

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

A MOST GLORIOUS MYSTERY

A homily on the Nativity of our Lord and Savior by Archbishop Philaret (+1985).

A strange and most glorious mystery do I behold: the cave is Heaven; the Virgin, the throne of the Cherubim; the manger, the place wherein lay Christ God Whom nothing can contain...

† † †

With these sacred words, in which the glad tidings of the great mystery of the Son of God are proclaimed, the Holy Church solemnly announces the radiant days of the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

They were heard first long before the feast itself, on the eve of another great feast—the Entrance into the Temple of the Mother of

God. And thereby the Church begins quite early on to prepare Her children to greet the Feast of the Nativity in a fitting manner

And if the holy hierarch Gregory the Theologian, speaking of our great feasts, refers to them as *mysteries*, thereby indicating the richness of their spiritual content and the exalted mysteries of the Faith which are disclosed therein, then perhaps this profound thought of the oecumenical teacher may be even more aptly applied to the feast of the Nativity of Christ, which is called *a strange and most glorious mystery*. And Paul, the preeminent Apostle, speaking in brief of the essence of our Christian evangelical task, said: *Great is the mys-*

tery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. (1 Tim 3:16).

Blessed was the night of the Nativity. In the fields of Bethlehem the flocks grazed peacefully. And round about them were the shepherds, *keeping watch over their flocks by night.* (Lk 2:8). There is a tradition, according to which these humble and faithful laborers were conversing on the peaceful night about the exact time of the advent of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And suddenly the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

Man cannot encounter denizens of the world above without experiencing fear and trembling; and the shepherds *were sore afraid.* Yet with what did the celestial herald begin his good tidings? *Fear not; for, behold, I bring*



you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (Luke 2:10). And this great, this sacred joy the Church has received, and preserved, and proclaims to Her faithful children yearly during the radiant days of the Nativity of Christ.

Well nigh two thousand years have passed. For two thousand years the Holy Gospel has been proclaimed to the world; and therein the Church, yearly, over and over again, announces the glad tidings of the birth of Christ and takes up the angels' doxology: *Glorry to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). But does contemporary humanity pay it any heed?

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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On the night of Christ's birth when Heaven came down to earth and earth became Heaven, in that God appeared on it incarnate, only the lowly shepherds of Bethlehem heard the angelic doxology and worshipped the Newborn, according to the Gospel. All the rest of mankind slept a deep sleep, unaware of the great event that had taken away our sorrow-filled and trying days; many are those who sleep a sound spiritual sleep from which they do not wake, who do not hearken to the good tidings of the Church! They pay no heed to the angels' song; it does not touch them. And if it reaches them in church, it leaves no trace in their souls; they are lost in earthly vanity and are not mindful of heaven.

The holy angels sang of peace, *and on earth peace...* Truly it is thus! For He Whom the Prophet called *the Prince of Peace* came to earth: He came Who, when He bid farewell to His beloved disciples, said to them; *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you.* (Jn 15:27). Oh, if only mankind, which has lost peace, yet yearns for it and seeks after it, would but listen to these holy words of the *Prince of Peace* and ponder on them!

When the faithful Christians see the desperate attempts and efforts of the children and sages of this age to establish peace on earth in our time, they bring to mind the dreadful prophecy of the Prophet: *There is NO PEACE, saith my God, for the wicked.* (Isa 57:21). Nay, nor shall there be! And pathetic are all the attempts of the lovers of peace to attain an external peace!

It is not for naught that the Lord, after speaking of the peace which He bestows upon His disciples, added: *Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.* (Jn 14:27). And the Gospel tells us plainly that the Lord has said of the outward (political) peace for which the learned men of this age are striving: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not*

to send peace, but a sword. (Mt 10:34). Therefore, in vain are the reproaches of those who maintain that Christianity has "failed," that it has promised men peace, but has not delivered it. For the angels chanted on the night of the Saviour's birth, and the Saviour Himself spoke, not of an outward peace, but of a spiritual peace, a peace between God and man, the peace of one's conscience, an inner peace. The Lord never promised an external peace; on the contrary, having foretold wars and rumors of wars, He added: *See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.* (Mt 24:6-7). He tells us that on earth there will never be that outward, political peace for which the propagandists are screaming.

The world is blind, has lost its senses, is entangled in its own passions and errors. Oh, if you could now but behold, see the light of knowledge, and understand what advances peace and your salvation.

Yet, alas! This is hidden from your eyes, for over them lies the impenetrable blindfold of vanity and the passions. The light of knowledge of God shines forth from the manger of Bethlehem, yet you do not perceive it; He Whose good pleasure it was to lie in that manger cries out to you: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28)--but you pay no heed to this saving call; you follow after your own wise men, of whom the word of God said long ago that "*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*" (Rom 1:22). And with yet greater and greater clarity, one senses in you the fetid breath of the approach of the one who will rise up before you as the full and dreadful incarnation of evil, sin and opposition to God.

Once, in the early days of the spreading of Christianity, the holy Apostle Peter, warning the first Christians, cried out: *Save yourselves from this perverse generation.* (Acts 2:40). By *perverse generation* the Apostle had in mind the implacable foes of Christ among the Jewish nation, as well as the entire pagan world, which to a great extent was depraved and debauched.

Prior to the birth of Christ, paganism had already become obsolete and moribund, having completely lost sight of the true meaning and significance of life. Christianity brought the light of understanding to pagan peoples and gave them new powers—and in Christianity pagans were regenerated spiritually. But what we see now in our own times is incomparably worse and more perilous than what took place of old. Now the Christian world has become depraved. Christians have become depraved—those whom the Saviour commanded to be the light of the world, with the awesome warning: *Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savor, with what shall it be salted?* (Mt 5:13).

Is this not taking place in our midst, right before our eyes? Are not today's Christians turning into salt which has lost its taste?

Flee this dreadful spiritual destruction, O faithful child of the Church! Save yourself from this perverse generation! Lo! In these radiant days the Church commemorates the Nativity of Christ and glorifies the newborn Saviour of the world; make haste in your faith to the manger of Bethlehem, following after the simple shepherds, pure of heart, and the wise magi who laid all their wisdom and knowledge down before that manger. Bring your own gifts to the divine Infant—faith in Him, trust in Him, love for Him—and then in your faithful and devoted heart the wondrous doxology of the angels will sound: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!*

Metropolitan Philaret



We are the offspring of disobedient parents. When disobedience entered our fore-bearers, Adam and Eve, our nature suddenly changed. It became corrupt, foul-smelling, prone to decay, and mortal. Death entered us. Before the Fall, our fore-bearers were immortal. Only God can bring us back to our original state, as He created us. It was for this reason that He, Who is love, came down to earth and was born of the Virgin as a child. It is for this reason that He lived for 33 years among men. He wanted to teach us the truth, and show us that He is love.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

DISCERNMENT IN FASTING

By Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



Apart from the causes I've already mentioned regarding the abnormal war of the flesh, we should also be careful of other things that cause the war to increase, such as the matter of our diet. First of all, the frying pan needs to be thrown away so as not to fry our flesh, and also so that we can save our stomach from ulcers. Boiled food with uncooked oil is beneficial. From among the vegetables, you should avoid mustard

for it causes burning in the flesh.

It sometimes happens that a carnal cloud suddenly comes over us and our mind darkens and our body paralyses. While, in such cases, a struggle is necessary, man is weaponless as much in his mind, which is found inebriated, as from his flesh, which is paralyzed and desires sleep, food, etc. In these cases, which stem from a preceding spiritual negligence, a cup of coffee—or even two, if necessary—helps a great deal. Immediately all the sensual insobriety, sleepiness and numbness, as well as languor are driven away by its invigorating energy, and all of the preconditions are created for the struggle of fasting, vigil and prayer, with prostrations and other spiritual exertions. In this way man acquires his twofold health.

Avoid wine while eating, especially if you are young, for it induces carnal warfare and burning along with dizziness, and then the enemy is armed with the weapons that you yourself have provided. If you are old, or young but of a sickly constitution, then drink some wine to supplement your frugal fare.

