14). Προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὸν ἐκμηδενίσουν μὲ κάθε τρόπο. Θάνατος στοὺς Χριστιανούς! φώναζαν στὰ ἀμφιθέατρα τῆς Ῥώμης. Εἰρωνεῖς, ἐμπαιγμοί, συκοφαντίες, παραγκωνισμοί, ἀπειλές, φυλακίσεις,

δημεύσεις περιοσιῶν, καὶ θανατώσεις σκληρές. Ἀλλὰ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ μὲ τὴν μάχαιρα τοῦ Πνεύματος πολεμοῦσαν τὸν ἑωσφόρο, ἤλεγχαν τὴ μωρία καὶ ἐγκληματικότητα τοῦ περιβάλλοντος. Οἱ θεοὶ σας, ἔλεγαν στοὺς διώκτες, εἶνε εἰδῶλα, «ἀργύριον καὶ χρυσίον, ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων στόμα ἔχουσι καὶ οὐ λαλήσουσιν, ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχουσι καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται, ὄτα ἔχουσι καὶ οὐκ ἀκούσονται...» (Ψαλμ. 113:12-16). Οἱ πιστοὶ ἐκεῖνοι ἦταν ἀπτόητοι, ὡς λέοντες πῦρ πνέοντες. «Ἐγγὺς μαχαίρας ἐγγὺς Θεοῦ, μεταξὺ θηρίων μεταξὺ Θεοῦ», θά ἔλεγον μαζὶ μὲ τὸν ἅγιο Ἰγνάτιο τὸν θεοφόρο. Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἐκεῖνοι νικοῦσαν σφαζόμενοι—ὄχι σφάζοντας, χύνοντας τὸ δικό τους αἷμα—ὄχι τῶν ἄλλων· νὰ ἡ διαφορὰ μὲ τὸ μωαμεθανισμὸ καὶ τὸν κομμουνισμὸ.

Ἔχοντας αὐτὰ ὑπ' ὄψιν ἂς δοῦμε τώρα τὴν κατάστασι. Μὲ θλίψι διαπιστώνεται, ὅτι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ σήμερα εἴμαστε χωρὶς «μάχαιραν», γενναῖες ἀποφάσεις, πόλεμο μὲ τὸ κακό. Χλιαρὴ ἡ ἀντίστασι. Ὁ κόσμος δὲν μᾶς πολεμεῖ, γιὰτὶ ἀπλούστατα δὲν ἐνοχλοῦμε τὸν



κοσμοκράτορα, δὲν συγκρουόμαστε μὲ τὸν κόσμον, δὲν ἀγωνιζόμαστε· ἀφωπλισθήκαμε, παραδινόμαστε. Ὅχι ὅ,τι θέλει ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἀλλ' ὅ,τι θέλει ὁ κόσμος καὶ τ' ἁμαρτωλὰ συγκροτήματά του, αὐτὸ δεχόμαστε. Κ' ἐπειδὴ θέλημα Χριστοῦ καὶ θελήματα τοῦ κόσμου συγκρούονται καὶ φαίνεται καθαρὰ ἢ ἀντίθεσί τους, ἐμεῖς μὲ ἔξυπνη καὶ συγχρονισμένη θεολογικὰ(!) σκέψι ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε ἐπιχειρήματα νὰ δικαιολογήσουμε τίς ὑποχωρήσεις στὶς κοσμικὲς τάσεις καὶ ἐπιθυμίες. Προσπαθοῦμε νὰ συμβιάσουμε τὰ ἀσυμβίβαστα, νὰ γεφυρώσουμε τὰ ἀγεφύρωτα, νὰ διαλύσουμε τὸ λάδι μέσα στὸ νερό, νὰ ἐπινοήσουμε μιὰ μικτὴ στάσι, κυμαινόμενοι διαρκῶς μεταξὺ ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου, φθορᾶς καὶ ἀφθαρσίας. Ἀκόμη κι ὅταν μιλάμε κατὰ τοῦ κόσμου, ὁ κόσμος κυριαρχεῖ μέσα μας! Φαίνονται ὑπερβολὲς αὐτά;

Νά μερικὰ παραδείγματα. Παίξεται ἓνα ἔργο. Καὶ ἐνῶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο θέλει καὶ τὸ βλέμμα καὶ τὴ σκέψι ἀμόλυντα (βλ. Ματθ. 5:28) καὶ τὸ Ψαλτήρι λέει «*Ἀπόστρεψον τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου τοῦ μὴ ἰδεῖν ματαιότητα*» (Ψαλμ. 118:37), ὁ σημερινὸς χριστιανὸς πάει καὶ τὸ βλέπει, ἐνῶ οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοὶ ποτέ δὲν θὰ τό 'καναν. Ἄς πῆγαινε, ἂν εἶχε ζῆλο, ὄχι νὰ δῆ ἀλλὰ νὰ διαμαρτυρηθῆ γιὰ τὸ θέαμα· τότε θὰ χρησιμοποιοῦσε τὴν μάχαιρα. Ἀλλὰ τώρα, γλιαρὸς αὐτός, ὑποχωρεῖ. Ὑποχωρεῖ ἀκόμη στὰ ζητήματα τοῦ χοροῦ, τοῦ καρναβάλου, τῆς ἀποφυγῆς τῆς τεκνογονίας, τῶν μικτῶν γάμων, τῆς καταργήσεως τῶν κωλυμάτων γάμου, τοῦ διαζυγίου. Γενικὴ ὑποχώρησις. Ὑποχωρεῖ ὅμως καὶ ἡ ἐπίσημος ἐκκλησία σὲ ἀντιχριστιανικὲς ἀπαιτήσεις τοῦ κράτους, τὸ ὁποῖο οὐσιαστικὰ τὴν κυβερνᾷ.

Μάχαιρα, ποὺ χωρίζει εὐεργετικὰ κράτος καὶ ἐκκλησία καὶ ἀποδίδει εὐαγγελικὰ «*τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ*» (Ματθ. 22:21), δὲν φαίνεται. Οἱ ναοὶ τείνουν νὰ γίνουν θέατρα. Ἀκούγονται ἡδη φωνὲς ἡθοποιῶν καὶ κανταδόρων. Σκέτς καὶ ἀθῶες δῆθεν θεατρικὲς παραστάσεις κατηχητριῶν παρουσία ἱερέων καὶ ἀρχιερέων ἄρχισαν μέσα σὲ ναοὺς. Αὐτά, βλέπετε, θέλει ὁ λαός. Γέλια καὶ καγχασιμοὶ ἀντὶ δακρῶν θ' ἀκούγονται στὸ ἔξῃς. Μάχαιρα Ὁρθοδοξίας, μάχαιρα εὐλογημένη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποῦ εἶσαι νὰ κάνης τὴν σωτήρια τομή;

Ἐφοδιασθῆτε μὲ μάχαιραν, ἀγαπητοί μου. Τὸ πνεῦμα μιᾶς νόθου θρησκευτικῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ συνεχῶς ἐκκοσμικεύεται καὶ συμβιάζεται μὲ νεωτερισμοὺς, πρέπει νὰ καταπολεμηθῆ. Τώρα, ποὺ τὸ κακὸ ὅπως στὸν βιβλικὸ κατακλυσμὸ τείνει νὰ καλύψῃ καὶ τίς κορυφές, καὶ θεολόγοι κι ἀκαδημαϊκοὶ βγαίνουν δημοσίως καὶ συνηγοροῦν σὲ εἰδωλολατρικὲς ἐκδηλώσεις, ἄς ἀκουσθῆ πάλι ἡ ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου· «*Ὁ μὴ ἔχων (μάχαιραν) πωλήσει τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ*

καὶ ἀγοράσει μάχαιραν» (Λουκ. 22:36). Ὅσοι ὡς τώρα δεῖξαμε γλιαρότητα καὶ ὑποχωρήσεις σὲ κοσμικὲς ἀπαιτήσεις, ἄς ἀναθεωρήσουμε. Ὅχι φίλοι τοῦ κόσμου· φίλοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ γίνουμε. Δὲν ἀκοῦμε πῶς μᾶς ἐλέγχει τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ; «*Μοιχοὶ καὶ μοιχαλίδες! οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστίν; ὅς ἂν οὖν βουληθῆ φίλος εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου, ἐχθρὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καθίσταται*» (Ἰακ. 4:4). Ν' ἀλλάξουμε τακτικὴ· στὶς ψυχές μας νὰ κυριαρχῆ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου· γιὰ χάρι του νὰ θυσιάζουμε συμφέροντα, συγγένειες, φιλίες, συναισθήματα, καὶ τὴ ζωὴ μας γι' αὐτόν. Νά ἡ μάχαιρα ποὺ πρέπει ν' ἀγοράσουμε.

Ἀδελφοί, δὲν εἶνε πάντα καλὸ ἡ ὁμόνοια καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη. Ἄν συνεπάγεται θυσία ἀρχῶν, τότε προτιμότερος ὁ πόλεμος. Κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν θεολόγο «*κρείττων ἐπαινετὸς πόλεμος εἰρήνης χωριζούσης Θεοῦ*». Λοιπὸν ἄς θυσιάσουμε τὴ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἄς ποῦμε τὰ λόγια ἐνὸς πιστοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ· «*Ὁ λέγων τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ, Οὐκ ἠώρακά σε, καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐπέγνω καὶ τοὺς υἱούς αὐτοῦ ἀπέγνω ἐφύλαξε τὰ λόγιά σου καὶ τὴν διαθήκην σου διετήρησε*» (Δευτ. 33:9), καὶ τὸ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης «*Εἴ τις οὐ φιλεῖ τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἦτω ἀνάθεμα. μαρὰν ἀθά (=ὁ Κύριος ἔρχεται)*» (Α' Κορ. 16:21-22).

«*Ὅν ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν*». Ναί, Κύριε, καταλαβαίνουμε τὸ λόγο σου· καμμία εἰρήνη δὲν κατακτᾶται χωρὶς πόλεμο. Καὶ ἔδωσες πρῶτος τὸ παράδειγμα. Ἡ εἰρήνη σου ἦρθε ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα πολέμου. Καὶ ἡ ἐπικράτησι τῆς βασιλείας σου γίνεται μόνο ὅταν ἐμπνεώμεθα ἀπὸ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς θυσίας σου. **Μάχαιρα = ἀπόφασι θανάτου γιὰ τὸ λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ.**

Κύριε! Στὰ σβησμένα θυσιαστήρια τῶν καρδιῶν μας ῥῖξε σπινθήρες ἀπ' τὴ φωτιὰ ποὺ ἔφερες. Χωρὶς μάχαιραν, ζῆλο καὶ ἀπόφασι θανάτου γιὰ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, τίποτα δὲν γίνεται.

Πόσο τὰ 'χομε ἀνάγκη αὐτά! Ἄς τὰ ζητήσουμε μετὰ δακρῶν ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο.

(†) ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



Ἄν ὁ θάνατος τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου δὲν σὲ συνέτισε, κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σὲ ὠφελῆσει. Ἄν δὲν μετανοήσεις βλέποντας ἓνα νεκρό, πότε λοιπὸν θὰ ἐπιστρέψεις; Ἄν δὲν νιώσεις κατάνυξη μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔχουν εἰπωθεῖ, τότε ποτέ δὲν θὰ ἀπομακρυνθεῖς ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία.

Ἅγιος Ἐφραίμ ὁ Σῦρος

Μὲ τὸ Λάδι τῆς Παναγίας

Πρεσβ. Διονύσιος Τάτσης.

Μπροστά ἀπὸ μισὸ περίπου αἰῶνα ζοῦσε ἓνας ἀγροφύλακας, ποὺ τὸν ἔλεγαν Ἀντώνη καὶ ἦταν γνωστὸς σὲ πολλὰ χωριά τῆς Κόνιτσας, ιδίως γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη του οἰκογένεια. Εἶχε ἔννια παιδιά, ἀπὸ δύο ἕως δέκα-ἑπτὰ χρονῶν. Ἐξί ἦταν κορίτσια καὶ τρία ἀγόρια. Ἦταν ἄνθρωπος διαφορετικός, μὲ ξεχωριστὸ ἦθος καὶ ἀσυνήθιστη συμπεριφορὰ. Ὅσοι τὸν γνώριζαν, τὸν περιέγραφαν μὲ ὑπερβολικὰ λόγια. Οἱ περισσότεροι τὸν ἐπαινοῦσαν καὶ τὸν συμπαθοῦσαν. Ἦσαν βέβαια, κι ἐκεῖνοι, ποῦ τὸν ἀντιπαθοῦσαν, χωρὶς αἰτία καὶ μιλοῦσαν περιφρονητικὰ. Ὁ ἴδιος, ἀδιαφορῶντας γιὰ τὸ τί λένε οἱ ἄλλοι, ἦταν ὀρηκτικὸς στὴ ζωὴ του. Ἀπ' τοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲν ζητοῦσε βοήθεια. Προσπαθοῦσε μὲ τίς δικές του δυνάμεις νὰ καλύπτει τίς βασικὲς ἀνάγκες τῆς οἰκογένειάς του. Εἶχε τὸ μικρὸ μισθὸ του, τὰ χωράφια, τὸ κυνήγι καὶ μερικὰ εὐκαιριακὰ μεροκάματα.

Ἡ γυναῖκα του, ἡ Δέσπω, ἦταν ἀπλὴ καὶ προσπαθοῦσε νὰ μεγαλώσει τὰ παιδιά της μὲ ἀξιοπρέπεια, χωρὶς γογγυσμοὺς καὶ θορύβους. Ἦταν καὶ ἀπερίεργη. Δὲν ἠθελε νὰ μαθαίνει τί συνέβαινε στοὺς ἄλλους, στὰ ξένα σπίτια. Ἀπέφευγε τὸ κουτσομπολιὸ καὶ τίς φιλονικίες. Ὡστόσο, οἱ ἄλλοι ἀσχολοῦνταν καθημερινὰ μὲ τὸ σπίτι της. Τὴ σχολίαζαν μὲ τρόπο σκληρὸ καὶ τὴ χαρακτηρίζαν καθυστερημένη, γιατί δὲν ἔκανε ἐκτρώσεις. Ἡ Δέσπω δὲν ἔβγαινε ἀπ' τὸ σπίτι. Εἶχε πάντα δουλειὲς καὶ ἦταν μόνιμα κουρασμένη. Ἡ φτώχεια της ἦταν ἐμφανὴς καὶ δικαιολογημένη. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφορία τῶν εὐπόρων μεγάλη. Δὲν θυμόταν ἡ Δέσπω ποτὲ νὰ τῆς ἔχει συμπαρασταθεῖ κάποιος. Οὔτε μιὰ δραχμὴ οὔτε μιὰ καραμέλα γιὰ τὰ παιδιά της.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, κάθε φορὰ, ποῦ γυροῦσε ἀπ' τὰ χωριά στὰ ὅποια ὑπηρετοῦσε, κάτι εἶχε στὸν τορβά του. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάντα τοῦ ἔδιναν, γιατί τὸν ἀγαποῦσαν. Τὰ παιδιά του ἄνοιγαν τὸν τορβά, γιὰ νὰ δοῦν τί εἶχε μέσα. Τὰ λουκοῦμα, οἱ καραμέλες καὶ τὰ φρούτα ἐξαφανίζονταν ἀμέσως. Μερικὲς φορὲς, ὅταν ἔβρισκε εὐκαιρία, τὰ καταβρόχθιζε μόνος του ὁ ζωηρὸς καὶ σωματώδης Νικόλας, τὸ τρίτο παιδί τῆς οἰκογένειάς.

Στὸ σχολεῖο τὰ παιδιά τοῦ Ἀντώνη καὶ τῆς Δέσπως ἦταν καλοὶ μαθητές. Δὲν ἀντιμετώπιζαν δυσκολίες καὶ δὲν δημιουργοῦσαν προβλήματα στ' ἄλλα παιδιά· ἦταν κοινωνικοποιημένα καὶ δὲν εἶχαν ἀπαιτήσεις. Ὅχι πὼς ὑποχωροῦσαν συνέχεια καὶ δέχονταν νὰ τοὺς κοροϊδεύουν οἱ ἄλλοι, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶχαν ἐγωισμό καὶ πονηριά.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης ἦταν ἀγνὸς ἄνθρωπος. Ὁ χαρακτηῖρας του τραχύς, ντόμπρος καὶ ἀποφασιστικός. Ἀγωνιζόταν ἀδιάκοπα γιὰ τὴν οἰκογένειά του, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ βρισκόταν σὲ διαρκῆ κίνηση. Ὅλες τίς ἐποχές. Καὶ τὸ

χειμῶνα, ποὺ δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανένας λόγος νὰ τρέχει ἀπὸ χωριὸ σὲ χωριὸ γιὰ τυχόν ἀγροτοζημιές. Ἦθελε νὰ γεμίζει καθημερινὰ τὸν τορβά του, γιατί καθημερινὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ θρέφει δέκα στόματα.

Μιὰ φορὰ το μῆνα πήγαινε καὶ στὴ χαράδρα τοῦ Ἄου, ὅπου ὑπῆρχαν πολλὰ γιδοπρόβατα. Ἐφτανε μέχρι τὴν τοποθεσία Μύγα. Περνοῦσε πάντα ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου, ὅπου ἔκανε στάση, ιδίως ὅταν γύριζε. Τότε βρισκόταν ἐκεῖ ὁ μοναχὸς Παΐσιος, νέος μοναχός, ποὺ εἶχε ἔρθει ἀπ' τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος. Ὁ Ἀντώνης γνώριζε τὸ μοναχὸ καὶ συχνὰ τοῦ ἐκμυστηρευόταν ὅτι τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσε. Ἐκεῖνος ἦταν πρόθυμος πάντα καὶ προσπαθοῦσε μὲ πολλοὺς τρόπους νὰ βοηθᾶει τὸν πολύτεκνο ἀγροφύλακα.

Στὸ μοναστήρι ὁ Ἀντώνης ἠθελε νὰ ἀνάβει μόνος του τὰ καντήλια καὶ νὰ προσεύχεται μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας γιὰ τὴν οἰκογένειά του. Ὁ μοναχὸς Παΐσιος ἄφηνε τὸν Ἀντώνη ἐλεύθερο, γιατί γνώριζε τὴν καλὴ του προαίρεση καὶ τὴ βαθιὰ του πίστη. Δὲν μποροῦσε, ὅμως, νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὸν πυροβολισμό, ποὺ ἄκουγε κάθε φορὰ, ποὺ ἀπομακρυνόταν ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι ὁ Ἀντώνης. Ἦξερε ὅτι εἶχε πάντα τὸ δίκαννο κοντὰ του, ἀλλὰ δὲν γνώριζε τί σημάδευε. Δὲν τὸν εἶχε ρωτήσει, γιατί δὲν ἠθελε νὰ φανεῖ περίεργος. Συνεχιζόταν αὐτὴ ἡ τακτικὴ γιὰ ἀρκετοὺς μῆνες. Κάποτε, ὅμως, ὁ μοναχός, ἐτοιμάζοντας καφὲ στὸν Ἀντώνη, βρῆκε τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή καὶ τὸν ρώτησε:

-Βρὲ Ἀντώνη, κάθε φορὰ, ποὺ φεύγεις ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι, ἀκούω καὶ μιὰ ντουφέκια. Τί βρίσκεις καὶ σημαδεύεις; Ὁ Ἀντώνης, λίγο ἀνήσυχος, ἀποκάλυψε:

-Ξέρεις, παππούλη, ἐγὼ ἔχω μεγάλη οἰκογένεια καὶ τὰ οἰκονομικά μου εἶναι λιγοστά. Δὲν φτάνουν ν' ἀγοράσω κρέας γιὰ τὰ παιδιά μου. Ἐτσι παίρνω κοντὰ καὶ τὸ δίκαννο κι ὅταν βρῶ κάτι στὸ βουνό, τὸ σκοτώνω.

-Μὰ ἐσὺ ντουφεκᾶς κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἔρχεσαι ἐδῶ.

-Πρέπει νὰ στὸ φανερώσω, παππούλη, τί κάνω. Ὅταν ἀνάβω τὰ καντήλια, κάνω τὴν προσευχὴ μου καὶ ζητῶ ἀπ' τὴν Παναγία νὰ μὲ βοηθήσει νὰ πάω στὰ παιδιά μου λίγο κρέας. Κι ἐκεῖνη πάντα βοηθᾶει. Ἐγὼ παίρνω λάδι ἀπ' τὸ καντήλι της καὶ ἀλείφω κάθε φορὰ τὸ στόχαστρο, ποὺ εἶναι πάνω στὴν κἀνη καὶ ὄλο κάτι βρίσκω.

-Πιστεύεις ὅτι σὲ βοηθᾶει ἡ Παναγία σ' αὐτό;

-Βέβαια, παππούλη. Σὲ μιὰ συγκεκριμένη μεριά, ἐκεῖ κοντὰ στὸν Ἀσπρόλακκο, τίς περισσότερες φορὲς μὲ περιμένει κάποιο ἀγριοκάτσικο, σταλμένο ἀπ' τὴν Παναγία. Τὸ σκοτώνω καὶ τὸ παίρνω.

Ὁ μοναχὸς Παΐσιος εἶχε μείνει κατάπληκτος ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ ἄκουσε. Ζήλευε τὸν Ἀντώνη γιὰ τὴν πίστη του, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν καθαρὸ του νοῦ. Τὸν θαύμαζε ποὺ μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ ἐξασφάλιζε τὸ κρέας τῶν παιδιῶν του.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, ὅταν σκότωνε τὸ ἀπαγορευμένο ἀπ' τὸ νόμο ζῶο, τὸ σήκωνε στὴν πλάτη του καὶ κατηφόριζε ἀπὸ ἓνα δικό του μονοπάτι κοντὰ στὴ ὄχθη τοῦ ποταμοῦ Ἀώου, σ' ἓνα κρυφὸ σημεῖο, ὅπου κανένας δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τὸν δεῖ. Ἦταν δύο μεγάλες πέτρες, ποὺ εἶχαν σχηματίσει μιὰ πυραμίδα κι ἓνα μικρὸ σπήλαιο, ἐνῶ γύρω, γύρω-γύρω ὑπῆρχαν ἴτιες καὶ διάφοροι θάμνοι. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Ἀντώνης ἔγδερνε τὸ ἀγριοκάτσικο, τὸ κοιμάτιαζε καὶ τὸ ἔβαζε μέσα στοὺς τορβάδες του. Κι ὅταν ἐκείνος ἔφευγε ἀπ' τὸ σπήλαιο, ἐμφανίζονταν οἱ ἀλεπούδες καὶ τὰ τσακάλια, ποὺ ἔτρωγαν ὅτι ἄφηνε ὁ λαθροκυνηγός. Συγχρόνως κατέβαιναν καὶ τὰ κοράκια, ποὺ ζητοῦσαν τὸ δικό τους μερίδιο.

Ὁ Ἀντώνης, φορῶντας τὴν ὑπηρεσιακὴ του στολή, φορτώνονταν τὸ κρέας, ποὺ κάποτε ἔφτανε καὶ τὰ εἴκοσι κιλά καὶ ὁδοιποροῦσε πολλὲς ὥρες, γιὰ νὰ φτάσει στὸ σπίτι του. Ἡ ἱκανοποίησή του ἦταν βαθιὰ καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὴν Παναγία ἀδιάκοπη.

Ὅταν ὁ μοναχὸς Παΐσιος ἔφυγε ἀπ' τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου, ὁ Ἀντώνης συνέχισε γιὰ λίγα χρόνια τὴν ἴδια διαδρομὴ, ὅσο ἄντεχαν οἱ σωματικὲς του δυνάμεις. Πολλὴ ἀργότερα, συνταξιούχος πιά, ἔμαθε ὅτι ὁ γνωστός του μοναχὸς Παΐσιος βρισκόταν στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος καὶ θέλησε νὰ τὸν ἐπισκεφθεῖ. Ἡ συνάντηση ὑπῆρξε συγκινητικὴ. Ὁ φημισμένος πιά μεγάλος Γέροντας θυμήθηκε τὰ παλιὰ καὶ συμβούλεψε τὸ γερασμένο Ἀντώνη:

—Νὰ διατηρήσεις τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη σου στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ 'σαι σίγουρος ὅτι ὅλα θὰ πηγαίνουν καλὰ...



Ὁ προηγούμενος αἰώνας ἦταν ὁ αἰώνας τῶν Ὁσίων, τῶν Ἀσκητῶν καὶ τῶν Ἀσκητριῶν... Πόσοι Ἅγιοι; Ἀναρίθμητο τὸ πλῆθος τους. Ὁ δικός μας αἰώνας θὰ εἶναι ὁ αἰώνας τῶν Ὁμολογητῶν! Καὶ τὴν ὁμολογία θὰ καλῆσαι νὰ τὴν κάνης παντοῦ!

Τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ τὸ ἀλλάξῃ ὁ Κύριος! Γιατί θὰ ἔχουμε αὐτὲς τὲς ἐξετάσεις; Διότι χρειάζεται ὁ Χριστὸς τοὺς δικούς του ἀνθρώπους τώρα, γιὰ νὰ φτειάξῃ τὸ καινούργιο πλήρωμα τοῦ σκάφους Του. Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία! Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ! Καὶ ἀποφάσισε ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ ἀποκαθαρίσῃ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτοῦ τοῦ σκάφους. Καὶ πλήρωμα δὲν εἶστε μόνον ἐσεῖς οἱ ἀπλοῖ Χριστιανοί.

Τώρα θὰ δώσουμε ἐξετάσεις ὅλοι! Κανένας μὴν ἔχει πεποίθησι στὶς παλαιὲς περγαμινές του: «Μὰ ἐγὼ ἔκαμα τόσα προσκυνήματα, μὰ ἐγὼ εἶχα τὸν τάδε Γέροντα, τὸν τάδε Ἅγιο...». Τώρα ΟΛΑ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀρχή! Σὰν νὰ ξεκινᾷ καινούργια ζωή!

† Μόρφου Νεόφυτος

Αἰωνία ἡ Εὐγνωμοσύνη μας καὶ ἡ Μνήμη τοῦ Ἀθάνατου Γέρου τοῦ Μοριὰ

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς.

«**Λάμπουν τὰ χιόνια στὰ βουνὰ κι ὁ ἥλιος στὰ λαγκάδια, λάμπουν καὶ τὰ 'λαφρά σπαθιά τῶν Κολοκοτρωναίων**»

† † †

Ἦταν 4 Φεβρουαρίου τοῦ 1843. Ὁ Θεοδωρὸς Κολοκοτρῶνης, ἀρπάζεται ἀπὸ τὰ φτερὰ τῆς δόξας καὶ μπαίνει διὰ παντὸς στὸ ἅγιο εἰκονοστάσι τοῦ Γένους. Τελευταία του ἐπιθυμία, νὰ βάλουν, στὸ μνημα του τὴν ἡμισέληνο, κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ τσαρούχια του, νὰ τὴν πατάει καὶ πεθαμένος τὴν Τουρκιά, ὅπως τὴν πατοῦσε καὶ ὅταν τὴν πολεμοῦσε καὶ τὴν κατατρόπωνε...

Διαβάξεις τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματά του καὶ τὲς φυλλάδες του γιὰ τὴν Ἐθνεγερασία καὶ νομίζεις ὅτι ἀνοίγεις ἓνα «μυρογιάλι», ἐκεῖνα τὰ μικρὰ φιαλίδια ποὺ ὅλα περιέχουν ἀρώματα ἐξαίσια. Ὁσὴ εὐωδίας πνευματικὴ ἀναδίδεται, παρ' ὅλα τὰ πάθια καὶ τοὺς καημοὺς ἐκεῖνης τῆς περιόδου.

Ἔχω τὸ συνήθειο, ὅταν συναντῶ στὰ ἀναγνώσματά μου, λόγια καὶ ἐπεισόδια τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν, ποὺ στέκεσαι καὶ τὰ ξαναδιαβάζεις, ποὺ κρῦβουν στὰ φυλλώματά τους πετράδια, νὰ τὰ καταγράψω, γιὰ νὰ μὴν λησμονηθοῦν. Σκοπός μου νὰ τὰ μοιραστῶ μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς μου. Σ' αὐτὲς τὲς ἐξοπλιστικὲς ἡλικίες, τὰ παιδιὰ δὲν θέλουν περισπούδαστες ἀναλύσεις καὶ κενόλογες φλυαρίες. Μαθαίνουν μὲ τὸ παράδειγμα, μὲ τὸ παραμῦθι, μὲ τὴν ἀξία καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ σαρκωμένες σὲ πρόσωπα. Τὸ λυμφατικὸ κράτος διδάσκει μὲ συνταγὲς μαγειρικῆς, ἐμεῖς θὰ ἐπιμενοῦμε νὰ δίνουμε στοὺς μαθητὲς μας παραδείγματα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀντρεωμένα χρόνια. Εἶπαμε πνευματικὸ ἀρματολόκι...

Ξαναθυμίζω, λοιπόν, κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ λεβέντικα τοῦ Κολοκοτρῶνη καὶ ἃς εἶναι αὐτά, ταπεινὸ μνημόσυνο στὸν ἐλευθερωτὴ μιᾶς Μάχης τῆς Γράνας, 10 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1821.

Βγήκαν οἱ πολιορκημένοι στὴν Τριπολιτσὰ Τοῦρκοι νὰ χτυπήσουν τοὺς Ἕλληνες. Ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης εἶχε διατάξει νὰ ἀνοιχθεῖ τάφος (γράνα) 700 μέτρων, βάθους ἑνὸς καὶ πλάτους δύο μέτρων. Κάποια στιγμή οἱ Τοῦρκοι ἐπιτίθενται στὴ γράνα καὶ ἀπὸ τὲς δύο μεριές. Ἐπρεπε ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μοριὰ νὰ διατάξει τὰ παλληκάρια του νὰ χωριστοῦν, νὰ μοιραστοῦν τὰ καριοφίλια, νὰ «χτυποῦν» οἱ μισοὶ πρὸς τὴν μία πλευρὰ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι μισοὶ πρὸς τὴν ἄλλη.

Ἐρωτῶ τοὺς μαθητὲς μου πῶς τὸ ἔκανε πάνω στὴν ἀντάρα τῆς μάχης: Τοὺς βασάνισα κανένα πεντάλεπτο καὶ ἄκουσα ἀπίθανες ἀπαντήσεις. Τί εἶπε ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης καὶ ἀμέσως χωρίστηκαν τὰ ντουφέκια;

«Κῶλο μὲ κῶλο ὠρὲ Ἕλληγες!». «Χαμὸς» στὴν τάξη, γέλια καὶ θαυμασμὸς γιὰ τὴν μεγαλοφυΐα τοῦ Γέρου.

Λίγο πρὶν συλλάβει ἡ βαυαρικὴ ἀντιβασιλεία τὸν ἐλευθερωτὴ τοῦ Ἔθνους μας, ὁ ἀντιβασιλεὺς Ἄρμανσπεργκ, θέλοντας νὰ τὸν δοκιμάσει, τοῦ εἶπε:

- Ἔχεις πολλοὺς ἐχθροὺς, στρατηγέ

- Ἔχω, παραδέχτηκε ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης, μὰ δύο ἀπ' αὐτοῦς, στέκονται οἱ χειρότεροι ἀπ' ὄλους.

- Καὶ ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ δύο αὐτοὶ ἐχθροὶ σου; ρώτησε περιέργω ὁ προϊστάμενος τῶν ἀντιβασιλιάδων.

Ὁ Γέρος τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε:

- Ὁ ἕνας τ' ὄνομά μου κι ὁ ἄλλος οἱ δούλεψές μου γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα.

Σεπτέμβριος τοῦ 1833. Ἔστειλαν οἱ Βαυαροὶ ἕνα «τσοῦρμo», σαράντα «χωροφύλακες» γιὰ νὰ ἀλυσοδέσουν, ποιόν; Τὸ ἀθάνατο Εἰκοσιένα. Ἀρχηγὸς τοὺς κάποιος εὐτελής καὶ γλοιώδης μοίραρχος, ὀνόματι Κλεόπας. Μόλις τὸν εἶδε ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μοριά, εἶπε:

- Ἐφτανε, ὠρὲ Κλεόπα, νὰ μοῦ στείλουν ἕνα σκυλι μαλλιαρό, ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα ὅπου κάνουν θελήματα, μ' ἕνα γράμμα στὸ στόμα νὰ πάω στ' Ἀνάπλι καὶ μ' ἕνα φαναράκι νὰ φέγγει καὶ τῶν δυονῶν μας...

Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸς ὁ τρόπος ποὺ ἔκοψε τὸ κάπνισμα ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης. Ὅταν κάποτε ξέμεινε ἀπὸ καπνὸ, ἔξυσε τὴν πίπα του γιὰ νὰ καπνίσει ὅσα ὑπολείμματα εἶχαν μείνει, ἀλλὰ ἀηδίασε ἀπὸ τὴν πίκρα. «Ὅριστε ἄνθρωπος ποὺ θέλει νὰ ἐλευθερώσει τὸν τόπο του καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ ὁ ἴδιος νὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ πάθος του. Θεέ μου συγχώρα με», εἶπε καὶ πέταξε τὸν καπνὸ καὶ τὰ σύνεργά του.

Ἡ μάχη στὸ Βαλτέτσι κράτησε σχεδὸν 23 ὥρες καὶ ἦταν ἡ πρώτη σημαντικὴ νίκη τοῦ Ἀγώνα. Ἀμέσως μετὰ τὴ μάχη, ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης συγκινημένος μίλησε πρὸς τοὺς νικητὲς καὶ ὅπως ἀναφέρει ὁ ἴδιος στὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του, τοὺς εἶπε μεταξὺ ἄλλων ὅτι ἡ ἡμέρα αὐτὴ πρέπει νὰ καθαγιαστεῖ μὲ νηστεία ὄλων καὶ νὰ ἐορτάζεται ἡ ἐπέτειός της εἰς «αἰῶνας αἰῶνων, ἕως οὐ στέκει τὸ ἔθνος, διότι ἦτο ἡ ἐλευθερία τῆς πατρίδος». Ἡ νίκη στὸ Βαλτέτσι ἐνίσχυσε τὸ ἠθικὸ καὶ τὴν αὐτοπεποίθηση τῶν Ἑλλήνων, στοιχεῖα ποὺ ἐπαιξαν ἀποφασιστικὸ ρόλο στὴν ἄλωση τῆς Τριπολιτσᾶς (23 Σεπτεμβρίου 1821).

Στὰ πρῶτα χρόνια τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως τοῦ 1821, στὴν Ἐθνοσυνέλευση τῆς Τροιζήνας συνέβη τὸ ἐξῆς περιστατικὸ. Οἱ πληρεξούσιοι, ὅπως ἔλεγαν

τότε τοὺς βουλευτὲς τοῦ νεοσύστατου ἐλληνικοῦ κράτους, συνεδρίαζαν στὰ χωράφια καὶ τὰ περιβόλια, ὅπως οἱ ἀρχαῖοι πρόγονοί μας. Ὅλοι τοὺς κάθονταν σταυροπόδι, κάτω στὸ χῶμα καὶ μόνον ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης ἦταν σκαρφαλωμένος στη διχάλα μίας λεμονιάς.

Κάποτε, λοιπόν, ἤθελαν νὰ ψηφίσουν ἕνα νομοσχέδιο καὶ μερικοὶ πληρεξούσιοι πρότειναν νὰ κοπεῖ στὸ κείμενο τοῦ νομοσχεδίου ἡ φράση «ἐν αὐτῇ». Ὁ Πρόεδρος τῆς Συνελεύσεως προσπαθοῦσε νὰ τοὺς πείσει πῶς δὲν ἦταν σωστὸ νὰ περικοποῦν οἱ δύο αὐτὲς λέξεις, ἡ φράση «ἐν αὐτῇ», γιατί θὰ ἀλλοιωνόταν ὅλο τὸ νόημα τοῦ σχετικοῦ ἀρθροῦ. Κάποια στιγμή δύο πληρεξούσιοι σηκώθηκαν ὀργισμένοι ἀπὸ τὶς «θέσεις» τοὺς καὶ ἄρχισαν νὰ φωνάζουν πρὸς τὸ προεδρεῖο: Νὰ κοπεῖ τὸ «ἐν αὐτῇ». Ναί, νὰ κοπεῖ. Τὸ «ἐν αὐτῇ» νὰ κοπεῖ ὅπωςδήποτε, ὁ ἄλλος.

Ὅχι, δὲν κόβεται τὸ «ἐν αὐτῇ» καὶ ἡ συνεδρίαση ἐξελισσόταν σὲ σύρραξη. Ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μοριά λαγοκοιμόταν, ἀφήνοντας τοὺς λογιότατους νὰ ἐρίζουν, μὲ τὴν ἀκατανόητη, γι' αὐτόν, στεγνὴ καὶ τυποποιημένη γλώσσα τους. Ἀκούγοντας ὅμως τὰ λόγια καὶ τὴν φασαρία, πήδηξε μ' ἕνα σάλτο κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν λεμονιά καὶ πηγαίνοντας κατ' εὐθείαν πρὸς τὸ προεδρεῖο, ἔξαλλος ἄρχισε νὰ ρωτᾷ:

- Τίνος τὸ αὐτὸ θὰ κόψετε, ὠρὲ πατριώτες; Τόσο μεγάλο ἔγκλημα ἔκανε ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ντροπὴ μας Ἕλληγες. Ἐμεῖς ἀγωνιστήκαμε τόσα χρόνια γιὰ νὰ διώξουμε τὸν τύραννο καὶ τώρα θ' ἀρχίσουμε νὰ κόβουμε τὰ αὐτιά τοῦ κοσμάκη;

Μέσα σ' ἕνα πανδαμῶνιο ἀπὸ γέλια, χρειάστηκε νὰ ἐπέμβει ὁ Πρόεδρος, γιὰ νὰ ἐξηγήσει στὸν Κολοκοτρῶνη ὅτι παρεξήγησε τὰ πράγματα. Στὸ τέλος, βέβαια, κατάλαβε καὶ ὁ Κολοκοτρῶνης τὴν γκάφα του καὶ τοὺς εἶπε χαμογελώντας:

- Ἐ! Καλὰ δά, δὲν εἶναι καὶ τίποτα σπουδαῖο, ὠρὲ γραμματιζόμενοι. Πῶς θέλετε νὰ καταλάβω, ἐγὼ ὁ σκράπας, τίς ἐλληνικοῦρες σας. Λέξεις κόψτε ὅσες θέλετε, αὐτιά μία φορὰ νὰ μὴν πειράξετε, γιατί θὰ ἔχουμε ἄσχημα ξεμπερδέματα. Εἶπα κι ἐγὼ παλάβωσαν οἱ καλαμαράδες. Τί κόρακα μαθές!

Αἰωνία του ἡ μνήμη καὶ ἡ εὐγνωμοσύνη τοῦ ἔθνους μας στὸν ἀθάνατο Γέρο τοῦ Μοριά. Νά ἔχουμε τὴν εὐχή του...



Ήσυχασμός: Ἡ Κορυφαία Ἐκφραση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πνευματικότητας

Τοῦ κ. Λάμπρου Κ. Σκόντζου, Θεολόγου – Καθηγητοῦ.

Ἡ λέξις ἡσυχασμὸς παράγεται ἀπὸ τὸ ρῆμα ἡσυχάζω ποὺ σημαίνει βρίσκομαι σὲ κατάστασις σιγῆς, ἡρεμίας καὶ αὐτογνωσίας.

Ὁ ἡσυχαστὴς μοναχὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ λαϊκὸς, πλημμυρισμένος ἀπὸ θεῖο ἔρωτα, προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἀποβάλλει κάθε κοσμικὴ ἐνασχόλησις καὶ σκέψις, ἀποζητᾷ τὴν ἡσυχία καὶ ἐπικεντρώνεται στὴ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, λέγοντας ἀδιάλειπτα τὴν νοερὰ προσευχὴ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἐλέησον μὲ τὸν ἁμαρτωλό». Ἡ ἄσκησις αὐτὴ καθαρίζει τὴν καρδιά ἀπὸ κάθε πάθος καὶ τὸ νοῦ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀκάθαρτους λογισμοὺς, τοὺς ὁποῖους ὑπαγορεύουν οἱ δαίμονες.

Ὁ ἡσυχαστὴς ἔτσι ἀποκτᾷ «νοῦν Χριστοῦ», ὅπως εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Τὸ μυαλό του, ἡ καρδιά του, οἱ αἰσθήσεις του καὶ γενικὰ ὁλόκληρη ἡ ψυχοσωματικὴ του ὑπόστασις γεμίζει ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκτιστη χάρις καὶ τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν καθαρίζει ἀπὸ τοὺς ρύπους τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τὸν ἀγιάζει, τὸν καθιστᾷ μέτοχο τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μὲ τὴν συνεχῆ ἄσκησις ὁ ἡσυχαστὴς αἰσθάνεται μὲ τίς σωματικὲς του αἰσθήσεις, βλέπει μὲ τὰ σωματικὰ μάτια του τὸ ἄκτιστο θεῖο φῶς, αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ποὺ εἶδαν οἱ ἅγιοι ἀπόστολοι στὸ ὄρος Θαβῶρ.

Τὸ ἡσυχαστικὸ κίνημα, ὑπῆρχε ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδρύσεως τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Μεγάλοι Πατέρες τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἐκκλησίας ἄσκησαν τὸν ἡσυχασμὸ, ὅπως ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀπομονώθηκαν στὸν Ἡρι ποταμὸ στὸν Πόντο, ὅπου ἀσκήθηκαν στὴν ἡσυχία, τὴν προσευχὴ, τὴν μελέτη τῶν Ἁγίων Γραφῶν, στὸ θεῖο στοχασμὸ καὶ ἔφτασαν σὲ θαυμαστὲς θεῖες ἐμπειρίες καὶ στὴ θεοπτία.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἡσυχαστικὸ κίνημα ἀναπτύχθηκε καὶ μεσουράνησε τὸν 13^ο καὶ 14^ο μ. Χ. αἰῶνα, μὲ ἐπικέντρο τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος. Πρῶτος κομιστὴς καὶ δάσκαλος ὑπῆρξε ὁ Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Σιναΐτης. Συνεχιστὴς του ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς (1296-1356), ὁ ὁποῖος λάμπρυνε τὸν ἀγιορειτικὸ μοναχισμὸ.

Ὅμως τὸ ἡσυχαστικὸ κίνημα πολεμήθηκε μὲ σφοδρότητα ἀπὸ τὸν δυτικὸ παρεφθαρμένον χριστιανισμὸ καὶ τὴν σχολιαστικὴν θεολογία. Τὸ

1335 ὁ μοναχὸς, θεολόγος καὶ φιλόσοφος Βαβλαάμ, ἤρθε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἰταλία στὴν ὀρθόδοξη ἀνατολή γιὰ νὰ ἀντικρούσει τὸ κίνημα τοῦ ἡσυχασμοῦ. Βαθύτατα ἐπηρεασμένος ἀπὸ τὸν ἀριστοτελισμὸ, τὴν λατινικὴν θεολογία καὶ τὸν σχολαστικισμὸ, δίδασκε πὼς ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ γνωρίσει, νὰ προσεγγίσει καὶ νὰ ἐνωθεῖ μὲ τὸ Θεό. Ἐπίσης δίδασκε πὼς ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι «κλεισμένος στὸν ἑαυτό του» καὶ δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἐνωθεῖ μὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

Ἀντίθετα, οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι Πατέρες, κάνοντας τὴν διευκρίνισις μεταξὺ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, δίδασκον πὼς ἡ γνώσις τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι μὲν ἀδύνατος, ὅχι ὅμως οἱ ἄκτιστες θεῖες ἐνεργεῖες, οἱ ὁποῖες δίνονται ὡς ὑψιστες δωρεὲς στοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ γίνονται φανερὲς σὲ ὅσους κατορθώνουν νὰ καθαρθοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τους. Κύριο μέσο φωτισμοῦ καὶ προσωπικῆς ἐμπειρίας τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἡ ἀδιάκοπη νοερὰ προσευχὴ, στὴν ὁποία ἀσκοῦνταν οἱ ἡσυχαστὲς μοναχοί, δια τῆς ἀδιάκοπης προσευχῆς:

«Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, γιὰ καὶ Λόγε τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με», κατόρθωναν νὰ βλέπουν μὲ τὰ σωματικὰ τους μάτια τὸ Ἄκτιστο Φῶς, δηλαδὴ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Γιὰ τοὺς δυτικούς, καὶ ἐν προκειμένῳ γιὰ τὸν ἐκπρόσωπό τους μοναχὸ Βαβλαάμ, ἡ δια τῆς νοερᾶς προσευχῆς

καὶ τῆς νύψεως θεοπτία ἦταν ἀκατανόητη καὶ βλάσφημη. Κατηγοροῦσαν τοὺς ἡσυχαστὲς γιὰ αἰρετικούς (μεσσαλιανιστὲς) καὶ τοὺς μέμφονταν ὡς «ὀμφαλοσκόπους», ἐπειδὴ οἱ μοναχοὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπικέντρωναν τὸ βλέμμα τους, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς προσευχῆς, στὸ στέρνο, στὸ μέρος τῆς καρδιάς. Ἡ σύγκρουσί τους μὲ τὸν ἅγιο Γρηγόριο ὑπῆρξε σφοδρὴ καὶ προκάλεσε πνευματικὴ θύελλα, ἐφάμιλλη τῆς εἰκονομαχίας.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς ὑπῆρξε ὑπέρμαχος τοῦ ἡσυχασμοῦ, τῆς πνευματικότερης ἔκφρασις τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου μοναχικοῦ ιδεώδους, διότι ἦταν ἀπόλυτα πεπεισμένος πὼς ἡ θεοπτία μέσῳ τῆς ἀσκήσεως καὶ τῆς νοερᾶς προσευχῆς εἶναι σύμφωνη μὲ τὴν διδασκαλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Γι' αὐτὸ ὑπῆρξε δάσκαλος καὶ ἐμπνευστὴς τοῦ ἡσυχασμοῦ.

Συνεχίζοντας ὁ ἴδιος τὴν μακροαίωνα παράδοσις τῶν ἀρχαίων Πατέρων καὶ ἀσκητῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δίδασκε πὼς ὁ ἄνθρωπος, μὲ τὴν ἄσκησις καὶ τὴ νύψη,



μπορεί να δει και από αυτή τη ζωή, με τα φυσικά του μάτια, το άκτιστο φῶς τοῦ Θεοῦ, αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ποὺ εἶδαν οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ τὴ Μεταμόρφωσή Του στὸ ὄρος Θαβῶρ.

Γι' αὐτὸ ξέσπασε νέα σφοδρὴ θεολογικὴ ἔριδα, παρόμοια μὲ ἐκείνη τῆς εἰκονομαχίας. Εἶναι γνωστὴ ἡ λεγομένη ἡσυχαστικὴ ἔριδα ἢ ὁποῖα συντάραξε τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἢ ὁποῖα ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ συγκαλέσει τρεῖς Συνόδους (1351, 1347 καὶ 1351), γιὰ νὰ ὀρίσει τὴν σῶζουσα διδασκαλία τῆς στὸ ἀκανθῶδες θέμα τοῦ ἡσυχασμοῦ, καταδικάζοντας τοὺς πολεμίους τῆς ὡς αἰρετικούς. Μάλιστα ἡ Σύνοδος τοῦ 1351 θεωρεῖται ὡς ἡ Θ' Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας.

Πρέπει νὰ ἐπισημανθεῖ πῶς, γιὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πίστη μας, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν εἶναι ἀπόκοσμος καὶ παντελῶς ἄγνωστος γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς πεπερασμένους ἀνθρώπους. Βεβαίως δὲν μπορούμε νὰ γνωρίσουμε τὴν οὐσία Του, ἢ ὁποῖα παραμένει ἐντελῶς ἄγνωστη σὲ μᾶς, ἀλλὰ μπορούμε νὰ ἔχουμε μετοχὴ καὶ γνώση τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν Του, μέσῳ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ σωζόμαστε. Ὁ θεὸς τοῦ δυτικῆς σχολαστικισμοῦ, τῆς δυτικῆς χριστιανικῆς παράδοσης, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑποτίθεται ὅτι «κατανοεῖται» δια τῆς λογικῆς δὲν ὑπάρχει, διότι ὅπως εἶπαμε δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸ στὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὴν οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ εἶναι στὴν οὐσία ἓνα εἶδωλο, μιὰ ἀνθρώπινη ἐπινόηση ἑνὸς ἀγνώστου Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ δυτικὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἀφοῦ κατάλαβε ὅτι αὐτὸ ποὺ ἐκλάμβανε ὡς «θεὸ» δὲν εἶναι ὁ Θεός, τὸν ἀρνήθηκε, φτάνοντας στὸ σημεῖο νὰ διακηρύξει ἐπίσημα τὸ «θάνατο τοῦ Θεοῦ» διὰ στόματος τοῦ τραγικοῦ ἐκπροσώπου τῆς εὐρωπαϊκῆς διάνοησης, Νίτσε. Ἀντίθετα στὴν ὀρθόδοξη ἀνατολή, ὅπου ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας ἔχει θέσει τὰ σωστὰ ὄρια μεταξὺ ἀνθρώπου καὶ Θεοῦ, δηλαδὴ τῆς γνώσεως καὶ μετοχῆς τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν του, ἀπουσιάζουν τέτοια φαινόμενα ἄρνησης καὶ ἀθεΐας. Ἡ σύγχρονη ἄρνηση καὶ ἀθεΐα μᾶς ἦρθε ἀπὸ τὴ Δύση.

Καταλαβαίνει λοιπὸν ὁ καθένας πόσο σημαντικὴ εἶναι ἡ συμβολὴ τοῦ ἡσυχαστικοῦ κινήματος γιὰ τὴ διαμόρφωση τῆς ἑλληνορθόδοξης ταυτότητάς μας καὶ αὐτοσυνειδησία μας. Γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς ὀρθοδόξους ὁ ἡσυχασμὸς εἶναι ταυτισμένος μὲ τὴν ἀνόθευτη καὶ ἀπαραχάρακτη χριστιανικὴ μας πίστη καὶ ζωή. Αὐτὸ τὸ βλέπουμε στὰ πρόσωπα τῶν ἁγίων μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἁγίασαν καὶ θεώθηκαν ἐπειδὴ ἦταν ἡσυχαστές, δηλαδὴ ἀγωνίστηκαν νὰ γίνουν μέτοχοι τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, δια τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως, τῆς καθάρσεως ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τῆς ἀδιάλειπτης καὶ καθαρῆς προσευχῆς, διὰ τοῦ καθαροῦ βίου, καὶ τῆς μετοχῆς στὴν ἁγιαστικὴ χάρις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Ποτὲ δὲν ἔπαψε νὰ βιώνεται ὁ ἡσυχασμὸς στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας, τὴ γνήσια, τὴν ἀληθινή, τὴ μοναδικὴ Μία Ἁγία Καθολικὴ καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Θυμίζουμε, πῶς καὶ στὰ δύσκολα χρόνια τῆς τουρκοκρατίας, ἔχουμε ἀνάλογο ἡσυχαστικὸ κίνημα, τὸ λεγόμενο κίνημα τῶν Κολλυβάδων, μὲ ἐπίκεντρο τὸ Ἅγιο Ὄρος.

Καὶ τότε ἦρθαν βλαβερὲς ἐπιδράσεις ἀπὸ τὸ χῶρο τῆς αἰρετικῆς Δύσης, μέσῳ τῶν παπικῶν καὶ προτεσταντῶν ἱεραποστόλων, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἶχαν εἰσβάλλει στὸν ὀρθόδοξο τουρκοκρατούμενο χῶρο γιὰ νὰ ἀλλοιώσουν τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πίστη μας καὶ νὰ μᾶς προσηλυτίσουν στὰ δικά τους δόγματα, νὰ ἀλλοιώσουν τὴν ὀρθόδοξη ζωὴ μας μὲ τὰ δικά τους ἔθιμα. Τότε ἐγέρθηκε ὡς ἰσχυρὸς κυματοθραύστης τὸ κολλυβαδικὸ κίνημα καὶ ἀπέτρεψε αὐτὸν τὸν κίνδυνο.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ σύγχρονοι ἅγιοί μας, ὁ ἅγιος Νεκτᾶριος, ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς, ὁ ἅγιος Παναγῆς Μπασιάς, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς, ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Ἀρχίδος, ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος, ὁ ἅγιος Πορφύριος, ὁ ἅγιος Ἀμφιλόχιος, ὁ ἅγιος Καλλίνικος, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἠσυχαστής, κ.α. καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι λογοτέχνες Παπαδιαμάντης, Μωραϊτίδης, Κόντογλου καὶ ἄλλοι ὑπῆρξαν συνεχιστὲς τοῦ ἡσυχαστικοῦ καὶ κολυβαδικοῦ πνεύματος. Αὐτὴ εἶναι μιὰ τρανὴ ἀπόδειξη ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία μας, μόνη αὐτὴ, ἔχει τὴν ἀλήθεια καὶ τὸ Πανάγιο Πνεῦμα, ποὺ ὑπάρχει σὲ αὐτὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, τὴν ὁδηγεῖ εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν διασώζει ἀκέραιη καὶ ἀλώβητη ἀπὸ τίς πλάνες, τίς αἰρέσεις καὶ τίς παραχαράξεις, διότι ὅπως τονίζουμε ἀδιάκοπα, ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι ταυτόσημη μὲ τὴ σωτηρία μας, χωρὶς τὴν ἀλήθεια, ποὺ διδάσκει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας σωτηρία δὲν ὑπάρχει. Ἐκτὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας σωτηρία δὲν ὑπάρχει, ὅπως διακήρυξε ὁ ἅγιος Κυπριανὸς Καρθαγένης, ὁ μέγας αὐτὸς πατέρας καὶ διδάσκαλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς μέρες μας δὲν λείπουν οἱ ἐπικριτὲς τοῦ Ἠσυχασμοῦ καὶ τοῦ Κολλυβαδικοῦ Κινήματος. Σύγχρονοι θεολογοῦντες καὶ μὴ, στερούμενοι τῆς γνήσιας ὀρθοδόξου πνευματικότητας, συγχέουν τὴν ἡσυχαστικὴ πνευματικότητα καὶ τῶν πρακτικῶν τῆς μὲ τίς ἀρχές, τίς δοξασίες καὶ τίς πρακτικὲς τῶν ἀνατολικῶν θρησκευμάτων καὶ κύρια τοῦ Ἰνδουισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ Βουδισμού. Τὴν ἡσυχία τὴ συγχέουν μὲ τὴν ἀπόκοσμη ἀπομόνωση τῶν γκουρού. Τὴν ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχή, τὴν μονολόγιστη εὐχή, μὲ τὸν ὑπερβατικὸ διαλογισμό.

Ὅμως θέλουν νὰ ἀγνοοῦν ὅτι ὑπάρχει χάσμα ἀγεφύρωτο ἀνάμεσα στὴν ὀρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα καὶ τὰ σύγχρονα αὐτὰ εἰδωλολατρικὰ καὶ πολυθεϊστικὰ θρησκευτάματα.

Παρὰ τίς φαινομενικὲς «ὁμοιότητες» κάποιων ἐξωτερικῶν πρακτικῶν, κανένα κοινὸ στοιχεῖο ἔχουν,

ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν θεολογία, τὴν ἀνθρωπολογία καὶ τὴ σωτηριολογία. Στὰ ἀνατολικά θρησκευόμενα δὲν ὑπάρχει ὕψιστος προσωπικὸς Θεός.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει κακὸ καὶ καλὸ, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ζωὴ ὀρίζει ἀπόλυτα τὸ μοιρολατρικὸ «κάρμα» καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου δὲν ἀπαιτεῖται σωτήρας. Σωτήρας εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του, ὁ ὁποῖος «σῶζεται» δια τῶν ἀσκήσεων τῆς γιόγκα καὶ τοῦ ὑπερβατικοῦ διαλογισμοῦ. Ὁ γιόγκι ἀπομονώνεται, γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν «ἀρνητικὴ ἐνέργεια» τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ γιὰ τὴν πραγμάτωση τῆς «αὐτολύτρωσης» του.

Ἀντίθετα στὴν ὀρθόδοξη ἡσυχαστικὴ παράδοση ὁ ἡσυχαστής, πιστεύει στὸν προσωπικὸ Τριαδικὸ Θεὸ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ ἐναποθέτει σ' Αὐτόν, μὲ ταπείνωση καὶ συντριβὴ τὸν ἀμαρτωλὸ ἑαυτό του. Δὲν ἀπομονώνεται γιὰ νὰ «ἀπαλλαγεῖ» ἀπὸ τοὺς συνανθρώπους του, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ἀφιερωθεῖ ἀπερίσπαστος ἀπὸ τὰ ἐγκόσμια, στὴν συνάντησή του μὲ τὸ Θεό. Ἡ ἀγάπη του γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον ἐκδηλώνεται μὲ τὴν ἀέναη προσευχὴ του γι' αὐτόν. Ἡ ἡσυχία, ἡ ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχὴ, ἡ νηστεία, ἡ ἀγρυπνία δὲν εἶναι αὐτοσκοπός, ἀλλὰ τὰ μέσα γιὰ τὴν πραγματοποίησιν τῆς ἐνώσεως μὲ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὴν θέα τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν Του.

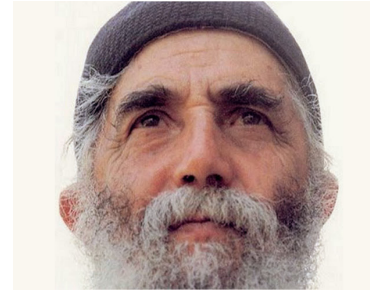
Ἴσως ἀναρωτηθοῦν πολλοί: Ἡ ἡσυχαστικὴ ζωὴ καὶ οἱ πρακτικὲς του, ἀναφέρονται στοὺς μοναχοὺς, αὐτοὶ μποροῦν καὶ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἡσυχαστές. Ἐμεῖς ποὺ ζοῦμε στὸν κόσμον καὶ εἴμαστε ἐπιφορτισμένοι μὲ ὑποχρεώσεις προσωπικὲς, οἰκογενειακὲς, ἐπαγγελματικὲς κλπ καὶ ἀντιμετωπίζουμε δυσκολίες καὶ προβλήματα τῆς καθημερινότητος, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ εἴμαστε ἡσυχαστές, ποὺ σημαίνει δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ γίνουμε μέτοχοι τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ θεόπτες.

Αὐτὸ εἶναι μιὰ λαθεμένη ἀντίληψη. Ὁ κάθε χριστιανός, ἀνεξάρτητα ἂν ζεῖ στὸν κόσμον, ἢ σὲ μοναστήρι ἢ στὴν ἔρημο, καλεῖται νὰ κάνει τὸ δικό του ἀγῶνα γιὰ κάθαρση ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη του, τὴν ἀπόκτηση ἀρετῶν, νὰ καλλιεργήσῃ τὴν πίστη του καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη του στὸ Θεό. Νὰ ἔχει συνειδητὴ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ, νὰ βρῆται σὲ συνεχῆ μετάνοια, νὰ ἐξομολογεῖται νὰ κοινωνᾷ τακτικά, νὰ ἐκκλησιάζεται, νὰ προσεύχεται μὲ κατάνυξη, νὰ νηστεύει, γιὰ νὰ παίρνει δύναμη στὸν ἀγῶνα του. Νὰ μελετᾷ τὸ λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νὰ βρῆται σὲ συνεχῆ ἐγρηγόρηση καὶ γενικὰ νὰ ἀναθέσει τὴ ζωὴ του στὸ Θεό.

Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ δρόμος ποὺ πρέπει νὰ ἀκολουθήσουμε γιὰ νὰ ἐνωθοῦμε μὲ τὸ Θεό, νὰ γίνουμε μέτοχοι τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν του καὶ νὰ τρέφουμε τὴ βεβαία ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας μας. Ὁ Θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, ὁ στοργικὸς μας Πατέρας, θὰ ἐκτιμήσῃ τὴν προσπάθειά μας, θὰ τὴν εὐλογήσῃ καὶ θὰ τὴν ἀξιοποιήσῃ γιὰ τὸ συμφέρον ἡμῶν τῶν παιδιῶν του.

Ἐνα Θαυμαστὸ Γεγονός

Ἀγ. Παΐσιου Ἀγορείτου.



Ὁ Ἅγιος Γέροντας Παΐσιος διηγήθηκε σὲ πνευματικὸ τοῦ παιδὶ τὸ ἀκόλουθο θαυμαστὸ γεγονός, τὸ ὁποῖο συνέβη στὸν ἴδιο:

Κάποτε, ὅταν ἤμουν στὸν Τίμιο Σταυρό, ἀρρώστησα βαριά.

Ἦταν χειμῶνας βαρὺς, εἶχε πέσει τόσο χιόνι ποὺ κανένα δέντρο δὲν ἔμοιαζε γιὰ δέντρο. ὅλα ἦταν πνιγμένα στὸ λευκά, τὰ μονοπάτια εἶχαν χαθεῖ, τὰ πουλιά εἶχαν λουφάξει, τὰ σύννεφα καὶ ἡ ὀμίχλη σκέπαζαν τὸν Ἄθωνα. Δὲν εἶχαν καμμία ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Σταυρονικήτα, μοῦ ἦταν ἀδύνατο νὰ ζήσω περισσότερο ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες, γιατί ἡ ἀρρώστια μὲ εἶχε παραλύσει τελείως.

Περίμενα τὸν Κύριο νὰ μοῦ πάρει τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ νὰ τὴν ὀδηγήσῃ στὸ ἔλεος τῆς εὐσπλαχνίας Του. Οὔτε ἓνα τσάι δὲν μποροῦσα νὰ φτιάξω, οὔτε τὴ σόμπα νὰ ἀνάψω, οὔτε νερὸ νὰ πιῶ εἶχα.

Ἡ ζωὴ μου ἦταν ἀφημένη στὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐλεγα «Ἰδοὺ Κύριε, εἰς τὸ ἔλεος Σοῦ ἐλπίζω μὴ μὲ ἐγκαταλείψεις!»

Ἔστερα ἀπὸ λίγη προσευχὴ ποὺ μὲ πολὺ κόπο ψέλλισα, εἶδα νὰ ἐμφανίζονται στὸ κελλί μου μέσα ἄγγελοι καὶ ἅγιοι, ἀπεσταλμένοι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ταχὺ μὲ προκατάλαβε ἡ Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εὐχαριστοῦσα καὶ δοξολογοῦσα τὸν Σωτῆρα μου. Δάκρυσα. Ἐνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους φρόντιζε γιὰ τὴ σόμπα, ἄλλος ἐτοίμαζε φαγητὸ ζεστό, φέρνανε καὶ εὐωδιαστὰ ψωμιά. Βρέθηκα στὸν Παράδεισο. Τί ἄλλο ἤθελα!

Οἱ ἅγιοι ἄρχισαν νὰ μὲ στηρίζουν μὲ λόγους παρηγορίας καὶ μὲ παρακλήσεις. Καὶ μόνο ἡ θέα τους μὲ ξεκούραζε, μὲ ἐνίσχυε καὶ μοῦ ἔδινε ἐλπίδα. Καθίσανε μαζί μου ὅσπου ἔγινε καλὰ καὶ μποροῦσα νὰ οἰκονομήσω τὸν ἑαυτό μου. Μετὰ φύγανε.

Μία βδομάδα καθίσανε. Ὅταν μετὰ ἀπὸ καιρὸ σηκώθηκα βγήκα ἀπὸ τὸ κελί καὶ κοίταξα γύρω— γύρω τὴ φύση μὲ διαφορετικὸ βλέμμα. Ὅλα ἔλαμπαν μέσα στὸ ἀκτίστο φῶς τῆς χάρης τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Δὲν ἤμουν ἄξιος ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀπειρὴ ἀγαθότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη Του ἐκδηλώθηκαν μὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο.

Πάντως ἐνοιωθα τόση χάρη νὰ μὲ πληρώνει ἐσωτερικὰ ποὺ ἔλεγα «Φτάνει Θεέ μου, δὲν ἀντέχω ἄλλο. Θὰ σκάσω. Ἡ πᾶρε με κοντὰ Σου ἢ λιγότεψε τὴ χάρη ποὺ μοῦ ἔδωσες. Ἄν τόση χάρη μοῦ δίνεις τώρα, φαντάζομαι στὸν Παράδεισο τί θὰ γίνεται...»

THE MYSTERY OF PENTECOST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos. From "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church. According to the Spoken Teaching of Father John Romanides," vol. 2 (2013). Quoted text is directly from Fr. John Romanides' lectures.

After Christ's Ascension into heaven, as He had affirmed, on the fiftieth day after His Resurrection and the tenth after His Ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit, Who proceeds from the Father.

Christ Himself had announced to the Disciples beforehand the sending of the Holy Spirit: *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [Paraclete, Comforter], 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 with you and will be in you.* (Jn 14:16-17). Immediately afterwards He said: *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.* (Jn 14:26). Later He said: *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* (Jn 16:7).

The coming of the Holy Spirit to the Disciples took place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). Pentecost had a significant place in the life of the Apostles. Having previously passed through purification of the heart and illumination—something that also existed in the Old Testament in the Prophets and the righteous—they then saw the Risen Christ, and on the day of Pentecost they became members of the risen Body of Christ. This is particularly important because every Apostle had to have the Risen Christ within Him.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit made the Disciples members of the theanthropic Body of Christ. Whereas at the Transfiguration the Light acted from within the three Disciples, through glorification, but the Body of Christ was outside them, at Pentecost the Disciples are united with Christ. They become members of the theanthropic Body and as members of the Body of Christ they share in the uncreated Light. This difference also exists between the Old Testament and Pentecost.

"All those who saw Christ's glory before the Ascension saw it twice. On the one hand they were covered by the cloud, because *In Thy light shall we see light.* (Pss 35:9). They were covered by the radiant cloud and, being within the uncre-

ated Light, they see the uncreated Light. However, the human nature of Christ is also a source of the Light, as at the Transfiguration.

The human nature of Christ is a source of Light. The Apostles saw this Light, since they are within the Light, as they are glorified. That is to say, *In Your light we shall see light.* That they are within the Light is shown by the fact that they were covered by the radiant cloud and also saw Christ's human nature as a source of Light. The Light shone from within, but from the body it shone from outside. The Light shone from within, but the Body of Christ, which transmitted the Light, the same Light, was outside. Starting from Pentecost, however, the human nature of Christ sends out the Light *now from within.* So there is no experience of the Light from outside, unless there is also an experience of Christ within. The two are now interlinked. In other words, the one is now the same as the other."

"Why was it necessary for the Ascension to happen and for the Holy Spirit to descend? What was the purpose? Why

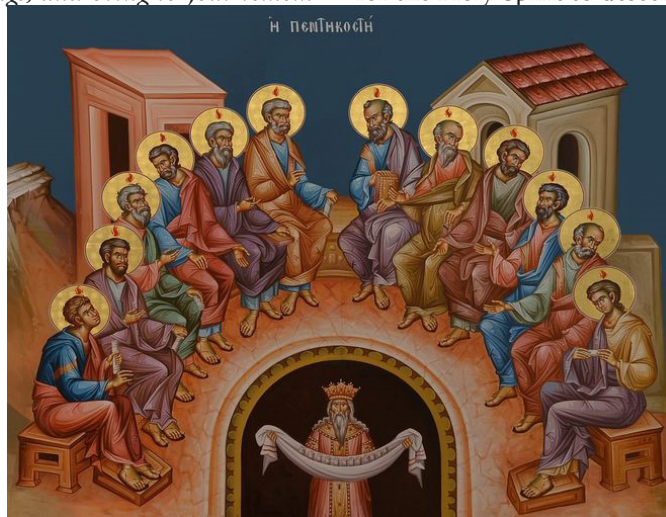
do we say that the Church was established on the day of Pentecost? The Church was not established on the day of Pentecost. The Church had been established since the time when God called Abraham and the Patriarchs and the Prophets. The Church was established from then. The Church exists in the Old Testament. The Church existed in Hades. But here the Church takes shape: the Church is established in the sense that from now on it is established as the Body of Christ."

This is an important point because it shows that Pentecost is the birthday of the Church as the Body of Christ, and also that all who are united with the Body of Christ overcome death.

"In the Old Testament there is reconciliation and friendship with God and glorification. Everything is in the Old Testament, the difference being that there is no Pentecost. The Church exists in the Old Testament, but under the domination of death.

What is Pentecost? The revelation of all truth. At that point the Church becomes the Body of Christ, which is why on the day of Pentecost we also celebrate the birthday of the Church that has risen in Christ."

"On the day of Pentecost Christ comes in the Holy Spirit. The energies of God are present in the world and whoever is in communion with God's energy understands that through His energies God is indivisibly divided and is multiplied without



becoming many. Thus someone who is in communion with God does not have a fragment of God. The whole of God is present in each human being and is present everywhere throughout the world.

At Pentecost Christ's human nature returns from now on to the Church. This is the day on which the Church was founded, because Christ's human nature is now indivisibly divided, and the whole of Christ, with His human nature, is in every believer.

This is the Church, where every believer is a temple; not only a temple of the Holy Spirit, but also the Body of Christ, having the whole of Christ within him. This is the new way in which the human nature of Christ is present in the world. That is why Pentecost is also regarded as the day on which the Church was established. All who reach glorification share in this experience of Pentecost. We have examples in Holy Scripture itself; all those who saw Christ after the Resurrection, and those who have seen Christ since Pentecost up until today."

Pentecost is called *the final feast* because it is the last phase of the incarnation of Christ. A great change now takes place, because the glorified are united in the Holy Spirit with the God-man Christ.

"The final, efficacious, phase was Pentecost. There the great change came about. Whereas the Spirit dwelt in the Prophets, as the Prophets had the Spirit of God, noetic prayer and glorification, from Pentecost onwards this indwelling of the Holy Spirit in someone who is divinely inspired comes about with the human nature of Christ as well. That is why the Church is now the Body of Christ. In other words, the Church became the Body of Christ on the day of Pentecost. And Christ, as man, now dwells within man.

This means permanent participation from now on in the glory of God. We now have permanent glorification, not temporary glorification, as the Prophets who reached glorification had, when it was glory that passes away, and they died. Now the deified do not die. This is the difference. What is different in the 'Pentecostal' experience is that the Church becomes the Body of Christ on the day of Pentecost; but it also makes the glorified permanent."

Starting from Pentecost God is partaken of, without being shared, by everyone in the Body of Christ. The presence of God is powerful.

"The mystery of the presence of God in the world, as described by the Fathers, is that God's uncreated energy is indivisibly divided among divided beings. It is shared out to each one, but without being divided among separate entities. This means that it is shared out like the Holy Bread in the Divine Eucharist. We say: *Being broken yet not divided, being ever eaten yet never consumed* and so on. This is exactly the same thing. What happens in the Divine Eucharist with regard to the Body of Christ is exactly what happens with the energy of God as well. It is indivisibly divided among individuals.

When someone who is glorified is in communion with the uncreated energy of God, he does not have a fragment of God within him—as if God could be broken up into pieces, so that each of us would have a portion of God—because God cannot be divided up. Nevertheless He is divided and multiplied, but without multiplying.

These contradictions are not a figure of speech. This is the mystery of God's presence in the world. God in His entirety is omnipresent, in everything, everywhere, without being divided, and He is divided without division. This is the mystery. This mode of God's presence in the world, particularly in the glorified, starts for the first time from the Ascension and Pentecost.

When Christ returns to the Church in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christ's human nature now shares this characteristic of being indivisibly divided among individuals. For that reason, when we take Holy Communion in the Divine Eucharist, one does not receive the finger, another the foot, another the nose and ear, but at the Divine Eucharist everyone receives the whole of Christ within him.

This is the mystery of Pentecost, which is why Pentecost is regarded as the Church's birthday. It is the Church of Pentecost that is born, although the Church existed in the Old Testament. The Church, in its fullest sense, is the uncreated Church, the glory of God, the uncreated dwelling where God abides and where we should also abide. This dwelling multiplies, so there are many dwellings, as Christ says in the New Testament. There is one dwelling, yet many dwellings. Why? Because it is indivisibly divided among individuals. This is the mystery of Pentecost."

In addition, on the day of Pentecost, the Disciples attained to *all truth*. Before His Passion, Christ told His Disciples: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.* (Jn 16:12-13). These words of Christ are closely linked with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, with the revelation of the whole truth, which the Disciples were unable to bear; they could not receive it earlier, without the Holy Spirit.

This *all truth* revealed on the day of Pentecost to the Apostles is the truth of the Church as the Body of Christ: that the Disciples will become members of this rise Body and that in the Church they will know the mysteries of the glory and rule (*vasileia*) of God in the flesh of Christ. On the day of Pentecost they knew the whole truth. It follows that the complete truth does not exist outside the Church. The Church has the truth, because it is the Body of Christ and a community of glorification.

"Apart from Christ's teaching and miracles, we also have another kind of revelation, which is the essence of the teaching of Holy Scripture on revelation. As Christ teaches the Apostles and prepares them, He reaches the point when He tells them

that He also has other things to reveal to them, but they cannot bear them now. *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.* (Jn 16:13).

In the patristic tradition these words *He will guide you into all truth* were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, so on that day *all truth* is revealed. This means that Christ Himself (before His Resurrection) did not reveal all the truth to the Apostles. Why not? Because they could not bear all the truth. They were not yet sufficiently prepared.”

This truth, which the Holy Spirit revealed to the Disciples on the day of Pentecost, is that the Church is the Body of Christ and the Disciples will become members of the Body of Christ. There is no other truth beyond that truth.

“This is the key to the patristic interpretation, that He will send another Comforter, Who will *guide you into all truth*. What is this *all truth*? In the Old Testament we have the unincarnate Christ Who was revealed. After that we have the incarnate Christ, Who is revealed and Who reveals Himself through human words, but is also revealed through His glory to some Apostles, to certain Disciples. Then we come to the Resurrection. And after the Resurrection He is revealed now in glory to His Disciples, to the women, and so on. We have all these appearances of Christ after the Resurrection. Later we have the Ascension, and then we have Pentecost.

Now, at Pentecost, we have a change in the Church. In the Old Testament the Church is the people of God, which is made up of those who pass through purification and reach illumination. Some of them get as far as glorification and become leaders of Israel, Prophets and Patriarchs. We have the same thing in the New Testament until the Ascension. Afterwards something happens that gives the Church of the Old Testament and of the New Testament, up until then, a new dimension.

Before that, God is indivisibly divided among separate people, which means that He appears to every glorified human being as God in His entirety, in His glory. The Prophets are not in communion with a fragment of God, because God is not fragmented, but is indivisibly divided among divided beings. So we have this paradoxical mystery concerning God’s presence in the Old Testament. In every action in which God multiplies Himself, without becoming many, God is wholly present in each action. He is present according to energy, but absent according to essence. He is present by His will, but absent in essence. He is both absent and present. Divided and undivided. Whole in every case, the same everywhere.

At Pentecost the distribution of the energies of the Holy Spirit takes place, so that the entire energy of the Holy Spirit is present in each Apostle. One tongue for each Apostle. With the descent of the Holy Spirit, however, we also have the descent of Christ. That is to say, it is like a second incarnation. The Church is changed into the Body of Christ.

So anyone nowadays who progresses from purification to illumination is not only a temple of the Holy Spirit, as were the Prophets in the Old Testament. He is not only a Church as the temple of God, but he is also a Church as the dwelling-place of Christ’s human nature. Every believer who is in the state of illumination has the whole of Christ within him.

For that reason we also have the reflection of this fact in the Mystery (Sacrament) of the Divine Eucharist, when the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the whole of Christ is present in every particle of the Holy Bread and Wine. The communicant does not receive a fragment of Christ when he takes Holy Communion. He receives the whole of Christ within himself. Thus we say, *Broken and distributed is the Lamb of God, being broken yet not divided, being ever eaten yet never consumed...*

This prayer, which the priest reads at the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, is the key to the mystery of Pentecost. This is *all truth*, which has now been revealed. After this revelation of the truth nothing more is revealed. That is to say, on the day of Pentecost the mystery of the Church, with its new dimension, was revealed. So the words *He will guide you into all truth* were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, in the interpretation of the Fathers, chapters 15, 16 and 17 of John were all fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. This is the patristic interpretation concerning Pentecost.”

“According to the Fathers of the Church, *all truth* on the day of Pentecost also refers, of course, to the revelation that the Holy Spirit is a hypostasis, that He has His own hypostasis, as do the Father and the Word. In addition, though, the fact that the Body of Christ, which was outside and was revealed to people from outside, this Body of Christ is inside from the day of Pentecost onwards. The Body of Christ itself is inside man. At the Transfiguration the Body was outside. The revelation comes from inside as well, but the Body is outside. Now, however, the Body is inside. And the reason why the day of Pentecost is regarded as the birthday of the Church is that from then onwards the Church becomes the Body of Christ. In other words, Christ dwells within believers also as man. We have the founding of the Church from this point of view.

We can summarize by saying that we have a full revelation in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we have a revelation of the truth, from the point of view of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Later we have the revelation in Christ of the incarnation. After that we have the revelation of the divinity of Christ, when Christ reveals Himself, not only through words, sayings and miracles, but also by revealing His divinity through the experience of glorification. Subsequently, the final form of the revelation is on the day of Pentecost, when not only the Light shines within man, but also the human nature of Christ shines within those who reach the experience of glorification.

From Pentecost onwards, anyone who reaches perfection passes through the stages of purification and illumination, and when he arrives at glorification, he reaches the same experience—to varying degrees, of course—that the Apostles had on the day of Pentecost.”

“We have the finishing touch to the teaching of the Gospel of John at the Feast of Pentecost, which is the supreme fulfillment of the Gospel of John. After that we have the finishing touch to Pentecost with the Sunday of All Saints, which is the fruit of Pentecost. The fruit of Pentecost is that the members of the Church are made into saints. We speak now about becoming a saint as though it were only for a few extraordinary monks. In those days it was definitely the aim of all Christians: to progress from purification to illumination and so on.

This is the context in which we see the Fathers of the Church telling us that the Holy Spirit ‘will guide... into all truth’, and that this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Everything that Christ taught before the Passion in chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John has now been accomplished.”

When someone who knows Christ *face to face* from experience and has unceasing inner prayer reads the Old Testament, he sees Christ everywhere, and he sees that the Prophets have experience of noetic prayer and *theoria* of the Angel of Great Counsel, the Angel of Glory. And he is capable of interpreting the Old Testament.

“What is important is that from Pentecost onwards, when Christ’s human nature shares in the energy of God, which is indivisibly divided among individuals, the whole Christ dwells in every believer, but only if Christ has been *formed* in him. The Apostle Paul uses this term. Christ is *formed* in each one. This comes about through prayer. It follows that this man has Christ within him and is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He is the Body of Christ and participates in the gift of grace of Pentecost. For that reason, as he knows Christ personally within him and is a temple of God, he reads the Old Testament and understands it. Because he sees what the Prophets saw. Each one had this personal contact with Christ, but again through prayer. This is the prophetic gift.”

In Western theology, however, Christ’s words, that the coming of the Holy Spirit would reveal *all truth* to them, were differently interpreted.

“In the Augustinian tradition, Augustine interpreted this passage from John, what Christ says to the Apostles, as meaning not only that the individual is led *into all truth*, but also that the Church is gradually led into the whole truth.

For the Fathers, the Apostles were led *into all truth* on the day of Pentecost, when the revelation was completed, and there is nothing beyond Pentecost. Everyone who reaches glorification is led into all truth, because he shares in the experience of glorification of Pentecost. This means that the **work of the theologians of the Church is not to improve or delve more deeply into the teaching of the Church, as Papal Christians and certain Protestants suppose**, but is something very different.”

“This whole problem about the gradually deepening understanding of the faith by the Church itself is the line taken by the Papal Church. According to the Papal Church, with the passage of time, the Church itself comes to a better understanding of the faith. For us, however, the deepest understanding of the faith that surpasses understanding is Pentecost. We have Pentecost, when *all truth* was revealed. There is no ‘prophecy’ about things to come; ‘prophecy’ from now on is the interpretation of the Prophets’ prophecy. What does one need, however, in order to interpret the Prophets correctly? Noetic prayer.”



“There is no understanding beyond Pentecost. Every glorification is a repeat of Pentecost within the Church. And this experience of Pentecost goes beyond understanding, beyond words and concepts, because in this experience both words and concepts are abolished, though not in the sense that they are wiped out, as the words

and concepts remain as a form of expression. The one who is glorified has a knowledge that surpasses knowledge, but he uses both words and concepts to speak to other people.”

“There is no deeper understanding beyond this experience of Pentecost. Essentially, the experience of Pentecost surpasses understanding and expression. I repeat what St. Gregory the Theologian says: *It is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him.*

Those who have experience of Pentecost and glorification neither express God nor understand God, because the experience transcends understanding and expression. All the same, Pentecost is expressed, in the sense that, although we do not pass on the revelation to others, because this experience is a revelation, we do pass on things about the revelation.”

Another important point connected with the mystery of Pentecost is Christ’s prayer to the Father that the Disciples may acquire unity between themselves. In His high-priestly prayer Christ says *that they may be one as We are.* (Jn 17:11). Elsewhere He says, *And the glory which You gave Me I have*

given them, that they may be one just as We are one. (Jn 17:22). Further on He prays: *I desire that they... may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me.* (Jn 17:24). Of course, beholding this glory they will become perfect: *That they may be made perfect in one*" (Jn 17:23).

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (Jn 17:24). Where I am, as He said previously: *I go to prepare a place for you.* (Jn 14:2). This place is the glory of God. So *the glory that I have given them*, the glory that they have already received, refers to something different. Afterwards He speaks about the place: *Where I shall be they too will be.* What does this mean? *That they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.* The Apostles received glory in the past, but they will see the glory in the future. They have received glory, but they will see glory. In other words, **they have reached illumination and will progress to glorification.**"

"Christ prays this for the future. Now, all our own people and the Protestants believe that He is praying for the union of the Churches. It has nothing to do with that. He is praying for glorification. It is a glorification prayer. *That they may be one as We are.* (Jn 17:11). As We have one glory, they too will be united among themselves, as they will have the same glory. So all together we become one with each other, and one with God, because all of us, we and the Holy Trinity, have the same glory. This means unity in the glory of God."

At Pentecost the Apostles saw the glory of God as members of the Body of Christ, as they had become in the Holy Spirit, and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles received the tongues of fire and acquired the gift of teaching. They spoke to the people and the people heard the revelational teaching in their own language.

"At Pentecost, first the Apostles had the gift of tongues and then they spoke. A whole tongue, the grace of the Holy Spirit, descended upon each Apostle. Afterwards, however, the result of this gift was that they spoke and preached to the people. The people did not see the tongues; the Apostles received the tongues and spoke to the people. Everybody understood in his own dialect, even in Arabic, what the Apostles were saying. Everyone heard in his own language.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: *For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.* (1 Cor 14:2). It seems that even at Pentecost no one heard the gift of the tongue that each Apostle received, but they heard the preaching of the Apostle and understood in their own language."

The experience of Pentecost constitutes the greatest experience of divine vision.

"The experience of Pentecost is the supreme experience of glorification, before the Second Coming. There is nothing higher than Pentecost. Why in Orthodox theology can there be no further revelation after Pentecost, but the revelation came to an end with Pentecost and there are no other revelations? Every time someone reaches the experience of glorification, the same experience of Pentecost is repeated. One can reach the experience of Pentecost. One cannot reach any other experience, because the revelation comes to an end: all truth is revealed at Pentecost."

Another important point connected with the mystery of Pentecost is that, although the experience of Pentecost is a unique event in the history of the Church, people who have the appropriate prerequisites ascend to the same height as the experience of Pentecost. Thus **the mystery of Pentecost is repeated down through the centuries.**

"After Pentecost all the experiences of glorification are on a scale: higher or lower within the framework of the experience of Pentecost. The same experience is always repeated in the glorified throughout the life of the Church. This experience produces holy relics and the entire worship and devotion of the Orthodox Church which, I very much fear, simple believers understand better than at least some theologians. Those who feel reverence for relics understand or sense something of this phenomenon of holy relics. This repetition of the experience of Pentecost within the history of the Church is the backbone both of ecclesiastical history and the history of dogmas in the Orthodox Church."

According to patristic tradition, this experience of Pentecost is repeated even after Pentecost. The first example that we have is from Holy Scripture, in the case of Cornelius, who attained to the gift of tongues and the glorification of Pentecost, and for that reason Peter baptized him. When he was called to account by the conservative Hebrews, he described the experience of Cornelius, that before being baptized Cornelius had *the same gift* (Acts 11:17) as the Apostles. The Apostle Peter himself tells us that Cornelius, before he was baptized, had the same grace that the Apostles had on the day of Pentecost. I would ask you to take the Acts of the Apostles and read very carefully what it says about Pentecost and the two chapters referring to Cornelius, to see that they are the same (see Acts ch. 10-11).

Holy Scripture bears witness that there is Pentecost after Pentecost, and it is in the lives of those who reach glorification. Throughout the course of the history of the Church we have innumerable examples of people who reach the same experience of Pentecost as the Apostles, Cornelius and others reached.

From a geographical point of view, these things not only happen in the East but in the West as well, because the experience of Pentecost also exists in the West, at least until the Middle Ages. If you want to see examples of this, take the

lives of the saints, especially those preserved from the era of the Merovingian Franks in the Papal States of the West. Here we not only have the testimony of St. John the Cassian, but particularly of Gregory of Tours, who wrote many lives of saints, in which this experience of glorification is clearly to be seen. We also have examples of people in the West who attained to such holiness that their bodies were preserved. Thus we have holy relics and all the consequences associated with the experience of glorification.

We observe the strange phenomenon that, although we have holy relics in the West, we have, by contrast, the scholastic theology of the Franks of the Middle Ages, which does not completely go along with this experience of glorification.

“As every experience of glorification is a repetition of Pentecost, and in every age people have reached this experience, from this point of view, who are all these saints of the Church, and what is the highest understanding of Orthodoxy? If it is not Pentecost, what is it? The Pope of Rome? Or is it a Protestant who has no idea what he is talking about and who interprets Holy Scripture?”

Certainly the experience of Pentecost is a mystery and is not connected with reason.

“Orthodox theology is circular in form. It is like a circle. Wherever you touch the circle, you know the whole circle, because the whole of the circle is the same. Everything leads up to Pentecost: the Mysteries of the Church, such as Ordination, Marriage, Baptism, Confession etc., the decisions of the Councils and so on. That is the key to Orthodox theology: Pentecost. So someone who reaches glorification after Pentecost is led *into all truth*.

What is *all truth*? It is something that transcends man’s reason. It includes Christ’s human nature and dwells within the one who has reached illumination and glorification. The whole mystery of the incarnation and the Holy Trinity, concerning divine grace, the cure of the human personality, salvation in the past in the Old Testament, about the future and the Second Coming: all these things are included in the mystery of Pentecost.

For that reason, Orthodox theology is amazingly simple. It is a different matter if necessity dictates, when dealing with heretics, that the one who speaks on behalf of Orthodoxy should be familiar with heretics and have a good knowledge of philosophy and so on. This, however, is not the essence of Orthodox theology. **The essence of Orthodox theology is purification, illumination and glorification.**”

“There is no understanding beyond Pentecost. Certainly the rational faculty participates in this experience—the body participates in this experience—but God and the incarnation and the human nature of Christ, which is the source of Light due to the incarnation of the Word in human nature: all these remain mysteries. They cannot be understood philosophically or speculatively.”

Because the experience of glorification and Pentecost continues down through the centuries, Pentecost is also the basis of the real history of the Church. When in any era there are saints who reach glorification in the experience of Pentecost, that age is described as a *golden age* of the Church.

“Whenever an Orthodox Christian reaches illumination, he is already participating in the results of the experience of glorification. Illumination gives a foretaste of this experience, and it will be perfected when he reaches glorification. So in my opinion *the golden age* can be described as follows. When the majority of Christians reach illumination and purification of the heart, and many of them also reach glorification, we have a *golden age*. So this is the criterion for judging where we are. Were the Christians in this position in the early centuries? They certainly were. The many relics of Martyrs that we have from that period bear witness to this.”

Consequently, the center of the Pentecost-revelation is Christ, Whom the Prophets experienced as unincarnate and the Apostles and Fathers as incarnate. This is the essence of the Orthodox tradition.



A God-pleasing life in old age blots out the sins of youth.
Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica

Why can you be annoyed with a person, why can you be angry with him? Because you consider yourself superior to him.

St. Ambrose of Optina

It also happens that even though a person does not do bad things, but the state of his heart is in bad shape. God rejects such people because of their poor inner self. Check with yourself. Are you one of those?

St. Theophan the Recluse

Can you place your hope in the world? Whom has it not deceived? To whom has it not lied? It promises much, but gives little. Only those who hope in the Lord, according to the words of the prophet David, do not sin, i.e., they are not deceived in their hope.

St. Anthony of Optina

Without humility before God, you are nothing. Virtue and success in any task depend on humility.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

We must not despair when we struggle and continuously see nothing but the slightest progress. We all do nearly nothing --- some a little more, some a little less. When Christ sees our little effort, He gives us an analogous token; and so our nearly nothing becomes valuable, and we can see a little progress. For this reason we must not despair, but hope in God.

St. Paisios the Athonite

GENERATIONS AND TRUTH

Source: "Death to the World," October 2, 2014.

I can barely count how many times I have muttered to myself about the generations of kids and early twenty-somethings, "These kids don't care about anything. They're zombies, zoned-out, beyond apathetic." But why is this? What has happened to this generation of kids, and why have they demonstrated the apathy and idleness that they are so often accused of?

Certainly, every generation is annoyed by the one preceding it. Each new trend or zeitgeist amongst the next generation is viewed as inexplicable or as somehow more self-indulgent and sinful than the ones we ourselves fell into.

Those born in the 1960's (like my parents) seemed to me to be beaten down by external legalisms, an emphasis was put on "hard work" and they were dragged to church on Sundays when they hated it and all the rest. Those same parents passed on all the trauma, guilt, values, and standards to the generation following it. Post-World War culture's excesses translated into the collective burn-out of the Gen-Xers, which passed on into the widespread depression and despair of my own Generation Y. The foundation for the new generation of kids born in the 1990's is a bleak one.

So I asked myself—who do these kids of today have to look to? What do they have to stand for? If they turn to the preceding generations, they are confronted with all the very sources of the pandemic apathy they now drown in – a laundry list of overdoses and suicides, aimless burnouts, rebels with vacuous causes who often turn out to be nothing more than sell outs. If they turn the other way, they are only confronted with the bleak prospect of the corporate world, the world of politicians who are laws unto themselves, the world of a slow suicide by white-picket fence and minivan culture that seems to be nothing more than just another dead-end.

The culture these kids of the 1990's are born into is one of endless distraction. Yes, we are more "connected" now, but the point which is often raised remains correct: the more connected we are via our technological advances, the more alienated the individual person remains. Human beings have become nothing more than individuals alone in the crowd.

The culture of today that these kids find themselves in is foundationless. Family means little anymore to many; divorce, adultery, lack of child support, abuse, and the like

are all rampant. Religion is irrelevant, or at the very best, neutered by a relativism whose only creed is "Everything is ok, except for saying something is not ok." Opinion is meaningless because everyone's opinion matters only for them, and the isolation of the individual is perpetuated further. All is simply ok.

What's worse is that religion itself is often not much more than a family heirloom passed down from one's parents, something one does on Sundays or some other designated day of the week. The ingredients of a modern faith life often constitute anything but a living faith, and rather are comprised of little more than potluck dinners, polite greetings and casual conversation, and cultural "this is just what we do" motives. In a word, I think that many kids today feel there is not only nothing to believe in, but also nothing that offers a compelling reason why they should believe in it.

When we look at the world of mainstream Christian-



ity today, so divorced from the faith once delivered to all the saints, can we blame so many young people for rejecting this "Christianity"? Who do the youth know as representatives of Christianity, other than an endless horde of prosperity Gospel peddlers and snake oil salesman, fakers and charlatans who cherry-pick the Gospel and form mutated versions of their own (as do all her-

etics). Today's "faces" of Christianity are often barely-veiled New Age gurus and psychics, cunning businessmen, or charismatic madmen orchestrating yet another "revival". If Joel Osteen and Kenneth Copeland were the authentic representatives of Christianity, I would have zero interest in Christianity either.

But the youth of today need to know that there is something, someone to believe in, beyond one's own self, which only perishes with the rest of the world and all its material offerings. I am convinced within my heart that if the youth of today really were to encounter Christ and authentic, true Christianity, that their minds and hearts would be open to it. How can I say this? Because I have seen proof of it myself.

These youth do not know the Truth because they have only been exposed to false piety, legalistic externals, empty rituals, simply "just another religion amongst religions" that really bears no effect on one's life. Can we blame them for their disinterest when they have only encountered these things, when all "religion" seems to offer them is just another set of meaningless do's and don'ts?

Pontius Pilate's question "What is truth?" to Jesus before He was sent to His death, rings through the centuries of history, through to our own days. And yet, if we read the account, he had Truth standing in front of him that very day. In this, we see that truth can be obvious, can be right at hand, and yet one can completely overlook it. In our days, the seed must be planted that there is something worth believing in, and more importantly, someone worth believing in, Who believes in us more than we ourselves ever could.

† † †

BOOMERS, GEN X, GEN Y, GEN Z, AND GEN A EXPLAINED

The breakdown of the various generations by age looks like this:

Baby Boomers: Baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. They're currently between 57-75 years old (71.6 million in the U.S.)

Gen X: Gen X was born between 1965 and 1979/80 and is currently between 41-56 years old (65.2 million people in the U.S.)

Gen Y: Gen Y, or Millennials, were born between 1981 and 1994/6. They are currently between 25 and 40 years old (72.1 million in the U.S.)

—**Gen Y.1:** 25-29 years old (around 31 million people in the U.S.)

—**Gen Y.2:** 29-39 (around 42 million people in the U.S.)

Gen Z: Gen Z is the newest generation, born between 1997 and 2012. They are currently between 9 and 24 years old (nearly 68 million in the U.S.)

Gen A: Generation Alpha starts with children born in 2012 and will continue at least through 2025, maybe later (approximately 48 million people in the U.S.)

The term "Millennial" has become the popular way to reference both segments of Gen Y.



Yes, my dearly beloved children, truly we lack this most holy virtue, humility. Egotism, this evil wickedness, has caused all the sufferings of man. Indeed, humility is holiness!

Why do we clash over a trifle? Because we do not have humility. He who has humility wards off troubles. Without true humility, troubles remain intact and increase, such that all hope of correction is lost. A humble person does not remember any past wrongs which his neighbor did to him, but with all his heart forgives and forgets everything for the love of God. Beg our humble Jesus in your prayers to give you a spirit of humble-mindedness and meekness.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

ON INCOMPATIBLE PARTNERS

By St. Paisios the Athonite.

Some men say: "I am not compatible to my wife, we are totally different characters! Why does God make such strange things? Couldn't God harmonize the married partners, so their characters be the same or similar, and so that they could live in spiritual togetherness?"

I tell them: "Don't you understand that God's harmony lies in the different characters? Different characters harmonize each other. God save you from being the same characters! Imagine that both of you have the same character, what would happen if both of you grew angry: you would destroy your house. Or, if both of you would be gentle and inactive, both would start sleeping on each others feet! If both of you would be stingy, you would be similar and you would agree among each other, but both of you would go to hell. If both of you would be squanderers, would you be able to save your house? No. You would demolish your house, and your children would end up on the street.

If one has a bad temper, and marries one with a bad temper, they will be the same or similar, won't they? But, they would kill each other in only one day! God created so that the gentle and nice partner is to marry someone different, give him help, because it might be he always has had good will, but there was no one to help him, since he was born."

Even little differences in our characters may help the partners to form a harmonic family, because they supplement each other. You need an accelerator pedal to move your car forward, but still you need the brake pedal to stop when needed. If there would be a car with only a brake pedal, it would stay in one place for good. If there would be a gear-box but no brakes, the car wouldn't stop.

Do you know what I once told a couple? "You do not fit with each other, because you fit too much with each other!" Both were oversensitive. Something would happen in the house. He was a bit confused saying: "Oh, what will happen to poor us?" Then she would say the same: "Oh, what will happen to poor us?" They were helping each other to fall more quickly in desperation. Couldn't she, in opposition, calm down her husband saying: "Wait, it's not so terrible what happened to us." I have noticed this in many marriages.

And, in the education of their children, when different characters, the partners are always helping each other to give the right education to their children. The one says: "Let's give the kids a bit more freedom," and the other one brakes a bit. If both are strict, they will lose the children. But also, if both are too liberal, they will again lose them. When different, they are able to keep their children in balance.

Everything in marriage is necessary. We must have in mind that every person may help the other; people are here to help each other.

TODAY'S CHILDREN OF WAR AND APOSTASY

Source: "Youth of the Apocalypse," ch. 1 and 2.

In the beginning when there was peace, mankind was given the fearful and noble gift of free will. This perfect gift of life was quickly subverted and brought about mankind's death. Within this gift of freedom there were two paths, two choices: good and evil. Mankind chose evil. As an angel falling from heaven, like lightning the whole of mankind fell into the abyss of corruption and death.

As children of war, this is our origin. We have come from thousands of years of sorrows—in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, in imprisonment, and in death. With every step on mankind's path of evil, man has almost entirely burned the bridge to his Creator. And, in place of the Creator, man has enthroned his own imperfect mind, his "system," his machine.

With this machine, mankind has progressed into regression. The machine has proved dysfunctional and is now totally out of control, victimizing the youth of today. There is not one youth of the Apocalypse that has not been caught in the gears of Nihilism.

From war to war, from genocide to genocide; from holocaust to holocaust, our history can be summed up in one word: Death. From the first tribal wars to the first civil war; from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution; from the wars of the ancient world to World War II; from Vietnam to the gulag to inner city gang wars, mankind has, in his freedom, chosen this path. Mankind has chosen this war of evil against good.

In this our history and origin, all these wars have come to a bloody end. But there is one war that man started in the beginning that continues unto this generation of youth. Every day, as our world steps further away from truth, the darkness of this war closes in on us. It will continue to become darker until we admit that the war we despise and the hunger and suffering it produces is in the battlefield of our hearts.

This war is not nation against nation or man against man, but is simply: Man against God.

God has been dying in the hearts of men since the world began. As time moves on, the state of mankind gets worse. A history course is actually a course in the slow death of God. In the school of Nihilism, it is a course in the destruction of the world. This is our origin as children of war. We were born under the waters of apostasy and were raised to drown, and our many tears are mixed with this ocean.

When Cain murdered his brother Abel, this rain of apostasy began to fall. When the Egyptian Pharaoh enslaved a chosen nation, this cry was heard from beneath this ocean.

When the Greek philosopher Socrates voluntarily drank of the cup of death for the sake of truth, his words drown in this poisonous sea. When Christ was crucified, his tears and blood outweighed this ocean.

The Emperor of what was known in the first century as the "whole of civilization" went mad and began to rage against those who sought and loved the truth. Emperor Nero began to play his harp as he watched his own people burn his capital of Rome at his secret command. Out on his balcony, watching the flames and listening to his people cry, he continued to play his harp. At this moment even the waters of apostasy were dried up and were changed into the flames of Nihilism. The frightening part about this history lesson is that this song of insanity has been playing until now, but it has gone from the beauty of a harp to total discord and distortion. Nero's song was the beginning of the decline of western civilization.

Since then, the distortion was amplified by the great schism of 1054 when western civilization broke off from the East. Because of this discord, the western part of the world summoned the "dark ages," the bloodshed of the Crusades, the Renaissance and its rebirth of paganism. Man's imperfect mind began to replace the dying God. Science replaced metaphysics; this world overshadowed heaven, and the war grew colder.

We have survived centuries of holocaust and are barely alive. We have lived through the philosophies of Voltaire and Rousseau, and witnessed the bloodshed of their philosophy in revolution. We have seen the old order of morality and tradition slain by their "new order." We have experienced the ideas of Darwin and have embraced this faith by the masses; we have seen a glimpse of his ideas through the eyes of Karl Marx when, inspired by Darwin, he said, "The idea of God must be destroyed."

And Karl Marx's son-in-law summed up the philosophy of the times when he said, "Darwin's Origin of the Species took away from God His role as Creator in the organic world." Lenin and Stalin were then given the keys to the "kingdom" of this world. Stalin was a student of theology when he heard Darwin's popular writings. He then came to the logical conclusion that people are the result of an evolutionary process in which ruthless competition reigns. This is the modern reality of "survival of the fittest." With this philosophy Stalin slaughtered over 40 million of his own people with the most cruel forms of torture ever known.

Just less than two thousand years after Nero played his song of destruction, the twentieth century mad prophet and philosopher of Nihilism, Friedrich Nietzsche, struck up the same song, stoking the same flame to burn even hotter. It was he who pronounced God "DOA" by his contempt of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. He is the one who delivered the devastating blow

to those who believed in God by saying, "God is Dead." Nietzsche wanted to look life square in the eye, with no God to obstruct his vision, and what he saw was agonizing to his mind.

Nietzsche's writings and philosophy opened the gates of hell not only to the belief in the non-existence of truth, but with his ideas of Nihilism he gave the long-awaited justification of murder. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a certain man drew inspiration from what he read in Nietzsche's philosophy and acted on this inspiration. This was Adolf Hitler. After reading Nietzsche's philosophy that the inferior and the weak should be destroyed, Hitler personified the "superman" in his will for power and brought humanity to its knees. He, like Nero, burned his own people in his "Holocaust," and fought mercilessly to be ruler of the world. Thus he introduced a second "World War."

It was war that gave birth to the first "counter-cultures," the first acceptable rebellions on a popular scale, the first protests of the "Beat Generation" and the new style of music called "Jazz" and later, "Blues." They sang the songs that were the voice of a confused search for answers amidst a world of violence. They would detach themselves from the ways of the "modern" world that made no sense. But the cry in the progression of music got louder with the birth of "rebellious" music with a hard edge, called "Rock n' roll," or just "Rock." It was not long after this that the arguably most popular band in the world, The Beatles, made the statement that summed up the spirit of the times: "We're more popular than Jesus Christ."

And then again war gave birth to another "counter-culture" and took it miles further than the "Beats," with even greater ideals, yet still not fully defined. This "counter-culture" was called the "Hippie movement." With "free love" they gave birth to the untraceable array of fashions and movements that comprised popular culture from the 20th century up to today. The generation of youth, today with the "counter-cultures" of outcasts, metal-heads, death-metalheads, punks, skins, crusts, hard-core kids, skaters, gangsters, ghetto youth, mods, scenesters, stoners, junkies, etc. comprise this generation in search of identity, Generation X.

Through all these different movements there is one element that ties them all together. There is one common cry; there is one message that they all preach: Nihilism. As time moves on, the confusion increases and the machine gains speed, working harder and faster. The youth of today cannot help but be burned and scarred for life by this machine. There is no one to tell us that the fire burns; thus we must learn the hard way and hope that we do not die in the process.

It is too easy to say that we (the children of the modern age) are not affected by the history of Nihilism, yet we sit in ashes: an abandoned child in a wasteland of apostasy, lonely

survivors of centuries of holocaust with no one to point in the direction of home, for all has been destroyed.

Nietzsche, the first voice of Generation X, in a frightening way portrayed these godless times and defined the experience if the youth of today in his parable, "The Madman":

"Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the marketplace and cried incessantly, 'I'm looking for God, I'm looking for God!' As many of those who did not believe in God were standing together there, he excited considerable laughter. 'Why, did he get lost?' said one. 'Did he lose his way like a child?' said another. 'Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Or emigrated?' Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

"'Whither is God?' he cried. 'I shall tell you. We have killed him, you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backwards, sideways, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods, too, decompose in the minds and hearts of men. God is dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed to great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us, for the sake of this deed, he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.'

"Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out..."

The youth of today also seem to have frantically searched for God, but in the innocence of their youth the world told them with laughter: "Why, did he get lost?" Thus, they threw their lantern to the ground and it too went out...

THE TOUCH OF THOMAS

By Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou.

The feast of the Resurrection of Christ, Pascha, is the central feast of the entire ecclesiastical year and the last of the Triodion and Great Lent, but also the beginning of another period that concludes with the great feast of Pentecost. This feast we celebrate today as well as throughout the entire period of the *Pentecostarion*, and every Sunday which is dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ.

Many events occurred on the first day of the Resurrection of Christ, as well as the days that followed. Christ appeared to His Disciples, who had prepared properly to see Him Risen and this appearance contributed to their salvation.

On the first day, late in the evening, the Risen Christ appeared to His Disciples, although Thomas was absent, and the next Sunday He appeared again to His Disciples in the Upper Room, with Thomas present. The Apostle Thomas wanted to put his finger on the mark of the nails and his hand on His side to be assured of His Resurrection. It is known that the nails of the crucifixion created wounds on the body of Christ and the lance opened His side from which flowed blood and water. For Thomas to see the wounds caused by the Cross and to touch them he considered it as an assurance of His Resurrection.

Christ, by His appearance after eight days, invited the Apostle Thomas to touch the wounds of His body and His side. This is the extreme humility - emptying of Christ, to accept to be touched, as well as His love towards man by satisfying all of his sacred desires. This is why in a hymn of the Church it is written: "Rejoice, investigator!." In other words, Christ rejoices when we investigate. As soon as the Apostle Thomas saw Christ and heard His invitation to touch, he proclaimed: "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:19-29). This is a confession of the divinity of Christ with the vision of the Risen Body of Christ.

The Gospel of John does not confirm whether the Apostle Thomas touched the Risen Body of Christ, but it only records his confession.

However, in the hymns of the Church it is written that the Apostle Thomas confessed Christ, since previously he had touched the wounds of Christ created by the Cross. Therefore, having touched and beheld, he confessed that Thou art an unabstract God, and an unsimple Man. In another hymn

it is written that the Apostle Thomas by touching the side theologized the One incarnate. He recognized that the Son of God suffered in the flesh and he preached the Risen God. Thus, in Orthodox theology the vision and touching of God are connected.

In another hymn it is written that John, who leaned on the breast of Christ, drew up from there the depth of theology, while Thomas was made worthy of the mystery of the divine economy by touching, that is, he came to know the mystery of the incarnation of Christ and he initiated us into it. Again, in another hymn it is written that Thomas, by putting his hand in the fiery side of Jesus Christ, was not burned by the touch, but the unbelief of his soul changed to verification.

The desire of the Apostle Thomas to see and touch the wounds of the body of Christ was not an unbelief in today's meaning of the word, but it was his desire to go from faith by hearing to faith by seeing. He did not only want to hear from

the Disciples that Christ had risen, but he wanted to see and verify the Resurrection with his senses. This shows that the life of the Church is empirical, a spiritual relationship, a touching of Christ.

The Church is not an abstract system, but life in its fullest. Christ is not imaginary, but the God-man who has a resurrected body, that shines

with the Light of Divinity and we have the ability to touch Him. The Church is the Body of Christ that consists of its Mysteries, is expressed by its dogmas and sacred canons, and is established by a particular ecclesiastical government. The theology of the Church is empirical, it is "the mystery of the touch."

We commune of the Body of Christ, when we Clergy liturgize we hold it in our hands. We kiss the Cross, the sacred relics of the Saints, the sacred icons. And when a Christian prays with spiritual strength, he touches eternity and participates in the glory of God.

My beloved brethren, the Risen Christ is not a man who once lived, but He is the God-man who is always with us. The Resurrection of Christ is not an event of the past, but it is experienced within the life of the Church. We are not people who believe in God only in theory, but we are members of His Risen Body. Christ calls us to touch Him and we must respond to this invitation. This is the mystery of the touch. The mystery of divine communication.

With resurrectional paternal blessings, I wish you all many years and exclaim: *Christ is Risen.*



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THE DEATH OF COMMON SENSE

A "London Times" obituary from 2015. One cannot help but wonder what this article would look like if honest reporters dared to address the evil madness of the alphabet movement and transgenderism/transmania, and the satanic plans behind Covidism and the (non-vaccine) jabs.

Today we mourn the passing of a beloved old friend, Common Sense, who has been with us for many years. No one knows for sure how old he was, since his birth records were long ago lost in bureaucratic red tape. He will be remembered as having cultivated such valuable lessons as: Knowing when to come in out of the rain; accidents may happen; if it ain't broken, don't fix it; why the early bird gets the worm; life isn't always fair; and maybe it was my fault.

Common Sense lived by simple, sound financial policies (don't spend more than you can earn) and reliable strategies (adults, not children, are in charge).

His health began to deteriorate rapidly when well-intentioned but overbearing regulations were set in place. Reports of a 6-year-old boy charged with sexual harassment for kissing a classmate; teens suspended from school for using mouthwash after lunch; and a teacher fired for reprimanding an unruly student, only worsened his condition.

When the time of the advent of the antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will grow unrecognizable. People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals. There will be no respect for parents and elders, love will disappear, and Christian pastors, bishops, and priests will become vial men, completely failing to distinguish the right-hand way from the left.

St. Nilus the Myrrhstreamer of Mount Athos (1651)

Common Sense lost ground when parents attacked teachers for doing the job that they themselves had failed to do in disciplining their unruly children. It declined even further when schools were required to get parental consent to administer sun lotion or an aspirin to a student; but could not inform parents when a student became pregnant and wanted to have an abortion.

Common Sense lost the will to live as the churches became businesses; and criminals received better treatment than their victims. Common Sense took a beating when you couldn't defend yourself from a burglar in your own home but the burglar could sue you for assault. Common Sense finally gave up the will to live, after a woman failed to realize that a steaming cup of coffee was hot. She spilled a little on her lap, and was promptly awarded a huge settlement.

Common Sense was preceded in death, by his parents, Truth and Trust, his wife, Discretion, his daughters, Responsibility and Integrity and his son, Reason.

He is survived by his 4 stepbrothers; I Know My Rights; I Want It Now; Someone Else Is To Blame and I'm A Victim.

Not many attended his funeral because so few realized he was gone. If you still remember him, pass this on. If not, join the majority and do nothing.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

By Archpriest Michael Reagan, a retired priest of the Orthodox Church of America. Originally published in 2006.

To the woman at the well in John 4, Jesus said that *the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* From this passage it is clear that there is such a thing as “true worship” which is decided by God and not by man. But what is true worship? Is there such a thing as false worship? If the ancient Christians, those closer to the apostles and the direct inheritors of their teaching and tradition, worshipped God in one way, and modern Christians 2000 years removed from that apostolic tradition choose to worship in another, completely different way, are both equally valid in the sight of God?

Perhaps we should step back a bit and ask the even more basic question of why we should worship God. A young girl in our parish recently posed this question to me by expressing her confusion over why God, who is humble and the perfect image of humility, would demand to be worshipped. Don't you love how children can boldly ask the questions that most adults are too afraid to even consider? God bless them!

I told her that God does not need our worship, but He demands it for our sakes and for our salvation. You see, it is we humans who need to learn that God is God and that we ourselves are not “gods.” Only by worshipping Him in spirit and truth, according to the way that God specifies we must worship, can we learn humility before Him and begin to come into a

right relationship with Him as His creatures. True worship pleases God because it corrects us (God knows we need that!) and leads us to unite with Him in the proper way.

If this is true, then obviously if we simply make up our own forms of worship according to what seems good and enjoyable to us, we are dethroning God and making ourselves the judge of what is acceptable worship. In this case, are we really worshipping God, or ourselves?

The earliest recorded instance of man formally worshipping God is found in the story of Cain and Abel. These brothers both recognized that the worship of God involved making an offering to Him. Abel, a keeper of flocks, brought to God the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. Cain, a tiller of the soil, brought some vegetables. As we know, God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's.

Many bible students conclude that the sole meaning of this is that only a blood offering is acceptable to God, but there may indeed be more to the story than this alone. Consider that Abel brought to God the absolute best that he had to offer, the choicest cuts and the juiciest fat. It was a truly desirable offering, a genuine sacrifice on the part of Abel, but he made it willingly to God whom he deemed worthy. Cain merely offered what he felt like offering; a few items from his garden that really didn't represent any major sacrifice on his part. For this reason God did not respect his offering.

If we understand that true worship is as much a correction of the worshipper as anything else, then what we see in this story is that Cain was not willing to be corrected. He stubbornly wanted God to accept what he thought was good enough, rather than to learn from

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

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

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God what would constitute true worship. Cain was therefore a false worshipper.

Throughout the history of Israel, we see God being very specific about true worship, not only in terms of what makes a true offering, the construction of the altar it should be offered upon, the Temple in which it should be offered, but even right down to the details of which incense to burn before Him. Once again, these instructions are given for man's benefit, not for God's. He who owns the cattle on a thousand hills does not need the blood of bulls and calves to be offered to Him. But man needed to offer them in order to humble himself before God, recognize his own sinfulness, and to glorify God as the Maker of all things and man's only Redeemer.

When the Perfect Sacrifice was made upon the altar of the Cross on Mt. Calvary, the veil of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, signifying that God was through with the offering of animals, and man now had access to the Holy of Holies through the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son. His Body broken for us, His Blood poured forth, is the only acceptable offering, the highest and most precious offering that can be made to God. Jesus Christ is both the Offering, and the One to Whom the Offering is made. He gives Himself freely to us, that we in turn may offer Him back to God as the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice on our behalf.



But how does this work itself out in terms of Christian worship? In the ancient Church, the altar was the focal point of the church and the Eucharist was the center of the worship experience. Christians would assemble and stand together in church and, following even more ancient Jewish models, would read Psalms, sing hymns, hear readings from the New Testament epistles and Gospels, listen to a brief teaching on the Gospel reading by the bishop or priest presiding, and then would culminate the worship experience by

praying over and offering the sanctified bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ back to God. Having offered the Only Acceptable Offering, they then partook of the same, as a royal priesthood, just as the priests of Aaron also partook of a portion of the sacrifice made to God. Being filled with the life-giving elements of Holy Communion ("for unless

you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you"), they then concluded with prayers of thanksgiving and went forth from the church to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, in their daily lives.

The New Testament scriptures, unlike the Old Testament scriptures, do not give specific instructions about these things because, quite frankly, none were needed. Each of the New Testament churches had already been established by an apostle who had previously instructed the people in

these matters in detail. There would have been no need to go over them again in later epistles, except in instances where some correction was needed, as in the case of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Those who today see the Bible as a kind of manual detailing everything of importance to the church, are making the mistake of turning their backs on the historic testimony of the Apostolic Church and what it has to tell us to complete the story. The Bible itself calls the Church of the living God "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), yet this crucial foundation is swept aside to make the Bible (and more to the point, our preferred interpretations of it) the pillar and foundation of truth. By divorcing the Bible from the context of the living tradition of faith and worship in the Apostolic Church and interpreting it himself according to his own understanding and culture, modern man has once again found a way to usurp God from the throne and make himself the final arbiter of what is truth.

In contemporary Christianity, this takes the form of worship that ignores ancient models and turns it into something that would be unrecognizable to the apostles. For one thing, the pulpit has replaced the altar as the center of worship. People no longer stand as priests but sit as students and are "fed on the Word" not as in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, but as in listening to the pastor teach his opinions from the Bible. Incrementally since the "Age of Reason", faith and mystery has been replaced by intellect and rationalism in Western culture and finally in Western Christendom itself. No longer are Christians comfortable with the idea of Holy Communion being a sharing in the actual Body and Blood of Christ ("How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"), and so they spiritualize it to become a mental memorial only, a mere symbol to be appreciated by the mind alone. Communion has been marginalized and made to be infinitely less important to giving life to the believer than reading the Bible. One wonders how Christians possibly survived before the invention of the modern printing press made Bibles commonly available to all! Of course the early Christians not only survived, but became remarkably holy by today's standards, and turned the world upside down as they joyfully endured terrible sufferings and martyrdom in preaching the Gospel of Christ to the known world.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern Christendom, besides its having divorced itself from communion with the historic, Apostolic Church, is that it imitates Cain in its stubborn refusal to be corrected by the same. Rather than answering the question of "What is true worship?" by looking backward to see what the early Christians did, it puts a premium on devising continually "new and contemporary" forms of worship that ultimately are geared more toward entertaining the participants and pleasing them, rather than

on pleasing God. Contemporary worship must be "exciting and lively" and "meeting the people where they are at" rather than on holy and reverential and lifting the people up to where God is at.

The contemporary worship experience can very nearly be likened to a junkie continually seeking a new and better "high", and the value of a morning's worship is evaluated entirely on whether or not its participants feel "blessed" by it. Does this not indicate the self-centered nature of such an experience, that they are putting their own blessing ahead of God's? Can we imagine that St. Paul's only concern for the church in Corinth was that they "get their socks blessed off during worship" and if they weren't, then perhaps they should replace the bass guitarist with someone more "spirit-led"? His primary concern for them was that they judge and conduct themselves rightly in order to partake of the Body and Blood of the Lord in a worthy manner, for without this they were not providing the spiritual worship which they owed to God.

Modern Christians have drifted terribly from these things! Many groups are beginning to recognize this and are leaving behind contemporary forms of worship to embrace the more traditional Eucharistic-based forms. This seems like death to those who love toe-tapping worship, but in fact the Life of God is hidden in these ancient forms and they very much need to be brought back in our day. Even better would be for modern Christians to return to the Orthodox Church, which is the Apostolic Church, and which still focuses on the worship of God "in spirit and truth" as it has from its beginning.

May God preserve us in true worship for our salvation, and to the glory of His Holy Name!



Together with my King, my God and Father, I worship Him who clothed Himself in the royal purple of my flesh, not as a garment that passes away, or as if the Lord incarnate constituted a fourth person of the Trinity—God forbid! The flesh assumed by Him is made divine and endures after its assumption.

Fleshly nature was not lost when it became part of the Godhead, but just as the Word made flesh remained the Word, so also flesh became the Word, yet remained flesh, being united to the person of the Word. Therefore I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood.

St. John of Damascus

SINISTER PSYCHOSIS AND THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

By Fr. Zechariah Lynch, St. Michael OCA church, Pueblo, CO.

The progress of technology had led and is still leading to a concentration and centralization of power.

[Aldous Huxley—English writer and philosopher]

† † †

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

[Lk 21:34-36]

† † †

Foundational to Christian living is the remembrance of God. Remembrance while waking. Remembrance while at work. Remembrance while fulfilling the duties of life. Remembrance while going to sleep. The Christian must be cultivating the remembrance of God in all things. It need not be elaborate, the believer may offer this service in the inner chamber of the heart. He may offer it in solitude or while in the midst of a multitude.

The littlest of things may serve to turn our hearts and minds to the Most-Holy Trinity. While at work, *Lord fashion me according to Your image.* While eating, *Lord feed me with true heavenly food.* While drinking, *Lord give unto me the Living Water.* Even when we encounter unpleasant situations—that insane driver on the freeway—*Lord have mercy and save us! Lord deliver our race from the evil one.* Thus, we can train ourselves to use everyday material things to lift up our minds to Heavenly things. Short prayers peppered throughout the day, these will act to cultivate in our hearts the remembrance of God.

If remembrance of God is foundational to the Christian life, then the opposing foundation of the anti-Christian life is the forgetfulness of God. The enemy seeks to use all of the cares of this life to drown the soul in forgetfulness. He seeks to lull it into a false sense of complacency or keep it occupied in constant worry and fear. He seeks to de-humanize humanity. In a state of de-humanized forgetfulness, he drives our race to the cliffs of perdition. The masses staggering forward in the darkness of forgetfulness are constantly told, “this is true freedom.” And under duress, they begin to believe it.

The devil seeks to convince man to reduce himself to bare material existence—there is nothing beyond what can be seen with physical eyes and touched with fleshly hands. Even if the possibility of something greater is admitted, it is

simultaneously wiped away as “unknowable or unknown.” Thus, man frees himself of any duty to contemplate higher things—after all, the thought stirs, what is truth and how could it be actually known? The shuffling masses are well supplied with the narcotic of indifferentism. This manifests itself in the fact that they then lash out at anything that would seek to disturb what they count their calm march, which ends in the abyss.

And we are in times which demand that one confess that the abyss is the ultimate “good.” For the enemy to make such an illusion seem to be a reality, he must purge from the human consciousness any striving and longing for Eternal things. He must obliterate the remembrance of God in the heart of man. He is not able to do this through his own power, but he may use his cunning to convince man to live of his own will in such a state.

In a past article, “Mind Control, Standardized Masses, and Conditioned Reflexes,” I point out that altering the psyche of man was a foundational goal of Sovietism. The early founders of Bolshevism in Russia were strong supporters and patrons of Ivan Pavlov. (Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, was a Russian and Soviet experimental neurologist, psychologist and physiologist known for his discovery of classical conditioning through his experiments with dogs, *Ed.*)

Aldous Huxley, in his work, “Brave New World Revisited,” has many very interesting admissions. Regardless of whether one thinks Huxley was trying to warn people of the goals of the elite or that he was engaging in the very typical tactic of “hiding in plain sight,” is not of the greatest concern to me at the moment. One way or another, he expresses the ideals, methods, and goals—the spirit—of the new order that seeks to take control of man.

“Whatever may have happened in the early years, it seems fairly certain that torture is not extensively used by the Communist police today. They draw their inspiration, not from the Inquisitor or the SS man, but from the physiologist and his methodically conditioned laboratory animals. For the dictator and his policemen, Pavlov’s findings have important practical implications. If the central nervous system of dogs can be broken down, so can the central nervous system of political prisoners.” And for that matter those of the general population, so they would also reason: “It is simply a matter of applying the right amount of stress for the right length of time. At the end of the treatment, the prisoner will be in a state of neurosis or hysteria, and will be ready to confess whatever his captors want him to confess.” (Brave New World Revisited, Harper Perennial, 2004, pg. 289).

Such tactics were used throughout the Soviet system, as much historical evidence testifies. One of the most diabolical of such experiments was carried out in Communist Romania in Pitesti prison. It was simply called

“Reeducation.” The modern materialist views man as but a biological machine.

Mr. Huxley continues, “But confession is not enough. A hopeless neurotic is no use to anyone. What the intelligent and practical dictator needs is not a patient to be institutionalized, or a victim to be shot, but a convert who will work for the Cause.” (Ibid).

And there is a new anti-evangelism going on, one that indeed has as its goal conversion. I take the time to highlight these things so that we may be aware of the methods that are being employed. For we are told to be watchful. We cannot disallow that we are part of the human race and that we are, if not careful in Christ, susceptible to the sly tactics devised and utilized.

“Turning once again to Pavlov, he learns that, on their way to the point of final breakdown, dogs become more than normally suggestible. New behavior patterns can easily be installed while the dog is at or near the limit of cerebral endurance, and these new behavior patterns seem to be ineradicable. The animal in which they have been implanted

cannot be de-conditioned; that which it has learned under stress will remain an integral part of its make-up.” (Ibid. 289-290).

It is the goal of the enemy to recondition man—his perverse imitation of Christ Jesus’ making of men *new creation* (cf. 2 Cor

5:17)—so to make of him but an animal that is stripped of all humanity, a utilitarian object that if found of not sufficient use and practicality may be discarded with little resistance. In a multitude of ways, the uniformity of forgetfulness of God is actively being cultivated in the psyche of people.

It is very worth noting the means and methods of producing psychological stress elaborated by Mr. Huxley; the reader, I am sure, will find much in common with the social environment that surrounds us. “Psychological stresses can be produced in many ways ... it has been found that the deliberate induction of fear, rage, or anxiety markedly heightens the dog’s suggestibility. If these emotions are kept at a high pitch of intensity for a long enough time, the brain goes ‘on strike.’ When this happens, new behavior patterns may be installed with the greatest of ease.” (Brave New World Revisited, pg. 290).

This is why our world is full of what some have labeled “pseudo-ideas.” The human mind is purposely broken down and fed false ideas, we may say fantastical and self-contradicting ideas—which it then takes as some sort of reality—

because in this state of constant emotional and sentimental reaction it is very easy to control.

For this to be effective, an environment of destabilization must be produced so to keep the subject in a state of anxiety, which will also stir up fear and rage. Does that sound familiar?

He continues, “Among the physical stresses that increase a dog’s suggestibility are fatigue, wounds, and every form of sickness.” (Ibid). And then as if explaining events of our day, he elaborates, “**Illness is even more effective than fatigue as an intensifier of suggestibility.**” (Ibid).

As I stated many a time, the fundamental goal of covidism (yes there was a real virus, I am speaking of the utilizing of the virus for an agenda) was primarily psychological—mandatory mask utilization, lockdowns (applied, eased, and applied again), new social habits, and so forth. It is also why the threat of some new disease is ever in the mainstream media.

Covidism proved that people, even Christians, are willing to accept a “new normal” under the threat of illness. It



was priming the pump. People are willing to accept new standards of human interaction (or lack thereof) and even Christians are willing to accept the modification of worship and interaction with the Divine under the threat of an illness. Some Christians even

refused the non-masked entrance into church buildings; some even willingly segregated the unvaccinated or barred them from worship. Those who would not accept the new mass psychosis were many times cut off, even by those counted as friends.

What do such actions say, and have we repented and reconciled? Or has it just been easier to brush it under the carpet? Does this not indicate the danger, and on some level the potency, of what is being addressed in this article? Although it may seem at current that covidism is dormant, I bring it up because substantial ground was taken, through it, in the reconditioning of humanity. Certian (indisputable) mentalities were cultivated in many and are all still there.

Mr. Huxley notes, “Intense, prolonged fear broke them down and produced a state of greatly intensified suggestibility ... If indoctrination is given in the right way at the proper stage of nervous exhaustion, it will work. Under favorable conditions, practically everybody can be converted to practically anything.” (Ibid. pg. 291).

As covidsm was losing its potency, the world was hurriedly moved into its next crisis. Somehow war was begun in a country most Americans couldn't find on a map. And it became the great scapegoat for a plethora of global "short-ages." And let us not forget about the use of "climate" for fear-mongering. Keep the masses in a state of anxiety and worry. We must also take into consideration that when there is instability people tend to be more open to saviors.

There is undoubtedly a certain reality behind the materialist understanding of the human psyche. The methods have been implemented with great success in many places. It does at least confirm that the human mind will be conformed to something or someone.

So, what is the Christian to do? Remember God. If in situations of heightened stress we become more "susceptible," then let us turn the constructed situations of continued crisis around us to a beneficial end. In trials and tribulations, let us turn to God. If the goal is to wear us down, then let us encourage ourselves in the Lord. The goal is to mentally weaken us, let us strengthen our minds in Christ. Ultimately, the plans of the Devil, executed through those sad persons who serve him, will all come crashing down and be destroyed.

The Scriptures admonish us: *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.* (1 Pet 5:6-9).

Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall nourish thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to stumble. But Thou, O God, shalt bring them into the pit of destruction; blood-thirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in the Lord. (Pss 54:23-24).

And then, if we remain in Christ Jesus, we may say with the righteous Joseph, *Do not be afraid, for I belong to God. But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.* (Gen 50:20).

If in all the instability of our days, we cultivate in our hearts the remembrance of God then we will find the still path through the stormy waters. Even in all the global machinations of men, we may be reminded of God: *O Lord, this world is passing away and all its lust, only Your Kingdom abides forever! Remember me when You come in Your Kingdom!*

Counteract the psychological attack of the evil one by cultivating in your psyche the remembrance of God. May we have the sobriety to understand the tactics being used against us, so as to implement the proper spiritual defense in our Lord Jesus. *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe*

in God, believe also in Me ... In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn 14:1; 16:33).

† † †

A Prayer by St. Anatole (the Younger) of Optina: *Deliver me, O Lord, from the deceptions of the God-hating and evil antichrist, whose coming is at hand, and shelter me from his snares in the secret desert of Thy salvation. Grant me, O Lord, strength and courage to firmly confess Thy Most Holy Name, that I may not abandon Thee because of the devil's fear and that I may not deny Thee my Saviour and Redeemer, nor Thy Holy Church. But grant me, O Lord, cries and tears for my sins, and spare me in the hour of Thy dread judgment. Amen*



Fear of death is a property of nature due to disobedience, but terror of death is a sign of unrepented sins.

St. John Climacus

If an unbaked brick is used within a foundation near a river, it does not last for even a single day; baked, however, it lasts just as long as a stone. Likewise, the man with a carnal disposition of soul, who has not been in a fire through fear of God like [the patriarch] Joseph, utterly disintegrates when he accepts a position of authority. For many are the temptations of those who live among men. It is good for him who knows his limitations to avoid the weight of being in charge of anything; but those who are firm in faith remain unmoved.

If anyone wished to speak of the great saint Joseph he would have to say that he was not worldly. How greatly was he tempted and in that place where there had not yet been any trace of devotion towards God! But the God of his fathers was with him and delivered him out of all his trouble and now he is with his fathers in the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us, therefore, know our limitations and let us keep the fight so that even scarcely we can escape the judgment of God.

Abba Orsirus

It is by means of thoughts that the spirits of evil wage a secret war against the soul. For since the soul is invisible, these malicious powers naturally attack it invisibly. Both sides prepare their weapons, muster their forces, devise stratagems, clash in fearful battle, gain victories and suffer defeats. But this noetic warfare lacks one feature possessed by visible warfare: declaration of hostilities. Suddenly, with no warning, the enemy attacks the inmost heart, sets an ambush there, and kills the soul through sin.

St. Philotheos of Sinai

OBTAINING JOY THROUGH REPENTANCE

By Bishop Augustinos Kantiotis, from «Κυριακή» 16 Απριλίου 2021 with the title «Διὰ τῆς μετανοίας σὴ χαρά». Translated by the Holy Monastery of St. Augustine, Florina, Greece.

Rejoice thou through whom joy shall shine forth.

Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out.

[Akathist Hymn]

† † †

My beloved, there are people who don't love the Church. They criticize it, saying it's old fashioned and out of date, because with its strict sermons and prohibitions, its asceticism, fasting, and its supernatural theories, it doesn't inspire joy in people, they say. We need to give an answer to this.

Our Orthodox Church is the source of light, love, freedom, righteousness and joy. The Akathist Hymn is proof of this, with all the Rejoice's that it contains. It is an echo of that joy that the Ever-virgin Mary felt when *an Angel, and the chiefest among them, was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! to the Mother of God.* (Akathist Hymn).

Indeed, the first *Rejoice* which is heard in this service is the hymn of joy: *Rejoice thou through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out.*

Man, my brethren, is not a chance creation, he is the pinnacle of God's creation. God created man *in His image and likeness* (Gen 1:26) and He put him in Paradise, where everything was wonderful. Everything was beautiful, and man was the most beautiful of all, mentally and physically. It is a miracle how the mind, the nerves, the senses and all the different organs work. Man is a wonderful creation.

There, everything breathed joy, and above all, the presence of God Himself, who "walked" amongst our forefathers Adam and Eve. So man was created to live in bliss.

But suddenly, as we know, due to his disobedience, man lost Paradise. He left there and began a life of sorrows on this earth. But throughout the whole world, there remains that memory, that nostalgia and searching for the joy of Paradise. Each person—no matter where they live in the world or what century they live in—seeks joy. Fish were created to swim in water, birds were created to fly in the air and man was created to live in bliss.

However, far from the light of God, men fell into delusion.¹ They believed that they would find joy in different things, either in riches, or high positions or glory, or in hedonism and entertainment, or in wisdom, in knowledge, in science, in the arts, etc. In the end, though, where is joy? Come here, you scientists, to wipe the peoples' tears! Not only did you not reduce the sufferings of the world, but you increased them, so that today peoples' faces are imprinted with sorrow.²

But praise the Lord! *When the fullness of time had come* (Gal 4:4), Panaghia came along and gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ and in an indescribable way lifted the curse of Eve;³ *the curse shall be blotted out.* Jesus brought joy and peace into the world. Let us glorify God for that. In sorrows, in pain, in the ruins that the different world theories and systems left behind, the fake paradises, the false dreams and delusions, an other-worldly voice was heard. An angel told the shepherds of Bethlehem: *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, and chanted the anthem Glory to God in the highest.* (Lk 2:10, 14). And after His resurrection, Jesus told the myrrh-bearing women and his disciples *Rejoice and Peace be to you.* (Lk 24:36, Jn 20:19).

One archaeologist says that in the period before Christ, all the statues that were carved, had melancholic faces, faces with an absence of joy. But even after Christ (AD) some still have faces like in the BC period. An old man aged 80 once told me that in all his life, he only felt happy 14 times. A philosopher and poet of our times, when asked when it was that he felt happy in his life, said that the only time he felt happy was when as a hunter, he killed his first hare. Another person said he felt a little happiness when he won the first prize in the lotto, but that night he went into hiding, because his friends, relatives and even his enemies kept ringing him trying to get him to give them the money.

So does happiness not exist? I once read a tale where a king sent his loyal knight to travel throughout his whole kingdom and to bring him the shirt of a person he finds who is happy and satisfied with their life. The knight went everywhere, but at whatever door he knocked, everyone was dissatisfied with their lives. In the end he found someone who said: "I am satisfied, Glory to God." "Give me your shirt," said the knight. "I only have one shirt, I'm not going to give it to you," the man answered. The tale wanted to show that often joy exists in the huts of virtuous poor people, rather than in the palaces of the rich.

These days, the number of people with mental illnesses have increased. The clinics are full. The psychiatrists make a lot of money prescribing antidepressants. One statistic showed that America, the country of riches and prosperity, had the highest rate of suicides; thousands commit suicide every year there, but also in England and other rich countries.

If there is a century of sorrow and sighing for all the offspring of Adam and Eve, it is this century that we live in. And if an angel were to collect all the tears that young and old shed, a lake the size of Prespa⁴ would be formed.

There isn't true and lasting joy anywhere except with God. *Indeed, the kingdom of God is within you* (Lk 17:21), God said. Do you want to see a contrast?

In the palaces of Rome there lived a king who had everything he wished for: money, women, hedonism, entertainment etc., but he felt so miserable that he

wanted to commit suicide. Who was he? Nero. Close by, in a dungeon, was a prisoner condemned to death, waiting at any minute to be executed. And yet he was so happy that he wrote *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* (Phil 4:4). Who was he? The Apostle Paul. Read his epistle to the Philippians and see.

[Spiritual] joy can not be found in riches, nor in entertainment, neither in sex, pornography and adultery, or in science. Joy is not even in family life, which often has problems and fills people with bitterness and poison. The source of [real] joy, the clear and immortal water, is our faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you doubt this? Whoever doubts, let him do what the famous Russian, Dostoyevsky, did. He was sorrowful, but when he started to believe in God, he felt Paradise blossoming in him. Man's sorrow and sighing is deep, Jesus is the only joy. He came to earth and lifted the curse of the forefathers. It's not a lie: whoever feels this will be convinced.

That is what I had to say to you, in short. If you want to feel joy—I've said it before and I'll repeat it again now—Great Lent is a source of joy, this exceptional period of repentance.

Unfortunately, we do not have repentance, we do not live the way Jesus, the son of the Most-Holy Theotokos, wants us to. Let us live Jesus! If we believe in God, if we repent and do His holy will, then we will experience happiness.

We need to confess our sins, please do not put off going to confession. We need to be constantly watchful and ready. The book of Revelation says that great events will occur. There will be a final war, that of *Armageddon* (Rev 16:16) which will be worse than all the previous wars; much blood will be shed. And there will be a huge earthquake, we need to expect an earthquake. We all need to be ready.

Please be vigilant and pray. Pray for our homeland, for the Church, for every person, for countries that are being tried and tested, and finally for me, the old bishop. May God have mercy on us.

It is up to us, my brethren. During these holy days of Lent we should not seek the joys of this vain world. Let us repent. When someone is thirsty, he does not go to the ocean to drink water, he goes to fountains of clear water. We are all spiritually thirsty, we are melancholic and despondent because joy has left us. But joy is waiting for us: it is Christ.

† Bishop Augoustinos Kantiotes

† † †

1 Light=Divine Knowledge

2 In Europe in the past generation, science was marketed as the new God and people called to reject religion and embrace science and technology, believing that only that would bring health and happiness.

3 *I will greatly multiply your sorrow.* (Gen 3:16)

4 Lake Prespa is on the border of Greece, Albania and Skopje, about an hour's drive from the town of Florina.

THE FORMATION OF THE SOUL

By Blessed Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Platina (edited for length).

The soul that comes to Orthodoxy today often finds itself in a disadvantaged or even crippled state. Often one hears from converts after some years of seemingly unfruitful struggles that "I didn't know what I was getting into when I became Orthodox." Some sense this when they are first exposed to the Orthodox Faith, and this can cause them to postpone their encounter with Orthodoxy or even run away from it entirely. A similar thing often happens to those baptized in childhood when they reach mature years and must choose whether or not to commit themselves to their childhood faith.

From one point of view, this is a result of the deep commitment required of those who are serious about the Orthodox Faith—a commitment that is quite different in kind from that of those who merely join a new denomination or sect. There are many denominations with their various interpretations of Christian life, but only One Church of Christ which lives the true life in Christ and the unchanged teaching and practice of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church.

But from a more practical point of view, the problem lies in the poverty of our modern soul, which has not been prepared or trained to receive the depths of true Christian experience. There is a cultural as well as a psychological aspect to this poverty of ours: The education of youth today, especially in America, is notoriously deficient in developing responsiveness to the best expressions of human art, literature, and music, as a result of which young people are formed haphazardly under the influence of television, rock music, and other manifestations of today's culture (or rather, anti-culture); and, both as a cause and as a result of this—but most of all because of the absence on the part of parents and teachers of any conscious idea of what Christian Life is and how a young person should be brought up in it—the soul of a person who has survived the years of youth is often an emotional wasteland, and at best reveals deficiencies in the basic attitudes towards life that were once considered normal and indispensable:

Few are those today who can clearly express their emotions and ideas and face them in a mature way; many do not even know what is going on inside themselves. Life is artificially divided into work (and very few can put the best part of themselves, their heart, into it because it is "just for money"); play (in which many see the real meaning of their life), religion (usually no more than an hour or two a week), and the like, without an underlying unity that gives meaning to the whole of one's life. Many, finding daily life unsatisfying, try to live in a fantasy world of their own creation (into which they also try to fit religion). And underlying the whole of modern culture is the common denominator of the worship of oneself and one's own comfort, which is deadly to any idea of spiritual life.

Such is something of the background, the “cultural baggage,” which a person brings with him today when he becomes Orthodox. Many, of course, survive as Orthodox despite their background; some come to some spiritual disaster because of it; but a good number remain cripples or at least spiritually undeveloped because they are simply unprepared for and unaware of the real demands of spiritual life.

As a beginning to the facing of this question (and hopefully, helping some of those troubled by it), let us look here briefly at the Orthodox teaching on human nature as set forth by a profound Orthodox writer of the 19th century, a true Holy Father of these latter times, Bishop Theophan the Recluse (+1892). In his hook, “What the Spiritual Life Is and How to Attune Oneself to It,” he writes: *Human life is complex and many-sided. In it there is a side of the body, another of the soul, and another of the spirit. Each of these has its own faculties and needs, its own methods and their exercise and satisfaction. Only when all our faculties are in movement and all our needs are satisfied does a man live. But when only one little part of these faculties is in motion and only one little part of our needs is satisfied, such a life is no life... A man does not live in a human way unless everything, in him is in motion... One must live as God created us, and when one does not live thus one can boldly say that he is not living at all.*

The distinction made here between “soul” and “spirit” does not mean that these are separate entities within human nature; rather, the “spirit” is the higher part, the “soul” the lower part, of the single invisible part of man (which as a whole is usually called the “soul”). To the “soul” in this sense belong those ideas and feelings which are not occupied directly with spiritual life—most of human art, knowledge, and culture; while to the “spirit” belong man’s strivings towards God through prayer, sacred art, and obedience to God’s law.

From these words of Bishop Theophan one can already spot a common fault of today’s seekers after spiritual life: Not all sides of their nature are in movement; they are trying to satisfy religious needs (the needs of the spirit) without having come to terms with some of their other (more specifically, psychological and emotional) needs, or worse: they use religion illegitimately to satisfy these psychological needs. In such people religion is an artificial thing that has not yet touched the deepest part of them, and often some upsetting event in their life, or just the natural attraction of the world, is enough to destroy their plastic universe and turn them away from religion. Sometimes such people, after bitter experience in life, return to religion: but too often they are lost, or at best crippled and unfruitful.

Bishop Theophan continues in his teaching: *“A man has three layers of life: that of the spirit, of the soul, and of the body. Each of these has its sum of needs, natural and proper to a man. These needs are not all of equal value, but some are higher and others lower; and the balanced satisfaction of them gives a man*

peace. Spiritual needs are the highest of all, and when they are satisfied, then there is peace even if the others are not satisfied; but when spiritual needs are not satisfied, then even if the others are satisfied abundantly, there is no peace. Therefore, the satisfaction of them is called the one thing needful.

He goes on: *When spiritual needs are satisfied, they instruct a man to put into harmony with them the satisfaction of one’s other needs also, so that neither what satisfies the soul nor what satisfies the body contradicts spiritual life, but helps it; and then there is a full harmony in a man of all the movements and revelations of his life, a harmony of thoughts, feelings, desires, undertakings, relationships, pleasures. And this is paradise!*

In our own day, the chief ingredient missing from this ideal harmony of human life is something one might call the emotional development of the soul. It is something that is not directly spiritual, but that very often hinders spiritual development. It is the state of someone who, while he may think he thirsts for spiritual struggles and an elevated life of prayer, is poorly able to respond to normal human love and friendship; for if a man say, *I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* (1 Jn 4:20).

In a few people this defect exists in an extreme form; but as a tendency it is present to some extent in all of us who have been raised in the emotional and spiritual wasteland of our times. This being so, it is often necessary for us to humble our seemingly spiritual impulses and struggles and be tested on our human and emotional readiness for them. Sometimes a spiritual father will deny his child the reading of some spiritual book and give him instead a novel of Dostoevsky or Dickens, or will encourage him to become familiar with certain kinds of classical music, not with any “aesthetic” purpose in mind—for one can be an “expert” in such matters and even be “emotionally well-developed” without the least interest in spiritual struggle, and that is also an unbalanced state—but solely to refine and form his soul and make it better disposed to understand genuine spiritual texts. Thus (and as an example of a spiritual father’s discernment towards a spiritual child) Bishop Theophan, in his advice to a young woman who was preparing in the world for monastic life, allowed her to read (in addition to other non-spiritual books) certain novels which were “...recommended by well-meaning people who have read them...”.



Whatever you may be seeking, seek it with all your strength, but do not expect your own search and efforts to bear fruit of themselves. Put your trust in the Lord, ascribing nothing to yourself, and He will give you your heart’s desire.

St. Theophan the Recluse

THE PLACE OF HOLY RELICS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

By St. Justin Popovich, from "Orthodox Tradition," Vol. VII, No. 1, p. 9, translated from the Serbian by the Rev. Gregory Telepneff.

Without doubt, matter is represented in the human body in a manner which is most puzzling, most mysterious, and most complex. The brain: What wondrous mysteries pass between its physical and spiritual parts! How vast is the experience of the human race. In no manner can one ever fully comprehend or grasp these mysteries. Indeed, little of this is accessible to the human senses or intellectual investigation. So it is also with the heart of man, formed as it is entirely and solely from cosmic mysteries. So formed, too, are every cell, every molecule, every atom. Everyone and all are set on their mystical path toward God, toward the God-Man.

Inasmuch as it was created by God, the Logos, matter possesses this same theocentricity. Moreover, by His advent into our earthly world, by His all-embracing condescension as God and Man for the redemption of the world, the Lord Christ clearly demonstrated that not only the soul, but matter also was created by God and for God, and that He is God and Man; and for it, matter, He is all and everything in the same manner as for the soul. Being created by God, the Logos, matter is, in its innermost core, God-longing and Christ-longing.

The most obvious proof of this is the fact that *God the Word has become Incarnate*, has become man. (Jn 1:14). By His Incarnation, matter has been magnified with Divine glory and has entered into the grace- and virtue-bestowing, ascetic aim of deification, or union with Christ. God has become flesh, has become human, so that the entire man, the entire body, might be filled with God and with His miracle-working forces and powers. In the God-Man, the Lord Christ, and His Body, all matter has been set on a path toward Christ—the path of deification, transfiguration, sanctification, resurrection, and ascent to an eternal glory surpassing that of the Cherubim. And all of this takes place and will continue to take place through the Divine and human Body of the Church, which is truly the God-Man Christ in the total fullness of His Divine and Human Person, the fullness that fills all in all. (Eph 1:23). Through its Divine and human existence in the Church, the human body, as matter, as substance, is sanctified by the Holy Spirit and in this way participates in the life of the Trinity. Matter thus attains its transcendent, divine meaning and goal, its eternal blessedness and its immortal joy in the God-Man.

The holiness of the Saints—both the holiness of their souls and of their bodies—derives from their zealous grace- and virtue-bestowing lives in the Body of the Church of Christ, of the God-Man. In this sense, holiness completely envelopes the human person—the entire soul and body and all that enters into the mystical composition of the human body. The

holiness of the Saints does not hold forth only in their souls, but it necessarily extends to their bodies; so it is that both the body and the soul of a saint are sanctified. Thus we, in piously venerating the Saints, also venerate the entire person, in this manner not separating the holy soul from the holy body.

Our pious veneration of the Saints' relics is a natural part of our pious respect for and prayerful entreaty to the Saints. All of this constitutes one indivisible ascetic act, just as the soul and body constitute the single, indivisible person of the Saint. Clearly, during his life on the earth, the Saint, by a continuous and singular grace- and virtue-bestowing synergy of soul and body, attains to the sanctification of his person, filling both the soul and body with the grace of the Holy Spirit and so transforming them into vessels of the holy mysteries and holy virtues.

It is completely natural, again, to show pious reverence both to the former and to the latter, both to soul and body, both of them holy vessels of God's grace. When the charismatic power of Christ issues forth, it makes Grace-filled all the constituent parts of the human person and the person in his entirety. By unceasing enactment of the ascetic efforts set forth in the Gospels, Saints gradually fill themselves with the Holy Spirit, so that their sacred bodies, according to the word of the holy Apostle, become temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19; 3:17), Christ dwelling by faith in their hearts (Eph 3:17) and by fruitful love also fulfilling the commandments of God the Father. Establishing themselves in the Holy Spirit through grace-bestowing ascetic labors, the Saints participate in the life of the Trinity, becoming sons of the Holy Trinity, temples of the Living God (2 Cor 6:16); their whole lives thus flow from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

By piously venerating the holy relics of the Saints, the Church reveres them as temples of the Holy Spirit, temples of the Living God, in which God dwells by Grace even after the earthly death of the Saints. And by His most wise and good Will, God creates miracles in and through these relics. Moreover, the miracles which derive from the holy relics witness also to the fact that their pious veneration by the people is pleasing to God.

The pious veneration of holy relics, based on their miraculous nature, originated from Divine Revelation. Even in the Old Testament God deigned to celebrate with miracles the holy relics of certain of those who were well-pleasing to Him. Thus, by the touch of the holy relics of the Prophet Elisea, a dead man was resurrected. The tomb and bones of this Prophet, who had prophesied to Jeroboam the destruction of idolatrous altars, were greatly revered in Judea. The Patriarch Joseph also left a testament to the sons of Israel to preserve his bones in Egypt and, during their exodus, to carry them to the promised land. (Gen 50:25).

The New Testament raised the human body to the sublime and divine heights, endowing it with a glory which the Cherubim and Seraphim do not possess. The Good News of the New

Testament concerning the body—the significance and goal of the human body—is that, together with the soul, it achieves and inherits immortal life in Divine eternity. The Lord Christ has come to deify, to make Christ-like, the entire man, that is, the soul and body, and this by the resurrection, insuring thereby victory over death and eternal life. No one ever elevated the human body as did the Lord Christ by His bodily resurrection, the ascension of His body into heaven, and its eternal session at the right hand of God the Father. In this way, the Resurrected Christ extended the promise of resurrection to the nature of the human body—“having made for all flesh a path to eternal life.” Thus man now knows that the body is created for eternity through union with the God-Man and that his divine work on earth is to struggle, with the soul, for eternal life; to struggle, with all those means that convey grace and virtue, to make himself grace-filled, fulfilled by Divine grace, and created anew as the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the Living God.

Bearing in mind that this New Testamental notion of the human body has been achieved and realized in the persons of the Saints, Christians show a pious veneration for the bodies of the Saints, towards holy relics, the temples of the Holy Spirit, Who by God’s grace abides within them. But Holy Revelation indicates that by God’s immeasurable love for man, the Holy Spirit abides through His grace not only in the bodies of the Saints, but also in their clothing. So it is that the handkerchiefs of the holy apostle Paul healed the ill and expelled unclean spirits. (Acts 19:12). With his mantle the Prophet Elias struck the water, separating the waters of the Jordan, and along the dry bed of the river crossed the Jordan with his disciple Elisea. (2Kgs 2:8). The prophet Elisea did the very same thing, himself, with the same mantle, after the taking-up of Elias into heaven. (2 Kgs 2:14). All this has its verification and source in the Divine power that rested in the garments of the Savior, which encompassed His most pure and Divine body. Moreover, by His inexpressible love for man, the Divine Lord allows the servants of His Divinity to work miracles not only through their bodies and clothing, but even with the shadow of their bodies, which is evident in an occurrence with the holy apostle Peter: his shadow healed an ill man and expelled unclean spirits. (Acts 5:15-16).

The eternal good news of Holy Revelation about sacred relics and their pious veneration is proved, and is continually being proved, by Holy Tradition from Apostolic times to the present day. Innumerable are the sacred relics of the holy Chosen Ones of God throughout the Orthodox world. Their miracles are innumerable. The pious veneration of these relics by Orthodox Christians is everywhere to be found. And without doubt this is because the holy relics, through their miracles, incite the Orthodox toward their pious veneration. From the very beginning, in Apostolic times, Christians piously preserved the honored relics of the Holy Forerunner and the holy Apostles,

so that these could be preserved even for us. As well, during the times of persecution the sacred remains of the bodies of the holy Martyrs were taken away by Christians and hidden in their homes. From that time until now, the sacred relics of the holy Chosen Ones of God have, by their miracles, poured forth the immortal joy of our faith into the hearts of Orthodox Christians. The proofs concerning this are countless. We shall cite only several.

The way that the holy relics of the Saints were translated and greeted is in a touching manner described by St. Chrysostom in a eulogy on St. Ignatios: *You, inhabitants of Antioch, have sent forth a bishop and received a martyr; you sent him forth with prayers, and received him back with crowns; and not only you, but all the cities which lay between. For how do you think that they behaved when they saw his remains being brought back? What pleasure was produced! How they rejoiced! With what laudations on all sides did they beset the crowned one! For as with a noble athlete, who has wrestled down all his antagonists, and who comes forth with radiant glory from the arena, the spectators receive him, and do not suffer him to tread the earth, bringing him home on their shoulders and according him countless praises. So also every city in turn received this Saint from Rome, and bearing him upon their shoulders as far as this city, escorted the crowned one with praises, hymning the champion.... At this time the holy Martyr bestows grace to the very same cities, establishing them in piety, and from that time to this day he enriches this city.*

Speaking of the miraculous power of holy relics, Saint Ephraim the Syrian relates the following concerning the holy Martyrs: *Even after death they act as if alive, healing the sick, expelling demons, and by the power of the Lord rejecting every evil influence of the demons. This is because the miraculous grace of the Holy Spirit is always present in the holy relics.*

During the finding of the relics of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, St. Ambrose, in speaking to his listeners, relates this with pious enthusiasm: *You know—indeed, you have yourselves seen—that many are cleansed from evil spirits, that very many also, having touched with their hands the robe of the Saints, are freed from those ailments which oppressed them. You see that the miracles of old times are renewed, when through the coming of the Lord Jesus grace was more abundantly shed forth upon the earth, and that many bodies are healed as it were by the shadow of the holy bodies. How many napkins are passed about! How many garments, laid upon the holy relics and endowed with the power of healing, are claimed! All are glad to touch even the outside thread, and whosoever touches it will be made whole.*

Speaking of the miracles produced by holy relics, the blessed Augustine says: *To what do these miracles witness, but to this faith which preaches Christ risen in the flesh and ascended with the same flesh into heaven? For the martyrs themselves were martyrs, that is to say, were witnesses of this faith.... For this faith they gave their lives, and can now ask these benefits from the Lord in whose name they were slain. For this faith their extraordinary constancy*

was exercised, so that in these miracles great power was manifested as the result. For if the resurrection of the flesh to eternal life had not taken place in Christ, and were not to be accomplished in His people, as predicted by Christ..., why do the martyrs who were slain for this faith which proclaims the resurrection possess such power? These miracles attest this faith which preaches the resurrection of the flesh unto eternal life.

Saint Damascene, summarizing the life-giving teaching of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition concerning the pious veneration of holy relics, preaches in a Cherubic manner from the altar of his God-bearing and Christ-like soul: *The Saints have become according to grace that which the Lord Christ is according to nature. That is, they have become gods according to grace: pure and living habitations of God. For God says: I will dwell in them, walk in them, and I will be their God. (2 Cor 6:16; Lev 16:12). The Holy Scriptures likewise say: The souls of the righteous are in God's hand, and death cannot lay hold of them. (Wis 3:1). For death is rather the sleep of Saints than their death. Further: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints. (Pss 119:6). What, then, is more precious than to be in the hand of God? For God is life and light, and those who are in God's hand are in life and light. Further, that God dwells even in their bodies in a spiritual manner the all-divine Apostle attests: Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you? (1 Cor 3:16). And, the Lord is Spirit. (2 Cor 3:17). Thus, the evangelical truth: If anyone destroy the temple of God, him will God destroy—for the temple of God is holy, and ye are that temple. (1 Cor 3:17). Surely, then, we must ascribe honor to the living temples of God, the living dwelling-places of God. These, while they lived, stood with boldness before God. The Lord Christ granted us the relics of the Saints to be fountains of salvation unto us, pouring forth manifold blessings and abounding in sweetly fragrant oil. Let no one disbelieve this! For if water burst in the desert from the steep and solid rock according to God's will (Exod 17:6), and from the jawbone of an ass to quench Samson's thirst (Judg 15:14-19), is it then unbelievable that fragrant oil should spring forth from relics of the holy Martyrs? By no means, at least to those who know the omnipotence of God and the honor which He accords to His Saints. According to the Old Testament law, everyone who touched a dead body was considered impure. (Num 19:11). However, the Saints are not dead. For from the time when He Who is Himself Life and the Author of life was counted among the dead, we do not call those dead who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection and with faith in Him. For how could a dead body work miracles? And how, through the holy relics, are demons driven off, diseases dispelled, the sick made well, the blind restored to sight, lepers cleansed, temptations and tribulations overcome; and how does every good gift come down from the Father of lights (Jas 1:17) to those who pray with sure faith?*

The universal faith of the Church concerning the pious veneration of holy relics was confirmed by the God-bearing Fathers

of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod in its decrees: *Our Lord Jesus Christ granted to us the relics of Saints as a salvation-bearing source which pours forth varied benefits on the infirm. Consequently, those who presume to abandon the relics of the Martyrs: if they be hierarchs, let them be deposed; if however monastics or laymen, let them merely be excommunicated.*

That a pious veneration of the holy relics is a constituent part of the salvation rendered by the God-Man is also evidenced by the following facts: from the depths of sacred antiquity, churches were built on the graves and relics of Saints, and the holy Liturgy is performed only on *antimensia*, in which are placed parts of the holy relics. Moreover, the divine service books, especially the *Menaion*, are replete with prayers and hymns which refer to the pious veneration of holy relics.

All in all, the mystery of holy relics is at the heart of the universal mystery of the New Testament: the incarnation of God. The full mystery of the human body is explained by the incarnation, the embodiment of God in the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, then, the Gospel message concerning the body: *The body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Cor 6:13)*. And through a human body also the entire creation, all of matter, received its divine significance, the universal meaning of the God-Man. By man, who is sanctified in the Church by the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, the creation and even matter are sanctified, united to Christ. There accrues to this also a joy—the myrrh-streaming property of many relics. This wonder of myrrh has been given to the holy relics in order to indicate that Christians are truly *a sweet-savour of Christ unto God* (2 Cor 2:15), sweet-smelling to God and to heaven. The truth of the Gospel is that the sin of man is a foul odor before God and every sin pleases the devil. Through the holy mysteries and holy virtues, Christians become *a sweet-savour of Christ unto God*. For this reason, then, the holy relics of the Saints pour forth myrrh.



He who has not yet attained divine knowledge energized by love is proud of his spiritual progress. But he who has been granted such knowledge repeats with deep conviction the words uttered by the patriarch Abraham when he was granted the manifestation of God: 'I am dust and ashes' (Gen. 18:27).

St. Maximos the Confessor

By keeping the Commandments the soul is purified and the mind too is enlightened, and starts to function as nature intended it to. *The command of the Lord gives light and enlightens the eyes. (Pss 19:8)*.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία Ψυχικῶς καὶ Λειτουργικῶς Διηρημένη!

Ἀπόρροια τῆς διαιρέσεως εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν ὁ πόλεμος τῶν δύο ὁμοδόξων καὶ ὁμοφύλων λαῶν, τῶν Ρώσων καὶ τῶν Οὐκρανῶν

Τοῦ κ. Γεωργίου Τραμπούλη, Θεολόγου.

Ο δημοσιογράφος καὶ συγγραφέας Γιώργος Παπαθανασόπουλος λίγους μῆνες μετὰ τὴν σύγκληση τῆς συνόδου τῆς Κρήτης ἐξέδωσε βιβλίο, στὸ ὁποῖο εἶχε κάνει μία πρώτη ἀποτίμηση τῆς συνόδου. Στὸν ἐπίλογο τοῦ βιβλίου του μεταξὺ τῶν ἄλλων σημειώνει ὅτι «ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι μία πολωμένη Ἐκκλησία, ἀσφαλῶς τὴν κύρια εὐθύνη ἔχει τὸ Φανάρι. Ὅμως καὶ οἱ ἄλλες τοπικὲς Ἐκκλησίες ἔχουν τὴν εὐθύνη τους... Γιὰ τὴν Σύνοδο τῆς Κρήτης δὲν χρειάζονται οὔτε θριαμβολογίες, οὔτε κατάρεις. Ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέτρεψε νὰ προβληθεῖ σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον τὸ σύμπτωμα, ὄχι λειτουργικῶς ἀλλὰ ψυχικῶς, τῆς διαιρεμένης Ὁρθοδοξίας. Δίδει ἔτσι **τὴν εὐκαιρία στοὺς Πατριάρχες καὶ στοὺς Προκαθημένους τῶν τοπικῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἐκκλησιῶν νὰ ταπεινωθοῦν καὶ νὰ σκεφθοῦν πνευματικότερα τίς εὐθύνες τους ἔναντι τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας Του**».

Ἐξὶ χρόνια ἀργότερα, ἐπειδὴ τὸ Φανάρι καὶ εἰδικότερα ὁ Προκαθήμενός του, ὁ Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος, δὲν ταπεινώθηκε καὶ δὲν ἀναλογίσθηκε πνευματικότερα τίς εὐθύνες του ἔναντι τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας Του, ἡ πόλωση ἔχει μετατραπῆ σὲ σχίσμα καὶ μάλιστα πολλοὶ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι εἶναι χειρότερο ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνο τοῦ 1054. Τὴν ἴδια στιγμή ἀπόρροια τῆς διαιρέσεως στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἀποτελεῖ καὶ ὁ πόλεμος τῶν δύο ὁμοδόξων καὶ ὁμοφύλων λαῶν, τῶν Ρώσων καὶ τῶν Οὐκρανῶν. Μία ἐξέλιξη τῆς ὁποίας **τὴν ἀπόλυτη εὐθύνη, ἀπὸ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς πλευρᾶς, τὴν ἐπωμίζεται τὸ Φανάρι καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος**.

Ἡ Ζωὴ καὶ ὁ Χῶρος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας

Χαρακτηρίζεται Πρωτίστως διὰ τὴν Ἐνότητα

Δήλωνε ὁ Πατριάρχης σὲ συνέντευξή του στὴν Μαρία Ἀντωνιάδου στὸ ΒΗΜΑ τὸν Ἰανουάριο 2021 ὅτι «Ἄς μιλήσουμε ξεκάθαρα, λοιπόν. Στὴν πραγματικότητα, τὸ πρόβλημα δὲν εἶναι τὸ Οὐκρανικὸ αὐτοκέφαλο, οὔτε οἱ δῆθεν ἀνυπόστατες ἢ ἄκυρες χειροτονίες τῆς Οὐκρανικῆς Ἱεραρχίας, ποὺ κάποιον σκοπὸν ἐπικαλοῦνται. Ὁ στόχος εἶναι νὰ ἀφαιρεθοῦν αὐτὲς οἱ μοναδικὲς εὐθύνες τοῦ Θρόνου τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, καὶ νὰ περιέλθουν σὲ ἄλλα χέρια. Ὡς ἐκ τῆς θέσεώς μου, λοιπόν, καταλαβαίνετε, δὲν μπορῶ ἀπὸ τὴν μία νὰ ἀπεμπολήσω τίς εὐθύνες ποὺ μοῦ κληροδότησαν,

μέσω τῆς πράξεως τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οἱ προκατόχοί μου καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη νὰ ἐπιτρέψω, καθότι καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι εὐθύνη μου, τὴν πνευματικὴ αὐτὴ διολίσθηση ἐκείνων ποὺ ἐρωτοτροποῦν μετὰ τὴν ὁμοσπονδιοποίηση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, κατὰ τὰ προτεσταντικὰ πρότυπα. Ποιός, λοιπόν, συμπεριφέρεται ὡς «Πάπας τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας»; Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ μένει πιστὸς στὴν παράδοσή της ἢ ἐκεῖνος ποὺ διεκδικεῖ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του θέση ποὺ οὐδέποτε εἶχε καὶ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἀποκτήσει;».

Εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητο γεγονός ὅτι **οἱ ἐνέργειες τοῦ Φαναρίου, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀπορρέουν ἀπὸ ἀνυπόστατα καὶ ἀνύπαρκα προνόμια, ἔχουν ἐνσπείρει τὸν διχασμὸ, μετὰ ἐπακόλουθο τὴν διάσπαση τῆς ἐνότητας στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Προνόμια ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα δῆθεν ἀπορρέουν ἰδιαίτερα δικαιώματα στὸν Πατριάρχη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐφ' ὅλης τῆς Ὁρθοδόξης Ἐκκλησίας. Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἔλεγε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὁ κορυφαῖος ἐκ τῶν ἀποστόλων, πρὸς ὁποιοδήποτε ἄλλον ἀπόστολο ὅτι «διεκδικεῖ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του θέση ποὺ οὐδέποτε εἶχε καὶ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἀποκτήσει;» Σὲ ἀντίθεση μετὰ τοὺς λόγους καὶ τίς πράξεις τοῦ Πατριάρχου Βαρθολομαίου ἡ ζωὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ χῶρος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας χαρακτηρίζεται πρωτίστως γιὰ τὴν ἐνότητα καὶ τὴν καθολικότητά της. Μία ἐνότητα, ὅπου τὸ σῶμα «*αὔξει τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ*» στὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ Πνεύματος, στὴν ἐνότητα τῆς ἀγάπης μεταξὺ τῶν μελῶν.**

«Μέσω αὐτῆς τῆς μυστηριακῆς καὶ ἀγίας ἀνάπτυξης», σημειώνει ὁ θεῖος Ἰουστίνος, ἐρμηνεύοντας τὸν παύλειο αὐτὸ στίχο ἀπὸ τὴν πρὸς Κολασσαεῖς ἐπιστολὴ «ὄλα τὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁδηγοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστό» καὶ ὄχι ἀπὸ κάποιον Πατριάρχη ἢ Προκαθήμενο. Γιὰ αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἀπολύτως παρὼν στὴν Ἐκκλησία του, κάθε χάρισμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, συμπεριλαμβανομένου καὶ τοῦ διοικητικοῦ, ἀποτελεῖ ἀπευθείας μετοχὴ στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ δὲν ἀπορρέει ἀπὸ κάποιον ἀναγκαστικὸ μεσίτη, Προκαθήμενο, ἀφοῦ κάθε χάρισμα εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός.

Εἶναι προφανές ὅτι ἡ ἐνότητα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰδικότερα στὴν διοίκησή της, δὲν διασφαλίζεται ἀπὸ κάποιον Πρῶτο, ἀλλὰ οὔτε βέβαια καὶ ἀπὸ ἕνα πλῆθος ἐπισκόπων, οἱ ὁποῖοι στόχο ἔχουν νὰ ὑπηρετήσουν τίς ὁποῖες προσταγὰς τοῦ Πρώτου, γιὰ νὰ φανοῦν ἀρεστοὶ σὲ αὐτόν. Ἡ ἐνότητα τῆς θεσμικῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν διασφαλίζεται οὔτε ἀπὸ τίς προσταγὰς τοῦ Πρώτου οὔτε βέβαια καὶ ἀπὸ ἀποφάσεις ποὺ παίρνονται μετὰ ἀπὸ δημοκρατικὲς διαδικασίες μεταξὺ τῶν ἐπισκόπων. Ἀλλὰ διασφαλίζεται μόνον ἐν Ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι.

Τὸ Ἰδίωμα τῆς Ἐνότητος Εἶναι Πρωτίστως Ἐσωτερικόν

Τὸ ἕνα φρόνημα τῆς διοικούσης Ἐκκλησίας, πὸν διασφαλίζεται μόνον ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργεῖ σὲ κάθε μέλος μίας Ὁρθόδοξης Ἱεραρχίας, εἶναι αὐτὸ πὸν διασφαλίζει καὶ τὴν συνεχή σχέση τοῦ κάθε ἐπισκόπου «σὺν πᾶσι τοῖς ἁγίοις» καὶ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ τὴν σχέση τοὺς μὲ τὸν θαυμαστὸ καὶ θαυματουργὸ Κύριό μας, τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, ὅπως σημειώνει καὶ ὁ θεῖος Ἰουστίνος. Καὶ τονίζει, λέγοντας ὅτι «Ὅταν εἶσαι μαζί Του, τότε εἶσαι ὀλόκληρος ἄπειρος καὶ ἅγιος, ὀλόκληρος αἰώνιος, ὀλόκληρος ἀγάπη καὶ ἀλήθεια, ὀλόκληρος δικαιοσύνη καὶ ὀλόκληρος προσευχή».

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ εἶσαι «ὀλόκληρος ἀγάπη καὶ ἀλήθεια, ὀλόκληρος δικαιοσύνη» καὶ νὰ ἀπευθύνεσαι πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸ σου καὶ νὰ τοῦ λέγεις ὅτι «διεκδικεῖ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του θέση πὸν οὐδέποτε εἶχε καὶ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἀποκτήσει»; Καὶ ἐὰν ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἔχη τὴν θέση μέχρι σήμερα τοῦ συντονιστῆ μέσα στὴν ὅλη Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, αὐτὴν τὴν θέση τῆς τὴν παραχώρησε ὁ Κύριος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἀνὰ πᾶσα στιγμή, ἐὰν θέλη, τὴν αἶρει καὶ τὴν παραδίδει γιὰ λόγους πὸν αὐτὸς μόνον γνωρίζει, ὅπου αὐτὸς θέλει καὶ ὅταν θέλη.

Ὅταν ὁ ἐπίσκοπος «αὔξει τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ», αὐξάνει τὸ πᾶν σὲ αὐτὸν τὴν αὔξησιν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ **πρωτίστως** αὐξάνει ὁ νοῦς του, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀδιάκοπα **διὰ τῆς χάριτος** τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος συνενώνεται μὲ τὸν νοῦν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὥστε ἀδίστακτα μπορεῖ νὰ εἰπωθῆ, τονίζει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος, ὅτι **οἱ δίκαιοι «νοῦν Χριστοῦ» ἔχουν.**

Σὲ ἀντίθεση, τὸ παπικὸ πρωτεῖο εἶτε τοῦ πάπα τῆς Ρώμης, εἶτε τοῦ πάπα τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, ὁ ὁποῖος στίς ἡμέρες μας ἐξήλωσε τὴν δόξα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ θέλει νὰ καταστήσῃ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του στατικῶς ἀντιπρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν Ἐκκλησία του καὶ ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ξένος τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, στηρίζεται σὲ κοσμικοῦ χαρακτήρα νοοτροπία ἐξουσίας, ἡ ὁποία ἀκυρώνει τὴν ἰσοτιμία τῶν ἐπισκόπων καὶ τὴν ἰδιοποιεῖται ἐφ' ὅλης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, παραμερίζοντας οὐσιαστικῶς τὸν

Θεάνθρωπο Χριστό. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀκριβῶς δὲν ἔχει τὸν «νοῦν Χριστοῦ» ἀδυνατεῖ νὰ κατανοήσῃ ὅτι τὸ νὰ ὑπηρετῆ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος τὴν ἐνότητα στὴν ποιμαντικὴ διακονία, εἶναι διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ τόπος τῆς ἐνότητος.

Τὸ ἰδίωμα τῆς ἐνότητος καὶ καθολικότητος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ ὁποῖο μαζί μὲ τὰ ἄλλα ἰδιώματά της πηγάζουν ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὸ σκοπὸ της καὶ καθορίζουν ἀκριβῶς τὸν χαρακτήρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ἐνότητα ὄχι ἐξωτερικὴ, ἀλλὰ πρωτίστως ἐσωτερικὴ. Ἡ ἐνότητα αὐτὴ ὄχι μόνον προϋποθέτει ὅτι εἶναι μία, ἀλλὰ εἶναι καὶ μοναδική.

Ἄφου πρῶτα ἀπὸ ὅλα βασικὸς ἐσωτερικὸς σκοπὸς

της, ὅπως τονίζουν καὶ οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, εἶναι ἡ ἐπανάσταση τῆς διαιρεμένης καὶ χωρισμένης ἀνθρωπότητος, μέσα ἀπὸ ἕνα νέο τρόπο ὑπάρξεως, μέσα ἀπὸ μία νέα καθολικὴ ζωὴ. Μία ζωὴ, ἡ ὁποία ὀρίζεται ἀπὸ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου «**ἵνα πάντες ἐν ὧσι, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καγὼ ἐν σοί, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ὧσιν, ἵνα ὧσιν ἐν καθὼς ἡμεῖς ἐν ἐσμέν**» καὶ μάλιστα τὸ μέτρο τῆς καθολικῆς αὐτῆς ἐνώσεως εἶναι ὅτι «**τοῦ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν ἡ καρδιά καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μία**».

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία Ὄφείλει νὰ Παραμένῃ Ἐλευθέρᾳ ἀπὸ Σχήματα τοῦ Κόσμου Τούτου

Αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον κατεργάζεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία στὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Τὸ ἐρώτημα πὸν τίθεται εἶναι, τὰ ἔργα καὶ οἱ λόγοι τοῦ Πατριάρχου Βαρθολομαίου ἔχουν καμία σχέση μὲ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου;

Ὁ Προκαθήμενος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὄχι μόνον δὲν ἐργάζεται πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση «**τοῦ ἦν ἡ καρδιά καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μία**», ἀλλὰ ἀκριβῶς τὸ ἀντίστροφο, δηλαδὴ τῆς διαίρεσης, τοῦ σχίσματος, τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τοῦ ἀνταγωνισμοῦ, κάτι τὸ ὁποῖο ἔγινε πολὺ ἐμφανὲς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς συνόδου τῆς Κρήτης καὶ μετέπειτα.

Δυστυχῶς, οἱ σύγχρονοι Προκαθήμενοι τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, ἐπηρεασμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν κοσμικὴ καὶ τὴν παπικὴ νοοτροπία, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἔχουν «**νοῦν Χριστοῦ**», ἀδυνατοῦν νὰ ἀντιληφθοῦν ὅτι ἡ



καθολικότητα και η ένότητα της Ἐκκλησίας δὲν εἶναι οὔτε ποσοτική οὔτε γεωγραφική οὔτε βέβαια και φυλετική ἔννοια. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καθὼς «οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου», ἔχει τὴν προέλευση, τὴν φύση και τὴν ἀποστολή της θεία και οὐράνια.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὀφείλει νὰ παραμένη ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου ἐλεύθερη και ἀνεξάρτητη ἀπὸ τὰ σχήματα και τίς ἀξίες τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ἔχοντας ὡς σκοπὸ νὰ πραγματοποιήση σταδιακὰ τὴν βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Ὁ Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος ὄχι μόνον μὲ τοὺς λόγους και τίς πράξεις του δὲν πραγματοποιοῖ τὴν βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἀλλὰ ἔχει πυροδοτήσει ἓνα ἀνελέητο πόλεμο, ὁ ὁποῖος τρέφει μίση και θάνατο.

Γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτευχθῆ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀφ' ἑνὸς εἶναι ἀναγκαία ἡ ἀμοιβαία ἀγάπη μεταξὺ τῶν μελῶν, ἀφ' ἑτέρου ἡ τήρηση τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, πὸ μᾶς ἔχουν κληροδοτήσει οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὁ Προκαθήμενος τοῦ Φαναρίου, δυστυχῶς, ἔχει ἀποτύχει τόσο στὸ πρῶτο ὅσο και στὸ δεῦτερο. Καὶ τὸν μὲν ἀδελφὸ του ἀδυνατεῖ νὰ ἀγαπήσῃ, τοὺς δε Ἱεροὺς Κανόνες καταπατεῖ και ἐξυβρίζει μὲ τοὺς λόγους και τίς πράξεις του.

Μὲ βαθεῖα θλίψη διαπιστώνουμε συνεχῶς ὅτι οἱ Ἱεροὶ Κανόνες δὲν ἀντιμετωπίζονται ἀπὸ τὸν Πατριάρχη μὲ τὸν ἐνδεδειγμένο σεβασμὸ. Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἐπεμβαίνῃ σὲ ξένες Ἐκκλησίες, νὰ νομιμοποιῆ ἀχειροτόνητους και σχισματικούς, νὰ συμπροσεύχεται μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς Οὐνίτες; Γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοση οἱ Ἱεροὶ Κανόνες, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὑπάρχουν και ἔχουν συνταχθῆ κατ' ἔμπνευση τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἡ συμμόρφωση στὶς προσταγές τους εἶναι ἀπόλυτα ὑποχρεωτική ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς Πιστοῦς, πόσο μᾶλλον ἀπὸ τοὺς Προκαθημένους.

Ὁ πρῶν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀμερικής Σπυρίδων σὲ συνέντευξη πὸν παραχώρησε στὸν Ἐθνικὸ Κήρυκα, στὴν ἐρώτηση τοῦ δημοσιογράφου, «Μετὰ τὸν Βαρθολομαῖο τί, ποῖος, τί θὰ γίνῃ;», ὁ πρῶν Ἱεράρχης τοῦ φαναριώτικου κλίματος, ὁ ὁποῖος γνωρίζει ἐκ τῶν ἔσω τὸ Φανάρι, ἀπερίφραστα ἀπάντησε ὅτι «Εἶμαι βέβαιος πὸς τὸ ἔχουν σκεφθῆ και μελετήσῃ σὲ βάθος τὸ θέμα ὅσοι φέρουν τὴν ἄμεση εὐθύνη. Αὐτοὶ θὰ φροντίσουν νὰ ἐκλεγῆ ὁ κατ' ἀνθρώπον καταλληλότερος...».

Ἡ μὲ πολλὰ ὑπονοούμενα και πολλοὺς ἀποδέκτες ἀπάντηση τοῦ πρῶν Ἀρχιεπισκόπου μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ προβλήματος πὸν ὀνομάζεται Φανάρι ἀλλὰ και τὸ πόσο τρομερὰ δύσκολη εἶναι ἡ ἐκλογή ἑνὸς Προκαθημένου, στὸ πολύπαθο αὐτὸ Πατριαρχεῖο, μὲ ὀρθόδοξο φρόνημα. Ἀφοῦ ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πολιτικὴ του

εἶναι ἄμεσα ἀλληλένδετη και ἀλληλεξαρτημένη μὲ ἄλλες θρησκευτικὲς και κοσμικὲς ἐξουσίες, ὅπου συμφύρονται τεράστια συμφέροντα.

Πρέπει νὰ κατανοήσουμε ὅτι ἡ ἀποστασία πὸν ζοῦμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας εἶναι πρωτίστως σὲ θεολογικὸ ἐπίπεδο και τὴν εὐθύνη ναὶ μὲν τὴν ἐπωμιζόμασθε ὅλοι μας, ἀφοῦ ὅλοι μας εἴμασθε ἀθεολόγητοι ἐκτὸς ἐξαιρέσεων, πρωτίστως ὅμως οἱ Προκαθήμενοι και εἰδικότερα ὁ Πατριάρχης Βαρθολομαῖος. Ὁ ὁποῖος ἀντιλαμβάνεται τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ ποιμαίνειν και διδάσκειν στὰ πρότυπα τῆς κοσμικῆς ἐξουσίας ἢ τῆς διοικήσεως ἐπιχειρήσεων. Ἀδυνατεῖ νὰ κατανοήσῃ ἢ δὲν θέλει νὰ καταλάβῃ ὅτι ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς χαρισματικῆς τάξεως τῶν ποιμένων δὲν εἶναι ἡ γοητεία και ἡ τυραννία, ἀλλὰ ἡ ὠφέλεια και ἡ σωτηρία τόσο τῶν ἰδίων ὅσο και τοῦ ὑπόλοιπου ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος.

Ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω!



Στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πολλὲς φορὲς σκανδαλώδεις ἐπιλογὲς καλύπτονται ἢ ὠραιοποιοῦνται γιὰ νὰ μὴ μειώνεται ἡ εἰκόνα τῶν ὑπευθύνων, δηλαδὴ τοῦ ἐκάστοτε Ἀρχιεπισκόπου ἢ κάποιων γνωστῶν Μητροπολιτῶν. Καλλιεργεῖται ἡ ψευδὴς αἴσθησις ὅτι ἐνεργοῦν μὲ φόβο Θεοῦ και ἄρα δὲν κάνουν λάθος. Ἐπικαλοῦνται κάποτε και οἱ ἴδιοι τὴν ἐμπειρία τους στὴ διαχείριση ἐκκλησιαστικῶν θεμάτων και αὐτοπροβάλλονται ὡς ἱκανοὶ στὴ διοίκηση, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς διαβεβαιώσουν ὅτι... εἶναι εὐλαβεῖς και χαρισματοῦχοι! ...

Τὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας προβλήματα οὐσιαστικὰ παραμένουν ἅλτα, παρὰ τίς πανηγυρικές ἐκλογὲς νέων Μητροπολιτῶν και νέων βοηθῶν Ἐπισκόπων. Ὅλοι οἱ Ἀρχιερεῖς, παλιοὶ και νέοι, (ἐκτὸς ἐλαχίστων ἐξαιρέσεων) εἶναι «παραδοσιακοί», δηλαδὴ ἀπολαμβάνουν τὴν ἀρχιερωσύνη σὰν νὰ εἶναι κοσμικὸς τρόπος ζωῆς και δράσης. Εὐφραίνονται συλλειτουργοῦντες και ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὸ τί συμβαίνει γύρω τους. «Ποιμαίνουν», ἀλλὰ τὸ ποιμνίό τους βρῖσκεται πολὺ μακριά, σὲ ἀπρόσιτες γι' αὐτοὺς πλαγιές, ἀφοῦ τὸ δεσποτικὸ πόδι δὲν ἀντέχει στὶς ὀδοιπορίες και ἡ ποιμαντορικὴ ράβδος εἶναι, γιὰ νὰ ἀπειλεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους και ὄχι νὰ τοὺς στηρίζει!

Ὅμως δὲν ἀπελπίζομαστε, γιατί τὸ ποιμαντικὸ ἔργο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὸ ἔχουν ἀναλάβει πρὸ πολλοῦ οἱ ταπεινοὶ ἱερεῖς και οἱ ἐνάρετοι γέροντες, τοὺς ὁποῖους, ἀλίμονο, δὲν ἀνέχονται κοντὰ τους οἱ περισσότεροι Μητροπολίτες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας!

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση

Οἱ Κεκοιμημένοι Ἐνα Πράγμα θὰ ἤθελαν ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, νὰ Ζήσουν Πέντε Λεπτά, γιὰ νὰ Μετανοήσουν!

Γέροντος Παϊσίου Ἀγιορείτου, «Ἡ μετὰ θάνατον ζωὴ — Λόγοι Δ' — Οἰκογενειακὴ ζωὴ».

- Γέροντα, οἱ ὑπόδικοι νεκροὶ μποροῦν νὰ προσεύχονται;

- Ἔρχονται σὲ συναίσθηση καὶ ζητοῦν βοήθεια, ἀλλὰ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ βοηθήσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους. Ὅσοι βρίσκονται στὸν Ἄδη μόνον ἓνα πράγμα θὰ ἤθελαν ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό: νὰ ζήσουν πέντε λεπτά, γιὰ νὰ μετανοήσουν. Ἐμεῖς ποὺ ζοῦμε, ἔχουμε περιθώρια μετανοίας, ἐνῶ οἱ καημένοι οἱ κεκοιμημένοι δὲν μποροῦν πιά μόνον τους νὰ καλυτερεύσουν τὴν θέση τους, ἀλλὰ περμιμένον ἀπὸ μᾶς βοήθεια. Γι' αὐτὸ ἔχουμε χρέος νὰ τοὺς βοηθοῦμε μὲ τὴν προσευχή μας.

Μοῦ λέει ὁ λογισμὸς ὅτι μόνον τὸ δέκα τοῖς ἑκατὸ ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπόδικους νεκροὺς βρίσκονται σὲ δαιμονικὴ κατάσταση καί, ἐκεῖ ποὺ εἶναι, βρίζουν τὸν Θεό, ὅπως οἱ δαίμονες. Δὲν ζητοῦν βοήθεια, ἀλλὰ καὶ δὲν δέχονται βοήθεια. Γιατί, τί νὰ τοὺς κάνη ὁ Θεός; Σὰν ἓνα παιδί ποὺ ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὸν πατέρα του, σπαταλάει ὅλη τὴν περιουσία του καὶ ἀπὸ πάνω βρίζει τὸν πατέρα του. Ε, τί νὰ τὸ κάνη αὐτὸ ὁ πατέρας του;

Οἱ ἄλλοι ὅμως ὑπόδικοι, ποὺ ἔχουν λίγο φιλότιμο, αἰσθάνονται τὴν ἐνοχὴ τους, μετανοοῦν καὶ ὑποφέρουν γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους. Ζητοῦν νὰ βοηθηθοῦν καὶ βοηθοῦνται θετικὰ μὲ τὶς προσευχὲς τῶν πιστῶν. Τοὺς δίνει δηλαδὴ ὁ Θεὸς μία εὐκαιρία, τώρα ποὺ εἶναι ὑπόδικοι, νὰ βοηθηθοῦν μέχρι νὰ γίνῃ ἡ Δευτέρα Παρουσία.

Καὶ ὅπως σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ, ἂν κάποιος εἶναι φίλος μὲ τὸν βασιλιά, μπορεῖ νὰ μεσολαβήσῃ καὶ νὰ βοηθήσῃ ἓναν ὑπόδικο, ἔτσι καὶ ἂν εἶναι κανεὶς «φίλος» μὲ τὸν Θεό, μπορεῖ νὰ μεσολαβήσῃ στὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὴν προσευχή του καὶ νὰ μεταφέρει τοὺς ὑπόδικους νεκροὺς ἀπὸ τὴν μία «φυλακὴ» σὲ ἄλλη καλύτερη, ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα «κρατητήριο» σὲ ἓνα ἄλλο καλύτερο. Ἡ ἀκόμη μπορεῖ νὰ τοὺς μεταφέρει καὶ σὲ «δωμάτιο» ἢ σὲ «διαμέρισμα».

Ὅπως ἀνακουφίζουμε τοὺς φυλακισμένους μὲ ἀναψυκτικὰ κ.λπ. ποὺ τοὺς πηγαίνουμε, ἔτσι καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἀνακουφίζουμε μὲ τὶς προσευχὲς καὶ τὶς ἐλεημοσύνες ποὺ κάνουμε γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τους. Οἱ

προσευχὲς τῶν ζώντων γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους καὶ τὰ μνημόσυνα εἶναι ἡ τελευταία εὐκαιρία ποὺ δίνει ὁ Θεὸς στοὺς κεκοιμημένους νὰ βοηθηθοῦν, μέχρι νὰ γίνῃ ἡ τελικὴ Κρίση. Μετὰ τὴν δίκη δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχῃ πλέον δυνατότητα νὰ βοηθηθοῦν.

Ὁ Θεὸς θέλει νὰ βοηθήσῃ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους, γιατί πονάει γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τους, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸ κάνει, γιατί ἔχει ἀρχοντιά. Δὲν θέλει νὰ δώσῃ δικαίωμα στὸν διάβολο νὰ πῇ: «Πῶς τὸν σώζεις αὐτόν, ἐνῶ δὲν κοπίασε;».

Ὅταν ὅμως ἐμεῖς προσευχώμαστε γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους, Τοῦ δίνουμε τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ ἐπεμβαίῃ. **Περισσότερο μάλιστα συγκινεῖται ὁ Θεός, ὅταν κάνουμε προσευχὴ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους παρὰ γιὰ τοὺς ζῶντες.** Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς ἔχει τὰ κόλλυβα, τὰ μνημόσυνα.

Τὰ μνημόσυνα εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος δικηγόρος γιὰ τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν κεκοιμημένων. Ἔχουν τὴν δυνατότητα καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν κόλαση νὰ βγάλουν τὴν ψυχὴ.

Κι ἐσεῖς σὲ κάθε Θεῖα Λειτουργία νὰ διαβάσετε κόλλυβα γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους. Ἔχει νόημα τὸ σιτάρι. «Σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ, ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ», λέει ἡ Γραφή. (1 Κορ. 15:2).

Στὸν κόσμο μερικοὶ βαριοῦνται νὰ βράσουν λίγο σιτάρι καὶ πηγαίνουν στὴν ἐκκλησία σταφίδες, κουραμπιέδες, κουλουράκια, γιὰ νὰ τὰ διαβάσουν οἱ ἱερεῖς. Καὶ βλέπεις, ἐκεῖ στὸ

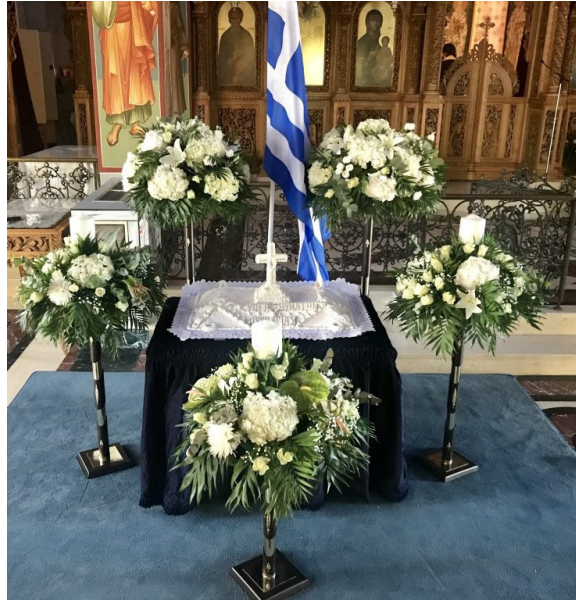
Ἅγιον Ὅρος κάτι γεροντάκια τὰ καημένα σὲ κάθε Θεῖα Λειτουργία κάνουν κόλλυβα καὶ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους καὶ γιὰ τὸν Ἅγιο ποὺ γιορτάζει, γιὰ νὰ ἔχουν τὴν εὐλογία του.

- **Γέροντα, αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἔχουν πεθάνει πρόσφατα ἔχουν μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ προσευχὴ;**

- Ἐμ, ὅταν μπαίνει κάποιος στὴν φυλακὴ, στὴν ἀρχὴ δὲν δυσκολεύεται πιὸ πολύ;

Νὰ κάνουμε προσευχὴ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους ποὺ δὲν εὐαρέστησαν στὸν Θεό, γιὰ νὰ κάνῃ κάτι καὶ γι' αὐτοὺς ὁ Θεός.