Excessive amounts of water are not beneficial, as they cause swelling in the stomach and carnal warfare, especially at night, aside from the fact that this swelling obstructs breathing in the unceasing prayer. Therefore, it is good to avoid salty food, which is harmful; too many sweets, which make you thirsty, as well as too many dry nuts, which cause thirst but also carnal warfare. Instead, one should use light and lean foods in order to assist in his spiritual flight of prayer.

One should avoid as much as possible all fatty foods and sauces, which tarnish the soul, as well as salty or canned foods. These, apart from being unhealthy for the body, are also unhealthy for the soul on account of the burning and perspiration, which the flesh emits, obliging man to wash continually, for otherwise he stinks like a Turk who doesn't have Holy Oil.

Apart from taking care for the food we eat, we should also pay attention to the customary times we eat, that we may be assisted in our spiritual struggle, since this also is of great consequence.

ORTHODOXY IS NOT A RELIGION

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion," edited for length.

Many people are under the impression that Orthodoxy is one of many religions and that it is primarily concerned with preparing the members of the Church for life after death; that is, with securing a place in Paradise for every Orthodox Christian. Thus, they reckon that Orthodox doctrine offers an additional guarantee (because it is Orthodox), and that if someone does not believe in Orthodox doctrine, this serves as just one more reason for this person to go to Hell—apart, that is, from the fact that his personal sins will, in all probability, send him there. Any Orthodox Christian who believes that such a thing is Orthodoxy has associated Orthodoxy exclusively with the future life. Such people do not do much in this life, but rather wait to die in order to go to Paradise, since in their lifetime they were Orthodox Christians!

Another portion of the Orthodox are active within the domain of the Church, being interested not in the next life, but primarily in the present life. In other words, what interests them is how Orthodoxy will help them to live well in this life. Such Orthodox Christians pray to God, have priests say prayers, bless Holy Water, read supplicatory Canons, and anoint them with Holy Oil, etc., so that God will help them to have a pleasant life, to avoid falling ill, to provide for their children, to secure a good dowry and a good husband for their daughters, to have their sons find nice girls with good dowries to marry, to have their work go well, and even to help them with their stocks or businesses, etc. So we see that these Christians do not differ significantly from the faithful of other religions, who also do pretty much the same things.

In other words, from the foregoing, one sees Orthodoxy as having these two points in common with all of the other faiths: Firstly, it prepares the faithful for life after death so that they might go to Paradise, as each one imagines it; secondly, it ensures that Christians do not pass through sorrows, worries, disasters, illnesses, wars, etc., in this life—that is, God takes care of everything according to their needs or desires. Thus, for the second group of Christians, religion plays a major role in this life, and especially in everyday life.

Deep down, however, who, among all of the aforementioned Christians, is interested in whether God exists or not? Who is seeking Him? For such people, whether or not God exists is not an issue, since it would simply be better if God *did* exist, so that we can call upon Him and ask Him to satisfy our needs, that our jobs might go well, and that we might have some happiness in this life. Thus, we see that man has a very strong proclivity to want God to exist and to believe that God exists, because it is a human need for God to exist, in order that He might secure for him all of the things we have mentioned. Well then, since it is a human need for God to exist, *ergo*, God exists!

If man had no need of a God and could self-sufficiently secure a livelihood for himself in this life in some other way, then no one knows how many people would believe in God. Such is frequently the case, even in Greece.

We see, then, how many people, though previously indifferent with regard to religion, become religious towards the end of

their lives, perhaps after having been frightened by some event. For they can no longer live without calling upon some God to help them—that is, out of superstition. For these reasons, human nature helps man to become religious. This does not apply to Orthodox Christians alone; it applies to the faithful of all religions. Human nature is the same everywhere. Thus it is that man, after



his fall—darkened as he is by nature, or, rather, contrary to nature—inclines towards superstition.

How About True Faith?

We now face the question: Where does superstition end and true faith begin?

The Fathers have clear positions and teachings on this subject. A person who follows (or rather believes that he follows) the teaching of Christ and simply goes to Church every Sunday, communes at regular intervals, and makes use of priests for blessings of the waters, anointments, etc., without exploring these things in greater depth, abiding in the *letter of the law* and not the *spirit of the law*—does such a person benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy? Next, another person who prays exclusively for the next life, for himself and for others, while being totally indifferent to this life—does he, again, benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy?

The first tendency is personified by a parish priest and those gathered around him with the aforementioned spirit, while

the latter tendency is personified by a monastery Elder (usually an Archimandrite), who is retired and waiting to die, with a few monks around him. To the extent that these two tendencies are not centered around *purification* and *illumination*, from a patristic viewpoint they are at fault as to the thing they are pursuing. On the other hand, to the extent that they are centered around *purification*, *illumination* and the implementation of the Orthodox patristic ascetic regimen for the acquisition of *noetic prayer*, only then are things placed on a proper foundation.

These two tendencies incline towards opposite extremes. They do not have a *common axis*. The common axis that upholds Orthodoxy and holds it together, its one and only *axis*, on all of the questions that concern Orthodoxy, and which puts everything on a correct foundation, when taken into account, is the axis: *purification, illumination, deification*.

The Fathers are not exclusively interested in what will happen to a person after his death; what is of primary interest to them is what a person will become in this life. After death, there is no *treatment of the mind*, so the *treatment* must begin in this life; for “there is no repentance in Hades.” This is why Orthodox theology is not “other-worldly,” futurological, or eschatological, but is purely “this-worldly.” For the solicitude of Orthodoxy is for man in this world, in this life, not after death.

Now, why are *purification* and *illumination* necessary? So that a person will go to Paradise and escape going to Hell? Is that why we need them? What constitutes *purification* and *illumination* and why do the Orthodox seek after them?

In order for one to find the reason and give an answer to this question, he must have the basic key in his possession, which is: All people on earth share the **same end**, from an Orthodox theological viewpoint. Whether a person is Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic or atheist, or whatever he may be (that is, every person on earth), **he is destined to see the Glory of God**. He will see the Glory of God at the **common end** of mankind during the Second Coming of Christ. All people will see the Glory (Uncreated Light) of God, and from this viewpoint they have the **same end**, but with one difference: The saved will see the Glory of God as a most sweet and never-setting **Light**, whereas the damned will see the same Glory of God as a consuming **Fire** that will burn them.

That we will all see the Glory of God is a true and expected fact. Beholding God—that is, His Glory, His Light—is something that will happen whether we want it or not. The experience of this Light, however, will be different from one person to another. Thus, the task of the Church and the clergy is not to help us to see this Glory, because this will come to pass one way or another. The work of the Church is focused on *how* each person will see God, not on *whether* he will see God. In other words, the task of the Church is to proclaim to people that there is a true God, that God is revealed as either

Light or a consuming **Fire**, and that all people will see God at the Second Coming of Christ, and to prepare its members so that they might see God not as **Fire**, but as **Light**.

The Essence of Orthodoxy

This preparation of the members of the Church, and also of all people who want to see God as Light, is essentially a *therapeutic treatment*, which must begin and end in this life. The *therapy* must take place and be completed *in this life*. For *after death, there is no repentance*. This therapeutic treatment is the essence and primary content of Orthodox Tradition, as well as being the principal concern of the Orthodox Church. It is composed of the following three stages of spiritual ascent: *Purification* from passions, *illumination* by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and *deification*, again by the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is also the case that **if someone does not at least arrive at the state of partial illumination in this life, he is unable to see God as Light either in this life or in the next**. It is, therefore, clear that the Fathers of the Church concern themselves with man as he is today, *at this moment*. And the one needing *treatment* is each person, who has the responsibility before God to begin this task today, *in this life*, because in this life he is able to do so; not after death. And this person himself will decide if he will follow this *therapeutic* path or not.

Christ said: *I am the way*. The Way towards what? Not only towards the next life. Christ is primarily the *Way* in this life. Christ is the *Way* to His Father and to our Father. Christ is revealed to man first in this life, and He shows him the path to His Father. This path is Christ Himself.

What Is Religion then?