Ἰδίως, ὅταν ξέρουμε ὅτι κάποιος ἦταν σκληρὸς—θέλω νὰ πῶ, ὅτι φαινόταν σκληρὸς, γιατί μπορεῖ νὰ νομίζουμε ὅτι ἦταν σκληρὸς, ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα νὰ μὴν ἦταν—καὶ εἶχε καὶ ἁμαρτωλὴ ζωὴ, τότε νὰ κάνουμε πολλὴ προσευχὴ, Θεῖες Λειτουργίες, Σαρανταλείτουργα γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ του καὶ νὰ δίνουμε ἐλεημοσύνη σὲ



φτωχούς για την σωτηρία της ψυχής του, για να εύχρηστούν οι φτωχοί «ν' αγιάσουν τα κόκκαλά του», ώστε να καμφθῆ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ νὰ τὸν ἐλεήσῃ.

Ἔτσι, ὅ,τι δὲν ἔκανε ἐκεῖνος, τὸ κάνουμε ἐμεῖς γι' αὐτόν. Ἐνῶ ἕνας ἄνθρωπος ποὺ εἶχε καλωσύνη, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν ἡ ζωὴ του δὲν ἦταν καλὴ, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε καλὴ διάθεση, μὲ λίγη προσευχὴ πολὺ βοηθιέται.

Ἔχω ὑπ' ὄψιν μου γεγονότα ποὺ μαρτυροῦν πόσο οἱ κεκοιμημένοι βοηθοῦνται μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ πνευματικῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Κάποιος ἦρθε στὸ Καλύβι καὶ μοῦ εἶπε μὲ κλάματα: «Γέροντα, δὲν ἔκανα προσευχὴ γιὰ κάποιον γνωστό μου κεκοιμημένο καὶ μοῦ παρουσιάσθηκε στὸν ὕπνο μου. «Εἴκοσι μέρες, μοῦ εἶπε, ἔχεις νὰ μὲ βοηθήσῃς μὲ ξέχασες καὶ ὑποφέρω».

Πράγματι, μοῦ λέει, ἐδῶ καὶ εἴκοσι μέρες εἶχα ξεχασθῆ μὲ διάφορες μέριμνες καὶ οὔτε γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό μου δὲν προσευχόμουν».

- Ὅταν, Γέροντα, πεθάνῃ κάποιος καὶ μᾶς ζητήσουν νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε γι' αὐτόν, εἶναι καλὸ νὰ κάνουμε κάθε μέρα ἓνα κομποσχοῖνι μέχρι τὰ σαράντα;

- Ἄμα κάνῃς κομποσχοῖνι γι' αὐτόν, βάλῃς καὶ ἄλλους κεκοιμημένους. Γιατί νὰ πάῃ μία ἀμαξοστοιχία στὸν προορισμό της μὲ ἓναν μόνον ἐπιβάτη, ἐνῶ χωράει καὶ ἄλλους;

Πόσοι κεκοιμημένοι ἔχουν ἀναγκὴ οἱ καημένοι καὶ ζητοῦν βοήθεια καὶ δὲν ἔχουν κανέναν νὰ προσευχηθῆ γι' αὐτούς! Μερικοὶ κάθε τόσο κάνουν μνημόσυνο μόνο γιὰ κάποιον δικό τους. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο δὲν βοηθιέται οὔτε ὁ δικός τους, γιατί ἡ προσευχὴ τους δὲν εἶναι τόσο εὐάρεστη στὸν Θεό. Ἀφοῦ τόσα μνημόσυνα ἔκαναν γι' αὐτόν, ἂς κάνουν συγχρόνως καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ξένους.

- Γέροντα, μὲ ἀπασχολεῖ μερικὲς φορὲς ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ πατέρα μου, γιατί δὲν εἶχε καμμιά σχέση μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

- Δὲν ξέρεις τὴν κρίση τοῦ Θεοῦ τὴν τελευταία στιγμή. Πότε σὲ ἀπασχολεῖ; Κάθε Σάββατο;

- Δὲν ἔχω παρακολουθήσει, ἀλλὰ γιατί τὸ Σάββατο;

- Γιατί αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέρα τὴν δικαιοῦνται οἱ κεκοιμημένοι.

- Γέροντα, οἱ νεκροὶ ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν ἀνθρώπους νὰ προσεύχονται γι' αὐτούς βοηθοῦνται ἀπὸ τίς προσευχὲς ἐκείνων ποὺ προσεύχονται γενικὰ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους;

- Καὶ βέβαια βοηθοῦνται. Ἐγώ, ὅταν προσεύχομαι γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς κεκοιμημένους, βλέπω στὸν ὕπνο μου τοὺς γονεῖς μου, γιατί ἀναπαύονται ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ ποὺ κάνω.

Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἔχω Θεία Λειτουργία, κάνω καὶ γενικὸ μνημόσυνο γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς κεκοιμημένους καὶ εὐχομαι γιὰ τοὺς βασιλεῖς, γιὰ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς κ.λπ.

καὶ στὸ τέλος λέω «καὶ ὑπὲρ ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα οὐκ ἐμνημονεύθησαν».

Ἄν καμμιά φορὰ δὲν κάνω εὐχὴ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους, παρουσιάζονται γνωστοὶ κεκοιμημένοι μπροστά μου. Ἐναν συγγενή μου, ποὺ εἶχε σκοτωθῆ στὸν πόλεμο, τὸν εἶδα ὁλόκληρο μπροστά μου μετὰ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία, τὴν ὥρα τοῦ μνημοσύνου, γιατί αὐτὸν δὲν τὸν εἶχα ὁλόκληρο γραμμένο μὲ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων, ἐπειδὴ μνημονευόταν στὴν Προσκομιδῆ μὲ τοὺς ἡρωικῶς πεσόντες.

Κι ἐσεῖς στὴν Ἁγία Πρόθεση νὰ μὴ δίνετε νὰ μνημονευθοῦν μόνον ὀνόματα ἀσθενῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὀνόματα κεκοιμημένων, γιατί μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη ἔχουν οἱ κεκοιμημένοι.

- Γέροντα, ποῖο εἶναι τὸ καλύτερο μνημόσυνο γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους;

Τὸ καλύτερο ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ μνημόσυνα ποὺ μπορούμε νὰ κάνουμε γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους εἶναι ἡ προσεκτικὴ ζωὴ μας, ὁ ἀγώνας ποὺ θὰ κάνουμε, γιὰ νὰ κόψουμε τὰ ἐλαττώματά μας καὶ νὰ λαμπικάρουμε τὴν ψυχὴ μας. Γιατί ἡ δικὴ μας ἐλευθερία ἀπὸ τὰ ὑλικά πράγματα καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ψυχικὰ πάθη, ἔκτος ἀπὸ τὴν δικὴ μας ἀνακούφιση, ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα καὶ τὴν ἀνακούφιση τῶν κεκοιμημένων προπάππων ὅλης της γενιᾶς μας.

Οἱ κεκοιμημένοι νιώθουν χαρὰ, ὅταν ἕνας ἀπόγονός τους εἶναι κοντὰ στὸν Θεό.

Ἄν ἐμεῖς δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ καλὴ πνευματικὴ κατάσταση, τότε ὑποφέρουν οἱ κεκοιμημένοι γονεῖς μας, ὁ πάππος μας, ὁ προπάππος μας, ὅλες οἱ γενεές. «Δὲς τί ἀπογόνους κάναμε!», λένε καὶ στενοχωριοῦνται.

Ἄν ὅμως εἴμαστε σὲ καλὴ πνευματικὴ κατάσταση, εὐφραίνονται, γιατί καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔγιναν συνεργοὶ νὰ γεννηθοῦμε καὶ ὁ Θεὸς κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο ὑποχρεώνεται νὰ τοὺς βοηθήσῃ. Αὐτὸ δηλαδὴ ποὺ θὰ δώσῃ χαρὰ στοὺς κεκοιμημένους εἶναι νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε νὰ εὐαρεστήσουμε στὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὴν ζωὴ μας, ὥστε νὰ τοὺς συναντήσουμε στὸν Παράδεισο καὶ νὰ ζήσουμε ὅλοι μαζί στὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ.

Ἐπομένως, ἀξίζει τὸν κόπο νὰ χτυπήσουμε τὸν παλαιό μας ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ καινός καὶ νὰ μὴ βλάβῃ πιὰ οὔτε τὸν ἑαυτό του οὔτε ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ νὰ βοηθήσῃ καὶ τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους, εἴτε ζῶντες εἶναι εἴτε κεκοιμημένοι.



Τὸ νὰ διδάσκεις τοὺς ἄλλους εἶναι τόσο εὐκόλο, ὅσο τὸ νὰ ρίχνεις πέτρες ἀπὸ ἓνα καμπαναριό. Τὸ νὰ ἐφαρμόζεις ὅμως ὅσα διδάσκεις, αὐτὸ εἶναι σὰν νὰ ἀνεβάξῃς τίς πέτρες ἐκεῖ πάνω. Τόσο διαφέρει ἡ διδασκαλία ἀπὸ τὴν ἐφαρμογὴ.

Ὅσιος Σεραφεῖμ τοῦ Σάροφ

Γιατί Πρέπει να Θυμόμαστε την Άλωση: 29^η Μαΐου, 1453

Γράφει ο Κωνσταντίνος Χολέβας, Πολιτικός Επιστήμων.



Πεντακόσια πενήντα χρόνια (τὸ ἄρθρο γράφτηκε τὸ 2003) πέρασαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποφράδα ἐκείνη ἡμέρα τῆς 29^{ης} Μαΐου 1453. Τότε ποὺ ἀκούστηκε ἡ κραυγὴ «*Εἶλω ἢ Πόλις*» καὶ ἡ Βασιλεύουσα, ἡ Πόλις τῶν Ἁγίων, τῶν Αὐτοκρατόρων καὶ τῶν θρύλων, πέρασε ὑπὸ τὴν κατοχὴ τοῦ Ὀθωμανοῦ δυνάστη. Ἔτσι ἄρχισε ἡ Τουρκοκρατία. Τὸ Γένος ἀπεβίωσε, ἀλλὰ ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολις καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία παραμένουν σὲ ξένα χέρια. Σήμερα τιμοῦμε τοὺς πεσόντες κατὰ τὴν πολιορκία καὶ κατὰ τὴν Ἄλωση, διαβάζουμε τοὺς θρήνους καὶ τοὺς θρύλους, συγκινούμεθα καὶ διδασκόμεθα. Διότι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀξία τῆς ἱστορικῆς μνήμης. Νὰ ἀποτελεῖ μάθημα ἐς αἰεὶ γιὰ τὶς νεώτερες καὶ τὶς ἀπερχόμενες γενεές.

(1) Πρέπει νὰ θυμόμαστε τὴν Ἄλωση γιὰ νὰ ἀποτιούμε ἓνα διαρκὴ καὶ μεγάλο φόρο τιμῆς στὸ Βυζαντινὸ κράτος, τὴν Ρωμανία ὅπως τὴν ἀναφέρουν τὰ κείμενα τῆς ἐποχῆς, τὸ ἐκχριστιανισθὲν Ρωμαϊκὸ κράτος τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους, ὅπως τὸ χαρακτηρίζει ὁ νεώτερος βυζαντινολόγος Διονύσιος Ζακυνθινός. Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ Αὐτοκρατορία μὲ πρωτεύουσα τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη Νέα Ρώμη ἄντεξε ἐπὶ 11 αἰῶνες. Μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση ἀπὸ τοὺς Σταυροφόρους τὸ 1204, ἡ ἑδαφικὴ τῆς ἔκτασις καὶ τὸ σφρίγος τῆς περιορίσθηκαν σημαντικά. Παρέμεινε ὅμως καθ' ὅλην τὴν διάρκειά τοῦ βίου τῆς τὸ κράτος στὸ ὁποῖο πραγματοποιήθηκε ἡ ἐπιτυχὴς καὶ δημιουργικὴ συνάντησις Χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ.

Ἡ Ἑλληνορθόδοξη παράδοσις ὑπῆρξε τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα αὐτῆς τῆς συναντήσεως καὶ τὸ Βυζάντιο τὴν διέδωσε μὲ εἰρηνικὸ τρόπο στοὺς γειτονικοὺς λαοὺς. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἱεραποστολικὴν δράσις τῶν Βυζαντινῶν προγόνων μᾶς καταδεικνύουν καὶ μαρτυροῦν οἱ πολιτισμοὶ τῶν σημερινῶν λαῶν τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Εὐρώπης. Ὁ Ρῶσος Πατριάρχης Ἀλέξιος παραδέχθηκε, ὅταν βρέθηκε τὸ 1992 στὴν Ἀθήνα, ὅτι ἡ Ρωσία εἶναι πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τοῦ Βυζαντίου.

Ὁ Ρουμᾶνος Ἱστορικὸς καὶ πολιτικὸς τοῦ 20^{ου} αἰῶνος Νικολαΐ Γιόργκα χαρακτήρισε τὴν Μολδοβλαχία μετὰ

τὴν Ἄλωση ὡς «τὸ Βυζάντιο μετὰ τὸ Βυζάντιο». Καὶ τὸ κυριλλικὸ ἑλληνογενὲς ἀλφάβητο ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῦν πολλοὶ σλαβικοὶ λαοὶ ἀποτελεῖ ἔμπρακτὴ ἐπιβεβαίωσις τῆς ἀκτινοβολίας τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Αὐτόν, λοιπόν, τὸν πολιτισμὸ πρέπει νὰ διδάσκουμε καὶ νὰ διδασκόμαστε ἐμεῖς οἱ σύγχρονοι Ἕλληνες.

(2) Πρέπει νὰ θυμόμαστε τὴν Ἄλωση, διότι μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς διηγήσεις τῶν ἱστορικῶν τῆς ἐποχῆς ξετυλίγεται ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Διάρκεια, ἡ διαχρονικὴ πορεία τῶν ἀξιῶν τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ἡ συγκλονιστικὴ ὁμιλία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Παλαιολόγου στὶς 28 Μαΐου πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν τελικὴ ἐπίθεσις τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν μᾶς διδάσκει γιὰ τὴν ἀγωνιζόμεσθε: *Γιὰ τὴν Πίστιν, γιὰ τὴν Πατρίδα, γιὰ τοὺς συγγενεῖς μας.* Προσθέτει καὶ τὸν βασιλέα, διότι ἐκεῖνο ἦταν τὸ πολίτευμα τῆς ἐποχῆς.

Ὅμως τὸ τρίπτυχο Πίστις, Πατρίδα, συγγενεῖς, ποὺ ἀναφέρει ὁ τελευταῖος Αὐτοκράτορας, μᾶς συνδέει μὲ τὸν ὄρκο τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἀθηναίων ἐφήβων καὶ μὲ τὸν παιᾶνα τῶν Σαλαμινομάχων («*Ὡ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, ἴτε, ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ', ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τε πατρῶων ἔδη, θήκας τε προγόνων νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγῶν*») καὶ φθάνει αὐτὴ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Διάρκεια μέχρι τὴν προκήρυξις τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου Ὑψηλάντη, ποὺ ἔγραφε τὸν Φεβρουάριον τοῦ 1821 «*Μάχου ὑπὲρ Πίστεως καὶ Πατρίδος*», καὶ μέχρι τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κολοκοτρώνη πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ πρώτου Γυμνασίου τῆς Ἐλεύθερης πλέον Ἀθήνας: «*Ὅταν πιάσαμε τ' ἄρματα εἶπαμε πρῶτα ὑπὲρ Πίστεως καὶ ὕστερα ὑπὲρ Πατρίδος*».

Αὐτὲς εἶναι οἱ διαχρονικὲς ἀξίες τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἠθικὸς δεσμὸς ἐνώνει τὸν Παλαιολόγο μὲ τοὺς Σαλαμινομάχους καὶ μὲ τὸν Κολοκοτρώνη καὶ μὲ τὸ 1940. Μαχόμεθα γιὰ τὴν Πίστιν, τὴν Πατρίδα, τὴν Οἰκογένεια ὅσο κι ἂν κάποιος μᾶς χαρακτηρίζουν ... ἀναχρονιστικοὺς. Τιμώντας τὴν μνήμη τῶν προδρόμων καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Διάρκειας ἐμεῖς γι' αὐτὰ θὰ συνεχίζουμε νὰ ἀγωνιζόμεσθε!

(3) Θυμόμαστε τὰ γεγονότα τῆς ἐποχῆς πρὶν καὶ γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλωση, διότι μᾶς διδάσκουν τὴν πολύτιμη συμβολὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου ἐκκλησίας μας στὴν ἐπιβίωσις τοῦ Γένους μας. Λίγες δεκαετίες πρὸ τῆς ἀλώσεως εἴχαμε μία ἔντονη καὶ αὐταρχικὴ παρέμβασις τῆς τότε Πολιτείας πρὸς τὴν ἐκκλησία. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορικὴ ἐξουσία πίστεψε—φεῦ!—ὅτι ἂν ὑπογράψουμε τὴν ὑποταγὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας στὸν Πάπα, θὰ ἔχουμε μεγάλη βοήθεια ἀπὸ τὴν Δύση κατὰ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν. Τὸ 1438-39 στὴν Φερράρα καὶ στὴν Φλωρεντία σύρθηκαν μὲ πιέσεις καὶ ἐξευτελισμοὺς οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ἡγέτες στὴν ὑπογραφή τῆς ψευδοενώσεως τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν.

Ὁ μεγάλος ἅγιός μας, ὁ Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, Ἐπίσκοπος Ἐφέσου, ἀρνήθηκε νὰ ὑπογράψει καὶ

ἔσωσε τὴν τιμὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Προσέξτε: Δὲν ἀρνήθηκε νὰ συζητήσει, διότι ἡ ἀγνή Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν ἀρνεῖται τὸν διάλογο. **Ἀρνεῖται τὴν ὑποταγή.** Καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ὑπέγραψαν μία μεγάλη μορφή ἀπέσυρε τὴν ὑπογραφή τῆς μόλις ἐπέστεψε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν Γεώργιο Σχολάριο, τὸν μετέπειτα Γεννάδιο, πρῶτο Πατριάρχη μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση.

Ὁ λαὸς ἀκολούθησε τὸν Μάρκο καὶ τὸν Σχολάριο. Οἱ ἀνθωνωτικοὶ εἶχαν δίκαιο, διότι παρὰ τὴν ὑπογραφή τῆς ψευδοενώσεως, τὰ καράβια τοῦ Πάπα δὲν φάνηκαν ποτὲ στὴν μαχόμενη Βασιλεύουσα. Ὁ Βρετανὸς ἱστορικὸς Στῆβεν Ράνσιμαν στὸ περισπούδαστο ἔργο του «Ἡ Μεγάλη ἐκκλησία ἐν Αἰχμαλωσία» δικαιώνει τοὺς ἀνθωνωτικούς λέγοντας ὅτι διασώσαν τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ μόνον ἔτσι ἐπεβίωσε ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς.

Καὶ στὸ ἄλλο σπουδαῖο ἔργο του, τὴν «Ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως» διαψεύδει ὅλους τοὺς ἐπικριτὲς τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ τονίζοντας ὅτι στὰ θαλάσσια τεῖχη τῆς Βασιλεύουσας ἕναν ἀπὸ τοὺς πύργους τὸν ὑπεράσπιζαν Ἑλληνες μοναχοί.

4) Θυμόμαστε τὴν Ἄλωση, διότι ἡ ἱστορία μᾶς διδάσκει ὅτι ὅταν οἱ λίγοι ἀποφασίσουν νὰ ἀντισταθοῦν κατὰ τῶν πολλῶν, μπορεῖ νὰ ἡττηθοῦν πρόσκαιρα, ἀλλὰ τελικὰ σὲ βάθος χρόνου κερδίζουν. Ἡ ἀντίσταση στὰ τεῖχη τῆς Βασιλεύουσας τῶν 5000 χιλιάδων Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν 2000 ξένων συμμάχων τοὺς ἔμεινε στίς ψυχὲς τῶν ὑποδούλων ὡς τίτλος τιμῆς καὶ δέσμευση γιὰ νέους ἀγῶνες. Ἡ θυσία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Παλιολόγου στὴ πύλη τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ ἔθεσε τὶς βάσεις γιὰ τὸ 1821. Τὰ δεκάδες κινήματα τῶν ὑποδούλων ἐτράφησαν ἀπὸ τοὺς θρούλους τοῦ Μαρμαρωμένου Βασιλιᾶ καὶ τῆς Κόκκινης Μηλιάς. Ἄν εἶχαν παραδοθεῖ τὴν 29^η Μαΐου 1453, δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε ἀντίσταση καὶ ἐθνεγερσία. Ἡ συνθηκολόγηση θὰ ἦταν ἀνεξήγητη ντροπή. Ἐνῶ ἡ ἡρωϊκὴ ἄμυνα γέννησε τὴν ὑπομονή, τὴν ἐλπίδα, τὴν προσδοκία. Αὐτὴ τὴν ἐλπίδα ἐκφράζει καὶ ὁ Ποντιακὸς θρῆνος:

Ἡ Ρωμανία περασεν, Ἡ Ρωμανία πόρθεν,

Ἡ Ρωμανία κι ἂν περασεν ἀνθεὶ καὶ φέρει κι ἄλλο...

Ἄλλωστε καὶ ὁ Θ. Κολοκοτρώνης ἔλεγε πρὸς τοὺς ξένους συνομιλητὲς του: «Ὁ βασιλεὺς μας συνθήκην δὲν ἔκαμε, ἡ φρουρὰ του πολεμᾷ ἀκόμη καὶ τὸ φρούριό του ἀντιστέκονται». Καὶ ἐξηγοῦσε ὅτι ἀναφερόταν στὸν

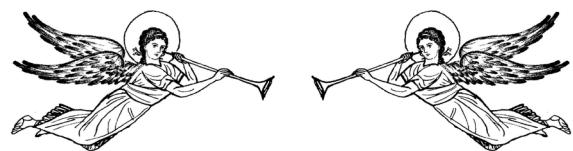
Κωνσταντῖνο Παλιολόγο, στοὺς κλεφταρματολοὺς, στὸ Σούλι καὶ στὴν Μάνη. Οἱ πεσόντες κατὰ τὴν ἄλωση μᾶς δόρησαν τὸ δικαίωμα στὴν Μεγάλη ἰδέα. Καὶ χωρὶς Μεγάλες ἰδέες τὰ ἔθνη δὲν πᾶνε μπροστά.

5) Ἡ ἀντίσταση τῶν τελευταίων μαχητῶν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ τὸ «πάντες αὐτοπροαιρέτως ἀποθανοῦμεν καὶ οὐ φεισόμεθα τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν» ἐμπνέει ἔκτοτε τὸ ΟΧΙ τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Τὸ 1940 κατὰ τοῦ Μουσσολίνι, τὸ 1941 κατὰ τοῦ Χίτλερ, τὸ 1955 στὴν Κύπρο κατὰ τῆς ἀποικιοκρατίας καὶ τοῦ ἀφελθηνισμοῦ.

Σήμερα ὀφείλουμε νὰ συνεχίζουμε νὰ ἀντιστεκόμαστε μὲ κάθε τρόπο. Οἱ σημερινὲς ἀλώσεις εἶναι μικρὲς καὶ καθημερινές. Ἄρα ὑποὺλες καὶ ἐξίσου ἐπικίνδυνες. Ἡ ὑπονόμευση τῆς γλώσσας μας, ἡ ἄγνοια τῆς ἱστορίας μας, ἡ ξενομανία, οἱ συκοφαντίες κατὰ τῆς ἀγίας Ἑλληνορθοδόξου Παραδόσεώς μας, οἱ ὑποχωρήσεις (προδοσίες;) ἀπέναντι σὲ Τούρκους, Σκοπιανούς καὶ Ἀλβανούς, ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα ἀποτελοῦν μικρὲς ἀλώσεις ποὺ ἀπαιτοῦν γνώση, ἀντίσταση καὶ μαχητικότητα.

Δὲν ἀρνούμαστε τὴν ἐπικοινωνία καὶ τὴν συνεργασία μὲ ἄλλους λαοὺς καὶ πολιτισμοὺς. Ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς ποτὲ δὲ κλείστηκε στὸ καβούκι του. Θὰ ἀρνηθοῦμε ὅμως τὴν ἀφομοίωση, τὴν ἀλλοτρίωση, τὶς γκριζὲς ζώνες στὰ ἐδάφη μας, στὰ πελάγη μας, στὴν Ταυτότητά μας καὶ στίς ταυτότητές μας. Θὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε μὲ ὄπλα πρωτίστως πνευματικὰ καὶ ἠθικά. Καὶ θὰ διδασκόμαστε ἀπὸ τὴν Παράδοση καὶ τὸ βίωμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας μας.

Ἡ Ἄλωση καὶ οἱ μετέπειτα ἐξεληξίξεις μᾶς διδάσκουν ὅτι τελικὰ ἐπιβιώσαμε μέχρι σήμερα χάρις στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας. Διότι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοση εἶναι Σταυροαναστάσιμη. Μᾶς θυμίζει ὅτι μετὰ τὴν κάθε Σταύρωση τοῦ Γένους ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ Ἀνάσταση. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ τὸ πιστέψουμε!



Ὁ,τι θέλεις μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ ἀποφύγεις, ὅλα ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή σου....

Ἱερός Αὐγουστίνος

Ζητείται Ἐκκλησιαστικός Ἀνὴρ Μεταξὺ τῶν Ἱεραρχῶν. Ὑπάρχει;

Τοῦ κ. Δημητρίου Κ. Αναγνώστου, Θεολόγου.

Αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες διαδραματίζονται φοβερὰ καὶ ἀπαίσιμα γεγονότα στὸ Κίεβο καὶ συγκεκριμένα στὴν Λαύρα τῶν Σπηλαίων τοῦ Κιέβου (11^{ου} αἰῶνος), τὸ σέμνωμα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας γιὰ ὀλόκληρο τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο Σλαβικὸ κόσμο.

Οἱ ἑκατοντάδες μοναχοὶ τῆς Λαύρας ἐκδιώκονται ἀπὸ τὴ Μονὴ τῆς Μετανοίας τους· ὁ Ἡγούμενός τους, Ἐπίσκοπος Παῦλος, καταδικάζεται σὲ κατ' οἶκον περιορισμὸ (ἐκτός τῆς Λαύρας) καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς Ἀστυνομικὲς Ἀρχές τοποθετεῖται στὸ πόδι του τὸ γνωστὸ ἠλεκτρονικὸ «βραχιολάκι». Οἱ χιλιάδες διαμαρτυρόμενοι πιστοὶ γλευάζονται ἀπὸ ὑποστηρικτὲς τῆς ἐκδιώξεως τῶν μοναχῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι (γλευαστὲς) φέρουν στὰ ἐνδύματά τους φασιστικὰ καὶ σατανιστικὰ σύμβολα!

Τὸ πρόσχημα εἶναι οἱ ἀπαιτήσεις τῶν Οὐκρανικῶν Ἀρχῶν καὶ εἰδικότερα τοῦ Οὐκρανικοῦ Ὑπουργείου Πολιτισμοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ χώρου, τὸν ὁποῖο ἀντιμετωπίζουν ὡς κρατικὴ περιουσία καὶ τουριστικὸ ἀξιοθέατο γιὰ προσπορισμὸ ἐσόδων. Ἡ πραγματικὴ αἰτία εἶναι ἡ συνεργασία τοῦ καθεστώτος Β. Ζελένσκυ μὲ τὸν ἐπικεφαλῆς τῆς Αὐτοκέφαλῆς ψευδὸ-ἐκκλησίας στὴν Οὐκρανία ὑπὸ τὸν «Μητροπολίτη» Κιέβου Ἐπιφάνιο Ντουμένκο, στὴν κατεύθυνση μίας σχεδιασμένης ἀρπαγῆς, ἀπὸ τὴν κατοχὴ καὶ δικαιοδοσία τῆς περὶ τὸν Μητροπολίτη Κιέβου κ. Ὀνούφριου Ἱεραρχίας τῆς Οὐκρανικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, ὅλων τῶν ἱστορικῶν Μονῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν Ἐνοριῶν καὶ προσκυνημάτων τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων τῆς Οὐκρανίας.

Πέραν, ὅμως, ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνωτέρω δρώντες καὶ συνενόχους τοῦ ἀπάνθρωπου καὶ ἀντιχριστοῦ διωγμοῦ κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας στὴν Οὐκρανία, ὑπάρχει καὶ κρύπτεται ὀπισθεν αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ ἠθικὸς αὐτουργὸς τοῦ τεράστιου αὐτοῦ σκανδάλου καὶ φοβεροῦ ἐγκλήματος, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος παρὰ ὁ ἐπικαθήμενος στὸν Πατριαρχικὸ Θρόνο τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κ. Βαρθολομαῖος. Ὁ τελευταῖος μὲ προκλητικὴ ἐκδικητικότητα καὶ μανία πολεμᾶ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ ἐπιδίδεται στὸ ἀνίερο ἔργο τῆς «δημιουργίας», ὅπου δὲν ἀναγνωρίζεται ἡ κυριαρχία του, παραλλήλων πρὸς τὶς ὑφιστάμενες τοπικὲς Ἐκκλησίες «ἐκκλησιῶν», τῶν ὁποίων ὄχι μόνον ἡ κανονικότητα ἀμφισβητεῖται, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἴδια ἡ πίστη τους!

Στὸ πλευρὸ τοῦ Βαρθολομαίου, ἄβουλοι καὶ μοιραῖοι ἀντάμα, στὸ σχέδιο ἐξουθενώσεως καὶ ἀπομονώσεως τῶν Πατριαρχείων καὶ Ἐκκλησιῶν ἐκείνων ποὺ μὲ τὴν ἀποχὴ τους «χάλασαν» τὸ ἀφήγημα τῆς παντοκρατορίας του κατὰ τὴ σύγκληση τῆς διαβοήτου «Συνόδου» στὸ

Κολυμπάρι τῆς Κρήτης (Ἰούνιος 2016), βρίσκονται μόνον τέσσερις (4), τοῦ Πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως συναριθμουμένους, ἐκ τῶν δεκατεσσάρων (14) Πατριαρχείων καὶ Αὐτοκεφάλων Ἐκκλησιῶν ἀνὰ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο κόσμο. Μεταξὺ δὲ αὐτῶν, ἀτυχῶς καὶ ἀδικαιολογήτως, ἂν καὶ ὄχι ἀνεξηγήτως, βρίσκεται καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος.

Ὅμως, τὸ Οὐκρανικὸ ζήτημα πλέον ἔχει πάρει ἐκρηκτικὲς διαστάσεις καὶ ἔχει ἐξελιχθεῖ, ἀπὸ ἓνα διοικητικὸ σχίσμα μεταξὺ Πατριαρχείων Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ Μόσχας, σὲ πνευματικὴ ὠρολογιακὴ βόμβα γιὰ τὴν παγκόσμια Ὁρθοδοξία, ἡ ὁποία ἀπειλεῖ νὰ ἀνατινάξει τὴν ἐνότητά Της στὸν ἄερα!

Ἐπιπλέον, ὅσοι γιὰ συγκεκριμένους λόγους (μίας κακῶς νοουμένης στηριζέως πρὸς τὸν λεγόμενο «Προκαθήμενο τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας» ἢ ἐκ λόγων ἰδιαίτερου συμφέροντος) εὐθυγραμμίζονται, ἄνευ ἑτέρου, πρὸς τὴν τακτικὴ καὶ πρακτικὴ τοῦ Φαναρίου, εἶναι πρόδηλο καὶ σαφὲς ὅτι ἐπωμίζονται τεράστια εὐθύνη γιὰ σειρὰ ἀνόσιων πρακτικῶν κρυφοῦ καὶ φανεροῦ διωγμοῦ τῆς Οὐκρανικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων πιστῶν της. **Αὐτὲς οἱ πρακτικὲς ἔχουν ἤδη καταγραφεῖ καὶ θὰ παραμείνουν ἀνεξίτηλες στίς σελίδες τῆς σύγχρονης ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱστορίας, βαμμένες κυριολεκτικὰ ἀκόμη καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα κληρικῶν, μοναχῶν καὶ πιστῶν στὴν μαρτυρικὴ, καὶ ὄχι μόνον λόγῳ πολέμου, Οὐκρανία.** Γι' αὐτό, πλέον, ὅσοι στηρίζουν, ὑπερασπίζονται καὶ δικαιολογοῦν ἢ σιωποῦν μπροστὰ στὰ ἀποτρόπαια «κατορθώματα» τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς πολιτικῆς τοῦ Φαναρίου καὶ τοῦ φερομένου ὡς «πρώτου ἄνευ ἴσων» Πατριάρχου κ. Βαρθολομαίου, θὰ εἶναι καὶ ἤδη εἶναι **ὑπόλογοι καὶ συνένοχοι γιὰ αὐτὰ ἐναντι Θεοῦ, Ἱστορίας καὶ ἀνθρώπων!**

Ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ποὺ ὡς μὴ ὄφειλε ἐνεπλάκη σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ βρώμικο παιγνίδι τῶν ἰσχυρῶν τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν μετ' αὐτῶν διαπλεκομένων ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ταγῶν, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος γιὰ τὴν Ἱεραρχία Της τίθεται πιεστικὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα: Δὲν ὑπάρχει μεταξὺ τῶν Ἱεραρχῶν τῆς ΕΝΑΣ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ΑΝΔΡΑΣ (Ἐπίσκοπος μὲ ἀνδρεῖο φρόνημα) νὰ διαφωνήσει, νὰ διαμαρτυρηθεῖ, νὰ διαχωρίσει τὴν θέση του καὶ νὰ καταγγεῖλλει τὰ ἐγκλήματα ποὺ συντελοῦνται καὶ τοὺς καθιστοῦν συνενόχους των;

Σήμερα, ἴσως, θὰ ἀποτελοῦσε μία διέξοδο στὰ συσσωρευμένα ἀδιέξοδα τῆς Φαναριώτικης πολιτικῆς (καὶ) στὸ Οὐκρανικὸ ἢ σύγκληση ἀληθινῆς Πανορθοδόξου Συνόδου πρὸς ἀντιμετώπιση ὅσων ἔχουν προκληθεῖ καὶ δημιουργηθεῖ. Φοβούμεθα, ὅμως, ὅτι ἂν ὄχι καὶ σήμερα, αὔριο πάντως ἴσως νὰ εἶναι ἀργὰ γιὰ μίαν κοινῶς ἀποδεκτὴ κανονικὴ δευθέτηση καὶ ἀποκατάσταση τῶν πραγμάτων!

LET US LEARN TO PRAY

By St. Theophan the Recluse, as compiled by Bishop Alexander Vasilievich Mileant (+2005).

How One Can Enter a Prayerful State of Mind

Being the soul's breath, prayer is most important in the life of a Christian. The presence of prayer in one's life means that the person is spiritually alive; without a prayer he is dead.

Standing in front of icons and bowing is not prayer itself—those are only attributes of prayer. The same can be said about reading a prayer; whether recited by memory or read from a book, it would be not prayer itself, but merely a way to begin. The main thing in praying is the invocation of feelings of reverence for God: devotedness to the Father, gratitude, submission to the will of God, an aspiration to glorify Him and similar feelings. That is why while praying we should make those feelings permeate us so that our hearts would not be dry. It is only when our hearts appeal to God that reading prayers (evening or morning praying) becomes true prayer; otherwise it is not yet prayer.

A prayer, which is an appeal of our heart to God, should be invoked and strengthened; a spirit of intercession should be brought forth within us.

The first way to do this is to pray by reading or listening to prayers written in prayer books.

Read the prayer book or listen to it very attentively and you will definitely incite and strengthen your heart in its ascension to God, which means you would enter into a prayerful spirit. In the prayers of the holy fathers (printed in prayer books and other church books), a great power of prayer is in motion. Whoever diligently pays attention to them will through this force of interaction delight in that power, as the state of mind of the person praying comes closer to the essence of those prayers. In order to turn your intercessions into an effective way of cultivating prayer, you must make it so that both your mind and heart would perceive the content of the prayers being read.

Here are the three simplest ways to achieve this:

1. Do not start a prayer without preparing yourself for it properly.
2. Say prayers with feeling and attention, but not casually.
3. After completing your prayer, do not hasten to go back to your everyday cares.

Preparation for praying: Before you start a prayer, no matter where it might be, stand or sit for a short time and try to

sober your mind, relieving it of all irrelevant work and cares. Then give thought to the One to Whom you are turning in prayer, and who you are in praying to Him; invoke the appropriate attitude of humility and reverential awe for God. That is the beginning of a prayer, and a good beginning is half the success.

The prayer itself: Having prepared yourself, stand in front of the icons, make a sign of cross, bow and begin the usual prayers. Say the prayer without haste, discerning every word and taking it close to your heart. In other words, you should understand what you are reading and feel what you understood. Cross yourself and make bows while praying. This is the essence of reading prayers that are fruitful and God pleasing. For example, when reading, *Cleanse us from all impurity*” you should feel how impure you are; desire the cleansing and with hope ask the Lord for it. Saying, *Thy will be done*, commend your destiny to the Lord completely and wholeheartedly, with readiness to accept gladly whatever He sends you. While reading *And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*, your soul should forgive everyone who offended you.

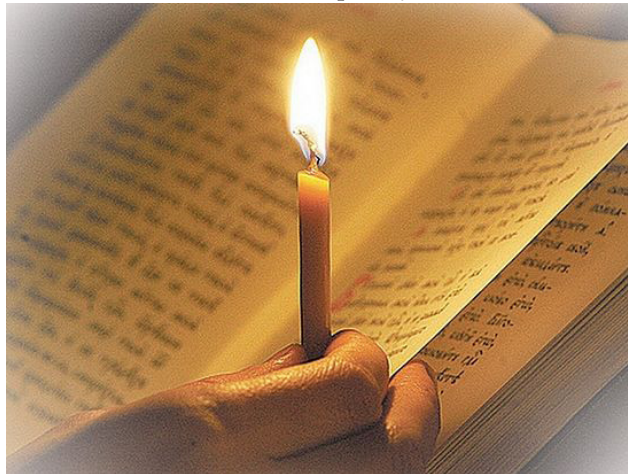
Doing that with every phrase of the prayer makes it the right prayer indeed. Also take care to do the the following:

First, set a specific praying rule for yourself. It should not be too lengthy, so that you might be able to fulfill it without haste amidst your daily routine.

Second, read through the prayers of your prayer rule attentively, understanding and perceiving every word. Thus, you prepare yourself beforehand and learn what feeling and thoughts you need to evoke in your soul to understand and perceive everything easily during your prayers.

Third, if other things distract your volatile thoughts during your prayer, exert yourself to focus your attention, keeping your mind concentrated on the subject of your prayer. Bring your mind back to it every time it wanders away. Read the prayer again and again until every word of the prayer is said with awareness and feeling. That will rule out your absent-mindedness during prayers.

Fourth, if some word in the prayer touches your soul in a special way, do not proceed with the prayer, but focus on that word or phrase, nourishing your soul with the attention, feeling and thoughts evoked by the word, stick to that state of mind until it fades away. This is a sign of the prayerful spirit beginning to enter you. That state of mind and soul is the most reliable way to cherish and strengthen the prayerful spirit in a person.



What to do after the prayer: After finishing your prayer, do not hasten to take up your usual chores, but slow down and think at least for a little while about what you felt and to what it obligates you to do. Try to keep in your mind what impressed you most of all. The nature of the prayer itself is such that after a really good prayer one would not want to switch over to one's usual things, as those who have relished something sweet do not want anything bitter. Enjoying the sweetness of praying is in fact the goal of saying prayers, which brings up the prayerful spirit.

Following those simple rules will soon bring results. Any prayerful invocation makes a good impact on the soul, if you stick to those rules, and it deepens the impact; patience in praying will generate a prayerful mood.

Those are the first steps in bringing up a prayerful spirit in oneself. It is for this purpose that the practice of praying is set. Yet, it is not the aim in itself, but just the beginning of gaining mastery in prayer. We have to go on.

Further Progress in Praying

After your mind and heart get accustomed to turn to God through prayer books, you should try to do it in your own way. Your aim is to make your soul capable of entering, so to speak, into a conversation with the Lord, lifting up your mind and heart and opening up in confession to Him, telling Him what is in your soul and what it needs. We must teach our souls to do this.

So what can we do to succeed in mastering this knowledge? The first way is to pray by the book with awe, attention and deep emotion. For it is from the heart filled with devout feelings and prayers that your own prayer will begin to emanate and be addressed to God. But there are also other ways leading to the desired result in prayer.

The first way to teach your soul to have frequent recourse to God is the devout contemplation of divine ways and deeds: thinking about God's mercy, justice, wisdom, creation, and Providence, about His granting us salvation through Christ, about the Grace and the Word of God, about sacred mysteries and heaven. Those thoughts will unfailingly fill your soul with devout awe towards God, which directly turns the whole of the being of a man to God and is hence the direct way to teach your soul to be lifted up to God.

Having finished your praying, especially in the morning, sit down and begin thinking about that or this way or deed of God, and try to tune your soul respectively. Join St. Dimity of Rostov, saying, *Visit me, sacred Godly thinking, and we will be absorbed in contemplating great acts of God.* This will touch your heart, and your soul will start pouring itself out in a prayer. With little effort you will be able to achieve much. You must only have the will and persistence to do it. For example, beginning to think of God's Grace will show you that both your spiritual and bodily being is

endowed with God's mercies, and you will fall down before Him overwhelmed with gratitude.

Start thinking about God's omnipresence and you will understand that wherever you are, you are facing God and God is facing you. Then you will be filled with devout awe. Think of the Truth of God and you will become convinced that no bad deed goes without punishment. Then you will certainly decide to cleanse out all your sins through your heart-felt repentance and humility. Begin thinking of God's omniscience, and you will understand that everything in you is open before God's eye. Then you will definitely become strict with yourself in everything, so that you would not in any way offend God Who sees everything.

The second way to teach your soul to turn to God is based on devoting every deed, large or small, to the glory of God. For, if according to the commandment of the Apostle (1 Cor. 10:31), we make it a rule for ourselves to do everything, even eating and drinking, to the glory of God, then no matter what we are doing we will certainly remember God—and not just remember, but fear to do anything that might anger God. That would make us turn to God with fear and ask Him prayerfully to grant us help and enlightenment. And since we are always doing something, we will constantly turn to Him in prayer and thus almost at all times will we learn the skill of addressing God in prayer. This way we will learn in practice to turn to God more often during the day.

The third way to teach our souls to pray is to appeal frequently to God from our hearts during the day, saying short petitions concerning the needs of our souls and the things we are doing at the moment. When beginning to do something, say: *Bless me, O Lord!* Finishing the work, say: *Glory to Thee, O Lord!* If a passion inflames you, fall down before God in your heart saying the following: *Save me, O Lord, I am perishing!* When overcome with disconcerting thoughts call out: *Lead me by your way, O Lord,* or *Do not let my feet go astray.* If you are downcast by sin and becoming despondent, cry out as the tax collector: *O, God be merciful to me a sinner!* You should act this way in all situations. Or you can just repeat: *Lord have mercy!* or *Holy Lady Theotokos, save me!* or *Angel of God, my holy guardian, protect me!* Or you can say other similar words, calling on God's name; you should do it often and try to make the words come from your heart, as if squeezed out of it. When we do that, we will often be lifting our hearts up to God, frequently addressing God, frequently praying—and that translates into the ability to converse intelligently with God.

Thus, there are three more ways, besides setting a practice of prayer for yourself, which will lead us to a prayerful spirit. They are:

1. To devote some time in the morning to Godly thinking,
2. To do everything devoting it to the glory of God, and
3. To appeal to God more often with short invocations.

After we thoroughly ponder over spiritual ideas in the morning, these sacred thoughts tune us to remember God all day long. Those thoughts in turn will direct all our actions, both external and internal, to the glory of God. Through this procedure our soul may become predisposed to sending up its short, prayerful invocations to God. Those three things—Godly thinking, doing everything to the glory of God, and frequent appeals to Him—are the most effective ways to learn intelligent and heart-felt prayer. Those who practice this will soon master the skill of ascending to God in their hearts. Thus, a soul will begin to enter the sphere of the Sublime, which is inherent to it, through the heart and thoughts in this life, and will truly be allowed to appear before God in the next life.

The Prayer Rule

We should master the skill of saying the prayer, and reading with feeling in order to not just read out the necessary prayer, but also to invoke and strengthen a prayerful spirit in our souls.

To succeed in this we should:

First: Never pray hastily; we should rather pray slowly as if singing. In olden times, when all the prayers were taken from psalms, they were sung, not read.

Second: Perceive every word, not only understanding the idea consciously, but involving the appropriate emotion.

Third: In order to curb your desire to read quickly, make it a rule for yourself that praying is not just reading this or that number of prayers, but providing a definite time to pray, say, a quarter or half an hour—for as long as you are accustomed to pray. Do not worry about the number of prayers, but when the set time is up and you do not want to go on praying, just stop there.

Fourth: Having tuned yourself thus do not look at the clock, but take a stand as if you will stand there forever. Then your *nous* will not rush ahead....

Fifth: in order to enable the movement of prayerful feelings, reread and ponder over all the prayers of your prayer rule in your spare time, with due feelings, so that when you are praying you might know beforehand what feeling should be born in your heart.

Sixth: never read all the prayers one after another, but always intersperse them with your own prayers and bows. When you feel something suddenly coming into your heart you should stop your prayer and make bows. This last rule is the most important and necessary for cultivating a prayer-

ful spirit. If you are overcome by some very strong feeling, retain it and make bows to the end of the set time without reading any prayers.

Pray not only in the morning and evening, but if you have a chance—at any time of the day, bowing several times.

When you are too busy to fulfill your prayer rule, make it shorter, but do not pray hastily. God is everywhere. After getting up in the morning give thanks to Him and ask Him to bless the work of your coming day in your own words, then make some bows and that is enough! Never turn to God nonchalantly, but always with great reverence. He does not need either our bows or long prayers. A short, but strong cry of your heart—that is what reaches Him! And you are always able to do that.

You can also compile your own prayer rule. Memorize the prayers printed in prayer books and read them by heart with understanding and feeling. While doing this, insert your own prayer. The less you depend on the book, the better. Learn some psalms, and when you are going somewhere or doing



something while your head is not occupied with it, read them. That is your conversation with God. A prayer rule is a guide, not something to fulfill with the obedience of a slave. You should by all means avoid mechanical and formal reading. It should always be the result of thoughtful decision of your free will, performed with consciousness and feeling, not neglectfully. You should be able to shorten

your pray rule when necessary. Family life is full of such instances. For instance, in the morning and in the evening you can read the memorized prayers. You can even omit some of them. Or you can even skip reading prayers at all, just making several bows with a prayer coming truly from your heart. **You should be the master of your prayer rule, not its slave.** It is to God only that we are servants, who must devote every minute of their lives to Him.

The prayer rule is a safety shell of prayer. Prayer is an internal matter, while the rule is only external. But just as a person without a body is incomplete, so is prayer without a prayer rule. We must have both, and fulfill the rule as much we can. There is an indispensable law: to pray within yourself always and everywhere. However, reading prayers requires allocating a definite time, place and measure for it. The combination of those three elements makes the prayer rule.

So, one must be guided by reason while deciding when, where and how long one should stand praying as well as what prayers to say. One can choose that according to one's

circumstance: whether one can spend more time for prayer, reduce it or postpone the time and change the place of praying. The main effort should be directed to properly saying internal prayers. It is internal prayer that must be said incessantly.

What does incessant prayer mean? To be constantly in the prayerful spirit means to turn one's thoughts and feelings to God. Thinking of God means keeping always in mind His omnipresence and ability to see everything. Feelings towards God are fear of God, love for Him, the ardent desire to please Him and to avoid all that displeases Him. The main thing is to commend oneself obediently to His will and to accept everything that happens to us as something sent directly by Him. One can have that feeling for God at any time, doing anything and under any circumstances, if that feeling no longer being sought but has already been established in one's heart.

Our thought may be distracted by various subjects, but even in that one can attain the ability to stay with God while doing something else, and feel His presence. One must be totally concerned with those two things: thoughts and feelings for God. When they are there, there is prayer, even though it be without words. The morning prayers were established precisely for setting our mind and heart on those two things, so that later in the day we might take up our work with them. If in the morning your soul is filled with thoughts and feelings for God, then your prayer was successful, even if you have not read all the written prayers.

Supposing you started your daily work that way in the morning. However, the very first things you begin doing then distract you from God. What is to be done? You have to refresh your thoughts and feelings for God through your internal appeals to Him. And for that you must get accustomed to your short prayer and to repeat it as often as possible. Any short prayer leads to that. The best prayer of all is *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!* You have to get accustomed to it and never cease saying it. When it is fixed in you, that prayer will become the driving force and appeal to God with your thought and feeling. This is the whole schedule of your work of prayer.

Beginners should first of all learn how to pray appropriately according to the written prayers, in order to memorize the thoughts, feelings and words of prayer. This is important because the words with which we turn to God must be good and beautiful. When the beginner succeeds in that, he can start with both the established prayers, and those of his own.

A Prayer given by God

What else can be said about prayer? There is prayer made by man, and there is a prayer granted by God to a praying man. Who has not known the former? You should know the latter as well, at least in its initial form. When a man begins turning to God, his first duty is a prayer. He begins to go to church, and at home he reads prayers from

the prayer book and by heart. But his thoughts get distracted and he cannot control them. However, the more he works on his prayers, the more balanced his thoughts become, and his prayer becomes clearer.

And yet, the soul's atmosphere will not be cleansed until it is ignited with a small light of spirituality. That light is a token of God's grace, but it is granted to all—not only to the chosen. That light appears as a result of a certain state of purity in the entire moral system of the seeker. When that light is ignited, and the heart harbors constant warmth, it stops the turmoil of thoughts. The soul experiences what happened to the woman with an issue of blood: *And immediately her bleeding stopped.* (Lk 8:44). In that state, prayer turns to a greater or lesser extent into ceaseless prayer. The prayer of Jesus serves as a medium to that ceaseless prayer. And that is the boundary line to which prayer made only by the person can go.

The next stage of that state is when prayer overcomes a person, and was not created by him. The prayerful spirit captivates a person and carries him into his heart, as if somebody had taken him by the hand and made him go from one room to another. The soul is bound there by some external force and stays willingly inside while it is overcome by the Spirit that captivated it. I know two degrees of that captivation. In the first, the soul can see everything; it perceives itself and its external position consciously, it can reason and control itself, and even destroy that state, if it wishes.

The Holy Fathers, especially St. Isaac the Syrian, described also another stage of the prayer given from above, or overcoming a person. At that stage, the soul is also overcome by the prayerful spirit, but it is carried to such contemplative spheres that it forgets its external position, it does not have the power to reason, control or destroy that state, but only to reflect. Such a state is mentioned in the *Patericon*, where a case is described of a person who began praying before dinner and came to himself only in the morning. This is exactly what we call a prayer in rapture, or a reflective/contemplative prayer. In such a state, some have been surrounded by light or their faces illumined, and some have been lifted from the ground. Holy Apostle Paul was taken into heavens in that state.

Clarification of Some Difficult Points

You wrote, "My praying by the prayer book has gotten worse."

This is not a loss; even if you never pick up the prayer book again. A prayer book is something like a phrase book of French, for example. You memorize dialogues until you can fluently express yourself, and after learning to speak you forget those phrases. In the same manner, we need a prayer book until the time comes when the soul itself begins to pray, after which we can lay the prayer book aside. Although, when your own prayer is not proceeding freely, it would be good to set it in motion by praying from the book.

You should fear fascination. It happens to those who grow proud, who think that since they feel warmth in their hearts, it means they have achieved ultimate perfection. However, this is only the beginning, and an unstable beginning it is; for the warmth and satisfaction in the heart can also be of natural origin—the result of heartfelt mindfulness. But one must work and work, wait and wait, until what is natural is replaced with what is granted by God’s grace. We should never consider that we have achieved anything, but rather we must see ourselves as poor, naked, blind, and good for nothing.

You complain of your prayer being meager. But you can pray not only standing in front of icons, since any ascension of your mind and heart to God is true prayer. And if you do that while doing something else, it means you are praying. St. Basil the Great treats the matter of the Apostles’ remaining in unceasing prayer the following way: *no matter what they were doing, they were thinking about God and living in permanent devotion to Him*. That state of their spirituality was in fact their unceasing prayer.

Here is an example. As I have earlier written to you, different demands are made upon working people and those who live idly at home. The main concern of busy people is not to allow wrong feelings while they are doing their job, and to try to devote all their feelings to God. This devotion will then turn into prayer. We read that *Abel’s blood cries out to God*. In the same way, everything we do in devotion to God, cries out



to Him. Someone once sent a dish of food to an elder, who said, “It smells terrible!” But the food was very good, and fresh. They asked him, “Why?” He explained that it was not sent by a good person, and not sent with good feelings. People whose feelings are refined feel this. Thus, apparently, as a good smell comes from good flowers, so do good things done with a good disposition emit an aroma, which rises like incense during church services.

You write about a spiritual dullness of the senses in prayer. That is a great loss! Take the trouble to wake up your feelings. Our chores are only an excuse for shortening the time allocated for prayer, and not an impoverishment of internal prayer—the latter is unpardonable. You can please God with little, but that little should come from your heart. Lift up your mind to Him and say with repentance, *O Lord, have mercy on me! O Lord, bless me! O Lord, help me!* This is a prayerful cry. And if the feeling for God is revived and established in your heart, then that will be an unceasing prayer without

words, and without standing and reading prayers in front of the icons.

Is your conscience troubled because you say prayers hastily? That is justifiable! Why do you listen to the Enemy? He is the one who spurs you on. “Make haste, hurry up,” he says. That is why you do not sense any fruits from your prayer. Make it a rule for yourself to take your time and to say every word of the prayers with understanding, and if possible, with feeling. Assume this task as resolutely as a commander-in-chief who does not bear any objection. The Enemy would suggest you need to do this or that; but you should just say to yourself, “I know that without your seduction. Off with you....” And then you will see how successful your prayer will be. Otherwise you have only the prayer rule, but not the prayer itself. It is only prayer that nourishes your soul.

You should check by the clock the length of time devoted to prayer said slowly, and you will see that you spent no more than several minutes. But **hasty prayer brings much harm**.

When a bad thought suddenly occurs to you, it is an arrow shot by the Enemy. He shoots it trying to distract you from the prayer and to occupy your mind with worldly things. If you start concentrating on that thought, the Enemy will begin contriving various tales in your mind to sully your soul and to incite bad, passionate feelings. That is why there is one ruling guide in this case: Cast that thought away quickly and immediately return your at-

tention to the prayer.

Do all our prayers reach God? A prayer is never wasted, regardless of whether or not the Lord grants us what we ask. Because of our ignorance, we often ask for something that would bring us harm instead of benefit. Not fulfilling that plea, the Lord wills to grant us something else for our work of prayer, and He wants to do it inconspicuously. That is why there is no sense in such utterances as, “You are praying to God, but what have you gotten for it?” The person praying is asking God for a specific thing. If God knows that the fulfillment of that supplication would eventually be to the person’s detriment, He does not grant the wish and thus does him good; for if He had fulfilled that supplication, it would have done him much harm. Beware of the snares all around you in this deceitful world!

On the Jesus Prayer

From time immemorial, ardent Christians repeated short invocations to God so that they might pray unceasingly,

and drive away idle, wandering thoughts. These were prayers were various. Saint John Cassian said that in Egypt, all Christians would say, *O God, help me, O Lord, grant me your help*. St. Joanicus repeated constantly, *My hope is the Father, my refuge is the Son, my shelter is the Holy Spirit; O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee*. Someone else would say, *As a man, I have sinned, but as the bountiful God, have mercy on me*.

Certainly, there were other similar short prayers. With time, the Jesus prayer became established and widely used by everyone: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. The aim of this prayer is the same as for the others: to keep one's mind turned to God. At the same time, one must remember that saying the Jesus prayer is only a tool or activity that shows our strong desire to find the Lord.

Everyone would benefit from saying the Jesus prayer. Those in the monastic rank must repeat it at all times. So there is no danger in the prayer itself, if one says it reverently. What is dangerous is "artistry" (i.e. some artificial tricks) invented to accompany the prayer. For example, while saying the Jesus prayer, some people put their hand on the table and concentrate their attention under the fingers; This is an inconsistent oddity. Or here is yet another such whim: striking the finger of your right hand against the palm of left one and in this way, attempting to concentrate the mind on the prayer.

The first person to write about the "artistic" repetition of the Jesus prayer was St. Gregory of Sinai in the thirteenth century. Tricks like these plunged some people into a dreamy state of enchantment, while others, strange as it sounds, into a constant state of lust. That is why those tricks should be disapproved and condemned resolutely. And we must urge and teach everyone to revere the sweetest name of the Lord in a simple, heartfelt way.

The essence of a prayer is easy to explain. Make your heart and mind stand before the Lord and appeal to Him, saying, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. That will be your prayer work. The Lord will see who prays devotedly and will grant him spiritual prayer according to his zeal. That spiritual prayer is in fact the fruit of the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is all we should say about the Jesus prayer. All those other inventions have nothing to do with it: they are the Enemy's attempts to distract us from prayer.

Conclusion

So, the essence of prayer consists in attentively addressing God and appealing to Him with a warm heartfelt feeling—whether you are expressing your gratitude, repentance or something else in your prayer. If there is no such feeling, then there is no real prayer.

In order to learn how to pray, pray more often and more zealously and you will learn it. You will not need anything else. If you work hard and patiently, with time you will acquire the skill of unceasing prayer. Make it your goal—to seek it, and do seek it. The Lord is near you. Keep God always in

your mind and always try to see the Lord before you, and to venerate Him.

When interfering thoughts come to your mind during prayer, drive them away. If they persist, banish them again... and be that way in everything. This is an act of sobriety. Exert yourself to keep your heart in a religious spirit. When your heart is overcome with a feeling, vain thoughts do not bother it.

We began writing with an effort and the wish to do this work properly. In the same way, we have to learn how to pray through effort and persistence. Prayer will not come by itself—you have to learn it, as if you were rubbing your soul to warm it up. When the warmth comes, your thoughts will calm down, and your prayer will become pure. Everything comes through God's grace. That is why we have to pray to the Lord for Him to grant us prayer.

As far as the prayer rule is concerned, you can choose any of them as long as you are keeping your soul in reverence for God. It would be good to get used to appealing to God with short prayers during the day. The main prayer out of all of them is the Jesus prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*.

Do not forget that the strength of the prayer is the *contrite spirit*; that is, the state of a heart filled with repentance and humility. Commit yourselves to the hands of God and He will never leave you. While praying, you should not try to visualize God or the Mother of God, nor the saints, angels, or any other visions, but just pray being sure that God and the saints hear your prayer. How can they hear it? What use is there in discussing that? They just hear it—that's all. If you start creating various images in your mind, the danger arises of praying to some fantasy. How can we visualize something that we have never seen? Moreover, the state in which the saints abide in that other world is so different from anything familiar to us that all our visualizations are doomed to be fraudulent and false. That is why we should get accustomed to saying prayers without creating any images in our minds.



I saw Hades and what is happening. No one should go there, even for a second. I saw my villagers. I did not reveal to anyone what I saw. Then I lit candles and I prayed. The poor ones started jumping (for joy).

That's where heretics are. The wizards (warlocks), the witches! If the ones alive knew what awaits them! It would have been better if they had not been born. The wicked priests. Oh the poor ones. The blasphemers, the criminals, the debauchers, the dishonorable (adulterers), fornicators, above all the sodomites (homosexuals)! Unbearable suffering! Now married people are doing these things too... Horror! Horror!

Blessed Holy Gerondissa Galaktia (+2021)

“SOMEONE IS IN THE WAY! SOMEONE IS DISRUPTING MY SÉANCE”

ABOUT THE POWER OF THE JESUS PRAYER

By Irina Dmitrieva, translation by Liubov Ambrose.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. How many times have I read about the power of this prayer?! I remember once rereading the lives of St. Cyprian and St. Justina. There is probably no point in retelling it, since everyone is familiar with it, but let me use an incident that happened to Cyprian before his baptism. It left me speechless.

“The prince of darkness himself has demonstrated the great power of evil spirits and has placed his host at the service of the great sorcerer. The power and intensity of his magic has gone to Cyprian’s head. It seemed that he could do anything on this sinful earth. But the Lord put him to shame when he encountered the fragile girl, Justina, and neither the powers of darkness nor spells could have any effect over her. Having lost his patience, he called upon the prince of darkness himself, but even he was powerless.

‘Why? Why can’t you do anything with her?’

‘She speaks the name of the Crucified One.’

‘So what? Just one name and you feel overpowered?! Along with your whole army?!’

‘Yes,’ confessed the prince of evil who seemingly had power over all mankind.

The girl prayed silently as she surrendered herself to the Almighty and humbly whispered the words of prayer to the Lord. *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* And so, the devastated Cyprian burned all his occult books and fled to a monastery. Subsequently, they both met martyrdom.”

Two other incidents dating back to our [in Russia] stormy 1990s surprised me no less than the life of the great magician turned martyr for Christ.

When our country was on the verge of collapse, it was plagued by psychics, magicians, shamans and sorcerers of all kinds. Their hold was so powerful that advertisements about their upcoming appearances were seen at every turn, in every newspaper, and in every club. At the same time, many churches were reopened, but the number of people dying to get a “quick answer” to their problems was ten or

a hundred times greater than that. The well-known psychic Kashpirovsky prophesied from the television screens and his shows attracted every family member, young and old, while Chumak (another such personality as Kashpirovsky) was also working hard, positively charging everything and anything around. People were slowly going mad.

I once read about two incidents related by eyewitnesses. In both cases, the priests asked their parishioners to go and help the people understand where they were going, what those psychic seances were, and what the consequences were. Those who were willing to help had to go to the club where the next magician was scheduled to appear, and try to stop those who were flying like moths straight to a flame.

In the first incident, a woman found herself all alone in front of the Palace of Culture; no one else came. What

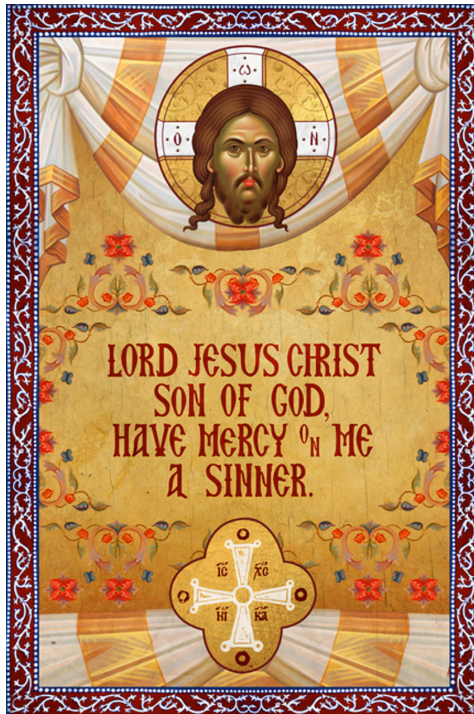
was she supposed to do? What could she do there, all alone? She bought a ticket, sat down in front of the stage, and as soon as the demonic spectacle began, she began to shout accusations urging people to stop. Yes, the show was cancelled. But at what cost! She was summoned to the director’s office, followed by an envenomed psychic. The last thing she remembered was how he stared at her and how an intense pain immediately gripped her head. A month of regular confession and weekly communion helped her to gradually recover her health.

In the second incident, a woman also ended up being alone. No one could come to support her and respond to the church rector’s plea. She wondered what she could do in such a situation? Well, nothing, she decided. She entered the lobby of a movie theater and stayed there. The show was about to start. But then suddenly, breaking the silence inside the auditorium where the audience sat with bated breath, the “homegrown sorcerer” let out a scream.

“Someone’s hindering me!!! Someone is disrupting the séance!!! Find out who it is!!!”

The guards stormed out of the auditorium, and having gone over every corner of the lobby, sprinted out into the street. No one was there—except for the quiet woman, a “gray mouse” in a modest headscarf, who was huddled somewhere in the corner humbly praying the Jesus Prayer. Of course, the guards could not hear her. They returned empty-handed and made a helpless gesture in response to continued cries of discontent from the disgruntled sorcerer.

“No one’s out there.”



“That’s not true, someone keeps interrupting me. I’m under bondage, and I can’t continue.”

“But there’s no one out there,” the guards repeated, “except for an old woman sitting in the corner waiting for someone.”

The séance was ruined. For good! The sorcerer angrily stormed off the stage. The crowds rushed disgruntled out of the auditorium. Then there came out that same modestly dressed woman who humbly prayed to God Almighty.

With these two stories in mind, along with the Life of the holy martyrs Cyprian and Justina, I tested the power of this prayer when I found myself in the crosshairs.

My son’s family and I traveled to an Orthodox camp in the Tunka Valley. His wife and young children were also along. We were late, but we had to make it there before dark. We still had a very long way left to go and so my son was driving at full speed. I was in the front passenger seat, and at my feet was a large thermos that always accompanied me when we traveled. I couldn’t quite understand what had happened to it, but suddenly a large stream of boiling water poured out right onto my feet. Next, sparks flew out of my eyes and I immediately felt the urge to scream at the top of my lungs. What could I do?! All the medical supplies were in the trunk of the car, including the first aid kit and anti-burn ointment, as well as the oil from Holy Unction. It was useless to ask my son to stop for a few minutes because we were in a hurry while packing, and we piled up our luggage, including a bunch of baby supplies to be used on vacation. So, it was impossible to find anything quickly. My legs were on fire, so, clenching my teeth, I chanted the Jesus Prayer, since I had nothing else at hand. The pain began to subside.

I came to my senses when I was in the camp. I looked down at my feet—there was not even a hint of a burn there. The skin looked healthy. The pain was gone. It had disappeared so imperceptibly that I didn’t even notice when I stopped feeling the effects of my burn. That was when, as I recall, a thought popped into my head: Wasn’t this what came to the martyrs’ rescue when they went to be tortured and killed?

There was another important point I learned from these stories: the humble recitation of the Jesus Prayer, combined with the confession of one’s weakness, can work a miracle. Justina humbly appealed to the Lord by calling His name. A woman who came to the sorcerer’s séance had admitted her weakness and infirmity and, holding fast to the name of Jesus, put the sorcerer to shame and disrupted his séance. The only one who shamed herself was the Christian woman who trusted in her own strength...



O God, do not leave me. I have done nothing good in Your sight, but according to Your goodness, let me now make a beginning of good.

Abba Arsenius

ON DISTRACTION

By St. Ignatius (Brianchininov).



The sons of the world consider distraction to be something innocent, but the holy fathers recognize it to be the origin of all evils. The person who has given up to distraction has, concerning all subjects and even the most important ones, a very light most superficial understanding. One who is distracted is usually inconstant. The feelings of his heart usually lack depth and strength; and therefore, they are not solid but transitory. As a butterfly flits from flower to flower so also a distracted person passes from one earthly satisfaction to another, from one vain care to another.

The distracted person is a stranger to love for one’s neighbor. He indifferently looks on the misfortune of men and he lightly lays on them burdens, which are difficult to bear. Sorrows powerfully affect a distracted person, precisely because he does not expect them. He expects only joys. If the sorrow is a strong one but swiftly passing, then the distracted person soon forgets about it in the noise of amusements, but a long lasting sorrow crushes him.

Distraction itself punishes the one who is devoted to it. With time everything bores him; and he as one who has not acquired any sound understandings and fundamental impressions whatsoever is given up to a tormenting endless despondency. As much as distraction is harmful in general, it is especially harmful in the work of God and the work of salvation, which requires constant and intense vigilance and attention. *Watch and pray lest you enter into misfortune*, says the Saviour to his disciples. (Mt 26:41). *I say to all watch*, (Mk 13:21), the Saviour said to all Christianity, and therefore, he said it to us in this time.

He, who is leading a distracted life is directly contradicting the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ with his life. All of the saints diligently fled from distraction. Constantly or at least as often as possible they were concentrated in themselves. They paid attention to the movements of the mind and heart and they directed them according to the testament of the gospel.

The habit of attending to oneself keeps one from distraction, even amongst distractions which is noisy and surrounding one on all sides. The attentive person abides in solitude, even amidst a multitude of people. A certain great father who had learned by experience the benefit of atten-

tion and the harm of distraction said that without intense watchfulness over himself it is impossible to succeed in even one virtue.

The works of God, obviously, ought to be learned and examined with the greatest reverence and attention. Otherwise a person can neither examine them nor know them. The great work of God, the creation of man, and then after his fall, his restoration by redemption, ought to be well known to every Christian. Without this knowledge one cannot know and fulfil the obligations of a Christian; but the knowledge of this great work of God cannot be acquired with distraction.

The commandments of Christ are given not only to the outer man but even more to the inner man. They embrace all of the thoughts and feelings of man, all of his most subtle movements. To keep these commandments is impossible without constant vigilance and deep attention. Vigilance and attention are impossible with a distracted life. Sin and the devil who arms himself with sin subtly creep into the mind and the heart. A person must constantly be on the watch against his invisible enemies. How can he be on this watch when he is given over to distraction?

The distracted person is like a house without doors or gates. No treasure whatsoever can be kept in such a house. It is open for thieves, robbers, and harlots. The distracted life, completely full of earthly cares, gains for a person heaviness just as gluttony and surfeiting do. (cf. Luke 21: 34). Such a person is attached to the earth. He is occupied with only the temporary and vain. The service of God becomes for the distracted person an irrelevant subject. The very thought about this service is something for him wild, full of darkness, and unbearably heavy.

Distraction is nourished by the unceasing effect of the bodily senses. In vain do distracted people ascribe innocence to the distracted life. With this they are unmasking the evil quality of the illness which has seized them. Their illness is so great and has so dulled the feelings of the soul, that the soul, which is sick with this disease, does not even feel its unfortunate condition.

Those who wish to learn attentiveness must forbid themselves all vain occupations. The fulfilling of one's personal and social obligations does not enter into the formation of distraction. Distraction is always united with idleness or with occupations that are so empty that they can be undoubtedly ascribed to idleness. A beneficial occupation, especially an occupation which is one of service, and which is joined with responsibility, does not hinder one in preserving attentiveness to oneself. Rather it guides one to such attentiveness. All the more do monastic obediences lead one to attentiveness when they are fulfilled in the due manner.

Being active is the essential path to vigilance over oneself. This path is prescribed by the Holy Fathers for all persons

who wish to learn attentiveness to themselves. Attentiveness to oneself in deep solitude brings forth precious spiritual fruits; but for this only people of mature spiritual stature are capable, who have advanced in the struggle of piety, and who first learned attentiveness in the active life. In the active life people help a person acquire attentiveness as they remind him of violations of attentiveness. Being in a subordinate position is the best means of learning attention. No one teaches a person to attend to himself as much as his strict and prudent superior.

During your occupations of service amidst people, do not allow yourself to slay time in empty conversations and foolish jokes. In your solitary occupations, forbid yourself daydreaming and soon your conscience will become sharpened and will begin to point out to you every deviation into distraction as a violation of the law of the gospel and even as a violation of good sense. Amen.



Do not grieve for me, my child, but struggle ardently. Struggle in silence, prayer, and mourning, and you will find the elements of eternal life. Compel yourself: close your mouth both in joy and in mourning. This is a mark of experience, so that both states are kept safely. For the mouth does not know how to guard riches.

Silence is the greatest and most fruitful virtue; for this reason the God-bearing Fathers call it *sinlessness*. Silence and stillness, one and the same thing.

The first divine fruit of silence is mourning—godly sorrow, joyful sadness. Afterwards come luminous thoughts, which bring the holy flow of life-streaming tears, through which the second baptism occurs and by which the soul is purified, shines, and becomes like the angels.

Where shall I place, child of Jesus, the spiritual visions springing forth from silence? How the eyes of the intellect are opened and see Jesus with sweetness greater than that of honey! What a novel wonder is worked from lawful silence and an attentive intellect!

You know these things, so struggle. I have revealed a little to you; compel yourself and you will find yet greater. I keep you in my prayers just as I promised you. I wonder, are you ready?

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

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

PHANAR'S THREE TRAGICALLY GLARING SIGNS OF PRIDE

THE PHANAR HEAD SAID HE “DOESN'T CARE” ABOUT SEVERED COMMUNION WITH THE ROC. WHY DID ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED BISHOPS OF THE CHURCH SAY SO, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

By Metropolitan Varsonofy of Vinnytsia and Bar.

Speaking to distinguished members of the Greek Diaspora in the United States, Patriarch Bartholomew claimed he “does not care” that his name had been excluded from the *diptychs* of the Russian Orthodox Church. The phrase used by the Patriarch of the Great Church of Constantinople is quite improper. According to the Russian-speaking Greeks, who are equally fluent in both languages, the words of Patriarch Bartholomew “σκασίλα μου” are close to rudeness, and their translation into Russian as “I don't care” is quite soft. The theatrical pause of the head of Phanar at this moment and the laughter of the Greek audience are also very revealing.

Pat. Bartholomew seems to have stopped literally one step away from using obscene language. It is possible that down the road he will say something “more” without restraint. Why do we think so? Because we have to state with big regret that once one of the most authoritative patriarchs of the world, the hierarch of the Church of Christ is gradually becoming a person who is increasingly departing from the Gospel and the teachings of Christ. This can be evidenced not only by his “I-don't-care” response to the issue of the unity of the Church, but also by many other examples, which we will discuss below. Why is this happening and what has caused such outright spiritual degradation?

“Stubbornness of the Will” and Acknowledgement of Mistakes

One of the Church Fathers said that *heresy is not a delusion of the mind but stubbornness of the will*. Indeed, a lot of heretics were well-educated people and could not help but understand that their teachings went against the teachings of Christ and the Church, but still adhered to their heresies. Why? Because of stubbornness of the will, i.e. because of pride.

In other words, admitting one's mistake requires abandoning pride, which has always been a painful solution for heretics, as evidenced by the history of the Church. After all, they believed that they were better than others, smarter, more educated, and therefore no one dared to teach or correct them. As a result, Arius, Nestorius, and Macedonius denigrated their names and entered the history of the Church as heresiarchs. It seems that the same problem concerns Patriarch Bartholomew.

By granting the *Tomos* to the OCU, he committed a deliberate canonical crime. The head of Phanar explained his action by

the “need” and “benefit” for the Church. That is, according to him, the “autocephaly” of the OCU was to overcome the split in Ukraine, unite the “three branches of Ukrainian Orthodoxy” and bring millions of Ukrainians to the Church of Christ (we will not mention the personal interests of the Patriarchate of Constantinople). However, none of this happened. And it is impossible not to see it. There is not even a unification of Ukrainian schismatics among themselves!

As is known, one of the main principles of the Church's existence as an institution is the “one city - one bishop” principle, worded at the First Ecumenical Council. According to the logic of canon law, with the formation of the OCU, the dioceses of the UOC-KP and the UAOC in one territory had to unite into one, whereas one of the “ruling bishops” had to concede and make way for another. But nothing of that kind happened. There are still two dioceses and two “bishops” in each regional center. Moreover, in Vinnytsia, where after the split of Metropolitan Simeon (Shostatsky), the former ruling bishop of the Vinnytsia diocese of the UOC, there are three dioceses in the structure of the OCU: Vinnytsia-Bar, Vinnytsia-Bratslav, and Vinnytsia-Tulchyn. Despite the difference in names, all three structures have their sees in Vinnytsia, with the “ruling bishops” also based there.

In other words, the autocephaly of the OCU did not fulfill its mission for which it was issued by Phanar. Moreover, it has split the Orthodox world, as some Churches and bishops recognize its legitimacy, others do not.

Does Patriarch Bartholomew see this? Yes. Does he understand what's going on? Of course. Then why doesn't he annul his decision on the *Tomos* of the OCU as, for example, he abolished the autonomy of the Archdiocese of the Western parishes? Stubbornness of the will rather than delusion of the mind. It means that pride does not allow the head of Phanar to make the only right decision in this situation. What gives us the right to say this? Comparison of Patriarch Bartholomew's actions with what the holy fathers say about pride.

The First Sign of Pride: Exaltation

Pride is a mortal sin and passion, which has a progressive character, like any passion, and necessarily affects all aspects of a person's spiritual life. St. John Chrysostomos wrote that *pride is the beginning of sin*, because *every sin begins with it and is rooted in it*.

Abba John Cassian the Roman speaks of pride as follows: *This passion, although the last in the struggle against vices and in the order of calculation, is the first in importance and time of origin: this beast is the fiercest, most ferocious of all previous ones, and tempts particularly perfect and those who have almost achieved the top of virtue to destroy them with cruel remorse*. Pride is such a great evil that deserves to have neither the Angel nor other opposing forces as its adversary, but God Himself. The Venerable Anthony the Great echoes him: *All sins are abominable before God, but the most abominable of all is the pride of the heart*.

How do we recognize a proud person, what signs indicate that a person has succumbed to this passion?

Let us listen to St. Basil the Great: *The beginning of pride is usually contempt. He who despises and considers others to be nothing—some poor, others of low birth, others ignorant, as a result of such contempt comes to the point that he considers himself wise, prudent, rich, noble and strong.*

And now let us compare the words of the great saint with some of the statements of Patriarch Bartholomew. For example, commenting on the disagreement of the Russian Church with the recognition of the OCU, the head of Phanar said that it was “a slanderous campaign against the historical responsibility of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which brought them Christianity and made them civilized people.”

These words savor of the exaltation, which St. Basil pointed to. It is confirmed not only by Patriarch Bartholomew, but also by his closest associates. For example, one of the oldest bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Metropolitan Apostolos (Dannilidis) of Derkoi, said literally the following: “I read with disgust in the media the anti-church and anti-Greek statements of representatives of the Russian presence in Ukraine and with holy indignation, I answer: Put your hands and mouth down from the Successor of those who made you Christians! You owe everything you are to what you so disparagingly call: Constantinople! For us, it is the one City that has stood here

for centuries now and only benefits all of you who celebrate the thousand, one thousand, and thirty-three years of your Christianity, without mentioning anywhere who was the one who baptized you and gave you what you boast you have. We have given you light, you are returning it to us in darkness! We gave you grace; you give us ungratefulness! We brought you culture, you insult us!”

We can cite other statements of Patriarch Bartholomew and other representatives of Phanar, who constantly appeal to their role in the history of the Russian and other Churches. Phanariots believe that the very fact of receiving the faith of Christ from the hands of two Greek saints is already a sufficient reason to occupy a special position in the Church. But the main thing in the Church is not ethnic origin, the main thing is not to be the heirs of a particular nation or a civilization, but to be similar to the saints, to be of Christ’s origin. After all, didn’t the Jews tell Christ that *we are children of Abraham*? But do you remember what Christ answered them? *If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.* (Jn 8:39).

The Second Sign of Pride: Craving for Honors

Saint Basil the Great points to another sign of a proud man: *How do you recognize a proud man? It is known by the fact that he seeks preferableness.*

Therefore, in addition to exaltation, the second sign of pride is the desire for honors and preferences. Let us cite the words of Patriarch Bartholomew: “We have a responsibility to lead the Local Autocephalous Churches as an elder brother of one family.” Or “Those who question the rights and responsibilities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in fact, question their very existence and identity, the very structure of Orthodoxy.”

Elsewhere, the head of Phanar speaks of the place he thinks he should occupy in the Church: “I want to ask: isn’t there a first diocese in every diocese? Isn’t there a First in every church? Then why shouldn’t he (the First, *Ed.*) be in the Local Churches? Since there is the First starting from the smallest structure, which is a parish, to the Local Church as a whole, how is it possible that the Local Churches do not have their First?”

Here are the words of Metropolitan Amphilochios of Adrianople: “There is an opinion that the Church is headed by Christ. But in reality the Church is headed by the Ecumenical Patriarch.” However, in the Church the First, i.e. Her Head, has always been, is and will be the Lord Jesus Christ. Phanar’s disagreement with this capitalized truth only points to the disease that has afflicted

The passion of pride arises from two kinds of ignorance, and when these two kinds of ignorance unite together they form a single confused state of mind. For a man is proud only if he is ignorant both of divine help and of human weakness. Therefore pride is a lack of knowledge both in the divine and in the human spheres. For the denial of two true premises results in a single false affirmation.

St. Maximos the Confessor

this once Great Church.

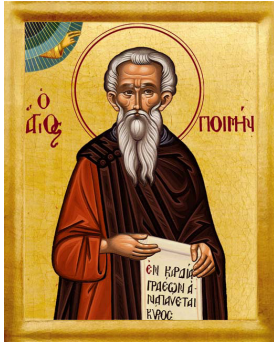
The Third Sign of Pride: Resentment

To the exaltation and desire for honors, St. John Chrysostom adds a third sign of pride—resentment: *A proud person is willing to take revenge for offenses. The proud cannot indifferently tolerate insults from either the higher or the lower; and whoever does not tolerate resentment calmly is unable to endure misfortune.*

Again, in an interview with the Greek newspaper *Politis*, Patriarch Bartholomew stated literally the following: “We are definitely upset by the initiative to hold a ‘fraternal meeting’ in Amman.” It would seem—why is the Orthodox patriarch upset because of the meeting of the Primates of the Local Churches? Because they do not agree with his decision to recognize the OCU, because he did not gather them, because some of them refused to take part in the Council of Crete, which was organized by Phanar.

In general, Patriarch Bartholomew has repeatedly hinted that the decision to recognize the OCU was prompted by the refusal

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
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of the Russian Church to participate in the Council of Crete. Here is just one of these statements: “Now they are asking for the Synod (in order to consider the decision to recognize the OCU, *Ed.*)! They should have recognized the Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete and they should also have come there. But they did not!”

How can we not recall the reasoning about the pride of the Venerable John Cassian the Roman: *Pride is characterized by the following signs: at first it's loud in conversation, annoyed in silence, bursts into laughter in merriment, gets unreasonably upset in the time of sorrow, obstinate in the answer, frivolous in speaking; words are expressed without any involvement of the heart, recklessly. Pride has no patience, it is alien to love, boldly insults but cannot stand being insulted. It is not inclined to obey if something contradicts its desire and will. It is adamantly resistant in accepting admonitions; weak in renouncing its will, very reluctant to obey others, always tries to insist on its own opinion and averse to another opinion; therefore, having become incapable of accepting salvific advice, it relies more on its own opinion rather than on the judgment of elders or spiritual fathers.*

Pride as a Spiritual Disease

The Orthodox are now getting accustomed to the fact that there is a shocking statement from Patriarch Bartholomew every month or two. It is probably not worth quoting all those words when Patriarch Bartholomew resorted to bold insults, was reluctant to accept admonition, tried to insist on his opinion, and relied on his own judgment more than that of the elders or spiritual fathers. All these statements were vigorously discussed in the Orthodox community.

It is obvious that the spiritual state of the head of the Church of Constantinople is very similar to the one described by the Venerable John Cassian the Roman. But could it be otherwise? After all, having decided to issue the *Tomos* to unrepentant Ukrainian schismatics and then having communion with them, the patriarch simply could not avoid being infected with the spiritual disease all the schismatics suffer from: pride. It is this passion that prevents a person from saying one simple word “forgive me,” it is this passion that does not allow him to admit his mistakes and prevents him from embarking on the path of correction.

If this is true when we speak of an ordinary Christian, then with regard to Patriarch Bartholomew the problem of spiritual dependence on pride is only exacerbated many times over. St. John Cassian wrote that *pride razes the high walls of holiness to the ground of vices and leaves no freedom to the conquered soul. Moreover, the richer the captured soul is, the more severely it is subjected to the yoke of slavery and is completely exposed by the pride in the end, all the property of virtues having been cruelly plundered.*

We dare say that Patriarch Bartholomew is a man who is captivated by passion and, according to St. Basil the Great, he *cannot be healed of this passion unless he gives up all thoughts of his preferableness*, especially since he is a monk, and it is always salvific for a monk and a Christian to fight against exaltation and pride. Because, as St. John Chrysostomos said, *there is no evil equal to pride, because it turns a man into a demon; a brazen, blasphemous oath-breaker.*

Let us add: it turns him and into the one who “does not care” about the unity of the Church of Christ.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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ON THE DORMITION OF OUR PURE LADY THEOTOKOS & EVER-VIRGIN MARY

By St. Gregory Palamas (edited for length).

Both love and duty today fashion my homily for your charity. If there be any among those things that bind by obligation and love and can be narrated with praise for the Church, it is the great deed of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God.

If death of the righteous man is honorable (Pss 115:6) and the memory of the just man is celebrated with songs of praise (Prov 10:7), how much more ought we to honor with great praises the memory of the holiest of the saints, she by whom all holiness is afforded to the saints! Even so we celebrate today her holy Dormition or translation to another life, whereby, while being a little lower than angels (Pss 8:6), she has ascended incomparably higher than the angels and the archangels and all the super-celestial hosts that are found beyond them.

For her sake the God-possessed prophets pronounce prophecies, miracles are wrought to foreshow that future Marvel of the whole world, the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The flow of generations and circumstances

journeys to the destination of that new mystery wrought in her; the statutes of the Spirit provide beforehand types of the future truth. The end, or rather the beginning and root of those divine wonders and deeds is the annunciation to the supremely virtuous Joachim and Anna of what was to be accomplished: namely, that they who were barren from youth would beget in deep old age her that would bring forth without seed Him that was timelessly begotten of God the Father before the ages.

A vow was given by those who marvelously begot her to return her to the Giver; so accordingly the Mother of God strangely changed her dwelling from the house of her father to the house of God while still an infant. She passed not a few years in the Holy of Holies itself, wherein under the care of an angel, she enjoyed ineffable nourishment such as even Adam did not succeed in tasting. But after that unutterable nourishment, a most mystical economy of courtship came to pass, a strange greeting surpassing speech which the Archangel addressed to her, and disclosures and salutations from God which overturn the condemnation of Eve and Adam and remedy the curse laid on them, transforming it into a blessing.

The King of all hath desired a mystic beauty of the Ever-Virgin, as David

ANNOUNCEMENT

After 21 years of publication and approximately 4,000 pages of Orthodox content, the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes to let "Orthodox Heritage" readers know that our publication will cease at the end of 2023. The last issue will be printed-published this December. We intend to upload all 21 years of "Orthodox Heritage" issues onto our website (<http://www.orthodoxheritage.org>). Their content is timeless and we hope and pray that

Orthodox faithful will refer to them in the future.

Our work will continue in other areas involving spiritual and material almsgiving. We thank all of our supporters as our publishing work was enabled only through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide.

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
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 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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foretold (Pss 44:11) and, *He bowed the heavens and came down* (Pss 17:9) and overshadowed her, or rather, the enhyposstatic Power of the Most High dwelt in her.

Thus the Word of God took up His dwelling in the Theotokos in an inexpressible manner and proceeded from her, bearing flesh. He appeared upon the earth and lived among men, deifying our nature and granting us, after the words of the divine Apostle, *things which angels desire to look into*. (1 Pet 1:12). This is the encomium which transcends nature and the surpassingly glorious glory of the Ever-Virgin, glory for which all mind and word suffice not, though they be angelic. But who can relate those things which came to pass after His ineffable birth? For, as she cooperated and suffered with that exalting condescension (*kenosis*) of the Word of God, she was also rightly glorified and exalted together with Him, ever adding thereto the supernatural increase of mighty deeds.

And after the ascent into the heavens of Him that was incarnate of her, she rivaled those great works, surpassing mind and speech, which through Him were her own, with a most valiant and diverse asceticism, and with her prayers and care for the entire world, her precepts and encouragements which she gave to God's heralds sent throughout the whole world. She was herself both a support and a comfort while she was both heard and seen, and while she labored with the rest in every way for the preaching of the Gospel. In such wise she led a most strenuous manner of life proclaimed in mind and speech.

The death of the Theotokos was thus also life-bearing, translating her into a celestial and immortal life and its commemoration is a joyful event and festivity for the entire world. It not merely renews the memory of the wondrous

deeds of the Mother of God, but also adds thereto the strange gathering at her all-sacred burial of all the sacred apostles conveyed from every nation, the God-revealing hymns of these God-possessed ones, and the solicitous presence of the angels, and their choir, and liturgy round about her, going on before, following after, assisting, opposing, defending, being defended.

They labored and chanted together to their uttermost with those who venerated that life-originating and God-receiving body, the saving balsam for our race and the boast of all creation; but they strove against and opposed with a secret hand the Jews who rose up against and attacked that body with hand and will set upon theomachy. All the while the Son of the Ever-Virgin, was present, into Whose hands she rendered her divinely-minded spirit, through which and with which its companion, her body, was translated into the domain of celestial and endless life.

In truth, many have been allotted divine favor and glory and power, as David says, *But to me exceedingly honorable are Thy friends, O Lord, their principalities are made exceeding strong. I will count them and they shall be multiplied more than the sand*. (Pss 138:17). And according to Solomon, *many daughters have attained wealth, many have wrought valiantly; but she doth exceed, she hath surpassed all, both men and women*. (Prov 31:29).

For while she alone stood between God and the whole human race, God became the Son of Man and made men sons of God; she made earth heavenly, she deified the human race, and she alone of all women was shown forth to be a mother by nature and the Mother of God, transcending every law of nature, and by her ineffable childbirth, the Queen of all creation, both terrestrial and celestial. Thus

she exalted those under her through herself, and, showing while on earth an obedience to things heavenly rather than things earthly, she partook of more excellent desserts and of superior power, and from the ordination which she received from heaven by the Divine Spirit, she became the most sublime of the sublime and the supremely blest Queen of a blessed race.

But now the Mother of God has her dwelling in Heaven. She *stands at the right of the King of all clothed in a vesture wrought with gold and arrayed with divers colors* (Pss 44:9), as the psalmic prophecy says concerning her. By *vesture wrought with gold* understand her divinely radiant body arrayed with divers colors of every virtue. She alone in her body, glorified by God, now enjoys the celestial realm together with her Son. For earth and grave and death did not hold forever her life-originating and God-receiving body—the dwelling more favored than Heaven and the Heaven of heavens.

If, therefore, her soul, which was an abode of God's grace, ascended into Heaven, how could it be that the body which not only received in itself the pre-eternal and only-begotten Son of God, the ever-flowing Well-spring of grace, but also manifested His Body by way of birth, should not have also been taken up into Heaven? Or, if while yet three years of age and not yet possessing that super-celestial indwelling, she seemed not to bear our flesh as she abode in the Holy of Holies, and after she became supremely perfect even as regards her body by such great marvels, how indeed could that body suffer corruption and turn to earth? How could such a thing be conceivable for anyone who thinks reasonably?

Hence, the body which gave birth is glorified together with what was born of it with God-befitting glory, and the *ark of holiness* (Pss 131:8) is resurrected, after the prophetic ode, together with Christ Who formerly arose from the dead on the third day. The strips of linen and the burial clothes afford the apostles a demonstration of the Theotokos' resurrection from the dead, since they remained alone in the tomb and at the apostles' scrutiny they were found there, even as it had been with the Master. There

was no necessity for her body to delay yet a little while in the earth, as was the case with her Son and God, and so it was taken up straightway from the tomb to a super-celestial realm, from whence she flashes forth most brilliant and divine illuminations and graces, irradiating earth's region; thus she is worshipped and marvelled at and hymned by all the faithful.

It was meet that she who contained Him that fills all things and who surpasses all should outstrip all and become by her virtue superior to them in the eminence of her dignity. Those things which sufficed the most excellent among men that have lived throughout the ages in order to reach such excellency, and that which all those graced of God have separately, both angels and men, she combines, and these she alone brings to fulfillment and surpasses. And this she now has beyond all: That she has become immortal after death and alone dwells together with her Son and God in her body. For this reason she pours forth from thence abundant grace upon those who honor her—for she is a receptacle of great graces—and she grants us even our ability to look towards her.

Because of her goodness she lavishes sublime gifts upon us and never ceases to provide a profitable and abundant tribute in our behalf. If a man looks towards this concurrence and dispensing of every good, he will say that the Virgin is for virtue and those who live virtuously, what the sun is for perceptible light and those who live in it.

But if he raises the eye of his mind to the Sun which rose for men from this Virgin in a wondrous manner, the Sun which by nature possesses all those qualities which were added to her nature by grace, he shall straightway call the Virgin a heaven. The excellent inheritance of every good which she has been allotted so much exceeds in holiness the portion of those who are divinely graced both under and above heaven as the heaven is greater than the sun and the sun is more radiant than heaven.

Who can describe in words thy divinely resplendent beauty, O Virgin Mother of God? Thoughts and words are inadequate to define thine attributes, since they surpass



mind and speech. Yet it is meet to chant hymns of praise to thee, for thou art a vessel containing every grace, the fullness of all things good and beautiful, the tablet and living icon of every good and all uprightness, since thou alone hast been deemed worthy to receive the fullness of every gift of the Spirit. Thou alone didst bear in thy womb Him in Whom are found the treasuries of all these gifts and didst become a wondrous tabernacle for Him; hence thou didst depart by way of death to immortality and art translated from earth to Heaven, as is proper, so that thou mightest dwell with Him eternally in a super-celestial abode. From thence thou ever carest diligently for thine inheritance and by thine unsleeping intercessions with Him, thou showest mercy to all.

To the degree that she is closer to God than all those who have drawn nigh unto Him, by so much has the Theotokos been deemed worthy of greater audience. I do not speak of men alone, but also of the angelic hierarchies themselves.

Isaiah writes with regard to the supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts: *And the Seraphim stood round about Him* (Isa 6:2); but David says concerning her, *at Thy right hand stood the queen.* (Pss 44:8). Do you see the difference in position? From this comprehend also the difference in the dignity of their station. The Seraphim are round about God, but the only Queen of all is near beside Him.

She is both wondered at and praised by God Himself, proclaiming her, as it were, by the mighty deeds enacted with respect to Him, and saying, as it is recorded in the Song of Songs, *How fair is my companion* (Cant 6:4), she is more radiant than light, more arrayed with flowers than the divine gardens, more adorned than the whole world, visible and invisible. She is not merely a companion but she also stands at God's right hand, for where Christ sat in the heavens, that is, at the *right hand of majesty* (Heb 1:3), there too she also takes her stand, having ascended now from earth into the heavens. Not merely does she love and is loved in return more than every other, according to the very laws of nature, but she is truly His Throne, and wherever the King sits, there His Throne is set also. And Isaiah beheld this throne amidst the choir of Cherubim and called it *high* and *exalted* (Isa 6:1), wishing to make explicit how the station of the Mother of God far exceeds that of the celestial hosts.



For this reason the Prophet introduces the angels themselves as glorifying the God come from her, saying, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His Place* (Ezek. 3:12). Jacob the patriarch, beholding this throne by way of types (*enigmata*), said, *How dreadful is this Place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven.* (Gen. 28:17). But David, joining himself to the multitude of the saved, who are like the strings of a musical instrument or like differing voices from different generations made harmonious in one faith through the Ever-Virgin, sounds a most melodic strain in praise of her, saying: *I shall commemorate thy name in every generation and generation. Therefore shall peoples give praise unto thee for ever, and unto the ages of ages.*

Do you see how the entire creation praises the Virgin Mother, and not only in times past, but *forever, and unto the ages of ages*? Thus it is evident that throughout the whole course of the ages, she shall never cease from benefiting all creation, and I mean not only created nature seen round about us, but also the very supreme commanders of the heavenly hosts, whose nature is immaterial and transcendent. Isaiah shows us clearly that it is only through her that they together with us both partake of and touch God, that Nature which defies

touch, for he did not see the Seraphim take the *coal* from the altar without mediation, but with *tongs*, by means of which the coal touched the prophetic lips and purified them. (Isa 6:6-7).

Moses beheld the tongs of that great vision of Isaiah when he saw the bush aflame with fire, yet unconsumed. And who does not know that the Virgin Mother is that very bush and those very tongs, she who herself (though an archangel assisted) conceived the Divine Fire without being consumed, Him that taketh away the sins of the world, Who through her touched mankind and by that ineffable touch and union cleansed us entirely. Therefore, she only is the frontier between created and uncreated nature, and there is no man that shall come to God except he be truly illumined through her, that Lamp truly radiant with divinity, even as the Prophet says, *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be shaken.* (Pss 45:5).

If recompense is bestowed according to the measure of love for God, and if the man who loves the Son is loved

of Him and of His Father and becomes the dwelling place of Both, and They mystically abide and walk in him, as it is recorded in the Master's Gospel, who, then, will love Him more than His Mother? For He was her only-begotten Son, and moreover she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of Him that had partaken of her flesh might be shared with her twofold. And who will the only-begotten Son love more than His Mother, He that came forth from Her ineffably without a father in this last age even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages? How indeed could He that descended to fulfill the Law not multiply that honor due to His Mother over and above the ordinances of the Law?

Hence, as it was through the Most Holy Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us, appeared upon earth and lived among men, being invisible to all before this time, so likewise in the endless age to come, without her mediation, every emanation of illuminating divine light, every revelation of the mysteries of the Godhead, every form of spiritual gift, will exceed the capacity of every created being. She alone has received the all-pervading fullness of Him that filleth all things, and through her all may now contain it, for she dispenses it according to the power of each, in proportion and to the degree of the purity of each.

Hence she is the treasury and overseer of the riches of the Godhead. For it is an everlasting ordinance in the heavens that the inferior partake of what lies beyond being, by the mediation of the superior, and the Virgin Mother is incomparably superior to all. It is through her that as many as partake of God do partake, and as many as know God understand her to be the enclosure of the Uncontainable One, and as many as hymn God praise her together with Him. She is the cause of what came before her, the champion of what came after her and the agent of things eternal. She is the substance of the prophets, the principle of the apostles, the firm foundation of the martyrs and the premise of the teachers of the Church. She is the glory of those upon earth, the joy of celestial beings, the adornment of all creation. She is the beginning and the source and root of unutterable good things; she is the summit and consummation of everything holy.

O divine, and now heavenly, Virgin, how can I express all things which pertain to thee? How can I glorify the treasury of all glory? Merely thy memory sanctifies whoever keeps it, and a mere movement towards thee makes the mind more translucent, and thou dost exalt it straightway to the Divine. The eye of the intellect is through thee made limpid, and through thee the spirit of a man is illumined by the sojourning of the Spirit of God, since thou hast become the steward of the treasury of divine gifts and their vault, and

this, not in order to keep them for thyself, but so that thou mightest make created nature replete with grace.

Indeed, the steward of those inexhaustible treasuries watches over them so that the riches may be dispensed; and what could confine that wealth which wanes not? Richly, therefore, bestow thy mercy and thy graces upon all thy people, this thine inheritance, O Lady! Dispel the perils which menace us. See how greatly we are expended by our own and by aliens, by those without and by those within. Uplift all by thy might: mollify our fellow citizens one with another and scatter those who assault us from without—like savage beasts. Measure out thy succor and healing in proportion to our passions, apportioning abundant grace to our souls and bodies, sufficient for every necessity.

And although we may prove incapable of containing thy bounties, augment our capacity and in this manner bestow them upon us, so that being both saved and fortified by thy grace, we may glorify the pre-eternal Word Who was incarnate of thee for our sakes, together with His unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the endless ages.

Amen.



What shall we say, O Queen? What words shall we use? What praise shall we pour upon thy sacred and glorified head, thou giver of good gifts and of riches, the pride of the human race, the glory of all creation, through whom it is truly blessed.

He whom nature did not contain in the beginning, was born of thee. The Invisible One is contemplated face to face. O Word of God, do Thou open my slow lips, and give their utterances Thy richest blessing; inflame us with the grace of Thy Spirit, through whom fishermen became orators, and ignorant men spoke supernatural wisdom, so that our feeble voices may contribute to thy loved Mother's praises, even though greatness should be extolled by misery.

She, the chosen one of an ancient race, by a predetermined counsel and the good pleasure of God the Father, who had begotten Thee in eternity immaterially, brought Thee forth in the latter times, Thou who art propitiation and salvation, justice and redemption, life of life, light of light, and true God of true God.

St. John of Damascus

SPIRITUAL PRIESTHOOD AND THE REMISSION OF SINS

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

Sacred (Ordained) Priesthood

My book “Orthodox Psychotherapy” emphasizes the great value of the Mystery of the Priesthood. Priesthood is highly prized. It is described in the writings of the holy Fathers of the Church, particularly in the teaching of St. John Chrysostom, who has been rightly called an expert on the priesthood. As well as observing and analyzing the value of the priesthood, however, we need to discuss the basic requirements that anyone receiving this great gift must meet.

Spiritual priesthood is a royal gift of grace and activates the grace of holy Baptism. It is the basis and essential prerequisite for priesthood (Bishop, Presbyter, Deacon). The tradition of the Church regarded the three degrees of priesthood as corresponding to the three stages of the spiritual life: purification (Deacon), illumination (Presbyter) and theosis (Bishop). This is analyzed in detail in Orthodox Psychotherapy.

It is impossible to overlook the great dignity of the (ordained) priesthood. However, according to the teaching of St. John Chrysostom, many ordinations *do not proceed from the grace of God, but are due to human ambition*. That is to say, many candidates put themselves forward, rather than being called by God or at least by the people. St. Symeon the New Theologian describes as *self-ordained* those Clergy who draw near and take the grace of priesthood without first having been purified and healed. He is not referring here to those who simply pretend to be Priests, but to those who have received the Mystery of Priesthood in spite of being impure. He is speaking about Priests who do not exercise this ministry in response to a divine calling, but are motivated by passions of vainglory and pride. *They set themselves up as fathers and teachers and become self-ordained apostles, without having received the grace of the Holy Spirit as they did, or being illuminated by the light of knowledge*. This teaching is linked with the teaching of St. John Chrysostom, who writes, *God does not ordain all, but He acts through all*.

The noble work of Priests is not to be underrated, but it should be emphasized, as St. Symeon the New Theologian says, that there are two kinds of *laying-on of hands*. One is on the human level; it comes *from men*. The other is divine and is the work of the Holy Spirit. Writing about his spiritual father, St. Symeon the Pious, St. Symeon the New

Theologian says, *I was a disciple of such a father who had not been ordained by men, but who by the hand of God, by the Holy Spirit, enlisted me as a disciple and ordered me to accept ordination from men according to the prescribed form—I who for a long time had been moved by the Holy Spirit to long for this*. His Elder became a partaker of His [Christ's] grace and His gifts, and received from Him the power to bind and loose sins, *inspired by the Holy Spirit*.

This passage makes clear two points. The first is that there are two kinds of *laying-on of hands* and the second is that St. Symeon the Pious himself did not undervalue the Mystery of Ordination. That is why, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he urged his spiritual child to accept the Mystery of Ordination.

Spiritual Priesthood

Apart from Sacred (ordained) priesthood, there is also what is called spiritual priesthood. “Orthodox Psychotherapy” has a whole section analyzing this important subject. It is explained there that a person who has noetic prayer and prays for the whole world belongs to this spiritual clergy. I write:

“The faithful who have noetic prayer have spiritual priesthood, especially those who have reached such a degree of grace as to pray for the whole world. This is the spiritual liturgy on behalf of the world. The prayers of these people, who sacrifice themselves praying on behalf of all, sustain the world and heal men. Therefore by prayer they become exorcists, driving

out the demons which rule in human societies. This the great work of those who pray unceasingly for the whole world.”

According to St. Gregory of Sinai, noetic prayer, which is a sign that a person has reached the stage of the illumination of the nous, is *the mystical liturgy of the nous*. When the heart has the grace of the Holy Spirit within it and the nous is free from thoughts, it is a true sanctuary. He writes: *A true sanctuary, even before the future life, is a heart free from thoughts, made active by the Spirit*.

St. Symeon the New Theologian also refers to the issue of spiritual priesthood in one of his letters, as set out by Venizelos Christoforidis in his doctoral thesis entitled, “Spiritual Fatherhood According to Symeon the New Theologian.”

Someone asked St. Symeon, “Is it possible for people to confess their sins to monks who are not Priests?” St. Symeon, in reply to this question, begins by acknowledging that the power to remit sins belongs to Priests, but not to all of them. This power belongs to those Priests who have been called to this



ministry by God and have been inwardly reborn. *The power to loose and bind and celebrate the Eucharist and teach is not given to those who were chosen and ordained only by men. "No man taketh this honour unto himself," says the Scripture, "but he that is called of God." It does not refer to the one who is chosen by men, but the one who is preordained and appointed by God for this purpose.* On the other hand, those who have risen to high office in the Church by means of money and other unethical means do not have the right to remit sins, because *they are thieves, stealing from men and through men, and robbers, as the Lord said.*

After this clarification, St. Symeon the New Theologian goes on to say that monks who have been regenerated and have received the grace of the Holy Spirit can remit sins. Thus he accepts that, *It is possible for us to confess to a monk who is not a Priest.* This confession will be discussed later. However, the answer given by St. Symeon the New Theologian should be examined in accordance with the question posed to him: "Is it possible for people to confess their sins to monks who are not Priests?" The Saint's answer is positive. He asserts that we can receive remission of sins not just from Priests but from monks. *In the same way, these things are also attributed to monks. Through confession and the forgiveness of sins granted by [monks] to [penitents], they receive forgiveness.*

Archbishop Basil Krivocheine^[*] observes that, *The teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian on the subject of loosing and binding, as expressed in his Letter "On Confession," is a development of his views, based on his personal experience of spiritual birth and mystical resurrection, and on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as well as on the conscious awareness of the acquisition of grace.* The same author also notes that this viewpoint, which has been forgotten in our era and may surprise and scandalize those who hear it for the first time, *was never condemned either directly or indirectly by the Church.* On the contrary, it is cultivated even today in monastic environments, so that *the ancient manuscripts do not omit the first Letter, which contains this teaching from their list of the complete works of St. Symeon.* There was actually a tendency to emphasize this teaching. For that reason, when doubts were expressed about it about it, they presented the Epistle as the work of St. John of Damascus. *Precisely in order to give it greater authenticity and to defend it from critics, they put it under the protection of someone whose Orthodox prestige was beyond all doubt: St. John of Damascus.*

The assertion that monks who have the energy of the All-Holy Spirit within them, and so constitute the true priesthood of divine grace, can forgive sins has to be considered in the light of certain essential presuppositions.

The first presupposition is that they stay within the Church and accept all its teaching and its life. When someone consciously cuts himself off from the Church and enters the ranks of the heretics, spiritual priesthood is out of the question.

Secondly, monks who belong in this category greatly honour and respect members of the Sacred (ordained) priesthood. We see this in many contemporary monks of the Holy Mountain, who revere Priests and Bishops to the point that, even though they are Elders in age and in grace, they nevertheless prostrate themselves to the ground before them and regard it as a special favour to receive their blessing.

I once visited the Holy Mountain and stayed in a Monastery for a while, and a certain Elder, who was 90 years old, did not realize that I was a Priest. Some time later, when he was told that I was a Priest not a monk, he was unbelievably upset because he had not been able to show me the respect due to the priesthood and had been deprived of the blessing of the grace of the priesthood. Monks endowed with divine grace revere all the gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on the Church.

The third presupposition is that, although they belong to this true priesthood, these monks do not celebrate the Mysteries of the Church or administer the Mystery of Confession in the way that Priests do. They do not wear a stole or read the prayer of absolution. They give people guidance and help them to understand more clearly the problems troubling them. They set their nous free and show them the way to deification. This is basically the remission that they offer.

Remission of Sins

The subject of the remission of sins needs to be examined here because, under the influence of Western ideas, we have a legalistic view of it. We look upon sins as moral transgressions that arouse God's anger, and so we see the remission of sins as nothing other than the propitiation of God's justice and wrath. This whole perception, which is borrowed from courts of law, is non-Orthodox.

In the Orthodox Church we speak about man's healing, not about the propitiation of divine justice. God does not punish, but we punish ourselves by not accepting God's gift and His love. We need to consider how Holy Scripture expresses God's wrath.

According to Orthodox Tradition, sin is not just breaking the law, but man's departure from God. Its significance is not just ethical but theological. Sin is actually the fall, deadening, darkening and captivity of the nous. This was also in essence the sin of Adam and Eve. The darkening of the nous is the loss of divine grace, the identification of the nous with the rational faculty and its subjection to the passions and the conditions in the world around it. Thus the remission of sins means first and foremost the illumination of the nous, its liberation from the domination of the rational faculty and the passions, and its illumination by divine grace.

We cannot forget, of course, that when man's nous is darkened all the passions come into action and he falls into every kind of sin. The remission of sins is, on the one hand, the

illumination of the nous—its release from the rational faculty and the passions—and, on the other hand, the transformation of the passions. These two things go together, and when both are activated, in conjunction with the Mystery of Confession, we can say that sins are remitted.

A spiritual father ought to know how to heal people, in other words, he should assist in the illumination of their nous and its liberation from the power of the rational faculty and also in transforming all the passions, so that the powers of the soul act naturally instead of functioning unnaturally as they did before. Participation in divine grace is necessary. This comes about through the Mystery of Confession but also through correct Orthodox guidance, in order that the nous may be set free and illumined.

There are many Christians who come regularly to the Mystery of Confession but because they are not given correct guidance, they cannot be liberated from the passions, as the working of the passions depends on the state of the nous. When the nous is illumined and free, the passions act according to nature. If, however, a person's nous is enslaved to the rational faculty and he lives with his nous in darkness, the passions function contrary to nature.

In order to heal people, a spiritual father needs to administer the Mystery of Confession but also to be aware of the therapeutic method of the Orthodox faith. Then he will guide his spiritual children towards illumination of their darkened nous. A doctor who deals with bodily ailments can only be regarded as a medical expert if he knows three things. Firstly, he must be able to diagnose illness correctly; secondly, he must know exactly what constitutes good health, that is to say, he must know precisely where he ought to be leading the patient; and thirdly, he must be familiar with the correct therapeutic methods that lead from sickness to health.

The same applies to the spiritual physician. He must make a correct diagnosis. In other words, he must be aware of the action of each passion and be capable of recognizing the darkened state of the nous. Then he must know by experience in which direction to guide people. As we know, spiritual well-being consists in the illumination of the nous, which enables a person, if God so wills, to attain to theoria of God. He also has to know the appropriate method to use to guide someone darkened by sin towards theoria of God and the experience of being in God's likeness. In order to have this knowledge, the spiritual father must have personal experience, or at least practise and follow the method laid down in Orthodox Tradition.

Spiritual Healers

There are thus three categories of healers.

Firstly, there are those spiritual fathers who hear confessions, and are also familiar with the Orthodox therapeutic method. They know how to heal people, so that they revive, are illumined and deified.

Secondly, there are spiritual fathers who administer the Mystery of Confession in a legalistic atmosphere. They feel that God is angry with sinners, so they attempt to placate divine righteousness, or at least they perform their task in a moralistic way. When a Christian tells them that he has committed theft, they are content just to explain why we ought not to steal and to urge him not to do so. They do the same with regard to all the other sins. These confessors, however, have no idea of the darkening of the nous, which leads a person to steal and to commit every sin. They also have no idea how to help Christians towards illumination of the nous and or how to lead them to deification. Thus Christians remain unhealed and make the same mistakes. They may manage to get rid of some bodily passions and become self-satisfied, as they are unaware that they ought to reach illumination of the nous; or else they become disappointed and lose hope because they are still not healed.

Thirdly, there are simple monks who are not Priests and so cannot perform the Mystery of Confession or read the prayer of absolution, but who know the therapeutic method. Because they have discernment, they can perceive the fundamental problem troubling the Christian and can guide him on the way to deification. Of course these monks send Christians to Priests for the Mystery of Confession. Spiritual guidance is not the same as sacred Confession.

In "Orthodox Psychotherapy" I write about this category as follows: "When we speak of remission of sins we should understand it mainly as the curing of passions. Thus we see clearly today that 'gifted' monks heal us without having Sacred priesthood. Being clear-sighted, they perceive the problem which is troubling us, they give us a remedy and a method of healing, and so we are cured of what was inwardly disturbing us. The existence of such holy men is a comfort for the people."

We see this combination of guidance from an Elder and confession to a spiritual father in many communities on the Holy Mountain, as well as in monasteries of nuns. There are communities where the Elder does not have Sacred priesthood, but bears all the responsibility for guiding the monks, as is the case in female monastic communities. The Elder or Abbess receives the thoughts of his or her spiritual children and guides them towards healing. By means of the obedience that the monks or nuns offer to their Elder or Abbess, they humble their rational faculty and thus release their nous, which was in subjection to it. Through unceasing prayer, and the complete therapeutic method that the Elder or Abbess uses, the nous that was previously in darkness is illuminated. However, when specific sins occur, the Elder or Abbess sends the Christian to the confessor, so that the appropriate prayer can be read and the Christian can receive God's grace. The Mystery of Confession is not overlooked, nor is the guidance given

by an Elder who has spiritual but not Sacred priesthood underrated.

In general, the remission of sins has a twofold meaning. It refers, firstly, to the correct therapeutic treatment that will enable the nous to be liberated from the control of the rational faculty and the passions, and then to be illumined by the grace of God, which comes about through a person endowed with divine grace, who has personal spiritual experiences. This is the absolutely fundamental task. The second meaning is the prayer of absolution bestowed on the penitent originally by the Bishop but later also by Priests whom the Bishop empowered to administer the Mystery of Confession. This prayer is the confirmation of healing and the re-admission of the Christian to the life of the Church. Therapeutic treatment precedes the prayer of absolution and also continues after confession.

This is clear from the Tradition of the Church. Someone who had committed a sin would follow the therapeutic method for years on end, and then the Bishop would read the appropriate prayer of absolution. Thus the Christian would be admitted to the Divine Eucharist and would partake of the undefiled Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. The prayer of absolution was the outcome of the healing that preceded it. It was the confirmation that the person had been healed and could therefore proceed to Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. Someone who has spiritual priesthood and knows how to heal can assist in healing the passions and reviving the dead nous. Finally we can draw the following conclusions: Bishops, as successors to the holy Apostles, and Priests, as representatives of the Bishop, perform the Mystery of Confession and all the Mysteries of the Church. Even if they are unworthy, the grace of Christ still acts through them. St. John Chrysostom states, *God does not ordain all, but He acts through all.*

Apart from the Priests who possess sacred (ordained) priesthood there is also a *spiritual priesthood*, particularly monks and nuns, who have attained to the illumination of the nous and pray for the whole world. They offer significant help to the people of God.

The remission of sins has many degrees and many stages. Confession is closely linked with man's healing and is an integral part of the therapeutic method. The gravest sin is the darkening of the nous and its subjection to the rational faculty and the passions. This darkness and captivity of the nous results in transgressions of God's commandments. The Apostle Paul says, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* (Gal 5:16). The remission of sins is man's healing, which consists in the liberation and revival of the nous and communion with God.

This is achieved through Orthodox guidance and the Mystery of Confession. Such guidance can be given by a discerning monk endowed with divine grace, who has spiritual

priesthood, whereas the Mystery of Confession can only be administered by a Priest invested with the grace of the Sacred priesthood. It is best when these two qualities exist together in the same person. In critical historical situations, however, a distinction can be made between these two roles. Monastic tradition allows such a separation. St. Symeon the New Theologian is unambiguous: *It is possible for us to confess to a monk who is not a Priest.*

Of course this does not justify Protestants, in all their many forms, because they completely reject priesthood as well as other truths revealed by Christ and upheld by the Church. Monks endowed with divine grace respect ordained Priests. We should mention, however, that priesthood exists to help the laity, whereas spiritual priesthood, which is the foundation of sacramental priesthood, will continue in the age to come.

† † †

[*] Basil Krivochéine (1900-1985), the son of a minister in the Tsar's government, joined the Army of the Volunteers of the "Whites" during the Bolshevik Revolution, became a monk in the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mount Athos, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Parish of Oxford and Archbishop of Belgium of the Patriarchate of Moscow. During his life, he spent 19 years in Russia, 22 years on Mount Athos, and about 40 years of exile in the Russian emigration.



People do not attend to learn humility, and because of their pride are unable to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and so the whole world is filled with suffering. Whereas if men came to know the Lord and how merciful, humble and meek He is, the face of the whole world would be changed in a single hour, and great joy and love would reign in every heart.

The merciful Lord has given us repentance, and through repentance are all things put right. Through repentance we receive forgiveness of sins; repentance brings the grace of the Holy Spirit, and thus we come to know God.

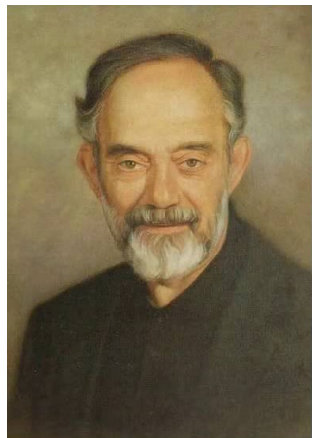
If one among you has lost grace and things go hard with him, let him repent, and the Lord will give him His peace.

If a people or a nation are in tribulation, all must repent, and then God will set everything right.

Holy Elder Silouan of Mount Athos

ON TERMINOLOGY, EXPRESSIONS AND CONCEPTS IN THEOLOGY

By *Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001)*.



The Fathers stress that all the expressions and concepts that a person can have are products of human thought. Concepts and expressions do not come down from heaven and God did not personally create concepts and expressions in the human mind. The Fathers base this teaching on their experience of theosis, which leads them to stress that every human language is a human invention.

Man is the creator of the language with which he communicates with his fellow man. There is no divine language. God does not have His own language that He gave to man and He does not even communicate with man via some special language that He gives to those with whom He communicates. Language is the result of human needs. People formed it in order to help them communicate and interact. (cf. Gen 2:19, 20).

So language is not what it was made out to be by Dante, a good number of Protestants, and the Frankish theologians of the Middle Ages. It is also not what the Muslims claim for the Koran—that the Koran and its language came down from heaven. The Muslims even maintain that there exists an uncreated Koran in heaven. On this very issue, there is an important discussion that took place between St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Eunomians. The Eunomians believed in the existence of a divine language that God revealed to the prophets and that included the names for God that the prophets mentioned. So the Eunomians were claiming that the names for God were the essence of God and that these names for God mentioned in Holy Scripture conveyed concepts that corresponded to the reality that is God. Of course, this is not the case.

In line with the above, we cannot make any distinction between a divine language and human languages, because there is no divine language with which God speaks to mankind. There is also no way to discern which words are appropriate for theology and which are not. There is no unambiguous distinction between acceptable and unacceptable terminology. The only criterion that we can use for terminology about God is the criterion of reverence. There are words that are not in good taste for us to use when referring to God. For example, it is disrespectful to say that God is a smooth operator. There are others words, however, that are

respectful enough to use when we speak about God, such as saying that God is Light.

In this context, the epistemology of the Fathers, which is clearly empirical, is in its entirety quite useful at least for Orthodox Christians. You could even call it quite modern. After all, when the Fathers composed their writings, they did not suspect that a Frankish tradition would later develop under the influence of Augustinian thought. Most of the Fathers in the East were not familiar with Augustine. Those who did know something about him did not consider him very important, at least in the earlier days. In any event, the Fathers did not read Augustine's writings and certainly could not imagine that the entire Western tradition of Goths, Franks, Lombards, Normans, and others would later embrace him as their only source of guidance in theology. Unfortunately, Augustine espoused the epistemology of the Platonists, Neo-Platonists and Aristotelians. Since his epistemology was clearly Aristotelian-Platonic, it was also completely different from that of the Church Fathers.

What sets Augustine's theology apart from the rest of Patristic theology is that he theologically accepts the very essence of Platonism by accepting Plato's archetypes. According to Plato, all things in the world are copies of certain archetypes. Naturally, the Fathers not only thoroughly rejected this teaching and the very existence of Plato's archetypes, but they even excommunicated from the body of the Church those who accepted Plato's archetypes, because the acceptance of these archetypes is a form of idolatry. Today, I do not know if there is any serious-minded human being who accepts this teaching.

From what has been said so far, you can see why Orthodox Christians do not make a distinction between secular and religious terminology. There are not secular words on the one hand and religious words on the other. All the words that we use for concepts about God are secular words. It is enough that they be respectful.

Thus, we see God or the Old Testament Yahweh being described as a rock. But is God a rock? In the spirit of Platonic philosophy, we should only use abstract expressions for God. That is, we should use terms for God that have a spiritual or intellectual content rather than a material one. We should employ terms like nous, logos, intellect, hypostasis, substance, trinity, unity, and so forth. Nevertheless, the Bible uses words like mountain, rock, stone, water, river, sky, sun, and so on. In other words, if we take a look at the Old Testament, we will find many names attributed to God that are not taken from human form or nature, but from inanimate creation. The energy of God is described as a cloud, fire, light, and so forth.

Since the time of the prophets, and even earlier, Jewish tradition has known that man cannot make any image of

God, because God does not have any image in the material universe. In the Old Testament, any image of God whatsoever is forbidden. This is why Jews did not have icons or images in the Old Testament.

The only exact image of God the Father is Christ, the Word of God Who became man. God does not have any other images outside of Christ. A common human being is not an image of God. Only Jesus Christ the God-man is the image of God. With the exception of Christ in His human nature, nothing in the created world is an image of God. Adam was fashioned in the image of Christ. Strictly speaking, man is not an image of God the Father, but he is an image of Christ.

This is the reason why we are free to borrow any name or concept and to attribute it to God as long as we do so in an apophatic way, because God does not have any likeness in the created world and because there are no concepts in the created world that can be attributed to God as a way of identifying Him. So on the one hand, we do attribute a name to God, but only if, on the other hand, we also take it away from Him. For example, although we say that God is Light, we negate this at the same time by saying that God is also darkness. We do not add this qualification because God is not Light, but because God transcends light. God does not lack anything, but He exceeds everything.

At this point, we come to a crucial difference between the apophatic theology of the Church Fathers and that of the Western Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages. Even today if we open up a dogmatic textbook written by Roman Catholic theologians, we will come across their claim that there are two ways to theologize—one way involves attributing names to God and the other negative way involves removing these names from God. But what is absurd is that for them these names are not taken away from God in order to avoid attributing them to Him, but in order to purify the names of their imperfections.

But you will not find such a thing in the Church Fathers, for whom the method of attributing names to God is really quite simple. Names are given and they are taken away. In other words, they make use of opposites. But when the Fathers speak about God and attribute opposites to Him, they negate Aristotle's law of contradiction^[*] and in so doing overturn the entire edifice of Aristotelian philosophy.

This means that the Fathers do not follow the rules of logic when they deal with theological matters or talk about God. Why? Because the rules of logic are valid, in so far as they are valid, only for God's creation. The rules of logic or philosophy are not applicable with God. There is not any philosophical system or system of logic that can be applied to God. The Fathers consider those who think that they can approach God via pure mathematics to be terribly naive, simply because there is no similarity between the

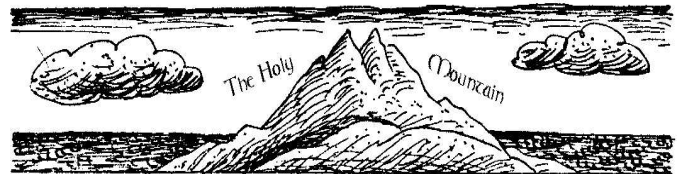
created and uncreated. What is valid in the created realm is not valid for the uncreated reality that is God, because there are no rules from created reality that can be applied to uncreated reality.

The Fathers do not say anything about God on the basis of philosophical reflection. They do not sit at their desks like the Scholastics in order to do theology, because when the Church Fathers theologize, speculation or reflection is strictly forbidden. **The only sensible way to study the Bible is not to speculate (that is, to try to understand Holy Scripture by employing the reason or abstractions), but to pray.** But what do we mean by prayer? Noetic prayer, because noetic prayer means that the Holy Spirit visits the believer and prays within his heart. When this occurs, the believer is illumined and becomes capable of rightly understanding the concepts from the Old and New Testament, and is also in a position to be led from his present state of illumination to theosis.

If and when someone reaches theosis, he will know from the very experience of theosis precisely what is meant by the sayings and concepts that he comes across in the Bible. This now brings us to an interpretive key—when those who reached theosis and who wrote Holy Scripture use expressions or concepts, these concepts are divinely inspired in the sense that they are based on the experience of illumination or theosis. This also applies to the expressions or concepts used in the writings of the Church Fathers and the saints. In other words, they wrote what they wrote on the basis of this experience and because of this experience what they wrote is divinely inspired.



[*] A law of Aristotelian logic that states that it is impossible for "p" and "not p" to both be true. For example, an object cannot simultaneously be entirely black and entirely white. It can be black or white, but it cannot be both at the same time.



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

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

St. John Damascene

WE ARE TO BE CRUCIFIED!

From "Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and Hesychast."



Near the end of his life, righteous Saint Joseph wrote:

"I came to know You [our Lord Jesus Christ] on Mt. Tabor.

I came to know You in the Resurrection.

I came to know You in the Ascension.

I came to know You in so many different glories, and so many marvelous aspects.

I came to know You on Golgotha."

The Elder used to say that the deepest and most intense knowledge that he received of our Saviour was in the crucifixion, in that suffering and voluntary passion. "I came to understand because, of course, we are made of God in His divinity, Who in His humanity suffered."

Our Saviour had His pathos and voluntary passion. It is only in this voluntary passion, voluntary constraining, denial, voluntary taking up of the cross, voluntary crucifixion, that we come, therefore, to know in depth the unity of the God-man, the Incarnation, and the Mystery and His bond to us, our unity with Him. To see angels, to see visions, to see the Resurrection—that is God. When God opens the Heavens, then you see the visions. When God closes the Heavens, then you do not see the visions, the visions pass. The visions are inside because the Kingdom [the rule and uncreated glory] is within—open, closed. To know yourself is much greater than to see angels. But you will come to know yourself through suffering, through the Cross, and death on the Cross, by crucifixion.

The Elder said that this knowledge is greater than all of the others. Other knowledges will record themselves. Through sin, etc., they can be blurred and forgotten, as another distant world. But that which you come to know through suffering and crucifixion for the sake of the Kingdom, for the sake of the love of our Saviour, that which you come to know on Golgotha, never will be obliterated. In the worst of sins, that experience and knowledge is right in the marrow of the bone. Therefore, it is so necessary to deny ourselves in a heroic spirit.

We are to be crucified through the cutting of the will, obedience, struggles, love of God, patience and long-suffering. At the end of his life the Elder became like the crop that is ready for harvest, like the fruit which is ripe and mellowed. Saint Joseph had been through the mill and like St. Ignatius,

was ground like fine flour to be that bread on the table in the Kingdom. He was ground through much patience and long-suffering.

In the Book of Wisdom it is recorded: *I loved her, and sought her from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse... Therefore, I purposed to take her to me to live with me...* Wisdom is theoria, the vision of God, understanding the knowledge of God. The Elder Joseph sought God with his whole soul: the Grace of God, the vision of God, the love of God, and he was not denied it. His struggles were such that they are unheard of. He was a real trooper. When he heard or read something, he applied it. He was unrelenting and had a very strong will. Because he was heroic in spirit, because of his faith, because of his love, and because foremost of the choice and gift of God, God provided for His chosen who He foreknew and pre-ordained. "I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me; and that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was;..." *But by the grace of God I am what I am, says St. Paul, and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

St. Paul was a struggler, a great lover of God, a captive and bondsman, a prisoner of God. Illed with God, suffering with God, and suffering because of God. So it was with the Elder Joseph.



The Church of Christ is alive and free. In her we move and have our being, through Christ Who is her Head. In Him we have full freedom. In the Church we learn of truth and *the truth will set us free.* (Jn 8:32).

You are in Christ's Church whenever you uplift someone bent down in sorrow, or when you give alms to the poor, and visit the sick. You are in Christ's Church when you cry out: *Lord, help me.* You are in Christ's Church when you are good and patient, when you refuse to get angry at your brother, even if he has wounded your feelings. You are in Christ's Church when you pray: *Lord, forgive him.* When you work honestly at your job, returning home weary in the evenings but with a smile upon your lips; when you repay evil with love—you are in Christ's Church.

Do you not see, therefore, young friend, how close the Church of Christ is? You are Peter and God is building His Church upon you. You are the rock of His Church against which nothing can prevail. Let us build churches with our faith, churches which no human power can pull down, a church whose foundation is Christ. Feel for your brother alongside you. Never ask: "Who is he?" Rather say: "He is no stranger; he is my brother. He is the Church of Christ just as I am."

Fr. George Calciu (+2006)

[Romanian priest whose relics were found incorrupt]

Ὁ Φύλακας τῆς Εἰκόνας τῆς Παναγίας

ΠΗΓΗ: Ὁρθόδοξη Ἱεραποστολή. Συγκλονιστικὴ καὶ ἀληθινὴ ἱστορία ποὺ θὰ σᾶς κάνει νὰ δακρῦσετε. Αἰετίζει νὰ ἀφιερῶστε τριὰ λεπτὰ ἀπὸ τὸν χρόνο σας καὶ νὰ τὴ διαβάσετε!

Ὁ γέρο Χαραλάμπης ἔζησε τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς του μὲ τὴν νοσταλγία τῆς χαμένης του πατρίδας.

Σκεφτόταν συνέχεια τὸ ὄμορφο χωριό του κοντὰ στὴν Προῦσα καὶ τὰ μάτια του βούρκωναν. Μ' αὐτὸν τὸν καημὸ ἔφυγε ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ. Συχνὰ ἔπαιρνε στὴν ἀγκαλιά του τὸν ἐγγονό του τὸν Μπάμπη, καὶ τοῦ μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὸ χωριό του. Τοῦ περιέγραφε πὼς ἦταν ἡ ἐκκλησία, τὸ σχολεῖο ποὺ ἔμαθε τὰ πρῶτα του γράμματα, τὴν πλατεῖα ποὺ ἔπαιζε. Μὲ μεγάλη λεπτομέρεια τοῦ περιέγραφε τὸ σπίτι ποὺ γεννήθηκε, παντρεύθηκε, ἀπέκτησε τὰ παιδιὰ του.

Ὁ Μπάμπης μεγάλωσε καὶ σπούδασε στὴν Ἀθήνα. Πάντα ὅμως θυμόταν τὸν παπποῦ του... Καὶ ὅταν κάποια μέρα πληροφορήθηκε πὼς ἕνα ταξιδιωτικὸ πρακτορεῖο εἶχε ὀργανώσει ἐκδρομὴ στὰ μέρη τῆς Προῦσας, θεώρησε χρέος του νὰ ἐπισκεφθεῖ αὐτὸν τὸν τόπο, στὴ μνήμη τοῦ παπποῦ του.

Δυνατὴ συγκίνηση κατέλαβε τὸν Μπάμπη ὅταν βρέθηκε στὸ χωριὸ τοῦ παπποῦ του. Εἶδε πρῶτα τὴν ἐκκλησία, μόνον ποὺ τώρα ἦταν τζαμί. Πλησίασε στὸ καφεενάκι τοῦ παπποῦ του... ἦταν κλειστό. Καὶ ἡ πλατεῖα ἐντελῶς παραμελημένη. Κι ἔφτασε μπροστὰ στὸ σπίτι...

Μὲ τρεμάμενο χέρι ἔσπρωξε τὴν αὐλόπορτα. Στὰ σκαλοπάτια καθόταν ἕνα γεροντάκι. Σηκώθηκε μόλις τὸν εἶδε.

«Ἐλα παιδί μου, τί θέλεις;» τὸν ρώτησε στὰ τούρκικα.

Μὲ τίς λίγες τούρκικες λέξεις ποὺ εἶχε μάθει ὁ Μπάμπης ἀπὸ τὸν παπποῦ του, προσπάθησε νὰ τοῦ δώσει νὰ καταλάβει πὼς εἶχε ἔρθει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα γιὰ νὰ γνωρίσει τὸ χωριὸ τοῦ παπποῦ του.

Σὰν τ' ἄκουσε ὁ γέρος τινάχτηκε πάνω. Ἄπλωσε τὰ χέρια καὶ τὸν ἔσφιξε στὴν ἀγκαλιά του.

«Κάλως ὄρισες», τοῦ εἶπε ἑλληνικά. «Τὸ ξέρα πὼς θὰ ἔρθεις καὶ σὲ περίμενα.»

Ὁ Μπάμπης τὸν κοίταξε σαστισμένος. Τὸν ἔπιασε ἐκεῖνος ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι καὶ τὸν ὀδήγησε σ' ἕνα μικρὸ

δωμάτιο στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τοῦ σπιτιοῦ. Τὸν ἔβαλε νὰ καθίσει στὴν μοναδικὴ καρέκλα. Σκούπισε ἕνα δάκρυ ποὺ κύλησε στὸ πρόσωπο του καὶ συνέχισε.

«Γεννήθηκα σ' ἕνα ὄμορφο χωριουδάκι τῆς Μακεδονίας. Οἱ γονεῖς μου ἦταν Μωαμεθανοὶ καὶ στὸ ἐπάγγελμα ἀγρότες. Ἐγὼ ἤμουν τὸ μικρότερο παιδί τῆς οἰκογένειας. Ὅταν οἱ ἄλλοι λείπανε ὅλη μέρα στὰ κτήματα ἐγὼ ἔμεινα στὸ σπίτι τοῦ φίλου μου τοῦ Νικολάκη. Πολλὲς φορὲς κοιμόμουν αἰόλας. Οἱ γονεῖς του μ' ἀγαποῦσαν καὶ δὲν με ξεχώριζαν ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιὰ τους. Ἦταν καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ πιστοὶ χριστιανοί, Ἐκκλησιάζονταν συχνὰ τὸ βράδυ ὅλη ἡ οἰκογένεια, γονάτιζαν καὶ προσεύχονταν μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας ὅπου ἔκαιγε συνέχεια τὸ καντήλι, καὶ δίπλα τὸ θυμιατήρι, ποὺ σκορποῦσε σ' ὅλο τὸ σπίτι εὐωδία.

«Ὅλα αὐτὰ ἔμεινα μ' ἔκαναν νὰ νιώθω δέος. Πολλὲς φορὲς γονάτιζα καὶ ἐγὼ μαζί τους καὶ μιλοῦσα μὲ τὴν Παναγία σὰν νὰ μιλοῦσα μὲ τὴν μάνα μου. Ἡ ψυχὴ μου τότε γέμιζε γαλήνη.

«Κάποια μέρα ἡ οἰκογένεια του Νικολάκη πήγαινε σ' ἕνα ξωκλήσι ποὺ πανηγύριζε. Μὲ πήραν κι ἐμένα μαζί τους. Παρακολούθησα τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία κι ὅταν εἶδα τοὺς πιστοὺς νὰ προχωροῦν πρὸς τὴν Ὁραία Πύλη γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβουν ἀκολούθησα καὶ ἐγώ.

«Ὁ πατέρας τοῦ φίλου μου μὲ συγκράτησε. “Ὅχι ἐσὺ παιδί μου” μοῦ εἶπε χαμηλόφωνα. “Δὲν μπορείς νὰ μεταλάβεις γιατί εἶσαι ἀβάπτιστος.” Τὸν κοίταξα μὲ παράπονο. “Τότε νὰ βαπτιστῶ” τοῦ ἀπάντησα.

Λίγο ἀργότερα ὁ κυρ-Δημήτρης μοῦ ἐξήγησε πὼς ἀνήκουσε σὲ διαφορετικὲς θρησκείες καὶ οἱ γονεῖς μου δὲν θὰ μοῦ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ βαπτιστῶ. Θὰ μπορούσα ὅμως νὰ τὸ κάνω ὅταν γινόμουν ἀνήλικος κι ἐξακολουθοῦσα νὰ ἔχω τὸν ἴδιο πόθο.

«Κι ἐγὼ περίμενα τὴν πολυπόθητη ἐκείνη μέρα καὶ συνέχιζα νὰ προσεύχομαι στὴν Παναγία. Δυστυχῶς ὅμως δὲν πρόλαβα νὰ πραγματοποιήσω τὴ μεγάλη μου ἐπιθυμία. Πρὶν ἀκόμα ἐνηλικιωθῶ ἔγινε ἡ ἀνταλλαγὴ τῶν πληθυσμῶν. Μὲ πήραν οἱ γονεῖς μου καὶ μὲ φέρανε σὲ τοῦτο ἐδῶ τὸ χωριό.

«Ἦταν νύχτα καὶ δὲν μπόρεσα νὰ ἀποχαιρετήσω τὸν φίλο μου καὶ τὴν ἀγαπημένη μου ἐκείνη οἰκογένεια.



Αὐτὸ μοῦ στοίχισε πολὺ. Μιὰ δυὸ φορὲς θέλησα νὰ φύγω ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι. Οἱ γονεῖς μου ἀναγκάστηκαν νὰ μὲ κλειδώσουν σὲ τοῦτο ἐδῶ τὸ δωμάτιο, καὶ συνέχισα νὰ μένω ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ χρόνια.

«Ἐνα βράδυ πάνω στὴν ἀπελπισία μου γονάτισα, ὅπως ἔκανε ἡ οἰκογένεια του Νικολάκη καὶ μὲ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια παρακάλεσα τὴν Παναγία νὰ μὲ βοηθήσει νὰ γυρίσω πίσω. Καὶ ξαφνικὰ νοιώθω μιὰ ὑπέροχη εὐωδία νὰ πλημμυρίζει τὸ δωμάτιο. Τὸ θεώρησα σὰν ἀπάντηση τῆς Παναγίας στὴν προσευχή μου. Τὴν ἴδια εὐωδία τὴν νιώθω ἀκόμα μέχρι σήμερα, ὅταν τὸ βράδυ προσεύχομαι.

«Ἀργότερα ἄρχισα νὰ ἀκούω κάποια ἑλαφρὰ χτυπήματα κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ κρεβάτι ποὺ κοιμόμουν. Ἐναν ὀλόκληρο χρόνο δὲν μποροῦσα νὰ καταλάβω τί συνέβαινε, οὔτε ὅμως τολμοῦσα νὰ τὸ πῶ σὲ κάποιον. Βοήκα τὴν εὐκαιρία κάποια μέρα ποὺ ὅλη ἡ οἰκογένεια μου εἶχε πάει σ' ἕνα γάμο στὸ διπλάνδ χωριὸ κι ἔψαξα μὲ πολὺ προσοχὴ στὸ σημεῖο ἐκεῖνο. Πρόσεξα πὼς κάποια σανίδια δὲν ἐφάρμοζαν ἐντελῶς. Τὰ ἀνασήκωσα μ' ἕνα αἰχμηρὸ ἀντικείμενο. Εἶδα ἀπὸ κάτω ἕνα μεταλλικὸ κουτί. “Σίγουρα θὰ εἶναι κάποιος κρυμμένος θησαυρὸς” σκέφτηκα.

«Ρίγος μὲ κατέλαβε ὅταν τὸ ἄνοιξα. Μέσα ὑπῆρχε μιὰ ὀλόχρυση εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας, ἕνα καντήλι καὶ ἕνα θυμιατήρι ποὺ εὐωδίαζαν.

«Σκέφτηκα πὼς οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ φύγανε ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ σπίτι ἔκρυψαν τὸν πολὺτιμὸ θησαυρὸ τους γιὰ νὰ μὴν πέσει σὲ βέβηλα χέρια. Τὸ ἴδιο σκέφτηκα νὰ κάνω καὶ γώ. Νὰ φυλάξω τὴν εἰκόνα μέχρι νὰ βρεθεῖ κάποιος ἀπὸ τὴν οἰκογένεια ποὺ θὰ μποροῦσα νὰ τὴν παραδώσω. Κι αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ αἶτημα μοῦ ὅταν προσευχόμουν κάθε βράδυ στὴν Παναγία.

«Πέρασαν χρόνια ἀπὸ τότε. Οἱ γονεῖς μου φύγανε ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ. Τ' ἀδέρφια μου παντρεύτηκαν κι ἔκαναν δικό τους σπίτι. Ἐγὼ ἔμεινα ἐδῶ μόνος. Φύλαγα τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας. Δὲν θέλησα νὰ παντρευτῶ, οὔτε νὰ μπεῖ γυναῖκα στὸ σπίτι μου. Οἱ συγγενεῖς καὶ συγχωριανοί μου μὲ θεωροῦσαν ἄλλοπαρμένο καὶ δὲν μὲ πλησίαζαν. Αὐτὸ μὲ βόλευε, γιατί δὲν μὲ ἐνοχλοῦσαν. Εἶχα πάντα τὴν Παναγία ποὺ μὲ προτάτευε.

«Τελευταία οἱ δυνάμεις μου ἄρχισαν νὰ μὲ ἐγκαταλείπουν. “Μὴν ἀφήσεις Παναγία μου νὰ πεθάνω πρὶν παραδώσω σὲ χέρια σίγουρα τὴν εἰκόνα σου” προσευχόμουν συνεχῶς.

«Καὶ πῆς τὸ βράδυ πῆρα τὴν ἀπάντηση τῆς. Ἡ εὐωδία σταμάτησε. Μιὰ δροσερὴ αὔρα ἀπλώθηκε στὴν ψυχὴ μου. Ἐβγαλα τὴν εἰκόνα ἀπὸ τὸ κουτί καὶ μοῦ φάνηκε πὼς ἡ Παναγία μου χαμογέλασε. “Κάποιον θὰ στείλει σήμερα νὰ τὴν πάρει”, σκέφτηκα καὶ κάθισα ἀπὸ τὸ

πρῶτὰ στὰ σκαλοπάτια νὰ περιμένω. Τώρα πιά μπορῶ νὰ κλείσω τὰ μάτια μου ἡσυχος.

Συγκινημένος ὁ Μπάμπης πῆρε τὸ ἱερὸ κειμήλιο ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τοῦ γέροντα. Ἐσκυψε μετὰ καὶ φίλησε τὸ χέρι του κι ἔνωσε σὰν νὰ φιλοῦσε τὸ χέρι τοῦ παπποῦ του. Τὸν εὐχαρίστησε μὲ ὅλη του τὴν καρδιά. Ἀποχαιρετήστηκαν δακρυσμένοι. Πρὶν φύγει ὁ Μπάμπης, ὁ γέροντας τοῦ ἔδωσε ἕνα σακουλάκι.

«Πάρτο παιδί μου», τοῦ εἶπε. Ἐχει χῶμα ἀπὸ τὸν κῆπο τοῦ παπποῦ σου. Βάλτο στὸν τάφο του νὰ ἀναπαυθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ του!».



Ὅσοι νηστεύετε ἀλλὰ τρῶτε μέχρι σκασμοῦ χταποδάκια, καλαμαράκια, σουπιές, πατάτες τηγανητές, πέντε κιλὰ ψωμί, ἕνα κιλὸ χαλβᾶ κλπ. ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲ νηστεύετε.

Ὅσοι νηστεύετε ἀλλὰ βλαστημιᾶτε, βρίζετε τὰ παιδιά σας, τὸν ἀπέναντι κλπ. ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲ νηστεύετε.

Ὅσοι νηστεύετε καὶ χτυπᾶτε τὴ γυναῖκα σας, βρίζετε καὶ κουτσομπολεύετε τὸν γείτονα κλπ. ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲν νηστεύετε.

Ὅσοι νηστεύετε καὶ κάνετε κάτι μεγάλους σταυροὺς ἐνῶ στὴ δουλειὰ καὶ στὴ ζωὴ σας εἶστε ψεῦτες, κακότροποι καὶ ἀγενεῖς ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲ νηστεύετε.

Ὅσοι νηστεύετε ἀλλὰ τὰ παίρνετε χοντρὰ εἴτε ἀπὸ φακελάκια, εἴτε ἀπὸ μίζες, εἴτε ἀπὸ θέση ἐξουσίας, εἴτε ἀπὸ ἐκμετάλλευση τοῦ ἄλλου ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲν νηστεύετε.

Ὅσοι νηστεύετε καὶ εἶστε κάθε Κυριακὴ στὴν ἐκκλησία ψέλνοντας παπαγαλία ἀλλὰ ὄχι κατανοώντας τὸ κήρυγμα ἐνῶ μόλις βγεῖτε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησία κουτσομπολεύετε καὶ πολὺ περισσότερο μὲ ἐμπάθεια τοὺς ἄλλους ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ μάθετε ὅτι δὲ νηστεύετε.

Ἡ νηστεία ἔχει κάποιο πνευματικὸ νόημα. Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ ἐγκράτεια, ἡ σύνεση, ἡ ταπεινότητα καὶ ἡ ἀποφυγὴ πειρασμῶν ποὺ θὰ μᾶς προετοιμάσουν σωματικῶς καὶ πνευματικῶς στὴν μεταλαβὴ των Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων.

Ὅταν τελειώσει ἡ νηστεία φρόντισε νὰ σὲ βρεῖ ἔστω καὶ ἐλάχιστα μὲ περισσότερη ἀγάπη τὴν καρδιά σου.

Ἀπὸ «Τὸ Βῆμα Ὁρθοδοξίας»

Ἡ Παγκοσμιοποίηση τῶν Παθῶν!

Κ. Γ. Παπαδημητράκοπουλος, «*Ορθόδοξος Τύπος*», 6 Αὐγούστου, 2023.

Ὡς τώρα, καλοί μου φίλοι, ἐκεῖνο ποῦ κυρίως ζούσαμε ἦταν ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση τῶν κακῶν. Σήμερα ζοῦμε τὴν ἐπόμενη φάση, ποῦ εἶναι ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση τῶν παθῶν. Ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων παθῶν. Ποῦ μὲ τρόπο ἀδιάντροπο κυκλοφοροῦν πλέον παντοῦ καὶ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβληθοῦν. Ὅπως δὴ ποτε καὶ σὲ ὅλους! Τόσο πολὺ ποῦ νὰ νομίζουμε ὅτι, ὄχι μόνο δὲν εἶναι τίποτα αὐτά, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅτι αὐτὸς τάχα εἶναι ὁ «σωστὸς» τρόπος ζωῆς! Ἄλλ' ἄς πάρουμε τὰ πράγματα μὲ τὴν σειρά τους ...

Κατὰ τὸ λεξικὸ Μπαμπινιώτη, «παγκοσμιοποίηση» εἶναι ἡ μετατροπὴ τῆς οἰκουμένης σὲ μία ἐνιαία οἰκονομικὴ, πολιτικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ ἐπικράτεια! Μόνο ποῦ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπικράτεια, ἡ «διεθνῆς τῶν πονηρῶν» αὐτὸ ποῦ θέλει νὰ ἐπικρατεῖ ὡς ἦθος, εἶναι τὸ ἄηθες. Ὡς ἀξίες ὅ,τι ἀντεστραμμένο ὑπάρχει. Ὡς ἀρχὲς ὅ,τι βρισκόταν στὸ περιθώριο καὶ τὰ κατακάθι τῆς κοινωνίας.

Εἶπαν ὅτι ἡ «παγκοσμιοποίηση» εἶναι ἡ τάση ὅλων τῶν δραστηριοτήτων τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ ἀποκτοῦν παγκόσμιο χαρακτήρα». Μόνο ποῦ παραγωνίζεται κάθε καλὴ του δραστηριότητα, γιὰ νὰ κυριαρχεῖ ὅ,τι κακὸ ὑπάρχει καὶ μάλιστα τὸ ἴδιο τὸ κατακάθι!

Ὅπως γράφει ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀλβανίας κ. Ἀναστάσιος: «Ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση δὲν εἶναι μόνο μία οἰκονομικὴ διαδικασία. Πρόκειται γιὰ ἄμεση ἢ ἔμμεση προβολὴ ἐνὸς συστήματος σκέψεως ποῦ ἀγνοεῖ ἢ καὶ καταστρέφει τὶς ἰδιαιτερότητες τῶν ἐπὶ μέρους λαῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων καὶ παραμερίζει ἢ καὶ διαλύει τὶς ἀξίες»!

Ὅπως ἔχει γράψει καὶ ὁ μακαριστὸς Καθηγούμενος τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Ὁσίου Γρηγορίου π. Γεώργ. Καψάνης: «Σχεδιάζεται μία παγκοσμιοποίησις ὄχι μόνο χωρὶς Χριστό, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τὸ ὑπερκράτος, ἡ ὑπεροικονομία, ἡ ὑπερθρησκεία δὲν θὰ ὑπηρετοῦν τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὡς εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο καὶ ὅσους προσκυνήσουν τὸν Ἀντίχριστο»!

Καθαρὰ πράγματα!

Τελευταῖα ζήσαμε τὸ πρόβλημα τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ. Καὶ τί διαπιστώσαμε; Πῶς ἀστραπιαῖα μεταδόθηκε σὲ ὅλο τὸν πλανήτη! Καὶ τί παγκοσμιοποίηση ἐνὸς κακοῦ δὲν ἦταν αὐτή!

Τὸ ἴδιο σκηρικὸ τὸ ζήσαμε καὶ τὸ ζοῦμε σὲ τόσα ἄλλα πράγματα, ὅπως αὐτὰ ...

Μὲ τὴ μουσικὴ, ποῦ παγκοσμιοποιημένη, κατέληξε νὰ εἶναι τὸ ροκ καὶ ὅλα του τὰ παρακλάδια καὶ αὐτό, γιὰ νὰ ἔχουμε τὴν ψευδαίσθησις τοῦ πλουραλισμοῦ καὶ τῆς πολυμορφίας σ' αὐτήν!

Μὲ τὸν ἀθλητισμὸ, ποῦ παγκοσμιοποιημένος, κατέληξε νὰ γίνῃ πρωταθλητισμὸς! Τὰ δὲ σπορ σέ... ποδόσφαιρο, προκειμένου νὰ μετατρέπονται οἱ φίλαθλοι σὲ ποδοσφαιρόφιλους καὶ αὐτοὶ σὲ

ὀπαδοὺς κάποιας ὁμάδας. Ἔτσι οἱ ποδοσφαιρικὲς ὁμάδες δὲν ἔχουν πλέον τίποτα νὰ ζηλέψουν ἀπὸ τὶς ἄλλες πολυεθνικὲς ποῦ γνωρίζουμε!

Μὲ τὸ θέαμα, ποῦ παγκοσμιοποιημένο, ὄχι μόνο κατέκλυσε τὰ πάντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ περιορίστηκε σαφῶς σὲ συγκεκριμένα θέματα (βίαις, ἐρωτισμοῦ, τρόμου, θρίλερ, μυστηρίου, ἐπιστημονικῆς—ὑποτίθεται—φαντασίας, reality shows κ.λπ.)!

Μὲ τὸ παιχνίδι καὶ τὸ παραμῦθι, τὰ τόσο ἀπαραίτητα γιὰ ἓνα παιδί, ποῦ παγκοσμιοποιημένα, κατέληξαν νὰ γίνουν βιντεοπαιχνίδια καὶ κινούμενα σχέδια μὲ τὰ ἐπίσης γνωστὰ θέματα, ὅπως τὰ πιὸ πάνω! Εἶναι δὲ χαρακτηριστικὴ ἡ περίπτωση αὐτοῦ ποῦ ἔγινε ἐκεῖ στὴν αὐγὴ τοῦ αἰῶνα μας

μὲ τὸν Χάρι Πότερ!

Μὲ τὴν ψυχαγωγία, ποῦ παγκοσμιοποιημένη, μετατράπηκε σὲ διασκέδαση περιέχουσα κι αὐτὴ τὰ πάντα. Μὰ τὰ πάντα!

Τί νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς καὶ γιὰ τὸ ἀλκοόλ, τὰ ναρκωτικά, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἐνδυμασία, τὴν μόδα, τὸν ἀτελειώτο καλλωπισμὸ καὶ τὴν ἐν γένει ἐξωτερικὴ μας ἐμφάνισις, ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ μὲ τὴν (παγκοσμιοποιημένη κι αὐτὴ) πλήρως ἀνθυγιεινὴ (GMO, κ.λπ.) διατροφή μας; Ἡ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἀντιστροφὴ τῶν προτύπων, ποῦ δὲν εἶναι πλέον οἱ ἅγιοι οὔτε καὶ οἱ ἥρωες, ἀλλὰ τὰ γνωστὰ εὐτελεῖ καὶ τιποτένια, νὰ τιποτένια, γνωστὰ εἰδῶλα;



Και τί παρατηρεί κανείς σε όλο αυτό τον κατάλογο που όλο και μακραίνει; Ότι, λίγο ως πολύ, με κραυγαλέο ή όχι τρόπο, κάποτε δε και φαινομενικά άθωο, έρπει ποικιλόμορφα ή διαφθορά. Ναί!

Πράγματι με όλα αυτά αυτό άκριβώς κατόρθωσαν, για να μη μείνει τελικά τίποτα όρθιο!

Μη ξεχνάμε πως ή λέξη «διαφθορά» σημαίνει καταστροφή, άφανισμός, θάνατο. Ειδικότερα σημαίνει χάλασμα, αλλοίωση του χαρακτήρα, έκλυση των ήθων, ήθικη κατάπτωση! Η διαφθορά είναι μία κατάσταση μέσα στο άτομο ή την κοινωνία, μη φυσιολογική. Σε κάθε περίπτωση ή διαφθορά έξασθενεί τη βούληση, υποχωρεί τη δύναμη του χαρακτήρα, καταπνίγει τη φωνή της συνείδησης, έξαφανίζει τον αυτόσεβασμό, καταπατά ιδανικά και άξιες, κλονίζει την υγεία και τελικά καταρρέει όλόκληρη την ανθρώπινη όντότητα.

Όποτε με τη διαφθορά, ειδικά ή νεολαία, αποχαυνώνεται και παραπαίει. Κι όταν πια δεν έχει προσανατολισμούς ανώτερους, ιδανικά και άξιες, είναι όπωσδήποτε έξαιρετικά ευάλωτη. Μπορούν πλέον να περάσουν σ' αυτή, και βέβαια στο αύριο της οικουμένης, οτιδήποτε θελήσουν. Και μάλιστα χωρίς την παραμικρή αντίσταση!

Και άφου ή διαφθορά έκανε για τα καλά τη δουλειά της τις τελευταίες δεκαετίες, τί παρατηρούμε σήμερα; Ότι ξεκίνησε ήδη ή παγκοσμιοποίηση των παθών μας!

Πρόχειρο παράδειγμα είναι ή άνευ προηγουμένου στην παγκόσμια ιστορία προβολή της όμοφυλοφιλίας και της κάθε σεξουαλικής διαστροφής (είναι θέμα χρόνου να δούμε και την αντίστοιχη προβολή της αίμομιξίας, της κτηνοβασίας κ.λπ.), της ίσοπέδωσης της έτερότητας των δύο φίλων που αυτά και μόνο δημιούργησε ό Θεός κ.λπ. Και όλα αυτά με «ώραία» λόγια, όπως είναι τα «δικαιώματα του άλλου», ή «έλευθερία του ατόμου» κ.λπ., αλλά και «ώραίες» διαδικασίες, όπως είναι ή λεγόμενη «σεξουαλική άγωγή»!

Η προβολή της πορνείας είναι άνευ προηγουμένου, όπως και της μοιχείας, για να αναφέρουμε κι ένα άκόμη παράδειγμα. Έγιναν ποικιλόμορφο θέαμα, αλλά και πρακτική. Κανένα «σοβαρό» σήριαλ δεν είναι δυνατόν να μην έχει αυτά ως θέμα, αν θέλει μάλιστα να έχει και... τηλεθέαση! Επόμενο είναι πλέον να μην ακούγεται τίποτε για την έγκράτεια και τη συζυγική πίστη. Για δε την άγνότητα έφθασαν τα πράγματα οί πολλοί άκόμη και να ... γελάνε ή και να... έπαναστατούν, όταν την ακούνε!

Τό μήνυμα της παγκοσμιοποίησης επ' αυτού ποιο είναι και μάλιστα σ' ένα έφηβο; Τό πως «θα τα φτιάξει»! Χωρίς σκέψη, χωρίς προϋποθέσεις, χωρίς

στόχους (δηλαδή την δημιουργία οικογένειας), άκόμη και από πολυ νωρίς και πριν την ώρα τους. Και τώρα πλέον όχι άπαραίτητα με τό άλλο φύλο. Αυτό κι αν είναι παγκοσμιοποίηση των παθών. Καημένα παιδιά!

Και ποιο είναι τό επιπλέον μήνυμα της παγκοσμιοποίησης, δηλαδή της «διεθνούς των πονηρών» που την κατευθύνει; Ότι όχι μόνον αυτά δεν είναι τίποτα τάχα, ότι όχι μόνον επιβάλλεται να γίνονται από όλους άκόμη και από τα παιδιά (όπως και από τους παππούδες τους!!!), αλλά πρέπει να είμαστε όλοι και υπερήφανοι γι' αυτά! Ναί, υπερήφανοι για τα πάθη μας!!!

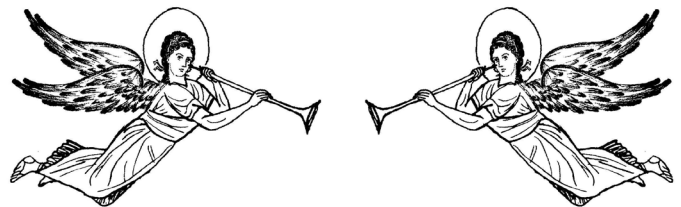
Πρός Θεού μη πούμε κάτι για τό σωστό, προς Θεού μη πούμε άκόμη και λέξη για την μετάνοια!

Λοιπόν σαφώς δεν μένει τίποτε άλλο, καλοί μου φίλοι, απ' την ίδια την αντίστασή μας. Ό Όρθόδοξος τρόπος ζωής, είναι ό,τι πολύτιμο έχουμε. Τό τζιβαερίκό μας κατά τον Μακρυγιάννη. Για να μπορέσουμε να ζήσουμε σήμερα, αλλά και αιώνια. Η άπελευθέρωση άξίζει και είναι καρποφόρα, όταν γίνεται από τα πάθη και όχι από τα ήθη. Μην αντιστρέφουμε τα πράγματα!

Όπως γράφει ό Άγ. Γρηγόριος Νύσσης «κάθε πάθος όπου επικρατεί και κυριεύει την ψυχή μας, γίνεται άληθινός μας τύραννος, γιατί υποδουλώνει και διευθύνει τις σκέψεις και τις πράξεις μας». Ναί! Κι έμεις δεν θέλουμε να γίνουμε κανενός σκλάβοι, πολυ δε περισσότερο στους τόσο πονηρούς παγκοσμιοποιητές!

Υπόψη μας και αυτό που αναφέρει ό Άγιος Σωφρόνιος του Έσσεξ: «Επειδή ζούμε σε δύσκολους καιρούς, θα λάβουμε μισθό περισσότερο από άλλους ανθρώπους που έζησαν στις παλαιότερες εποχές και κράτησαν την πίστη»...

Ό έχων ότα ακούειν άκουέτω!



Χίλιες φορές καλύτερα να φεύγεις σαν τό άγριό μίμετα τον Έκκλησιασμό σου από τους ανθρώπους, για να διατηρήσεις την πνευματική σου φρονιμάδα και ό,τι απέκτισε από τον Έκκλησιασμό σου, παρά να κάθεται και να χαζεύεις στις γούνες (ή στις γραβάτες ή νέα), και έτσι να άγριέψεις πνευματικά από τό γρατσούνισμα που θα σου κάνει ό έχθρός στην καρδιά.

Άγιος Παΐσιος Άγιορείτης

«Ἡμέρας καὶ Νυκτὸς Πρεσβεύεις ὑπὲρ Ἡμῶν»

Γράφει ὁ Σαββίδης Παῦλος, Θεολόγος.



Ὅλα τὰ βλέμματα καὶ οἱ καρδιές, τοῦτες τὶς δίσεχτες ἡμέρες, ἱκετευτικά, παρακλητικά στρέφονται πρὸς τὸ καλοκαιριάτικο αὐγουστιανὸ Πάσχα. Τὸν Δεκαπενταύγουστο. Στὸν ζωηφόρο θάνατο, στὴν ἀθάνατη Κοίμησι τῆς Κυρίας Θεοτόκου.

Συντονισμένα καὶ τὰ πόδια μας—ἔστω καὶ βαρυφορτωμένα ἀπὸ τὴν ἔνοχη συνείδησή μας, τὴν οἰκονομικὴ δυσπραγία καὶ τὰ ὅποια ἀσήκωτα

βάρη τῆς καθημερινότητος—μᾶς ὀδηγοῦν ἀνεπίστροφα μπροστὰ στὴν θαυματουργικὴ εἰκόνα, γιὰ νὰ ἀποθέσουμε στὰ ἁγιασμένα πόδια τῆς τὸν ὀφειλόμενο σεβαστικὸ ἀσπασμὸ μας. Γιὰ νὰ δροσίσουμε τὰ φρυγμένα ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸ καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία χεῖλιά μας καὶ νὰ δηλώσουμε ἀμετάκλητα τὴν ἀγάπη μας στὴν τόσο πονεμένη ἀλλὰ καὶ πληγωμένη ἀπὸ τὰ δικά μας λάθη, τὰ δικά τῆς παιδιά, Θεομάννα.

Ἐλάτε λοιπὸν χρεωστικά νὰ ὑμνήσουμε καὶ κυρίως νὰ τιμήσουμε «τὴν Θεοτόκο καὶ Μητέρα τοῦ φωτός». Ἡ Δαμασκηνὴ θεολογία πανέμορφα μᾶς ὑπενθυμίζει πὼς «οὐδεὶς κατ' ἄξιαν τῆς Θεομήτορος τὴν ἱεράν ἐκδημιαν εὐφημῆσαι δυνήσεται—ἐπειδὴ—αὕτη θεομὸν ἐγκωμίων ὑπέρκειται». Ὁ ἴδιος Πατέρας ὁμολογεῖ πολὺ παρήγορα πὼς δὲν ὑπάρχει πτυχή, λεπτομέρεια ζωῆς, τὴν ὅποια νὰ μὴ γνωρίζει ἡ Θεοτόκος καὶ νὰ μὴν μπορεῖ νὰ δώσει ἀνάσα ζωῆς καὶ ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας.

Ὁ ἁγιορειτικὸς μοναχισμὸς νιώθει βαθύτατο συγκλονισμὸ στὸ νὰ τὴν ἐπικαλεῖται καὶ νὰ μὴν τὴν ἀφήνει ἡσυχία «ὑπὲρ πάσης ψυχῆς θλιβομένης τὲ καὶ καταπονομένης». Ἡ Παναγία δὲν ξεκουράζεται, ἀναπαύεται στὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν τέκνων τῆς κόπωση, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ποτὲ δὲν χαμηλώνει τὰ δεόμενα πανάχραντα χέρια τῆς. Ἡ Παναγία ἐπανέρχεται συχνὰ μέσα στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἱστορία κυρίως ὡς μητέρα. Καὶ μία καλὴ μητέρα ξέρει ν' ἀκούει, νὰ... πονᾷ καὶ ν' ἀγαπᾷ. (Γέρον Μωϋσῆς Ἁγιορείτης).

Εἶναι ἀδίστακτη ἡ πίστη ὄλων μας, ὅτι ἡ Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκος μετέχει στὴ δόξα τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς, συμβασιλεύει μαζί του, διευθύνει κοντὰ στὸ πλευρὸ του τὶς τύχες καὶ ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τοῦ κόσμου ποὺ ἐκτυλίσσονται μέσα στὸ χρόνον, μεσιτεύει «ἡμέρας

καὶ νυκτὸς» γιὰ ὄλους μας πρὸς Ἐκεῖνον, ὁ ὁποῖος θὰ ἔρθει νὰ κρίνει τὸν κόσμον.

Ὁ π. Θεοκλητὸς Διονυσιάτης στοχάζεται: «Ἐκεῖνη ἔχει τὸ πλῆθος τῶν πολλῶν οἰκτιρῶν. Ἔχει πολλὴ ἀγάπη στὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος, προπάντων στοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς. Ὁ Υἱὸς τῆς παίρνει μεγάλη χαρὰ, ὅταν τὸν παρακαλεῖ ἡ Μητέρα του, διότι θέλει νὰ σώσει τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ μόνο ἔφερε τὴν Μητέρα του καὶ μᾶς τὴν ἐχάρισε, γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἔχουμε μέσον πρὸς σωτηρίαν.»

Θαυμάζοντας τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ὁ ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης ἀναφωνεῖ: «Ποῦ ἤμπορῶ ἐγὼ νὰ ἀπαριθμῶ ὅλα τὰ μεγαλεῖα ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς εἰς τὴν Ἀειπάρθενον; Αὐτὰ εἶναι ἄπειρα κατὰ τὸ μέγεθος καὶ ἀναρίθμητα κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος. Καὶ ἂν ἦταν δυνατὸν νὰ ἐνωθοῦν ὅλοι ὅσοι ἐσώθησαν μὲ τὸν ἄσπορον Τόκον τῆς, καὶ νὰ γίνουν ἓνα στόμα καὶ μία γλῶσσα πάλιν δὲν ἤθελαν δυναθῆναι νὰ ἀριθμήσουν τὰ μεγαλεῖα τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐγκωμιάσουν κατὰ τὴν ἄξιαν τους...».

Ἡ ἐποχή μας φαίνεται νὰ εἶναι ἡ ἐποχὴ τῆς μεγάλης ἀποστασίας καὶ πραγματικὰ ἀντίχριστες οἱ ἡμέρες ποὺ ζοῦμε, ἀφοῦ οἱ «κυβερνήτες» (πολιτικοὶ καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ) μᾶς «ἐδίωξαν» κυριολεκτικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγκαλιὰ τῆς Θεομήτορος, Αὐτὸν ποὺ βαστάζει τὰ πάντα. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ἐξορίζεται ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τὴν κατ' ἐξοχὴν δική Του ἡμέρα, τὴν Κυριακή, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀκοῦν τὴν κυριακάτικη καμπάνα καὶ τοὺς θυμίζουν ἐνοχές.

Καὶ ὅμως ὅλοι αὐτοὶ θὰ τρέξουν νὰ δώσουν ἀνερευθρίαστα τὸ παρὸν στὴν μεγάλη γιορτὴ τῆς Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου, ὄχι ἀπὸ εὐλάβεια ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι γιὰ ἐμπορία ψήφων καὶ κάλυψη ἐνόχων κατατρεγμῶν συνειδήσεων. Ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος ὅμως ἀποστρέφει τὸ πρόσωπό τῆς ἀπὸ ὅσους «ὑβρῖσαν» τὸν Υἱὸν τῆς, καὶ νὰ θυμηθοῦμε τοὺς σοφοὺς λόγους τοῦ γέροντος Παΐσιου ὅτι «**θὰ δουλέψουν οἱ πνευματικοὶ νόμοι!**»

Ὅσοι πιστοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι «προσέλθωμεν τῷ τάφῳ τῆς Θεομήτορος!» Νὰ γονατίσουμε ἱκετευτικά, νὰ προσκυνήσουμε λατρευτικά, νὰ ὑμνήσουμε δοξολογικὰ καὶ ταπεινὰ νὰ παρακαλέσουμε τὴν Κυρία Θεοτόκο νὰ πρεσβεύει γιὰ κάθε ψυχὴ πονεμένη, πικραμένη καὶ παραπονεμένη, καὶ γιὰ τούτῃ τὴν πολυβασανισμένη πατρίδα μᾶς Ἑλλάδα.



Προτιμότερο νὰ συναναστρέφουσαι μὲ μικρότερα παιδιὰ τῆς ἡλικίας σου, πού εἶναι Ἀγγελάκια, παρὰ μὲ μεγαλύτερα ἢ τῆς ἡλικίας σου, ὅταν εἶναι διαβολάκια.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος Ἁγιορείτης

Ἡ Ἱστορία τῆς Ἁγίας Ζώνης

Γράφει ὁ Σύγγραψης Κωνσταντῖνος.

Στις 31 Αὐγούστου ἐορτάζουμε τὴν Κατάθεση τῆς Τιμίας Ζώνης τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἀποτελεῖ τὸ μοναδικὸ ἱερὸ κειμήλιο ποὺ σχετίζεται μὲ τὸν ἐπίγειο βίον τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ διασώζεται μέχρι σήμερα στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ τοῦ Βατοπαιδίου στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, στὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας. Ἡ ἴδια ἢ Θεοτόκος τὴν ὕφανε ἀπὸ τρίχες καμήλας.

Οἱ πληροφορίες γιὰ τὸν ἐπίγειο βίον τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι λιγοστὲς καὶ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν παράδοση ποὺ διασώθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀποστολικοὺς ἀκόμη χρόνους. Ἡ Θεοτόκος μέχρι τὴν Κοίμησή της παρέμεινε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ ἦταν μέλος τῆς πρώτης Ἐκκλησίας. Τὴ φροντίδα της εἶχε ἀναλάβει ὁ ἀγαπημένος μαθητὴς τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης.

Οἱ τελευταῖες στιγμὲς τῆς ἐπίγειας ζωῆς της εἶναι θαυμαστὲς καὶ συγκινητικὲς. Κοντὰ της βρέθηκαν

οἱ Ἀπόστολοι οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔφτασαν ἀπὸ τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα μὲ τρόπο θαυμαστό, «ἐπὶ νεφελῶν». Καὶ τότε, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριος ἐφανίστηκε θριαμβευτικὰ «ἐπὶ νεφελῶν», μὲ τὴ συνοδεία πλήθους ἀγγέλων. Ἡ Θεοτόκος προσευχήθηκε στὸν Υἱό της, παρηγόρησε τοὺς Ἀποστόλους καὶ ὑποσχέθηκε ὅτι θὰ εἶναι πάντα κοντὰ στὴν Ἐκκλησία γιὰ νὰ μεσιτεύει στὸν Υἱό της καὶ παρέδωσε τὴν πανάμομη ψυχὴ της στὸν Κύριο.

Οἱ Ἀπόστολοι ἐναπόθεσαν τὴν Ἁγία Σορὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου σὲ «καινὸν μνημεῖον» στὴ Γεθσημανῆ. Ἐκεῖ ἢ Ἁγία Ἐλένη ἀργότερα ἔκτισε τὸ ναὸ τῆς Κοιμήσεως. Τρεῖς μέρες μετὰ τὴν κοίμησή της κατέβηκε ὁ Κύριος μὲ τὴ συνοδεία τῶν Ἀρχαγγέλων Μιχαὴλ καὶ Γαβριὴλ καὶ πλήθους ἀγγέλων. Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαὴλ μὲ ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου παρέλαβε τὴν Ἁγία Σορὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ ὅλοι μαζί ἀνῆλθαν στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Ἡ θαυμαστὴ Μετάσταση τῆς Θεομήτορος εἶχε συντελεστεῖ. Τὸ ἱερὸ Σῶμα τῆς ἐνώθηκε πάλι μὲ τὴν ἀγνή ψυχὴ της.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Θωμᾶς ἦταν ὁ μόνος ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους ποὺ εἶδε τὴ θαυμαστὴ Μετάσταση τῆς Θεοτόκου. Δὲν εἶχε μπορέσει νὰ παρευρεθεῖ στὴν κηδεῖα τῆς εὐρισκόμενος στὴς Ἰνδίες. Ἐκεῖ, μετὰ ἀπὸ τρεῖς ἡμέρες, καὶ ἐνῶ τελοῦσε τὴ Θεῖα Λειτουργία, βρέθηκε στὴ Γεθσημανῆ μὲ θαυμαστὸ τρόπο καὶ εἶδε ὅλα ὅσα συνέβησαν. Τότε παρακάλεσε τὴν Παναγία

νὰ τοῦ δώσει γιὰ εὐλογία τὴ Ζώνη της. Καὶ ἐκεῖνη, καθὼς ἀνέβαινε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, τοῦ ἔριξε τὸ Ἱερὸ κειμήλιο «πρὸς δόξαν ἀκήρατον, ἀνερχομένη Ἀγνή, χειρὶ σου δεδώρησαι τῷ ἀποστόλῳ Θωμᾶ τὴν πάνσεπτον Ζώνην σου» ψάλλουμε στὸ ἀπολυτίκιό τῆς ἐορτῆς τῆς Καταθέσεως τῆς Τιμίας Ζώνης.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Θωμᾶς στὴ συνέχεια πληροφορήσε καὶ τοὺς ὑπόλοιπους Ἀποστόλους γιὰ τὰ θαυμαστὰ αὐτὰ γεγονότα καὶ τοὺς ἔδειξε τὴν Ἁγία Ζώνη τῆς Παναγίας. Ἐκεῖνοι δοξολόγησαν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοῦ ζήτησαν νὰ τοὺς εὐλογήσει, καθὼς ἦταν ὁ μόνος ποὺ ἀξιώθηκε νὰ δεῖ τὴν ἐνδοξη Μετάσταση τῆς Θεοτόκου.

Τὴ διαφύλαξη τῆς Ἁγίας Ζώνης ἀνέλαβαν δύο φτωχὲς καὶ εὐσεβεῖς γυναῖκες στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, οἱ ὁποῖες φρόντιζαν τὴ Θεοτόκο. Παρέλαβαν μὲ εὐλάβεια τὸ ἱερὸ κειμήλιο καὶ ἀπὸ τότε τὸ ἔργο τῆς διαφύλαξής του συνέχισε ἀπὸ γενιὰ σὲ γενιὰ μία εὐλαβὴς παρθένος καταγόμενη ἀπὸ τὴν οἰκογένεια αὐτῆ.



Ἡ ἀνακομιδὴ τῆς Τιμίας Ζώνης καὶ ἡ μεταφορὰ της στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἀρκάδιο (395-408). Ἡ ὑποδοχὴ τοῦ ἱεροῦ λειψάνου στὴ Ἱερὰ Βασιλεύουσα ἦταν υπέρ-λαμπρότατη. Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἀρκάδιος κατέθεσε τὴν Τιμία Ζώνη τῆς Θεοτόκου

σὲ λειψανοθήκη ποὺ ὀνόμασε «ἀγίαν σορὸν». Ἡ κατάθεση ἔγινε στὴς 31 Αὐγούστου, τελευταία μέρα τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους. Στὴν πόλη τοῦ Ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου, τῆς ὁποίας Ὑπέρμαχος Στρατηγὸς καὶ Προστάτης ἦταν ἢ Θεοτόκος, θὰ φυλασσόταν πλέον ἢ Ἁγία Ζώνη τῆς Θεομήτορος.

Ἡ κόρη τοῦ Ἀρκαδίου, ἡ αὐτοκράτειρα Πουλχερία, ἀνήγειρε λαμπρὸ ναὸ πρὸς τιμὴ τῆς Παναγίας, τὸν περιήφημο ναὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου τῶν Χαλκοπρατείων. (Χαλκοπράτεια ὀνομαζόταν ἢ συνοικία ὅπου κτίστηκε ὁ ναὸς τὸ ὄνομά της ἢ συνοικία τὸ ἔλαβε ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἐκεῖ πρὶν κατασκευάζονταν καὶ πωλοῦνταν χάλκινα ἀντικείμενα). Στὸ ναὸ αὐτὸ ἢ αὐτοκράτειρα κατέθεσε τὴν Ἁγία Ζώνη τῆς Παναγίας. Ἡ ἴδια μάλιστα ἢ Πουλχερία κέντησε μὲ χρυσὴ κλωστή τὴν Τιμία Ζώνη διακοσμώντας την. Ἡ χρυσὴ αὐτὴ κλωστή εἶναι εὐδιάκριτη καὶ σήμερα στὸ τμήμα ποὺ φυλάσσεται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου.

Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἰουστίνος Β΄ καὶ ἡ σύζυγός του Σοφία ἀνακαίνισαν τὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ τῶν Χαλκοπρατείων

καὶ ἀνήγειραν ἐκεῖ καὶ τὸ παρεκκλήσιο τῆς Ἁγίας Σοροῦ· ἐκεῖ, μέσα σὲ λειψανοθήκη καὶ πάνω στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα, φυλασσόταν ἡ Τιμία Ζώνη τῆς Θεοτόκου.

Πλήθος πιστῶν συνέρρεαν γιὰ νὰ τὴν προσκυνήσουν μὲ εὐλάβεια ζητώντας ἀπὸ τὴν Παναγία νὰ μεσιτεύσει μὲ τὶς πρεσβείες τῆς στὸν Κύριο. Πλήθος θαυμάτων ἐπιτέλεσε ἡ Τιμία Ζώνη. Ἄνθρωποι δυστυχισμένοι καὶ πονεμένοι βρῆκαν λύτρωση μὲ τὴ θαυματουργὴ δύναμη τοῦ ἁγίου λειψάνου. Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ ὑμνήθηκε ἀπὸ φημισμένους ἀνθρώπους τῆς ἐποχῆς· μὲ τὴ χάρη τῆς Παναγίας καθαγιάζει τοὺς πιστοὺς ποὺ προσέρχονται εὐλαβικὰ γιὰ νὰ τὸ προσκυνήσουν· τοὺς ἀνυψώνει ἀπὸ τὴ φθορά, τοὺς ἀπαλλάσσει ἀπὸ ἀσθένειες καὶ θλίψεις.

Στὴ συνέχεια ἡ Ἁγία Ζώνη τεμαχίστηκε καὶ τεμάχιά της μεταφέρθηκαν σὲ διάφορους ναοὺς τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Μετὰ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Σταυροφόρους τὸ 1204, κάποια τεμάχια ἀρπάχτηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς βάρβαρους καὶ ἀπολίτιστους κατακτητὲς καὶ μεταφέρθηκαν στὴ Δύση. Ἐνα μέρος ὁμως διασώθηκε καὶ παρέμεινε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τὸν Μιχαὴλ Η΄ Παλαιολόγο. Φυλασσόταν στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου τῶν Βλαχερνῶν. Ἡ τελευταία ἀναφορὰ γιὰ τὸ ἅγιο λείψανο εἶναι ἐνὸς ἀνώνυμου Ρώσου προσκυνητῆ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη μετὰ τοῦ 1424 καὶ 1453.

Μετὰ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους τὸ 1453, εἶναι ἄγνωστο τί ἀπέγινε τὸ ὑπόλοιπο μέρος τῆς Ἁγίας Ζώνης στὴ συνέχεια. Ἔτσι τὸ μοναδικὸ σωζόμενο τμήμα εἶναι αὐτὸ ποὺ φυλάσσεται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου· μὲ ἐξαιρετικὰ περιπετειώδη τρόπο ἔφτασε ἐκεῖ.

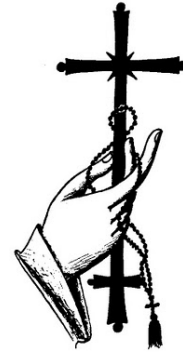
Ὁ Ἅγιος Κωνσταντῖνος εἶχε κατασκευάσει ἕναν χρυσοῦ σταυρὸ γιὰ νὰ τὸν προστατεύει στὶς ἐκστρατείες. Στὴ μέση του σταυροῦ εἶχε τοποθετηθεῖ τεμάχιο Τιμίου Ξύλου· ὁ σταυρὸς ἔφερε ἐπίσης θήκες μὲ ἅγια λείψανα Μαρτύρων, καὶ ἕνα τεμάχιο τῆς Τιμίας Ζώνης. Ὅλοι οἱ βυζαντινοὶ αὐτοκράτορες ἔπαιρναν αὐτὸν τὸν σταυρὸ στὶς ἐκστρατείες. Τὸ ἴδιο ἔπραξε καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἰσαάκιος Β΄ Ἄγγελος (1185-1195) σὲ μία ἐκστρατεία ἐναντίον τοῦ ἡγεμόνα τῶν Βουλγάρων Ἀσάν. Νικήθηκε ὁμως καὶ μέσα στὸν πανικὸ ἕνας ἱερέας τὸν πέταξε στὸ ποτάμι γιὰ νὰ μὴν τὸν βεβηλώσουν οἱ ἐχθροί. Μετὰ ἀπὸ μερικὲς μέρες ὁμως οἱ Βούλγαροι τὸν βρῆκαν· ἔτσι πέρασε στὰ χέρια τοῦ Ἀσάν.

Οἱ Βούλγαροι ἡγεμόνες μιμούμενοι τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς αὐτοκράτορες ἔπαιρναν μαζί τους στὶς ἐκστρατείες τὸ σταυρὸ. Σὲ μία μάχη ὁμως ἐναντίον τῶν Σέρβων ὁ βουλγαρικὸς στρατὸς νικήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Σέρβο ἡγεμόνα Λάζαρο (1371-1389). Ὁ Λάζαρος ἀργότερα δώρισε τὸ

σταυρὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Κωνσταντίνου στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου μαζί μὲ τὸ τεμάχιο τῆς Τιμίας Ζώνης.

Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς διασώζουν καὶ μία παράδοση σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἡ Τιμία Ζώνη τῆς Θεοτόκου ἀφιερώθηκε στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἰωάννη ΣΤ΄ Καντακουζηνὸ (1341-1354), ὁ ὁποῖος στὴ συνέχεια παραιτήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἀξίωμα, ἐκάφη μοναχὸς μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Ἰωάσαφ καὶ μόνασε στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου.

Τὰ θαύματα ποὺ πραγματοποίησε καὶ πραγματοποιεῖ ἡ Τιμία Ζώνη εἶναι πολλὰ. Βοηθᾷ εἰδικὰ τὶς στεῖρες γυναῖκες νὰ ἀποκτήσουν παιδί. Ἄν ζητήσουν μὲ εὐλάβεια τὴ βοήθεια τῆς Παναγίας, τοὺς δίδεται τεμάχιο κορδέλας ποὺ ἔχει εὐλογηθεῖ στὴν λειψανοθήκη τῆς Ἁγίας Ζώνης· ἂν ἔχουν πίστη, καθίστανται ἔγκυες.



Ὅταν ὁμιλοῦν γιὰ τὴν ἀποστασιοποίηση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπὸ τὴν «πολιτικὴ», ταυτίζουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία μὲ τὴν Ἱεραρχία καὶ γενικὰ τὸ Ἱερατεῖο!

Θέλουν νὰ λησμονοῦν ὅτι μία τέτοια ἐκκλησιολογικὴ ἀντίληψη εἶναι ἄκρως αἰρετικὴ, παπικῆς ἐμπνεύσεως. Ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι τὸ σῶμα τῶν πιστῶν, κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί. Ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι παροῦσα καὶ σὲ μία μικρὴ ομάδα πιστῶν, ὅπως μᾶς διαβεβαίωσε ὁ Κύριος, ὅπου «εἰσὶ δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν» (Ματθ. 18, 20), ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι ὅπου εἶναι παρὼν ὁ Χριστός, εἶναι παροῦσα καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία Του, τὸ δικό Του Σῶμα. Ἄρα ὅσοι πιστοὶ ἐνώθηκαν στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, νὰ διακονήσουν τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι (καὶ) αὐτοὶ Ἐκκλησία!

Μὲ βάση αὐτὴ τὴν κεφαλαιώδη ἐκκλησιολογικὴ ἀρχὴ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀπαγορευεῖται σὲ σύνολα χριστιανῶν νὰ πολιτεύονται; Μήπως ἔτσι παραδίδουν τὴν ἐξουσία στοὺς ἐκτὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Εἶναι δυνατόν ἡ Ἐκκλησία νὰ εἶναι ἀποξενωμένη ἀπὸ τὴν ὅλη ζωὴ τῶν πιστῶν, κλεισμένη στοὺς τοίχους τῶν ναῶν; Ἄν αὐτὴ δὲν εἶναι μανιχαϊστικὴ ἀντίληψη, τί ἄλλο μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι;

Γραφεῖο ἐπὶ τῶν Αἰρέσεων τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Πειραιῶς

Οἱ Πάντες Σχεδὸν τὴν Μεταστροφή τους τὴν Ὀφείλουν σὲ Κάποια Δοκιμασία

Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Φιλοθέτου, «Παραινέσεις Πατρικές». Εκδόσεις «Ορθόδοξος Κυψέλη», Θεσσαλονίκη 2013, σελ. 14.

Ἡ θλίψη εἶναι κακὸ πρᾶγμα. Ἀλλὰ πίσω ἀπ' αὐτό, πίσω ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο, πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ θλίψη, πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ δοκιμασία, κρύβεται ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, κρύβεται ἡ ἀναγέννηση, ἡ ἀνάπλαση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τῆς οἰκογένειας.

Οἱ πάντες σχεδὸν τὴν μεταστροφή τους τὴν ὀφείλουν σὲ κάποια δοκιμασία. Νομίζουν ὅτι πηγαίνουν ὅλα ὠραῖα· τοὺς παίρνει ὁ Θεὸς τὸ παιδί· κλάματα, κακὸ.

Ἔρχεται καὶ ἐπισκιάζει ἔπειτα ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ εἰρηνεύουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι· καὶ πλησιάζουν τὴν ἐκκλησία, πλησιάζουν τὴν ἐξομολόγηση, πλησιάζουν τὸν ἱερέα. Χάριν τοῦ παιδιοῦ πᾶνε στὴν ἐκκλησία· ὁ πόνος τους κάνει ν' ἀναζητήσουν, νὰ προσευχηθοῦν ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως, νὰ κάνουν τίς λειτουργίες.

Ὁ πόνος ἀπαλύνει τὴν καρδιά καὶ τὴν κάνει δεκτικὴ τῶν λόγων τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ πρῶτα ἦταν σκληρὴ, δὲν δεχόταν. Π.χ. ἓνας ἄνθρωπος στὸ σφρίγος τῆς νεότητος ἐγὼ εἶμαι, σκέφτεται, καὶ κανένας ἄλλος δὲν εἶναι. Νὰ πτυχία, νὰ καὶ οἱ δόξες, νὰ καὶ ἡ ὑγεία, νὰ καὶ οἱ ὁμορφιές, νὰ καὶ ὅλα.

Ὅταν ὁμως τὸν ξαπλώσει στὸ κρεβάτι μία ἀσθένεια, τότε ἀρχίζει νὰ σκέφτεται διαφορετικὰ: **«Ματαιότης ματαιότητων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης.** Μπορεῖ νὰ πεθάνω. Τί τὸ ὄφελος ὅλα αὐτὰ», καὶ ἀρχίζει νὰ σκέφτεται διαφορετικὰ. Ἔρχεται φερ' εἰπεῖν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος, τὸν πλησιάζει. Διάβασε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ βιβλίον νὰ δεῖς τί λέει. Ἀκούει καὶ ἓνα λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Τότε τὸν ἀκούει τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κι ἅμα τοῦ δώσεις καὶ βιβλίον, ὁ πόνος ἤδη τοῦ ἔχει κάνει τὴν καρδιά του ἔτσι κατάλληλη καὶ ἀνοίγει καὶ τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον καὶ τὸ διαβάξει καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἀρχίζει ἡ ἀνάπλαση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ ὅταν γίνῃ καλά, ἀμέσως πλέον σηκώνεται καὶ ζεῖ προσεκτικὰ τὴ ζωὴ του. Δὲν ζεῖ ὅπως πρῶτα μὲ τὴν ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ τὴ φαντασία ποὺ εἶχε.



Κάποιος πρέπει νὰ σᾶς πεῖ πὼς δὲν ζεῖτε σὲ ὄνειρο, οὔτε σὲ ἐφιάλτη. Ζεῖτε μία πολὺ ἄσχημη πραγματικότητα ποὺ θὰ χειροτερέψει!

Αὐτὰ τὰ χρόνια τὰ δύσκολα μόνο λίγοι ἀπλοὶ Παπᾶδες θὰ κρατήσουν καὶ θὰ διαφυλάξουν τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία. Οἱ μεγάλοι ἀξιωματοῦχοι θὰ ἀκολοθήσουν τὸν «ἄλλον». Ὁ κόσμος θὰ μοιραστεῖ: ποῖον νὰ ἀκολουθήσει; Αὐτὸ θὰ κρατήσῃ λίγο καὶ μετὰ θ' ἀκολουθήσῃ ὁ πόλεμος. Μετὰ τὸν πόλεμον θὰ γίνῃ μία Σύνοδος καὶ θὰ βάλῃ στὴν σειρὰ τὰ πράγματα.

Ἅγιος Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ Ἀριζόνας

Στενὲς Σχέσεις μὲ τοὺς Παπικούς, ποὺ ἐπὶ Τόσους Αἰῶνες Μᾶς Ρημάζανε;

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου, «Κατὰ Ἐνωτικῶν».

Μεγάλο, πολὺ μεγάλο καὶ σπουδαῖο εἶναι ἓνα ζήτημα ποὺ δὲν τοῦ δώσανε σχεδὸν καθόλου προσοχὴ οἱ περισσότεροί Ἕλληνες. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ὅτι ἀπὸ καιρὸ ἀρχίσανε κάποιοι δικοὶ μας κληρικοὶ νὰ θέλουν καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ δέσουν στενὲς σχέσεις μὲ τοὺς παπικούς, ποὺ ἐπὶ τόσους αἰῶνες μᾶς ρημάζανε. Γιατί, στὰ ἀληθινὰ, δὲν ὑπάρχει πιὸς μεγάλος ἀντίμαχος τῆς φυλῆς μας, καὶ ἐπίμονος ἀντίμαχος, ποὺ, σώνει καὶ καλά, θέλει νὰ σβῆσει τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία.