The question, now, is: Is religion equated with a teaching concerning the immortality of the soul, and also with a teaching concerning the existence of God for the future life? Likewise, is it equated with the victory of full justice? That is, do we need religion because there must be a Just God, Who will pronounce the final judgment on all people, so that the unjust might be punished in Hell and the just (*the good children*) be rewarded in Paradise?

If the answer is yes, well then, religion must exist, first of all so that justice might ultimately prevail and, secondly, so that man’s desire for bliss will not remain unfulfilled. Is it possible, in other words, for the *good child* **not** to live a blissful life after death? It is not possible! And let us say he was wronged in this life. In other words, is it possible for all of these wronged people, that is, the *good children*, not to be vindicated in the future life? It is not possible! And should they not lead a pleasant existence there, a life of bliss? Of course! But for this to happen, there has to be life after death, as well as a good and just God, Who must make a good and just distribution! Is it not so? There has to be [such a God], according to the understanding of the Middle Ages, that is, of Western theology.

With regard to all of these things, however, modern psychology comes along and explodes everything. It tells us that these perceptions are *psychological*; for man has inside him a sense of justice, which is what demands that the *bad children* be punished and the *good children* be rewarded! And since the rewarding fails to take place in this life, human imagination puts forth the idea that these things must be fulfilled in another life, for which reason a weak person, as well as one who loves justice and has profound and earnest feelings about justice, becomes religious and believes the doctrines of the religion that he follows. In other words, he believes because the doctrine in which he believes serves his psychological need for justice to be rendered. This reason does not have philosophical—that is, metaphysical—foundations, but only *psychological foundations*.

What is correct, however, about the foregoing line of thought is that if justice and bliss will ever prevail for good people, they will have to prevail in this life. For such people do not know if they will have another life, since the arguments we mentioned for the existence of another life are purely *psychological arguments* and not *scientific arguments*—that is, arguments founded on *experience* and the *scientific method*. Thus, these people believe in a life after death simply because they want to believe. And this is why the essence of their religion is the existence of another life where injustice is punished and justice rewarded.

For these reasons, then, one sees that sober people today in Europe and America no longer accept these foundations of religion and have been led to agnosticism, while others have been led to atheism. On the other side, there are churchgoers who continue to believe in life after death because, as we explained, they want to believe, without having scientific arguments to support their beliefs. This is the general situation.

Now, what is the Orthodox position on all of these issues?

The Metaphysical Concept of Religion

Orthodoxy is first and foremost concerned with this life, here. The Fathers stress that *there is no repentance after death*. Modern Greek theologians, however, following their teacher, Adamantios Koraes, have a metaphysical understanding of the subject and have copied the methodology of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in the matter of religion.

At the time when these people left to study theology in Europe and Russia, and also in America after the war, the great conflict had already begun years before between the *empiricists*, on the one hand, who are the heirs to the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution of 1789, and the *metaphysicians*, on the other hand. The basic difference between *empiricists* and *metaphysicians* is that the essence of the *empirical* approach is observation, while that of *metaphysics* is *philosophical speculation*.

At that time, all religious people were followers of metaphysics—and have been so even until recently—whereas all empiricists were agnostics, and some of them atheists. Why?

Because the essence of the empirical approach is not even philosophy. Certainly, it is presented as empirical philosophy, as the philosophy of empiricists. They prevailed over the metaphysicians in America and accomplished a great deed for Orthodoxy. They were, however, devastating for Modern Greek theology.

Nowadays, in Greece, all Marxists are empiricists, without being aware of it, of course. This is because Greek Marxist ideologists do not know what the family tree of Marxism is, as do their counterparts in Europe and America; for, here, they have merely learned their lessons mechanically, by rote, like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe that it is a great tragedy—not an Aeschylean one, but a shameful one—that there are no powerful intellectual Marxists in Greece. Of course, this is fortunate for the right-wingers, as well as for Modern Greek theologians, but it is unfortunate for the search for truth. For Marxism started out on empirical bases and ended up where it has ended up.

The foundation of Marxism and the foundation of Patristic Theology, from a scientific point of view, are the same; thus, between the two of them, the Marxists and the Patristic theologians could have come to an understanding. Marxism, however, clashed with religion. Yes, but with what religion? Not with Revelation, but rather with the religion that is equated with metaphysics.

Now, as for the atheist, why does he not believe? Because he does not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of *inward faith*. As for those who say that they believe, are they really believers? Not all; for example, the Calvinists, who often say that they believe because they are *predestined* [to believe]. In this way, however, they tread an anti-scientific path; that is, one that is not supported by any empirical reality. Nor do they have any metaphysical support for what they believe. They are, of course, aware of this, because they are intellectuals and know how things are, but they continue to act in this way.

This is why it has been observed that both Calvinists and Lutherans take refuge in existentialism. The same thing occurs with American Protestants, who also add emotionalism to the foregoing. American Protestants are very emotional both in their worship and in their behavior.

Orthodoxy as the Official Religion of the Roman State

Bearing these things in mind now, we see why the Byzantine State sought to have Orthodoxy as its official religion and why it made so many efforts to preserve Orthodox doctrine intact. Why did it do so? Simply to preserve doctrine as doctrine? Or perhaps because Orthodox doctrine in particular was a precondition for the cure of its citizens, which cure would occasion a social restoration to health through the healing of the personality of each and every citizen? More likely the latter.

What was the **national anthem** of the Byzantine Empire? Was it not *Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance;*

grant victories to the emperors over barbarians, and through Thy Cross preserve Thou Thy commonwealth? This hymn expresses the ideology—if we can call it that—of the implementation of Orthodox teaching, faith, and life within the State; that is, on a nationwide scale.

Since the State foresaw the contribution to society and the benefit that would result from the Orthodox *therapeutic teaching and method*, if it were implemented, it instituted and promoted the Orthodox Faith as the official State religion, such that the State would be filled with parishes in which Priests would practice this *therapeutic regimen*. Thus, the parishes would grow with time into [communities of] healthy citizens, as would the State itself, by extension. The Church naturally did not refuse this, but rather worked in consort with the State.

It so happened, however, that this power given to the Church, together with the requisite ecclesiastical administrative organization, created a public service problem as a necessary evil. That is, many who coveted public positions pretended to be Orthodox, though they were not, and the Church began to be secularized.

Aside from all of these things, the Church had as its parallel task to protect the State from quack doctors, that is, from heretics. The local and OEcumenical Synods attended to precisely this. In the Acts of the OEcumenical Synods, we find the phrase: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...* Those present at the Synods said this because they possessed *noetic prayer*, by which they were inwardly informed concerning the truth of the Decrees that they formulated.

Today, on the other hand, when the practice of *noetic prayer* has grown rare among Bishops, if a Synod of Bishops were to come together and they were to stand up at the opening and all say together: *O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things...* would the Holy Spirit illumine them without fail? That is, simply because they are canonical Bishops, assemble at a Synod, and say a prayer? The Holy Spirit does not work this way—that is, under these conditions; others are needed. The one praying needs to have *noetic prayer* already working inside him, when he attends a Synod, for the Grace of God to illumine him. Those attending false synods did not have this prayerful state.

The Bishops of old, however, did have such spiritual experience, and when they would come together as a Body, they knew what the Holy Spirit was informing them in their hearts on a particular matter. And, when they issued resolutions, they knew that their resolutions were sound. For they were in a state of *illumination*, and certain of them had even reached *glorification*, that is, *deification*. Thus, we see that in the ancient Church the charismatic element prevailed (that is, its members were governed by gifts of the Holy Spirit), and the institutional elements (that is, formal ecclesiastical and administrative qualifications) followed.

This is very clear in the New Testament, in the ancient Church, and in the great Fathers of the OEcumenical Synods, from the First OEcumenical Synod (fourth century) through the Ninth OEcumenical Synod, which took place under St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century). This kind of testimony of the Holy Spirit within the *heart* is well known only to those who have *noetic prayer* working in their hearts.