Οἱ δεσποτάδες ποὺ εἶπα πὼς τοὺς ἔπιασε, ἄξαφνα καὶ ἀναπάντεχα, ὁ ἔρωτας μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους, λένε πὼς τὸ κάνουν ἀπὸ «ἀγάπη». Μὰ αὐτὸ εἶναι χονδροειδέστατη δικαιολογία καὶ καλὰ θὰ κάνουν νὰ παρατήσουν αὐτὰ τὰ ροσόλια τῆς «ἀγάπης», ποὺ τὴν κάνανε ρεζίλι. Ὁ διάβολος, ἅμα θελήσῃ νὰ κάνει τὸ πιὸς πονηρὸ παιγνίδι του, μιᾶ, ὁ ἀλιτήριος γιὰ ἀγάπη. Ὅ,τι εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς, τὸ λέγει καὶ αὐτὸς κάλπικα, γιὰ νὰ ξεγελάσει.

Τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, τοὺς ρασοφόρους μας στὴν Πόλη, τοὺς ἔπιασε παροξυσμὸς τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τοὺς Ἰταλιάνους, ποὺ στέκονται, ὅπως πάντα, κρούοι καὶ περήφανοι καὶ δὲν γυρίζουν νὰ τοὺς δοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς «ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφούς», ποὺ ὅσα τοὺς κάνανε ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἴσαμε τώρα, δὲν τοὺς τᾶκανε μίτε Τοῦρκος, μίτε Τάταρος, μίτε Μωχαμετάνος. Ἴσως καὶ οἱ δικοὶ μας νὰ κάνουν ἀπὸ παρεξηγημένη καλωσύνη.

Ὅπως εἶπα, οἱ περισσότεροί δικοὶ μας δὲν δώσανε καμμιά σημασία σ' αὐτὲς τὶς φιλοπαπικὲς κινήσεις, ποὺ εἶναι θάνατος γιὰ τὸ γένος μας καὶ ποὺ τὶς κινήσανε οἱ καταχθόνιες δυνάμεις ποὺ πολεμᾶνε τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ποὺ μὲ τὰ λεπτὰ τους ἀγοράζουν ὅλους, δὲν δώσανε λοιπὸν καμμιά σημασία, γιὰ τὴν ἀθεωροῦνε τιποτένια πράγματα, ἂν δὲν εἶναι καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι ἀγορασμένοι, ἄξια μοναχὰ γιὰ κάποιους στενοκέφαλους παλιοημερολογίτες καὶ φανατικούς ἀποπετρωμένους χριστιανούς. Τώρα τὰ μυαλὰ γινήκανε φαρδεῖα, καὶ καταγίνονται μὲ ἄλλα κοσμοϊστορικὰ προβλήματα!

«Θὰ καθόμαστε νὰ κυττάζουμε τώρα παπᾶδες καὶ Ὀρθοδοξίες»; Μὰ αὐτοὺς δὲν τοὺς μέλει καὶ ἂν ἐξαφανισθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον κάθε ἑλληνικὸ πρᾶγμα. Καὶ θὰ ἐξαφανισθεῖ ὄχι τόσο εὐκόλα μὲ τὸν ἀμερικανισμὸ ποὺ πάθαμε, ὅσο ἂν γίνουμε στὴ θρησκεία παπικοί. Γιατί γι' αὐτοῦ πᾶμε. Παπικὴ Ἑλλάδα θὰ πεῖ ἐξαφάνιση τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Νὰ γιατί εἶπα πὼς εἶναι πολὺ σπουδαῖο ζήτημα αὐτὲς οἱ ἐρωτοτροπίες ποὺ ἀρχίσανε κάποιοι κληρικοὶ δικοὶ μας μὲ τοὺς παπικούς, καὶ ἡ αἰτία εἶναι τὸ ὅτι δὲν νοιώσανε τί εἶναι Ὀρθοδοξία ὀλότελα, μ' ὅλο ποὺ εἶναι δεσποτάδες.

ON THE EIGHT PRINCIPAL TEMPTING THOUGHTS

By Evagrius Ponticus from his "Praktikos / Πρακτικός." The author is also called Evagrius the Solitary (345–399 AD); he was a Christian monk and ascetic from Heraclea, a city on the coast of Bithynia in Asia Minor. One of the most influential theologians in the late fourth-century church, he was well known as a thinker, polished speaker, and gifted writer.

Being a Theologian means first and foremost that someone is an expert in the wiles of the devil.

[Fr. John S. Romanides]

† † †

There are eight principal kinds of [tempting] thoughts (logismoi), that contain within themselves every [tempting] thought:

First, that of gluttony;
and with it, that of sexual immorality;
third, that of love of money;
fourth, that of sadness;
fifth, that of anger;
sixth that of acedia;
seventh, that of vainglory;
eighth, that of pride.

We cannot [control] whether these [tempting-thoughts] can agitate the soul or not; but whether they remain [in us] or not, and whether they arouse the passions or not—that we can [control].

THE [tempting]-thought of gluttony suggests to the monk the sudden rejection of his asceticism. The stomach, liver, spleen, and [resultant] congestive heart failure are depicted, along with long sickness, lack of necessities, and unavailability of physicians. It often leads him to recall those of the brethren who have suffered these things. Sometimes it even deceives those who have suffered from this kind of thing to go and visit [others] who are practicing self-control, to tell them all about their misfortunes and how this resulted from their asceticism.

THE demon of sexual immorality (*porneia*) compels desiring for different bodies. Especially violently does it attack those who practice self-control, so that they will cease, as if achieving nothing.

Contaminating the soul, it bends it down towards these sorts of deeds: it makes it speak certain words and then hear them, as if the thing were actually there to be seen.

LOVE of money (avarice) suggests: a long old age; hands powerless to work; hunger and disease yet to come; the bitterness of poverty; and the disgrace of receiving the necessities [of life] from others.

GLOOMINESS sometimes arises from frustrated desires; but sometimes it is the result of anger. When desires are frustrated it arises thus: certain [tempting] thoughts first seize the soul and remind it of home and parents and its former course of life.

When they see the soul following them without resistance, and dissipating itself in mental pleasures, they take and dunk [lit baptize] it in gloom, since it is the case that these earlier things are gone and cannot be recovered due to the [monk's] present way of life. Then the miserable soul, having been dissipated by the first [tempting-]thought, is humiliated all the more by the second.

ANGER (*orgē*) is the sharpest passion. It is said to be a boiling and movement of indignation (*thymos*) against a wrongdoer or a presumed wrongdoer: it causes the soul to be savage all day long, but especially in prayers it seizes the nous, reflecting back the face of the distressing person.

Then sometimes it is lingering and is changed into rancor (*mēnis*) and [thus] it causes disturbances at night: bodily weakness and pallor; and attacks from poisonous beasts. These four things associated with rancor may be found to have been summoned up by many other [tempting] thoughts.

THE demon of acedia, which is also called the noonday demon (Pss 90:6), is the most burdensome of all the demons. It besets the monk at about the fourth hour (10 am) of the morning, encircling his soul until about the eighth hour (2 pm).

[1] First it makes the sun appear to slow down or stop, so the day seems to be fifty hours long.

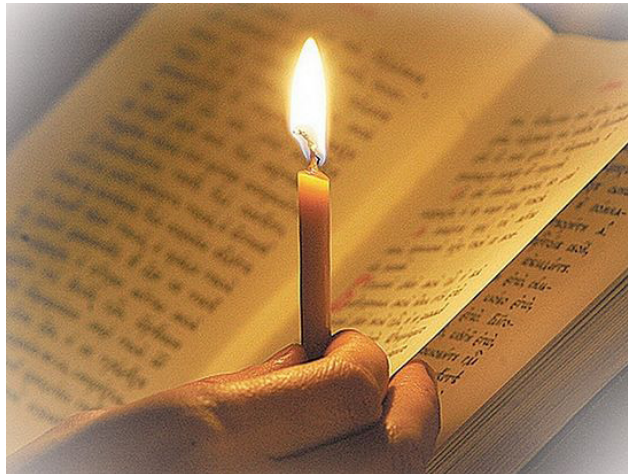
[2] Then it forces the monk to keep looking out the window and rush from his cell to observe the sun in order to see how much longer it is to the ninth hour, i.e. 3 pm, and to look about in every directions in case any of the brothers are there.

[3] Then it assails him with hatred of his place, his way of life and the work of his hands; that love has departed from the brethren and there is no one to console him (cf. Lam 1:17, 21).

[4] If anyone has recently caused the monk grief the demon adds this as well to amplify his hatred [of these things].

[5] It makes him desire other places where he can easily find all that he needs and practice an easier, more convenient craft. After all, pleasing the Lord is not dependent on geography, the demon adds; God is to be worshipped everywhere.

[6] It joins to this the remembrance of the monk's family and his previous way of life, and suggests to him that he still has a long time to live, raising up before his eyes a vision of how burdensome the ascetic life is.



So, it employs, as they say, every [possible] means to move the monk to abandon his cell and give up the race. No other demon follows on immediately after this one but after its struggle the soul receives in turn a peaceful condition and unspeakable joy.

THE thought of vainglory is especially subtle and it easily infiltrates those whose lives are going well, wanting to publish their efforts and go hunting for glory among men;

[1] it raises up a fantasy of demons shouting,

[2] and women being healed,

[3] and a crowd of people wanting to touch the monk's clothes.

[4] It prophesies priesthood for him, and sets the stage with people thronging at his door, calling for him, and even though he resists he will be carried off under constraint.

Then, having raised him up with empty hopes like this, it suddenly leaps away and leaves him, abandoning him to be tempted either by the demon of pride or by the demon of gloominess, which brings on thoughts contrary to the previous hopes. Sometimes it also hands over to the demon of sexual immorality the man who, a moment before, was being carried off forcibly to be made a holy priest.

THE demon of pride conducts the soul to its worst fall. It urges it:

[1] not to admit God's help

[2] and to believe that the soul is responsible for its own achievements,

[3] and to disdain the brethren as fools because they do not all see this about it.

This demon is followed by:

[1] anger and

[2] sadness and the final evil,

[3] utter insanity and madness, and visions of mobs of demons in the air.

Tactics for the Eight Tempting Thoughts

THE wandering nous is made stable by

[1] reading,

[2] vigils and

[3] prayer.

Burning *epithymia* (desire) is quenched by

[1] hunger,

[2] toil, and

[3] solitude.

Churning *thymos* (indignation) is calmed by

[1] the singing of Psalms, by

[2] patient endurance and

[3] mercy.

But all these practices are to be engaged in at proper times and in proper measure. What is done untimely or without measure is temporary. And what is temporary is more harmful and not beneficial.

WHEN our soul longs for a variety of different foods, then its portion should be reduced to bread and water to make it thankful for a little morsel. It is satiety that desires variety in food; hunger considers it blessedness just to have satiety of bread.

A GREAT aid to chastity is deprivation of water: be persuaded by three hundred Israelites who defeated Midian in company with Gideon. (Judges 7:5-7).

JUST as life and death cannot coexist in the same subject at the same time; so also it is impossible for love (*agape*) to coexist with wealth. Love destroys not only wealth, but also this, our temporal life.

THE one who flees all worldly pleasures is a tower inaccessible to the demon of gloominess. For gloominess is the deprivation of pleasure that is either present or anticipated. So it is impossible for us to drive away this enemy as long as we have any earthly attachment. He sets his trap and produces gloominess just where he sees our inclinations lead us.

ANGER and hatred amplify indignation: merciful compassion and gentleness decrease it even when present.

THE *sun should not set on our anger* (Eph 4:26): so that the demons do not, rising up by night, terrify the soul and make the nous more cowardly the day after for the fight. For terrifying phantasms are produced by the disturbance of indignation. And nothing makes a deserter out of the nous as much as disturbed indignation.

WHEN the irascible part of our soul (*thymikon*) seizes some excuse and is troubled, then the demons suggest to us how good it is to withdraw [into solitude] thus keeping us from resolving the cause of the gloominess and freeing ourselves from the disturbance.

But when our desiring part (*epithymetikon*) is enkindled, then they make us sociable and call us hardened and uncivil, so that by desiring bodies we [then] come into contact with bodies. We should not obey them, but instead do the opposite.

DO not give yourself to the [tempting] thought of anger by fighting mentally the distressing person; nor to that of fornication by spending most of the time in fantasies of pleasures.



For the one darkens the soul, the other summons it to burn with passion. Both of these pollute your nous.

And [thus] at the time of prayer [you will] fantasize images; and not [being able] to offer pure prayer to God, you will immediately fall victim to the demon of acedia. This demon readily leaps upon such states and, like a dog with a young deer, tears the soul to pieces.

THE nature of indignation is to fight the demons and to struggle over any kind of pleasure. For this reason the angels suggest to us spiritual pleasures and the blessedness [coming] from them; they encourage us to direct our indignation towards the demons. The latter, however, dragging us towards worldly desires, violently force our indignation against nature to fight human beings, so as to darken the nous, separating it from Knowledge, and [thus] making it a traitor to the virtues.

TAKE heed to yourself, that you never so provoke any of the brethren that he runs away, or you will never escape during your lifetime from the demon of despondency, which will always become an obstacle for you at the time of prayer.

GIFTS quench memory of injury (*mnēsikakia*). Let Jacob convince you of this. He insinuated himself into Esau's graces with gifts, when he came against him with four hundred men. (Gen 32). But as we are poor, we should make up for our lack by hospitality at table.

WHEN we are oppressed by the demon of listlessness, then with tears let us divide our soul in two, one part encouraging the other, sowing good hopes within us, soothing with David's chant, *Why are you downcast, my soul, why do you trouble me? Hope in God, for I will confess him, the Savior of my countenance and my God.* (Pss 41:6).

WE must not abandon our cell in time of temptation, making eloquent excuses: we should stay seated within and persevere and bravely receive all comers, especially the demon of acedia, the most oppressive of all, and thereby most highly proving the soul's quality. Fleeing from such conflicts and trying to shun this teaches the nous to be incompetent, fearful and fugitive.

OUR holy teacher, who was greatly experienced in said: "The monk must always be ready as though he were to die tomorrow, but he must as well treat his body as if he were going to live with it for many years. The first [approach] cuts off the thoughts of acedia and makes the monk more

zealous, while the second maintains the body and keeps its self-control in balance."

IT is difficult to escape the [tempting]thought [*logismos*] of vainglory, since whatever you do to subjugate it becomes the occasion for renewed vainglory. Our proper thoughts (*logismoī*) are not all opposed by the demons; some of them are opposed by our own individual vices.

I HAVE observed the demon of vainglory chased away by almost all the other demons; but then when its pursuers failed, it shamelessly came forward, proclaiming to the monk how great [the monk's] virtues are.

ONE who has reached knowledge and harvested the pleasure it brings will no longer be persuaded by the demon of vainglory setting before him all the pleasures of the world.

For what could it hold out to him better than spiritual contemplation? But to the extent that we have not tasted the savor of knowledge, we should eagerly engage in asceticism [*praktikē*], demonstrating to God our goal: namely, that we do everything for the sake of knowledge of Him.

REMEMBER your former life and your old trespasses, and how while subject to passions you transitioned to apathy by the mercy of Christ, and how you then left the world that had so frequently and in so many ways humiliated you.

And reflect on this for me: who kept guard over you in the desert and drove away the demons who gnashed their teeth against you?

Thoughts [*logismoī*] of this sort

will instill humility and deny entry the demon of pride.

IF we have memories full of passion of certain things, it is because we once welcomed these very things with passion. Whatever things we welcome with passion, these things we will later remember with passion. So anyone who has defeated the demons which activate such things makes light of the things they activate. The immaterial battle is harder than the material battle.

THE passions of the soul originate from human beings; those of the body [originate] from the body. And while the passions of the body are cut away by self-control, those of the soul [are cut back] by spiritual love.

THE demons that preside over the passions of the soul [i.e. anger] persist obstinately until death; those that preside over the passions of the body withdraw more quickly. And other demons are like the sun that rises and



sets, affecting only one part of the soul; but the noonday [demon] (i.e. acedia) generally envelops the whole soul and suffocates the nous. For this reason, the solitary life is sweet after we have emptied out the passions; then our memories are simple and the monk's struggle is thus not to prepare him to fight, but rather to contemplate [the struggle] itself.

WE must consider whether it is concepts (*ennoia*) that move passions or passions [that] move concepts. Some [people] have held the first opinion, others the second.

BY means of sensations passions are naturally aroused: if both charity and self-control are present they will not be aroused; [but] if absent, they will be aroused. Indignation requires more remedies than desire, and because of this charity is called *great* (1 Cor 13:13), because it bridles indignation; and therefore Holy Moses in his natural science symbolically names it *snake-fighter*. (Lev 11:22).

ON account of the strong stench in demons the soul is usually enflamed against [tempting] thoughts [*logismoï*] when it perceives them approaching, being affected by the passion associated with the demon that is annoying it.



He 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.

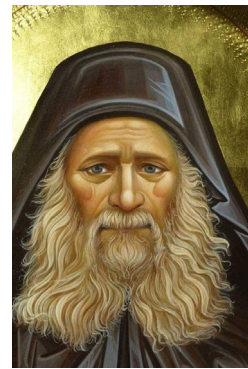
The one who still lives in the fog, and is still perceptive to sensuality, will relive the same passions, in such a way, that the remembrance of past sins will prove to be a contamination, and not a confession.

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

THE FRAGRANCE OF PRAYER

By the Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona, from "My Elder Joseph the Hesychast."



Once when Geronda and I were outside with our prayer-ropes and he was telling me about prayer and his experiences of looking after monks in their old age, I could smell lilies and roses, even though we only had holly-oak trees there. I was sniffing intently, and he said to me, "Why are you doing that?"

"Geronda, I smell lilies and roses."

"Why don't you go over there to my door?" So I went over to his door and smelled his cell. That heavenly fragrance was so strong that it stuck to my beard and my clothes. Then he explained to me, "It is from prayer. Don't you understand? The name of Christ is fragrance."

I could sense the scent of his prayer pervading everything around him. It affected not only my bodily senses but also my entire internal self. When my brothers went to Geronda's cell after his vigil to tell him their confessions, they also sensed the same fragrance many times.

When Geronda's prayer culminated, his little cell became a "burning bush." Many times I said to myself, "I wonder what takes place within the soul, within the heart of this holy man?"

In order to grasp what was really taking place within the heart of this contemporary saint, we, too, must also get a taste of how it feels when the prayer is continuously being said on its own accord within our heart. We must see and experience through noetic prayer what God is like—what beauty He has, what His divine traits are. We must feel how He mysteriously exists, how He miraculously sustains all creation, how He is present within creation yet beyond it and completely within the heart, how *theoria* occurs within the nous, how He takes the nous and divinely guides it into His mysteries, and what is revealed to the nous.

Geronda lived all these things to a fullness beyond our comprehension. The power of Geronda's pure prayer affected not just himself but even nature around him. When Geronda was praying, wild birds would come to the windows of his cell and peck on the panes. One would think that this was the activity of the devil to hinder him from prayer. But, in fact, the wild birds were attracted by Geronda's prayer!

† † †

How vividly these great monastic saints must have felt grace in prayer! God visits us somewhat faintly in prayer, and we feel a little bit of grace. But they who were engrossed in *theoria* all night long—how intensely they must have felt the kingdom of heaven! *The kingdom of heaven is within us.* (cf. Lk.17:21).

WHO IS A SAINT?

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, *Empirical Dogmatics*, vol. 1. The "quoted" text is by Fr. John Romanides.

All those who to varying degrees share in the sanctifying and glorifying energies of God are called saints. The category of saints includes the Prophets, Apostles, Fathers and all the friends of Christ down through the centuries, all who share in the illuminating and glorifying energies of God, among whom are the Martyrs and the holy ascetics, clergy and laity, men and women, young and old. All these are called saints.

Who is a Saint?

Saints are not just good people, but those who are united with the unincarnate and incarnate Word, with Christ. Sanctity is the shared characteristic of all the Prophets, Apostles, Fathers, Martyrs and Ascetics. All are saints, because they have God's sanctifying energy and they are Fathers, because they beget spiritual children.

"The distinction between saints and Fathers does not exist in the Fathers. For the Fathers of the Church the saints are Fathers and the Fathers are saints."

Saints is the name given to those who, through purification and illumination, reach glorification and share in the glorifying energies of God.

"Are those who have arrived at glorification and become saints a reality or are they not a reality? That is the fundamental issue."

The meaning of sanctity is not humanistic or moralistic but theological. Saints are those who have been spiritually cured. Their hearts have been purified and they have reached illumination of the nous and glorification. They are the real—the active—members of the Body of Christ.

"The current perception is that if someone is a good human being, law-abiding citizen and so on, then he is a good Christian and a prospective saint. In that case, all our grandmothers and grandfathers are prospective saints, according to the criteria of the moralists. Someone with a moralistic perception of sanctity might see things in exactly this way.

In patristic theology, however, there is another perception. Anyone who has been cured is a saint. A saint in the patristic tradition simply means someone who is cured. It means someone who has gone through purification and

reached illumination, and from illumination has gone on to glorification. He has been cured and, consequently, he is a saint.

For this reason, in the early Church they called one another saints, even before they died. Why were the Christians called saints—the saints of Thessaloniki, the saints of Corinth and so on—and why did they call living people saints? Why? Because **the members of the Church in early times were in the state of illumination.** They had noetic prayer at the very least, and as they had noetic prayer and were in the state of illumination, they were called saints."

In fallen human life the noetic faculty (energy) does not function or functions inadequately. When the noetic faculty is released from the rational faculty (energy) and activated, then the nous is illuminated and, by the action of God and his

own collaboration, man reaches glorification. He is a saint. A saint, by God's action and his own cooperation, becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul analyzes this fact. He writes: *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.* (Rom 8:14). To be led by the Spirit means that they have received the Holy Spirit and acquired the gift of adoption as sons: *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption.* (Rom 8:15). The spirit of adoption is expressed by prayer of the heart: *By whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."* (Rom 8:15). It is significant that *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.* (Rom 8:16). Someone who does not have this Spirit does not have noetic prayer. He is not a son of God by grace and, consequently, he is not a real member of the Body of Christ: *If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.* (Rom 8:9).

These are the characteristic features of a saint.

"The Apostle Paul says that we do not speak with human wisdom, but with the power of the Holy Spirit. What does this mean and why is the power of the Holy Spirit opposed to the wisdom of this world? It is the power of the energy of the Holy Spirit within man.

Everyone who sees a saint understands that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit. He is not convinced about him being a temple of the Holy Spirit by philosophical arguments or by the theology of this one or another. He sees that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because he often even hears Him taking the part of the priest within him.



What does the witness of the Spirit say to man's spirit? *That we are children of God*. This testimony that the Apostle Paul speaks about, saying that *The Spirit cries out Abba, Father in our hearts*, this Spirit, Who cries out within our hearts—is St. Paul describing a reality or a figment of the imagination?

St. Paul speaks in his Epistles about this power of the Holy Spirit in man's heart. What is this power? Anyone who looks carefully at what St. Paul writes sees that he is speaking about real prayer within the heart of man."

The difference between deranged people and saints lies in how their noetic faculty functions. If someone's noetic faculty is identified with the rational faculty and the latter deviates from its normal function, this is insanity. If the noetic faculty is motivated by the Holy Spirit according to God, then the man is a saint.

"The difference between madness and sanctity is that in the first case the noetic faculty is unfettered, unrestrained and so on, and is influenced by someone's personality in such a way that he becomes insane, because he does not function normally, like an ordinary human being."

When someone participates in the illuminating and glorifying energies of God, he experiences divine grace in his entire being: in his soul through noetic prayer, and in his body by overcoming the fear of death. Thus he is led to martyrdom.

"The lives of the New Martyrs are a proof that the state of illumination, as it existed in the early Church in the years of persecution, continued to exist as the heart of Orthodoxy in the years of Turkish domination. This power of the faithful to undergo martyrdom is what saved Orthodoxy in the years of Turkish domination, so that not all the Romans [Greeks] became Muslims. Most Romans became Muslims. Why did the small minority who remained not become Muslims? They had great confidence in the saints of the Church, that they were bearers of divine grace and that divine power really existed within them. And what is divine power? It is this power to be able to undergo martyrdom and physical tortures so as not to deny Christ. This was the proof of the true faith."

The saints, therefore, are not just good people but those who are glorified. There are some who pretend to be saints, but in reality they are hypocrites who lead people astray. Even heretics are good people and may lead moral lives, but because they do not have Orthodox theology and the ascetic teaching of the Church, they go no further than an ethical way of life. They do not share in the glorified energy of God and are unable to cure others.

"In a conference, someone stood up and said that Arius was a holy man. Because he did not know what sanctity was. Other people here were present and they heard him with their own ears. Arius was a saint! What did he mean? He meant that Arius was a good man. There is no doubt at all that he was a good man; Arius was a very good man."

A good man, however, is not the same as a saint. The saints participate in the glorifying energies of God, and this is obvious, because they are able to help people, work miracles and cure them. Fake doctors may be good people, but they are unable to cure.

"You go to a charlatan and he says 'Yes, so we shall do this and we shall do that, some liniments ... You have this, that, and the other...' and he gathers up the thousand-drachma notes month after month. In the end the patient is forced to go to another doctor. Then he realizes that the first one was a charlatan."

The aim of the Church is to sanctify its members, but simultaneously to use the appropriate means to achieve this aim. It has been emphasized repeatedly that sanctity is experienced through the action of God and man's cooperation. God acts and man collaborates.

"Here we have to mention man's freedom. I always remember that my mother used to say to me, 'Son,' she said, in Cappadocian, 'Son, you can't force someone to be a saint.' Of course a human being cannot become a saint by force. Everyone has to choose the path of therapeutic asceticism."

Therapeutic asceticism is inseparably linked with the sacramental life of the Church. It consists of purification, illumination and glorification, which we encounter in all the patristic teaching of the Church. Therapeutic asceticism is also integrally associated with the Church's Sacraments.

It should be pointed out here that there is a distinction between the noetic and rational faculties (energies). The noetic faculty must be activated by prayer, whereupon the nous is illuminated. In the first phase the nous, but not the rational faculty, must be emptied of all thoughts (*logismoi*). This is not a matter of being illiterate, but a special ascetic and ecclesiastical method.

"The Fathers never meant that by being illiterate someone could achieve sanctity, but by emptying the nous of thoughts. That is what they meant, not by mental ignorance."



You have need of books that will assist in your repentance. If you want to help the Church, correct yourself, and immediately amendment is made to a small part of the Church. Naturally, if everyone did this, then the Church would be put in order.

Therefore, limit yourself to the Patristic writings and avoid sappy and superficial books by contemporary writers, who use long titles to provoke spiritual interests [and deception]. One gets tired only by reading them, just like the cow, when its stall is full of straw, tires of chewing and ruminating its food all day long, and in the end does not produce even one glass of milk...

St. Paisios the Athonite

THE PURPOSE OF VISIONS (THEORIAS)

Excerpt from "The Departure of the Soul," pp. 898-900.

The visions, or more accurately, the theorias granted by God to his saints—divine revelations of spiritual realities beyond physical sense perception that are beheld with the inner [noetic] eyes of the soul—are, after God Himself, the very foundation of the doctrines of the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church's doctrine of the creation of the universe, the creation of man, the life of Adam and Eve before the fall, the devil's envy, and the fall—all of this doctrine is taken from the holy prophet Moses the God-seer, who was given this incredible spiritual information in theorias from God. (cf. Gen. chapters 1-3). The law itself, the doctrine of the Old Testament, was given by God to Moses in theorias to be revealed to His people for their benefit. (cf. Exod. 20:2-17).

All the holy prophets of the Old Testament revealed the theorias God granted them for the edification of Israel. Their warnings, prophecies, and dread visions, especially about the Incarnation of Christ and about the end times, were given by God Who specifically stated to the prophets *Go, and tell this people.* (Isa 6:9; cf. Isa 7:4, 22:15; Jer 11:6, 15:2, 23:32, 35:13; Ezek 3:11, 12:23, 17:12, et. al.).

The very doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the divinity of Christ came in theorias to St. John the Baptist and Forerunner who bare record saying, *I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him... And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.* (Jn 1:32, 34). Thus the greatest of prophets told his vision to the people for their supreme benefit that they might follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to salvation.

On mount Tabor the holy Apostles Peter, James, and John were given the highest theorias of the Uncreated Light shining forth from the body of our Lord, Who revealed Himself as the God-man Jesus Christ. Christ Himself allowed the three apostles to reveal the vision for the benefit of the faithful after His Resurrection: *Tell the vision to no man until the Son of Man be risen from the dead.* (Mt 17:9). Essential elements of the central Orthodox doctrine of hesychasm derive from this Taborian revelation.

The holy myrrh-bearer St. Mary Magdalene received the joyful news of Christ's Resurrection during a vision of a

holy angel. She was commanded by the angel to reveal the theorias to the apostles. (cf. Mt 28:7, Mk 16:7).

After the Apostle Peter's vision of a great sheet being let down from Heaven and the subsequent conversion of the household of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:9-48), the apostle's testimony at the council in Jerusalem was a central factor in the decision not to require Gentile converts to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses. (cf. Acts 15:1-29).

The Apocalypse (Revelation) of the holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian is in its entirety theorias from which the Orthodox Church received its doctrine about the end times and the life of the age to come.

The holy Apostle Paul revealed his theorias of being caught up to the third Heaven (cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4) so that the faithful would find consolation, assurance, zeal, and hope in the things which God has prepared for His children who love Him.

St. Symeon the New Theologian's Hymns of Divine Love are replete with descriptions of his theorias of God Who is revealed as Light. He set down his visions in writing solely for the edification of the faithful to help them realize that the purpose of their life in Christ is union with God in His Light in this present life so as to be counted worthy of the vision of Him unto the ages of ages.

St. Gregory Palamas's astonishing theorias became the foundation of his teachings regarding the hesychastic means of uniting to God through noetic prayer, while also establishing his Orthodox doctrine on the Uncreated Light. God Himself expressly told St. Gregory in a vision not to waste the *milk* he saw pouring out around him and changing into sweet wine (the grace of spiritual knowledge overflowing in him) but to share it with His people. The Church's special commemoration of St. Gregory Palamas on the second Sunday in Great Lent proclaims his Orthodox doctrine of hesychasm and the Uncreated Light.

The Church is a wellspring overflowing with countless examples of it; Orthodox doctrine deriving from the theorias given to saints as well as their revealing these visions for the edification of the faithful.

Shared by the antagonists of the teaching of the Orthodox Church, their fundamental misconception is about revelation, both the revelation of the theorias transmitted directly by God to the saints and also the teaching subsequently revealed and transmitted by the saints to the Church. Through images and symbols, words and concepts, the content of



these spiritual [noetic] visions is transmitted to the Church via the Holy Fathers' teachings. Originating from divine revelation, their teachings reveal their personal experiences of God and of spiritual realities.

Certainly, visions are not accepted as doctrine automatically. Rather, they are revealed to the faithful through Holy Scripture, Ecumenical Councils, liturgical hymnography, theological texts, hagiography, and iconography, and subsequently the theorias of the saints are confirmed and received by the consciousness of the Church as Orthodox doctrine manifesting and upholding the truth about God and spiritual realities. The numerous historical testimonies concerning the Orthodox saints' doctrine of the trial of the soul at the hour of death presented in this anthology are all excellent examples of this.

Thus, the saints' experience of the uncreated energies of God is the very center of the Sacred Tradition of the Orthodox Church. The theoria of the saints is the very basis of Orthodox theology.

The above examples of revelation in theoria underscore the saving love of God for His children. Passions and the sinful deeds committed under their influence are the very elements which the demons search for in the soul when it passes through the toll-houses. God's revelation to His saints about the spiritual reality that occurs at the hour of death helps to increase the Christian's desire to struggle ardently in this life to be freed from the enslaving passions. The saints themselves are also the very same God-bearing elders who teach the faithful how to struggle against the passions through watchfulness and noetic prayer. In time and by the mercy of God, this holy endeavor brings the faithful to a state of illumination. And when the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit's indwelling is given to one of the struggling faithful, they too, being deified, can then help others reach theosis which they found through the prayers and counsels of their holy elders.

Through this cycle of the reception and transmission of revelation, the very purpose of the holy community of the Orthodox Church is preserved and fulfilled. The revelations given by the Holy Trinity and described by the saints in their teachings to their beloved fellow Christians have the sole purpose of leading the faithful to theosis, thus making them true children of their Heavenly Father.



Demons want to make you despair or lose heart. Therefore, arm yourself with trust and hope in God and with the conviction that they are not allowed to do anything without the higher command of God.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH HELPS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Archpriest Andrei Gavrilenko, Vice-Rector for Educational and Methodological Work at the Odessa Theological Seminary.



Now we must learn to live and distinguish between what is important and what is secondary. Nowadays, the difference between the mortal and the immortal, the corruptible and the incorruptible has become full-blown.

Property, habits and the way of life—all of this is gone. The naked truth remains: We are mortal, but we really want to live. I recall a famous phrase of the writer Mikhail Bulgakov, a native of Kiev: “True, we are mortal, but that is half the trouble. The bad news is that sometimes we die suddenly.” During war this “sometimes” becomes a rule and awakens sleeping Christians: “I must always have the memory of death...” Like thunder, the words of the Scriptures come back to our memory: *Remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss.* (Sir 7:36).

All ascetics speak with one voice about the memory of death. But it is not a fatal task, and there is no black hopelessness here. This remembrance is permeated with faith in the Kingdom of God and a reward in the afterlife. This remembrance is permeated with the task of making efforts to ascend to Heaven. Thanks to it everything that hinders eternal life and our salvation will be cut off daily. Thanks to it we can build Christian relationships with the world, people, and God.

The remembrance of death is given by God. It is a great gift. St. John Climacus says: *Just as bread is vital for physical life, so the remembrance of death is vital for spiritual life.*

The advantages of remembrance of death are manifested in at least three points: It encourages us to perform spiritual labors and make daily efforts; it helps us endure problems and hardships peacefully; and it affirms us in prayer.

This remembrance forbids the spirit to relax, the body to be lazy and the mind to fall asleep. However, it should not go beyond an unnatural framework. A fruitful and proper remembrance of death, according to St. John Climacus, is manifested through impartiality to every creature, abandonment of your will, and accepting God's will.

One New Martyr was awaiting death by firing squad in a punishment cell. Every day for several days in a row he read to himself the Canon for the Departure of the Soul. He prepared for death and accepted the will of God. But rumors suddenly appeared about the re-examination of the case and his pardon. Here, too, he had to obey God's will.

He later wrote: “I didn’t tempt God, and I stopped reading the Canon for the Departure of the Soul.”

In order to live we must remember for Whom we live and Who controls our lives. In Biblical language it is expressed by the words *to walk before the face of God*, to be with God, to praise Him with every breath, as King David said: *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.* (Pss 150:6). In order to achieve this, it is necessary, in the words of the Liturgy of John Chrysostom, *to commit ourselves and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God.* We must set the mind and exercise the will in goodness, the heart in holy feelings and the body in ascetic practices.

The mind should never be lazy and without work. It must be occupied.

St. John of Sinai advises good exercises for this: *There are many activities for an active mind. Meditation on the love of God, on the remembrance of God, on the remembrance of the Kingdom, on the remembrance of the zeal of the holy martyrs, on the remembrance of God Himself present, according to him who said, “I saw the Lord before me” (Pss 15:8), on remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, on remembrance of one’s departure, judgment, punishment and sentence.*

So, we should teach the mind to love God, remember God and His omnipresence, the Kingdom of Heaven and death, realize the zeal of the martyrs, remember the Angels, the departure of the soul from the body, torture, torment and eternal condemnation. These things keep you from falling. And they attune the soul, like a musical instrument, to serving God.

The Ladder of Divine Ascent tells us the story of a negligent monk who died and then was brought back to life. For the remaining twelve years of his life he did not utter a word, closed his cell and *shed warm tears.* The memory of death leads to the fear of God. It is a gift from God, a virtue, the rejection of worldly comforts for the sake of Heavenly comfort. According to St. John Climacus: *He who has mortified himself for everything in the world truly remembers death, and he who still has some attachment cannot exercise the meditation of death freely.*

Prayer is as necessary for such spiritual work as is air. Especially when death is hovering over you and when, like a condemned person, you do not know the “number of your days.” Holy Hieromartyr Michael Chelstov, in his “Memoirs of a Man Sentenced to Death, about His Experience”, relates his experience of the nearness of death: “Only during prayer—and even then not immediately—did I forget myself a little. It was sad, a heavy weight in the heart, dark and bleak, and a state of involuntary melancholy, which cannot be expressed in words or fit into any specific concepts or formulas. As I stood up to pray, I felt as if some unknown force were pushing me away from it and I was awfully disinclined to pray; I was pronouncing the words, but the same painful

question remained in my mind, and there was no peace in my heart. I was reading, without understanding; I reread the same words of prayer two and three times, and only by forcing myself like that did I finally free myself from my tormentor; my soul became quiet, contented, and I finished my prayer calmed, and perhaps even joyful, seeming to have found a favorable answer to my question and ready even now to go to death. **Only prison made it possible to feel and experience true pleasure, calmness and joy in prayer and from prayer.**”

In the face of executioners, when the back of the head was chilled by the muzzle of a gun, we see many New Martyrs kneeling with their hands raised to Heaven. Holy Hieromartyr Bishop Ambrose (Gudko) of Sarapul was on his knees with his hands raised to heaven, praying to God while they were digging a shallow hole for him. Death, according to the New Martyrs, is passing into eternity. But already during our lifetime we commune with this eternity in prayer. Hence the labor of prayer—the opportunity to know the incorruptible life, while still living in a corruptible body.

We who live in the world and worry about the lives of our loved ones and our own people, must have at least the rudiments of such a prayer with the memory of death. It will reassure us, give us hope and teach us to commend our lives into the hands of God. Those who have wisdom will understand that the remembrance of death is a huge incentive to live on.

Holy Hieromartyr Anatoly Zhurakovsky, who while still young was famed throughout Kiev, wrote that Christ gives us not only life, but *life in abundance.* (cf. Jn 10:10).

We should keep in mind the principle of being: “Whatever does not grow, dies.” The remembrance of death helps us precisely in growth. It helps us keep the heart going in the direction of Heaven, encourages the body in pain and ascetic labors, comforts the restless spirit, and gives the mind the motivation to seek those things which are above..., *set your affection on things above.* (Col 3:1-2).



Before I was 80 year old, I would visit Paradise frequently. And now as well but age has a role to play.

One time the Lord took me by the hand and was telling me “...here you built a Church, here you Confessed and a soul was saved, here you comforted, here you corrected...” In other words, He was telling me everything and with that He was giving me great joy while talking to me. So much joy that I said: “My Christ, I can’t bear anymore. I can’t bear anymore. I’m going to explode, take me back.” And I found myself back again in my room.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

CHRIST LIVES AND REIGNS

By Metropolitan Avgoustinos (Kantiotes) of Florina of blessed memory. From the book *Εμπνευσμένα Κηρύγματα Ορθοδόξου Ομολογίας και Αγιοπατερικής Πνοής* (Orthodoxos Kypseli: Thessaloniki, 2011), 17-21.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[John 1:1]

† † †

The Word has existed from the beginning and thus there was never a moment that the Son and Word of God—Christ—was not. Christ has always existed. He is, together with the Father, without beginning; he is, together with the Father, eternal and everlasting. This is a difficult saying to accept you will say. It is a mystery, and a great mystery at that! We will not deny it, however. No! Rather we accept it in faith.

Mysteries, for that matter, are not hidden solely in the supernatural, but we also find them in the natural order. The world is full of mysteries. Every branch of science has its unsolved problems. Science simply describes: it cannot offer full explanations, nor can it penetrate the most fundamental causes of phenomena. What, for example, is electricity? What is magnetism? What is gravity? Science describes these things, but it cannot claim to know precisely what they are.

Mysteries are scattered all across the natural order, even in the smallest of things. The most basic unit of matter—the atom—is itself a microcosm of the created universe. I will give you an example: the top scientists working on that accursed disease which plagues humanity—cancer—gathered in Rome for an international medical conference. Much was said and when it was over, the chair offered the following synopsis: “We know,” he said, “what cancer looks like, how it develops, and what its symptoms are. However, there is yet one thing we do not know; why it begins, why one of the millions of cells in the human body suddenly goes crazy—for this is cancer: everything else is functioning harmoniously and then this one cell ‘leaves its orbit’—marking the diseases’ beginning.”

There is mystery everywhere. And thus, since scientists are left to wonder about things in the material world, how can we expect to explain the persons of the Holy Trinity? Let

them first solve those mysteries hidden in the natural world and then we will seek to solve those of the supernatural realm. The human intellect is but a small cup; it cannot hold the ocean.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the language of the scriptures, the Son of God is called the *Word* because he is begotten of God the Father who is absolute Mind. The Mind begets the Word, the Father begets the Son.

In order to grasp this truth to some degree we say the following: man is made, *in the image of God* (Gen 1:27) and thus he is called the *image of God*. (1 Cor 11:7, Col 3:10). How is man an image of God? With regard to his body?

Certainly not! There is nothing material in God—he has no body, no hands, no feet, no ears, as our ancient ancestors imagined that he had. Occasionally the Holy Scriptures speak of God anthropomorphically, but only out of condescension to our weakness. God is spirit. Consequently, the claim that man is an image of God cannot refer to his body, but rather to his soul; it is in his soul that man is made according to God’s image. Man is not principally that which is visible to the eyes, but rather that which is invisible. What is seen is material, what is unseen is the soul.

There is, then, some level of correspondence here. As God is Trinity, so is man’s soul Trinitarian. God the Father is absolute Mind, who begets his Son and Word, and from whom precedes the Holy Spirit. Man by comparison has a mind, he has word—or thought,

and he has spirit.

Thought is the greatest of God’s gifts. This is man’s glory. It is encountered solely in man; we find it neither in the animals, nor indeed anywhere else. O, thought! O, the mind! At one moment you are found here and then, as if by a rocket, you are flown to America or anywhere else. Have you considered how man thinks, how thoughts are born? Thought is the foundation of knowledge: it is how we study the earth, how we touch the stars, how we feel the heavens; it is how we discover and how we create.

First, though is something intimate—permit me to put you through a bit of a trial! What does it mean to be “intimate”? This means it is something hidden deep within man, something inconceivable. No one is able to know what we are thinking save God alone. **May God have mercy on us if they find a way to police thought!**



In the language of the Church, thought is often referred to as *word*—logic in other words. But pay attention! The mind begets word. How does it beget? Not as animals give birth. There is another kind of birth, another begetting. What is this? The mind, the theologians say, begets an interior word, a thought. And when this thought is expressed by means of the mouth, this interior word becomes spoken.

Another mystery—and I doubt there are any who question this one! How do we speak? Go ahead, think. How? Science offers no answer: it just tries to pin-point the location in the brain from which the spoken word issues. Our mind begets the interior “word” and then begets the spoken word, before finally begetting the written word.

Here in the Gospel, however, *Word* is written with a capital “W.” This is because the Word is God. [*And the Word was God.* God—the Mind—begets the Divine Word, the Father begets the Son. In the face of this Word, man’s thought, this great thing as we called it, is small and insignificant. Can we possibly comprehend the Divine Word?

Christ is the Divine Word which has existed from eternity. It is on basis of this that the Church opposed Arius and the other heretics, such as the Chilianists of today.

Let us approach Him, beloved brothers! At midday we will sit down and eat, we will partake of His goods. How many of us have God in our minds? Many of us do not even make our cross, or make mention of Christ’s name before we eat.

Let us give thanks to God for all His gifts and above all for the fact that we have the only true faith. The founders of other religions (Mohammed, Confucius and others) are mortals; they lived for a span and then died. Christ lives even today and will continue to live tomorrow, even unto the ages of ages. There never was a time when Christ was not and through His Resurrection He has proved that He lives and reigns unto the ages of ages.

This is the glory of the Holy Trinity. Amen.



One who passionately loves Christ is not satisfied with a mere acquaintance—an occasional visit to His house, or a cool greeting. Rather, he desires that Christ live and be experienced within his heart. The lover desires a perfect union with Christ; and Christ also, the Lover like no other, whose love is an unfathomable ocean, desires an intimate relationship with every one of His faithful children. He desires to be the most loving of persons, the Lover of lovers deep within us. As the head is inseparably attached to the rest of the body, so Christ, the head of the Church and the eternal center of life, wants to be united - inseparably - with every member of the Church — in our thoughts, in our feelings, in our hearts, in our everyday life.

Metropolitan Avgoustinos of Florina (+2010)

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE TO AVOID ANXIETY

By St. Paisios the Athonite.

The more people distance themselves from natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do. This is why they go around restless; they even “spin around the moon” since earth cannot contain all their restlessness.

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

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with the theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble and God fills it with divine consolation.

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

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

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
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POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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ON COWARDICE

From "The Ladder of Divine Ascent."

If you pursue virtue in a monastery or community, you are not likely to be attacked much by fear. But the man who spends his time in more solitary places should make every effort to avoid being overcome by that offspring of vainglory, that daughter of unbelief, cowardice.

Cowardice is a childish disposition in an old, vainglorious soul. Cowardice is a falling away from faith that comes of expecting the unexpected. Fear is a rehearsing of danger beforehand; or again, fear is a trembling sensation of the heart, alarmed and troubled by unknown misfortunes. Fear is a loss of conviction.

A proud soul is a slave of cowardice; it vainly trusts in itself, and is afraid of any sound or shadow of creatures.

Those who mourn over their sins but are insensible to every other sorrow do not feel cowardice, but the cowardly often have mental breakdowns. And this is natural. For the Lord rightly forsakes the proud that the rest of us may learn not to be puffed up.

Although all cowardly people are vainglorious, yet not all who are unafraid are humble, since even robbers and grave-plunderers may be without fear.

Do not hesitate to go late at night to those places where you usually feel afraid. But if you yield only a little to such weakness, then this childish and ridiculous infirmity will grow old with you. As you go on your way, arm yourself with prayer. When you reach the place, stretch out your hands. Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven

or earth. When you get rid of the disease (of fear), praise Him who has delivered you. If you continue to be thankful, He will protect you for ever.

Just as it is impossible to satisfy the stomach in one bout, so also it is impossible to overcome fear instantly. It will yield more quickly in proportion as you mourn; but to the extent that our mourning fails, we continue to be cowards.

My hair and my flesh shuddered (Job 4:15) said Eliphaz, when describing the malice of the demon. Sometimes the soul, and sometimes the flesh, turns coward first, and the one passes its infirmity on to the other. If this untimely fear does not pass into the soul when the flesh flinches, then deliverance from the disease is at hand. But the actual freedom from cowardice comes when we eagerly accept all unexpected events with a contrite heart.

It is not darkness and loneliness of place that gives the demons power against us, but barrenness of soul. And through God's providence this sometimes happens in order that we may learn by it.

He who has become the servant of the Lord will fear his Master alone, but he who does not yet fear Him is often afraid of his own shadow.

In the presence of an invisible spirit the body becomes afraid; but in the presence of an angel the soul of the humble is filled with joy. Therefore, when we recognize the presence from the effect, let us quickly hasten to prayer, for our good guardian has come to pray with us.

He who has conquered cowardice has clearly dedicated his life and soul to God.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

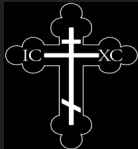
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Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

THE MYSTERY OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

By Metr. Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Empirical Dogmatics," vol. 2. Quoted text is from the lectures of Protopresbyter John Romanides, one of Orthodoxy's most prominent 20th century priests, theologians, and writers (+2001).

The Divine Liturgy is at the center of ecclesiastical life. The incarnation of the Son and Word of God came about in order that human nature might be glorified and Christ might be offered to humankind, so that they could take communion of His Body and Blood. This is the ultimate aim of the Mysteries (Sacraments). The purpose of all the Mysteries is participation in Christ's Body and Blood. Christ said, *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.* (Jn 6:53). We are baptized and chrismated in order that we may take Holy Communion as members of the Church and members of the Body of Christ.

"It is clear from the basic principles of the baptismal services, the prayers in the Liturgy and the Canons of the Church, that being a member of the Body of Christ means not only sharing in the common prayers of the Church, but also taking Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ. Any sort of distinction between prayer and Holy

Communion is inconceivable, because the whole body of the local Church prays *with one mouth and one heart* the whole Church says *Amen* at the end of the Eucharistic prayer, and the whole body of the Church is called by Christ to Holy Communion."

Once a baby has been born and left its mother's womb, it must be fed in order to live, because otherwise it will die. As soon as a Christian leaves the spiritual womb of the Church, which is the sacred font, and it has been confirmed through Chrismation that he is a member of the Body of Christ and of the Church, he ought to take Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

"Man does not have his own life. He can only have life if he dies with regard to the elements of this world and lives the life of love in the Eucharistic life of the community. His salvation cannot come from a moralizing, individualistic piety. It is accomplished only through grace, according to how much he struggles against the devil and empties himself in the life of Christ, Whose Body is made up of real human beings, the Church."

As human beings have a rational faculty and a noetic faculty, there is rational worship and noetic worship. Rational worship takes place using words, whereas noetic worship is performed inwardly through prayer in the heart. The Divine Liturgy is rational worship, but within it

ANNOUNCEMENT

After 21 years of publication and approximately 4,000 pages of Orthodox content, the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes to let "Orthodox Heritage" readers know that our publication will cease at the end of 2023. The last issue will be printed-published this December. We intend to upload all 21 years of "Orthodox Heritage" issues onto our website (<http://www.orthodoxheritage.org>). Their content is timeless and we hope and pray that

Orthodox faithful will refer to them in the future.

Our work will continue in other areas involving spiritual and material almsgiving. We thank all of our supporters as our publishing work was enabled only through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide.

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 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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

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noetic worship is also offered by the one who has developed his noetic faculty. For that reason, someone who also offers noetic worship participates in the Divine Liturgy in the best possible way.

"That is why we say in the Liturgy: *Again we offer unto Thee this reasonable worship*. We offer rational worship to God and God gives us noetic worship. This is a gift of God to man. When we have this visitation of the Holy Spirit, it is proof that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit."

Those who take part in the Divine Liturgy benefit according to their spiritual state.

"The Divine Liturgy is rational worship. But rational worship is of no benefit to someone who does not have noetic worship as well. Human beings are not only rational; they also have noetic energy. They ought not to pray only with the rational faculty; they should also have the prayer of the Holy Spirit within their heart, which is prayer without ceasing. According to the Fathers of the Church, those who are in this state are members of the Church."

We know that God's uncreated energy is *indivisibly divided among divided beings, and multiplied among many without becoming many*. After the incarnation of Christ, in which the divine nature was united inseparably, immutably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the human nature, Christ's human nature too became a source of God's uncreated energy.

"The way in which God appears and reveals Himself to man is also through the human nature of Christ, which is now itself divided indivisibly among divided beings and multiplied among many without becoming many." This is what the Priest says when he cuts up the Holy Bread into many particles: *Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, being broken yet not divided, being ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifying those who partake*.

"When we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ we do not receive only a fragment of Christ within us, but everyone who takes Holy Communion receives the whole Christ within him. However, this does not mean that there are many Christs. Christ is one, and this Christ, Who is one, is wholly present in every believer who has partaken of the Most Pure Mysteries. On the holy Paten where the Lamb is cut into pieces by the Priest, Christ is not fragmented, but multiplied into many without becoming many. The whole Christ is in every particle of the Holy Bread. This is the Mystery of God's presence in man."

Preconditions to Receiving Holy Communion

Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, however, is not without preconditions. Clear preconditions must be met in order for Holy Communion to act unto life and not death. This is a very important subject. The Apostle Paul, speaking about the Mystery of Holy Communion, lays down the essential preconditions for approaching it. *Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.* (1 Cor 11:27-30).

This examination is not a moral test. The Christian examines whether he is a real member of the Church, to what extent he is a temple of the Holy Spirit or, at very least, if he is in the state of purification and in that perspective. Because Christ is the purification of those being purified, the illumination of those being illumined and the glorification of those being glorified. Thus Christ also becomes the Hell of the impure,

as He will be at the Second Coming. Then the same Christ will be Light for the righteous and fire for the unrepentant.

In the early Church, ascertaining whether it was possible for a Christian to take Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ was not a matter of ascertaining whether his life was moral, but whether he was in the state of illumination!

“This was always the case with us. According to the Fathers, the one who takes Holy Communion is in the state of illumination. When it was ascertained that he was not in the state of illumination, he did not take Holy Communion. This was the criterion. In the phrase *those who communicate worthily*, they did not mean by *worthily* those who avoided sin and were morally correct, but those who were in the state of illumination and so took Holy Communion. Of course this had moral foundations, but it was not identified with morals.”

Someone takes Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ when he belongs to the Church, which is the Body of Christ. He communicates as a member of the Church, as a member of the Body of Christ. But the Christian must be clearly aware of being a member of the Body of Christ.

“It is the Body of Christ that comes into being through the descent of the Holy Spirit. The experience of *theoria* is also an experience of the human nature of Christ within man. For that reason, the Fathers emphasize that anyone who does not sense Christ within him, does not have Christ within him. It is not a matter merely of saying that we are the Body of Christ. One must be aware of being a member of the Body of Christ. Someone who senses that he lacks this awareness, does not have it. The one who senses that he has this awareness within him, has the proof within him.

Holy Communion for Today's Orthodox

One of the greatest difficulties that exist in Orthodoxy today is the movement of Makrakis and the members of *Zoe*. They have destroyed this concept. According to the Fathers of the Church, in the early Church they took Holy Communion every Sunday. And the Canons of the Church presuppose that Christians will naturally take Holy Communion every Sunday. Yes, but only until it was proved that someone had lapsed from the state of illumination. After falling from illumination, he was excluded from Holy Communion, because Holy Communion is for the illuminated. He lapses from illumination and no longer takes Holy Communion.

This was the reason why the Fathers constructed the Sanctuary with curtains and so on. The majority of the faithful were no longer in the state of illumination, as were most monks and some pious people in the villages, so that the ceremonies could take place as they do in monasteries today. That is why even monks sometimes abstain from taking Holy Communion and communicate at intervals, according to their spiritual state. To be sure, if one is in the state of illumination and *theoria*, one can take Holy Communion every week. Someone who is not in this state does not communicate. However, the spiritual father knew if his spiritual child was in the state of illumination.

Then the “clever” people of today came along. They read the Canons of the Church and said that we ought to take Holy Communion every Sunday. The Canons do not say that we should communicate every Sunday. They mean that the illuminated should communicate every Sunday. And now Holy Communion has been reduced to a sort of magic, particularly among the pious. We go there and take Holy Communion...

The very ones who did this and talked about frequent Holy Communion, went and abolished monasticism for us. They told the children, “Don't go to monasteries.” They made out that all monks were illiterate. Only now, in the last few years, have they begun to wake up a bit.

In any case, Holy Communion acts in accordance with the spiritual state of the communicant. It purifies those being purified, illumines those being illuminated and glorifies those being glorified, just as it burns up those not undergoing purification.

“In Holy Communion we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ. Provided we are in the state of illumination, this is beneficial to us. If we are not in the state of illumination this Holy Communion does not help us. This is what we mean by *worthily*. Someone who approaches worthily derives benefit. When someone approaches unworthily, he derives no benefit, but rather sleeps, because he remains dead and not alive in Christ. This Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ in experience is not just a reality, but even becomes visible. This is the purpose of the Divine Eucharist: the glorification of the faithful. Read the prayers of preparation for Holy Communion and you will clearly see the aim of the Divine Eucharist.

Recently a bishop asserted, somewhere where I was present, that we are all glorified, as we read in the prayer of preparation for Holy Communion that it *glorifies and nourishes me*. Well, this is a prayer by St. Symeon the New Theologian and refers to his personal experience, not to the experience of every Orthodox Christian who takes Holy Communion today. This is St. Symeon's prayer. Consequently, when we pray in this way, we say it *glorifies and nourishes me*, but this does not mean that it *glorifies and nourishes me*, because only those who communicate worthily are glorified and nourished in the manner of Symeon the New Theologian.”

Unfortunately, the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist has become secularized. Christians take Holy Communion unconditionally, or at best, they prepare with fasting and a formal confession.

“Today things have reached such a state that not even the priest ought to take Holy Communion. If you read what St. Basil the Great says about the preparation of the clergy for the Liturgy, it is clear that St. Basil lays down that at least the clergy ought to be in the state of illumination in order to celebrate the Divine Liturgy.”

As things have changed and the true Orthodox preconditions have been altered, the Church has set some limits. It laid down

holy Canons that define **how** one should partake of Holy Communion, it prescribed the Mystery of Holy Confession, which determines the basic degree of repentance, and it made some adjustments to the church building and to the way the prayers were read. In the early Church the whole church building was one unit and the prayers were read out loud. Because, however, the classifications of catechumens, those being baptized, the faithful and the glorified were abolished, certain outward divisions were put in place.

“That is why the iconostasis developed. Originally there was no iconostasis, because the nave of the church was only for the illuminated. The icon screen was the entrance to the nave. It was not a wooden screen as it is today. For that reason, in monasteries on the Holy Mountain, in Kalambaka and Meteora, the entrance to the nave is an iconostasis painted with icons. The iconostasis was on the walls at the entrance to the nave, and the Sanctuary was an open area. At most it had railings on which they put an icon of Christ and one of the Holy Virgin.

Originally this was the iconostasis. Afterwards the other iconostasis was made higher and the Liturgy was arranged in such a way that, because the unilluminated were allowed to attend the Liturgy, they limited when they could receive Holy Communion. Those who were not illuminated communicated during particular fasts in the course of the year. It was assumed that at Baptism they had received illumination through Chrismation, but due to the life they were leading they did not possess an illuminated nous, so they did not take Holy Communion.

The clergy celebrated the Liturgy behind the curtain, hidden now from the people, because those who were not in the state of illumination ought not to see the Mysteries. For the same reason they did not take part in the prayers, and the prayers began to be said secretly. Because these prayers are for the illuminated; they are not for everybody.”

“Training” the Orthodox

One of the basic tasks of bishops and priests is to train Christians to pass from purification to illumination and glorification, so that they can partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, and Holy Communion may act as purification, illumination and glorification. The faithful ought to live noetic worship so that they also take part worthily in rational worship. This is the work of spiritual fathers.

“I do not mean the spiritual fathers in modern parishes, to whom people go to receive social and family advice, and at the end the spiritual father reads them a prayer of forgiveness and they go away content that they have been forgiven, and can go and take Holy Communion, without either the priest or the penitent having the slightest idea about noetic prayer. In the early Church it was perceptible that someone was in a state of illumination and someone else was not. One took Holy Communion and the other did not. It was perceptible in the early Church. Now these things are imperceptible.

Everyone feels a certain comfort from confession and Holy Communion, nothing more.”

In the past in the Church it was the bishop who was the spiritual father par excellence and prepared the faithful for Holy Communion. He also trained the priests to become good spiritual fathers. The same happened as with human knowledge.

“The professor of astronomy teaches the doctoral candidates to become as good as he is. Why? So that he can leave successors and the tradition of astronomy will continue. Because if this teaching and preparation of doctoral candidates and prospective professors to succeed today’s astronomers ceases, astronomy will disappear as a science.”

This used to happen in the Church as well, with regard to the therapeutic method for preparing Christians for Holy Communion. Thus in the teaching of St. Symeon the New Theologian teaching and catechism are very closely linked with confession and repentance, which was the work of the bishop, in accordance with the example of the astronomer that we have referred to.

“Exactly the same used to take place in the Church. The bishop is the university professor who teaches doctoral candidates. Who are these candidates? They are the monks, who will succeed the bishop. Why will they succeed the bishop? Not because they are monks in the modern sense of the word, but because they are the ones who learn **how** to remember God at all times, **how** the nous is purified, **how** to reach illumination, and **how** to reach glorification. For that reason, the bishop is the teacher of monks.

Later on we arrived at the era described by St. Symeon the New Theologian, who was in conflict and in dispute with many people in his time because monks were becoming teachers. Whereas before only the bishop taught, now monks also began to teach. So what argument did the bishops use? That only bishops should teach and monks are not teachers.

Note this point very carefully. The bishop is the teacher; the monk is the pupil. Monks cannot act as teachers. What is the issue? If you look carefully, the dispute is about the Mystery of Confession, the Sacrament of Repentance: whether monks are permitted to hear confessions. In the early Church the bishop was the one who heard confessions. Later, however, it became customary for the bishop to give priests permission to hear confessions. But here we also saw monks who hear confessions. The dispute alternates: sometimes it refers to confession, sometimes to teaching.

If you read carefully, St. Symeon the New Theologian identifies teaching with confession, with the Mystery of Repentance. Why does he regard these two things as the same? Because in the early Church the bishop’s task was to teach people **how** to pass through the stage of purification and reach illumination. Priests who were spiritual fathers did this in the parishes under the bishop’s supervision. In those days there were not just a handful of catechumens: there were hundreds of them. There

was a complete education system within the Church. There were hundreds of catechumens every year and usually they baptized them on Holy Saturday.

To ensure that catechetical instruction was organized correctly, the priest, under the guidance of the bishop, undertook the teaching of the newly-baptized, those preparing for Baptism and certain catechumens, and then the deacons taught the rest of the catechumens. St. Dionysios the Areopagite describes this in great detail. If you want to see the practice of the early Church, read *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* by Dionysios the Areopagite. It is all in there.

The bishop was regarded as the teacher of monks. Why? Because in those days someone went through the state of purification, reached illumination and he had a strong character. Then the bishop took on the newly-baptized Christian and taught him last of all. Why? So as to bring him to perfection and make him a ‘doctor of theology’. What does being a ‘doctor of theology’ mean? It means constant remembrance of God and noetic prayer, which had for the most part become restricted to monastic circles, as monks were prepared in this way. Subsequently the bishops of the Church were chosen from the order of monks—not always, but we could say in most cases.”

As time passed this tradition was lost, with the result that monks would also teach. They did not perform the Mystery of Confession, but they gave instruction and catechism. In other words, they helped the faithful to free themselves from thoughts, so that the noetic faculty would be separated from the rational faculty and noetic prayer would begin. Thus we understand what teaching and repentance mean, and **how** they relate to Holy Communion.

“If we take the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian, what does he have in mind when he talks about teaching? Who teaches? He explains why monks had also become teachers, whereas in earlier times monks were not permitted to teach. Monks are pupils, say the early Fathers, and bishops are teachers. He explains why monks had become teachers in his day, and what teaching is. He means confessions and remission of sins. When St. Symeon speaks about teaching and why monks have the duty to teach, he means the duty to hear confessions. Confession is the Church’s teaching in the highest sense, because teaching about purification and **how** to reach illumination took place in the Mystery of Confession.

Nowadays when we say ‘teacher’ it has nothing at all to do with confession. Nowadays teachers are catechists, university professors, high school teachers and so on, but when they teach they teach man’s rational faculty, they no longer train his nous. So teaching has no connection with spiritual guidance—the connection is only indirect these days. Monks became teachers or spiritual fathers, because in the era of Symeon the New Theologian the bishops did not do their duty in this respect.”

Divine Liturgy Sermons

It is from this point of view that we ought to look at the sermon in the Divine Liturgy, which refers to **how** we can acquire a relationship with God, **how** we can experience glorification, **how** we can acquire love. The fact that sermons in Church today make little mention of “how” but speak about “what” shows that they are not in accord with the perspective of the Divine Eucharist. They are neither eucharistic nor ecclesiastical, because they do not presuppose hesychasm.

“This is where the greatest problem of Christianity lies today. We hear fine sermons from the pulpit. All the priests who preach speak about love, about one thing or another.

I have written a whole book called *The Ancestral Sin* and when I wrote it I had no idea how one attains to this unselfish love. There I described it, so to speak, analytically, but what is the method for achieving it? We sit and talk about unselfish love. But who can become unselfish? And who has reached unselfishness? Who has attained to love? When we sit there and say that we possess love, what are we? Do we really have love or are we pretending that we have it? That is the problem.

The sermons are excellent. They fill the pulpit and are a good thing. Christians sit there listening enthusiastically to these sermons. But although we hear sermons, I for one have not heard **how**. I have heard **what** and **where**. Usually the ‘how’ is ‘Don’t do this, don’t do that, don’t do the other. This is a sin, that is a sin. Do this: do good works.’ All very well, but one can do good works and in the end go to Hell instead of going to Paradise.”

In the early Church, instead of giving individual sermons, they read the homilies of the Fathers.

“Among the Fathers of the Church, one only needs to read Chrysostom’s sermons to see how highly developed the sense of social justice was in Chrysostom, who is one of the great Fathers of the Church. His works were read for centuries by all the Orthodox.

In the past the good custom existed that, instead of listening to the priest expounding the Gospel every Sunday in those pietistic sermons, they used to read patristic sermons on each Gospel.”

In the final analysis, the whole Orthodox liturgical tradition and all the other Mysteries and services concern the members of the Church, and their aim is participation in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, so that Christ may become purification, illumination and glorification.

There is no other purpose. There are no private Mysteries. It is impossible to separate all the other rites of the Church from Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. And none of these things can be separated from the real mystery, which is purification, illumination and glorification. There is obvious unity between dogma, prayer, the Mysteries, asceticism and the Divine Eucharist. Ecclesiastical life revolves around these axes.

THE TRUE FACE OF THE HERESY OF PROTESTANTISM

ACCORDING TO ST. IGNATIUS (BRIANCHANINOV)

By Fr. Valery Dukhanin, translated by "Orthodox Christianity," OrthoChristian.com.



When some people in the Church become interested in liberalism and reforms, expressing their dissatisfaction with the Church's traditions, it would not be superfluous to remind them that that is precisely how Protestantism was born in its time. What Protestantism leads to, and its hidden essence is something that the holy fathers reveal to us most

precisely. Amongst the fathers of the Church, especially significant is St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), whose spiritual intuition always exactly exposed the subtlest deceptions.

Being in society and having experienced the influence coming from the Protestant West, St. Ignatius often spoke out on this issue. In the present time, now having the complete works of St. Ignatius, we are able to compile a sufficiently clear picture of his views on Protestantism.

In talking about the nature of Protestantism, which gave birth to a multitude of professors-theologians but not a single saint, St. Ignatius made the following evaluation: *The Protestant is coldly intelligent, that earthly character, having nothing in common with Heaven. The rationalism of Protestantism, pettily researching the letter of Scripture and not noticing its profound essence, always hindered serious spiritual life. Discussing the Karelians on Lake Ladoga in the article, "A Visit to Valaam Monastery," the saint next talks about the Lutheran proselytism among the local population, as a result of which Orthodoxy on the Finnish shore was pressured to leave. Now there are Lutheran churches here, which pronounce only the meagre sermons of a cold pastor. Telling the people in his sermons nothing more than superficial, scholarly information about the Redeemer and His moral teaching, he gives each time something like a funeral eulogy over the true, living faith and Church that the people in these regions have lost.* Thus, there is no true faith and life in Protestantism, only rational scholarship with a superficial moral teaching. Therefore, in Protestantism there could never be any serious asceticism, or deep spiritual experience.

Moreover, rationalism, and the absence of a deep spiritual life led Protestantism to the rejection of ascetical principles that have been natural to traditional Christianity over the course of a millennia and a half. To some extent, Protestants,

just like godless atheists, blaspheme monasticism, denying its divine origins. Such denial was directly embodied in the life of the progenitor of Protestantism—Martin Luther—and was later expressed in Protestantism's rejection of the Church's corresponding dogmatic statements concerning the Ever-Virginity of the Mother of God: *Protestants, the sworn enemies of New Testament virginity, assert that the Most Holy Vessel and Temple of God, the Mother of God, violated her virginity after she had given birth to the God-Man, became a vessel of human lust, entered into a relationship with Joseph as his wife, and had other children. A horrible thought! A thought both beastly and demonic! A blasphemous thought! It could only have been born in bowels of profound depravation! It could only have been pronounced and be pronounced by a desperate and outlawed adulterer! It can only be accepted and assimilated by those who have fallen so far from the image and likeness of God to the likeness of beasts, that they have and are only capable of having an understanding of human nature exclusively in its degraded, animal-like state... Luther, who threw off his own monasticism and took a nun who also cast off her monasticism as his lover—the union of Luther with Catharina Von Bora cannot be understood any other way, because it is not seen that the vows of virginity that they both gave to God were ever returned by them—cries out against Christian virginity. All Protestants cry out against them together with Luther. They call virginity unnatural, against the will, blessing, and commandment of God.*

St. Ignatius did not even consider the path to Christian perfection to be outside of virginity, chastity, and monasticism. It was a path that was shown in the life of Christ Himself, and was embodied already by the first generations of Christians. Protestantism, in rejecting this foundation of Orthodox asceticism, was naturally regarded by the saint as a fall from a spiritual and moral height to a level of life like that of beasts. *Luther's writings are unendurable not only for the pious reader, but even for a decent reader. They breathe the crudest depravity and wildest blasphemy... Lutheranism provides more pleasure to the person who desires to turn as rarely as possible to God, and to limit his fleshly desires as little as possible.*

In the complete works of St. Ignatius is published a brief writing entitled, "Lutheranism," composed of questions and answers. The saint views the birth of Protestantism in the person of Luther as something absolutely unnecessary for people's salvation. *If Christ's teachings were sufficient for people's salvation for fifteen centuries, then what is Lutheranism for? If one accepts Luther's teaching necessary, then by this very acceptance one is compelled to accept that the original teaching of Christ's Church was not enough for salvation—which is an obvious absurdity and blasphemy.*

Although Luther's writing was directed against a series of errors of the Roman church, St. Ignatius finds three kinds of error in Luther himself. First of all, in place of the Roman

errors Luther offers his own errors; secondly, he kept certain of Catholicism's errors; and thirdly, he even magnified some of Roman Catholicism's error.

Among the preserved errors of Catholicism, St. Ignatius distinguishes: the teaching of the *Filioque* (which, in the saint's view, was the main reason for the West's separation from Christ's Church) and the performance of the sacrament of Baptism through pouring (as opposed to immersion).

Among the magnified errors of the Latins, the saint directs our attention to the relationship towards the Eucharist: If Catholics lost the sacrament of the Eucharist by taking out the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of transubstantiation, then *Luther, rejecting the Eucharist altogether, says, 'The bread transubstantiates in the mouths of those to partake of it with faith!'*

The saint sees Luther's own errors in the following. Having rejected the lawful authority of the Roman popes, Luther rejected also the lawful rank of the episcopate and ordination itself, having by this violated what was established by the Apostles. Having rejected indulgences, he rejected also the sacrament of Confession. The saint points out one of Luther's key errors: preferring faith with the rejection of good works, saying that supposedly, *faith is sufficient for salvation, even though one's works do not correspond to faith.*

Naming Luther's well-known errors—rejection of icons, holy relics, prayers to the saints in Heaven, most of the Sacraments, and Tradition itself by a false interpretation of the Holy Scriptures according to one's own whims—the saint concludes, *All of these errors, taken together, are not only in opposition to the one true Holy Church, but also contain in themselves many serious blasphemies against the Holy Spirit!* That is, this is not simply a personal opinion with which we can tolerantly agree, but a serious blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we do not find in St. Ignatius's writings even a hint of any remaining grace outside of Orthodoxy. The saint does not see any possibility of salvation within Lutheranism. For St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) himself, the borderline between true teaching entirely corresponds with the boundaries of Orthodox confession, and the grace of the Holy Spirit dwells only there, where the truth is—in the Orthodox Church. As opposed to modern ecumenist ideas, St. Ignatius was not afraid to call Protestantism a soul-destroying, heretical host: *Many millions of Protestants have used and continue to use the most-divine Gospel for evil, for their own destruction, interpreting it incorrectly and impiously, and are as if moving away from unity with the Universal Church, forming a separate, soul-destroying heretical assembly, which they dare to call the Evangelical Church.*

Heresy leads to destruction. Therefore, the saint always recalls Protestantism in the context of general decline and corruption that was being propagated in the Russian Empire:

— *We of the Orthodox faith, viewing it and the Church from the vantage point of ideas brought on by depravity, Protestantism and atheism were the cause for stealthily and forcibly introducing ordinances into the Orthodox Church that are outside, alien, and hostile to the spirit of the Church, and against the canons and teachings of the Orthodox Church.*

— *The monasteries are corrupted by the pride and ignorance of various "thinkers", who "think" and act according to the elements of Western Protestantism and atheism.*

— *It is obvious that apostasy from the Orthodox faith is widespread among the people. Some are openly atheist, others are deists, others are Protestants, others are indifferent, while yet others are schismatics. There is no treatment for this wound, no healing. May he who is saving his soul, save it!*

It is telling that St. Ignatius places Protestantism next to atheism, like a certain preliminary step on the path towards ever greater apostasy from God. In coming out against the Roman Church, Protestants *exchanged evil for evil, error for error, abuse for abuse*; they trampled upon, rejected, and distorted Divine ordinances.

Accordingly, the saint called to question the developed practice of receiving new converts, according to which those who came from Protestantism to Orthodoxy were generally received without Baptism. In December 1838, St. Ignatius wrote to St. Leonid (Nagolkin), the Optina elder, a letter in which among other things he wrote, *I have a most humble question for you: Please tell me whether in Moldavia and Vlachia they re-baptize Lutherans and other Protestants, and why. Much is now being said here on these subjects; the Ober-Procurator is especially very zealous for Orthodoxy, and is publishing the canons of the Ecumenical and Local Councils, for our Rudder contains largely not the canons themselves, but interpretations under the name of canons and other very extensive interpretations on these brief interpretations. Grant, O Lord, that having received the true canons in printed form, we might at least somewhat raise our weakened hands for action.*

As could be supposed, the saint's search for precedents on the practice of Baptism of former Lutherans proceeded from his thoughts on the existence of a practice in the Russian Church of receiving Lutherans through Chrismation alone. The saint himself, having an idea of the total loss of the Holy Spirit in Protestant communities, most likely was coming to the conclusion that it is impossible that they have any [valid] sacraments, including Baptism (incidentally, the saint's thoughts on this theme have been lost).

We have at our disposal the answer of St. Leonid of Optina: *As to your question concerning whether in Moldavia and Vlachia Lutherans and other Protestants are re-baptized, I can only say that I heard from the elder Fr. Theodore, who lived there a rather long time, that they do re-baptize; but why exactly I can-*

not say, for I never had the opportunity to discuss it with him in more detail. But since the discussions arising these days on this subject are related to dogmatic topics, and inasmuch as there is some perplexity, then is it not possible to use some means for the publication this year of a booklet of Royal and Patriarchal Grammatas, shown on the fourth page? By the way, this should all be committed to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, and we should pray to Him about it, that He might preserve His Church in purity, with all the beauty of Her Orthodox confession, and suggest to those pastors holding Her rudder to guard Her in safety as a firm stronghold, through the publication of very clear and reliable canons of the Councils. May He grant us the will and strength to fulfill them, and acquire to the measure of spiritual maturity the will of Christ.

Compared with Catholicism, St. Ignatius views Protestantism as a greater fall. If the Catholics made changes to the sacrament of Confession, the Protestants rejected it outright. If the Catholics excluded the invocation of the Holy Spirit from the Liturgy, the Protestants have rejected the Liturgy altogether. In Catholicism, there is still an element of asceticism, albeit spiritually delusional, while Protestantism has completely lost the ascetic life; remaining is only soullessness and cold rationalism. As we know, St. Ignatius relied upon asceticism, based upon the writings of the holy fathers, for his entire spiritual life; he saw in it a pure and clear path to salvation. Therefore, he especially sharply commented on Protestantism's disgust for patristic ascesis. Thus, the saint evaluates Protestantism as the loss of the key institutions of Christianity—a kind of foreshadowing of the ultimate loss of them in atheism and godlessness.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the saint despised Protestants themselves. The toughness and categoricalness of his statements were always explainable by the obvious fact that any departure from the truth in Christ, which is manifested in Orthodoxy, is a departure from salvation; moreover, it is an unnoticeable departure and therefore more dangerous. The saint's bitter feelings regarding the spread of heterodox teachings was bitterness over the spread of seductive lies, which conceal the truth. But the saint never expressed any contempt for Protestants themselves.

For example, he had a very warm relationship with a famous artist who was a Protestant by confession—Karl Pavlovich Bryullov (1799–1852). Despite the secular character of his main works, Bryullov often filled orders from churches. For instance, Bryullov painted an image of the Holy Trinity for the St. Sergius Hermitage located near St. Petersburg, where St. Ignatius was the superior. Extant is a letter from St. Ignatius to Bryullov, which shows the heartfelt warmth of feeling he had for the artist. *I have always had a warm sympathy for you. Your soul seemed to me as one wandering lonely in the world. I also wander this way, surrounded by difficulties from my childhood ...*

The saint strove not to wound the artist's soul, saying of his creative work, *I have long seen that your soul seeks the beauty*

that would satisfy it, amidst earthly chaos. Your paintings are an expression of a strongly thirsting soul. However, the saint politely and tactfully hinted about the need to seek authentic, eternal beauty: The picture that would decisively satisfy you should be a picture from eternity. These are the demands of true inspiration. Any beauty, both visible and invisible, should be anointed by the Spirit; without that, the anointing upon it is the seal of corruption; it (beauty) helps to satisfy a person who is led by true inspiration. He needs that beauty to respond life, eternal life. When from beauty breathes death, he turns away from such beauty in disgust.

As can be supposed, in the next lines are expressed the saint's heartfelt desire that Bryullov receive Orthodoxy: *I wish when I arrive to see you healthy and strengthened. And you must live, live in order to become more closely acquainted with eternity, so that before entering it your soul would acquire heavenly beauty; this lofty yearning has always been in your soul. The Heavenly Father's embrace is always open to receive anyone who desires to have recourse to this holy, saving embrace.* Unfortunately, although he associated with a holy man, Bryullov ended his life's path outside the bosom of Orthodoxy.

On the whole, St. Ignatius' evaluation of Protestantism might seem to some too categorical and strict. Just the same, it would make sense to heed the saint's spiritual intuition: The path of rational comprehension of the truths of faith, while having lost the Holy Tradition of the Church, leads to coldness in spiritual life, and without fail to the loss of dogmatic purity, which we often see in our modern liberal reformers.



St. Anthony the Great affirms: *If a person places the blame on himself, he finds rest. The moment he casts it on someone else, he will feel troubled internally.* Try it when an opportunity arises. If during a temptation you blame the other person, internally you will feel troubled, distressed—a mess! On the other hand, as soon as you think, *The other person is not at fault, I am to blame. Why am I speaking about another person? I have made so many mistakes and sins ... hence, I shouldn't speak at all,* you will feel as if you are landing on solid ground and are no longer falling. You no longer have anything to fear.

Sometimes we find ourselves at odds with another person, and we stubbornly insist, *He is at fault. He's the one who became angry. He's the one who spoke to me rudely. He must humble himself. If he had spoken to me calmly and addressed me with respect, I would have been patient and not have been offended. Hence, he is to blame.* Behold the passion of egotism! We must oppose such thoughts by responding, *No, no! If I did not have egotism, I would not be bothered. Hence, I am to blame. My brother is not at fault.*

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

THE BEAUTY OF VIRGINITY

By St. Stephan of Fileika.

In His Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ shows two paths of salvation. The Christian life in the world and the raising of children in faith and piety is one of the ways to serve God. The Lord also shows another path—a more direct path, accompanied by greater self-denial and asceticism, greater zeal; a path thanks to which those who truly traverse it offer fruit to God a hundredfold (cf. Mt 13:8). *Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.* (1 Cor 7:37). *But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh.* (1 Cor 7:28)—troubles arising from earthly cares and inevitable distractions. And the Apostle Paul commands married people not to cling to the world completely—to live so that *they that have wives be as though they had none*; that is, to please not your wives, but God; *and they that use this world, as not abusing it.* (1 Cor 7:29, 31).

The Loftiness of Virginity

It is known that *the flesh lusteth against the Spirit* (Gal 5:17); but when the lust of the flesh is mortified, then the spirit is pacified, and peace is established in the heart. The satisfaction of evil lust darkens the mind, hardens the heart, plunges the soul into despair, and makes a man crass and senseless. The fulfillment of lusts is the beginning of sorrows, afflictions, and sighs; from here flows the source of that evil in which the entire world lies. (cf. 1 Jn 5:19). Therefore, blessed is he who loves the virginal life: He will see the blessings of the Lord on Earth, and in this vale of tears he will find grace from God.

Virginity serves as a blessing for virgins, delivering them from the need to be subordinate to a husband and to bring forth children in pain. (cf. Gen 3:16). The Apostle Paul advises whomever seeks the ascetic life to preserve his virginity, as the best barrier from the evils of this world: *I would have you be without cares... For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.* (1 Cor 7:32, 7). Blessed is he who is not bound by the bonds of marriage, the strongest of all that this world imposes. *The celibate life*, according to St. Gregory the Theologian, *is the beginning of the future life; in it, a man, having no need of a helpmate, who inclines him towards pernicious food, devotes his private desires to God alone.*

And Scripture says: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman* (1 Cor 7:1); however, *All men cannot receive this saying*, the Lord said, *save they to whom it is given.* (Mt 19:11). The Lord does not drive anyone away from Himself by presenting virginity as a high gift not obtainable for all, but rather thereby attracts lovers of Divine gifts to Him all the more. Unblemished virginity is nothing other than the angelic state, according

to the Lord: *The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage. But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels.* (Lk 20:34-36).

Virgins begin already here to be what the righteous will be in the Kingdom of Christ. They have many advantages over those who enter into marriage: They are free from worldly cares; they can always be about the one thing needful. (cf. Lk 10:42). Because their hearts have nothing to enjoy on Earth, they begin to love God more and to desire Heavenly blessings more fervently. Just as angels, who mighty in power, easily fulfill the will of the Lord, so virgins, endowed with spiritual strength, do not fear the labors of the spiritual life, sorrows, or deprivations. Therefore, St. John Chrysostom says: *Virginity can plant a good root in us from which grows all the blessings: freedom, courage, ardent zeal, fiery love for Heavenly things, and contempt for all things earthly.*

Although sometimes living in virginity can be hard for a man, because such a man has no help from a spouse and is subjected to temptation from the devil, it is on the other hand far superior to the happiest of family lives. He who has a wife and children, and rejoices in his charity to neighbors here, will not be so blessed in the future age as he who endures the deprivation of the solitary life and makes himself a “eunuch” for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Mt. 19:12). St. John of Karpathos speaks truly: *Never praise a layman with a wife and children who is comforted by his charity to many and suffers nothing from the demons, above a monk—do not consider yourself less than him in pleasing God. Although I don't say that you live blamelessly in leading a celibate life; but if you do a few works, your spiritual sorrows, and sighs, and lamentations, and tears are more pleasing to God than all the blessed works of a man in the world.* \Therefore, do not praise those who lead a life in the world; and have no desire to cleave to the world.

The high dignity of virginity can be judged by the words of the divine seer: *And I looked*, says the Apostle John the Theologian, *and, lo ... a hundred forty and four thousand... And they sung as it were a new song before the throne... And no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.* (Rev 14:1-4). Virginity in this life also distinguishes those who love it from all others in body and soul: Virginal purity is manifested in them both by the quietness of their gazes and the modesty of their words; and a feeling of virginal modesty is manifested in all their eternal conduct. Whoever preserves his virginity intact, has a face that becomes fairer and a voice more pleasant.

Whoever does not want to be separated from virginity, let him hear how his wise companions lived on Earth. St.

Gregory the Theologian says: *Marriage, the beginning of many burdens in life, did not bind me with its shackles. I disregarded expensive clothing and exquisite meals, which feed the fire of lust; I did not love vast beautiful chambers; I fled from the songs and poems of the lascivious. There were no scents of perfumes around me; I left silver and gold to those who love to look after treasures—their labors are great and their pleasure insignificant. My favorite food is bread and salt, and my drink—simple water. Christ, Who exalts my spirit, is all my treasure.*

True Preservation of Virginity

Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord... For they that work iniquity have not walked in His ways. (Pss 118:1, 3). *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit* (Rom 8:1)—they do not fulfill carnal lusts, but keep in their hearts the words of the Lord, which are spirit and life. (cf. Jn 6:63). Those who live according to the spirit contemplate spiritual things and thereby mortify carnal desires—they become vigilant in spirit, fearless, fully trusting in the Lord. *Blessed is the man that hath not slipped with his mouth, and is not pricked with the multitude of sins. Blessed is he whose conscience hath not condemned him, and who is not fallen from his hope.* (Sir 14:1-2). *Woe be to fearful hearts ... and the sinner that goeth two ways! Woe unto him that is fainthearted.* (Sir 2:12-13).

If anyone keeps his body from fornication, says St. Macarius the Great, but commits fornication mentally (by the desire of his heart), *he receives no benefit* (from his external virginity). And St. Euthymius the Great, pointing to such a one, says: *He is a fornicator, and the devil possesses him.* According to St. John Chrysostom, *It is not celibacy alone that makes a virgin, but purity of heart, separation from women, and abiding in divine contemplation.*

The lust of the flesh is very seductive: It easily snares the unwary and makes the 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). That means you can defile yourself without touching anyone, through the eyes, through the imagination and the desires of the heart. A man is already defiled once thoughts of fornication enter the heart. (cf. Mt 15:19–20). Therefore, Scripture says, more than anything, *Keep thy heart with all diligence.* (Prov 4:23).

Preserving the Bodily Senses

The desires of the heart are often aroused in us by external impressions. Therefore, we must protect our bodily senses, that is, sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell. Speaking of them, Scripture says: *For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces.* (Jer 9:21). Through these doorways, the temptations of the world penetrate into the heart, even if it is full of good desires, and they desolate it, as it is said: *Evil company corrupts good morals.* (1 Cor 15:33).

Of all the external senses, sight serves as the most convenient conduit for temptations, and therefore it must be especially preserved for the purity of virginity. The lust of the eyes, observing tempting things, easily and quickly unites them with the lust of the flesh and the *hidden man of the heart.* (1 Pet 3:4), regardless of time or place, and fornicates with anyone it wants. Willingly looking at and admiring the beauty of faces, the fornicator always and everywhere carries and nourishes impure lust within himself, like an untamable beast. What could be worse than such a condition? It is the same as a strong fever, when the patient cannot quench his thirst no matter how much he drinks.

Thus, Scripture says, *For many have been deceived by the beauty of a woman; for herewith love is kindled as a fire.* (Sir 9:9). And what pleasure can there be from the lust of the eyes? There is essentially no pleasure here, but only a shadow, a fraud and a deception; for where there is confusion of thoughts and anxiety of the heart, what kind of pleasure can there be? It is not the one who indulges in the lust of the eyes who enjoys peace of mind, but he who does not. And no matter how much this lustful man tries to bring himself pleasure, he will not be able to and he will not be able to make it last. The consolation of the chaste man is not like this; but his whole life, we can say, passes in pleasure, because his conscience is at peace and nothing disturbs his soul—he is always calm and happily looks to Heaven, inspired by the desire for eternal blessings.

But what is the harm, you might ask, if I look but I am not carried away by passion? You might not see the trouble for yourself the first time, and even when you look once, twice, three times, you might be able to overcome the passion, but if you start doing it often, then you will certainly be defeated. For you are not higher than the Prophet David, who we know was exposed to danger by the sight of feminine beauty. (cf. 2 Kgs/2 Sam. 11:1-27). But even if this does not happen to you right away, still, once a shameful desire is ignited within you, then even though the thing you saw is no longer there, you will imagine it and be drawn into committing shameful acts.

Therefore, St. John Chrysostom says: *Whoever is accustomed to gazing upon bodily beauty, to catching charming glances, to not averting his gaze from comely faces, and to feeding his soul with such spectacles is already a fornicator.* Although speaking with women seems pleasant in the beginning, temptation later comes to the soul through them. As long as a man does not get close to them, it seems their gaze is serene and their conversation humble; or, as it says in Proverbs: *For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.* (Prov 5:3–4). When you draw near to a fire and burn yourself, you quickly jump back; but having enfeebled your soul with feminine flattery, you will not soon turn away from it. As a magnet attracts metal, so a woman's love attracts the soul to desire her and be with her.

The beautiful contours of the face, the sparkle of the eyes, the blush of the cheeks, the scarlet color of the lips—all of this pleases the reckless soul; but have you thought, O man, what all this that attracts the eye is composed of? *The composition of bodily beauty*, says St. John Chrysostom, *is nothing more than blood and bile—the juice of the food you’ve eaten: the eyes, the cheeks, and everything else are filled with it. If you think about what’s inside a slender nose and rosy cheeks, then you’ll say that all the beauty of the flesh is the same as an ornate coffin filled inside with putridness.*

So, why love the beauty of the flesh, which consists simply of moisture, and betray your priceless soul into slavery to it? Is it not better, when meeting with those who are taken from the earth and will return to the earth, to turn away from this gaze and seeing not to see; to look without a thought and all the sooner stop the dangerous vision? For what is the beauty of the flesh? It is a flower that blooms in the morning and is dried up by evening. (cf. Pss 89:6).

As *the love of money*, according to the word of truth, *is the root of all evil* (1 Tim. 6:10), so carnal love is nothing other than the service of corruption and fetor. That is why the demons love flesh, especially idle, pampered, wanton flesh. The pleasure of looking at the beauty of the flesh is a great pleasure! And does it last? A month, two, a year if you are lucky, and then? Familiarity causes it to lose all its charm. But what happens when one’s addiction to external charm remains forever? Displeasure, boredom, bitterness, the blinding of the mind... Do we not see how many there are who lived with beautiful wives but ended their lives in misery?

Even in the greatest beauty, the exterior alone is deceptive, while the essence is nothing but a heavy yoke for the heart, which brings with it emptiness and great poverty—great deprivation of spiritual goods. One man, lamenting the calamity that comes from the beauty of the flesh, cried out: *For my loins are filled with mockings, and there is no healing in my flesh. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly, I have roared from the groaning of my heart.* (Pss 37:8-9). But what is especially disastrous is what St. Symeon the New Theologian spoke about: *Every addiction destroys the kindled warmth of the heart*, or, as St. Maximus the Confessor states: *He whose mind is attached to any one thing (or any person) does not love God.*

Can you imagine the evil that comes from this, when we know for sure that the Kingdom of Heaven is prepared only for those who love God?— *neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers ... shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* (1 Cor 6:9-10). And do we not remember that we will have to give an account for our words and thoughts just as much as for our deeds? For the Lord says: *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). What forgiveness can there be for those who do not fear the words of the Lord? What will they say in their own defense?—nothing; but with a great cry, with gnashing of teeth, they will be cast into the fires of hell, the

place of eternal and inescapable torment, as it is written: *Let sinners be turned away unto hades, yea, all the nations that are forgetful of God.* (Pss 9:17).

To keep your eyes from beholding tempting things, you need to look downward more, remembering the words spoken at God’s behest to St. Ephraim the Syrian: *You who were taken from the earth, look at the earth.* You must also preserve one’s hearing from hearing immodest speech, worldly songs, and music that delight and enfeeble the spiritual senses, for all this draws the soul to impure love and lust of the flesh. You must take great care in acquaintance and communication with the female sex; as a warrior among enemies receives a great number of wounds, so he who freely communicates with women causes many wounds for his soul. Therefore, even in the Old Testament it was said: *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.* (Sir 9:10).

The sense of taste is very dangerous for the purity of the flesh; therefore, we must renounce the enjoyment of food and drink. Who has not noticed what disastrous consequences comes from eating sweet things? It is not without reason that the Apostle calls the widow who eats intemperately *dead while she liveth.* (1 Tim 5:6). That is why those who strictly guarded their virginity rarely ate sweet food, but took mainly bread and water.

Although the sense of touch is less often subjected to temptation, it is extremely dangerous for the purity of virginity. Therefore, beware not only touching the opposite sex, but keep your hand from touching your own members, from which passion is aroused.

Of all the bodily senses, the sense of smell presents fewer temptations for chastity; however, it is necessary to refuse fragrant ointments that lead the soul to effeminacy and dispose it towards sensuality.

In addition to all of this, we must also flee impure dreams or imaginations—they subject a man to spiritual corruption much more than when fulfilling his mutual duty in marriage. Therefore, the Apostle Paul says: *It is better to marry than to burn.* (1 Cor 7:9).

Those who lead a virginal life will inevitably have to struggle with the lust of the flesh; it threatens the man who is inexperienced in the struggle with a fall and even the possible death of the soul. *For to be carnally minded is death*, says the Apostle Paul (Rom. 8:6); moreover, carnal sins are mortal sins. Therefore, *no whoremonger, nor unclean person ... hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God* (Eph. 5:5), unless he repents and turns away from his sin in mind and heart.

The Battle of Spirit and Flesh

Now let us try to find a way to deliver ourselves from the captivity of sin, to overcome the evil lust hiding within us. Who has not noticed within himself the struggle of the spirit

with the flesh, the enmity between good and evil? And who does not sigh under the yoke that the Lord has imposed on all the sons of Adam? The Apostle Paul says: *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Rom. 7:23–24)—from the law of the flesh, which injures and causes death to the soul?

The soul is struck and confounded by the lawless gratification of excessive carnal desires, negligence, and complete cooling towards virtue. From this comes the continual forgetfulness of God, which is the death of the soul, its languor and sorrow—first temporary, then eternal. Whoever wants to avoid this death should learn as much as possible about the law of the Lord and call on His help. The revelation of the Lord is a spiritual light that enlightens the mind and brings the soul out of the shadow of death (cf. Mt 4:16); and the remembrance of the Lord is the life of the soul, or, what's the same, unceasing joy in the Lord.

Hope in God's Help and the Destruction of Pride

Nothing makes the soul so weak and negligent in the work of salvation as self-love and self-will—the forebears and feeders of carnal passions; therefore, you must reject them and force yourself to do good. Labor and humility are necessary for those who want to be free from the captivity of sin. And David cried out: *Behold my lowliness and my toil, and forgive all my sins.* (Pss 24:18). Sin reigns in proud hearts, but grace abides in the humble (cf. Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5)—and the kingdom of evil is destroyed.

God restores a contrite heart in hope and raises one who is conscious of the poverty and wretchedness of his soul from the festering passions; therefore, you must not despair when you see yourself in spiritual misery, dying from sinful wounds. Or as St. Philaret, the Metropolitan of Moscow says, *Use the feeling of weakness not unto despair, but to reject hope in yourself and hope in God by prayerfully entreating His help.* For the Lord always shows His saving power in our impotence and weakness: *My strength, He says, is made perfect in weakness.* (2 Cor 12:9).

The passions of the flesh war against us so that we might know our infirmity, like David, who said: *Deliver me, for a poor man am I and a pauper* (Pss 108:21); so that we might place our salvation in God alone: *For He shall save his people from their sins.* (Mt. 1:21). Therefore, it is impossible to have freedom from carnal desires and to be pure of passionate thoughts as long as a man hopes in himself. But whoever maintains humility, contrition, and hope in the mercy of God is granted a portion among the saved and is counted among the righteous; and the Lord will say to him, as to the Apostle Paul: *My grace is sufficient for thee.* (2 Cor 12:9). *I am the Lord Thy God Who has mercy on thee and heals all thine afflictions.*

Do not marvel as though it's something strange if you see yourself powerless in the battle with sinful lusts, and do not

think that this happens to you alone: Many of the saints have endured the same. Listen to how St. Gregory the Theologian laments his misfortunes: *Oh, my soul, how sinful and worthy of punishment you are! Oh, mortals, how vain and insignificant is our pride! And a light wind already shakes us. Everything in man is impermanent—both the good and the evil: Both are close to each other. The evil man doesn't know what his end will be, and the good man can't assure he will always be virtuous. As a youth, innocence guided me and chastity subdued my senses and kindled fervent love for the wisdom of God in my heart. But now, despite the knowledge I have gained, despite my mature age, I can barely drag my feet like a drunkard: The enemy secretly creeps into my heart and steals my good intentions. Sometimes my spirit soars to God, and sometimes it plunges into the abyss of the world that has inflicted so many wounds upon my soul. But though sin dominates me, although the enemy drowns me in the waters of lawlessness, although I see my condition, I know who I am and where I would like to ascend to. I see the depth of my fall and the whole abyss into which I may still plunge.*

Another saint, Venerable Isaac the Syrian says: *When we surrender ourselves to an inexperienced mind and we begin to do unseemly things again, then we will not be negligent about correcting our lives, for the righteous also have a tendency to sin; but remaining in sin is a consequence of the deadening of the soul. God replaces the fulfillment of His commandments with repentance, and imputes to us sorrow for sins instead of virtues—such is the goodness of God! But whoever, hoping in repentance, gives himself over to sin, and turns God's grace into indulgence in sin thereby sinning grievously, does not reach the state in which he could be cleansed from sins, and thus he dies an unrepentant sinner.*

Thus, let us not neglect our salvation; let us not despair of correction, in either case adding sin to sin. *The Lord hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man licence to sin.* (Sir 15:20). *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* (1 Pet 4:18). *A wise man will fear in everything, and in the day of sinning he will beware of offence.* (Sir 18:27). *He will turn to the Lord with all his heart and will pray before Him day and night until iniquity passes away* (Pss 56:3); *he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him,* (Ezek 33:15–16).

Prayerful Appeal to God

St. Gregory the Theologian says of himself: *I seek help everywhere, and everywhere I'm amazed, and I again turn my gaze to Thee, my God, the Lamp of our souls, enlightening pure hearts and making man a partaker of Divinity! Have mercy on me, strengthen me first of all in hope of salvation; fill the fading lamp in my soul with oil that it might shine with a new radiance, and I will enter with it into eternal life. Deliver me from sorrow and lead me into blessed peace, for Thou hast already tamed my heart with sorrows, as a rider tames a wild horse galloping through the thickets. Thou hast tempted me aplenty with*

sorrow, in punishment for my sins, and with the humiliation of my pride: For often Thy goodness makes us proud and reliant upon ourselves. My afflictions themselves can serve to teach the good and the bad alike how insignificant is our life. But this is a secret hidden in the depths of Thy wisdom; and therefore, whether it is good or evil that serves to instruct us, we must receive it all for good, although we cannot penetrate into the causes of everything that happens to us.

Scripture also points to this: *For it is a token of His great goodness, when wicked doers are not suffered any long time, but forthwith punished* (2 Macc 6:13), for such suffering serves for their enlightenment, not their destruction.

According to the word of the Lord: *Ask, and it shall be given you.* (Mt. 7:7). We must ask for deliverance from evil desires that weigh us down and not doubt in the good providence of the Physician of our souls. He Who heals spiritual ailments does not heal you from visible evils so that external healing might not cause you to be infected internally with pride and conceit, condemnation, and contempt for others—so that instead of the cup of salvation you're not given deadly poison.

But being at a loss, you ask: "What remains to be done?" Be patient, pray, and hope in the mercy of God; for we are told to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17); *In your patience possess ye your souls.* (Lk 21:19). And the Prophet David says: *Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and let thy heart be strengthened, and wait on the Lord.* (Pss 26:14). For the eyes of the Lord are turned upon those who await His mercy to protect them. Always have a heart that hungers and thirsts for a righteous life and, according to the word of the Lord, you will be satisfied—you will see God's righteousness. (cf. Mt. 5:6).

There will come a time when the Lord will say: *Do you want to be healed?* And you, having a good desire, will say: *I do, Lord!* (cf. Jn 5:6-7). And the Lord will give you according to your desire—you will be chaste. Only, do not inflame your spiritual wounds, and even more so do not violate your virginity, even if carnal thoughts greatly enfeeble your soul. Remember that those who live according to the flesh cannot please God—they think about the flesh and do not submit to the law of God (cf. Rom 8:5-8), whereas *he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit* with the Lord (1 Cor 6:17).

Refraining from Evil

An excellent means of adhering to virginity is to point to the vice of sensuality, committed in various ways—not only by copulation with the flesh of another, but also without it. It is not only the soul of such a wicked man that perishes, but his body is also deprived of vigor and strength; he loses his memory and good sense—even his vision and hearing are damaged by such actions, which are an abomination before God and man. Nothing so delights the God-defying spirit as this most painful and grave sin for the soul. And the Spirit of God does not depart from anyone so much as from a fornicator and indulger in self-pleasure.

Therefore, it is said: *For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter; nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin.* (Wis 1:4). Thus, having lost Divine reason, man becomes like cattle in his senses, falling into many iniquities and the snares of the enemy, like a stupid imbecile, and becomes completely incapable of pleasing God. Scriptures says rightly that neither fornicators nor self-gratifiers will inherit the Kingdom of God. (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10). The Apostle Paul also advises not to associate with fornicators, or with idolaters: We should not even eat with them. (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-11). There is an important reason for this, which can be understood from the following example.

In the Kiev Caves Lavra, around the year 1140, there lived Hieromonk Onesiphor. He had a spiritual son and friend—one monk who appeared to be a faster but in fact lived impurely. But this was hidden from his spiritual father. And then, although healthy, he suddenly died—and no one could draw near to his body because of the stench coming from him. Standing a way off, they could barely sing the usual hymns over him, and plugging up their noses, they carried and placed him in a cave. Many times a cry was heard, as though someone were being tortured. St. Anthony appeared to Onesiphor and threateningly said: "Why did you put such a vile, iniquitous man here? He has desecrated this holy place." The next night, Monk Onesiphor again heard: "Immediately throw him out for the dogs to eat; he's not worthy to be here." From this you can see how the secret iniquity of the fleshly man is repugnant to God and His saints! Not only the soul, but also the dead body of a fornicator is unbearable for them. And the Apostle Paul says rightly: *Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.* (1 Cor 6:18).

Conclusion

We must know that without God's grace, no one can preserve the purity of virginity; and it is not given to the negligent: We have to have fervent love for studying God's wisdom, for eating and drinking in moderation, and for placing labors of vigil and prayer upon the body. Without this, there will inevitably be a battle with the lust of the flesh, being overcome by and falling into sinful impurity. The saints observed that for pride and the condemnation of others, man is allowed to suffer an attack from a thorn in the flesh; and that for the preservation of purity, frequent Confession and Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ are very useful.



No matter what injustice is made unto you by your brother, if you will be angry with him, you are angry without a cause. Even if he takes your right eye out and cuts your right hand off, and you will be angry with him, you are angry without a cause. But if he separates you from God, then you must be very angry.

Abba Poimen the Great

Φιλαργυρία: Ἡ Ρίζα Πάντων τῶν Κακῶν

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Όταν οἱ χριστιανοὶ δεχθοῦν ὅτι ἡ πλεονεξία εἶναι εἰδωλολατρία καὶ φοβερὴ ἀσθένεια, ποὺ ἐπηρεάζει καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ, πάρα πολλὰ προβλήματα θὰ λυθοῦν στὴν προσωπικὴ τους ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία γενικότερα. Πρέπει νὰ μελετήσουν τὸ θέμα καὶ νὰ κατανοήσουν ὅτι ὁ ἀληθινὸς χριστιανὸς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι πλεονέκτης, γιατί «*ἡ λατρεία τοῦ χρήματος ἀπορροφᾷ ὀλόκληρη τὴν καρδιά του καὶ δὲν ἔχει κανένα δικαίωμα κληρονομίᾳ στὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ*», ὅπως ἐρμηνεύει ὁ Π. Ν. Τρεμπέλας τὸ λόγο τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου ὅτι ὁ πλεονέκτης εἶναι εἰδωλόλατρες (Ἐφ. 5:5).

Πολλοὶ περήφανοι καὶ ἀμαθεῖς κοσμικοὶ ἄνθρωποι θεωροῦν τὴν εὐσέβεια ὅτι εἶναι πορισμός, δηλαδή πηγὴ αἰσχροῦς ἐκμετάλλευσης καὶ ὑλικοῦ πλουτισμοῦ (Α΄ Τιμ. 6:5), ἐνῶ ἡ εὐσέβεια εἶναι μεγάλη πηγὴ πνευματικοῦ πλουτισμοῦ, ὅταν συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ὀλιγάρκεια, ἡ ὁποία καταπολεμεῖ τὴν πλεονεξία καὶ τὴν αἰσχροκέρδεια.

Ὁ εὐσεβὴς ὅταν ἔχει τροφές, ἐνδύματα καὶ κατοικία, ἀρκεῖται σὲ αὐτὰ σκεπτόμενος πάντα τὸ λόγο τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου «*ὅτι τίποτα δὲν φέραμε μαζί μας ὅταν ἦλθαμε στὸν κόσμον καὶ εἶναι φανερὸ πῶς οὔτε μποροῦμε νὰ βγάλουμε τίποτα φεύγοντας*» (Α΄ Τιμ. 6:7). Εἶναι δὲ ἀποκαλυπτικὸς καὶ συνάμα φοβερός ὁ λόγος του καὶ γιὰ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ πλουτίσουν: «*Ὅσοι θέλουν νὰ πλουτίσουν πέφτουν σὲ πειρασμό, σὲ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ σὲ πολλὰς ἐπιθυμίες ἀνόητες καὶ βλαβερές, ποὺ βυθίζουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὴν καταστροφή καὶ στὸ χαμό. Γιατί ἡ ρίζα ὅλων τῶν κακῶν εἶναι ἡ φιλαργυρία. Τὸ χρήμα μερικοὶ τὸ ἐπιθύμησαν τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε πλανήθηκαν καὶ ἀπομακρύνθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη καὶ πλῆγωσαν τὸν ἑαυτό τους μὲ βάσανα πολλὰ*» (Α΄ Τιμ. 6:9-10).

Ἡ πλεονεξία εἶναι ἀσθένεια ποὺ δύσκολα θεραπεύεται. Χρειάζεται σταθερότητα στὴν καταπολέμησή της καὶ πάντα νὰ συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ τὸ καθῆκον τῆς ἔμπρακτης ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν πλησίον, δηλαδή τὴν ἐλεημοσύνη. Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης

τονίζει ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν φρόντισε πολὺ γιὰ τὴν θεραπεία τῆς ἀσθένειας αὐτῆς, «*γι' αὐτὸ καὶ πλεονάζει στὶς ἐκκλησίες καὶ κανένας δὲν ἐξετάζει προσεκτικὰ ὅσους ὀδηγοῦνται στὸν κλῆρο μὴπως ἔχουν μολυνθεῖ μὲ τὸ εἶδος αὐτὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας*». Καὶ στὴν ἐποχὴ μας παρατηρεῖται τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς πλεονεξίας στους ναοὺς καὶ τοὺς κληρικούς.

Μερικοὶ μητροπολίτες ζητοῦν ἐπίμονα τὴν αὔξηση τῶν εἰσφορῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ναοὺς. Ἀπαιτοῦν ὑπερβολικά, λησιμονώντας ὅτι ἡ μητρόπολη δὲν περιορίζεται στὸ μέγαρο, ἀλλὰ φτάνει καὶ στὸ τελευταῖο καὶ ἀπόμακρο ταπεινὸ ἐξωκκλήσι, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ ἐνδιαφέρεται μέσω τοῦ ἐφημερίου τῆς περιοχῆς.

Συνήθως στὶς ἐνορίες τῶν πόλεων ἰσχύουν τιμοκατάλογοι γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τῶν ἱερῶν μυστηρίων. Ἀλήθεια, γιατί δὲν τοὺς καταργοῦν οἱ ὑπεύθυνοι; Θυμοῦνται ἄραγε τὸ «*δωρεὰν ἐλάβετε, δωρεὰν δότε*»

(Ματθ. 10:8). Τί ζήτησε ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητὲς του καὶ τί ζητάει κατ' ἐπέκταση καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς διαδόχους τους; Ἀπλά, νὰ ἐργάζονται μὲ ἀνιδιοτέλεια καὶ χωρὶς βέβαια νὰ πάσχουν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀσθένεια τῆς πλεονεξίας.

Ἐπίσης ὁ βαρῦτιμος διάκοσμος τῶν ναῶν δὲν εἶναι ἀπαραίτητος καὶ οἱ πιστοί, ποὺ ἐκκλησιάζονται δὲν ἐπηρεάζονται ἀπὸ αὐτόν, οὔτε φυσικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ λαμπερὰ καὶ χρυσοκέντητα ἄμφια, τὰ ἐγκόλπια καὶ τοὺς περίτεχνους σταυροὺς. Ἀντίθετα, θὰ λέγαμε, ὅτι τοὺς προκαλοῦν καὶ τοὺς σκανδαλίζουν.

Γιατί οἱ μεγάλοι ναοὶ τῶν πόλεων εἶναι πλούσιοι; Τὸ κεράκι τῶν ἐκκλησιαζομένων φθάνει καὶ περισσεύει γιὰ τὶς λειτουργικὲς τους ἀνάγκες. Καὶ ὅμως οἱ ἐφημέριοι ἔχουν ἀνοικτὸ τὸ χέρι τους καὶ γιὰ ἓνα «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» καὶ ὅταν γεμίσει τὸ κλείνουν σφικτά! Οἱ περισσότεροι εἶναι πλεονέκτες καὶ ὄχι ἐλεήμονες. Οἱ πιστοὶ ἀκοῦν τὰ θεμιτὰ λόγια τους γιὰ δωρεές καὶ προσφορές, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν ἀκοῦν τὶς παρακλήσεις τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ τῶν δυστυχημένων, οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν ἔχουν οὔτε τὰ στοιχειώδη ἀγαθὰ γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τους. Οἱ ἐφημέριοι δέχονται πολλὰ καὶ προσφέρουν ψιχία.

Ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ ἀγιορείτης (τὸν ὁποῖο πολλοὶ ἐπικαλοῦνται, λίγοι ὅμως τὸν μιμοῦνται) ἔλεγε κάτι σχετικὸ γιὰ τὰ μοναστήρια, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἐνοριακοὺς ναοὺς: «*Τὰ μεγάλα προσκυνήματα μονῶν πολλὰς φορὲς ξεφεύγουν ἀπὸ τὸν πραγματικὸ τους*



σκοπό, γιατί φθάνουν πολλές φορές από μοναστήρια να καταντάνε επιχειρήσεις. Γι' αυτό και μερικοί δεσποτάδες, πολύ δικαίως, θα ήθελαν να τις έχουν οί ίδιοι, γιατί οί μοναχοί θα πρέπει να αγαπούν την άκτημοσύνη, πού όρκιστήκανε στόν Θεό να φυλάξουν. Δυστυχώς όμως, δέν περιορίζονται στα άπαραίτητα, τὰ άπλά, τόσο για τόν έαυτό τους, όσο και γενικότερα για τή μονή, για να μη δέχονται και από τούς πιστούς και να τούς παρακινούν να βοηθήσουν μόνοι τους τούς άδελφούς μας τούς πτωχούς, πού ύποφέρουν, αλλά τί κάνουν; Μαζεύουν και τόν ιδρώτα άκόμα τών πτωχών και γεμίζουν ένα σωρό καντήλια και καμπάνες, νομίζοντας ότι έτσι δοξολογείται ο Θεός. Αυτού του είδους όμως ή ευλάβεια είναι σαν τήν ευλάβεια πού έχουν πολλοί Ρώσοι κληρικοί, οί όποιοι έγιναν αίτια, χωρίς να τδ θέλουν, τὰ καντήλια, οί πολυέλαιοι και οί καμπάνες να γίνουν κανόνια και να χτυπήσουν τήν ίδια τήν Έκκλησία του Χριστού.» («Έπιστολές», Σουρωτή 1994, σελ. 44-45).

Μερικοί μητροπολίτες κτίζουν ναούς έπ' όνόματι του άγίου Παΐσιου, για να προσελκύουν προσκυνητές και να γεμίζουν τὰ παγκάρια. Ένας μάλιστα μητροπολίτης, όταν ανακοίνωσε ότι θα άνεγερθεί μεγαλοπρεπής ναός πρδς τιμήν του άγίου Παΐσιου, τόνισε ότι θα γεμίσει ή πόλη τους από χιλιάδες προσκυνητές! Η προκλητική αυτή δήλωση του μητροπολίτη φανερώνει ότι ο ίδιος είναι δέσμιος του φοβερού πάθους τής πλεονεξίας. Άν όμως ο Σεβασμιώτατος ήταν ένάρετος, δέν θα χρειαζόταν ο ναός του άγίου Παΐσιου, γιατί τὰ πλήθη τών προσκυνητών θα κατευθύνονταν πρδς τδ μητροπολιτικό μέγαρο, για να πάρουν τήν εύχή του και να ώφεληθοϋν πνευματικά, άνάβοντας και ένα κεράκι στόν παρακείμενο μητροπολιτικό ναό. Αλλά, τί ύποθέτω; Αυτό είναι σπάνιο φαινόμενο, σχεδόν άνύπαρκτο. Οί έννοικοι τών μητροπολιτικών μεγάρων δέν παρουσιάζουν κανένα ένδιαφέρν για τούς προσκυνητές. Εκεί πηγαίνουν οί άνθρωποι μόνο για άδειες γάμου και οί ιερείς, για να καταθέσουν τς τριμηνιαίες είσφορές τών ναών τους...

Τδ άμάρτημα τής πλεονεξίας έχει στενότατη σχέση και με τήν κλοπή, γι' αυτό πρέπει να άντιμετωπίζεται από τόν πνευματικό με ιδιαίτερη προσοχή. Ο άγιος Γρηγόριος ύποδεικνύει σχετικά τὰ έξής: «Εκείνος πού με λαθραία άφαίρεση σφετερίζεται τὰ ξένα αγαθά κι έπειτα φανερώνει με τήν έξομολόγηση στόν ιερέα τδ άμάρτημά του, θα θεραπεύσει τή νόσο του με τήν πραγματοποίηση του άντιθέτου του πάθους. Τήν θεραπεία τήν έννοώ με τή διανομή τής περιουσίας του στούς πτωχούς, ώστε με τήν παραχώρηση όσων έχει, να γίνει φανερό ότι είναι καθαρός από τή νόσο τής πλεονεξίας. Κι αν δέν έχει τίποτα, αλλά μόνο τδ

σώμα του, ο άπόστολος προστάζει να έξιλωθεί για τδ άμάρτημά του αυτό με τή σωματική του καταπόνηση». Λέει σχετικά ότι «ο κλέπτης να μη κλέβει πιά. Καλύτερα να κοπιάζει πράττοντας τδ αγαθό, για να έχει να μεταδίδει σ' εκείνον πού έχει ανάγκη».

Μακάριοι είναι εκείνοι πού άντιμετωπίζουν τδ πάθος τής πλεονεξίας, γιατί μπορούν να βαδίζουν τδ δρόμο πρδς τήν ούράνια Βασιλεία με τή βεβαιότητα ότι θα καταλήξουν εκεί.



Ο κόσμος είναι τδ μεγάλο άμπέλι. Ο Χριστός άνέθεσε στούς Άποστόλους τήν καλλιέργειά του. Είχαν συγκεκριμένο έργο. Τούς έδωκε τήν χάριν του και τήν εύλογίαν του και τούς έστειλεν εις όλον τόν κόσμο να διδάξουν τούς άνθρωπους, άνίσως και θέλουν να ζήσουν και έδω καλά, ειρηνικά, ήγαπημένα και μετά τα ταϋτα να πηγαίνουν εις τόν Παράδεισον να χαίρονται πάντοτε, να μετανοούν, να πιστεύουν και να βαπτίζονται.

Με τή χάρη και τήν εύλογία του Χριστού και τδ δικό τους ζήλο οί Άπόστολοι άνέπτυξαν τδ έργο τους, χωρίς να έπηρεάζονται από τούς άρχοντες του άμαρτωλού κόσμου. Και τὰ άποτελέσματα ήταν θεαματικά. Οί σύγχρονοι κληρικοί πρέπει να άποκτήσουν άποστολικό φρόνημα, άποβάλλοντας από τήν καρδιά τους τδ φιλήδοно κοσμικό φρόνημα. Ο άφοσιωμένος στό Θεό άνθρωπος δέν μπορεί να σκέφτεται, να έπιθυμεί και να ενεργεί κοσμικώς. Όλα του πρέπει να είναι χριστοκεντρικά. Η σκέψη του να στρέφεται στό Χριστό. Η έπιθυμία του να ίκανοποιείται από τδ Χριστό. Τδ έργο του να οδηγεί στό Χριστό.

Οί Άπόστολοι δέν είχαν ιδιαίτερα προσόντα, όπως πολλοί σημερινοί κληρικοί. Δέν είχαν σπουδές, δέν είχαν τίτλους, δέν είχαν άποκτήσει τήν κατά κόσμο σοφία. Δύναμη για αυτούς ήταν ή χάρις του Άγίου Πνεύματος. Οί «φρόνιμοι και πιστοί δοϋλοι του Χριστού», «έτρεξαν ώσαν άστραπή εις όλον τόν κόσμο και με εκείνην τήν χάριν έλαλούσανε όλες τες γλώσσες του κόσμου, με εκείνην τήν χάριν ίάτρευαν και τυφλούς και κωφούς και λεπτρούς και δαιμονισμένους και, τδ μαγαλύτερον, με τδ όνομα του Χριστού μας έπρόσταζαν τούς νεκρούς και άνεσταίνοντο».

Δέν ήταν καθολική ή άποδοχή τής διδασκαλίας τών Άποστόλων. Ύπηρχαν περιοχές όπου με ένθουσιασμό πίστευαν οί άνθρωποι και ιδρύονταν εκκλησίες και ύπηρχαν έπίσης περιοχές, πού άρνούνταν να τούς άκούσουν. Οί πρώτες ήταν έπίγειος Παράδεισος και οί δεύτερες κατοικία του Διαβόλου.

Διδαχαί του Άγίου Κοσμά του Αιτωλού

Ποιό Εἶνε τὸ Ὄνομά σας;

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικό «Κυριακή», 25 Ὀκτωβρίου 2020, ἀριθμ. φύλλον 2332, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεία Ἱερά Μονὴ Ἁγίου Ἀγιοστίνου Φλωρίνης. Γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης πρῶην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Ἀγιοστίνοσ Καντιώτης, (+2010).

«**Ἐπηρώτησε δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς λέγων· Τί σοί ἐστιν ὄνομα; ὁ δὲ εἶπε· Λεγεών.**»

(Λουκ. 8:30)

† † †



Τὸ σημερινὸ εὐαγγέλιο (βλ. Λουκ. 8:26-39) θὰ τὸ ἔχετε ἀκούσει κατ' ἐπανάληψιν, ἀδελφοί μου, ἢ στὸ σχολεῖο ἢ στὸ κατηχητικὸ. Ἀλλὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιο εἶνε πηγᾶδι ἀνεξάντλητο· ὅσο νερὸ κι ἂν βγάλῃς, δὲν τελειώνει ποτέ. Ἔτσι καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπλᾶ λόγια τῆς σημερινῆς περικοπῆς κρύβεται θησαυρὸς μεγάλος. Τί μᾶς λέει;

Λέει γιὰ κάποιον ποὺ ἦταν ἄρρωστος. Ἄρρωστος; Μὰ χίλιες φορὲς καλύτερα νὰ ἦταν ἄρρωστος. Ἐπασχε—Θεὸς φυλάξοι—ἀπὸ κάτι ποὺ εἶνε χειρότερο ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἀρρώστιες· ἦταν δαμονιζόμενος. Δηλαδή; Εἶχε καταληφθῆ ἀπὸ δαμόνια· ὄχι ἓνα, πολλὰ δαμόνια. Κι ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ καταλήφθηκε ἔχασε τὴν προσωπικότητά του, τὸν ἑαυτὸ του· ἦταν ἀπλῶς ἓνα ῥομπότι κινούμενο κατὰ τὶς ὁρῆξεις τοῦ πονηροῦ πνεύματος. Καὶ τί ἔκανε;

Πρῶτα-πρῶτα—προσέξτε, ἔχει σημασία—ἔγινε **ἀδιάντροπος**. Ἐνῶ ἦταν ντυμένος, ἔσχισε τὰ ῥοῦχα του, τὰ ἔκανε κομμάτια, καὶ παρουσιαζόταν γυμνὸς ὅπως τὸν γέννησε ἡ μάνα του. Ποιὸς τὸν ἔσπρωξε σ' αὐτό; Τὸ δαμόνιο. Καὶ ποιὸς σπρώχνει σήμερα γυναῖκες καὶ ἄντρες νὰ πετᾶνε τὰ ῥοῦχα τους καὶ νὰ μένουν γυμνοί; Τὸ δαμόνιο ἀσφαλῶς.

Εἶχε μιὰ ὑπεράνθρωπη **μυϊκὴ δύναμι**· τὸν ἔδεναν μὲ ἄλυσίδες κι αὐτὸς τὶς ἔσπαζε ὅπως ἐμεῖς σπάμε μιὰ κλωστή τέτοια δύναμι εἶχε.

Ἦταν ἐπίσης **ἐπικίνδυνος καὶ ἐπιθετικὸς**· ἔπιανε πέτρες καὶ πετροβολοῦσε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους· κανεῖς δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ περάσῃ ἀπ' τὸ μέρος ποὺ στεκόταν, εἶχε γίνε φόβητρο.

Ἔδειχνε μιὰ **ἀφύσικη συμπεριφορὰ** καὶ μιὰ μακάβρια οἰκειότητα μὲ τὸ θάνατο· δὲν μαζευόταν στὸ σπῆτι, γύριζε ὅλη μέρα ἔξω· κι ὅταν βράδιαζε κοιμόταν στὸ νεκροταφεῖο μὲ τοὺς πεθαμένους, ἀνάμεσα στὰ

μνήματα.

Ποιὸς τὸν ἄλλαξε, ποιὰ δύνამις τὸν μετέβαλε; Ἦνας· ὁ Χριστὸς! Κι ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Χριστὸς τὸν ἐλευθέρωσε ἀπὸ τὰ δαμόνια, ὁ λύκος ἔγινε ἀρνί. Γιατὶ λύκος καὶ θηρίο εἶνε ὁ δαμονιζόμενος ἄνθρωπος.

Ἀπ' ὅλη τὴν περικοπή, ἀπὸ τὸ θαῦμα αὐτό, δὲν θέλω τώρα νὰ σᾶς πῶ οὔτε γιὰ τὸν διάβολο, οὔτε γιὰ τὸν δαμονιζόμενο, οὔτε γιὰ τὴν γυμνότητά του, οὔτε γιὰ κάτι ἄλλο· θέλω νὰ προσέξετε ἓνα σημεῖο. Στὴν περικοπή αὐτὴ ὑπάρχει μιὰ ἐρώτησις καὶ μιὰ ἀπάντησις. Τίνος εἶνε ἡ ἐρώτησις; Τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τίνος εἶνε ἡ ἀπάντησις; Τοῦ δαμονιζομένου.

Τί λείπει ἡ ἐρώτησις; **Τὸ ὄνομά σου;** Ὅπως ὁ ἀστυνόμος ὅταν συλλάβῃ κάποιον κακοποιὸ ρωτᾷει «Ποιὸς εἶσαι; δός μου τὴν ταυτότητά σου, πῶς λέγεσαι;», ἔτσι ὁ Χριστὸς ζητᾷ τὴν ταυτότητα τοῦ δαμονιζομένου· «Τί σοί ἐστιν ὄνομα;», πῆς ποιὸ εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου.

Θὰ σκεφτῆ κάποιος· Καλὰ ἓνας ἀστυνόμος δὲν ξέρει καὶ ρωτᾷει, μὰ ὁ Χριστὸς; Ἐκεῖνος τὰ ξέρει ὅλα. Δὲν ἤξερε τάχα ποιὸ ἦταν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κ' εἶχε ἀνάγκη νὰ τὸ μάθῃ ἀπ' αὐτόν; Ὅχι βέβαια. Τότε γιατί ρωτᾷει;

Ἀπόδειξις ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς τὰ ξέρει ὅλα εἶνε ἡ περίπτωσι ἑνὸς ἄλλου ἀγνώστου ἀνθρώπου ποὺ ὁ Κύριος τὸν φώναξε μὲ τ' ὄνομά του· ἐκεῖνου—θυμηθῆτε—ποὺ σκαρφάλωσε σὰν τὸ γατὶ πάνω σ' ἓνα δέντρο καὶ περιέμενε τὸν Ἰησοῦ νὰ περάσῃ· καὶ μόλις ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἔφτασε ἐκεῖ, σήκωσε τὰ μάτια, τὸν εἶδε καὶ τοῦ λέει «Ζακχαῖε...» (Λουκ. 19:5). Τί θὰ σκέφτηκε τότε ὁ Ζακχαῖος; Μὰ δὲν μ' ἔχει ποτέ συναντήσει, τοῦ εἶμαι τελείως ἀγνωστος· ἀπὸ ποῦ λοιπὸν μὲ ξέρει; καὶ πῶς μὲ ἐντόπισε ἐδῶ πάνω κρυμμένο σὰν τὸ πουλὶ μέσ' στὶς φυλλωσιές;

«Ζακχαῖε!» Μᾶς ξέρει ὁ Χριστὸς κατ' ὄνομα. Γι' αὐτὸν δὲν εἶμαστε μᾶζα, ἀπρόσωπα νοῦμερα· εἶμαστε πρόσωπα, προσωπικότητες. Ξέρει τὸν καθένα μας λεπτομερῶς. Συνεπῶς, ὅπως ἤξερε τὸν Ζακχαῖο, ἔτσι ἤξερε καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ δαμονιζομένου. **Γιατί λοιπὸν τὸν ρωτᾷει;**

Ῥωτᾷει σκοπίμως, **γιὰ νὰ βρῆ ἀφορμὴ διδασκαλίας**. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτὸς εἶχε ὄνομα. Σὰν Ἐβραῖος ποὺ ἦταν, θὰ λεγόταν ἴσως Δαυίδ, ἢ Μωυσῆς, ἢ Ἀβραάμ, ἢ Ἰσαάκ!... (οἱ Ἐβραῖοι, βλέπετε, παίρνουν ὀνόματα τῆς θρησκείας τους, ὄχι σὰν ἐμᾶς ποὺ υἱοθετοῦμε κάθε τι ξενικὸ).

Ὁ δυστυχεὴς αὐτὸς λοιπὸν, ἐνῶ εἶχε ὄνομα, δὲν εἶπε τὸ ὄνομά του. Ἄντ' αὐτοῦ ἀπήντησε ὁ ἄλλος, τὸ πονηρὸ πνεῦμα ποὺ εἶχε φωλιάσει μέσα του, καὶ εἶπε· «**Λεγεών!**» Ξέρετε τί θὰ πῆ αὐτό; Λεγεών ἦταν μονάδα τοῦ ῥωμαϊκοῦ στρατοῦ μὲ 6.000 ἄντρες· ἰσοδυναμεῖ μὲ μιὰ σημερινὴ μεραρχία. Σὰν νὰ ἔλεγε δηλαδή τὸ δαμόνιο: Μὴ μὲ πλησιάσῃς, εἶμαι δυνατὸς

ἐνῶ ἐσὺ εἶσαι ἕνας ἄοπλος... Καὶ ὅμως ὁ Ἐνας νίκησε τὴ λεγεῶνα· γιατί ὁ Χριστός, τὸ δαχτυλάκι του νὰ κουνήσει, γίναμε ὅλοι κάρβουνο.

«**Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου;**». Τὸ ἐρώτημα ποὺ ὁ Χριστός μας ἀπηύθυνε στὸν δαμονιζόμενο, τὸ ἀπευθύνει καὶ στὸν καθένα ἀπὸ μᾶς σήμερα. Παιδί μου, μᾶς λέει, ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου;

Προτοῦ νὰ βαπτισθοῦμε, ἀδελφοί μου, δὲν εἶχαμε ὄνομα. Ἦμασταν χωρὶς προσωπικότητα, χωρὶς πνευματικὴ ὄντοτητα. Ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ βαπτισθήκαμε «*εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος*» (ἀκολ. τοῦ Βαπτ.), ἔχουμε ἰσοβίως ὀνόματα χριστιανικά (οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι στὸ βάπτισμα δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ παίρνουμε ὀνόματα ξενικά, φράγκικα ἢ τούρκικα ἢ εἰδωλολατρικά).

Τὰ χριστιανικά μας ὀνόματα μᾶς ὑπενθυμίζουν τὴν πίστι μας καὶ τὴν ἱστορία τῆς χριστιανοσύνης, ἱστορία θαυμάτων - δακρύων - αἵματος. Μᾶς φωνάζουν ὅτι πρέπει κ' ἐμεῖς **νὰ ζήσουμε ὅπως απαιτεῖ τὸ ὄνομά μας**. Ὀνομάζεσαι Δημήτριος; Νά ἴσαι γενναῖος καὶ ἀτρόμητος σὰν τὸν ἅγιο Δημήτριο, μὴν τρέμεις νὰ κάνης τὸ σταυρό σου. Ὀνομάζεσαι Νικόλαος; Νά ἴσαι ἀνοιχτοχέρης, νὰ κοιμᾶσαι μὲ πορτοφόλι ἀδειανό, μὴν εἶσαι φιλάργυρος - τσιγγούνης. Ὀνομάζεσαι Λουκάς; Νὰ εἶσαι φῶς Χριστοῦ διὰ τῶν ἔργων. Ὀνομάζεσαι Λαυρέντιος; Νά ἴσαι φωτιὰ καὶ λάβρα, ἠφαίστειο θείας ἀγάπης. Καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες· ὀνομάζεσαι Μαρία; Πρέπει ν' ἀκολουθήσῃ τὴν ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο κ.λπ..

Ἀφοῦ πήραμε χριστιανικά ὀνόματα, ποῦ εἶνε ἡ ἀγάπη μας, ἡ αὐταπάρησί μας, ἡ παρρησία μας, τὸ θάρρος μας, ἡ τόλμη μας, ἡ ὁμολογία τῆς πίστεώς μας, ἡ παρθενία μας, ἡ ἀγνότητά μας, ἡ αὐτοθυσία μας; Ποῦ εἶνε ὅλα αὐτά; Πέταξαν, ἔκαναν φτερὰ καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχουν; Σ' ἐμᾶς ταιριάζει τὸ ἐξῆς ἀνέκδοτο.

Ὁ μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος εἶχε ἕνα στρατιώτη συννόμοτο. Ἀλλ' ὅσο ἐκεῖνος ἦταν ἀτρόμητο λιοντάρι, τόσο ὁ στρατιώτης Ἀλέξανδρος ἦταν δειλὸς σὰν τὸ λαγό. Μία μέρα λοιπὸν λέει ὁ βασιλιάς: Ἀλέξανδρε, **ἢ θ' ἀλλάξης διαγωγή,** ἢ θ' ἀλλάξης ὄνομα. Ἔτσι κ' ἐμεῖς σήμερα ἀτιμάζουμε τὰ ὀνόματά μας· ὁ Νικόλαος εἶνε φιλάργυρος, ὁ Δημήτριος δειλός, ὁ Γεώργιος ἀνανδρὸς λιποτάκτης, ἡ Μαρία ἄσμενη, ἡ Ἐλένη ἄστοργη... Καὶ ὁ Ἐσταυρωμένος μᾶς λέει: Ἦ ἀλλάξτε ὄνομα, ἢ ἀλλάξτε διαγωγή. Μὴν εἴμαστε σὰν ἐκεῖνο τὸ κατάστημα ποὺ ἢ ταμπέλλα ἀπ' ἔξω ἔγραφε «Καθαριότης» καὶ μέσα ἐπικρατοῦσε ἀκαθαροσία. Ἡ ζωὴ μας νὰ συμφωνῇ μὲ τὸ ὄνομά μας.

Γιαὶ συμβαίνει αὐτό; Μᾶς ἐπηρεάζουν πονηρὰ πνεύματα, πλῆθος δαιμόνια. Δὲν εἶμαι μέγας Ἀντώνιος νὰ δέσω τὸν διάβολο καὶ νὰ τὸν βάλω πῆ τὰ δαιμόνια ποὺ ἔχει ὁ καθένας.

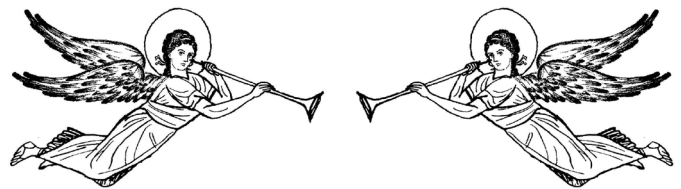
Ἀπὸ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν δαιμονίων τρία κυριαρχοῦν: τῆς **φιλαργυρίας,** τῆς **φιληδονίας,** καὶ τῆς **φιλοδοξίας.** Αὐτὰ εἶνε ἡ ἀλογόμυγα, ποὺ δὲν ἀφήνει ἡσυχους οὔτε μικροὺς οὔτε μεγάλους, ἀλλὰ σπρώχνει ὅλους σὰν τὸ κοπάδι τῶν χοίρων στὸ γκρεμό (βλ. Λουκ. 8:33). Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μὲ βγάλη ψεύτη, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀνθρωπότης, ὅπως ἔπεσε πρώτη καὶ δεύτερη φορὰ στὸ γκρεμὸ παγκοσμίου πολέμου, κινδυνεύει τώρα νὰ πέσῃ πιὸ βαθεῖα σὲ τρίτο παγκόσμιο πόλεμο.

Δαιμόνια, λεγὼν δαιμονίων. Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου, Ῥωσία; Λεγεῶν. Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου, Ἀγγλία; Λεγεῶν. Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου, Ἀμερική; Λεγεῶν. Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σου, Ἑλλάς; Λεγεῶν. Ποιό εἶνε τὸ ὄνομά σας, Βαλκάνια; Λεγεῶν. Στὰ τρία δαιμόνια, ποὺ ἀναφέραμε, ὑπάγονται ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ ταλανίζουν τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου: πλοῦτος - χρῆμα - λεφτὰ - γυναῖκες - σέξ - ἔρωτες - ἐπιδείξεις - ἀνέσεις - εὐμάθεια· αὐτὰ εἶνε τὰ δαιμονικά εἶδωλα, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα ἡ ἀνθρωπότης ὀδηγεῖται στὴν ἄβυσσο.

Ἄς προσευχόμεθα στὸ Θεό. Λίγοι εἶνε οἱ πιστοί, ἀλλὰ «ὄσοι πιστοί» (ἀκολ. χειροτ.), μὴ φοβᾶστε! Ὅπως ὁ Ἐνας νίκησε τὴ λεγεῶνα τῶν δαιμόνων στὴ λίμνη, ἔτσι καὶ κάθε πιστὸ παιδί του.

Δῶστε μου δέκα ἄντρες, δέκα γυναῖκες, δέκα ῥασοφόρους, δέκα ἐπισκόπους μὲ πῦρ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, καὶ θὰ νικήσουν πάλι, καὶ ἡ πατρίδα μας θὰ γίνῃ παράδεισος, κῆπος Θεοῦ, ὅπου μέρα καὶ νύχτα νὰ ὑμνοῦμε τὸ Χριστό· ὄν, παῖδες Ἑλλήνων, ὑμνεῖτε καὶ ὑπερψοῦτε εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.

(†) ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



Ὅ,τι θέλεις μπορείς νὰ τὸ ἀποφύγεις, ὅλα ἐκτός ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή σου....

Ἱερός Αὐγουστίνος

Μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴ ζήλια. Τὸν κατατρώγει τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅλα γίνονται στὸ φθονερὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ἐγὼ τὰ ἔζησα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ εἶχαν γιὰ καλὸ καὶ ἐρχόντουσαν πολλοὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν. Καὶ μοῦ τὰ ἔλεγαν μὲ εἰλικρίνεια. Μακριὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ γυναικίστικα παράπονα. Τὸ Χριστό, μωρέ, τὸ Χριστό νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε μὲ πάθος, μὲ θεῖο ἔρωτα.

Εὐτυχημένος ὁ μοναχὸς ποὺ ἔμαθε νὰ ἀγαπάει ὅλους μυστικά. Δὲν ζητᾶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀγάπη, οὔτε τὸν νοιάζει νὰ τὸν ἀγαποῦν.

Ἐσὺ ἀγάπα ὅλους, καὶ προσεύχου μυστικά μέσα σου. Ἐσχυνε τὴν ἀγάπη σου πρὸς ὅλους.

Ἅγιος Πορφύριος

Νὰ Προσέχουμε τὴν Γλῶσσα μας

Ἀγίου Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Ἀριζόνας.

Διαβάζουμε στὸ Γεροντικὸ: «Ὁ τάδε πλανήθηκε». Τί ἔκανε αὐτὸς ὁ πλανεμένος;

Νά, ὑπερηφανεύθηκε, τὸν πλάνησε ὁ διάβολος, τὸν πῆγε στὸ πηγάδι καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἄμα θὰ πέσεις κάτω, θὰ στείλει ὁ Χριστὸς τοὺς ἀγγέλους Του καὶ θὰ σὲ κρατήσουν, γιατί αὐτὸ εἶναι γραμμένο στὸ Ψαλτήρι: “Τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ διαφυλάξει σὲ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς σου” καὶ “ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀρούσι σέ, ἵνα μὴ προσκόψης πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου.” Ἐπομένως, πέσε κι ἐσὺ κάτω καὶ δὲν θὰ πάθεις τίποτα, θὰ τὸ δεῖς στὴν πράξη». Καὶ ἔπεσε καὶ πνίγηκε, καὶ αὐτὸ λογίζεται ὡς αὐτοκτονία.

Οἱ πατέρες τὸ γράφουν στὸ Γεροντικὸ ὄχι γιὰ νὰ κατακρίνουν τὸν πατέρα αὐτὸν ποὺ τὸ ἔπαθε, ἀλλὰ πρὸς παραδειγματισμὸ τῶν μεταγενεστέρων, νὰ προσέξουν νὰ μὴ φουσκῶνει τὸ μυαλό τους κι ἔρχονται στὴν οἴηση καὶ καταλήγουν στὴν πλάνη. Ἔτσι καὶ ἐμεῖς, ὅταν καμιὰ φορὰ διηγούμαστε κάτι, δὲν τὸ λέμε γιὰ νὰ θεατρίσουμε κάποιον, ἀλλὰ γιὰ παράδειγμα τῶν νεωτέρων μοναχῶν.

Γενικὰ ὅμως πρέπει νὰ προσέχουμε τὴ γλῶσσα μας, πότε πρέπει νὰ μιλήσουμε καὶ τί πρέπει νὰ ποῦμε, ἐπειδὴ δὲν εἴμαστε πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ συνεχῶς σφάλουμε. «Κάλλιον πεσεῖν ἐξ ὕψους ἢ ἀπὸ γλώσσης». Καλύτερα εἶναι κανεὶς νὰ πέσει ἀπὸ ἕνα ὕψος καὶ νὰ σπάσει τὸ κεφάλι καὶ τὰ πόδια του, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι σωματικὰ καὶ θεραπεύσιμα, παρὰ νὰ πέσει ἀπὸ τὴ γλῶσσα, ἡ ὁποία κάνει φοβερὰ σφάλματα καὶ μὲ ἕνα λόγο μπορεῖ νὰ ὀδηγήσει τὸν ἄλλο ἀκόμη καὶ στὴν αὐτοκτονία. Ὅταν κατακρίνουμε καὶ ἐξευτελίζουμε τὸν ἄλλο, μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν φέρουμε σὲ ἀπελπισία, ἢ καὶ μὲ ἕνα λόγο μας νὰ πάρει τὸν δρόμο τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Λέμε: «Μὰ ἕνα λόγο εἶπα». Κι ὅμως ἕνας λόγος γιὰ κοιτάξε τί ἔκανε!

Στὸ Μοναστήρι τῆς Σιμωνόπετρας εἶχε πάει ἕνας δαμονισμένος. Μετὰ τὴν ἀγρυπνία, ἔτσι ὅπως εἶχαν βγεῖ οἱ πατέρες ἐκεῖ λίγο στὸν ἐξώστη, ἦταν κι αὐτός. Ὁ διάβολος, γιὰ νὰ ἐνοχοποιήσει ἕναν μοναχό, ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν πολὺ καλὸς καὶ ἀσκητὴς ἀπὸ τὰ Κατουνακία, ἔκανε τὸ ἐξῆς: Πάει ὁ δαμονισμένος κοντὰ του καὶ τοῦ λέει: «Μοῦ λέει ὁ λογισμὸς νὰ πέσω κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ μπαλκόνι». Ὁ μοναχὸς τὸ πῆρε γιὰ ἀστεῖο καὶ τοῦ λέει:

«Καὶ δὲν πέφτεις!» Αὐτὸς «τσὰκ», ἔπεσε καὶ σκοτώθηκε!

Ὁ μοναχὸς νόμισε ὅτι ἀστειευόταν, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος μιλοῦσε σοβαρά. Καὶ μετὰ ὁ λογισμὸς χρόνια καὶ χρόνια πείραζε τὸν ἀδελφό. Ὁ διάβολος οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως θὰ τὸν σκότωνε, ἀλλὰ παρέσυρε καὶ τὸν μοναχό, γιὰ νὰ τὸν τυραννάει ἐφ’ ὄρου ζωῆς. Ἕνας μόνον λόγος πόση τυραννία τοῦ προξένησε!

Ὅπως πολλὲς φορὲς συμβαίνει μὲ τίς γυναῖκες, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν ἔκτρωση. Πάνε καὶ συμβουλευόταν: «Τί νὰ κάνω, βρὲ ἀδελφή». Καὶ τίς λένε: «Τί θές καὶ τὸ κρατάς, τόσα παιδιὰ ἔχεις, δὲν τὸ ρίχνεις!» Αὐτὴ λίγο ἤθελε, ἦταν κατὰ τὸ ἥμισυ ἀποφασισμένη. Συμπλήρωσε καὶ τὸ ἄλλο μισὸ ἢ ἄλλη μὲ τὸν λόγο της καὶ πάει, ρίχνει τὸ παιδί καὶ γίνεται ὁ φόνο! Βέβαια ἔχει καὶ ἡ ἄλλη τὴν εὐθύνη γιὰ τὸν μισὸ φόνο.

Ἦ, ὅπως μερικὲς μητέρες, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουνε μυαλό, ἂν τύχη ἢ κόρη τους νὰ κάνει ἕνα λάθος, τὴν συμβουλευοῦν:

«Ἄντε, θὰ γίνουμε ρεζίλι, πῆγαινε καὶ βγάλτο». Πάει ἡ κοπέλα καὶ τὸ σκοτώνει τὸ παιδί. Ποιὸς ἔχει τὴν εὐθύνη; Ἡ μάνα, ποὺ εἶπε αὐτὴ τὴ συμβουλή. Βλέπετε ἕνας λόγος τί κακὸ μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει; Γι’ αὐτὸ θέλει πάρα πολλὴ προσοχὴ στὰ ὅσα λέμε. Πόσο πάει νὰ μᾶς ὑποσκελίσει ὁ διάβολος! Καὶ σέ μᾶς τοὺς πνευματικοὺς καμιὰ

φορὰ ἔρχονται νὰ ζητήσουν συμβουλή σὲ κάτι δύσκολα θέματα! Πὼς τὸ σκέπτεσαι νὰ μετρήσεις τὴν κάθε λέξη! Λὲς μία λέξη παραπάνω καὶ τὴν παίρνουν στραβά. Καὶ ὕστερα «τρέχα γύρευε». Πάρα πολλὴ προσοχὴ χρειάζεται σὲ ὅλους μας.



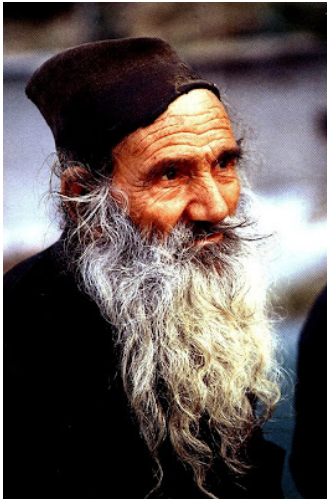
Ὡ, πόσο σκληρὸ μῆνυμα, πόσο φορικτὴ ὑπόμνηση σὲ ὅλους ἐμᾶς ποὺ εἴμαστε βαπτισμένοι! Τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἐγκαταστάθηκε μέσα μας κατὰ τὴ βάπτισή μας καὶ μᾶς ἔκανε «ναοὺς» γιὰ Ἐκεῖνον. Ὅμως, τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα δὲν κατοικεῖ μέσα μας μὲ τὴ βία, ἀλλὰ σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν δική μας καλὴ προαίρεση. Ἄν γίνουμε παραβάτες ἀπέναντί Του, τότε φεύγει ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς καὶ τότε εἰσέρχεται ὁ Σατανᾶς στὴ θέση Του καὶ ὁ «ναὸς» τοῦ σώματός μας μεταβάλλεται σὲ χοιροστάσιο. Ὡ! Πανάγαθε Παράκλητε, μὴ μακρύνεις ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Ἐλέησε καὶ συγχώρησέ μας!

Ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελιμίροβιτς

Φυλακή Αισθήσεων

Διδακτική Διήγηση για Όσους «Σκοτώνουν» τὸν Πολύτιμο Χρόνο τους

Orthodoxia News Agency, 22 Ιουλίου, 2019



Ζούσε στους πρώτους Ζαΐωνας ένας μοναχός, ὁ ὁποῖος ὅσες φορές τὸν ἐρωτοῦσε ὁ Ἡγούμενός του «Πῶς πηγαίνει; Στὴν ὑγεία σου, ἀδελφέ;». Αὐτὸς πάντοτε παραπονιόταν ὅτι ἦταν κατάκοπος ἀπὸ τὴν πολλὴ ἐργασία.

Ἀκούγοντας καθημερινῶς ὁ Ἡγούμενος τὸ ἴδιο παραπονο ἐρώτησε κάποια ἡμέρα τὸν Μοναχό: «Τί εἶδους ἐργασία κάμνεις καὶ κοπιᾶζεις τόσο πολύ,

ἀδελφέ;» Καὶ ὁ Μοναχὸς ἀπάντησε:

«Ἄγιε Ἡγούμενε ἔχω τόσες ἐργασίες κάθε ἡμέρα καὶ νύκτα, ὥστε οἱ δυνάμεις μου δὲν θὰ ἐφθάναν γι' αὐτές, ἐὰν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μὲ βοηθοῦσε.»

«Πρῶτον, ἔχω δύο γεράκια, τὰ ὁποῖα προσπαθῶ νὰ κρατῶ δέσμια καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξημερώνω.

«Δεύτερον, ἔχω δύο λαγούς, τοὺς ὁποίους φυλάγω γιὰ νὰ μὴ φύγουν.

«Τρίτον, ἔχω δύο βόδια, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐπιβλέπω γιὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται.

«Τέταρτον, ἔχω ἓνα λύκο τὸν ὅποιον προσέχω διὰ νὰ μὴ βλάψει κανένα.

«Πέμπτον, ἔχω ἓνα λιοντάρι, τὸ ὁποῖο προσπαθῶ νὰ κατανικήσω, καὶ

«Ἐκτον, ἔχω ἓνα ἀσθενή, τὸν ὅποιον πρέπει πάντοτε νὰ τὸν περιποιοῦμαι.

Ὁ Ἡγούμενος ἀφοῦ ἄκουσε αὐτὰ γέλασε λίγο καὶ εἶπε στὸν Μοναχό:

«Αὐτὰ παιδί μου, δὲν γίνονται, διότι εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐκτελεῖ κανεὶς τόσες ἐργασίες.»

«Καὶ ὅμως, σεβαστέ μου πάτερ, σοῦ εἶπα τὴν ἀλήθεια», ἀπάντησε ὁ Μοναχός.

Καὶ ὁ Ἡγούμενος, ὁ ὁποῖος νόμιζε μέχρι ἓνα βαθμὸ ἐπιπόλαια καὶ χωρὶς περιεχόμενο τὰ λόγια τοῦ Μοναχοῦ, εἶπε:

«Ἐξήγησε μου, παιδί μου, τὴν παραβολή.»

Καὶ ὁ Μοναχὸς ἀπάντησε:

«Πρῶτον, τὰ δύο γεράκια, Πάτερ μου, εἶναι τὰ δύο μάτια μου, τὰ ὁποῖα πετοῦν, πηγαίνουν ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ ἀπ' ἐκεῖ καὶ πρέπει νὰ φροντίζω γιὰ νὰ μὴ δοῦν κάτι, τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ μπορούσε νὰ μὲ προτρέψει σὲ κάποια

ἀμαρτία, πράγμα δυστυχῶς ποὺ ἔπαθε ὁ προφήτης καὶ βασιλεὺς Δαβίδ, βλέποντας τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ Οὕριου, τὴν Βηρσαβεέ.

«Δεύτερον, οἱ δύο λαγοί, εἶναι τὰ πόδια μου, τὰ ὁποῖα πρέπει νὰ ἐμποδίζω ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ τρέχουν στίς ἡδονές καὶ τὸν δρόμο τῆς ἀμαρτίας διότι εἰς τὸ βάπτισμα μου, ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἔχριε αὐτὰ εἶπε: *Τοῦ πορεύεσθε τὰ διαβήματα Σου* δηλαδὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Φαντάζεσαι λοιπόν, Πάτερ μου, πόσους κόπους χρειάζεται αὐτό;

«Τρίτον, τὰ δύο βόδια εἶναι τὰ χέρια μου, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐπιβλέπω μὲ μεγάλη προσοχή γιὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται. Νὰ ἐργάζονται ὅμως τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὡς τὰ χέρια τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ πάλι στὸ βάπτισμά μου γι' αὐτὰ ὁ ἱερεὺς εἶπε: *Αἱ χεῖρες σου ἐποίησάν με καὶ ἔπλασάν με.*

«Τέταρτον, ὁ λύκος εἶναι ἡ γλώσσα μου, ἡ ὁποῖα πάντοτε ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ χαλινάρι, γιὰ νὰ μὴ δαγκάσει κανένα ἀδελφόν μου, μὲ τὴν κατηγορία, ποὺ εἶναι παρῶν ἢ ἀπῶν καὶ πεθάνει. Καὶ ἀντιλαμβάνεσαι, πάτερ μου, ὅταν τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα διὰ τοῦ Ἀδελφόθεου Ἰακώβου γιὰ τὴν γλώσσα λέγει: *Εἰ τίς ἐν λόγῳ οὐ πταιεῖ, οὗτος τέλειος ἀνὴρ, καὶ πάλιν: Ἡ γλώσσα πῦρ, ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας, οὕτως ἡ γλώσσα καθίσταται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν ἢ σπιλοῦσα (μολύνουσα) ὄλον τὸ σῶμα...,* καὶ πάλιν: *Τὴν γλώσσαν οὐδεὶς δύναται ἀνθρώπων δαμᾶσαι ἀκατάσχετον κακόν, μεστὴ ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου. Ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν Θεὸν καὶ πατέρα, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν Θεοῦ γεγονότος... (Ἰακ. 3:2, 6 καὶ 8).* Τί πρέπει νὰ κάμνω ἐγὼ μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο, τὸν λύκο ποὺ ἔχω στὸ στόμα μου;

«Ἄλλὰ καὶ ἀκόμη, πῶς ἐγώ, πάτερ μου, νὰ ἐπιτύχω αὐτὸ ποὺ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος γιὰ τὴν γλώσσα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ λέγει περισσότερα ἢ λιγότερα, ἀλλὰ ὅλα μὲ τὸ ζῦγισμα νὰ λέγω, γιὰ νὰ εἶμαι δίκαιος χωρὶς κόπου μεγάλου; Δὲν λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος ὅτι: *Ζυγαριά νὰ ἔχομεν τὴν γλώσσα μας ὥστε μὲ μεγάλη προσοχή νὰ ζυγίζομε τὰ λόγια μας καὶ νὰ μὴ λέμε περισσότερα οὔτε λιγότερα ἀλλὰ τὰ σωστὰ μὲ ἀκρίβεια. Διότι, ἐὰν ζυγίζομε μὲ ἀκρίβεια καὶ μεγάλη προσοχή τὸν χρυσὸ καὶ ἄλλα πράγματα, πρέπει, μὲ μεγαλύτερη προσοχή καὶ ἀκρίβεια, νὰ προσέχομε τὰ λόγια μας.*

«Καὶ ἀκόμη, πάτερ μου, πῶς νὰ μὴ παλέψω μὲ τὸν λύκο αὐτόν, τὴν γλώσσα μου, ποὺ διαβάζω τὸν Ἀββὰ Σισώη καὶ λέγει: *Ἀδελφέ, ἔχω τριάντα χρόνια ὅπου δὲν κάμνω πλέον δέησιν εἰς τὸν Θεὸν περὶ ἀμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ μόνον λέγω εἰς τὴν προσευχήν μου: Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ σκέπασόν με ἀπὸ τῆς γλώσσης μου, διότι τόσους χρόνους ἔχω ἀσκητεύοντας καὶ πάλιν σκοντάπτω μὲ τὴν γλώσσαν καὶ ἀμαρτάνω.*

«Πέμπτον, ὁ λέων, πάτερ μου, εἶναι ἡ καρδιά μου, κατὰ τῆς ὁποίας διεξάγω νύκτα καὶ ἡμέρα πεισματώδη ἀγώνα καὶ δυστυχῶς μὲ ἔλκει μὲ μεγάλη βία σὲ ὅλα ὅσα βλάπτουν καὶ καταστρέφουν τὴν ψυχὴν μου. Βλέπεις, πάτερ μου, ὅτι ἐγκείται ἡ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ οὐ προσθήσω οὐν ἔτι πατάξαι πᾶσαν σάρκα ζῶσαν, καθὼς ἐποίησα. (Γέν. 8:21), καὶ ἀκόμη, ὅτι ἡ καρδιά μου εἶναι ἀκάθαρτος ὡς εἶπεν ὁ Κύριός μου: Ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι (Μάτθ. 15:19). Καὶ ὅτι πράγματι ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ πρέπει νὰ κουρασθῶ νὰ τὴν καθαρίσω μου τὸ ἐπιβεβαίωσε ὁ Προφήτης Δαβὶδ ποῦ λέγει εἰς τὸν Κύριον: Καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισον ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου (Ψαλμ. 50:12), καὶ,

«Ἐκτον, πάτερ μου, ὁ ἀσθενής, εἶναι τὸ σῶμα μου, τὸ ὁποῖον ποτὲ δὲν εὐρίσκεται στὴν ἴδια κατάσταση. Ἄλλοτε θέλει τροφή καὶ ἄλλοτε νηστεία. Ἄλλοτε ἀνάπαυση καὶ ἄλλοτε τυραννία. Ἄλλοτε περιθάλψη καὶ ἄλλοτε ὄχι, καὶ γιὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτὸν εἶμαι ἀναγκασμένος νὰ ἔχω τὴν προσοχή μου διαρκῶς γυρισμένη πρὸς αὐτό, γιὰ νὰ τὸ περιποιούμαι ὅσο εἶναι δίκαιο, ἐπειδὴ χρειάζεται καὶ αὐτό ὅπως τὸ τσουκνυφλι γιὰ τὸ αὐγό.»

Ἀφοῦ ἄκουσε αὐτὰ ὁ Ἡγούμενος ἀπὸ τὸν σοφὸ του Μοναχό, τὸν συγχάρηκε καὶ εἶπε:

«Ἐὰν ὅλοι κάναμε ὅπως ἐσὺ τέκνον μου, δηλαδὴ νὰ ἐργαζόμαστε διὰ νὰ συγκρατήσουμε τὰ πάθη μας καὶ ἐνημερώσουμε τὸν κακὸν ἐαυτό μας, ἡ γῆ θὰ γινόταν οὐρανὸς καὶ ὅλοι θὰ ἤμασταν εὐτυχησμένοι καὶ εἰρηνικοί».

Δυστυχῶς, ἀγαπητοί, ἐμεῖς δὲν ἐργαζόμαστε γιὰ τὸν ἐαυτό μας, καὶ ἡ κοινωνία μας κατάντησε ζούγκλα, καίτοι στὴν Κυριακὴ προσευχὴ ὁ Κύριος μᾶς προτρέπει νὰ λέμε: Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου..., ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Ἀλλὰ ποῦ χρόνος γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ μας, τὴν ἀρετὴ, τὴν πίστη, τὸν Χριστό, τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Βλέπετε τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἀνόητα καὶ ἁμαρτωλὰ τὰ ἔχουμε περισπούδαστα, μόδα, καφενεῖο, χαρτί, γήπεδο, ταβέρνα, διαφθορά, χορδὸς καὶ γενικά ὅτι ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὴν σάρκα. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φθάσαμε τόσο χαμηλὰ καὶ ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν γνωρίσαμε Χριστὸν καὶ ἤμεθα ἄξιοι τῆς τύχης μας. Αὐτοτιμωρούμεθα ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιλογὲς καὶ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας.

Εἶθε νὰ θελήσουμε νὰ δεχθῶμε τὸν Θεῖο φωτισμό, νὰ ἐργαστοῦμε γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση τῶν αἰσθήσεων ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὴν ἀπόκτηση τῶν ἀρετῶν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου γιὰ νὰ ἔχουμε ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας, μὲ τὶς πρεσβεῖες τῆς Παναγίας καὶ ὅλων τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἀμήν.

Ἄν ἤξεραν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τί εἶναι ἡ Παναγία στὴ σωτηρία τους καὶ γενικότερα στὴ ζωὴ τους, εἴτε ἔπιναν νερό, εἴτε περπατοῦσαν, εἴτε ὅ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο ἔκαναν, θὰ τὰ ἔκαναν στὸ ὄνομα τῆς Παναγίας! Εἶναι τὸ γλυκύτερο πρόσωπο καὶ τὸ γλυκύτερο ὄνομα, ὅπως καὶ αὐτὸ τῆς Μάνας μας. Βλέπετε, ὅ,τι καὶ νὰ μᾶς συμβεῖ, «μᾶνα μου» θὰ ποῦμε, δὲν λέμε «πατέρα μου».

Ὅπως καὶ σὲ αὐτὲς τὶς δύσκολες στιγμὲς, δὲν λέμε «Χριστέ μου» ἀλλὰ «Παναγία μου», ἀκόμα καὶ ἄνθρωποι ποῦ μέχρι χθὲς τὴν βλασφημοῦσαν! Εἶναι συνυφασμένη ἡ Παναγία μὲ τὸ εἶναι μας. Ἔχουμε σαρκικὴ μητέρα, ἀλλὰ ἔχουμε καὶ...πνευματικὴ μητέρα. Ὅμως δὲν χρησιμοποιοῦμε τὸ ὄνομα τῆς Παναγίας ὅσο πρέπει.

Στὸ σημεῖο αὐτό, ὠραία λειτουργοῦν οἱ Ἁγιορεῖτες Πατέρες. Ὅ,τι νὰ τοὺς πεῖς, θὰ ποῦνε: «ἂν θέλει ἡ Παναγία... ἂν μᾶς ξημερώσει ἡ Παναγία, ἂν, ἂν...» δηλ. εἶναι περισσότερο Παναγιολάτρες παρὰ Χριστολάτρες.

Βέβαια δὲν παρεξηγεῖται ὁ Κύριος, διότι ὅποια λατρεία καὶ τιμὴ δίδεται στὴν Μητέρα Του, ἀντανακλᾶται στὸ πρόσωπό Του, διότι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ τῆς ἔδωσε αὐτὴ τὴν αἴγλη, ποῦ τῆς ἔδωσε αὐτὴ τὴ δύναμη, ποῦ τῆς ἔδωσε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀξία...

Δημητρίου Παναγόπουλου (+1982)

Ἄσας συμβαίνουν δὲν ἔρχονται ἀπὸ μόνες τους, ἀλλὰ μὲ παραχώρηση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κάνετε, λοιπόν, κάθε δυνατὴ προσπάθεια νὰ τὶς σηκώνετε μὲ ὑπομονὴ καὶ καρτερία, δοξολογώντας καὶ εὐχαριστώντας τὸν Θεό!

Νὰ θυμᾶστε ὅτι ὅποιος ἐναντιώνεται στὶς θλίψεις, ὅποιος πασχίζει ν' ἀποφύγει τὴ στενὴ καὶ δύσκολη ὁδὸ, ματαιώνει τὴν εἴσοδό του στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, γιατί, μέσα στὴν τύφλωσή του, ἀκυρώνει τὸν τρόπο καὶ τὴ μέθοδο σωτηρίας ποῦ ὄρισε ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τοὺς δούλους Του.

Ἅγιος Ἰγνάτιος Μπριαντανίωφ

Κρατεῖστε γερὰ τὴν παράδοση ποῦ σᾶς παρέδωσα καὶ νὰ ξέρετε ὅτι σήμερα εἶναι ὁμολογία νὰ λέμε ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ Θεὸς μας. Αὐτὸ δὲν τὸ θέλουν οἱ σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις...

Ἔρχονται πολλὲς δύσκολες ἡμέρες. Προσέξτε τὴν ψυχὴ σας. Μαζευτεῖτε καὶ δώστε τὸν ἀγώνα σας.

Σὲ αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο δὲν ἔχουμε θέση κανεῖς. Ὁ πνευματικὸς κόσμος μας περιμένει ὅλους. Περραστικοὶ εἴμεθα πάνω στὴ γῆ.

Πρὶν δὲ μᾶς πάρει ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸν φθαρτὸ κόσμο νὰ παρακαλοῦμε νὰ μᾶς τακτοποιήσει μαζί Του, ὅσον γίνεται πρὸ τέλεια, γιὰ νὰ μὴ δυσκολευθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μας στὴν ἄνοδο τῆς ἀπὸ τοὺς κακοὺς φορολόγους δαίμονας.

Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ τῆς Ἀριζόνας

HOW TO COPE WITH BAD THOUGHTS AND FAILURES IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol.

Our spiritual state is rarely even, calm, and serene for any long period of time. Circumstances, thoughts, even the weather—all of this can easily darken the soul or, conversely, unexpectedly gladden it. How can we lead a spiritual life when man is so volatile?

All the thoughts that affect the state of the soul come either from God (good changes), or from the devil (bad changes), or from a man himself (both good and bad). We know the good thoughts by their fruits. If we become humbler, more prayerful, meeker, more patient, warmer, nobler, more sensitive, this is the result of a good thought. But what should we do if not all of our changes are good?

A bad thought prevents us from thinking logically.

A man himself also influences his spiritual world, producing good or bad thoughts depending on whether his internal “mechanism” is attuned correctly or not.

I will give you an example from the Gospels. When the harlot came into the house and anointed Christ’s feet with myrrh, many of the Disciples were indignant, especially Judas, who was a lover of money. He began to say: “Why is this woman wasting such expensive myrrh in vain to anoint the feet of Christ?” The bad thought was that she was wasting the myrrh. But further on in the Gospel it says that he was not concerned for the poor, but was simply avaricious and wanted to get money for this myrrh, put it in the money bag, and then use it for his own purposes.

People often ask me why we have so much luxury in the Church. But show me what we have that is luxurious. If you want, cut yourself a piece of a candle stand and take it home, sell it, and get the money. Can you not see that it is bronze? You see, a bad thought does not allow a man to even think logically.

Or someone gives alms. He gives five euros and starts thinking: “Maybe it’s not necessary? What’s five euros? Will a beggar get rich from this? It’s probably a scam.” Perhaps that is so, but he immediately turns on a bad thought that inclines the soul towards evil, making it stubborn and opposed to grace.

It happens that bad thoughts come from demons. However, there are also purely physiological changes that impact us. You think differently in the morning, day, evening, and after midnight; differently in the dark and in the light; when it is a dreary day, when the south wind blows, or when it is sunny. Many note that people are in a better mood on sunny days, and when you are around happy and grateful people, you rejoice with them.

What to do if the soul is clouded?

Why did the Holy Fathers study all of this? To know when there is a true spiritual battle going on, and when it is possible to ignore internal changes. They tell us one main thing: We have to learn how to manage what happens to us.

If my soul is clouded, it is important not to allow myself to become downcast, not to start talking harshly, offensively, and nervously, or to turn away and not accept another person. Whatever changes occur in our soul, we must maintain the routine of the spiritual life and remain in communication with other people.

Man is created according to the image of God, “very good,” and called to become like our Father. And the rest of what happens to us—bad behavior, nerves, words, nastiness—they are not our true self.

What does it take to change for the better?

It is important to learn to behave in such a way as to not hurt other people, not to speak out disparagingly, not to be lazy, to maintain your way of life, no matter what happens. Precision in fulfilling our prayer rule helps with this.

Let us not say on Sunday morning: “I’m not in the mood for some reason. I’m not going to church today.” Go, whether you are in the mood or not. Even if our mind starts reasoning: “Where are you going? You’re just going to fall asleep there. You’re full of thoughts, bad thoughts inside of yourself. Don’t go!”—we shouldn’t step back and change our rule because of a change in our disposition.

How to deal with bad thoughts, and should we scold ourselves for them?

It is better to immediately cut off bad thoughts and not engage with them. It is like a bag of trash: It is better to throw it out right away so you do not get soiled.

As for the question of whether we need to reproach ourselves for bad thoughts—we need discernment. If you can endure it, then good—the Holy Fathers did it. But for the young, it is better to maintain yourself in love and gratitude. And we need good discernment, a good spiritual father, otherwise it is easy to fall into despair.

If we are oversensitive and we condemn and berate ourselves, then we can start to despond or despair. Since in our time we can easily despair, it is better not to bring ourselves to this situation or condition.

The gift of tearful repentance, which the saints had, comes from spiritual labor, not from self-reproach. Tears of repentance are the first stage—then they become tears of love!

Spiritual work and self-reproach are important, but it is the healthy man who can do it. But if a man is spiritually and mentally weak, has a weak nervous system, then he will not be able to stand it—he will become despondent and hopeless.

Therefore, as Christ told St. Silouan, let us *keep our mind in hell and despair not!*

THE DEAD ARE IN GREAT NEED OF OUR HELP

Source: Orthodox Monastery of the Archangel Michael, Marrickville, Australia.

With the Saints grant rest, O Christ, to the souls of Thy servants, where there is neither pain, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life unending.

[Kontakion from the memorial service for the Dead]

† † †

WHAT CAN WE DO FOR THE DEAD?

By Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Every one of us who desires to manifest his love for the dead and give them real help, can do this best of all through prayer for them, and in particular by commemorating them at the Liturgy, when the particles which are cut out for the living and the dead are let fall into the Blood of the Lord with the words: *Wash away, O Lord, the sins of those here commemorated by Thy Precious Blood, by the prayers of Thy saints.*

We can do nothing better or greater for the dead than to pray for them, offering commemoration for them at the Liturgy, of this they are always in need, and especially during those forty days when the soul of the deceased is proceeding on its path to the eternal habitations. The body feels nothing then: it does not see its close ones who have assembled, does not smell the fragrance of the flowers, does not hear the funeral orations. But the soul senses the prayers offered for it and is grateful to those who make them and is spiritually close to them.

O relatives and close ones of the dead! Do for them what is needful for them and what is within your power. Use your money not for outward adornment of the coffin and grave, but in order to help those in need, in memory of your close ones who have died, for churches, where prayers for them are offered. Show mercy to the dead, take care for their souls. Before us all stands that same path, and how we shall then wish that we would be remembered in prayer!

Let us therefore be ourselves merciful to the dead. As soon as someone has reposed, immediately call or inform a priest, so he can read the *Prayers on the Departure of the Soul*, which are appointed to be read over all Orthodox Christians after death. Try, if it be possible, to have the funeral in church and to have the Psalter read over the deceased until the funeral.

The funeral need not be performed elaborately, but most definitely it should be complete, without abbreviations; think at this time not of yourself and your convenience. Each word of prayer for the reposed is like a drop of water to a thirsty man. Most definitely arrange at once for the serving of the forty-day memorial, that is, daily commemoration at the Liturgy for the course of forty days.

Usually, in churches where there are daily services, the deceased whose funerals have been served there are commemorated for forty days and longer. But if the funeral is in a church where there are no daily services, the relatives themselves should take care to order the forty-day memorial wherever there are daily services. It is likewise good to send contributions for commemoration to monasteries, as well as to Jerusalem, where there is constant prayer at the holy places. But the forty-day memorial must be begun immediately after death, when the soul is especially in need of help in prayer, and therefore one should begin commemoration in the nearest place where there are daily services.

Therefore, memorial services for the dead and prayer at home for the dead are beneficial for them, as are good deeds done in their memory, such as alms or contributions to the Church. But especially beneficial for them is commemoration at the Divine Liturgy. There have been many appearances of the dead and other occurrences which confirm how beneficial the commemoration of the dead is. Many who died in repentance, but who were unable to manifest this while they were alive, have been freed from tortures and have obtained repose. In the Church, prayers are continually offered for the repose of the dead, and on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, in the kneeling prayers at vespers, there is even a special petition *for those in hell*.

Let us take care for those who have departed into the other world before us, in order to do for them all that we can, remembering that *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

† † †

HOW CAN WE BEST HONOUR OUR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES WHO HAVE DEPARTED THIS LIFE?

By Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Deliver, O our Saviour, all who have died in faith from the ever scorching fire, and unilluminated darkness, the gnashing of teeth, and the eternally tormenting worm, and all torment.

[from the Service of Meat Fare Saturday]

Give rest, O God, to the souls of Thy servants, and appoint for them a place in Paradise; where the choirs of the saints, O Lord, and the just will shine forth like stars; to Thy servants that are sleeping now give rest, overlooking all their offenses.

[from the memorial service for the Dead]

We often see relatives of the departed go to great lengths in arranging an elaborate funeral. Substantial sums are not infrequently spent on fancy tombstones. Relatives and friends spend lots of money on wreaths and flowers

(even though the latter have to be removed from the coffin before it is closed, so as not to hasten the decomposition of the body).

Some like to pay their respects to the departed and express their condolences by placing a notice in the newspaper, although such a public display reflects the shallowness of their feelings and often their insincerity. One who is truly grieved will not advertise it; a personal expression of sympathy carries more warmth.

Whatever such arrangements we make, the deceased is not going to benefit. For the dead body, it is all the same whether it lies in a plain or a fancy coffin, in a lavish or a humble grave. It does not smell the fragrance of the flowers that are brought; it does not need feigned expressions of sympathy. The body will be given over to decay; the soul lives, but it no longer experiences any feelings through the sensory organs. Another life has begun for the soul, and it has other needs.

Here is what it needs and what we must do if we indeed love the departed and desire to bring him our gifts. What, in fact, will bring comfort to the soul of the departed?

First of all, sincere prayers on his/her behalf—prayers at home and especially the prayers of the Church, joined with the Bloodless Sacrifice, i.e., commemoration at the Divine Liturgy. Many appearances of the deceased and other visions attest to the tremendous benefit which the departed receive from prayers on their behalf and from offering the Bodiless Sacrifice in their name.

Another thing that brings them consolation is almsgiving and other charity in their name. To feed a hungry person in the name of the departed, to help an indigent is to do the same for the deceased.

Saint Athanasia (commemorated April 12), before she died, willed that for the forty days after her repose the poor be fed in memory of her. However, the sisters of the convent were lax and did so for only nine days. The Saint then appeared to them in the company of two angels and said, “Why did you forget my will? Know that charity and the prayers of a priest, offered on behalf of a soul through the course of forty days, stir up God’s mercy: if the souls of the departed were sinful, the Lord absolves their sins; if they were righteous, those praying for them are rewarded with virtue.”

Especially nowadays, when it is so difficult for everyone, it is senseless to waste money on useless things when, in spending it on the poor, one can do two good deeds at once—benefiting the departed and also the recipient of the charity.

Not long ago, on the first-year anniversary of nun Mari’s repose, in accordance with her will, donations were collected and a dinner for the needy was prepared on the grounds of the Archbishop’s residence. Some 150 people responded to the notice, and all were fed. A great good was thereby accomplished.

Even if one does not do good on such a big scale, if one feeds at least a few or even one hungry person, this is already something. To do this is not difficult; one has but to give a sum of money for a memorial meal to the committee for Assistance to the Needy at the Archbishop’s church, or to the House of Mercy or the soup kitchen. With prayer for the departed, food will be given to the poor. They will be satisfied physically, and the departed will have their fill spiritually.

† † †

PRAY FOR THE REPOSED!

By the New Hieromartyr John of Riga.

With the spirits of the righteous made perfect in faith, give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy servants and preserve them in that life of blessedness that is lived with Thee, O Friend of man.

[from the memorial service for the Dead]

Let us all entreat Christ, performing a memorial today for those dead from the ages that He might deliver from eternal fire those departed in faith and in hope of eternal life.

[from a Canon of Saint Theodore the Studite for the Departed]

The death of people who are close and dear to us is one of the most difficult trials sent to us by the Lord God during this temporary life. There are no tears more bitter than the tears of a mother for the beloved child of her heart who goes to the grave before his/her time. What sorrow can we compare to the sorrow of widows and orphans? Nonetheless, our Lord and Saviour turns to these people, the most unfortunate ones in the eyes of the world, saying respectfully, *Do not weep!* The Apostle Paul commands these sorrowing ones, saying, *Do not sorrow!* What does all this mean?

Of course, it does not mean that we should forget those dear loved ones of ours who have departed, that we should cast them out of our hearts. No. We should love them after their death just as we loved them in life. However, we should not sorrow over their death. Death does not separate us who are Christians from communion in love with those who are dear to us. The Lord Himself has given us the very grace-filled means needed to have communion with them.

The first among these means is prayer. Prayer is the best means for spiritual communion among people who are still alive. The Apostle Paul beseeched the believers to pray continually for him in order that the Lord would grant him strength and power to preach. Likewise, St. Paul prayed for others that the Lord would confirm them in the Faith and in a Christian life. There is no doubt that the prayers of believers strengthened the Apostle and that his prayers strengthened them.

We find an amazing example of the power and action of mutual prayer in the Acts of the Apostles. While St. Peter was in prison sleeping between two guards, *prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.* (Acts 12:5). What was the result of this prayer? During that very night, the Angel of the Lord appeared in the prison, awoke the sleeping Apostle, and led him out of prison.

The power and action of prayer for the souls of the departed is even greater than prayer for the living. There is no greater comfort than prayer and no greater joy than joy in the Lord for those who are separated from their bodies. It is unjust, as some think, to assume that the needs of our departed brethren are unknown to us. However, this is not true. The spiritual needs of the dead are the same as the spiritual needs of the living. The dead need the mercy and goodness of the Heavenly Father, forgiveness and remission of sins, grace-filled help from God in the fulfilment of all good desires, and the peace and ease of the heart and conscience. These things are most important both for the living and the dead. *Give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy departed servants* is the continual prayer and best intention of our Mother Church for the souls of Her departed. We should also beseech the Lord with this intention for the departed souls of our own loved ones.

It could be that some soul bound himself with earthly attachments, with earthly cares, and could not be free of them after death. Earthly thoughts about home and cares, about acquiring things, might still tug at this soul, torture him, and not allow him the freedom to strive with heart and soul towards God. We should pray that the Lord will grant rest to such a soul in the quiet harbour of His Kingdom. We should pray that the Lord will destroy and burn up in the fire of His Grace the memory of his earthly cares. We should pray that the Lord will warm this soul with love and with the desire for eternal treasure, that the Lord will give rest to this soul in the sweetest hope of eternal blessedness...

Perhaps, having confessed at the hour of death, some soul did so quickly, in a confused manner. This soul might have forgotten something because of troubled feelings, and he now grieves over this. Perhaps, this soul did not have time to offer God true repentance, to fully cleanse his sins by tears of compunction. Perhaps, the awareness of unconfessed and unforgiven sins tear and torture this soul. Pray for this soul

who is suffering. Pray that the Lord God might comfort him with the protection of His inextinguishable mercy. Pray that this soul might receive, albeit at this late hour, remission of sins because of his sincere remorse.

Who can enumerate all those bonds with which our soul might bind itself in this lifetime and by which it might remain bound for eternity. One might have been envious of his neighbour in the depths of one's soul and bound himself thus. Another person might have mocked the weakness of His neighbour and become according to the words of the Lord, worthy of Hell. Another person might have lied and as a result became the son of the father of lies. *If Thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, O Lord, who shall stand?* Therefore, no matter how holy a man's life might be, no one can be sure that he will pass into the next world completely reconciled with God. No man can say that the prayerful intercessions

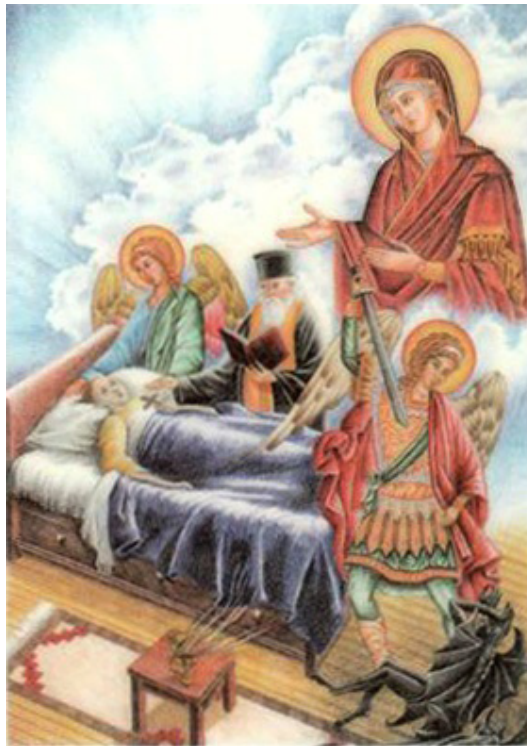
of those brethren who are left alive are unnecessary for him.

Was not the repentance of St. Ephraim the Syrian sincere and deep? Even he, sensing that his end was near, besought his brethren, *O Brothers, accompany me into the world above with prayers, psalms, and offerings. Remember me on the fortieth day after my death; because prayers and offerings made by the living help the departed.*

Works of charity are another means of communion with the departed. *If you desire to honour the dead, offer a gift for him. Honour him by good works, charitable offerings, and services.* (St. John Chrysostom). Send gifts for the reposed through the hands of the poor and the hopeless. In the name of the reposed, do acts of charity to the best of your ability and be assured

that your gift will be received by God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assured us that our gifts will be received, saying, *In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.* (Mt 25:40). Can it be that He Who is All-powerful will remain in debt to us? If you give food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty in His Name, then the Lord will fill the soul of your departed brother with the appearance of His light-bearing and joy-filling Image.

It could be that the soul of your relative is ashamed before the holy angels because of his lack of good deeds and because of his wretched sins, and he hides in darkness and in murky depths from the face of God. Clothe the naked; wash the feet of the tired; receive and give rest to the traveler in the name of such a soul; and the merciful Lord will vest



this soul in the Garment of His Mercy, will adorn it in the Robe of His justification, will wash its sinful filth in His Most Precious Blood...

It could be that the soul of your friend bound by sins languishes in a dungeon without the vision of God's face. Hurry to a prison and assuage the heart of a suffering prisoner in the name of your departed friend. The Lord will send His bright angels to comfort the soul of your sorrowing friend, to strengthen him with hope, and make him rejoice in the promise of God's mercy.

It could be that a soul has left this world for the spiritual world without having drawn close to the holy inhabitants of that world through prayer; he may have appeared in that higher sphere as one entering a strange and unfamiliar land and may not find any spiritual "relative" in this upper Sion. Take in the stranger; give rest to the beggar; give him a place to rest his head, and the Lord will grant the soul, for whom you do this, one of the bright dwellings in His Father's mansion. The souls of the righteous will receive this soul in bright and joyful communion. St. John Chrysostom says, *If we desire to relieve the sufferings of a sinner, let us do acts of mercy in his name. Though he be unworthy, the Lord will comfort and pity him.*

When we pray for the reposed and do charitable works in their name, it is necessary, Brethren, to reflect on our own death while there is still time. We should prepare now so that we will not pass into the future life of torture bound by bonds of sin. No matter how short or how long the Lord has determined that we will live on earth, there is no doubt that our entire present life is a road leading to death and to the threshold of eternity. There is nothing better or of more value for us to acquire than a peaceful, blameless, repentant, and Christian end to our life. He who has lived piously will repose piously. He who has lived with the Lord will die with the Lord. He who zealously serves the Lord before death will be with the Lord after his repose. *Where I am, there shall also My servant be. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*

† † †

WEEP FOR THOSE IN HADES

By Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain.

The choir of the saints has found the fountain of life and the door of Paradise. May I also find the way through repentance, I am the sheep that was lost, call me up to Thee, O Saviour, and save me.

[from the memorial service for the Dead]

Deliver, O Saviour, Thy slaves who are in the hell of tears and sighing.

[from a Canon of Saint Theophan the Branded]

No one can deny that Memorial Services for those who have fallen asleep are mournful and that they bring

about sorrow. First, because the Church considers the departed brethren as sinners, and not as righteous, sin being the root and cause of sorrow and mourning because it separates one from God. Second, because the souls of those who have fallen asleep are considered to be in a dark and distressing place, and simply, in the prison of Hades, which is truly a place of sorrow and a cause for sadness.

Wherefore, the Church offers supplication through the Memorial Services that the souls of the departed brethren be liberated from such a place and be placed in a place of light, a place of green pasture, a place of refreshment, wherein there is no sorrow and sighing. It is for this reason that all the living Christians who are present at the Memorial Services for the deceased wear mournful clothes, their eyes are sorrowful and filled with tears, and they supplicate and beseech the Holy God on behalf of the one fallen asleep with a grievous voice, saying: *Lord have mercy. Lord, grant rest to the soul of Thy servant.*

Third and finally, Memorial Services are mournful on account of their reference to death, the source of every sorrow and mourning. And if Paul says that we should not grieve over those who have fallen asleep (1 Th. 4:13), here, *those who have fallen asleep*, does not refer to sinners (as those for whom we hold Memorial Services are considered to be), but it refers to the Righteous and to the Saints, as is evident by his words which follow, and as Chrysostom and Theophylact interpret this passage.

† † †

Those who have sinned forgivably and moderately hope to gain freedom through the unspeakable mercy of God. For on behalf of such souls, that is of the moderately and forgivably sinful, there are in the Church's prayers, supplications, liturgies, as well as memorial services and almsgiving, that those souls may receive favour and comfort. Thus when the Church prays for the souls of those who are lying asleep, we hope that there will be comfort for them from God, but not through fire and purgatory, but through Divine love for mankind, whereby the infinite goodness of God is seen.

[Council of 1722 in Constantinople]

† † †

THOSE IN HADES AWAIT HELP FOR THEIR RELEASE

By Saint Mark of Ephesus.

The sinners and those imprisoned after death in Hades benefit from these prayers (for the reposed) on the one hand because they have not been definitively condemned and do not yet have the final decision of the tribunal, on the other hand because they have not yet fallen into hell, which will happen after the Second Coming of Christ. If this is effective

for sinners, much more do the memorial services and prayers benefit those who have repented but did not have time to be purified completely and therefore illuminated. If these have very small or light sins, they are restored to the inheritance of the righteous or remain where they are, that is to say in Hades, and *their troubles are lightened and they return towards more honourable hopes.*



In the place of Thy rest, O Lord, where all Thy saints repose, give rest also to the souls of Thy servants for Thou alone art immortal.

[from the memorial service for the Dead]



One of you often says: “Where is the persecution so I can be martyred?” Suffer martyrdom in your conscience; die to sin; *Mortify your members which are upon the earth* [cf. Col 3:5] and you will have become a martyr by intention.

Those [former martyrs] fought with emperors and rulers; you have the devil, the emperor of sin, for adversary and demons for rulers. For at that time a shrine and an altar stood before them and an abomination of idolatry, an execrable idol.

Take careful thought; even today there is an altar and a sanctuary and a virtual execrable idol in the soul. An altar, that is luxurious gluttony; a sanctuary, the longing for delights; an idol, the spirit of covetousness. For he who is a slave to *porneia* (illicit sexual activity in nous, word or deed, *Ed.*) and spends his time on the delights of the flesh has denied Jesus and is an idol-worshipper, having within himself the effigy of Aphrodite, i.e. the shameful pleasures of the flesh. Or again, he who is the slave of anger and wrath and does not extirpate the madness of this passion, he has denied Jesus, having Ares within himself for a god, for he is still worshipping wrath which is an idol of madness. Somebody else who loves money and pleasure but who *shuts up his bowels of compassion* against his brother [cf. 1 Jn 3:17] and is not merciful to his neighbour, he has denied Jesus too and serves idols, for he has the effigy of Hermes within himself, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, *For the love of money is the root of all evil* [1 Tim 6:10].

So if you achieve self-control and guard yourself against these raving passions, you have trodden the idols underfoot, denied superstition and become a martyr by making a good confession.

St. Athanasios, bishop of Alexandria

THE SOUL DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO LIVE WITHOUT THE BODY

Elder Sophrony of Essex, “I Know a Man in Christ.”

Question: Your Eminence, you tell us that the saints through their experiences have clarified all dogmatic issues. From the little that I have read, I think that there is one issue that is not so clear, particularly when one reads the writings of Macarius of Egypt. I am referring to what exactly happens to the soul when someone dies. It goes into an intermediate state—St. Makarios says for forty days, until it ascends. Some Fathers speak about the “taxing” of souls (i.e., tollhouses), others talk about the warfare of the demons against the soul as they try to seize it. Finally, what can you, who are well-read, tell us?

Answer: I am not well-read. I simply read, seek and search out people who have spiritual experience. I shall tell you a few things about this.

Much is said on these issues, and it depends on each one’s experience. Every saint is in a different spiritual state. They are not all the same. All the children in the same class do not have the same perception and powers of observation. One understands one thing, a second something else, and so on with the third and fourth. Father John Romanides of blessed memory said that, when someone who has beheld God reads something written by one of the Fathers, he understands more or less what spiritual state that Father was in, compared with his own experience. One should also look at when the Father wrote the text. Did he write it before the tradition of the Church had taken shape through the Ecumenical Synods? Did he write it when he was twenty or thirty years old, before he had so much experience? And there may be other texts that correct earlier ones. We, too, are authors and write. I wrote a text when I was twenty years old, and now I look at it and revise it. I look at it in the light of other experience that I have.

The most important thing is the consensus, the common agreement of all the holy Fathers. There are also many issues where there are difficulties in translation. Or some people go and ask living Fathers, but they understand and record what they hear in different ways. Many texts have been incorrectly translated. A translation can be a betrayal. One can betray the “spirit” of the writer who wrote the original.

What I have realized from studying the holy Fathers is that the human being is made up of soul and body, which are very closely interconnected. St. Gregory Nyssa says that the human soul is as closely linked with the body as the lover with his beloved: the link is very strong. The terrible thing about death is when, by God’s will, this separation takes place. The soul did not exist prior to the body (i.e., conception), nor did the body exist before the soul. They

were created at the same time by God. Therefore, the soul does not know how to live without the body. So the awfulness of death is what St. John of Damascus writes and we chant at the funeral service: *Truly most terrible is the mystery of death, how the soul is violently parted from the body, from its harmony, and the most natural bond of kinship is cut off by the divine will.*

What happens at death, when the soul is separated from the body, is most alarming. For that reason, St. John of Damascus says fear is natural, because the soul does not know how to live outside the body without the hypostasis being destroyed. According to St. John of Damascus, the reason why Christ said before His Passion, *O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will* (Mt 26:39), is because He was afraid as a human being, not as God, in the face of death, as death is terrible. A moment comes for the human being when, by God's will, the soul is separated from the body. The body dies.

I should add that, according to the Fathers, the complete human being is not someone who has a soul and a body, but the heavenly human being, who has the grace of the Holy Spirit. The relationship between soul and body is the same as the relationship between the soul and the Holy Spirit. Just as, when the soul leaves the body, the body dies, so, when the soul loses the Holy Spirit, it dies. It is dead, in spite of the fact that the human being is biologically alive.

The Fathers teach that, when the soul leaves the body, the soul passes through "toll houses"—this is what you mean. I think that these are images that the Fathers took from the East. When I read St. Gregory of Nyssa and Abba Dorotheos I saw what they mean by the "taxing" of the soul. Often the Fathers use symbolic language in order to describe reality. We say that God is Father, and a biological father comes to mind. We say that He is "Son" and we think of a son who is younger than the Father. These images, however, do not completely express the reality, because the Persons of the Holy Trinity are co-eternal, none is more ancient or younger. These are merely images and do not fully convey the reality.

Let's look at how we can understand the "toll houses." It is a fact that a struggle takes place after the soul leaves the body, as we see in the Epistle of Jude, when the Archangel

Michael contended with the devil for the body of Moses. After death, the devil wants to take the human being's soul with him: he hates him. So there is a struggle, as St. John of Damascus writes: *What a struggle the soul has when it separates from the body!* The devil always wants to harm man and take him prisoner. Every human being, of course, also has his good angel, who tries to find something good so that he can take him with him.

I read something in the patristic tradition that, I believe, provides an answer. When someone dies and his soul leaves his body, the hypostasis is not abolished. It remains, the person exists, but the soul is temporarily separated from the body. In order for the human soul to be aware of God and to enter Paradise it must have been purified from the

passions, through asceticism and the sacramental life. This is what is meant by being cured. The cure consists in turning all the natural energies of our soul to God and acquiring unselfish love. When the passible part of the soul, love and anger, functions unnaturally, when the human being is in the grip of love of sensual pleasure and love of praise, then, after his soul leaves his body his soul will not be able to satisfy the passions, as there will not be a body. This is one form of "taxation."