Noetic prayer is an empirical verification and assurance that a person's mind has been cured. Such a cure is feasible for all people, as long as the spiritual preconditions of the *therapeutic method are met*. In other words, this method is not destined or designed only for certain monastics—that is, for certain people wearing *rasa*—but for all people. For nowhere in Holy Scripture does any distinction seem to be made between *monastic spirituality* and *lay spirituality*. Holy Scripture speaks of only one spirituality. Have you ever found a passage in Holy Scripture that speaks separately about the spirituality of lay people and the spirituality of the clergy? There is no such thing in Holy Scripture. **Spirituality in Christ is the same for all of the faithful.**

This Christian spirituality is essentially a *therapeutic regimen*, which is offered by Christ to all people. It is designed for all people. It is not just for monastics, or the clergy, or the educated, or intellectuals, because there is no intellectualism whatsoever contained therein. Nor does it deal with the outer and visible aspects of man, but rather with the inner and hidden aspects.



The Word of God Himself, Who is before all worlds, the Invisible, the Incomprehensible, the Bodiless, the Source of Life and Immortality came to His own image; and took flesh on Him, for the sake of our flesh and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul, for my soul's sake—purifying like by like. He came forth—as God—with that which He had assumed: One Person in two Natures, Flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former.

O new commingling! O strange conjunction! The Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreated is created, That which cannot be contained is contained. And He Who gives riches becomes poor; for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself; for He empties Himself of His glory for a short while, that I may have a share in His Fullness. What are the riches of His Goodness? What is this mystery that is around me? I had a share in the image, I did not keep it. He partakes of my flesh, that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal.

St. Gregory the Theologian

THE JOY OF GIVING

Source: "The Messenger," parish bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, San Francisco, January, 1973.

It was the last year of the war. We had long since grown accustomed to hunger. Our father received a mere pittance in wages which supported the family with increasing difficulty. Almost the entire sum went to pay the rent of our small apartment and my lessons. Poor Papa, working long hours overtime, he was thoroughly exhausted.

Our situation became critical. We were being evicted from our apartment, there was no fuel. The family gathered to confer. What was to be done? Of the family valuables there remained only our baptismal crosses, the wedding rings, and Papa's gold medal. Papa announced that as difficult as it was, he would have to part with the medal.

Early in the morning our father left for the city. At home we waited anxiously for him. At last, towards evening, he returned. Heaviness had settled over him like a cloud; he looked aged and haggard. He had given up the last thing in the house from his distant homeland, an award he had earned and treasured dearly. For him, part of his life was now extinguished. We paid off our debts, paid up our rent, and once again were left penniless.

Christ's Nativity was approaching. With my sister's help Mama transformed the apartment into a cozy little nest, but even to think of having a tree or a special holiday dinner was out of the question.

Christmas Eve. Soon the whole family would be going off to church. All was quiet at home. The vigil lamp flickered. Suddenly the stillness was pierced by a sharp ring. Mama went to open the door. A tall, well dressed young man handed her a large parcel. Before she could say a word he gave bow and disappeared. Our astonishment knew no limits when there spilled out from the parcel sausages, cheeses, cans of butter, chocolate and lots of other delicacies. Through a kind man the Lord had sent us a feast-day meal.

The war came to an end, and at last fate took pity on us. Papa began to receive a decent salary, my sister found a position as a stenographer, and I was enrolled at a university. Life returned to its brighter side, just as it was before the war.

The Feast of Nativity drew near once again. But this time the house was bustling with preparations. We shopped for presents, painted the apartment, a maid cleaned and tidied up, we made ready a sumptuous holiday meal for the celebration...



On the eve, early in the afternoon, my sister and I were gaily decorating the tree when suddenly I was struck by the remembrance of the past year's Nativity. Against the poverty of our former circumstances I clearly saw Mama's face, her eyes full of tears as she opened the mysterious parcel. A feeling of shame came over me as I contemplated our present egotism. I threw myself at my sister with the suggestion that we make haste to help some poor family. My sister knew of just the one.

Within minutes we were striding through the frosty air. Going into a store, we bought all kinds of this and that. Then we purchased a small Christmas tree and toy decorations; we also bought some children's toys. Soon we found ourselves before the shabby dwelling. We ascended a dark, dismal staircase and knocked at the door. The gaunt face of a woman, no longer young, peered through the narrowly opened door and rested with bewilderment upon us and our bundles. We called the woman by name and she offered us to come in. There was no stove in the small room. The windows, panes missing, were pasted up with some sort of cardboard; A dim light illumined the picture of destitution.

We explained the purpose of our visit and handed the woman the bundle. When my sister placed the tree on the table, a girl of about seven ran towards us, clapping her hands with joy. The woman tried to say something but no words came forth, and she burst into tears. My sister began to comfort her as I left the room, unable to control the feeling of pity which welled up within me.

We walked home in silence. People hurried along the streets, laden with packages and presents. An electrifying holiday atmosphere was in the air. But we, somehow involuntarily, walked slowly. We couldn't join in this holiday gaiety. I shall never forget that feeling of heaviness which I then experienced. At the same time, my sister and I were exceedingly happy. Instead of life's hustle and bustle, our hearts were sparked by the true light and peace of the holy Feast.

The happiest times in a man's life are when he helps his neighbor.



If you pray without giving alms, your prayer is dead. Your hand should always be open. Give alms to orphans and widows. Alms and prayer go together.

Abba George (+1959)

AND LO, THE STAR...

By Fr. Gerasimos, from the Russian "Athonite Patericon."

And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. [Mt 2:9-10]

† † †

On December 28th, shortly after the Feast of the Nativity, our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St. Simon the Myrrh-gusher through whom the Lord wrought great wonders. A star, like that which led the Magi to Bethlehem, miraculously revealed to the saint the site upon which, by divine command, he was to found a monastery. The monastery was appropriately dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and was initially named New Bethlehem (later Simonopetra). Today, nearly eight centuries later, it is still one of the flourishing monasteries on Mt. Athos.

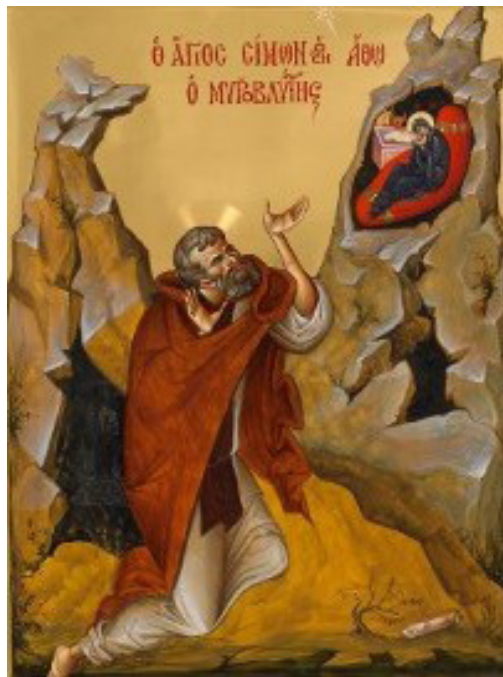
The life of the venerable Simon was arrayed with mighty ascetic feats and miracles not only during his lifetime but even after his repose, when there gushed forth from his relics an abundant fount of myrrh in a manner similar to that of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki. Where he came from, who his parents were, and where he began his monastic labors, no one knows. Sometime in the 13th century, he arrived on the Holy Mountain. Recalling the saying of the Fathers that without obedience one cannot be saved, the venerable Simon sought before all else to find a spiritual elder, one to whom he could entrust his soul without reserve, an elder who would be not only a faithful guide unto salvation and a radiant model of ascetic perfection, but also strict in bodily discipline.

After looking all over the Holy Mountain, he finally chose out of the multitude of monks leading virtuous lives, an unknown elder, perfect in all respects in the ascetic life. He labored in complete submission to his elder, fulfilling all his obediences with love and zeal and soon attained to such great spiritual heights that he became known all over the Holy Mountain for his irreproachable life. Finally, the time came when the elder was convinced that his period of trial was over. Casting aside his paternal kindness towards the venerable Simon, he decided to dwell with him as with a brother and on several occasions he even asked for his advice and counsel.