I shall give you an example. Someone has the passion of greed and his soul incites his body to satisfy this passion. Living an impassioned life, the soul has not learnt to live with prayer and Holy Communion. It merely satisfies the irrational passions, love of pleasure, love of money and love of praise. Can you imagine a

soul after death, which has passions, which has not turned towards God, and does not have a body to satisfy them? This is torment for the soul. The Fathers referred to this as the "toll houses." Can you imagine, says Abba Dorotheos, someone who is inside a dark room for three days, without seeing the sun, without hearing anyone, without eating, without water? He would go mad! Can you imagine a soul that wants to satisfy its passions and does not have a body to satisfy them? This is torture.

That is why we say that starting from this life one must repent, begin to love God more, to turn to God with love, and use anger to do God's will, to strive, so that, when the soul departs from this life, it will make its way to God.



As for what they say about forty days and so forth, perhaps this originates from the fact that Christ appeared to the Disciples for forty days after His Resurrection. This does not apply to the soul. After the soul's departure from the body it receives a foretaste either of hell or of Paradise. The final judgment will take place at the Second Coming.

Nor should we regard hell and Paradise as created realities, as Paradise and hell do not exist from God's point of view. Paradise and hell exist from man's point of view.

St. Basil the Great, interpreting the verse from the Psalms, *The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire*, says that fire has two properties, it burns and it gives light. Thus the same fire burns some and illumines others. Whom does it burn and whom does it illumine? If you put a candle in the sun, the sun will melt it; if you put clay, the sun will harden it. It is not the sun's fault. It is due to the property of each object. One receives the sun's power to illumine, the other its power to burn. It is the same with someone who is blind, who does not see the sunlight but senses its caustic property, whereas someone who can see is illumined by its illuminating property and protects himself so as not to suffer the effects of its burning energy.

So we shall all stand before God. We shall all appear before Him. We shall all see God and speak to Him. Remember the passage about the Last Judgment. God will converse with the righteous and with sinners. But for the former this will be participation and light, whereas for the latter it will be participation and darkness. God Himself becomes hell for someone who has not prepared himself appropriately for the encounter.

I shall finish with two examples, because this is a very serious subject. The first is Holy Communion. We go to take Holy Communion. We ask God that Holy Communion may not be for us *for judgment and condemnation*, but that it may be light, life and Paradise. For the one who is prepared, Holy Communion is light and Paradise. For someone else who is unprepared it becomes his condemnation, hell.

The second example. When you go to monasteries, look at the narthex and you will see that there is an icon of the Christ's Second Coming. Christ is on the throne. To the right and left are the Apostles and the saints, and from the throne issues a light that illumines them. Underneath are the damned in the river of fire, and this river of fire springs from God's throne, from God Himself. In other words, the light starts from God and this is the illuminating property of the light; and the darkness starts from God, the river of fire, the caustic property.

St. Isaac the Syrian says that hell is *the scourge of God's love*. Christ said that the heavenly Father *makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*. (Mt 5:45). In other words, He sends the sun to all, righteous and unrighteous. This means that at the Second

Coming, God will send His grace to all, both saints and sinners. There will not be a specific place, Paradise, above, and hell underneath, but everyone will be in the same place. He will send His grace to all, but to those who have not been cured it will act for damnation and they will experience the fire's power to burn, whereas for others who have been cured, it will act for their illumination and they will experience the illuminating power of the light.

Spiritual fathers do not "issue tickets" for Paradise through confession, but they cure people, so that, having been cured, they may go to Paradise. This comes about through confession and repentance. The cure consists in changing and transfiguring these powers of the soul. The words of Holy Scripture apply: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*. (Mk 12:30). The nous, the heart, the desire and the will should be turned towards God. This is the cure.

I thank you for your questions, and I congratulate you on your interest in dogmatic issues. Dogma is the experience of the saints and it is important for the Church. **Spiritual life without dogma is merely moralism.**



The *toll houses* about which the many holy Fathers write are **symbols of a reality**. The Fathers understand them as follows: after the fall of man, the soul is nourished by the body, in other words, it finds refreshment in material pleasures. [After death](#), however, these bodily passions that used to divert the soul no longer exist, because the soul has left the body, and they choke and stifle the soul. These are the *toll houses* and *eternal torment*. Abba Dorotheos says that eternal torment is for someone to be shut up for three days in a room without food, sleep or prayer. Then he can understand what hell is.



What was the Canaanite woman shouting behind Christ? What was she begging for? "Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David; my daughter is badly demon possessed..."¹ And after the Lord tested her faith, to set an example for future generations until this day, He worked the miracle and said: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you desire."

From this *Lord, have mercy* begins also the theology of the **noetic prayer of the heart**. All the art consists precisely in this. Whether walking, sitting, standing, working, or being in church, keep this prayer unceasingly on your lips and in your heart. By calling on the name of God in this manner you will find peace, you will attain purity of spirit and body, and the Holy Spirit, the Source of all good things, will dwell in you, and He will guide you to holiness, to all piety and purity.

St. Seraphim, of Sarov

ON A SERIOUS DELUSION

By St. Joseph the Hesychast, from "Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast." An Epistle to a Hesychast Hermit, chapter XII.



My child, hear about another delusion. There are also other monks who work on all the virtues together, and trust in their works. And when they pray and ask something from God, they do not seek it with humility, but with insolence and pretension, as if they have obligated God with their toils and therefore He owes it to them. When they are not heard and the Lord does not do their

will, they are troubled and greatly grieved. Then when the Devil our enemy sees them with this ignorance, he attacks them with twisted thoughts and teaches them saying, "See? You are struggling so hard even until death to work for Him, and He doesn't even listen to you! So why do you work for Him?" Then he pushes him to blaspheme the name of God, so that he may enter inside him and possess him, and then bind him with chains.

But if the Devil is unable to accomplish this, he comes around differently. He transforms himself into an angel of light saying that he is the Archangel Gabriel or some other angel, and that God sent him to be near him, since God is pleased with his works. Or similarly, he transforms himself into the form of our Lord Jesus Christ, while another demon goes earlier and says, "Since you have gladdened God with your sweat, He has come to visit, so go and venerate Him to receive grace." Or he says that he has come to raise him like the Prophet Elias to the heavens. And in closing, to make a long story short, with such methods he has deluded many both in the past and today. Some were thrown upon the rocks, others into wells, others were slaughtered in various ways and were utterly destroyed. And all this happened because from the beginning they had no discernment and were doing their own will, without having obedience.

But you, my beloved child in the Lord, since you are obedient, and confess everything openly, do not be afraid. Since you have an elder who guides you and prays for you day and night, God will not allow you to be deluded. But even if some such fantasy in the form of an angel appears to you, do not be afraid but tell him with boldness, even if it is in the form of the Lord, a saint, or an angel, tell him: "I have an elder who guides me. I don't want the teachings of angels! I want to see my Lord, the angels, and the saints in the other life. I don't want to see them here." And turn your face elsewhere. Do not

look at him. And since he is unable to endure such boldness, he will disappear. But even if the vision is true, the Lord will not get angry with you, but at once your fear is transformed into joy and things will turn out as the Lord wills.

We should never have such requests and desires from God, that is, to see angels or saints, because this is delusion. We should seek—as we have written many times—God's mercy for the remission of our sins, and should attend to the purification of our soul. Then things from God come by themselves, without our seeking them.

And even if we ascend to the heavens by theoria, nothing is due to us. But if after a little while we undergo a change without wanting to, and great sorrow and unbearable distress come upon us as if we are in Hades, and it seems to us that it will never leave, but will afflict us till death, once again we should remain composed. And just as we were happy when we were raised to the heavens, likewise, when some change occurs and grief overtakes us, we should have patience, without being agitated and without grumbling. But in peace tell your thoughts: *The Father has two places for us to dwell: one of joy and pleasure in the heavens, and one of sorrows down in Hades. And whenever He wants He raises me to the joy above, and whenever He wants He takes me below, so that I learn that as long as I wear this earthen body, I am subject to change. So I have nothing to say. Only let the will of the Lord be done in all, to all, and through all. But even if He leaves me below forever, I would say: My sweetest Savior and God, I have done nothing good or pleasing before Thee, but as a diligent worker of sin I am worthy to be a son of hell. So, even if I am punished, I rightly deserve it. Only do not be grieved with me, but rather look upon me with a happy face, and then even Hades will become a brilliant paradise for me!*

When you say such things, the sorrow departs and joy returns. However, you should not say it so that joy comes back, but you should say it from your heart. And as long as you are in this life—as we have already said—you should never become cocky, even if you ascend to the seventh heaven and see all kinds of mysteries. Since you bear a body, there is danger and caution is needed. Only once you have departed from your dead body should you rejoice, because then you are not subject to change anymore, but whatever the Lord bestows upon you is yours and no one can take it from you—to Whom be glory and dominion unto the ages of ages.



Do not search about for the words to show people you love them. Instead, ask God to show them your love without your having to talk about it. Otherwise you will never have time enough both for loving gestures and for compunction.

St. John Climacus

WHEN THE PERSECUTION BEGINS, THE END WILL ALREADY BE CLOSE

By Vasily Polyakov. The Lavra's confessor, Archimandrite Avramiy, gave his children instructions on what they need to be prepared for in the coming years.

These words were spoken by Archimandrite Avramy (+2020), confessor and last elder of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra, in a conversation with him a year before his blessed death. The elder knew firsthand what trials and tribulations were. He himself humbly drank the cup set before him, in which the bitterness of the terrible war, the poverty of the hungry years, the closure of the monastery in 1961, persecution and persecution of the brethren, and the hostility of the godless. The Lord also gave the elder consolation: he lived his last quarter of a century in the Lavra, being a witness and participant in its revival and spiritual flourishing.

Father Avramy was a truly humble and extremely modest monk, and many know that his prayer worked miracles. He possessed genuine simplicity and childlike gentleness, characteristic of those generously infused with the grace of God, true citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. On the day of his blessed repose, it was sixty years since his priestly ordination. The words of the Lavra's confessor about the final trials ahead for the inhabitants of the monastery and all Orthodox Christians today sound prophetic. However, they were said with encouragement and faith...



Everything goes exactly as written in the Gospel, in Revelation. The enemy is putting snares on his kingdom. The Apostle warned that terrible, cruel times would come, when Christians, faithful to God, would be declared enemies. Grant, Lord, not to test them, because it will be very hard and difficult. Satan will be very angry, especially at Orthodox Christians who do not listen to him and will subject them to severe persecution for this.

When the persecution begins—this is when the end is close—then if you do not have agreement with the authorities, you will lose everything, you have no right to anything. No laws will help you, because they are common to everyone and there is no other choice.

But this will be the end of the struggle, when Satan goes against the believing people. Here, let everyone prepare and decide for themselves, because they will immediately find fault if you do not recognize their power. And a person must pray, read, know, reason and understand what is happening and where everything is going. And do not socialize with company that goes against God!

There is a struggle going on, you know? And in Orthodox countries there are those who lean to the left. It is up to everyone to whom and where to bow, and to answer for that before God. God grant that it will work out... Although technologies have now been invented that confuse a person with his head. Times are still coming when there will be deportation and other persecutions—like under Soviet rule. Then, if you did

not go to the collective farm, your land was taken away and you were taken into exile. This kind of thing will come back.

The Lord leads believers along such thorny paths. To each their own. And a thorny path awaits us. Christians must certainly bear their cross. Just as the Lord bore the cross of Calvary, so we also face the cross. Otherwise we will end up in the other direction and lose everything. And so I am already crying out: Lord, help, have mercy on us! Just ask God. And rely on Him, but with all your hope!

Defending the soul is a serious matter! May God give every believer strength and strength so as not to fall into the Antichrist yoke that the rulers of the world are preparing. Let their plans fall apart! And everything has already been written in their plans for a long time. They use great deceit, throwing a net over people. And many do not understand what is happening. They say: "And what's wrong with that? Now is the time for all new things, and this is how it should be. That was then, but now it's new." There were temptations and persecutions in the old days, but there was never anything like we see now.

Believers, however, need not be afraid. The Lord will take care and protect His faithful, even with a crumb of bread; He will keep safe all those who will not accept the Antichrist. And those who gorge themselves on the evil one's handouts will never find any satisfaction.

This is where things are heading. What is the reason for the declared "freedom" and the permitted free, that is, vicious, perverted relationships? The spirit of the Antichrist has already completely spread them and made them "acceptable," just like before the flood. Perversion has been openly and willingly legalized, and sins cry out against God. Why did the ancient world perish and the Lord wipe it off the face of the earth? For sins. They lived like cattle. Only eight souls, the family of Noah, were preserved and saved. When Noah built the ark and the Lord saw that it was useless to continue maintaining the world, he sent such rain for forty days that it flooded and destroyed everyone. Only Noah's family remained, which the Lord preserved as good seedlings. And the entire world of sin was drowned by water. And a new people arose from Noah to our time, until people again reached the antediluvian state...

There is a pre-revolutionary prediction that the Lord in the last days, when the Antichrist comes, will take the Great Church of the Lavra to Heaven. The entire Church of the Mother of God has a price. Lavra, of course, especially. But the Church also means people. They will be raised to Heaven. Those who will remain faithful and will not be subject to government influence, which will force them to accept anti-Christian institutions. The Lord will take away worthy people who do not submit to Satan. Grant, Lord, that we may be worthy and that the Mother of God will take pity on us. So that the saints do not despise us, because it will be shameful, God forbid.

The main thing for us is to be saved and that means remaining faithful to Christ to the end.

THE WISDOM OF ELDER TIKHON OF HOLY MOUNTAIN

THE SPIRITUAL FATHER OF ST. PAISIOS

From a pamphlet by Fr. Constantine (Charles) J. Simones.



The stories that follow are taken from the life and works of the Russian Elder Tikhon. Father Tikhon was the Elder of Father Paisios and they enjoyed an extremely close spiritual relationship. During the last ten days of Elder Tikhon's life, he asked for his disciple Father Paisios to care for him. Elder Paisios writes the following about these last ten days: "Those last ten days were God's greatest blessing, because, since I had

the chance, for a little while, to live so close to him and to get to know him better, I was helped more than any other time. On the last night he had his hands on my head for three hours straight, and then he blessed and embraced me for the last time." After foretelling his death, he fell asleep on September 10, 1968, having prepared his own grave himself.

To his good disciple, "sweet Paisios" as he called him, Elder Tikhon left his abundant blessings, and he promised to visit him every year. He also said, "We will be united by love unto the ages of ages, my child."

These stories from the life of Elder Tikhon emphasize the reality that God is the sovereign of all that we are. In the first story that he tells us about the obese layman that came to him, the Elder counseled him to turn to God in fasting and prayer in order to defeat the demons of obesity and carnal passions that were destroying his life. In the second story the Elder shares with us, he makes it very clear that God is the Landlord of our lives and our universe. And God is our Landlord we should begin everything we do in life by first invoking His blessing upon us.



The Elder would get very upset when he would see a well-nourished young man. He would get even more upset when he encountered a well-nourished monk since being obese was not compatible with the Angelic state of monasticism.

One day a layman visited him on Mt. Athos. He was very obese and he said to the Elder: "Elder, I am having a fearful battle with my passions. I am constantly having dirty, unclean sexual thoughts and they do not ever give me any peace." Father Tikhon responded to him: "If you, my child, are obedient to my recommendations and with the help of the Grace of Christ, I will be able to transform you into an Angel. I want you, my

child, to repeat the Jesus Prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, forgive me a sinner*. You are to eat only bread and water every day and on Saturday and Sunday you are to eat a little food with olive oil. I want you also to do one hundred and fifty prostrations every night and read the service of supplication to the Holy Mother. In addition to this, I want you to read a chapter from the Gospel and read the list of the saints that are commemorated on each day in the Church calendar."

Six months later, when the obese layman visited Mount Athos again, the Elder did not recognize him because he had lost all of his excessive fat. He was now able to easily fit through the narrow door that led into the Church. The Elder asked him: "How are you now, my child, dealing with your life's problems?" The young man responded: "I now truly feel like an Angel because I no longer suffer from sexual passions and feel a sense of relief that I have lost all that weight."

The Elder had the habit of beginning everything he did with a prayer. He would always call upon the help of the Holy Spirit to enlighten him. He also advised all other people to use the same prayer. He would say: "Dear Lord, allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten us because He is the Landlord of our world. This is why our Church begins its prayers with: *Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth, everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of blessings and Giver of Life, come and dwell in us; cleanse us of every stain and save our souls, o gracious one.*" While saying this prayer, his face would be transformed and the pious people around him would see this change in his appearance.

The Elder said: "A monk once visited a monastic cell that was very clean, well maintained and pleasant to see. This monk then said: "As clean as the Elder's heart is, this is reflected in the cleanliness of his cell." This monk went to another monastic cell that was completely disheveled, filled with cobwebs and in disarray. The Elder then said: "This monk is a good monk because he is always concerned with spiritual things and he does not bother himself with worldly pursuits."

Because the monk who visited these monastic cells was filled with such goodness he looked upon everything that he saw as beautiful. The moral of this teaching is that whatever you are as a person is what you see in other people and whatever you desire is what you find.



When you are insulted by someone or humiliated, guard against angry thoughts, lest they arouse a feeling of irritation, and so cut you off from love and place you in the realm of hatred. You should know that you have been greatly benefited when you have suffered deeply because of some insult or indignity; for by means of the indignity self-esteem has been driven out of you.

St. Maximos the Confessor

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)
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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ON FASTING

By St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Fasting consists not only in eating rarely, but also in eating little; and not in eating once a day, but also in not eating very much. Unreasonable is the faster who waits for a given hour, and at the hour of *trapeza* gives himself over to insatiable eating. In both body and mind, our reasoning mind should watch that it not choose between tasty repasts and those that are not tasty. That is what animals do, but it is not praiseworthy in a rational human. We refuse pleasant foods in order to humble the warring members of the flesh and give freedom to the actions of the spirit. A true fast consists not only in exhausting the flesh, but also in giving away to the hungry that piece of bread you would have liked to eat. *Blessed are the hungry, for they shall be filled.* (Mt 5:6).

Our Teacher of asceticism and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, before beginning the *podvig* of redeeming mankind, strengthened Himself with a prolonged fast. And all laborers in asceticism, before beginning to work for the Lord, armed themselves with fasting and never stepped upon the way of the cross without the work of fasting. **They measured their successes in asceticism by their success in fasting.**

Holy people did not begin a strict fast suddenly; they gradually, little-by-little made themselves capable of being satisfied with the poorest foods. In accustoming his disciple Dositheus to fasting, St. Dorotheus gradually took his food away from him in small portions, so that from four pounds his daily intake decreased finally to eight lots [3.6 oz.] of bread. Moreover, those holy fasters

were amazingly foreign to feebleness, but were always hale, strong, and ready for work. They rarely got sick, and their lives lasted extremely long. To the measure that the faster's flesh becomes subtle and light, spiritual life reaches perfection and reveals itself in wondrous manifestations. Then the spirit performs its works in an as if bodiless body. The outward senses simply close off, and the mind, which has renounced the world, is exalted to heaven and is entirely immersed in contemplation of the spiritual world.

However, not all can place a strict rule of abstinence in all things on themselves, or deprive themselves of everything that might serve to ease infirmities. *He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.* (Mt 19:12). Only those foods should be taken each day so that by gathering strength, the body would become the friend and helper to the soul in perfect virtue. Otherwise it can happen that with an exhausted body, the spirit becomes weak. On Fridays and Wednesdays, especially in the four Fasts, according to the example of the fathers, take food only once a day—and an angel of the Lord will cleave to you.

We should ceaselessly guard our hearts from indecent thoughts and impressions, according to the words of the Proverbs: *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.* (Prov 4:23). From the diligent guarding of the heart, purity is born in it, which makes it possible to see the Lord, as eternal truth assures us: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8). We should not bring out what is best in the heart to the surface, for what has been gathered remains safe from seen and unseen enemies only when it is guarded like a treasure in the depths of the heart. Do not reveal the secrets of your heart to everyone.

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

ANOTHER WAY

A homily by Fr. Seraphim Holland, Archpriest of the St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney TX.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen! Christ is Born!

On a day like today, there are many episcopal letters—very good ones, that I would like to read to you, but not right now. And the reason is because on a day like today, a pastor wants to share something of his heart with his flock. That is why those letters are written: because the archpastor wants to share something of his heart. Well, in every church celebrating the Nativity today, pastors want to share from their hearts, and this is what I want to do with you right now. This Gospel is not expressly about the Nativity of Christ, is it? It not a narrative; it isn't about a baby in a manger. It is about what happened after the Nativity of Christ.

We are not quite sure exactly how long after, but not on the day of the Nativity; probably not even during the week of the Nativity. It is about the wise men, the astrologers from Persia, who came to worship Christ. They enquired of Herod where the Christ Child would be born. They did this because by God's dispensation the star, which was actually an angel guiding them, moving in a way that a star does

not move—from north to south, and not according to the way a star would move in that area—disappeared when the wise men came to Jerusalem. They didn't know where to go, so they enquired, and then Herod knew of their intentions. He said, *When you worship the Child, then tell me, so that I can also worship Him.* (Mt. 2:1–8). But of course, we know that he wanted not to worship, but to kill. And shortly after the wise men had left, he did kill ten thousand holy innocents, trying to make sure that he killed the Christ Child. But by then our Lord was either on His way to Egypt or there already.

Here is what I want to share with you from my heart. When the wise men had finished worshipping the Lord Jesus, being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they *departed into their own country another way.* (Mt. 2:12). This is very significant. Every time I read this, I am filled with great joy.

There is another way, brothers and sisters. Not the way of the world, not the way of death, not the way of mundane life; there is another way. And we are celebrating that the God-man came down, became incarnate—He actually became the God-man, so that we could have this other way. These wise men went another way to avoid Herod; but mystically this means there is now another way to

ANNOUNCEMENT

After 21 years of publication and approximately 4,000 pages of Orthodox content, the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes to let "Orthodox Heritage" readers know that our publication will cease with this issue. We intend to upload all 21 years of "Orthodox Heritage" issues onto our website (<http://www.orthodoxheritage.org>). Their content is timeless and we hope and pray that Orthodox faithful will refer to them in the future.

Our work will continue in other areas involving spiritual and material almsgiving. We thank all of our supporters as our publishing work was enabled only through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers worldwide.

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 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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

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live: because Christ is born. There is another way to be. There is another way to become. Human life is filled with sorrow, it is filled with sin, uncertainty, incompleteness, sickness, death. But there is another way. That way is life, that way is perfection, that way is completeness, peace, and righteousness. And that way is obtainable because of Jesus Christ. So we must apply the Nativity to our souls. We must learn to live in another way.

Now, sometimes when I look at my own life, and I happen to know the lives of many other people (they are very similar to mine), I see how mundanely we live, how easily we become angry or confused, how easy it is for us to be lazy about holy things and diligent about things that do not matter. It seems that we are always living in the way of the world. But that was not what we were born for. We were born for perfection. We were born for eternal life. And that eternal life is to be in God, and with God; to be united with Him, to not have anything in us that is corruptible. We see corruption every day in our lives, but we were not born for that. We were born for another way. We were born to know Jesus Christ personally, intimately, by becoming like Him. And that is what the incarnation of the God-man provides—for us to become like Him.

Now, there is much that must transpire for us to become like Him. He gives us the ability, but He does not give us the will. He strengthens our will, but He does not give it to us. We must desire to follow this other way. And if we do, then we will indeed become perfect. We will become what we were born for.

Just recently I was having a conversation, and as often happens in conversations, the significance did not hit until later. This person said that it really hit her that Christ was born to die... When we look at Him in the manger, we see someone Whose whole purpose in life as a human being was to die. From the beginning, His purpose was to die—so that we could live. But we are not born to die. Now, we do die, and we live with that stench of death around us when we sin. Because anything that is sin is death: when our thoughts, emotions, or priorities are not holy and righteous—

that is death. But we weren't born to die.

We were born to live. We were born to be fully alive. Do you know that in our ascetical theology, we do not consider human beings without Christ to be truly human? You are not truly human until you are a Christ-man, and Christ is totally filling you—because man was created to have Christ within him. If Christ is not within the man, then he is not



The place of the Manger in Bethlehem
The Star of David (exact spot of Christ's birth) is seen within the cave—close-up depicted in the picture on pp. 3

fully a man. We are becoming fully men, fully humans because of Christ. That is the other way, not the way of the world.

I also want to say something about why this particular passage was selected—not about the Nativity narrative, not about the babe in the manger, but what happened afterwards; just as on Pascha, we do not read about the Resurrection. We read from the first chapter of St. John about the nature of God, Jesus Christ Who is eternally the Son, becoming man so that we could be one with Him. Why do we do this? Why do we look ahead? Well, first of all, in our services we have already read the Nativity narrative many times previous to today. In the same way, throughout the year, every Sunday we read the Resurrection narratives. But knowing the history is not what you need. What you need is to become what the purpose is of our Lord's incarnation, death, and Resurrection. So, we read on the Nativity about the wise men, and how they went back another way—because the Nativity is so that you can live another way, a different way, not the way of human flesh without Christ, but the way of being a Christ-man, a deified creature. That is why we read it.

It is the same on Pascha, and the same thing also after Theophany. On the Sunday after the Theophany we read of Christ going into the wilderness, being tempted by the devil, because after baptism comes temptation. After baptism comes life, the living of your life with the power that God has given you, so that you can live differently from the rest of the world, differently from your own motivations; so that you can be changed, become a deified Christ-human creature.

That is the purpose of the incarnation. St. Paul says it in clear language—for those who have ears to hear—in one of my favorites of all the epistles, where he speaks of the fullness of time, when God sent His Son, the Incarnation, and then he says to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. *And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* (Gal 4:6-7). Do you know what this means? This is possible because through the Incarnation, and then Baptism, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can become something that we are not. We can become, as the Scripture says, gods.

It is not blasphemous to say that. The Psalm says *ye are gods*, and the Church understands that to mean that we will become God-like, full of righteousness, truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God—something that we do not have by nature. Jesus Christ is the Son of God by nature, eternally. But we are not sons of God by nature—we are adopted into sonship; and with this adoption we are treated entirely as sons. But this necessitates a change in the way we think, the way we live, the priorities we have, and how we spend our time. It means we must live a different way, another way.

This is what my heart wants to tell you today, on this day of the Nativity, when the Lord has made it possible for us to be adopted, to be of His family, to become united with Him, and perfected in Him. We must remember this in everything we do, and not live the way of the world, but rather live the other

way, the holy way—the way that makes no sense to the world, the way that is foolishness to the world. We must remember this in everything we do. We were born to be alive, even though there is evidence of death in us every day—from our sins, from aging, from the mistakes we make, from our uncertainties. If a Christian has the God-given ability in his heart, he can feel that death. But that death is



not natural, that death is not the purpose of our life. The purpose of our life is to be alive in Christ. And with God becoming man, it is now possible.

Remember this. Live a different way from the rest of the world. And if there are things in you that are living like the world, beg God to help you with them. Do something about it. You were born for perfection. Do not wallow in mediocrity. None of us should be mediocre. All of us should know God, and feel God in everything we do; with every breath we take, we should feel the Holy Spirit. If we do not feel this, then we must change the way we live. This is the purpose of life—to live a different way from just being a human—to live as a Christ-human. The Greeks have a word, *Theanthropos*, or God-man. We are also to become God-men. We call Jesus Christ the God-man, but we are to become God-men. We are to become like God and to be united with God, and to do godly things, to have the knowledge of God, to be united to Him in holiness, wisdom, and purpose. This is that other way that is possible today.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

THE GOSPEL OF THE FIRSTBORN

By St. Nikolai (Velimirovic).

Whoever approaches the Lord Jesus Christ with obedience and humility will never want to be separated from Him.

† † †

The beginning exercises of the newly-recruited army of Christ are the exercises of obedience and humility.

With obedience begins a new world, a new creature, a new mankind. The old world trampled upon obedience to God and humility before God, and thus destroyed the bridge between earth and heaven. The spiritual building materials for restoring this bridge are first of all, obedience and humility.

As long as Adam was rich in obedience and humility, he could hardly introduce a difference between his own spirit and the Spirit of God, between his own will and the will of God, between his own thoughts and the thoughts of God. He could not feel, want, and think anything that could not have been in God and from God. Like the angels of God, so too did Adam stand in direct proximity to God, and because of this direct proximity he contemplated the Primary Source of light, wisdom, and love. Living within the sun itself, he had no need to light any candle of his own. His candle would not have burned or given off light within the sun.

Disobedience and Loss of Humility

But when Adam violated obedience and lost humility—and these are always lost or acquired at the same time—then his direct communion with God was broken, the bridge destroyed, and he fell into terrible and rotten dankness, which he was forced to light up with his own candle given to him nevertheless by God's mercy when God's righteousness cast him out of Paradise. Then he not only began to feel the difference between himself and God, between his own will and God's will, his own feeling and God's feelings, his own thoughts and God's thoughts—he not only began to be aware of the difference, but only in rare hours of enlightenment was just barely able to notice his own divine likeness.

Alas, into such an abyss was he cast down by his disobedience and pride who had been first created in the image and likeness of the Most Holy and Divine Trinity! (*In man, the incorrupt image of God was the source of blessedness, while in fallen man it was [only] the hope of blessedness*, St. Philaret of Moscow). Alas, all of us, descendants of Adam, all are low outgrowths from the stump of the felled cedar that once majestically towered and rose over all God's creation in Paradise—low sprouts, smothered by the tall thistles of crude nature, which have come down like a veil between us and the First Source of immortal love.

Just look at how, as if at the wave of a magic wand, the disobedience and pride of mankind's forefathers immediately changed all creation around him, and he was immediately surrounded by a whole army of the disobedient and proud!

As long as Adam was obedient to his Creator and humble before Him, everything around him breathed obedience and

humility. But what a momentary change of decoration! In the moment of Adam's fall, Adam was surrounded by nothing but disobedience. Next to him was the disobedient Eve. And there, the main bearer of disobedience and pride—the spirit of disobedience, satan. And there was all of nature, disobedient, rebellious, and mad. The fruits that were up to then sweet and melted in man's mouth begin to torment him with bitterness. The grass that spread like a silken carpet under his feet begins to scratch him with prickles. The flowers that gladdened their king when he breathed in their fragrance begin to arm themselves with thorns in order to push him away from them. The beasts that nuzzled him affectionately like lambs begin to attack him with sharp claws and eyes blazing with anger. Everything takes a position toward Adam that is rebellious and threatening. Thus the richest of all created nature now felt himself to be the poorest. Dressed earlier in garments of arch-angelic glory, now he felt humiliated, lonely, and naked—so naked that he was forced to borrow clothing from nature for his nakedness both bodily and spiritual. For his body he began to borrow skins from the animals and leaves from the trees, and for his spirit he began to borrow from all things—from things!—knowledge and abilities. He who before drank from the abundant source of life now had to walk after the animals, bend down to the dirt and drink from the animal tracks in both his physical and spiritual thirst.

The Fruits of Obedience and Humility and Our Lord's Nativity

Take a look now at our Lord Jesus Christ and His those around Him. They are all obedience and humility themselves! Archangel Gabriel, a representative of angelic obedience and humility; the Virgin Mary—obedience and humility; Joseph—obedience and humility; the shepherds—obedience and humility; the Oriental Magi—obedience and humility; the stars of heaven—obedience and humility. Obedient storms, obedient winds, obedient earth and sun, obedient people, obedient animals, and even the tomb itself is obedient. **All is obedient to the Son of God, the New Adam, and all humble themselves before Him, for He Himself is infinitely obedient to His Father and humble before Him.**

We know that along with many earthly seeds that man sows and cultivates, certain other grasses and plants eagerly grow up that were not sown or cultivated. It is the same with the virtues: If you try hard to sow and cultivate obedience and humility in your soul, you will soon see that next to them grow up a whole bouquet of other virtues. One of the first is simplicity both inward and outward. The obedient and humble Virgin Mary is at the same time adorned with chaste simplicity. It is the same with righteous Joseph, the apostles and Evangelists. Only see with what inimitable simplicity the Evangelists describe the greatest events in the history of man's salvation, in universal history!

Can you imagine how broadly and theatrically a worldly author of literature would have described, for example, the res-

urrection of Lazarus should he have been the accidental witness to that event? Or what a high-sounding and pompous drama he would have written about all that happened in the soul of Joseph, an obedient, humble, and simple man, in the moment he found out that his ward and betrothed was pregnant? But the Evangelist in today's [Nativity] Gospel reading describes all of this in but a few simple sentences. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.* (Mt 1:18). Before this, the Evangelist described the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ, or more precisely, the genealogy of Righteous Joseph of the tribe of Judah, the seed of David. In this genealogy the Evangelist enumerates people born of people in the natural way and manner, as all mortals are born in the world. Then suddenly he begins to describe the Nativity of the Lord and says, *Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις οὕτως ἦν...*, wanting by this *δὲ* ("now," "however") to show the unusualness and supernaturalness of His Birth, which is completely different from the manner of birth of all the enumerated ancestors of Joseph.

His mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph. In the eyes of people this betrothal could have been considered a certain preface to married life, but in the eyes of Maria and Joseph it could not have been considered as such. The Virgin Mary was the answer to her parents' fervent, tearful prayer, and they had promised to dedicate her forever to God. She too had voluntarily accepted her parents' vow, which can be seen by her many years of service in the Jerusalem temple. Had it been a matter of her own will, she would have undoubtedly remained in the temple to her very death, like Anna the daughter of Phanuel (Lk 2:36–37). But the law prescribed something else, and something else had to be fulfilled. **She was betrothed to Joseph not in order to live in marriage, but in order to avoid marriage.**

All the details of this betrothal and its significance are kept in Church Tradition. And if people were to value the Tradition connected with the Mother of God, with Righteous Joseph, and with all the personalities mentioned in the Gospel as much as they value traditions that are often very silly, connected with worldly kings, generals, and pundits, then the meaning of Mary and Joseph's betrothal would be clear to anyone. (Holy Hieromartyr Ignatius says that the Virgin was betrothed *so that His Birth would be hidden from the devil and so that the devil would think of Him as born from a lawful wife, and not from a virgin.* Blessed Jerome in his Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew, and St. Gregory of Neocæsaria in his Two Homilies on the Annunciation say the same.)

Joseph: An Exemplary Man in both Righteousness and Mercy

Before they came together—these words do not mean that they later united as husband and wife; the Evangelist does not even think about this. The Evangelist is interested in the Nativity itself of the Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing else. And he writes the words cited above in order to show that His

Nativity happened without the unification of husband and wife. Therefore, you should understand the words of the Evangelist exactly as if he had written: and without their uniting it happened that She was with child in her womb from the Holy Spirit. Only from the Holy Spirit could be born He Who was to restore the Kingdom of the Spirit of light and love amidst the kingdom of darkness and wickedness. How could he have fulfilled His divine mission in the world if he had come into the world through earthly channels, enclosed in sin and the reeking rottenness of death? In that case the new wine would have smelled of old wineskins, and He Who came to save the world would Himself be in need of salvation. The world could only be saved by a miracle—a miracle of God; the whole race of man on earth believed in this. And **when God's miracle happened, it behooves us not to doubt it but to bow our heads before it and find medicine and salvation for ourselves in this miracle.**

What does Joseph do when he learns that Mary is with child? *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.* (Mt 1:19). He wants to do this in accordance with the law of God. He is obedient to God's will in the form and extent that God's will had been proclaimed to the people of Israel up to that time. He acts also out of humility before God. *Be not righteous over much* warns the wise Solomon (Ooh 7:16). That is, do not be too severe towards those who have sinned, but remember your own infirmities and sins, and strive to dissolve severity with mercy in relation to sinners. Nurtured by this spirit, Joseph did not even think to commit the Virgin Mary to judgment for a suspected sin: and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. Joseph shows us this plan as an exemplary man, exemplary in both righteousness and mercy—the highest that the spirit of the Old Testament law could raise. Everything with him is simple and clear, as could only be in the heart of a man who fears God.

But no sooner did Joseph come up with a convenient way out of this uncomfortable situation, than heaven suddenly intervenes in his plans, giving him an unexpected command: *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.* (Mt 1:20). The angel of God, who before had announced to the Most Pure Virgin the coming into the world of the God-Man, now goes to prepare the way for Him and make His paths straight. Joseph's doubts are one of the obstacles on His path, and a very powerful and dangerous one at that. These obstacles must be removed. In order to show how easy it is for the powers of heaven to do what is very hard for people, the angel appears to Joseph not openly but in a dream. Calling Joseph the son of David, the angel wants at the same time to both show him honor and to bring him to reason. As the descendant of King David, you should rejoice at this divine mystery more than other people,

and you should also understand it better than others. But how then does the angel call the Virgin his wife? *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife. In the same way that the Lord on the Cross said to His Mother: Woman! Behold thy son, and then to His disciple: behold, thy Mother.* (Jn 19:26–27).

Truly, heaven is thrifty with words and says nothing superfluous. If it were not appropriate for the angel to say it, would he have said it? Although this naming of Mary as Joseph's wife is a stumbling block for some unbelieving people, it is a shield of purity against unclean spirits. For not only people hear the word of God, but all the worlds both good and evil. Whoever would wish to penetrate all the mysteries of God should have divine vision for everything created, visible and invisible. For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. This is God's business, and not man's. Do not look at nature and do not fear the law. Here a Greater nature is at work, and a Stronger law, without Whom neither would nature have life, nor the law have force.

The Obedience of the Holy Virgin

From the angel's message to Joseph it is clear that the Virgin Mary never told the latter about the appearance of the great archangel to her earlier; it is likewise clear that now, when Joseph intended to put her away, she did not justify herself in the least. The archangel's tidings, like all the heavenly mysteries that were gradually revealed to her, *she kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.* (Lk 2:19; 2:51). In her faith in God and obedience to God, she did not fear any kind of humiliation before people. *If my sufferings are pleasing to God, then why should I not endure them?* certain martyrs of Christ would say later. Living in ceaseless prayer and divine contemplation, the Most Pure One could have said, *If my humiliation is pleasing to God, then why should I not endure it? If only I'm right before the Lord Who knows the hearts—but let people do with me as they please.* She also knew that the whole world cannot do anything with her if God does not allow it.

What good-natured humility before the Living Lord, and what marvelous faithfulness to His will! And besides that—what heroism of spirit in a tender Virgin! The Lord is the strength to them that fear Him, and His covenant shall be manifested unto them (Ps. 24:14). If sinners now, as throughout all times, even seek false witnesses for themselves, the Virgin Mary, having as witness not a man but the Most High God, does not justify herself, is not disturbed but remains silent—she is silent and waits, that God Himself might justify

her in His own time. And God soon hastened to justify His chosen one. The same angel who revealed to her the great mystery of her Conception now rushes to speak, instead of the silent Virgin. Thus, explaining to Joseph what has already happened, the angel of God now goes further and explains to him what things must come to pass:

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. (Mt 1:21). “He did not say, *She will bring you forth Son*, but said simply, ‘bring forth. For she will bring (Him) forth not to Joseph but to the whole world.” (St. John Chrysostom). The angel instructs Joseph to treat the Newborn as would a real father, and therefore he says, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, which means, “Savior.” That is why the second sentence begins with *for*, which means: *And you shall call Him Savior, for he shall save his people from their sins.*

The Archangel is God's messenger of truth. He speaks what he

learns from God; he sees the truth in God. For him, nature with its laws literally do not exist. He knows only about the omnipotence of the living God, as once Adam knew. Having said *he shall save his people from their sins*, the archangel foretold Christ's main work. Christ had to come in order to save people not from some secondary evil, but from the main evil, from sin, which is the source of all evil in the world. He must save the tree of mankind not from one swarm of caterpillars, which



attacked it during a certain year with the desire to eat it bare, but from the worm at its root, from which the tree is withering. He comes not to save a man from another man, or a nation from another nation, but in order to save all people and all nations from satan—the sower and ruler of sin.

Christ later fulfilled the archangel's prophecy completely. *Thy sins are forgiven thee* were his victorious words throughout the course of His whole service on earth amidst people. In these words, there are both the diagnosis and the medicine. Sin is the diagnosis of the illness, and forgiveness of sins is the medicine. And Joseph was found worthy to be the first of mortals in the New Creation to learn of the true goal of the coming of the Messiah and the true nature of His service.

What the archangel spoke to Joseph was enough so that in obedience to the new and direct law of God, he would reject his own thoughts, as he did the plan to put Mary away. Heaven commands, and Joseph submits. But the usual method of heaven is to not give people a command without an appeal toward human understanding and self-determination.

It was important for God from the beginning that man act as a free being. Without freedom, man would be no more than an artificial, mechanical tool of God, which God would maintain and set in motion exclusively according to His own will. God has enough of such mechanisms in nature—but He vouchsafed to man an exclusive position, **giving him freedom to make his own decision to be before God or against God, for life, or for death.**

This position is of high honor, but at the same time very dangerous. Therefore, God does not simply command Adam. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, and he immediately adds, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* (Gen 2:16–17). By this last sentence God gives man an argument for his mind and a motivation for his will, so that he will not eat of the forbidden tree. *For the day that you taste of it, you will surely die.* The archangel does the same now with Joseph. Having given him the command to accept Mary and not put her away, and explaining that the Fruit of her Virgin womb is from the Holy Spirit, the archangel reminds Joseph also about the clear prophecy of the great prophet: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, which means, God is with us.* (Isa 7:14).

Call his Name Immanuel

What was said earlier, *and ye shall call his name Jesus*, does not contradict what is said now, namely, *and shall call his name Immanuel, which means, God is with us.* In the first case, Joseph is commanded to call His name Jesus, which means Savior; but in the second case it is confirmed that the Child will be called by the people and nations, Immanuel, which means, God is with us. Both names, each in their own way, express the most important meaning of Christ's coming to the world and His service in the world. Namely, He will come in order to forgive sins, in order to have mercy and save people from sin—and therefore He will be called the Savior—Jesus. But, *Who can forgive sins, but God only?* (Mk 2:7)? No one in the world; no one in heaven, nor on earth has the authority or the power to forgive sins and save from sins—only God can do that. For sin is the main worm of the whole world's sickness. And no one knows the bottomless horror of sin like God. And because Jesus forgave sins and through this made people healthy, then He is God amongst people.

If we wanted to present the names in a cause-and-effect connection, then the name Immanuel should come before the name Jesus. For in order for the Newly Born to do the work of the Savior, he should be Immanuel—that is, He should come as God amongst us. But in this order the meaning also remains the same. It is all the same one way or another how we say it—the meaning does not change if we say, “Immanuel and therefore Savior,” or “Savior, and therefore Immanuel”.

In any case, there is one thing that is clearer than anything in the world: **That there is no salvation for this world if God does not come into it; and there is no medicine for us people if God is not with us.** If God is not with us, and at that not as an idea or a beautiful dream but with us, like us: with a soul, like us; in the flesh, like us; in sorrows and suffering, like us; and finally, in what makes us most different of all from God—in death—like us. Because every faith is false that teaches that God did not come in the flesh and cannot come in the flesh, for it imagines God as powerless and unmerciful; it imagines Him as a stepmother and not a mother. It imagines Him as powerless, for it ever guards Him from the greatest field of battle—the field of battle with satan, sin, and death.

Satan must be bound, the growths of sin must be torn up from the root of the human soul, the sting of death must be destroyed—ah, the greatest and hardest work must be done, as if the whole world needed to be held on His shoulders. Our God was able to endure this battle, and victoriously at that. People of other faiths are afraid even in their thoughts to allow their gods such a battle in which their opponents could win. And what sort of a mother would she be who would not lean down to the earth out of love for her child to comfort him, sing him lullabies, and coo at him? Especially if the child were in the flames or amongst wild animals!

O Lord, forgive us for asking such questions! What sort of merciful Creator would You be if You would not come down to us in Your mercy, if You had only looked at our unhappiness from a misty and sorrowless distance, and never stretched out a single cold finger to our flame, or stepped a foot into the pit where the wild animals are tearing us? Truly, You came down to us, and even lower than earthly love would require. You were born in the flesh in order to live with the fleshly and save the fleshly. You partook of the suffering of Your whole creation. You did not share this cup of bitter communion with anyone, but drank it all Yourself to the dregs. Therefore, You are our Savior, for You were God amidst us; You were God amidst us, and therefore could You be our Savior. **Glory to Thee, Jesus Immanuel!**

Serving the Very Center of the Cloth of the New Creation

As for Joseph, he with fear and trembling saw ever more clearly that next to him was being woven a cloth that is longer than the light of the sun and wider than the air; a cloth for which the Most High Himself is the warp, and the angels and all creation are the weft. The lot had not fallen to him of serving as the instrument of God in the very center of the cloth of the New Creation. Until man feels that God is doing His work through him, he will feel weak and infirm, undetermined, and have contempt for himself. But when a man feels that God has taken him in His hands like a smithy takes iron for smithing, he will feel at once both strong and humble, clear in his actions, glorifying his God.

And Joseph rising up from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife. *And he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.* When we read the Holy Gospel, we should **bring the mind of the Gospel into ourselves, and not our minds into the Gospel.** Himself marveling, the Evangelist tells about the miracle of the Nativity of the Savior. For him the most important thing is to show that this Nativity came about it a miraculous way.

Here is now the fourth proof of this brought by the Evangelist Matthew in today's Gospel reading. First, he said that the Virgin Mary is only betrothed to Joseph: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph... Second, he says: she was found with child, of the Holy Ghost. Third, Matthew informs us that the angel in the dream announces her pregnancy as miraculous and supernatural. And now, fourthly, the Evangelist repeats the same thought with the help of the words: And he knew her not till she brought forth her firstborn son. Thus it is clear as day that Matthew does not even think of saying that after this Birth, Joseph joins with Mary. What did not happen till she brought forth her firstborn son did not happen later either, when she had given birth to her Son.

If we say of a certain person that as long as services are going on in the church, he does not pay any attention to the priest's words, then we do not even think of saying that the man paid attention to the priest's words at the end of the service. Or, if we say of a shepherd that he sings as long as the sheep are grazing, we do not mean that the shepherd does not sing when the sheep stop grazing. (*"As it is said of the time of the Flood, that the crow did not return to the ark while the earth was not yet dry—it would mean that it did not return afterwards either. (Or) as Christ says, and lo, I am with you always, even till the end of the word—will He not be with us afterwards also?"—Blessed Theophylact.*)

The Firstborn Son

The words firstborn son relates exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ (Pss 88:28; compare 2 Kings 7:12–16; Heb 1:5–6; Rom 8:29), Who is the firstborn of all kings and the firstborn amongst many brethren (Rom 8:29); that is, amongst the saved and adopted people. If the word firstborn were written with a capital F, like a personal name, there would be no ambiguity. Or if before the word firstborn were a comma, there would likewise be no ambiguity and no perplexity. Meanwhile, the word firstborn should be read as if it were a personal name and with a comma before it: She brought forth her Son, Firstborn. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Firstborn as the Creator of a new Kingdom, as the New Adam.

It is told of St. Ammon ("Lives of the Saints," October 4th) that he was lawfully married for eighteen years without having any physical union with his wife. Holy Great Martyr Anastasia (December 22nd) also lived several years in marriage with Publeus, the Roman senator, without having any

physical contact with him. We give only two examples out of thousands.

In her most pure virginity, before Childbirth, in Childbirth, and after Childbirth, the Virgin Mary throughout the history of the Church provided inspiration for virginal life to thousands and thousands of maidens and youths. Beholding her virginity, many lawful wives tore up their marriages and dedicated themselves to virginal purity. Beholding her, many inveterate harlots rejected their depraved lives, cleansing their defiled souls with tears and prayer. So then how could anyone think that the Most Pure Virgin, the pillar and inspiration of Christian purity and virginity over so many centuries, could be lower in virginity than Anastasia, Thecla, Barbara, Catherine, Parasceva, and numberless others? Or how could anyone think that she who bore in her body the passionless Lord could at any time have had even the shadow of bodily passion? She, who bore God and gave birth to God, *was a Virgin not only in body but also in spirit*, says Holy Hierarch Ambrose. St. Chrysostom, comparing the Holy Spirit with a bee, says, *As a bee will not fly into a foul-smelling vessel, do also the Spirit will not enter an impure soul.*

But let us interrupt our conversation on what should be given less talk and more admiration: **Where there is obedience to the living God and humility before Him, there is also purity.** God heals His obedient and humble servants from all earthly passions and lusts. Therefore, let us dedicate ourselves to cleansing our consciences, our souls, our hearts, and our minds, that we also might be counted worthy of the grace-filled power of the Holy Spirit; that the earth would finally cease to sow its seed in our inner man—and the Holy Spirit would conceive a new life and a new man within us, like unto our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be honor and glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity One in Essence and Undivided, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



During this time of the year that has opened up for us again—through general fasting, by abstaining not only from food, but mainly from evil desires—every Christian who longs for salvation must collect his thoughts and decisively struggle to live more modestly, moderately, and plainly. He must cease trying to look attractive externally and turn toward his internal embellishment. The external vessel will be destroyed; it will disintegrate; it will decay and become food for the worms. However, nothing can ruin the beauty of the soul; on the contrary, the Spirit of God remodels it to a more noble state.

Saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona

CAN THEOLOGY BE COMBINED WITH PHILOSOPHY?

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, "The Orthodox Church in the World."

Question: How can theology be combined with philosophy? What are the points they have in common, the points of contact, and what are the differences? Can we say that classical philosophy and the writings of the holy Fathers are two methods of acquiring knowledge, one empirical and noetic, and the other rational?

Answer: In the fourteenth century, in the discussion between St. Gregory Palamas and Barlaam, this was one of the issues raised.

Barlaam said that there was one single form of knowledge. In other words, the philosophers and the Prophets acquired knowledge of God in the same way. He even asserted that the philosophers were superior to the Prophets because their knowledge was connected with the reason, which is the noblest element of man's being. So the philosophers acquired knowledge of God through their rational faculty, as opposed to the Prophets, who, according to his assertion, saw visions with their imagination, independently of their reason. For that reason he said that the knowledge of God possessed by the Prophets was inferior to that of the philosophers.

St. Gregory Palamas responded to this point. He said that the Prophets are superior to the philosophers, because man has nous and reason. The Prophets beheld God with their nous, not with their imagination, as their nous was illuminated by divine grace, whereas the philosophers speculated with their reason. The nous, not the rational faculty, is the appropriate organ for seeing God. The work of the rational faculty is to be aware of the surrounding world; the work of the nous is to have uninterrupted remembrance of God, and at times it even ascends to the vision of God. This explains why the Apostles had no knowledge at all of philosophy and yet they surpassed the philosophers in knowledge of God. Man's discovery of things through his reason, as in science and philosophy, is not the same as the revelation of God in his heart. That is why Christ said: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8), and **not** "Blessed are the philosophers, who will see God with their reason."

There is a difference between theology and philosophy, which is why St. Gregory the Theologian said that the Apostles spoke about God like fishermen and not like Aristotle. In other words, they spoke about God through the experience of Pentecost, and not through philosophical knowledge. Something that philosophers and theologians evidently have in common is how they express themselves. God-seeing theologians beheld God and, in order to express the experience they had acquired, they used terms current in their era, although they gave them a different meaning. In spite of the

difference between philosophy and theology, there is no need for any conflict, because they function at different levels of knowledge.

St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Basil the Great studied ancient Greek philosophy in Athens. St. Gregory of Nyssa was also very familiar with the philosophy of his age. The same applies to other Fathers of the Church, including, among others, St. Maximus the Confessor and St. Gregory Palamas.

As for St. Gregory Palamas, we know that when he was a student at the University of Constantinople, he had an excellent knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy. After his studies he was summoned before the Governor and the Senate of the Empire to expound Aristotle's views. He spoke so well that his teacher said that, if Aristotle himself had been present, he would have praised him.

Subsequently, however, he abandoned all worldly knowledge and his career, and went to the Holy Mountain, where he prayed continuously: *Lighten my darkness.* He did not mean the darkness of his rational faculty, because he knew Aristotle very well, but the darkness of his nous and heart. Afterwards he reached theoria of God. He saw the All-Holy Virgin, he saw Christ, St. John the Theologian and, on many occasions, the uncreated Light.

The point I want to make is that the Fathers of the Church studied ancient Greek philosophy. They saw the ontological and cosmological problems posed by the philosophers, including, for instance, the ontological question of what being is, where being is, and what God is, and the cosmological question of what the world is, who created the world, why there is evil in the world, and why death exists.

As we know, every philosopher provided his own answers. The answers given by the pre-Socratic philosophers, the Ionic natural philosophers, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoic philosophers and the Neoplatonic philosophers were all different.

The Fathers of the Church studied these ontological and cosmological questions raised by the ancient philosophers. They noted their questions, rejected their answers, and to their questions they gave their own answers drawn from the revelation that they had received, as His Eminence Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon writes.

So we can speak about an encounter between Hellenism and Christianity. The holy Fathers adopted terms from ancient Greek philosophy and gave them new content. For instance, the Neoplatonic philosophers spoke about "ecstasy," in the sense of the soul's departure from the body, but the Fathers, although they used the term "ecstasy," they gave it another meaning, namely, that the nous departs from the carnal and bodily mentality and enters the heart.

The same happened with the term "person." When the ancient Greeks spoke about the person, they meant the mask that actors put on to play a part. Some theologians in the

early Church used the notion of the person wrongly, such as Sabellius, who, when he spoke about the Triune God, meant three revelations of the one God: in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and in the life of the Church. St. Basil the Great, however, adopted the term “person” and linked it with the hypostasis, thus giving it ontological content. According to the Fathers, therefore, “person” means the essence together with the hypostatic properties.

This is how we should work today. We should not reject philosophy, but we should not say that philosophy is the same as theology. Nor can we say that philosophy saves. Philosophy is the so-called “seminal word,” but theology goes beyond philosophy. Theology uses philosophical terms to express the experience of revelation, but it is not philosophy and speculation.

I know that there are some Western theologians who cannot see all these details and subtle analyses, so they misinterpret things. They say, for instance, that St. Dionysius the Areopagite is a Neoplatonist because he uses some Neoplatonic terms, whereas he is not a Neoplatonist at all, for the following simple reason.

Plato asserted that man’s soul, which was previously in the uncreated world of ideas before being enclosed in the body, recollects its previous life, and so it wishes to return to where it was before. This is referred to as Platonic eros (intense longing). In other words, God does not have eros for man, but man for God, so eros is a human weakness, because man feels that he is lacking something. God has fullness, so He does not have eros. Also, Aristotle asserted that God is the prime unmoved mover: God does not move but He moves things. So the two basic principles of classical metaphysics are that God does not have love (eros) and He does not move.

In the writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, as St. Maximus the Confessor interprets them, it says that God is love (eros) and beloved, and as love He moves towards man, and as beloved He draws towards Himself everything that is receptive of love. Here God is described as having love for man and as moving towards man, while at the same time causing those who are receptive of love to move towards Himself. This overturns classical metaphysics and Neoplatonism.

On these two points, among others, the difference between the ancient philosophers and the Fathers of the Church is absolutely clear. We should bear this in mind every time we study the relationship between theology and philosophy, and also between theologians and philosophers.



To throw yourself before God, not to measure your progress, to leave behind all self-will; these are the instruments for the work of the soul.

Abba Poimen the Great

THE INCARNATION AND HUMILITY

New Hieromartyr Hilarion (+1929), Archbishop of Verey. This treatise on the incarnation of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was published in the early twentieth century, when European scholars (particularly in Germany) were blatantly re-writing Christian history and theology. Their light-minded efforts have resounded to our day, reiterating themselves in modern articles, books, and films, rendering St. Hilarion’s treatise ever relevant as well.

With modern religious society’s cooling toward God’s Church, there are not likely to be many people who feel in full measure how the Church celebrates the remembrance of *The Incarnation of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ*. There is perhaps only one attribute that has not yet been forgotten—the *irmos* (initial troparion), *Christ is born, give ye glory...* is chanted in Church more than a month before the feast [of the Nativity] itself. After all, the Church dedicates whole weeks to preparation for the feast.

In parish churches the advent of the great feast is not very noticeable, because the Church *typicon* has lost there all its charm, its profound theology; there, the feast comes on almost immediately. I will not even talk about the fact that in the life of the laity, the feast’s approach is felt only in an increase of domestic hustle-bustle.

The original element of Church life can only be caught these days in the monasteries, where not a single canon or a single *stichera* is skipped. These hymns are given full voice beneath the monastic church domes and fill all present with their content. Hearing them, the faithful’s consciousness breaks away from the earth; not for one day or for a few hours, as in the parish churches—no, it breaks away from the earth long before the feast and remains in the heights of spiritual upliftment, spiritual rapture, for nearly an entire week. Only the Bright Resurrection of Christ is celebrated more radiantly. But in a certain sense, the Nativity services even exceed the Paschal services; and if they do not exceed them, then they at any rate bear an absolutely special character.

The Paschal service is one triumphant, joyful, exultant hymn by the Church to the Risen Lord. The Nativity service has a special element of theology. Throughout the cycle of the Church’s service books, you will not find more abundant dogmatic content than in the services for the Nativity. Here, in short but powerful expressions is contained the fundamental idea of Christianity—the renewal of corrupt human nature by the incarnation of the Son of God.

For example, there is the incomparable *irmos* of the canon read during Compline on the day of the forefeast—unknown, unfortunately, to parish churches: *Be not amazed O Mother, beholding Me now as a babe, whom the Father begat from the womb before the morning star. For I have come openly to restore and glorify with Myself the fallen nature of mortal man, that magnifies thee in faith and love.*

As in these brief words, so throughout the entire Nativity service is revealed the fundamental idea of Christianity, from which must proceed all Christian theology. In the scholastic theology taught in our church schools, this great idea of the incarnation for the restoration of fallen human nature is not given its due place; but in the theology of the greatest fathers and teachers of the Church, this very idea lay at the foundation of everything. Look, for example, at the homily of St. Athanasius the Great *On the Incarnation of God the Word and on His Coming to Us in the Flesh*. The ancient Church lived by this idea more intensely than the Church of our times. It fought for this idea and suffered for it, striking down those who betrayed it with fearsome *anathemas*.

But in the modern religious awareness, this idea departs from its royal place, and at times this fundamental idea of true religious awareness disappears altogether. Are there many who could now say together with St. Basil the Great, *I cannot worship creatures, because I myself have the commandment to become a god!* Denial of the incarnation, denial of the Lord Jesus Christ's divine dignity is unthinkable to a member of the Church, and any denier of it has of course already thereby apostatized from the Church. Who is the liar if not he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son (cf. 1 Jn 2:22).

These words of the first theologian, who reclined upon the breast of the incarnate Son of God, need to be repeated as often as possible in our day, when people talk so much about the Gospels, about Christ's teachings, but do not want to know in Him the incarnate Only-Begotten Son of God. They talk about Christ as a great man, a great teacher, and think that this is quite sufficient. The rest is not important. You can be a Christian without all the rest. Let them all know the words of the son of Thunder, that any denial of the incarnation makes a person antichrist, the greatest liar.

Listening to the modern religious pulse beat, you involuntarily notice that in this sense, antichrist reigns in religious consciousness. Lately, large waves of scientific ideas have rushed upon the rock that lies in the foundation of the Church. In the area of New Testament studies, especially many new—or renewed—ideas are appearing lately from comparative study of religion.

New, monumental discoveries are broadening our knowledge of the ancient East, and people have started to discuss the Gospels in the light of this knowledge. Once, the magi came

from the East to worship the Infant God-Man, and brought their treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. From the same countries that produced the magi, now different wise men are coming to Europe. Entire scientific expeditions, supplied by governments and private individuals, are carrying away their loot in huge treasure boxes. There are no gold, frankincense, or myrrh in these treasure boxes, but rather entire blocks of stone, or broken pieces of stone with mysterious inscriptions. Scholars in Europe will read these mysterious inscriptions and will not worship the newborn Infant. The star of the East leads science away from Bethlehem. Comparative studies of eastern religions end in nothing other than the very denial of the incarnation of the Son of God.

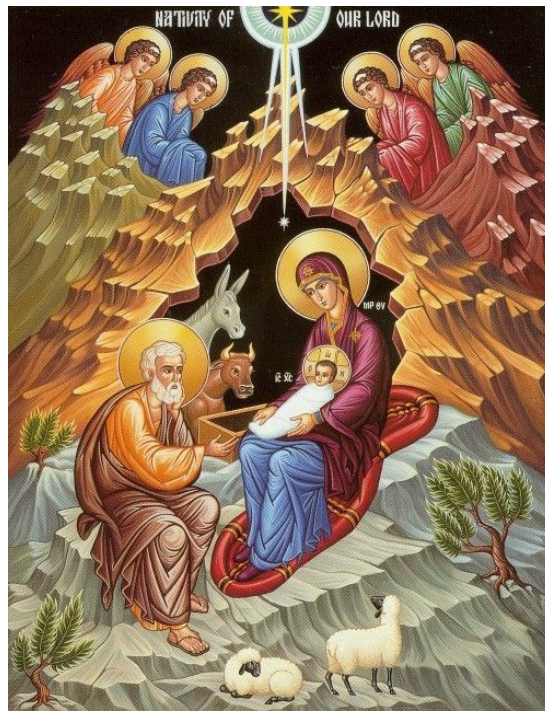
When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some,

Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Mt. 16:13–16). The question was put about the dignity of the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In the disciple's reply through the lips of Peter was given the entire Christology of the Church. The Savior of the world is the incarnate Only-Begotten Son of God. This Christology was new.

Flesh and blood of the Jewish religious consciousness could not reveal the truth of the incarnation. But who do you, representatives of modern comparative religion, say that Jesus Christ is? Oh, anything but the incarnate Son of God. He is Buddha, He is Marduk, Attis, Adonis, He is Mithra,

god of the magi, He is one of the eastern gods, He is whoever you like, other than the Son of the Living God.

In new works, where comparative study of religion is applied to the evaluation of Christ and Christianity, a section can always be found under the title of "Pre-Christian Jesus." Christianity could also have arisen without Christ; it was sufficient to collect, mix, and clean up the eastern myths, in which Jesus was already given in His main characteristics. It is not Christ who created Christianity, but Christianity which created Christ. So here you have the mythological theories of (Joseph) Smith, (Arthur) Drews, (Johannes) Jensen, who so daringly acclaimed the "Monist's Union" all across Germany. They try to prove—no more no less—that Jesus Christ was never on the earth. Jesus is only the personification of an eastern myth.



Take Arthur Drews's two volumes entitled, "The Myth of Christ." They spawned an entire swarm of brochures entitled, "Did Jesus really live?" Drews' book was translated into Russian also, but it was confiscated only a month and a half ago. The liberal press wept crocodile tears over "the persecution of science." They say there was nothing dangerous in them, only pure science. Yes, pure science agitating against Christianity; science created by dilettantes, as "His Theological Excellency" of German science called them—Adolf von Harnack, who himself made such noise only recently with his liberal lectures on "the essence of Christianity".

The religious consciousness of the ancient Church was outraged by Arianism, which after all did not deny the incarnation. Well now something worse than Arianism has appeared—it denies even the reality of Christ's earthly life, and in an Orthodox country the newspapers are lamenting, "Why did they confiscate A. Drews's book, *The Myth of Christ*! But the religious consciousness of Protestantism, spawning from its bowels a new child worthy of its progenitor, barely shudders: even pastors come to the defense of the mythological theory. Society is more disturbed over it than the "hierarchy." For instance, this is what an observer of the public dispute between pastors and monists wrote about the question of the historical existence of Jesus Christ: "At the tribune where the question of the historical existence of the Savior was being debated, all was calm: the monists and pastors amicably whispered amongst themselves, ate sandwiches, drank beer..." (Priest N. N. Sakharov, *Theological Herald*, [1911], 3:777 [Russian]).

Well, could a similar scene have been thinkable during the time of the First Ecumenical Council, when St. Athanasius the Great rebuked the impious Arians? There was a feat of the soul, its struggle for life—for *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.* (1 Jn 5:12). But here... Here we have no more than an academic debate, with beer and sandwiches taken by a sated and self-satisfied bourgeoisie.

Why is there such a relationship to the incarnation of the Son of God? It seems that the roots of this relationship are deeply seated in the moral self-awareness of modern man. This self-awareness is mainly proud. And what does it mean to believe in the incarnation? It means, first of all, merely to confess that earlier, human nature was very good. It came that way from the hands of the Creator. Human freedom brought sin, the breakdown of man's nature, and *a civil war began in human nature*, as one holy father writes. By abusing his freedom, man so corrupted his nature that he could only exclaim, *I am an accursed, wretched man!* I cannot save myself. We need a new creation, we need an in-pouring of new, grace-filled strength.

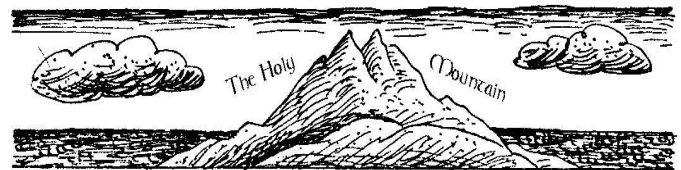
This is what all mankind should say in order to believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. Such a humble awareness, such a humble confession of our weakness, our guilt before

the work of God's hands—is this in the spirit of modern man? But the modern consciousness is penetrated with the idea of evolution, the idea of progress; that is, with the very ideas that can feed human pride.

Christianity requires a humble awareness. My forefather, Adam, was perfect, but I, mankind, introduced only sin and corruption. The Church calls us to humility when it calls Adam our ancestor. But evolution? Descent from the ape? No matter how modestly we rate ourselves, it is impossible not to think with a certain pride: "After all, I am not an ape; after all, progress is manifest in me." Thus, by calling the ape our ancestor, evolution feeds human pride. If we compare ourselves to the ape we can be proud of our progress, but if we think of sinless Adam, outward progress loses its value. The progress is external, but it is also a sophisticated sin. If mankind is steadily progressing forward, then we can hope in ourselves. We create ourselves. But the Church says the opposite: *We could not become incorrupt and immortal had not the Incorrupt and Immortal One first become the same as we are. Believing in the incarnation means confessing that without God, all of mankind is nothing.*

Throughout the ages, the Church carries the ideal of deification. This ideal is very high, but it demands very much from man. It is unthinkable without the incarnation; it demands first of all that man be humble. Mankind is renouncing this high ideal, and has no need of the incarnation of the Son of God. An infinitely depreciated ideal of life allows man to talk of progress, and gives him the opportunity to be proud of his accomplishments. These two series of ideas make up two different worldviews: that of the Church, and that which is not of the Church. The worldview that is not of the Church—descent from the ape, progress, having no need of and denying the incarnation—is pride. Accepting the incarnation is inseparably bound with humility. Pride wars with the incarnation, as with something unneeded.

Taking part in the triumphant Church celebration of the Nativity of Christ, we should shout aloud: **Be humble, proud man, and believe in the incarnation of the Only Begotten Son of God!**



Repentance is the abandoning of all false paths that have been trodden by men's feet, and men's thoughts and desires, and a return to the new path: Christ's path. But how can a sinful man repent unless he, in his heart, meets with the Lord and knows his own shame? Before little Zacchaeus saw the Lord with his eyes, he met Him in his heart and was ashamed of all his ways.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

Ὁ Ῥόλος τῆς Παναγίας στὸ Σχέδιο τῆς Θείας Οἰκονομίας

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικὸ «Κυριακή», Δευτέρα 26 Δεκεμβρίου 2022, ἀριθμ. φύλλου 2522, ἐκδίδεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κοινοβιακὴ Γυναικεῖα Τερά Μονὴ Ἁγίου Αὐγουστίνου Φλωρίνης. Γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης πρώην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης, (+2010).

Χθὲς ἑορτή, σήμερα πάλι ἑορτή. Χθὲς ἐώρταζε ὁ ἥλιος, σήμερα ἐορτάζει ἡ σελήνη.

–Μπᾶ, παράξενα πράγματα μᾶς λές. Τὸν ἥλιο καὶ τὸ φεγγάρι προσκυνᾶμε τώρα ἐμεῖς;

Πρὸ Χριστοῦ, ναί, οἱ ἄνθρωποι λάτρευαν τὸν ἥλιο, τὰ ἄστρα καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα εἰδωλα. Καὶ μέχρι σήμερα στὴν Περσία λατρεύουν τὴ φωτιά· καὶ στὴν Ἀφρικὴ ὑπάρχουν φυλὲς ποὺ μὲ τὴν ἀνατολὴ χτυποῦν ἕνα τύμπανο καὶ πέφτουν προσκυνώντας τὸν ἥλιο.

Μὰ τώρα ἐμεῖς πῶς λές ὅτι ἐορτάζουμε τὸν ἥλιο καὶ τὴ σελήνη; Δὲν τὸ λέω ἐγώ, τὸ λέει τὸ ἀπολυτίκιο ποὺ συνεχῶς ἀκοῦμε τὶς ἅγιες αὐτὲς ἡμέρες:

«Ἡ Γέννησίς σου, Χριστέ
ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν,
ἀνέτειλε τῷ κόσμῳ τὸ φῶς
τὸ τῆς γνώσεως
ἐν αὐτῇ γὰρ οἱ τοῖς
ἄστροις λατρεύοντες
ὑπὸ ἀστέρος ἐδιδάσκοντο
σὲ προσκυνεῖν, τὸν Ἥλιον
τῆς δικαιοσύνης,
καὶ σὲ γινώσκειν ἐξ ὕψους
Ἀνατολήν.

Κύριε, δόξα σοι».

Μὲ ἀπλᾶ λόγια· Χριστέ, στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια, προτοῦ νὰ ἔρθης, σκοτάδι ἦταν πάνω στὴ γῆ· τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς πλάνης, τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας, τῶν προλήψεων, ὄλων τῶν ὀργίων τοῦ ἀρχαίου κόσμου. Κι ὅπως ὅταν βγῆ ὁ ἥλιος τὸ σκοτάδι διαλύεται, ἔτσι καὶ Σὺ μὲ τὴ Γέννησί σου σκόρπισες τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος καὶ «ἀνέτειλε τῷ κόσμῳ τὸ φῶς τὸ τῆς γνώσεως», γνώρισε δηλαδὴ ὁ κόσμος ἐσένα τὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεό. Μάλιστα κι αὐτοὺς τοὺς τρεῖς μάγους, ποὺ σὲ ζητοῦσαν, ἀκριβῶς ἐπειδὴ λάτρευαν τ' ἀστέρια, ἐσὺ ἀστέρι ἔστειλες νὰ τοὺς ὀδηγήσῃ νὰ σὲ βροῦν, κ' ἔτσι ἦρθαν καὶ προσκύνησαν ἐσένα, «τὸν Ἥλιον τῆς δικαιοσύνης».

Δὲν ἦταν λάθος λοιπὸν αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶπα. Ἦλιος εἶνε ὁ Χριστός, ἀλλὰ πολὺ διαφορετικὸς ἀπὸ τὸν φυσικὸ ἥλιο· ἀφοῦ δι' αὐτοῦ, τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, δημιουργήθηκαν ὅλα, καὶ ὁ ἥλιος βέβαια· «δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο» (Σύμβ. πίστ. 2).

Θυμήθηκα τώρα κάτι σχετικὸ καὶ σᾶς τὸ λέω ὡς ἀνέκδοτο. Κάποτε σ' ἕνα χωριὸ ἕνας ἡμιμαθὴς νεαρὸς ἔλεγε παντοῦ μὲ ἰταμότητα:

–Δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεός, ποιὸς τὸν εἶδε τὸ Θεό;

Τότε ἕνας ἀπλὸς ἄνθρωπος, γέρος μὲ ἄσπρα μαλλιά, ἀγράμματος τσοπάνος, τοῦ λέει:

–Ἔλα νὰ δῆς τὸ Θεό.

Ἦταν μεσημέρι, Ἰούλιος μῆνας, ὁ ἥλιος ἔκαιγε τὶς πέτρες. Τὸν ἀνεβάζει σὲ μιὰ καρέκλα τοῦ καφφενείου.

–Γιὰ κοίτα ψηλά, τοῦ λέει, κοίτα τὸν ἥλιο.

Ποῦ νὰ κοιτάξῃ αὐτός! μπορεῖς νὰ κοιτάξῃς καὶ νὰ μὴν τυφλωθῆς;

–Δὲν μπορῶ, λέει ὁ νέος.

–Ἔ, λέει ὁ γέρος ἂν δὲν μπορῆς νὰ δῆς τὸν ἥλιο, ποῦ εἶνε ἕνα δημιούργημα, ἔχεις τὴν ἀξίωσι νὰ δῆς τὸ Δημιουργὸ τοῦ ἥλιου; αὐτὸ εἶνε παράλογο.

Ἔτσι ἀποστόμωσε τὸν ὑπερήφανο νεανία. Καί, ὑπογραμμίζω, δὲν ὑπάρχει μόνο ἕνας ἥλιος· ὑπάρχουν ἑκατομμύρια ἥλιοι στὸ σύμπαν. Κι ἀκόμη, ὅτι μιὰ μέρα αὐτὸς μὲν ὁ φυσικὸς ἥλιος θὰ σβήσῃ ὅπως σβήνουν τὰ καντήλια καὶ τὰ πυροτεχνήματα, ἀλλὰ ὁ Ἦλιος - Χριστὸς θὰ μένη εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων.

Ἐπαναλαμβάνω λοιπὸν· χθὲς ἀνέτειλε «ὁ Ἦλιος τῆς δικαιοσύνης», καὶ σήμερα προβάλλει ἡ σελήνη! Ὅπως στὸν οὐρανὸ τὸ λαμπρότερο σῶμα μετὰ τὸν ἥλιο εἶνε ἡ σελήνη, ἔτσι στὸν οὐρανὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μετὰ τὸν Ἦλιο - Χριστὸ ἀνατέλλει σήμερα ὡς πανσέληνος μὲ τὸ γλυκύτατο φῶς τῆς ἡ Παναγίας μας. Σήμερα εἶνε ἡ Σύναξις τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου.

Ἀφ' οὗτου ἐγίνε ὁ κόσμος, ἀδελφοί μου, μέχρι σήμερα ἐπάνω στὸ φλούδι τῆς γῆς γεννήθηκαν δισεκατομμύρια γυναῖκες. Ἄλλες διέπρεψαν γιὰ τὸ κάλλος τους, ἄλλες γιὰ τὴν καταγωγὴ τους, ἄλλες λόγῳ τῶν συζύγων ἢ τῶν τέκνων τους κ.τ.λ.. Ὅλων ὅμως τὰ ὀνόματα ἔσβησαν σὰν τὰ πυροτεχνήματα· ἕνα μόνο μένει καὶ θ' ἀκούγεται αἰωνίως σ' ἀνατολὴ καὶ δύσι, βορρᾶ καὶ νότο· τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου.

Τί ἦταν ἡ Παναγία; Μία φτωχὴ κόρη. Φτωχὴ σὲ ὑλικά πλούτη, μὰ πλούσια σὲ ἄλλο θησαυρό. Τί θησαυρό; Θὰ σᾶς τὸ πῶ μ' ἕνα παράδειγμα.

Μὲ ἐπισκέφθηκε ἕνα φτωχαδάκι.

–Πῶς περνᾶς; ρωτῶ.

–Καλά, μοῦ λέει, εἶμαι πλούσιος.

–Μὰ ἐγὼ σὲ ξέρω, σκουπίζεις δρόμους στὸ δῆμο



Ἀθηναίων· τί πλούσιος μου λές; σοῦ ἔπες κανένα λαχεῖο;

-Ἐχω σὸ σπίτι ἕνα θησαυρό.

-Ποιόν;

-Τὴ γυναῖκα μου!...

Κ' ἔτσι εἶνε. Τί νὰ τὰ κάνη ὁ ἄλλος τὰ ἑκατομμύρια του, ὅταν ἔχη μιὰ γυναῖκα «γλωσσώδη» (Παρ. 21:19) ἢ υπερήφανη ἢ φαύλη καὶ ἄπιστη ποὺ τὸν ἀτιμάζει; Χαρὰ σὲ ὅποιον βρῆκε ἀγία γυναῖκα· αὐτὸς βρῆκε θησαυρό (βλ. ἔ.ἀ. 31:10). Ἡ γυναικεία ἀρετὴ εἶνε θησαυρός. Κι ὅπως ἔλεγαν οἱ πρόγονοί μας, «πᾶς ὁ τ' ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ ὑπὸ γῆς χρυσὸς ἀρετῆς οὐκ ἀντάξιος» (Πλάτ., Νόμ. 5,728Α· παρὰ Μιχ. Ἰατροῦ, Πόθεν καὶ διατί σ. 70). Παραπάνω ἀπ' τὰ λεφτὰ εἶνε ἡ ἀρετὴ.

Ἡ Παναγία εἶνε ἡ ὄντως ἐνάρετη. Εἶχε πρῶτα - πρῶτα ταπεινώσι. Ὡς ἡ ταπεινώσι! Ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἔλεγε· «Ὅταν ἰδοῦμέν τινα ταπεινόν, τὸν βλέπομεν ὡς ἄγγελον, μᾶς φαίνεται ν' ἀνοίξωμεν τὴν καρδίαν μας νὰ τὸν βάλωμεν μέσα καὶ ὅταν ἰδοῦμέν τινα υπερήφανον, τὸν βλέπομεν ὡς τὸν διάβολον, γυρίζομεν τὸ πρόσωπόν μας εἰς ἄλλο μέρος νὰ μὴ τὸν βλέπωμεν.» (ἡμ. βιβλ. Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός, Ἀθῆναι 2013 31, σ. 117).

Ἡ Παναγία εἶχε ἀκόμα τὴν παρθενία στὸν ἀπόλυτο βαθμό. Ἀγνή, παρθένος πρὸ τοῦ τόκου, παρθένος ἐν τῷ τόκῳ, παρθένος μετὰ τὸν τόκον· εἶνε ἡ μόνη «Ἀειπάρθενος». Σὲ ὅσους ἀποροῦν, πῶς εἶνε δυνατὸν νὰ γεννήσῃ παιδί καὶ νὰ μείνῃ παρθένος, ἀπαντῶ μ' ἕνα παράδειγμα. Ὅπως ὁ ἥλιος περνάει τὸ τζάμι χωρὶς νὰ τὸ σπάῃ, ἔτσι ὁ νοητὸς Ἥλιος, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, πέρασε μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ πάναγνα σπλάχνα τῆς ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου καὶ δὲν κατέστρεψε τὴν παρθενία της.

Αὐτὴν τὴν Ἀειπάρθενο τιμᾷ σήμερα ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία. Εἶνε ἀνεπανάληπτος ὁ ῥόλος της στὸ πάνσοφο σχέδιο τῆς Θεῆς Οἰκονομίας γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους· οὔτε ὑπῆρξε σὸ παρελθὸν οὔτε θὰ ὑπάρξῃ σὸ μέλλον ἄλλο πρόσωπο ποὺ θὰ τοῦ ἐμπιστευθῇ ὁ Θεὸς τέτοια ἀποστολή· μία καὶ μόνη φορὰ ὁ Θεὸς ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος, μία καὶ μοναδική.

Ἡ Παναγία συνέβαλε σ' αὐτὸ ἐκουσίως καὶ ἐλευθέρως. Προσέφερε δὲ γι' αὐτὸ ὄχι κάτι δικό της, π.χ. κάποιον ἀντικείμενο ποὺ τῆς ἀνήκε, ἀλλὰ ὁλόκληρο τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Ἐαυτὸ της. Συνήργησε μὲ τὸ Θεὸ συνειδητά.

Ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἀγάπησε, διότι τὸν εἴλκυσε τὸ κάλλος τῆς ψυχῆς της· καὶ αὐτὴ ἐπίσης ἐλκύσθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπειρὴ ἀγάπη Του, τὸν πόθησε, δόθηκε σ' αὐτόν· τὸν νυμφεύθηκε, ἔγινε Νύμφη Του, γι' αὐτὸ λέμε «Χαῖρε, Νύμφη ἀνύμφευτε»!

Ποιὸς ἦταν ὁ σκοπὸς τοῦ σχεδίου τοῦ Ὑψίστου; Ὑψιστος νὰ ἐνωθῇ ὁ Θεὸς μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὁ Ἄκτιστος

μὲ τὸ κτιστὸ λογικὸ πλάσμα του. Καὶ ποῦ ἔγινε αὐτὴ ἡ ἔνωσις; Μέσα στὴν παρθενικὴ μήτρα τῆς Μαριάμ, τῆς πανάγνου Κόρης τῆς Ναζαρέτ. Καὶ πῶς συντελέσθηκε τὸ ὑπερφυῆς τοῦτο μυστήριον; Ὅχι βεβαίως μὲ τὸν πεζὸ τρόπο ποὺ γεννώμεθα ἐμεῖς οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, ὄχι δηλαδὴ ἐκ σπέρματος ἀνδρὸς, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὸν ἄρρητο τρόπο ποὺ γνωρίζει μόνον ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ποὺ ἀρμόζει σ' αὐτὴ τὴ μοναδικὴ καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτη γέννησι· ἡ Παρθένος Μαρία δηλαδὴ συνέλαβε καὶ κυοφόρησε τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ «ἐκ Πνεύματος ἁγίου» (Σύμβ. πίστ. 3).

Οἱ πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας λένε, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς περιέμενε αἰῶνες ὁλοκλήρους νὰ φτάσῃ «τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου» (Γαλ. 4:4) καὶ νὰ ἔλθῃ στὴ ζωὴ τὸ μοναδικὸ αὐτὸ Πλάσμα, νὰ γεννηθῇ πάνω στὴ γῆ ἡ Γυναῖκα ποὺ μόνον αὐτὴ μποροῦσε νὰ γίνῃ ἡ Μητέρα Του.

Ἴδου λοιπόν, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς Παναγίας στὸ σχέδιο τῆς σωτηρίας μας· ἔγινε ἡ σκάλα μὲ τὴν ὁποία ὁ Θεὸς κατέβηκε ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν στὴ γῆ· κ' ἐν συνεχείᾳ ἔγινε ἡ γέφυρα ποὺ μεταφέρει τοὺς σωζομένους ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανόν. «Χαῖρε, κλίμαξ ἐπουράνιε, δι' ἧς κατέβη ὁ Θεός· χαῖρε, γέφυρα μετάγουσα τοὺς ἐκ γῆς πρὸς οὐρανόν» (Ἀκάθ. ὕμν. Γ' 3α).

Χθὲς ὁ νοητὸς Ἥλιος, σήμερα ἡ ὠραιότατη Πανσέληνος. Γεννᾶται ὅμως τὸ ἐρώτημα· τιμᾶται ἡ Παναγία σήμερα; Ἄλλοτε ἄκουγαν τὸ ὄνομά της κ' ἔκλαιγαν. Ὁ ζευγολάτης κι ὁ τσοπάνος, ὁ ψαρᾶς κι ὁ ναύτης, ὁ ἄρρωστος κι ὁ φυλακισμένος, ὁ στρατιώτης κι ὁ ἐργάτης, ἡ μάνα καὶ ἡ κόρη, ὅλοι ἔλεγαν «Παναγία μου!». Οἱ Ἕλληνες τὴν εἶδαν καὶ στὴν Κορυτσᾶ καὶ στὸ Μοράβα. Ξεχνοῦσαν τὴ μάνα καὶ τὸν πατέρα τους, καὶ θυμόντουσαν Ἐκείνην. Ἐτιμᾶτο τότε ἡ Παναγία.

Σήμερα ὅμως πολλοὶ ὄχι μόνον δὲν τὴν τιμοῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀτιμάζουν. Δὲν εἶνε μόνον οἱ χιλιασταί· εἶνε καὶ κάποιον «χριστιανοί». Γι' αὐτοὺς ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς λέει· «Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὲ ὑβρίσῃ, νὰ φονεύσῃ τὸν πατέρα μου, τὴν μητέρα μου, τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, καὶ ὕστερα τὸ μάτι νὰ μοῦ βγάλῃ, ἔχω χρέος ὡσὰν χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συγχωρήσω. Τὸ δὲ νὰ ὑβρίσῃ τὸν Χριστόν μου καὶ τὴν Παναγίαν μου, δὲν θέλω νὰ τὸν βλέπω» (ἔ.ἀ. σ. 185).

Καμμιά γυναῖκα, καὶ ἡ πιὸ διεφθαρμένη, δὲν ὑβρίζεται ἔτσι. Γι' αὐτὸ σᾶς παρακαλῶ, ἐσεῖς νὰ κλείσετε αὐτὰ τὰ στόματα. Ὅπως δὲν ἐπιτρέπετε σὲ κανένα νὰ βρίζῃ τὴ μάνα σου, πολὺ περισσότερο τὴν Πανσέληνο ποὺ ἐορτάζουμε σήμερα.

Εὐχομαι νὰ ξεριζωθοῦν καὶ τὰ τελευταῖα ἴχνη τῆς βλασφημίας, ὥστε μὲ μιὰ καρδιά νὰ ὑμνοῦμε Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν εἰς αἰῶνας αἰώνων· ἀμήν!

Ὁ Κύριος ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῆς Θεοτόκου ἅς ἐλεήσῃ ὅλους μας.

(†) ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος

Όχι εις τὸ Ἀμάρτημα, Ναί εις τὴν Μετάνοιαν

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Συχνὰ ἐμφανίζονται μερικοὶ κληρικοὶ ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζουν μὲ δυσεξηγήτη εὐαισθησία τοὺς ὁμοφυλόφιλους καὶ τοὺς ἐντάσσουν στὴν πομπαντική τους δραστηριότητα. Δὲν τοὺς βλέπουν ὡς ἁμαρτωλοὺς καὶ φιλήδονους, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἀδύναμους καὶ συμπαθεῖς καὶ προσπαθοῦν μὲ διάφορα «ἐπιστημονικά» ἐπιχειρήματα νὰ μᾶς πείσουν ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία κάποια στιγμή θὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει τὸ πρόβλημα τῶν ὁμοφυλόφιλων καὶ μὲ σοβαρότητα καὶ ἀγάπη θὰ τοὺς ἀναγνωρίσει τὴν ἀδυναμία, ποὺ ἔχουν καὶ ἡ ὁποία δὲν ὀφείλεται σ' αὐτοὺς ἀλλὰ σὲ λάθος τῆς δημιουργίας τους, κάτι ποὺ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἐξηγήσουμε. Ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι ἐπιχειρήματα τῶν συμπαθούντων τοὺς ὁμοφυλόφιλους!

Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὅμως καὶ ἡ σοβαρὴ ἀντίρρηση. Τί μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ τί ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ ἀποφασίσει, ὅταν ἡ ὁμοφυλοφιλία εἶναι μεγάλο ἁμάρτημα, ποὺ μόνον μὲ σταθερὴ μετάνοια καὶ μὲ γενναία ἐγκράτεια ἀντιμετωπίζεται. Εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἀποχαρκτηρίσει τὸ μεγάλο ἁμάρτημα καὶ κατ' οἰκονομίαν νὰ τὸ ἀνεχθεῖ; Μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ κάτι τέτοιο; Ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ ἀναθεωρεῖ τὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ τὶς προσαρμόζει ἀνάλογα μὲ τὶς ἐπικρατοῦσες ἀντιλήψεις τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ κόσμου, γιὰ νὰ ἀποφεύγει τὶς διαμαρτυρίες τῶν ἀθέων, τῶν ἀπίστων καὶ τῶν σαρκολατρῶν; Νὰ ἐκσυγχρονίσει τὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ μεταβάλλει τὶς ἁμαρτίες σὲ «δικαιώματα», ποὺ πρέπει νὰ σεβόμαστε; Ἐπιτέλους, ἔχουμε χάσει παντελῶς τὴν κοινὴ λογικὴ καὶ μὲ τὸν ἀσύδοτο στοχασμὸ μας βλέπουμε τὸ μαῦρο ὡς ἄσπρο καὶ τὸ κτηνώδες πάθος ὡς ἀξιοσεβαστὸ «δικαίωμα».

Ἄς μὴ εἶναι οἱ συγκεκριμένοι κληρικοὶ τόσο στοργικοὶ ἀπέναντι στοὺς ὁμοφυλόφιλους καὶ ἄς τοὺς δείχνουν τὴν πραγματικὴ ἀγάπη, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἀπομακρύνουν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ τὴ διαστροφή. Καὶ νὰ μὴ προκαλοῦν μὲ τὸν ἐπιπόλαιο ἰσχυρισμὸ τους ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία δέχεται ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, χωρὶς νὰ κάνει διακρίσεις. Ναί, ὅλους τοὺς δέχεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ ἀποδέχεται καὶ τὰ ἁμαρτωλά τους πάθη. Ἄς μειώσουν καὶ τὴν ὑπεράσπιση τῶν ὁμοφυλόφιλων, ἀφοῦ ποτὲ δὲν τοὺς βλέπουμε στοὺς ναοὺς μας!

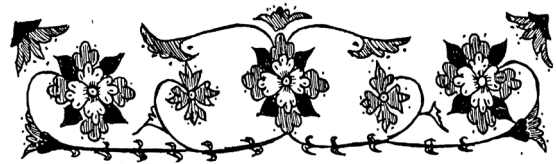
Στὴν ἐποχὴ μας οἱ ὁμοφυλόφιλοι δημοσιοποιοῦν μὲ ὑπερηφάνεια τὸ ἁμάρτημά τους, μᾶς δείχνουν τοὺς συντρόφους τους, μιλοῦν γιὰ τὸν ἔρωτά τους, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμία τους νὰ «ἀποκτήσουν» παιδιὰ μὲ παρένθετες μητέρες, γιὰ νὰ τὰ ἀναθρέψουν μὲ μεγάλη στοργὴ καὶ νὰ τοὺς δείξουν τὸν προσωπικό τους ὀλέθριο δρόμο τῆς ὁμοφυλοφιλίας!

Ὅταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ κατέχουν κάποιο δημόσιο ἀξίωμα ἢ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ κυβερνήσουν καὶ τὴ χώρα,

προκαλοῦν ἀλγεινὴ ἐντύπωση στὸ λαὸ καὶ δίνουν τὸ κακὸ παράδειγμα στοὺς νέους. Τὰ δὲ μέσα ἐνημέρωσης ἀναφέρονται στὶς δραστηριότητές τους καὶ προβάλλουν καὶ τὶς λεπτομέρειες τῆς προσωπικῆς τους ζωῆς, κάτι ποὺ διαφθείρει μικροὺς καὶ μεγάλους.

Οἱ ὁμοφυλόφιλοι κάνουν παρελάσεις καταισχύνει καὶ κατηγοροῦν τὴν κοινωνία γιὰ τὶς διακρίσεις, ποὺ γίνονται εἰς βάρος τους. Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὅμως οἱ κατὰ συνθήκην κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις, ὅπου βλέπουμε ὑψηλόβαθμους κληρικοὺς νὰ συγκαίρουν ὁμοφυλόφιλους, ὅταν καταλαμβάνουν κάποιο ἀξίωμα στὴν πολιτικὴ ἐξουσία, ἀποδεχόμενοι μερικῶς καὶ τὶς ἁμαρτωλὲς ἐπιλογὲς τῆς ζωῆς τους!

Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιά ὄριο στὴν ἐπικοινωνία. Ὅλοι εἶναι δικοὶ μας. Ὅλοι εἶναι ἄξιοι. Ἀπ' ὅλους ἀδιακρίτως περιμένουμε εὐεργετικὰ μέτρα γιὰ τὴν κοινωνία, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία! Παραλογισμὸς σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ, ποὺ ἀποκαλύπτει τὴ μειωμένη πνευματικὴ εὐαισθησία ἀπέναντι στὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δυστυχῶς εἶναι ἄνθρωποι τοῦ παρόντος καὶ ὄχι τοῦ μέλλοντος.



Ὁ Μακάριος Γέρον Παΐσιος χαριτωμένος πάντοτε στὶς διδαχές του, μᾶς ἄφησε μεταξὺ ἄλλων σχετικῶν καὶ τὰ ἑξῆς: Τοῦ εἶπαν κάποιοι ἐπισκέπτες:

Γέροντα λένε! Μήπως τὸ ρᾶσο κάνει τὸν παπᾶ; Καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἀπήντησε:

—Πρόσεχε λ.χ. δύο ἐλιές ποὺ ἡ μία ἔχει φύλλα καὶ ἡ ἄλλη δὲν ἔχει. Ποιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς δύο σοῦ ἀρέσει... Ὅταν ἤμουν στὸ Καλύβι τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, μιὰ φορὰ ξεφλούδισα τὸν κορμὸ τῆς ἐλιάς, ποὺ ἦταν στὴν αὐλὴ καὶ ἔγραψα: «Τὰ δέντρα πέταξαν τὴν στολή τους, θὰ δοῦμε τὴν προκοπὴ τους». Καὶ δίπλα ἔγραψα: «Παπᾶς ἀράσοτος, ἄρα ἄσωτος».

Τὸν ἐπισκέφθηκε κάποτε ἓνας ἱερεὺς μὲ ψαλιδισμένα γένεια, ὅπως πρᾶττον τώρα πολλοὶ κληρικοὶ, νέοι καὶ ἠλικιωμένοι. Καὶ μεταξὺ τους ἔγινε ὁ ἑξῆς χαριτωμένος καὶ διδακτικὸς διάλογος:

—Ἐσὺ πάτερ ἀπὸ ποῦ εἶσαι;

—Ἀπὸ τὴν Κρήτη Γέροντα.

—Πόσα χρόνια εἶσαι παπᾶς;

—Ἐσεῖς, Γέροντα, πόσων χρόνων παπᾶ μὲ κάνετε;

—Ἐγὼ σὲ κάνω μιᾶς ἐβδομάδος παπᾶ!

—Ἐ ὄχι, Γέροντα, καὶ μιᾶς ἐβδομάδος! Ἐχω τριάντα χρόνια παπᾶς!

—Δὲν σοῦ φαίνεται! Μοῦ φαίνεται μιᾶς ἐβδομάδος ἀξύριστος...

«Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», τ. 1905, 9-12-2011

Εἰς τό Γενέθλιον τοῦ Κυρίου Ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. Ἀπό τή σειρά τῶν φυλλαδίων «Ἡ Φωνή τῶν Πατέρων» τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Παρακλήτου Ὠρωποῦ Ἀττικῆς.