But instead of rejoicing over the benevolence and honor bestowed upon him by his elder, Simon was utterly grieved. He decided to leave, seeking for himself total reclusion. Expressing his intention to his elder, he asked his blessing amidst a shower of tears, desiring with heartfelt sorrow that the elder would grant his consent. In this way, he took leave of his dear elder for whom he had already become not so much a disciple as another mighty co-struggler in the angelic life.

For a long time St. Simon searched all over the Holy Mountain for a secluded hermitage where no one would know of his existence and no one would find him. Finally, with God's help, he found a deserted mountainside with caves on the southern part of the Holy Mountain. Knowing that before him lay the relentless struggle of unseen warfare, the saint clothed himself with spiritual armor with the help of the Holy Spirit, taking the cross, prayer, faith, patience, fasting, and everything that could crush the wily schemes of the demons and raise a man to angelic purity and childlike simplicity. It is difficult to recount the fierce schemes and hidden traps with which Satan tormented and tried to catch unaware Saint Simon. The holy ascetic, however, boldly trampled upon the brazen arrogance of his adversary and crushed all his plans. For many years St. Simon remained secluded within his cave where he manfully endured the constant battle with the unseen enemies of his soul. He lived in sorrows and utter deprivation, lacking even the assurance of his own salvation.

Meanwhile, hearing of the severity of his life and in particular of his spiritual discernment and insight, many monks on the Holy Mountain began to come to him and to receive great spiritual benefit from his soul-profitting counsel, thus fulfilling the word of God: *A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.* (Mt 5:14). Together with those who came to him, Simon was accounted worthy to receive from the Lord the gift of foreknowledge. However, through his humility he grew weary of such earthly honor, and he sought refuge from the disturbance created by all those who came to him. He was burdened by the stream of visitors which, it seemed to him, only served as a hindrance to his desire for a life of seclusion. He yearned, therefore, to abandon his dwelling for a yet more isolated one. But God, desiring the well-being and salvation of each and everyone, prevented the realization of his desire in the following way.



One night, while persevering in prayer, the righteous one saw outside his cave, as if before his very eyes, the effulgence of a divine light; an ineffable fragrance spread all around him and he heard a loud voice: *Simon, Simon, thou faithful friend and servant of my Son! Do not go away from here. I shall glorify this place; you shall be its guiding light, and your name shall be glorified.* Out of caution, Simon chose at first not to believe this vision, not desiring to fall into the nets of the evil one; for he knew, according to the word of the Apostle, that Satan could transform himself into an angel of light. Nevertheless, he continued to ponder upon the actual source of the voice. This took place shortly before the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. Then, one night, walking outside his cave, he saw a strange apparition: a star descended from the heavens and came to rest just above the rocky cliffs where later the holy monastery was to be situated. This same vision repeated itself on the following evenings; but the venerable Simon was still fearful. Was it possible that this was solely one of the consequences of his intense spiritual warfare? And he continued to distrust the vision.

When the Eve of the Nativity of Christ arrived, he saw in a dream a brilliant star and heard a divine voice: *Simon! You must build a monastic dwelling here. I myself shall help you. Cast aside your doubts, or you shall be punished for your unbelief.* The same voice spoke to him three times. At that time (as he later related to his disciples) it seemed to him that he was in Bethlehem of Judea, in the very place where the shepherds were tending their flocks, and he heard the sweet sound of angelic singing: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men: fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* (Lk 2:14, 2:10). After this, said the saint, all fear and uneasiness were dispelled from my soul and I rejoiced in spirit, and secretly beheld the scene in Bethlehem; there, before the manger, the Sovereign Lady stood before the Divine Child, lying in swaddling clothes.

Several days after the Feast of the Nativity, three rich men, brothers after the flesh, came to the venerable one. They confessed all their sins and began persuasively to entreat him to permit them to live in obedience under his direction. After a brief period of trial and testing, St. Simon revealed unto them, as to his own sons according to the spirit, the divine vision. More than once he related to them the vision concerning the building of a monastery on the neighboring cliffs, asking them not to speak of this to anyone while he

was still alive until the proper time. Hearing all this, the brothers with love offered to the saintly elder all of their earthly wealth for the construction of the monastery, and in accordance with the saint's wish and blessing, they offered immediately to prepare everything necessary for such an important and God-pleasing labor.

All necessary preparations were made. They had yet to learn, however, of the exact site for the foundation upon which the monastery was to be built. When St. Simon directed the brothers to the location where the church and other buildings were to be constructed they were horrified, seeing the sheer cliffs which, according to his orders, were to serve as the monastery's foundation. "Are you trying to fool us, Abba?" they asked the saint, "or are you speaking the truth? How can this be the site, when that cliff might be quite dangerous for the workers and even more so for those that will dwell here. If this is your desire, we shall surely oppose you!"



The matter was left undecided. In the meantime, seeing that he could not convince them to proceed with the work, St. Simon ordered the trapeza meal to be served. While they were eating, one of the saint's disciples who was bringing wine to the table, lost his balance, through the prompting of a demon, and fell off the cliff into a great abyss; still hold-

ing in one hand a pitcher and in the other several glasses of wine. Stricken with horror at this sudden tragedy, the spokesman of the brothers strongly rebuked the venerable one: "Behold, Abba, what has already been wrought by these deadly crags before you have even begun your undertaking. How many similar incidents of such a frightful death will occur if we should agree to build the monastery here."

The saint did not answer but secretly prayed to the Sovereign Lady Theotokos that he would not be put to shame in placing his trust in her intercession. "Who can tell of all thy miracles, O Sovereign Lady, and who can praise thy majesty?" What happened next was entirely unexpected: the brother who had fallen over the precipice suddenly appeared before them. Through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos he was not only perfectly whole and unscathed, but he even held the glasses and pitcher from which not a drop of wine had spilled!

Such a miracle brought fear and trembling upon the laborers. They fell to their knees before the saint and beseeching forgiveness said: "Now we know, O father, that you are truly a man of God." With heartfelt sincerity they were all

grateful to be numbered among the saint's disciples and were soon accounted worthy of the angelic habit. Then, under the immediate supervision of the venerable Simon himself, his disciples, formerly simple laborers, proceeded with the construction of the Monastery.

The situation, however, was such that before anything else it was necessary to lay the foundation. According to the instruction of the saint, they were to use a nearby stone of enormous size. The elder ordered them to move it, but they, forgetting about the miracle of the unspilled wine, were of the firm opinion that not only was it impossible for them with their combined efforts to move that massive weight, but that it could not even be budged. They stood there bewildered, not having the slightest idea what to do.

Seeing this, the saint approached them and, making the sign of the life-giving Cross on the stone, he single-handedly lifted it upon his shoulder and carried it to the designated site. In this way he demonstrated in actual fact the truth of the word which the Lord spoke unto the Apostles: *Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove.* (Mt 17:20). That such a man, whose body was weakened by fasting and ascetic labor, should lift such a weight far exceeding human strength, can only serve as a testimony of God's almighty power and His readiness to help those who turn to Him with faith.

Having established the monastery which he named New Bethlehem, and having spent his life in God-pleasing labors, St. Simon reposed on the 28th of December, 1287. On the morning of the next day, in the presence of the entire brotherhood, the face of the righteous one shone with a wondrous light. After his soul had ascended unto the choirs of the righteous, a fragrant myrrh issued forth from his holy relics through which St. Simon worked many miracles to the glory of God, for kings, monks, and laymen.

Many years after the saint's earthly departure, a pious Serbian king helped to greatly enlarge and rebuild the monastery in honor of its founder. Since that time it has been known as Simonopetra, or the "Rock of Simon." Today it is perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring architectural monuments in the world, a standing testimony to the power of faith and God's good will toward men.



T rue love is like the flame of a candle. However many candles you light from the flame, the initial flame remains unaffected. It doesn't lessen at all. And every freshly lit candle has as much flame as the others do.

Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)

THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Source: *Orthodox Word*, Vol. 3, //16-17, 1967.

The Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has been celebrated with all solemnity and joy since the very earliest period of the Church. Until the fourth century this Feast was kept on January 6th, when the Church also remembered the baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan. It was called the Theophany and was dedicated especially to the manifestation of God in the flesh.

The early Church knew that there was a mystical relationship between the first and the Second Adam, between the one that brought death into the world and the One Who brought life and salvation. According to very ancient tradition, Christ, the *Second Adam*, was born on the same day on which Adam, the first-created one, was born, that is, on the "Sixth Day," which corresponded to the sixth day of the first month (January 6th on the Julian Calendar).

Fighting Errors

In the fourth century many errors were being taught, especially by the followers of Arius. They denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God; they believed that He was only the highest of created beings (a false teaching—also fashionable in our own days). According to this error, Orthodox Christians could not celebrate the birth in flesh of God Himself (which is called the Doctrine of the Incarnation), but only the birth of a very special creature who was not in reality God...

In order to combat this heresy it was agreed that the commemoration of the Birth of the Son of God should be separated from the feast of His Baptism: the Church intended by this to make even clearer the truth about the incarnation. Many different dates were suggested for the celebration of Christmas, but in order to remove a temptation from the Christians of that time it was decided to use December 25th.

The Romans had a pagan festival on this day called *dies natalis Solis invicti*, a celebration of the return of the sun to summer, as if renewing itself. The Romans used this day as an excuse for unbridled merry-making and immorality (much as it has again become in the 20th century). Since the Church had already decided to establish a separate feast day for the Nativity of Christ, December 25th was chosen in order to preserve the faithful from the temptation to participate in pagan revels. The Church Fathers also wanted to make use of the symbolism of the sun on that day, thinking to ennoble or elevate the pagan feast to a Christian understanding because Christ is often spoken of in the New Testament as the *Sun of Justice*, *The Light of the World*, etc. (The fact that the early Church deliberately chose a pagan feast for the celebration of Christmas has been confused in the minds of many modern sectarians—viz., Jehovah's Witnesses—who do not understand the authority of the Church, and are themselves latter-day Arians.)

By establishing the Feast of the Lord's Birth on December 25th, the Church did two things; first, She clearly rejected pagan ideas about life, death, birth, etc., and showed that Christ had come to replace those lifeless and gloomy teachings; secondly, the Church confessed Her undying faith in a great dogma: that God had taken flesh from a woman and come to dwell among and save men.

In the center is the cave in which the Saviour was born; the two animals fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (1:3): *The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me.* Surrounding the cave, the whole of creation offers what it can in thanksgiving to the new-born Saviour: *Angels their song, the heavens a star, the Magi gifts, the shepherds wonder, the earth a cave, the wilderness a manger, and we the Virgin Mother.* (Christmas Vespers). At the bottom are two details handed down in iconographic tradition: two women wash the Child and St. Joseph is tempted to doubt the Virgin Birth by the Devil disguised as a shepherd.

At the same time, by means of special hymns and prayers on this day, Orthodox instructs the world in ways of holiness and morality, wishing to kindle in the hearts of people a determination to be reborn from a life of sin to a life pleasing to God. As one writer explains: *"Not in glory and magnificence, but in poverty, wretchedness and humiliation does the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth appear in the world; not a luxurious palace, but a humble cave, receives the King of those who reign and the Lord of those who rule. By this we are shown the greatness of humility, poverty, meekness and simplicity, and the ruinousness of pride, riches, vainglory and luxury ... By this it is suggested to us that the Lord receives all and everyone: He is pleased by unlettered simplicity, when it is united to faithful fulfillment of one's calling, to purity of conscience and life; and He does not reject human wisdom, when it knows how to submit itself to illumination from above and make use of its learning for the glory of God and the benefit of one's fellow men.*

The Spirit of Christmas

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas in a manner directly opposed to the way in which it is kept by the world. While western countries are involved in weeks of partying and eating, from Thanksgiving on, Orthodox Christians are deep in a preparatory fast of 40 days. We do not participate in Christmas parties before the Feast itself because we are trying to understand what it must have been like for the righteous ones of the Old Testament, who waited so many generations for the coming of the Messiah. This fast period is of very early origin and was universally known at the time of the great

Church Councils. We do not break this fast from meat and dairy products until after receiving Holy Communion on Christmas Day itself, although the Feast actually begins with Divine Services after the appearance of the first star on Christmas Eve. Furthermore, since many of our Orthodox brethren still observe the Julian Calendar (which is 13 days behind the civil calendar), Christmas is celebrated on January 7th by them, according to the latter; after the world has removed its tinsel, then these Orthodox Christians are able to meet the Feast of the Nativity in peace and true spiritual joy much more akin to the first Christmas in Bethlehem.

The celebration of the Birth of Christ begins at nightfall on December 25th and continues for three days. With the exception of Pascha (Easter), it is the greatest of all Church Feasts; St. John Chrysostom calls it *the mother of all feasts.* On this day we also celebrate the memory of the Three Magi

(who later received baptism from the Apostle Thomas) and the simple shepherds who were the first of the Chosen People to learn of the Birth of the long awaited Messiah.

The second day of Christmas is dedicated to the honor and memory of the one from whom our Redeemer took His flesh: the Most Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, whom Orthodox call by the dogmatic title *Theotokos* (*She who gave birth to God*), and for whom all true Christians have had immense reverence, love and feelings of closeness since the beginning

of Her Son's ministry.

Lastly, the word *incarnation*, as applied to the Birth of Christ is worthy of a special note: the dictionary defines the word as "a manifestation or the act of making manifest in bodily form." It comes from the Latin *incarnare*, to make flesh: *in-* (to cause or make) + *carn-* (from the stem, *caro*, flesh). Our word "carnal" comes from the same root, as does "carnage," "carnival" (festival of flesh), "carnivorous", etc. Thus, God, Who is pure being and pure spirit, took flesh from a woman, uniting Himself to human nature, and made His tabernacle among men in a human body.



Everyone who speaks contrary to what has been prescribed, even if he fasts, even if he is a virgin, even if he prophesies, even if he works miracles, you should see him as a wolf in sheep's clothing, who is contriving the destruction of the sheep.

St. Ignatius of Antioch



Ἐξομολόγησις: Ἡ Θεία Ψυχανάλυσις

Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Καυσοκαλυβίτου (+1991).



Όταν εξομολογείται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἡ χάρις τὸν ἐλευθερώνει ἀπὸ τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα.

Δὲν εὐθύνεται μονάχα ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὰ παραπτώματά του. Τὰ λάθη, οἱ ἁμαρτίες καὶ τὰ πάθη δὲν εἶναι μόνο προσωπικὰ βιώματα τοῦ εξομολογούμενου. Ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος ἔχει πάρει μέσα

του καὶ τὰ βιώματα τῶν γονέων του καὶ εἰδικὰ τῆς μητέρας του· δηλαδή τὸ πὼς ζοῦσε ἡ μητέρα του, ὅταν τὸν κυφοροῦσε, ἂν στενοχωριόταν, τί ἔκανε, ἂν κουραζόταν τὸ νευρικό της σύστημα, ἂν εἶχε χαρὰ, ἂν εἶχε θλίψη, ἂν εἶχε μελαγχολία.

Ἐ, ὅλο τὸ νευρικό σύστημα τὸ δικό της ἐπηρεάσε τὸ νευρικό σύστημα τοῦ ἐμβρύου της. Ὅποτε, ὅταν γεννηθεῖ τὸ παιδί καὶ μεγαλώσει, παίρνει μέσα του καὶ τὰ βιώματα τῆς μητέρας του, δηλαδή ἄλλου ἀνθρώπου. Δημιουργεῖται μία κατάσταση στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐξαιτίας τῶν γονέων του, ποὺ τὴν παίρνει μαζί του σ' ὅλη του τὴ ζωὴ, ἀφήνει ἴχνη μέσα του καὶ πολλὰ πράγματα ποὺ συμβαίνουν στὴ ζωὴ του εἶναι ἀπόρροια τῆς καταστάσεως αὐτῆς. Τὰ φερσίματά του ἔχουν ἄμεση σχέση μὲ τὴν κατάσταση τῶν γονέων του. Μεγαλώνει, μορφώνεται, ἀλλὰ δὲν διορθώνεται. Ἐδῶ βρίσκεται μεγάλο μέρος ἀπὸ τὴν εὐθύνη γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴν κατάσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Υπάρχει, ὅμως, ἓνα μυστικό. Υπάρχει κάποιος τρόπος ν' ἀπαλλαγεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ κακό. Ὁ τρόπος αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ γενικὴ ἐξομολόγησις, ἡ ὁποία γίνεται μὲ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μπορεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ σοῦ πεῖ ὁ πνευματικός:

- Πὼς θὰ ἤθελα νὰ ἦμασταν σ' ἓνα ἡσυχὸ μέρος, νὰ μὴν εἶχα ἀσχολίες καὶ νὰ μοῦ ἔλεγεσ τὴ ζωὴ σου ἀπ' τὴν ἀρχή, ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ αἰσθάνθηκες τὸν ἑαυτό σου, ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα ποὺ θυμᾶσαι καὶ ποῖα ἦταν ἡ ἀντιμετώπισή τους ἀπὸ σένα, ὄχι μόνο τὰ δυσάρεστα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ εὐχάριστα, ὄχι μόνο τὶς ἁμαρτίες ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ καλά. Καὶ τὶς ἐπιτυχίες καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες. Ὅλα. Ὅλα ὅσα ἀπαρτίζουν τὴ ζωὴ σου.