Μυστήριο παράξενο καί παράδοξο ἀντικρούζω. Βοσκῶν φωνές φτάνουν στ' αὐτιά μου. Δέν παίζουσι σήμερα μέ τίς φλογέρες τους κάποιοι τυχαῖο σκοπό. Τά χεῖλη τους ψάλλουν ὕμνο οὐράνιο. Οἱ ἄγγελοι ὑμνολογοῦν, οἱ ἀρχάγγελοι ἀνυμνοῦν, ψάλλουν τὰ Χερουβεὶμ καί δοξολογοῦν τὰ Σεραφεῖμ. Πανηγυρίζουν ὅλοι, βλέποντας τὸ Θεὸ στῆ γῆ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπο στοὺς οὐρανοὺς.

Σήμερα ἡ Βηθλεὲμ μιμήθηκε τὸν οὐρανό: Ἄντι γι' ἀστέρια, δέχτηκε τοὺς ἀγγέλους· ἀντι γιὰ ἥλιο, δέχτηκε τὸν ἥλιο τῆς δικαιοσύνης. Καὶ μὴ ζητᾶς νὰ μάθεις τὸ πῶς. Γιατί ὅπου θέλει ὁ Θεός, ἀνατρέπονται οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Ἐκεῖνος λοιπὸν τὸ θέλησε. Καὶ τὸ ἔκανε. Κατέβηκε στῆ γῆ καὶ ἔσωσε τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅλα συνεργάστηκαν μαζί Του γι' αὐτὸν τὸ σκοπό.

Σήμερα γεννιέται Αὐτὸς ποὺ ὑπάρχει αἰώνια, καὶ γίνεται αὐτὸ ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν ὑπῆρξε. Εἶναι Θεὸς καὶ γίνεται ἄνθρωπος! Γίνεται ἄνθρωπος καὶ πάλι Θεὸς μένει!

Ὅταν γεννήθηκε, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι δὲν δέχονταν τὴν παράδοξη γέννησή Του: Ἀπὸ τὴν μία οἱ Φαρισαῖοι παρερμίνευαν τὰ ἱερὰ βιβλία· καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη οἱ γραμματεῖς δίδασκαν ἄλλα ἀντὶ ἄλλων. Ὁ Ἡρώδης πάλι, ζητοῦσε νὰ βρεῖ τὸ νεογέννητο Βρέφος ὄχι γιὰ νὰ τὸ τιμήσει, μὰ γιὰ νὰ τὸ θανατώσει. Ἐ λοιπὸν, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ σήμερα τρίβουν τὰ μάτια τους, βλέποντας τὸ Βασιλιά τ' οὐρανοῦ νὰ βρισκεται στῆ γῆ μ' ἀνθρώπινη σάρκα, γεννημένος ἀπὸ παρθενικὴ μήτρα.

Καὶ ἦρθαν οἱ βασιλιάδες νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸν ἐπουράνιο Βασιλιά τῆς δόξας. ἦρθαν οἱ στρατιῶτες νὰ ὑπηρετήσουν τὸν Ἀρχιστρατήγο τῶν οὐράνιων Δυνάμεων. ἦρθαν οἱ γυναῖκες νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ μετέβαλε τίς λύπες τῆς γυναίκας σὲ χαρά. ἦρθαν οἱ παρθένας νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ δημιούργησε τοὺς μαστοὺς καὶ τὸ γάλα, καὶ τώρα θηλάζει ἀπὸ Μητέρα Παρθένο. ἦρθαν τὰ νήπια νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔγινε νήπιο, γιὰ νὰ συνθέσει δοξολογικὸ ὕμνο «ἀπ' τὰ στόματα τῶν νηπίων» (Ψαλμ. 8:3). ἦρθαν τὰ παιδιά νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἡ μανία τοῦ Ἡρώδη τὰ ἀνέδειξε σὲ πρωτομάρτυρες. ἦρθαν οἱ ποιμένες νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸν καλὸ Ποιμένα, ποὺ θυσίασε τὴ ζωὴ Του γιὰ χάρι τῶν προβάτων. ἦρθαν οἱ ἱερεῖς νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔγινε ἀρχιερέας ὅπως ὁ Μελχισεδὲκ (Ἐβρ. 5:10). ἦρθαν οἱ δοῦλοι νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ πῆρε μορφή δούλου, γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψει τὴ δουλεία μας σ' ἐλευθερία. ἦρθαν οἱ ψαράδες νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ τοὺς μετέβαλε σὲ «ψαράδες ἀνθρώπων» (Ματθ. 4:19).

ἦρθαν οἱ τελῶνες νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἀπὸ τοὺς τελῶνες ἀνέδειξε εὐαγγελιστὴ. ἦρθαν οἱ πόρνες νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ παρέδωσε τὰ πόδια του στὰ δάκρυα μίας πόρνης.

Κοντολογίς, ἦρθαν ὅλοι οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ νὰ δοῦν τὸν Ἄμνὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ σηκώνει στοὺς ὤμους Του τὴν ἁμαρτία τοῦ κόσμου: Οἱ μάγοι γιὰ νὰ Τὸν προσκυνήσουν· οἱ ποιμένες γιὰ νὰ Τὸν δοξολογήσουν· οἱ τελῶνες γιὰ νὰ Τὸν κηρύξουν· οἱ πόρνες γιὰ νὰ Τοῦ προσφέρουν μύρα· ἡ Σαμαρεΐτισσα γιὰ νὰ ξεδιψάσει· ἡ Χαναναία γιὰ νὰ εὐεργετηθεῖ.

Ἄφοῦ λοιπὸν ὅλοι σκιρτοῦν ἀπὸ χαρὰ, θέλω καὶ ἐγὼ νὰ σκιρτήσω, θέλω νὰ χορέψω, θέλω νὰ πανηγυρίσω. Δίχως κιθάρα, δίχως αὐλό, δίχως λαμπάδες ἀναμμένες στὰ χεῖρα μου. Πανηγυρίζω κρατώντας, ἀντὶ γι' αὐτά, τὰ σπάργανα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὰ εἶναι ἡ ἐλπίδα μου, αὐτὰ ἡ ζωὴ μου, αὐτὰ ἡ σωτηρία μου, αὐτὰ ὁ αὐλὸς μου, αὐτὰ ἡ κιθάρα μου. Γι' αὐτὸ τὰ ἔχω μαζί μου: Γιὰ νὰ πάρω ἀπὸ τὴ δύναμή τους δύναμη, γιὰ νὰ φωνάξω μαζί με τοὺς ἀγγέλους, «δόξα στὸν ὕψιστο Θεό», καὶ με τοὺς ποιμένες, «καὶ εἰρήνη στῆ γῆ, εὐλογία στοὺς ἀνθρώπους» (Λουκ. 2:14).

Καὶ ξέρετε γιατί; Γιατί Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ προαιώνια γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα ἀνεξήγητα, γεννιέται σήμερα ἀπὸ παρθένα ὑπερφυσικά. Τὸ πῶς, τὸ γνωρίζει ἡ χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ἐμεῖς μόνο τοῦτο μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε: Πὼς ἀληθινὴ εἶναι καὶ ἡ οὐράνια γέννησή Του, ἀδιάψευστη εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἐπίγεια. Ἀλήθεια εἶναι ὅτι γεννήθηκε Θεὸς ἀπὸ Θεό, ἀλήθεια εἶναι καὶ ὅτι γεννήθηκε ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ παρθένα. Στὸν οὐρανὸ εἶναι ὁ μόνος ποὺ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα μόνο, γιὸς Του μονογενῆς. Καὶ στῆ γῆ εἶναι ὁ μόνος ποὺ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο μόνο, γιὸς τῆς μονογενῆς. Ὅπως στὴν περίπτωση τῆς οὐράνιας γεννήσεώς Του εἶναι ἀσέβεια νὰ σκεφτοῦμε μητέρα, ἔτσι καὶ στὴν περίπτωση τῆς ἐπίγειας γεννήσεώς Του εἶναι βλασφημία νὰ υποθέσουμε πατέρα. Ὁ Θεὸς Τὸν γέννησε με τρόπο θεϊκό. Ἡ Παρθένος Τὸν γέννησε με τρόπο ὑπερφυσικό. Ἔτσι, οὔτε ἡ οὐράνια γέννησή Του μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξηγηθεῖ, οὔτε ἡ ἐνανθρώπησή Του μπορεῖ νὰ ἐρευνηθεῖ. Τὸ ὅτι Τὸν γέννησε ἡ Παρθένος σήμερα τὸ γνωρίζω. Τὸ ὅτι Τὸν γέννησε ὁ Θεὸς προαιώνια τὸ πιστεύω. Κι ἔχω μάθει νὰ τιμῶ σιωπηλὰ τὴ γέννησή Του, χωρὶς φιλοπερίεργες ἔρευνες καὶ ἀνώφελες συζητήσεις. Γιατί, σ' ὅτι ἀφορᾶ τὸ Θεό, δὲν πρέπει νὰ στέκεται κανεὶς στῆ φυσικὴ ἐξέλιξη τῶν πραγμάτων, ἀλλὰ νὰ πιστεύει στῆ δύναμη Ἐκεῖνου ποὺ κατευθύνει τὰ πάντα.

Τί φυσικότερο ἀπ' τὸ νὰ γεννήσει μία παντρεμένη γυναῖκα; Ἀλλὰ καὶ τί πῖο παράδοξο ἀπ' τὸ νὰ γεννήσει παιδὶ μία παρθένα, δίχως ἄνδρα, καὶ νὰ παραμείνει παρθένα; Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπὸν μποροῦμε νὰ ἐρευνοῦμε ὅ,τι γίνεται σύμφωνα με τοὺς φυσικοὺς νόμους. Ὅ,τι ὅμως συμβαίνει με τρόπο ὑπερφυσικό, ἄς τὸ σεβόμαστε

σιωπηλά. Όχι γιατί είναι επικίνδυνο, αλλά γιατί είναι ανεπιθύμητο.

Φόβο νιώθω μπροστά στο θείο μυστήριο. Τι να πω και τι να λαλήσω; Βλέπω εκείνη που γέννησε. Βλέπω κι Εκείνον που γεννήθηκε. Αλλά τον τρόπο της γεννήσεως δεν μπορώ να τον καταλάβω. Όπου θέλει, βλέπετε, ο Θεός, νικούνται οι φυσικοί νόμοι. Έτσι έγινε κι εδώ: Παραμερίστηκε η φυσική τάξη και ενέργησε η θεία θέληση. Πόσο ανέκφραστη είναι η εὐσπλαχνία του Θεού!

Ό προαιώνιος Υἱός του Θεού, ο άφθαρτος και άόρατος και άσώματος, κατοίκησε μέσα στο φθαρτό και όρατό σώμα μας. Για ποιο λόγο; Νά, όπως ξέρετε, εμείς οι άνθρωποι πιστεύουμε περισσότερο σ' ό,τι βλέπουμε παρά σ' ό,τι ακοῦμε. Στα όρατά πιστεύουμε. Στ' άόρατα όχι. Έτσι δεν πιστεύαμε στον άόρατο άληθινό Θεό, αλλά λατρεύαμε όρατά είδωλα με μορφή ανθρώπων.

Δέχτηκε λοιπόν ο Θεός να παρουσιαστεί μπροστά μας με όρατη μορφή ανθρώπου, για να διαλύσει μ' αυτόν τον τρόπο κάθε άμφιβολία για την ύπαρξή Του. Κι ύστερα, άφοῦ μᾶς διδάξει με την αισθητή και άναμφισβήτητη παρουσία Του, να μᾶς όδηγήσει εύκολα στην άληθινή πίστη, στ' άόρατα και ύπερφυσικά.

Κατάπληξη με γεμίζει το θαῦμα! Παιδι βλέπω τον προαιώνιο Θεό! Σε φάτνη άναπαύεται, Αυτός που έχει θρόνο τον οὐρανό! Χέρια ανθρώπινα άγγίζουν τον άπρόσιτο κι άσώματο! Με σπάργανα είναι σφιχτοδεμένος, Αυτός που σπάει τα δεσμά της άμαρτίας!

Όμως... τοῦτο είναι το θέλημά Του: Την άτιμία να μεταβάλει σε τιμή με δόξα να ντύσει την εὐτέλεια και την προσβολή σ' άρετή να μεταπλάσει. Πήρε το σώμα μου. Μοῦ προσφέρει το Πνεῦμα Του. Μοῦ χαρίζει το θησαυρό της αιώνιας ζωής, παίρνοντας άλλα και δίνοντάς μου: Παίρνει τη σάρκα μου για να με άγιάσει: μοῦ δίνει το Πνεῦμα Του για να με σώσει.

«Νά, η παρθένος θα μείνει έγκυος» (Ήσ. 7:14). Τα λόγια είναι της συναγωγής, μα το άπόκτημα της Έκκλησίας. Η συναγωγή έβαψε το νήμα· η Έκκλησία φόρεσε τη βασιλική στολή. Η Ίουδαία Τον γέννησε· η οικουμένη Τον ύποδέχτηκε. Η συναγωγή Τον θήλασε και Τον έθρεψε· η Έκκλησία Τον παρέλαβε και ώφελήθηκε.

Στη συναγωγή βλάστησε το κλήμα· εμείς όμως άπολαμβάνουμε τα σταφύλια της άλήθειας. Η συναγωγή τρύγησε τα σταφύλια· οι ειδωλολάτρες όμως πίνουν το μυστικό πιστό. Εκείνη έσπειρε στην Ίουδαία το σπόρο· οι ειδωλολάτρες όμως θέρισαν το στάχυ με το δρεπάνι της πίστεως. Αυτοί έκοψαν με σεβασμό το ρόδο, και στους Ίουδαίους έμεινε το άγκάθι της άπιστίας.

Το πουλάκι πέταξε, κι αυτοί οι άνόητοι κάθονται και φυλάνε ακόμα τη φωλιά. Οι Ίουδαίοι πασχίζουν να έρμηνεύσουν το βιβλίο του γράμματος, και οι ειδωλολάτρες τρυγοῦν τον καρπό του Πνεύματος. «Νά, η παρθένος θα μείνει έγκυος». Πές μου, Ίουδαίε,

πές μου λοιπόν, ποιόν γέννησε; Δείξε, σε παρακαλώ, θάρρος, έστω και σαν εκείνο που έδειξες μπροστά στον Ηρώδη. Αλλά δεν έχεις θάρρος. Και ξέρω γιατί. Γιατί είσαι έπίβουλος. Στον Ηρώδη μίλησες για να Τον έξολοθρεύσει· και σ' έμένα δεν μιλάς για να μην Τον προσκυνήσω.

Ποιόν λοιπόν γέννησε; Ποιόν; Το Δημιουργό της κτίσεως. Κι αν έσῶ σωπαίνεις, η φύση το βροντοφωνάζει. Τον γέννησε λοιπόν με τον τρόπο που ο ίδιος θέλησε να γεννηθεί. Στη φύση δεν υπήρχε η δυνατότητα μίας τέτοιας γεννήσεως. Εκείνος όμως, ως Κύριος της φύσεως, έπινόησε τρόπο γεννήσεως παράδοξο. Κι έδειξε έτσι ότι, και άνθρωπος που έγινε, δεν γεννήθηκε σαν άνθρωπος, μα όπως μόνο σε Θεό ταιριάζει.

Έκείνος που έπλασε τον Άδάμ από παρθένα γη, Εκείνος που από τον Άδάμ κατόπιν έκαμε γυναίκα, γεννήθηκε σήμερα από παρθένα κόρη που νίκησε τη φύση, ξεπερνώντας το νόμο του γάμου.

Ό Άδάμ τότε, χωρίς να έχει γυναίκα, γυναίκα άπόκτησε. Η Παρθένος τώρα, χωρίς να έχει άνδρα, άνδρα γέννησε. Και γιατί έγινε αυτό; Να γιατί: Οι γυναίκες είχαν ένα παλαιό χρέος προς τους άνδρες, άφοῦ από τον Άδάμ είχε βλαστήσει γυναίκα χωρίς τη μεσολάβηση άλλης γυναίκας. Για αυτό η Παρθένος σήμερα, ξεπληρώνοντας στους άνδρες το χρέος της Εύας, γέννησε χωρίς άνδρα, δείχνοντας έτσι την ίσοτιμία της φύσεως.

Σώος έμεινε ο Άδάμ μετά την άφαιρέση της πλευράς του. Αδιάφθορη έμεινε κι η Παρθένος μετά τη γέννηση του Βρέφους. Αλλά πρόσεξε και κάτι ακόμα: Δεν έπλασε ο Κύριος κάποιο άλλο σώμα για να έμφανιστεί στη γη. Πήρε το σώμα του ανθρώπου, για να μη φανεί ότι περιφρονεί την ύλη από την όποία δημιουργήθηκε ο Άδάμ. Ήρθαν έτσι, Θεός και άνθρωπος, σε μυστική ένωση. Κι ο διάβολος, που είχε ύποδουλώσει τον άνθρωπο, τράπηκε σε φυγή.

Ό Θεός γίνεται άνθρωπος, αλλά γεννιέται ως Θεός. Άν προερχόταν, όπως έγω, από έναν κοινό γάμο, πολλοί θα θεωρούσαν άπάτη τη γέννησή Του. Γι' αυτό γεννιέται από παρθένα· γι' αυτό διατηρεί τη μήτρα της άθικτη· γι' αυτό διαφυλάσσει την παρθενία της άκέραιη: Για να γίνει ο παράξενος τρόπος της γεννήσεως αίτια άκλόνητης πίστεως. Σ' αυτόν λοιπόν που θ' άμφισβητήσει την άσπορη γέννηση του Λόγου του Θεού, θα επικαλεστώ ως μάρτυρα την άμόλυνη σφραγίδα της παρθενίας.

Πές μου λοιπόν, Ίουδαίε, γέννησε η Παρθένος η όχι; Κι αν μὲν γέννησε, γιατί δεν όμολογείς την ύπερφυσική γέννηση; Άν πάλι δεν γέννησε, γιατί έξαπάτησες τον Ηρώδη; Όταν εκείνος ζητούσε να μάθει που θα γεννηθεί ο Χριστός, έσῶ δεν είπες «στη Βηθλεέμ της Ίουδαίας» (Μαθ. 2:4); Μήπως έγω γνώριζα την πόλη η τον τόπο; Μήπως έγω γνώριζα την άξία του Βρέφους που ήρθε στον κόσμο; Ό Ήσαίας και οι προφήτες σας

δὲν μίλησαν γι' Αὐτό; Κι ἐσεῖς, οἱ ἀγνώμονες ἐχθροί, δὲν ἐξηγήσατε τὴν ἀλήθεια; Ἐσεῖς, οἱ γραμματεῖς κι οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, οἱ ἀκριβεῖς φύλακες τοῦ νόμου, δὲν μᾶς διδάξατε γιὰ τὸ Χριστό; Ἐσεῖς δὲν ἐρμηνεύσατε τίς Γραφές; Μήπως ἐμεῖς γνωρίζαμε τὴ γλῶσσα σας; Καὶ ὅταν γέννησε ἡ Παρθένος, ἐσεῖς δὲν παρουσιάσατε στὸν Ἡρώδη τὴ μαρτυρία τοῦ προφήτη Μιχαῖα, «Ἄλλ' ἀπὸ σένα, Βηθλεὲμ, πόλη τῆς περιοχῆς τοῦ Ἐφραθᾶ, ἂν καὶ εἶσαι μία ἀπὸ τὶς μικρότερες πόλεις τοῦ Ἰούδα, θὰ ἀναδειχθεῖ ἀρχηγὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ» (Μιχ. 5:2); Πολὺ καλὰ εἶπε ὁ προφήτης «ἀπὸ σένα». Ἀπὸ σᾶς προήλθε καὶ παρουσιάστηκε σ' ὀλόκληρο τὸν κόσμο. Παρουσιάστηκε ὡς ἄνθρωπος, γιὰ νὰ καθοδηγήσει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Παρουσιάστηκε ὡς Θεός, γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὴν οἰκουμένη.

Μὰ τί ὠφέλιμοι ἐχθροὶ ποὺ εἶσ' ἐσεῖς! Τί φιλόανθρωποι κατήγοροι! Ἐσεῖς κατὰ λάθος δεῖξατε πὼς τὸ νεογέννητο τῆς Βηθλεὲμ εἶναι Θεός. Ἐσεῖς τὸν κηρύξατε χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλετε. Ἐσεῖς τὸν φανερώσατε, πασχίζοντας νὰ τὸν κρύψετε. Ἐσεῖς τὸν εὐεργετήσατε, ἐπιθυμώντας νὰ τὸν βλάψετε. Τί ἀστοιχείωτοι δάσκαλοι εἶστε, ἀλήθεια; Ἐσεῖς πεινᾶτε, καὶ τρέφετε ἄλλους. Ἐσεῖς διψᾶτε, καὶ ποτίζετε ἄλλους. Πάμφτωχοι εἶστε, καὶ πλουτίζετε ἄλλους.

Ἐλάτε λοιπὸν νὰ γιορτάσουμε! Ἐλάτε νὰ πανηγυρίσουμε! Εἶναι παράξενος ὁ τρόπος τῆς γιορτῆς —ὅσο παράξενος εἶναι κι ὁ λόγος τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Σήμερα λύθηκαν τὰ μακροχρόνια δεσμά. Ὁ διάβολος καταντροπιάστηκε. Οἱ δαίμονες δραπέτευσαν. Ὁ θάνατος καταργήθηκε. Ὁ παράδεισος ἀνοίχτηκε. Ἡ κατάρα ἐξαφανίστηκε. Ἡ ἁμαρτία διώχτηκε. Ἡ πλάνη ἀπομακρύνθηκε. Ἡ ἀλήθεια ἀποκαλύφθηκε. Τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς εὐσέβειας ξεχύθηκε καὶ διαδόθηκε παντοῦ. Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν μεταφυτεύθηκε στὴ γῆ. Οἱ ἄγγελοι συνομιλοῦν μὲ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

Ὅλα ἔγιναν ἓνα. Γιατί; Γιατί κατέβηκε ὁ Θεὸς στὴ γῆ κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀνέβηκε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Κατέβηκε ὁ Θεὸς στὴ γῆ καὶ πάλι βρίσκεται στὸν οὐρανό. Ὁλόκληρος εἶναι στὸν οὐρανὸ κι ὀλόκληρος στὴ γῆ. Ἐγινε ἄνθρωπος κι εἶναι Θεός. Εἶναι Θεὸς καὶ πῆρε σάρκα. Κρατιέται σὲ παρθενικὴ ἀγκαλιὰ καὶ στὰ χέρια Του κρατᾷ τὴν οἰκουμένη.

Τρέχουν κοντὰ Του οἱ μάγοι. Τρέχουμε κι ἐμεῖς. Τρέχει καὶ τ' ἀστὲρι γιὰ νὰ φανερώσει τὸν Κύριο τ' οὐρανοῦ. Μὰ κι Ἐκεῖνος τρέχει. Τρέχει πρὸς τὴν Αἴγυπτο. Καὶ φαίνεται βέβαια, πὼς πηγαίνει ἐκεῖ γιὰ ν' ἀποφύγει τὴν ἐπιβουλὴ τοῦ Ἡρώδη. Ὅμως τοῦτο γίνεται γιὰ νὰ ἐκπληρωθοῦν τὰ προφητικὰ λόγια: «Τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη ὁ Ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαὸς θὰ πάρει τρίτος, μετὰ τοὺς Ἀσσυρίους καὶ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ πάνω στὴ γῆ» (Ἠσ. 19:24).

Τί λές, Ἰουδαῖε; Ἐσὺ ποῦ ἦσουν πρῶτος ἔγινες τρίτος; Οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ οἱ Ἀσσύριοι μῆκαν μπροστά, καὶ ὁ πρωτότοκος Ἰσραὴλ πῆγε πίσω; Ναί. Ἔτσι εἶναι. Οἱ Ἀσσύριοι θὰ γίνουν πρῶτοι, ἐπειδὴ αὐτοὶ πρῶτοι μὲ τοὺς μάγους τοὺς προσκύνησαν τὸν Κύριο. Πίσω τοὺς οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, ποὺ τὸν δέχτηκαν, ὅταν κατέφυγε στὰ μέρη τοὺς γιὰ ν' ἀποφύγει τὴν ἐπιβουλὴ τοῦ Ἡρώδη. Τρίτος καὶ τελευταῖος ὁ Ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαός, ποὺ γνώρισε τὸν Κύριο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀποστόλους, μετὰ τὴ βάπτισή Του στὸν Ἰορδάνη.

Τί ἄλλο μένει νὰ πῶ; Δημιουργὸ καὶ φάτνη βλέπω... Βρέφος καὶ σπάργανα... Λεχῶνα παρθένα, περιφρονημένη... Φτώχεια πολλή... Ἀνέχεια πολλή... Εἶδες ὅμως τί πλοῦτος μέσα στὴ μεγάλη φτώχεια; Ὁ Πλούσιος ἔγινε φτωχὸς γιὰ χάρη μας. Δὲν ἔχει οὔτε κρεβάτι οὔτε στρώμα. Μέσα σὲ ταπεινὸ παχνὶ τὸν ἔχουν ἀποθέσει. Ὡ φτώχεια, πλοῦτου πηγὴ! Ὡ πλοῦτε ἀμέτρητε, κρυμμένε μὲς στὴ φτώχεια! Μέσα στὴ φάτνη κείτεσαι καὶ τὴν οἰκουμένη σαλεύεις. Μέσα σὲ σπάργανα τυλίγεσαι καὶ σπᾶς τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Λέξι ἀκόμα δὲν ἄρθρωσες καὶ δίδαξες στοὺς μάγους τὴ θεογνωσία.

Τί νὰ πῶ καὶ τί νὰ λαλήσω; Νὰ Βρέφος σπαργανωμένο! Νὰ ἡ Μαρία, Μητέρα καὶ Παρθένος μαζί! Νὰ ὁ Ἰωσήφ, πατέρας τάχα τοῦ Παιδιοῦ! Ἐκεῖνη ἡ γυναίκα, αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνδρας. Νόμιμες οἱ ὀνομασίες, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς περιεχόμενο. Ὁ Ἰωσήφ μνηστεύθηκε μόνο τὴ Μαρία, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τὴν ἐπισκίασε. Ἔτσι, γεμάτος ἀπορία, δὲν ἤξερε τί νὰ ὑποθέσει γιὰ τὸ Βρέφος; Νὰ πει πὼς ἦταν καρπὸς μοιχείας, δὲν τολμοῦσε. Νὰ προσφέρει λόγο βλάσφημο ἐναντίον τῆς Παρθένου, δὲν μποροῦσε. Οὔτε πάλι δεχόταν τὸ Παιδί σὰν δικό του, γιατί τοῦ ἦταν ἄγνωστο τὸ πὼς καὶ ἀπὸ ποῖον γεννήθηκε.

Ἄλλὰ νά, πού, πάνω στὴ σύγχυσή του, παίρνει ἀπάντηση ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανό, μὲ τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ἀγγέλου: «Ἰωσήφ, μὴ διστάσεις νὰ πάρεις στὸ σπίτι σου τὴ Μαριάμ, γιατί τὸ παιδί ποὺ περιμένει προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα» (Ματθ. 1:20). Καὶ φανέρωσε ἔτσι σ' ἐκεῖνον καὶ σ' ἐμᾶς ὅτι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἐπισκίασε τὴν Παρθένο.

Γιατί ὅμως ὁ Χριστὸς θέλησε νὰ γεννηθεῖ ἀπὸ παρθένα, ἀφήνοντας ἀβλαβὴ τὴν παρθενία της;

Νὰ γιατί: Κάποτε ὁ διάβολος ἐξαπάτησε τὴν παρθένα Εὔα. Τώρα ὁ ἄγγελος ἔφερε τὸ λυτρωτικὸ μήνυμα στὴν Παρθένο Μαριάμ. Κάποτε ἡ Εὔα ξεστόμισε λόγο, ποὺ ἔγινε αἰτία θανάτου. Τώρα ἡ Μαρία γέννησε τὸ Λόγο, ποὺ ἔγινε αἰτία αἰώνιας ζωῆς. Ὁ λόγος τῆς Εὔας ἔδειξε τὸ δέντρο, ποὺ ἔβγαλε τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἀπὸ τὸν παράδεισο. Ὁ Λόγος τῆς Μαρίας ἔδειξε τὸ Σταυρό, ποὺ ἔβαλε τὸν Ἀδὰμ πάλι στὸν παράδεισο.

Σ' αὐτὸν λοιπόν, τὸ Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Υἱὸ τῆς Παρθένου, ποὺ ἄνοιξε δρόμο μέσα σὲ τόπο ἀδιάβατο, ἃς ἀναπέμψουμε δοξολογία μαζί μὲ τὸν Πατέρα καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα στοὺς αἰῶνες τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

Τί Είναι η Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία;

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Εὐκολα διαπιστώνει ἓνας συνειδητὸς χριστιανὸς ὅτι στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὑπάρχουν πολλὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ κομικὲς συνήθειες, ποὺ μειώνουν τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ παράδοση καὶ νοθεύουν τὴ γνησιότητα τῆς λατρείας τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πρόκειται γιὰ μιὰ πραγματικότητα, τὴν ὁποία δὲν καταδικάζουν οἱ κληρικοὶ ποὺ κυριαρχοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ κοσμικὸ φρόνημα. Καὶ ὅμως πρέπει νὰ περιγραφεῖται καὶ νὰ ἀπορρίπτεται.

Ἐνας σεβάσιμος ἐπίσκοπος ἔλεγε γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία κάτι ποὺ πολλοὶ κληρικοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐσεβεῖς λαϊκοὶ ἀγνοοῦν. Ἀξίζει τὴν ιδιαίτερη προσοχὴ μας: «*Ἀξίωμα τῶν ἱερῶν Πατέρων τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας εἶναι τὸ «πρᾶξις θεωρίας ἐπίβασις».* Αὐτὸ θὰ πεῖ ὅτι *στὴν Ἐκκλησία ὁ λόγος στηρίζεται ἐπάνω στὴν πράξη. Τίποτε θεωρητικὸ, τίποτε φτιαγμένο, πρῶτα στὴ σκέψη... τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τίποτε ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ πράγματα καὶ τὴ ζωὴ δὲν ὑπάρχει στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ πίστις, ἡ θεολογία, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ὅλα εἶναι κήρυγμα γεγονότων. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἓνα γεγονός, μιὰ ζωὴ καὶ μιὰ παράδοση στὸ πέρασμα τῶν αἰώνων. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἡ ὀρθὴ καὶ σωστὴ δοξολογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἡ λογικὴ λατρεία καὶ στὴ λατρευτικὴ σύναξη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ στὴ βιοτὴ τῶν πιστῶν».*

Ὁ λαὸς συχνὰ μπερδεύει τὴν ἀνωτέρω παράδοση μὲ τὰ ἥθη καὶ ἔθιμα τοῦ λαϊκοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὴν οὐσιώδη διαφορὰ. Κραυγαλέο παράδειγμα εἶναι τὰ πανηγύρια στὴν ἐπαρχία, ὅπου ἡ τιμὴ ἑνὸς ἁγίου συνοδεύεται μὲ χοροὺς καὶ τραγούδια καὶ μάλιστα νὰ σέρνουν πρῶτοι τὸ χορὸ οἱ ἐφημέριοι! Καὶ κάποτε, ἂν παρίσταται καὶ ὁ οἰκείος μητροπολίτης ἀκοῦμε νὰ προτρέπει τοὺς ἱερεῖς νὰ χορέψουν, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἴδιος κωλύεται λόγω τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ του ἀξιώματος. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ὅ,τι κομίζουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ τιμοῦν τὸν ἅγιό τους τὸ χάνουν σὲ λίγη ὥρα, ἀφοῦ ἀφοσιώνονται στὸ ξέφρενο πανηγύρι, τὸ ὁποῖο στήνεται στὸν ἐξωτερικὸ χῶρο τοῦ ναοῦ, ποὺ συνήθως εἶναι καὶ ἡ κεντρικὴ πλατεῖα τῆς κωμόπολης ἢ τοῦ χωριοῦ. Οἱ πρωινὲς ἱερὲς ψαλμωδίες σιγοῦν καὶ ἀρχίζουν τὰ δημοτικὰ καὶ ὄχι μόνον τραγούδια καὶ ὁ τιμώμενος ἅγιος ἀναγκάζεται νὰ φύγει μὲ μυστικὸ τρόπο ἀπὸ τὸ ναὸ του, γιὰτὶ δὲν θέλει νὰ συμφύρεται μὲ πλανεμένους πανηγυριστὲς ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν ἱερὸ καὶ ὄσιο...

Ἰδιαίτερα προκλητικὴ εἶναι ἡ περίπτωση στὰ παλιὰ ἐγκαταλειμμένα μοναστήρια, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν μοναχοὺς καὶ οἱ διάφοροι ἐπίτροποι καὶ οἱ ὑπεύθυνοι τῶν συλλόγων καὶ ἀδελφοτήτων διοργανώνουν

πανηγύρια, ὅπως ἐκεῖνοι ἐπιθυμοῦν, χωρὶς σὲ σέβονται τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ χώρου, καὶ γλεντοκοποῦν γιὰ νὰ τιμήσουν τὸν ἅγιο, στὸν ὁποῖο εἶναι ἀφιερωμένο τὸ μοναστήρι. Οἱ ἐφημέριοι συνήθως ὑποχωροῦν καὶ δὲν προβάλλουν καμία ἀντίδραση, γιὰτὶ ὑπολογίζουν τὶς εἰσπράξεις ἀπὸ τοὺς πανηγυριστὲς. Καὶ μετὰ τὸ πανηγύρι, ὁ τόπος μεταβάλλεται σὲ ἓνα ἀπέραντο σκουπιδότοπο μὲ πλαστικὰ καὶ σπασμένα μπουκάλια. Ἡ φρικτὴ αὐτὴ εἰκόνα εἶναι ἀποτέλεσμα τῶν πολιτιστικῶν ἐκδηλώσεων καὶ τῆς τήρησης τῶν ἐθίμων ποὺ πρέπει νὰ διατηροῦνται ὁπωςδὴποτε, γιὰτὶ ἔτσι ἔκαναν καὶ οἱ πρόγονοί μας, ὅπως ἰσχυρίζονται οἱ διαστήριοι διοργανωτὲς.

Ὅλα αὐτὰ ὅμως δὲν ἔχουν καμία σχέση μὲ τὴ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν παράδοσή της. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι κάτι ποὺ βιώνεται καὶ ἀλλοιώνει ἱερῶς τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν πιστῶν. Καὶ τὸ πετυχαίνει αὐτὸ μὲ «*τὸ κήρυγμα τῶν Προφητῶν, τὴν παράδοση τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τὴ διδασκαλία τῶν Πατέρων, τὴ θεία λατρεία μας, τὴν ἄχραντη εἰκονογραφία μας, τὴν κατανυκτικὴ ψαλμωδία μας, τὸ κερί μας καὶ τὸ λιβάνι μας, τὴν προσφορὰ μας καὶ τὸ κόλλυβο, τὴ σαρακοστὴ καὶ τὴ νηστεία μας, τὴ λειτουργία μας καὶ τὴ θεία μετάληψη, τὴ πτωχὴ ἀγιοσύνη μας καὶ τὶς πολλὲς μας ἁμαρτίες, γιὰ τὶς ὁποῖες ζητοῦμε τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία κι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία: οἱ Ἅγιοί μας οἱ Ἀπόστολοι, οἱ Μάρτυρες καὶ οἱ Προφῆτες, οἱ Ἱεράρχες, οἱ Ὅσιοι καὶ οἱ Δίκαιοι αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἀγωνίστηκαν κι ἔδωσαν αἷμα καὶ δάκρυ καὶ ἰδρώτα, γιὰ νὰ φυλάξουν τὴν πίστιν αὐτοὶ ποὺ, πηγαίνοντας ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανὸ, πρεσβεύουν στὸ Θεὸ γιὰ μᾶς, μὲ πρῶτη κι ἐπάνω ἀπ' ὅλους τὴν ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο».*

Πρέπει νὰ ἐκτιμήσουμε κάποτε αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ νὰ ἀποφεύγουμε τὴ νόθευση τῆς παράδοσής της ἀπὸ τὸ λαϊκὸ πολιτισμὸ, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο πολὺς λόγος γίνεται στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Χρειάζεται ἐγρήγορη γιὰ τὴν προστασία της καὶ προσπάθεια ἀπὸ τοὺς κληρικοὺς γιὰ τὴν ἀνάδειξή της.

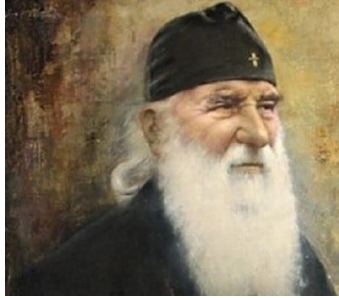


Ἀδελφέ, νὰ περιμένῃς καθημερινὰ τὸν θάνατό σου. Καὶ νὰ ἐτοιμάζεσαι γιὰ τὴν πορεία ἐκείνη. Διότι θὰ ἔλθῃ ἡ φοβερὴ διαταγὴ τοῦ θανάτου, σὲ ὥρα, ποὺ δὲν θὰ τὴν περιμένῃς. Καὶ ἀλίμονον σὲ ἐκείνον, ποὺ θὰ βρεθῇ ἀνέτοιμος... Νὰ ἔχῃς λοιπόν, πάντοτε στὸν νοῦ σου τὴν ἡμέρα τοῦ θανάτου σου.

Ἄγ. Ἐφραίμ ὁ Σύρος

Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καὶ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος

Ἀγίου Ἰουστίνου Πόποβιτς, Δογματική, Ὁρθόδοξη Φιλοσοφία τῆς Ἀλήθειας – Β΄ Ἐκδοση (κέφ. Ἐσχατολογία – Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος καὶ ἡ Δράση του, σέλ. 961-962).



Ἡφοβερὴ ἀλήθεια περὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου ἀνήκει σὲ σημαντικότερες ἀλήθειες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Σωτῆρος. Περὶ αὐτῆς ὀφείλουμε νὰ ὀμιλοῦμε ὅπως περὶ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἄν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπέκρυπτε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀλήθεια, τότε πόσο πῶ ἐπικίνδυνη θὰ ἦταν ἡ δράση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου! Ἐμεῖς οἱ χριστιανοὶ γνωρίζουμε ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Σωτῆρος τί σκέπτεται ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ ἐμᾶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τί θέλει ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς.

Ὅμως ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς στὸ Εὐαγγέλιό Του μᾶς ἀπεκάλυψε καὶ τί ὁ σατανᾶς σκέπτεται γιὰ ἐμᾶς καὶ θέλει ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς, ὅπως καὶ ὁ κύριος ἀπόστολός του, ὁ Ἀντίχριστος. Σὲ ἐμᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς τίποτε τὸ θεῖο δὲν εἶναι ἄγνωστο, ἀλλὰ ἐξίσου δὲν εἶναι ἄγνωστο καὶ τίποτε τὸ σατανικό, ὥστε νὰ γνωρίζουμε πῶς νὰ προφυλαχθοῦμε καὶ νὰ ὑπερασπίσουμε τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας ἀπὸ τοὺς σατανικοὺς πειρασμοὺς. Εἴμαστε ἄνθρωποι δημιουργημένοι μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ γίνουμε χαρισματικοὶ θεάνθρωποι.

Ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὡς Θεάνθρωπος κατέδειξε πῶς ὅ,τι τὸ Θεῖο μπορεῖ νὰ πραγματοποιηθεῖ στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ζωὴ ἐπὶ γῆς καὶ νὰ ἀποτρέψει, νὰ καταστρέψει ὅ,τι τὸ ἀντίθεο, τὸ ἁμαρτωλό, τὸ κακό, τὸ σατανικό, τὸ ἀντίχριστο. Γνωρίζουμε πῶς εἴμαστε κατὰ πάντα ἰσχυρότεροι τοῦ σατανᾶ καὶ τῶν σκοτεινῶν ἀγγέλων του.

Εἴμαστε ἰσχυρότεροι διὰ τῆς Χάριτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διὰ τῆς ἀγίας Ἐκκλησίας Του, στὴν ὁποία ἀδιαλείπτως, ὅπως στὸ σῶμα Του, ζεῖ καὶ ζωοποιεῖ ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Χριστὸς μὲ ὅλες τὶς θεῖες χαρισματικὲς Του δυνάμεις, τῶν ὁποίων ἐμεῖς μετέχουμε διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν μυστηρίων καὶ τῶν ἀγίων ἀρετῶν καὶ κατανικοῦμε κάθε σατανικό κακὸ καὶ ἁμαρτία καὶ θάνατο καὶ κόλαση.

Ὁ Θεὸς ποὺ εἶναι μαζί μας διὰ τῶν ἱερῶν μυστηρίων καὶ ἀρετῶν εἶναι ἀσύγκριτα ἰσχυρότερος ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο, ὁ ὁποῖος βρίσκεται σὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες, στὰ πάθη, στοὺς θανάτους καὶ σὲ τὶς κολάσεις. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ χριστιανοὶ δὲν φοβοῦνται οὔτε σατανᾶ, οὔτε Ἀντίχριστο. Τοὺς νικοῦμε κατὰ πάντα μὲ τὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, ποὺ ἐν τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ του ἐνεργεῖ παντοδύναμα μέσα μας διὰ τῶν μυστηρίων καὶ τῶν ἀρετῶν.

Ἡ Θεοποίησις τῆς Γῆς καὶ ὁ Ρόλος τοῦ Πατρ. Βαρθολομαίου

Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος, 7 Σεπτεμβρίου 2023.



Ὁ (αὐτοαποκαλούμενος) «πράσινος Πατριάρχης» Βαρθολομαῖος πρωτοστατεῖ γιὰ τὴν «διάσωση τοῦ περιβάλλοντος»· μᾶλλον ἔχει ἀναλωθεῖ σὲ αὐτό,

θέτοντας σὲ δευτέρη μοῖρα τὰ ὅποια πατριαρχικά του καθήκοντα. Ὅρισε μάλιστα ἡ 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου νὰ εἶναι ἀφιερωμένη στὸ περιβάλλον, μιμούμενος τὶς νεοταξίτικες «παγκόσμιες ἑορτές»!

Ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ «φροντίδα» γιὰ τὸ περιβάλλον ἔχει καὶ ἄλλες κρυφές καὶ δόλιες διαστάσεις. Εἶναι ἡ προώθηση μίας νέας μορφῆς εἰδωλολατρίας, μὲ τὴ λατρεία τῆς Γῆς ὡς «θεότητα».

Ὁ διάσημος Ἰταλὸς στοχαστὴς Ρομπέρτο Πετσιόλι, ἀναφέρει πῶς ἤδη τὸ «περιβαλλοντικό» ἔχει μετατραπεῖ σὲ θρησκεία. Ἐγραψε: «Εἶναι μία αὐθεντικὴ θρησκευτικὴ πίστη, μὲ τὶς τελετές της (περιοδικὰ διεθνῆ συνέδρια), τοὺς πιστοὺς καὶ τοὺς μαθητὲς της, τοὺς ἱερεῖς—ἐπιστήμονες καὶ ἀγωνιστὲς—μία Πρωθιέρεια, τὴν Γκρέτα Τούνμπεργκ, μὲ ἀποκαλυπτικὴ γλῶσσα, σκυθρωπὸ πρόσωπο καὶ ἀνήσυχο τόνο. Ἡ θεότητα τῆς λατρείας, θηλυκὴ ὅπως ὀρίζουν οἱ καιροί, εἶναι ἡ Γαῖα, ἡ γῆ, ἕνας αἰσθανόμενος ὄργανισμός, τοῦ ὁποῖου ἐχθρὸς εἶναι ὁ homo sapiens» (Ἰστ. Ἀμέθυστος)!

Ἐμεῖς θὰ προσθέταμε ὅτι ἡ νέα «πράσινη θρησκεία» ἔχει καὶ τὸν Πατριάρχη της, τὸν Βαρθολομαῖο!...



Ἀδέλφια, φυλάξτε τὴν ἐλληνικὴ συνήθειά μας, γιορτάστε ὅπως γιορτάζανε οἱ πατεράδες σας, καὶ μὴ ξεγελιώσατε μὲ ξένα κι ἄνοστα πυροτεχνήματα. Οἱ δικές μας οἱ γιορτὲς ἀδελφώνουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς ἐνώνει ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀκοῦστε τί λένε τὰ παιδάκια ποὺ λένε τὰ κάλαντα: «Καὶ βάλετε τὰ ροῦχα σας, εὐμορφα ἐνδυθῆτε, στὴν ἐκκλησίαν τρέξετε, μὲ προθυμίαν μῆπτε, ν' ἀκούσετε μὲ προσοχὴν ὄλην τὴν ὑμνωδίαν, καὶ μὲ πολλὴν εὐλάβειαν τὴν θεῖαν λειτουργίαν. Καὶ πάλιν σὰν γυρίσετε εἰς τὸ ἀρχοντικόν σας, εὐθὺς τραπέζι στρώσετε, βάλτε τὸ φαγητόν σας. Καὶ τὸν σταυρόν σας κάνετε, γυυθῆτε, εὐφρανθῆτε. Δώστε καὶ κανενὸς φτωχοῦ ὅστις νὰ ὑστερηται».

Κυρ-Φώτης Κόντογλου

ON THE HOLY FATHERS

By Metropolitan Augustinos (Kantiotes) of Florina (+2010). This article is a translation of, “Οι Πατέρες” in “Πνευματικά Σαλπίσματα Ορθοδόξου Ζωής και Ομολογίας.” (Thessalonki, 2008), pp. 83-93. Translated by Rev Dr John Palmer.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

[1 Cor 4:15]

† † †

Beloved readers, the word “father” is a holy word; implicit in it are many holy ideas. First, for Christians, it calls to mind the Heavenly Father, who alone is worthy of the title in an absolute sense. For this reason the Lord said, *And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.* (Mt 23:19). Further, it calls to mind all of those who in this earthly life reflect the rays of the Heavenly Father’s love. Primarily, these are fathers according to nature.

Life

Father! This word plucks at the most tender of man’s heart-strings. When a father has left this life and is wrapped in the glory of eternity, the simple remembrance of him proves deeply moving, bringing tears to the eyes. A father is someone to be revered; he is an instrument of Divine Providence for each and every person who has passed from non-being into being, who has seen the light of day, has come through him. None of us was born of a stone; we all have a father. Jesus alone is fatherless on earth, just as he is motherless in the heavens.

O, how much each of us owes to his father! A father—and here we speak of a good father—is not satisfied with the fact that he had a share in bringing a person into this world, but rather, from the moment he hears his child’s first cry he becomes his protector since if an infant is left on its own it cannot possibly survive. Like a plant, an infant needs particular care until its small, vulnerable body grows, until he matures to the point of being able to care for himself. The progenitor thus becomes a provider as well. He labours; he wears himself out; he makes sacrifices.

If there is no work to be found in his area, he moves. He goes to the ends of the earth just to scrape together what is necessary for his child’s sustenance. Moreover, a father’s affection for his child is great. He will even do heroic things like give his own life to save his child from some life-threatening danger, or deprive himself of food to feed his starving child. He will spend entire nights at his child’s side when he is sick; he will sell all that he has so that his child can see the best doctors in the world. He would throw himself into fire; he would brave the waves; he would do battle with wild beasts...

O, how much children owe to their parents when they are good parents! To them—after God—they owe their very life! This is why the Decalogue, immediately after setting out our

obligations toward God the Heavenly Father in the first four commandments, places the commandment which enjoins the honouring of parents. This is the lone commandment which contains an explicit promise to those who keep it—that God’s blessing will be with them throughout the whole of their lives. Children who honour their parents will be richly blessed: *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* (Exod 20:12). Conversely, the Moasic Law condemns an Israelite who ill-treats his father or mother to the most extreme of punishments, that is, death by stoning. *And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.* (Exod 21:15).

Moreover, while the testimony of two or three witnesses is required as proof in the case of other offences and misdeeds, this is not required when an Israelite has been disrespectful to his parents. All that is needed is the testimony of the disrespected father. The father—and the father alone—is deemed worthy of trust in such an instance because for a parent to arrive at the point of accusing his own child and delivering him over to the most extreme of punishments means that the child truly disrespected him since the child’s lack of respect had to overcome the father’s natural affection. Making the matter worse, a disrespectful child, through his disrespectful behavior, has become a cause of turmoil within the moral order of the family and the broader community, which is founded upon the honoring of parents.

Children who honor and respect their parents receive blessings, then, while those who slander and wrong their parents are cursed. History, both ancient and modern, shows us by means of many examples that displays of disrespect towards one’s ancestors do not go unpunished in this life, but also that the respectful and loving behavior of children towards their parents is not without its blessings. Therefore, you children who are fortunate enough to still have your good parents with you in this life, hear the words of the Wisdom of Sirach: *For the blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations* (Sir 3:9), and, *Honour thy father with thy whole heart, and forget not the sorrows of thy mother. Remember that thou wast begot of them, and how canst thou recompense them the things that they have done for thee.* (Sir 7:27-28).

The Good Life

There are yet others, beyond those who have given us life according to the flesh, who warrant a respect similar to that which is due unto parents. We are speaking of those who labour and sacrifice, not for the sake of the outer man, but rather for the sake of the inner man. The inner man, the principal man, is the spirit, the soul. The outer man is visible; you can photograph a man every day, beginning with the day he is born and continuing until he reaches deep old age, and keep these photos in the family album as a record of that person’s bodily growth and development. Looking at those photos, you will

wonder at how that tiny being who walks on all fours, became a perfect man... from imperfection to perfection!

Life According to Christ.

So, parents bestow life, while teachers and professors bestow knowledge, the arts, and science, through which one secures a life of luxury, wealth, and glory. Beyond bodily existence, however, beyond knowledge and science, there is yet something else infinitely more lofty which gives life true meaning. This is holiness. Holiness is separation from everything profane; it is the cleansing of the soul from the filth of sin; it is the putting off of vice, which like rust blemishes the inner man. It is also the acquisition of the virtues through which man is raised up from the lowly to the spiritual and heavenly so that he approaches the Cherubim and Seraphim, appearing to be some sort of earthly angel. This is man at his peak, achieved through the imitation of the virtues of Christ who is the unrivalled, unapproachable, and eternal model of holiness.

Holiness is the most important thing in a person's life. It stands above all other things. All other things, as much as they may impress the world, are but small and lowly in comparison with holiness. Moreover, whatever value they have is acquired only when they are watered by the life-giving power of holiness. In the service of holiness, science becomes a force for good; isolated from it and partnered with vice, it becomes malignant and destructive. It has rightly been observed that one speck of holiness is worth more than tons of human knowledge and worldly wisdom.

Parents bestow life, then, and teachers bestow the good life, but who bestows upon us the life in Christ, life within the sphere of holiness? Who are those instruments by means of which man is white-washed, purified, made radiant?

O, how poor is our vocabulary when it comes to describing the life in Christ which the Holy Scriptures refers to as *new birth*, *rebirth*, and *a new creation*! It is the Holy Spirit who fashions holiness, but the instruments of the Holy Spirit are those whom the Apostle Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians, saying that Christ gave, *some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.* (Eph 4:11-16). This blessed person is the priest, by whom infants are baptized; by whom marriages are preformed; by whom the sins of those who are repentant are remitted; by whom the Holy Gifts are sanctified; by whom the bread and wine are transformed at the Divine Liturgy; by

whom our entrance and exit from this world are blessed. He is worthy of reverence on account of his loft service which excels even that offered by the angels. It is from this perspective that these might be called, *Father*.

In the Orthodox Church, we also call fathers those exceptional figures who shone in the spiritual sky like radiant stars; who shone through their holiness; who shone through their writings; and not a small number of who shone through their miracles and martyric ends.

The Fathers! They loved the Lord with the full flame of their love. Out of a desire to attain purity of heart [nous], to achieve holiness in the highest degree, to be as close to God as possible, they fled to desolate places, they undertook strict ascetical practices, they fasted, they prayed, they studied the Scriptures. Then after many years of ascetical labour they left their hermitages and came to the cities. With what love they embraced humanity! With what boldness and daring they rebuked those who oppressed and wronged the people of God! With what wisdom and skill they fought against the heresiarchs, scattering heretical assemblies!

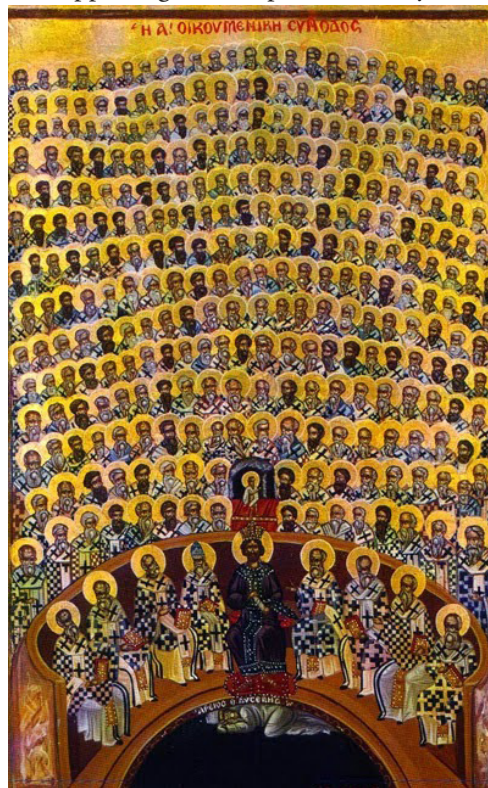
The Fathers! In times of famine and social unrest they were shown to be new Josephs since through their preaching they opened storehouse doors, thereby feeding the hungry, and sheltered widows and orphans. They sold whatever they had—sometimes even the Church's silver and gold vessels—to ransom captives from the clutches of barbarians.

The Fathers! In times of persecution they did not abandon the people of God to save their own skin, but they remained with the people as defenders and protectors and often met martyric

ends as a consequence.

The Fathers! In times of fearful heresy they sounded like trumpets. They made up the body of local and ecumenical councils; they condemned heretical mindsets; they formulated dogmas with crystalline clarity; they anathematized heretics; they secured the flock, safeguarding it from wolves.

The Fathers! In life, they are the Church's benefactors, however they do not cease from benefitting it even after their repose. Then they benefit it by their holy relics which are not only proof that the corruption of time has been overcome, but are also sources of healing. Above all, however, they benefit it through their writings. Having embraced voluntary poverty, it is these which they have bequeathed to the Church as its inheritance. O, the writing of the Fathers! Despite the fact that they were written ages ago, they—together with what they teach—ever



remain relevant for they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. They never wax old. When someone picks these up and studies them, he feels as if he is next to some fresh-water spring from which he draws the water of life, drinks insatiably, is refreshed, and is made glad. Truly, these Fathers are an ever-flowing stream of wisdom!

Among those characteristics which serve to distinguish the Orthodox Church from other churches is the fact that it honors and venerates the Fathers in accordance with divine command: *Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us... Their seed shall remain forever, and their glory shall not be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will show forth their praise*" (Sir 44:1) and also, *Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.* (Deut 32:7).

Proof that the Orthodox Church honours its Fathers may be found in the fact that, apart from the various feasts when great Fathers and Teachers are celebrated individually, it dedicates three Sundays of the year to the corporate memory of the Fathers, namely the 7th Sunday after Pascha when we celebrate the memory of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council, the Sunday falling between the 13th -19th of July when we celebrate the memory of the Holy Fathers who assembled at the first six ecumenical councils, and the Sunday between the 11th - 17th of October when we celebrate the memory of the Holy Fathers who assembled at the Seventh Ecumenical Council to condemn Iconoclasm. By means of the outstanding hymns that we sing at these services, the Church honours their memory. Of these hymns, we submit the following God-inspired example: *The choir of the holy fathers hath gathered from the ends of the earth, hath taught the single essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and hath carefully committed to the Church the mystery of theology. Praising them in faith, let us bless them saying: O divine legion, divinely eloquent swordsmen of the Lord's command, most radiant stars of the noetic firmament, unassailable towers of the mystical Sion, sweet-scented blossoms of paradise, golden mouths of the Word, boast of Nicaea and adornments of the whole world: Pray ye in behalf of our souls!*

Beloved brethren! In the end times, the disrespect that people have often shown toward their parents according to the flesh, dishonoring them in various ways, has crept into their relationship with their spiritual fathers and the teachers of the Church. People today stand with jaws agape, staring into bookshop windows wherein are displayed writings of questionable value—some even highly dangerous. In our schools, texts written by pre-Christian writers which are full of myths and which propound the cosmology associated with the false gods of Olympus are taught in Ancient Greek classes. But the texts of the great Fathers and teachers of the Church which flow with

the sweetness of divine wisdom, where are they? The Fathers have been exiled from the schools of our Orthodox kingdom. Hesiod, Herodotus, Lysias, Lucian, Theokritos, Arrian, along with other poets and literary figures of the idol-worshiping world, are to be held in higher esteem according to the view of the Department of Education. **Sadly, the writings of the Holy Fathers, a treasure written for the most part in Greek, are kept hidden from our people.**

Living in a Manner Worthy of the Fathers

Honoring the Fathers should not be limited simply to hymns and encomia, beloved brethren. Just as being the descendent of noble forefathers entails certain obligations, so being the spiritual descendant of the glorious Fathers of the Church places holy obligations on all faithful children of Orthodoxy. Just as those who have lived in hostile environments and amid many troubles did not lose heart, become disillusioned, or faint-hearted, but instead held aloft the standard of Orthodoxy throughout everything, bearing witness to Jesus in their generation, so are we called to do. Let us too hold aloft the standard of Orthodoxy; let us too bear witness to Jesus in our generation which is either doesn't know, or distorts the holy truths of Orthodoxy.

By the manner of our life, we ought to show that Christ not only lived and worked wonders in the era of the Fathers, but that he lives and continues to work wonders even today; that the miracle of faith is something continuous and uninterrupted in accordance with the Apostolic teaching which says, *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* (Heb 13:8). Orthodoxy is not what her critics, misunderstanding our deep reverence for the Fathers, say that she is; Orthodoxy is not something static, but rather an unbroken living stream, a holy fire which one generation receives from the previous, and then in turn passes on to the next, calling it to lay hold of the saving light. Orthodoxy is an unceasing lighting of the lamps, an uninterrupted and continuous torch race which began with the fires of Pentecost and continues down to our day, and will continue until the second coming of Christ. We are called to bear witness to all this, thus becoming imitators of the Holy Fathers.

May our lives shine as theirs did, then, for if we limit ourselves to hymns of praise and encomiums, boasting in the Patristic treasure, then we will resemble the unworthy sons of Israel who boasted in their glorious forefathers yet lived lives altogether different from them. *You who live impiously cannot possibly call Abraham your father,)))* calls out the voice of the Forerunner like thunder. Sadly, this rebuke might just as easily be spoken of our generation, a generation of sin and hypocrisy, *O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* (Lk 3:7-8).

THE DEEPER MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

By Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol.

Every time we stand before the Lord either in prayer or in celebration in Church of an event from the life of Christ, or we are in any other way experiencing the presence of the Lord, two basic things happen, which are attested by the Church and the experience of the Saints: Firstly, we are feeling joy because we are experiencing the Lord's abundant love towards man. He moves our heart into great gratitude, since we are experiencing—to the measure of our spiritual condition—God's great gift for us.

Secondly, by being presented before the Lord, we are also standing in a kind of critical judgment for our actions; this, in turn, leads to our salvation, particularly if this takes place during the great feast days which commemorate events from the life of Christ. Indeed, any event in His life prompts us into adopting a critical attitude towards ourselves which does not lead to damnation but to our deliverance.

Accordingly, we are commemorating our Lord's incarnation in order to experience on the one hand His great love for us, and on the other to feel great gratitude for all the wonderful things He has granted us. In addition, this benefits us in a practical way, because we are offered the opportunity to pass judgement on our life. As St. Paul says: *The Lord will not judge us if we pass judgement on ourselves. (For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged—1 Cor 11:31).* If we criticise our ways in this life, we will not be judged in the afterlife, because judgement has already been accomplished in this world.

In other words, now that our Lord's feast is before us, we have the opportunity to critically compare our lives in terms of all the things that our Lord has accomplished for our deliverance, particularly since we know that He did not leave anything to chance but guided all things as the Master of history that He is. He is the One Who wished all events to take place in the way they did, even to the smallest detail. He was the One Who wished to be born in the specific

year, at the specific place, as well as all the other elements which constitute the great event of His incarnation.

All the Saints used to critically compare the particular events happening in their lives with the life of Christ and passed judgement on themselves. We would like to believe that a true Christian is one who imitates the life of Christ, as far as humanly possible. He then replenishes any deficiencies through repentance and humility. And this constitutes his inner spiritual work.

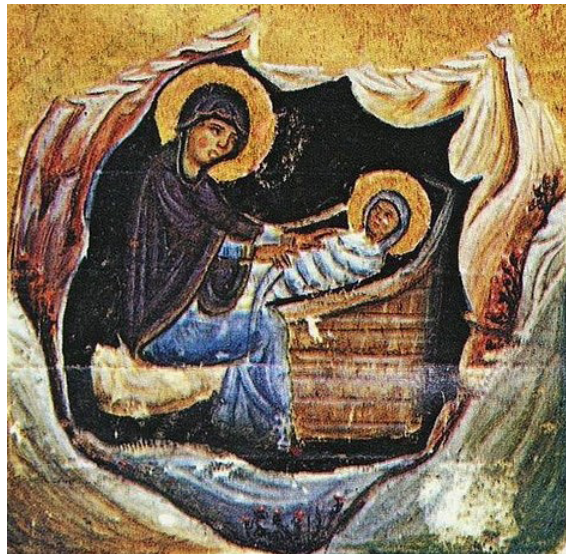
On such feast days, our Church constantly glorifies the Lord for His great condescension towards man through wonderful hymns, while digging into the deeper theological meaning of His incarnation. Holy elders as well as pious laity have particular experience of this event's deeper meaning. When elder (St.) Efraim Katounakiotis returned from a trip to Jerusalem, we had expected him to be overwhelmed by the experience of Golgotha and of the Crucifixion. Yet, he was overwhelmed by the Cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem. He stood before this event saying: *I thought I was somebody when I was living in my ascetic hut at Katounakia, amongst my meagre possessions. But when I saw where Christ was born, I became truly crushed in spirit.*

Having been born in a cave, persecuted and despised by all men, Christ accomplished the greatest event in man's history: His incarnation. God became man in total quietude, humility and obscurity. No one knew what was happening that night, except for some shepherds and the wise men from Persia.

This event took place in absolute poverty and humility. Therefore, every time we are bothered by various demands and desires, we should place ourselves in front of the Cave of the Nativity, stand before the Divine Word's incarnation, and see how our actions compare with what the Lord did that night. In this way we are passing judgement on our actions. In the same manner

we ought to critically examine our entire life.

Ever since God became Man and the angels sang *peace on earth*, the Word of God is saying to us: *I did not come to bring peace, but to bring a sword. (Mt 10:34).* Why did the Lord bring a sword while the angels were singing about peace?



Christ was the Peace which came to the world and became man so that we would be able to love Him. He showed us that our relationship with the Lord is not a relationship with an ideology, because nobody can love an idea. One may be devoted to some philosophical ideology, but no one can love it, because it will not reciprocate one's love.

In the life of the Church quite the opposite is happening. We have nothing to do with a philosophical ideology and the Word of God did not become any such idea. The Word became flesh. The Word of God incarnated so that we could love Him. And as soon as we begin to love Him, we will be able to understand that He was the One Who loved us first in a manner which cannot be comprehended.

The Apostle says that *we love Him, since He first loved us.* (1 Jn 4:19). This is the kind of mystery which takes place in the Church. It is for this reason that Christ, as the peace of the world, became the subject of love and not of faith. One ought to transcend faith and hope in order to remain in love. As the Apostle says, eventually hope and faith may be abandoned and only love will remain, since love is an experiential fact, an existential event which makes man realize that he is truly united with God. This is the path walked by all those who loved Him unto the end.

Stephen, the first martyr, sealed his love for the Lord by imitating Him. It is written in the Acts, that when he was arrested because he was preaching about Christ, his face lit up like the face of an angel while standing trial. They condemned him to death by stoning as if he was a great sinner because this was what the Law of Moses stipulated. Yet, filled by the Holy Spirit, Stephen was praying not for himself but for the whole world, despite his awful predicament. Thus he imitated Christ, Who had been praying for those who crucified Him while dying on the Cross.

Therefore, ever since Christ came into the world and brought peace, millions of martyrs gave up their lives because of their faith in Him and because they truly loved Him and had tasted His love. The love of Christ spoke into their hearts.

When we are celebrating the feast days for the Saints and the martyrs, we are not just commemorating certain events of their lives. We are commemorating the days when they passed judgement on themselves. They had critically looked at themselves in line with the life of the Lord. They did not take such days lightly. The saints delved deeply into the true meaning of their lives, critically examining and passing judgement on their own actions. On the one hand, they thought about Christ in His manger, His humility and obscurity, His silence and poverty, His rejection and wretchedness and on the other, they compared their own actions and examined them critically.

The Lord revealed, through the lives of the Apostles and of all the Saints, that it is not possible for the Holy Spirit to reside in us without us bearing Its fruit. He expressly

stressed that the fruits of the Holy Spirit are *'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control.* Therefore, we ought to look for such fruit inside ourselves, which indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit. Then we may assess where we stand spiritually. Such critical assessment is necessary and life-saving. If we embark on this exercise during this festive season, then it will be truly lifesaving for us because it will give rise to the spiritual struggle of repentance and humility and will change our ways.

At the same time it will lead us to seek the Lord's mercy in a loving way. As soon as we recognize that we are indeed people who live in the dark, we too will declare: *where would your light shine, Lord, if not on those who live in the dark?* As soon as we recognize that we live in the dark, we will immediately seek the light. Yet, if we think that we are living in the light, then we will never see the true light, since we only possess the light which we can see.



A man can know nothing about the judgment of God. He alone is the one who takes account of all and is able to judge the hearts of each one of us, as He alone is our Master.

Truly it happens that a man may do a certain thing which seems to be wrong out of simplicity, and there may be something about it which makes more amends to God than your whole life; how are you going to sit in judgment and constrict your own soul? And should it happen that he has fallen away, how do you know how much and how well he fought? How much blood he sweated before he did it?

Perhaps so little fault can be found in him that God can look on his action as if it were just, for God looks on his labor and all the struggle he had before he did it, and has pity on him. And do you know this, and what God has spared him for? Are you going to condemn him for this and ruin your own soul? And how do you know what tears he has shed about it before God? You may well know about the sin but do you not know about the repentance!

St. Dorotheos of Gaza



Christ is born; glorify Him!

Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!

Christ is on earth; be exalted!

Sing to the Lord, all the earth!

And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!

CHRIST IS BORN: GOD ENTERED INTO THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN LIFE

By St. Justin Popovic.

In truth God as a man was born on earth! Why? *That we might live through him.* (1 Jn 4:9). For without the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, human life is wholly and completely a suicidal absurdity, and death is truly the most outright and horrible absurdity on earth. To comprehend death means comprehending life in all its depth, height, and limitlessness. This can only be done by the All-man-loving Lord, Who by His immeasurable love becomes man and forever remains the God-man in the human world. Only as God-life, life in God, can human life acquire its eternal meaning. But outside of God, life is the most ridiculous absurdity, filled with offense and bitterness.

Your life, O man, can find its only reasonable, rational, logical meaning in God alone. And your thought, brother, your human thought finds its divine and immortal meaning only in God, only as God-thought. Human thought only becomes God-thought in the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the same with your senses, O man—only in God do they find their divine, immortal meaning. Without this, your senses are your most merciless torturers, continually crucifying you on an eternal cross, after which there is no resurrection. And the conscience? Where does this ferocious stranger come from in us, people? It too only unites with its divine and eternal meaning as God-conscience. Without this, human conscience is a ferocious and ghastly absurdity.

And your death, and my death, and the death of all people— isn't it the cruelest torture for human beings throughout the world? Yes, it truly is. But it too, only as the death of the God-man, gains its eternal meaning through the resurrection of the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ; for through Him and only through Him does victory over death happen and death in the human world can be comprehended. Thus also everything human, the entire human with all his innumerable infinities, only as the grace-filled God-man in the deified and all-vivifying Body of the God-man Christ—the Church—gains his divine, eternal, God-human, and higher meaning.

Through His incarnation, through becoming man, becoming human, has God in the most manifest way entered into the very womb, the very bowels of human life, into the blood, into the heart, into the center of all existence. Squeezed out by voluntary human sin from the world, from the body, from the human soul, through the incarnation, by becoming man He returns to the world, to the body, to the soul. He wholly becomes a man, and being a man He labors for man, settles into the world and among creatures, takes care of the creature, enlightens the creature, saves the creature, transforms

the creature, and deifies the creature. God's incarnation is the greatest upheaval and the most providential event, both on Earth and in Heaven, for the miracle of miracles has happened. If up until then the creation of the world from nothing was the greatest miracle, the incarnation of God in man has without a doubt surpassed it in its miraculousness. If at the creation of the world the words of God were clothed in matter, then at the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ God has clothed Himself in a body, in matter, in flesh. Therefore the incarnation of God became providential throughout the whole creation—for every individual, for every being, for every creature.

You, too, live by Him—live by the God-man and you will be healed of all deaths, all sins, all passions, and all diabolism. May your life become a God-life. In this is your whole heavenly-earthly mystery, O man, the moment you become a member of the church—a member of the God-man Body of Christ. And how should we live in the Church of Christ? We should live through the Holy Mysteries and holy virtues. That is why there is a fast before the Nativity. Fasting is the first virtue, and prayer is always with it. These two foundational virtues bring a person to the God-man and teach him with divine wisdom how to live by Him and in Him.

What should we do with the body given to us from God? Purify it, free it from all uncleanness, from all passions, from all evil, from every demon. And what does this mean? It means cleansing it of every sin, for in every sin a devil is hiding, in every sin a devil works apart from your free will. In a great sin is a prince of demons, in a small sin is an imp. You and I and every person has been given all the necessary means to conquer those demons, all the passions, all sins, and all deaths in us and in the world around us. Prayer and fasting are in the first place. The all-true lips of the All-true Lord Jesus Christ have pronounced also this life-creating truth: This kind *goeth not out but by prayer and fasting* (Mt 17:21)—all kinds of sins, all kinds of passions, all kinds of demons.

The Nativity is before you, before me, before us, brothers and sisters: God is born as a man, *so that we would receive life through Him* and thus be filled in soul and body with God. And this is most readily acquired by prayer and fasting. They cleanse and purify the body and the soul, so that wondrous joy would settle into them, and the sweetest God-infant, our Lord Jesus and God would fill completely our human existence, all of its enumerable infinities. It is for this reason, O man, that your body and your soul were created—to be filled with God and to live with God in the divine world on high. Our God-given teachers in this work are humble prayer and humble fasting—these holy foundational Gospel virtues. May they fly with us, may they precede us and ceaselessly announce to all people throughout the world the all-saving and all-joyful glad tidings:

Christ is Born!

ON THE NEW YEAR

By St. John Chrysostom.



The whole year will be fortunate for you, not if you are intoxicated on the new-moon [New Year' Day], but if both on the new-moon [January 1st], and each day, you do those things approved by God. For days come wicked

and good, not from their own nature; for a day differs nothing from another day, but from our zeal and sluggishness. If you perform righteousness, then the day becomes good to you; if you perform sin, then it will be evil and full of retribution.

If you contemplate these things, and are so disposed, you will consider the whole year favorable, performing prayers and charity every day; but if you are careless of virtue for yourself, and you entrust the contentment of your soul to beginnings of months and numbers of days, you will be desolate of everything good unto yourself.

Strong drink does not produce delight, but spiritual prayer; not wine, but a learned word. Wine effects a storm, but the Word of God effects calm; the former transports in an uproar, the latter expels disturbance; the former darkens the understanding, the latter lightens the darkened; the former brings new dependencies that previously were not there, but the latter drives away those that were beforehand. For nothing is so accustomed to produce contentment and delight, as the teachings of our wisdom: which is to despise present affairs, to yearn for the things to come, to consider nothing of human affairs to be secure, and if you behold some rich man not to be bitten with envy, and if you fall into poverty not to be downcast by that poverty. Thus, you are always able to celebrate festivals.

The Christian ought to hold feasts not for months, nor new moons, nor Lord's days, but continually through life to conduct a feast befitting him. What is the feast that befits him? Let us listen to St. Paul speaking: *Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not in the old leaven, nor by leaven of evil and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* (1 Cor 5:8).

If then you have a clean conscience, you hold a feast continually, nourished with good hopes, and reveling in the delight of the good things to come; then just as if you conducted yourself lacking boldness, and you were liable from many sins, and if there be ten thousand feasts and holy-days, you would be in no better state than those grieving. For what is the benefit to me of bright days, if my soul is darkened in its conscience? If then one wishes to gain some benefit from the new moon, do this. When you see the year ending, thank the Lord, because he had led you into this cycle of years. Stab the heart (prick the heart) reckon up the time of your life, say

to oneself: "The days run and pass by, the years fill-up, we have progressed much of the way; what good is there for us to do? Will we not depart from here, empty and deserted of all righteousness, the judgment at the doors, the rest of life leads us to our old age."

These things, [from the new moon], contemplate on New Year's Day, these from the circuit of the years, recollect. Let us reckon the future day, no longer something spoken to us that, which was said to the Jews by the prophet, *Their days slipped away in vanity, and their years with haste.* [Pss 77:33]. This is the feast which I mentioned, the continual one, and the one not delayed by the passage of years, not limited by days, both the rich and the poor will be able to celebrate in the same manner: For here there is no want of wealth, nor provision, but only of virtue. Do you not have wealth? But you have the fear of God, a treasure more fruitful than all wealth, not consumed, not changed, not spent-up. Look to heaven, and to the heaven of heavens, the earth, the sea, the air, the kinds of the animals, the manifold plants, the whole nature of human-beings; consider the angels, archangels, the powers above; recall that these are all creations of your Master. It is thus not poverty to be the slave of the providential Master, if you have him as your propitious Lord. The observation of days is not of Christian philosophy (Christian teaching, wisdom), but of Hellenic error. [Note: Philosophy, both here and throughout Chrysostom, refers to Christianity as both a distinct set of beliefs, and a set of practices or way of life. It highlights the rivalry between the Christian philosophy, and the philosophical schools of the Hellenism.]

Into the city above you are enrolled [i.e. as a citizen] into the *politeia*^[1] there you are reckoned, you will mingle with the angels; where light does not give way to darkness, nor day fulfilled to night, but is always day, always light. To these therefore let us look continually. *For seek, he says, the things above, where Christ is seated at God's right hand.* (Col 3:1). You have nothing in common with the earth, where the courses of the sun are, and circuits, and days; but if you live rightly, the night will be day for you; just as then for those living in licentiousness and drunkenness and intemperance, their day is turned into the darkness of night, not with the sun's extinction, but the darkening of their mind by inebriation.

To be passionately excited towards these days, and to receive greater pleasure in them, and to kindle lights in the forum, and to weave wreaths, is of childish folly. But you have been freed from this weakness, and come into adulthood, and been enrolled in the polity of the heavens. Do not therefore kindle sensate fire in the forum, but kindle spiritual light in your mind. *For let, he said, your light shine before men, so they may see your good works, and they will glorify our Father in the heavens.* (Mt 5:16; St. Chrysostom has *our Father for your Father*).

This light brings you much recompense. Do not crown the door of the house, but display such a way of life so that you will receive the crown of righteousness on your head from the hand of Christ. Let nothing be done rashly, nor simply; thus Paul enjoins that all things be done for the glory of God. *For whether you eat, he said, or drink, or do whatever, do all for the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31; this verse provides the theme for the rest of the sermon).

And what is it, he says, to eat and drink for God's glory? Call the poor man, make Christ a participant of the table, and you eat and drink for God's glory. But not this alone does he enjoin us to do for God's glory, but all the rest as well, as to go into the forum, and to remain at home; let these both be done for God's sake [διὰ τὸν Θεὸν and so throughout]. And how are these both to be done for God's sake? Whenever you come into church, whenever you partake of prayer, whenever of spiritual teaching, the advance has occurred for God's glory. Again, it is to remain at home for God's sake. And how is this? [i.e. How will one glorify God in this action of staying at home?]

Whenever you hear disturbances, disorderly and diabolical processions, the forum filled with wicked and undisciplined men, remain at home, free from this disorder, and you remain for God's glory. Just as spending time at home and going-out is able to be done for God's sake, thus also of praise and censure. And what is it to praise something for God's glory, he says, and to accuse? You sit frequently in workplaces, you see evil and wicked men passing by, raising the eyebrows [a sign of haughtiness and importance], puffed up, trailing many parasites and flatterers, wearing expensive clothes, surrounded with some mystique, seizing all things, avaricious. If you hear someone saying, "Is he not enviable, is he not blessed?" Rebuke [the word], accuse it, [have] silence, pity, and weep; this is what it means to censure for God's sake.

Censure is teaching of philosophy to those meeting together and is so strong of virtue, so as to no longer long for the things of everyday life. Say to the one saying these things: "Why is this man blessed? Because he has a marvelous horse and a golden bridle, and possesses many servants, and wears bright clothing, and bursts each day in drunkenness and luxury?" But for this reason he would be wretched and cursed, and worthy of a thousand tears. I see then that you are able to praise nothing of him, but all things external to him, the horse, the bridle, the clothing, of which nothing is his. What then, tell me, is more pitiable than this, when his horse, and the horse's bridle, and the beauty of his clothes, and the bodily vigor of his servants are marveled, but he passes by upraised? Who then could be poorer than this man, having nothing good of his own, nor anything that he is able to carry away from here, but is adorned entirely by external things? For adornment and riches are properly our own, not servants and

clothing and horses, but virtue of soul, and wealth of good deeds, and confidence towards God.

Again, you see another man, a pauper, rejected, despised and passing his life in poverty and virtue, considered unhappy by his companions: commend this man, and the praise of this man as he passes by is exhortation and counsel of a useful and good way of life [*politeia*]. If they say, "He is wretched and miserable," say that this one is the most blessed of all, having God as his friend, passing life in virtue, possessing a wealth never failing, having a pure conscience. For what harm is there to him from the lack of possessions, when he is going to inherit heaven and the good things in heaven? And if you yourself philosophize in this manner, and instruct others, you will receive a great reward from both censure and from praises, doing both for God's glory. And that I do not allure you vainly saying these things, but that a certain great recompense exists with the God of all things for those whose intellect is thus disposed, and that the thing has been considered a certain virtue, [that is] the resolving to do such things, hear what the prophet says concerning those so living, and how he places things in an order of perfections, the despising of those doing wickedness, and the glorifying of those fearing God.

For after recounting the other virtue of the one who will be honored by God, also he says, of what sort one must be to dwell in the holy tabernacle, that is blameless, and performing righteousness, and wicked-less, and this he adds: For saying, *Who did not deceive with his tongue, and did no harm to his neighbor* (Ps 15:3) he adds, *The one doing evil is set at naught before him, but those fearing the Lord he glorifies* (Ps 15:4) showing that this is one of those perfections, that is to despise the wicked, and to praise and bless the good. And again elsewhere this same thing he makes plain, saying, *Your friends were exceedingly honorable to me, God, their beginnings* [poss. authorities] *became very strong.*" (Pss 138:17).

Whom God praises, do not censure: He praises the one living in righteousness, even if he be poor; whom God turns away, do not praise: He turns away the one living in wickedness, even if he be surrounded by much wealth. But if you praise, and if you censure, do both as God wishes. For there is even accusing unto the glory of God. How? Frequently we are vexed with our servants. How then is there accusing for God's sake? If you see someone drunk, or stealing, whether servant, or friend, or some other of those related to you, whether running into the theatre, or having no concern for their soul, or swearing [i.e. swearing oaths], or perjuring [i.e. to swear falsely] or lying: be angry, punish, turn them back, correct; and you did all these things for God's sake. And if you see someone sinning against you, and omitting something of their service toward you, pardon them, and you are forgiven for God's sake.

But now many do the opposite, both to their friends, and to their servants. For when they sin against them, they become bitter and unforgiving judges; but when they insult God, and ruin their own souls, they produce no rationale. Again, is it necessary to make friends? Make them, for God's sake. Is it necessary to make enemies? Make them, for God's sake. And by what means does one make friends and enemies for God's sake? If we do not attract those friends, whence money is taken, whence sharing of a table, whence obtaining of human patronage, but pursue and make those friends, those able always to order our soul, counsel necessities, rebuke sinners, expose trespassers, restore those fallen, and aiding by counsel and prayers to lead to God.

Again, it is permitted to make enemies for God's sake. If you see someone undisciplined, abominable, full of wickedness, replete with unclean teachings, tripping you up and harming you, stand apart and turn away, just as also Christ commanded, saying, *If your right eye trips you up, pluck it out and cast it from you* (Mt 5:29) commanding those friends, those being desirable in the rank of eyes [i.e., those friends whom we hold as dear as our own eyes], and necessary in the things of everyday life, to cut off, and to cast out, if they harm you with regard to the salvation of the soul. If you share in their meetings, and you prolong your speech, do even this for God's sake, and if you keep silent, keep silent for God's sake.

And what is it to participate in the meeting for God's sake? If you are seated with someone, converse nothing concerning daily affairs, nor of simple things even vainly and nothing of those related to you, but concerning our philosophy, concerning Hell, concerning the Kingdom of the Heavens, but not superfluities and unprofitable things, such as, "Who entered authority? Who lost power? For what reason was so-and-so injured [possibly with a technical or financial sense: fined, punished]? Whence did so-and-so profit and become better off? What did so-and-so dying leave behind to such-and-such? How did so-and-so miss out, expecting to be listed among the foremost of the heirs?" And many other such things. Let us not then discuss such things, nor bear others discussing [them]; but let us consider doing and saying what is pleasing to God. Again, it is to keep silent for God's sake, being maltreated, abused, suffering a thousand evils, if you bear them nobly, and emit no blasphemous word against the one doing these things to you. Not to praise and to censure alone, nor to remain indoors and to go out, not to utter and to keep silent, but also to weep and mourn, and to enjoy and delight is to God's glory.

For when you see either a brother sinning, or yourself falling into a transgression, [if] then you groan and mourn, then you gain from the grief a salvation without regret, just as Paul says, *For grief according to God produces a salvation without regret.* [2 Cor. 7:10]. If you see another person being highly esteemed,

then do not disparage him, but as for one's own goods give thanks to God, to the one making your brother illustrious, and you receive a great reward from this joy.

What then, tell me, is more pitiable than the envious, when it is permitted both to rejoice and to profit through joy, and they prefer rather to grieve upon the advantages of others, and with the grief to yet also attract a punishment from God, an unendurable retribution. And what need is there to speak of praise, and of blame, and of pain, and of joy, when indeed even from the least of these things and from the meanest [*meanest* in the sense of cheap, frugal, vulgar] events the greatest things are to be profited, if we do them for God's sake?

Whether you eat, whether you drink, whether you do some other thing, do all for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31). If we pray, if we fast, if we accuse, if we pardon, if we praise, if we censure, if we enter, if we exit, if we sell, if we buy, if we are silent, if we converse, if we do any thing else whatsoever, let us do all for the glory of God, and if something be not for the glory of God, neither let it be done, nor be spoken by us; but in place of a great staff, in place of arms and safeguard, in place of unspeakable treasures, wherever we might be, let us carry around this word with us, having inscribed it upon our understanding, so that doing and speaking and trafficking all things for the glory of God, we shall obtain the glory that is from him both in this world and after the journey here [i.e., after this life].

For those that glorified me, he says, I will glorify. (1 Sam 2:30). Not therefore with words, but also through deeds let us glorify him continually with Christ our God, because all glory befits him, honor and worship, now and always unto the ages of ages. Amen.



[*] *Politeia*, like philosophy, is a key concept-work for Chrysostom. It refers variously to the body of Christians both on earth and in heaven, their way of life as citizens, and their ordered existence in the church. It is also a rival *politeia* to that of Plato's Republic and the like.



Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE THORNS OF APOSTASY

Source: "The Inkless Pen," a blog by Fr. Zecariah Lynch, 12/14/2020.

And that which fell into the thorns, these are the ones who heard, and while they are going on their way, they being choked by the cares and wealth and pleasures of life, and do not bring forth fruit to perfection.

[Lk 8:14]



In another place our Lord says a similar thing, *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* (Mt 6:21). If the heart is preoccupied with material, passing, things, then it will labor with all its might to preserve them. For the materialized heart, all that exists is physical existence. The preservation of material existence becomes the primary goal of the material-man; indeed it becomes the all-encompassing driving factor.

The fleeting pleasures of mortal life are very seductive and addictive. It is not without reason the modern man, mostly in the "western" world, has become satiated on pleasures. He grows ever more numb to old pleasures and tumbles forward seeking new and more tantalizing ones. And the powers that be feed this addiction relentlessly.

Yet, even a more benign comfort and dependency on pleasure is potentially deadly to the spirit. All these pleasures have the potential to act as chains which will keep a person bound and spiritually impotent. There is a very healthy and balanced enjoyment of earthly life, which in the Christian sense is always framed in the context of Eternity. The root ailment of modernity is that it takes the passing nature of material pleasure to be the end-all of human existence. It perverts something good. A Christian should live in thankful enjoyment to God for all the *fruits of the earth* that are His most gracious gifts to His creature man. (It bears noting here, I am addressing a state of the heart. **Wealth or poverty in and of themselves carry no vice or virtue.**)

St. Seraphim of Vyritsa, speaking on the days near the end, teaches: *The time will come when there will be no persecution, but money and the attractions of this world will draw people away from God and many more souls will perish than during the period of open militant atheism. On the one hand, they will raise up crosses and gold cupolas, but on the other hand, the kingdom of lies and evil will come. The True Church will*

always be persecuted. Salvation will only be possible through sorrows and illness, persecutions will take on a very refined and unpredictable character. It will be terrible to live to those times.

The refined and unpredictable character quite possibly indicates the fact that humanity's addiction to pleasure and comfort will be used as a strong mechanism for control. Few will be ready to sacrifice the comforts of the times. Why? Because for them these material things are truly all they have.

Moreover, for Christians it may well be that few will be willing to sacrifice physical comfort so as to hold to Truth. God understands after all. He doesn't want us to be fanatics. Christians will be unwilling to sacrifice for Truth because they have been cultivated in a field of thorns. It will just seem like "normal" Christian living.

The message of "repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" has been supplanted by the message of "let us build an earthly kingdom of well-being for all humanity." The



health and salvation of the soul have been subordinated to the physical preservation and well-being of the flesh and its desires.

The Truth of the Gospel is no longer an all-encompassing eternal standard for the lives of men. Rather, it has been beat back to the realm of the "individual" and what seems good to him. Thus, a false separation has taken place. The needs of mankind have been compartmentalized into the strictly religious, which is

viewed in subjective terms, and the socio-political. It is the latter that is given preeminence in the modern world because it, seemingly, tends the physical needs of man.

Since for modern man the material is the only "real," that which tends to his material cravings and desires is made divine. Humanity never outgrows idolatry, it only becomes more sophisticated. He will always pinch incense on the altar of the gods of physical comfort.

In such a mindset, Christianity, specifically Orthodoxy, becomes a set of predominately outward rites which may be modified and adapted to meet the "needs of men." Truth may be sacrificed for the "greater good" of the physical well-being of humanity. It is, thus, easily molded to promote the gospel of the times, the preeminence of the physical well-being of man in the world. At this point serving as a minister, a priest, becomes just a profession.

Yet if the Church is only an institution primarily concerned with physical well-being, then it is indeed useless

and is sealing its fate as being obsolete. For there are plenty of other organizations that tend to material well-being in a far superior manner.

It is precisely the Revealed Truth, which is the essential reality of true Christianity, that guarantees its eternal relevance. Once these treasures are sacrificed in the name of mortal material existence then it truly becomes savorless salt.

In some sense, as “western” Christians, we stand in the most dire of positions, saturated as we are with physical “comforts and pleasures.” We are indeed to be pitied the most! Is our “standard of Western living” simply a prison in which we have become spiritually anemic? Will it be the means by which we softly accept the pillaging of the treasures of faith so to at least maintain external structures?

In a sobering article written in the 20th century during the crisis of Communism entitled “The Epoch of Apostasy,” the author, Pr. Boris Molchanov makes this prophetic observation, “The situation is completely different in the West, where people are fully and solely immersed in their material interests. This is leading people unto a total indifference towards faith and submerging them into spiritual blindness. This doesn’t allow them to see the tortuous path, which leads towards the Antichrist. God’s grace is departing from the bustling and materialistic masses and thus they will fall.”

And so the great danger of the thorns. Those who grow there will believe that such a place is indeed “Christianity.” In reality, all fruit is choked out and the spiritual life begins to die away. “Christianity” becomes Indifferentism; as such it begins to preach another Christ (cf. Gal. 1:6ff)

May we of the “West” examine our hearts most diligently. If we find there thorns growing in abundance may we, by the grace of God, begin the labor of weeding them out. “Keep your heart with all watchfulness” (Prov. 4:22/23), “Nobel and good ... held fast in patience” (cf. Lk. 8:15).



APOSTASY IS PERMITTED BY GOD!

By St Ignatius Brianchaninov.

Apostasy is permitted by God – do not attempt to stop it with your powerless hand. Flee from it yourself, protect yourself from it; that is enough for you to do. Learn to know the spirit of the age, study it, so whenever possible you will be able to avoid its influence... Only God’s special mercy is able to stop this all-destroying moral epidemic, to stop it for a while, because it is necessary that everything foretold by the Scriptures happen.

Judging by the spirit of the times and the intellectual ferment, one must suppose that the structure of the Church, which has been shaking for some time, will fall quickly and horribly. There is no one to stop and oppose it. The measures undertaken to support it are borrowed and hasten its fall,

rather than stopping it. There is no one who can be expected to restore Christianity!

The vessels of the Holy Spirit have finally dried up everywhere, even in the monasteries, those treasures of piety and grace... The salt has lost its savor.

In the chief pastors of the Church there remains only a weak, dim, inconsistent and incorrect understanding according to the “letter” which kills the spiritual life in Christian society and destroys Christianity, which is an action, not a letter. It is distressing to see to whom the sheep of Christ have been entrusted, to whom their direction and salvation have been committed. But this has been permitted by God...

God’s merciful patience delays and postpones the decisive disintegration for the small remnant of those being saved, while those who are decaying or have decayed attain the fullness of their corruption.

Those who are being saved must understand this and make use of the time given them for salvation. May the merciful Lord shield the remnant of those who believe in Him! But, this remnant is meager and is becoming more and more so... Let him who is being saved save his soul.



When of old Satan deceived the first man Adam, thinking that through him he should have all men subject to him, he exulted with great boldness and said, *My hand has found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there is none that shall escape me or speak against me.* (Isa 10:14).

But when the Lord came upon the earth and the enemy made trial of His human Economy, being unable to deceive the flesh which He had taken upon Him, from that time forth he, who promised himself the occupation of the whole world, is for His sake mocked even by children: that proud one is mocked as a sparrow. (cf. Job 41:5). For now the infant child lays his hand upon the hole of the asp and laughs at him that deceived Eve (cf. Is 11:8; II Cor. 11:3); and all that rightly believe in the Lord tread under foot him that said, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High.* (Isa 14:14).

Thus he suffers and is dishonored; and although he still ventures with shameless confidence to disguise himself, yet now, wretched spirit, he is detected the rather by them that bear the Sign on their foreheads (cf. Ezek 9:4); yea, more, he is rejected of them, and is humbled, and put to shame. For even if, now that he is a creeping serpent, he shall transform himself into an angel of light, yet his deception will not profit him; for we have been taught that *though an angel from heaven preach to us any other gospel than that we have received, he is anathema.* (Gal 1:8-9).

St. Athanasius

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
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CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

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

ON SPIRITUAL FASTING

By St. Justin (Polyansky) of Ufa and Menzelinsk.

Spiritual fasting is closely connected with bodily fasting, similar to how our soul is connected with the body, penetrates it, animates it, and together with it makes up one whole as the soul and body make up one living person. And therefore, while fasting bodily, it is necessary for us to fast spiritually as well. How can we keep this spiritual fast?

In bodily fasting, abstinence from abundant, delicious, and sweet food is at the forefront; in spiritual fasting, it is abstinence from passionate sinful movements that delight our sensual inclinations and vices. Here giving up more substantive non-fasting food in favor of less filling fasting food; there giving up our favorite sins and transgressions and practicing the opposing virtues. Spiritual fasting means fasting with all the powers and capabilities of our soul, as well as all the members of our body.

Let the mind fast, not permitting empty and bad thoughts; let the heart fast, refraining from sinful feelings; let our will fast, directing all our desires and intentions to the one thing needful; let the tongue fast from shameful speech and slander; for what good is it if we abstain from poultry and fish, yet gnaw and devour our brethren with our evil tongue? *Whoever slanders, devours the flesh of his brother, gnaws the flesh of his neighbor*, says St. John Chrysostom. Let our eyes fast, learning not to run after beautiful faces, not gaze at someone else's beauty; for the food of the eyes is contemplation. It harms fasting and subverts the salvation of the entire soul if it is lawless and not permitted.

It would be very foolish to abstain with the mouth through fasting from foods and even from permitted food, while allowing the eyes even what is not permitted. *You are not eating meat—do not consume sensuality with your eyes.* (Chrysostom). Let your ears fast, not heeding any gossip or slander. Let the hands also fast, purifying themselves from stealing that which belongs to another, and acquisitiveness; and let the feet fast, ceasing to run to disreputable spectacles and soul-damaging festivities, to seductive and shameful dances. *You are fasting*, says St. John Chrysostom, *let it be expressed by your very deeds. What deeds, you may ask. If you see a poor man, give him alms; if you see an enemy, make peace with him; if you see a friend doing praiseworthy deeds, do not envy him; if you see a beautiful woman, pass by.*

In brief, the essence of fasting is expressed in the following Church hymn: *If thou dost fast from food, O my soul, yet dost not cleanse thyself from passions, in vain dost thou rejoice over thine abstinence. For if thou seekest not amendment, as a liar thou art hateful in God's sight, resembling the wicked spirits, who eat not at all. Render not the fast worthless by sinning, but firmly resist all wicked impulses. Picture to thyself that thou art standing beside the crucified Savior, or rather, that thou art thyself crucified with Him Who was crucified for thee; and cry out to Him: Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom.* (Cheesefare Week, Wednesday Matins, Aposticha, 1st stichera).

This is true fasting!

If, beloveds, we try to combine spiritual fasting with bodily fasting, then our fast will be *true and acceptable*. (First Week of Great Lent, Monday Vespers, Aposticha, 1st stichera).