Πολλὲς φορὲς ἔχω μεταχειριστεῖ αὐτὴ τὴν γενικὴ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ εἶδα θαύματα πάνω σ' αὐτό. Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὰ λὲς στὸν ἐξομολόγο, ἔρχεται ἡ θεία χάρις καὶ σὲ ἀπαλλάσσει ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ ἄσχημα βιώματα καὶ τὶς πληγὲς καὶ τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα καὶ τὶς ἐνοχές, διότι, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὰ λὲς, ὁ ἐξομολόγος εὐχεται θεομῶρα στὸν Κύριο γιὰ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴ σου.

Εἶχε ἔλθει σ' ἐμένα πρὸ καιροῦ μία κυρία, ποὺ ἔκανε αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τὴν ἐξομολόγησις καὶ βρῆκε μεγάλη ὠφέλεια. Βελτιώθηκε ἡ ψυχολογικὴ της κατάσταση, διότι τὴν βασάνιζε κάτι. Ἔστειλε, λοιπόν, αὐτὴ μιά φίλη της καὶ πήγαμε ἔξω στὸ βράχο, στὰ Καλλίσια. Καθίσαμε καὶ ἄρχισε κι ἐκεῖνη νὰ μοῦ μιλάει. Τῆς λέω:

- Νὰ μοῦ πεῖς ὅ,τι αἰσθάνεσαι. Ἄν σὲ ρωτήσω ἐγὼ γιὰ κάτι, νὰ μοῦ πεῖς. Ἄν δὲν σὲ ρωτήσω, νὰ συνεχίσεις νὰ τὰ λέγεις, ὅπως τὰ αἰσθάνεσαι.

Ὅλ' αὐτὰ ποὺ μοῦ ἔλεγε, τὰ παρακολουθοῦσα ὄχι ἀπλῶς μὲ προσοχή, ἀλλὰ «ἔβλεπα» μέσα στὸν ψυχικό της κόσμον τὴν ἐπίδραση τῆς προσευχῆς. Τὴν παρακολουθοῦσα μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ της κι «ἔβλεπα» ὅτι πήγαινε χάρις μέσα της, ὅπως τὴν κοίταζα ἐγὼ. Διότι στὸν πνευματικὸ ὑπάρχει χάρις καὶ στὸν παπὰ ὑπάρχει χάρις. Τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Δηλαδή, ἐνῶ ἐξομολογεῖται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ἱερέας προσεύχεται γι' αὐτόν. Συγχρόνως ἔρχεται ἡ χάρις καὶ τὸν ἐλευθερώνει ἀπ' τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα, ποὺ γιὰ χρόνια τὸν βασανίζουν, χωρὶς νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν αἰτία τους.

Ἦ, αὐτὰ ὅλα τὰ πιστεύω πολύ!

Στὸν ἐξομολόγο μπορεῖς νὰ μιλήσεις ὅπως αἰσθάνεσαι, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸ τόσο σημαντικό, ὅσο εἶναι τὸ ὅτι κοιτάζει μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ σου προσευχόμενος ὁ παπᾶς καὶ βλέπει πὼς εἶσαι καὶ σοῦ μεταδίδει τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἔχει ἀποδειχθεῖ ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ κοίταγμα εἶναι πνευματικὲς «ἀκτίνες» ποὺ σὲ ἀλαφρώνουν καὶ σὲ θεραπεύουν, μὴ νομίσετε ὅτι εἶναι ἀκτίνες φυσικὲς.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα. Καὶ μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ τί ἔγινε; Ἐπίασε τὸ χέρι τῆς αἰμορροούσης καὶ εἶπε: Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔγνων δύναμιν ἐξεληθοῦσαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ. Θὰ πεῖς: «Ναί, μὰ ἦταν Θεός». Ὁ Χριστὸς βέβαια ἦταν Θεός, ἀλλὰ μήπως καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι δὲν κάνανε τὸ ἴδιο;

Ὅλοι οἱ πνευματικοί, οἱ ἐξομολόγοι, ἔχουν αὐτὴν τὴν χάρι κι ὅταν εὐχονται, τὴν ἐκπέμπουν ὡς ἀγωγὴ. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, θέλουμε ν' ἀνάψουμε ἐδῶ πέρα μιὰ θεομάστρα καὶ βάζουμε ἓνα καλώδιο, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει ἐπαφή, διότι τὸ καλώδιο δὲν εἶναι στὴν πρίζα. Ἄν, ὅμως, τὸ καλώδιο μπεῖ στὴν πρίζα, μόλις κάνει τὴν ἐπαφή, ἔρχεται τὸ ρεῦμα μέσω αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγωγοῦ.

Εἶναι πνευματικὰ πράγματα τῆς θρησκείας μας αὐτά. Μπορεῖ νὰ λέμε γιὰ καλώδιο, ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα αὐτὴ εἶναι «ἡ Θεία ψυχανάλυσις».



Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ἀγαπᾶ τὴ σιωπὴν κι ἀποφεύγει τὶς πολλὲς κουβέντες μοιάζει μὲ ὄρμιον σταφύλι, γεμῆτο γλυκὸ χυμό· ὁ πολυλογᾶς μὲ ἀγουρίδα.

Ἀββᾶς Μωϋσῆς

Ἀμαρτία: Ἡ Ἐσχάτη Μέθη!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἦτσι τὴν εἶπε καὶ τὴ χαρακτηρισίει ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, τὴν ἀμαρτία: *Ἐσχάτη μέθη*. Καὶ τέτοια εἶναι κάθε παράβαση τοῦ θείου Νόμου.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ μέθη. Ὅσο πιὸ πολλὴ κρασί πίνει κανεὶς, τόσο καὶ ὁ ὀργανισμὸς τὸ ἀποζητάει. Κι ὅσο τὸ ἀποζητάει, τόσο καὶ περισσότερο μεθάει. Ἡ μέθη δὲν ἔχει ποτὲ κορεσμό. Ὁ νοῦς θολώνει, ἡ θέληση χαλαρώνει καὶ χάνει τὴ δύναμή της, κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος δένεται στὰ σκλαβόσχοινα τοῦ πάθους του.

Ἐσχάτη μέθη καὶ κακὸν ἔσχατον εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ποιὸς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον καὶ φόρεσε σάρκα καὶ δὲν εἶδε τὴν ἀμαρτία νὰ τοῦ γλείφει τὰ πόδια; Ποιὸς ἀνάπνευσε τὸν ἀέρα καὶ δὲ μύρισε τὴ δυσωδία τῆς κακίας; Ποιὸς πάτησε τὸ πόδι του σὲ τοῦτο τὸν πλανήτη καὶ δὲ σκουντούφλησε στὰ χαλίγια καὶ δὲν τὸν τρύπησαν τ' ἀγκάθια τῆς παρανομίας; *Τις γὰρ καθαρὸς ἔσται ἀπὸ ρύπου, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς, ἐὰν καὶ μία ἡμέρα ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.* (Ἰωβ 4:5). Τὸ κακὸ λοιπὸν, εἶναι κληρονομικὸ. *Ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήφθην, καὶ ἐν ἀμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου.* (Ψαλμ. 50:7).

Ἡ ὑπαρξη τοῦ ἠθικοῦ νόμου εἶναι ὁ ρυθμιστὴς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς. Ὅπως οἱ ὠροδείκτες καὶ λεπτοδείκτες δείχνουν τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὸ χρόνο τῶν ἐνεργειῶν σου, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος—τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ νόμος—σὲ καθοδηγεῖ στὴν ὀρθὴ πορεία τῶν πράξεων τῆς ζωῆς σου.

Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμίροβιτς λέγει ὅτι: «Ὅλα γίνονται κατὰ τὸ συνειδητὸ καὶ λογικὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸ τι ἐπιτρέπει πάντοτε σὲ συνάρτηση μὲ τὴν ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀνῆθικη συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς νόμος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Κύριος Δημιουργὸς καὶ Παντοκράτορας καθοδηγεῖ τὸ σύμπαν, τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσης καὶ τίς μοῖρες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν λαῶν». Βέβαια, συμπληρώνει ὁ ἴδιος: «ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἠθικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἀλληλοαποκλείονται καὶ δὲ συμπιπτουν, ἀλλὰ κινοῦνται παράλληλα».

Ἐνας, βέβαια, εἶναι ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος, ἀλλ' ἡ φωνὴ του μεταδίδεται ἀπὸ δύο ἡγεῖα: τὸ ἓνα ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ἔμφυτου νόμου, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὸν τέλειο καὶ ἀποκαλυμμένο νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἀμαρτίες μοιάζουν μὲ τὰ φάλτσα μιᾶς χορῶδίας ἢ μιᾶς ὀρχήστρας. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ μαέστρος εἶναι εὐαίσθητος καὶ στὰ πιὸ μικρὰ φάλτσα—δηλαδή, στὰ μουσικὰ λάθη καὶ τίς παραφωνίες—κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζει καὶ ἀναγνωρίζει τὰ ἐλαφρότερα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ ἐπιδημικὴ ἀσθένεια, ποὺ δὲν ἀναχαιτίζεται, παρὰ μὲ μετάνοια. Ἡ ἀμαρτία εἶναι καὶ δόλωμα καὶ δηλητήριο. Ἔχει γεύση ἐλκυστικὴ καὶ ἀποτέλεσμα θανάσιμο. Ἔχει γοητεία, ποὺ

ἐξαπατᾷ. Εἶναι τραγοῦδι, ποὺ σβήνει σύντομα. «Ὁ τυφλὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ δεῖ τὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα ἀριστούργημα τοῦ Γκρέκο καὶ ἐνὸς ἀπλοῦ τοπίου. Ὁ κουφὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει τὸν ἦχο ἐνὸς συριγμοῦ καὶ ἐνὸς ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ὀργάνου ἢ ἐνὸς Μπάχ. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ἀκριβῆ ἰδέα τι κακὸ πράγμα εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ ὁποῖου ὅλα τὰ δημιουργήματα εἶναι τέλεια».

Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μεθάει στὴν ἀμαρτία, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸ ν' ἀντικρύσει τὸ Θεό; Μήπως ὁ ἄνθρωπος, στὸ μεθύσι του ἐπάνω, μπορεῖ ν' αὐτοσυγκεντρωθεῖ ἢ νὰ κοιτάξει στὰ μάτια τὸν ἄλλο; Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, λέγει ὁ Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας: *ἐπὶ ἢ ἰδὸς ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁρᾶσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὕτως καὶ ὅταν ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁ τοιοῦτος ἄνθρωπος θεωρεῖν τὸν Θεόν.* Ἐὰν συμβεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ χαλάσει ἡ διαφάνεια τοῦ καθρέφτη, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἰδεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπό του, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀχρεΐωση ποὺ προκαλεῖ ἡ ἀμαρτία, δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἰδεῖ καὶ νὰ νιώσει τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Φοβερὴ σκουριά, ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ἀμαυρώνει τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μειώνει τὴν ἀντίσταση τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Σκοτίζεται ὁ νοῦς καὶ τὸ ἔρεβος μένει νὰ κυβερνᾷ τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ἡ ἀμαρτία, ὡς παράβαση καὶ παραβίαση τοῦ νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ, δημιουργεῖ τύψεις καὶ πολλές ἀνεπιθύμητες καταστάσεις, ποὺ ἀφαιροῦν τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ ψυχραίνουν τὴ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Αὐτὸ ἐκφράζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅταν λέγει: *Θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν... δόξα δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν.* (Ρωμ. Β' 9:10).

Ἡ ἀμαρτία ὑπόσχειται πορφύρα καὶ δίδει σάβανο, ὑπόσχειται ἐλευθερία καὶ φέρει δουλεία, ὑπόσχειται νέκταρ καὶ προσφέρει χολή. Δὲ νομίζω ν' ἀμφισβητεῖ κανεὶς, ὅτι ὅλη ἡ βία, ὁ πόνος, ἡ θλίψη, ἡ αἰσχύνη καὶ ὅλες οἱ τραγωδίαι τῆς ζωῆς, συνοψίζονται σὲ τούτη τὴ μικρὴ λέξη, ποὺ λέγεται «ἀμαρτία».

Ὁ μέγας τῆς οἰκουμένης διδάσκαλος καὶ κήρυκας, ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, πάντοτε στὰ κηρύγματά του τόνιζε πῶς, *οὐδὲν δεινὸν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δεινῶν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἀμαρτία μόνον.* Ἄλλοτε πάλι ἔλεγε ὅτι, *μία συμφορὰ Χριστιανῶ μόνη, τὸ προσκροῦσαι Θεῷ.*

Πράγματι, «οὐδὲν δυσωδέστερον», «οὐδὲν ἐπαχθέστερον», οὐδὲν πλέον «ἀκάθαρτον»... Ἀλλά, θὰ πεῖ κανεὶς: Ὅλοι μας εἴμαστε ἀμαρτωλοὶ καὶ ἀμαρτάνουμε κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή. Λοιπὸν; Νὰ παραμείνουμε στὴ λάσπη καὶ στὴ δυσωδία τῆς ἀμαρτίας; Ὁχι, βέβαια. Ὑπάρχει ἐλπίδα. Ὑπάρχει σωτηρία. Ὑπάρχει μετάνοια. Ὑπάρχει Θεὸς τοῦ ἐλέους καὶ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν. **Ὁ παράδεισος εἶναι γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἀμαρτωλοὺς, ποὺ μετανοοῦν...**

Στὸ Λουτρό

Τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος Ἀγίουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010).



Ἦταν, ἀγαπητό μου παιδί, ἦταν ἐποχή, ποὺ δὲν εἶχες ὄνομα. Ἄν εἶσαι ἀγόρι, σὲ φώναζαν μπέμπη· ἂν εἶσαι κορίτσι, σὲ φώναζαν μπέμπα. Ἄλλ' ἦρθε μιὰ ἅγια μέρα, ποὺ πῆρες ὄνομα Χριστιανικό, τὸ ὄνομα ἐνὸς ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ ἑκατομμύρια ἁγίων καὶ μαρτύρων τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, κι ἀπὸ τότε

ὀνομάζεσαι Δημήτριος, Νικόλαος, Κωνσταντῖνος, Γεώργιος, Ἰωάννης..., ἢ, ἂν εἶσαι κορίτσι, Μαρία, Ἄννα, Αἰκατερίνη, Βαρβάρα, Παρασκευή... Ἀπὸ ἀνώνυμος ἕγινες ἐπώνυμος. Γράφτηκες στὸ μητρώο τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν καὶ σὰν παιδί τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπολαμβάνεις ὅλες τὶς εὐλογίες τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ποιά εἶναι ἡ μέρα ποὺ πῆρες τὸ Χριστιανικό ὄνομα; Εἶνε ἡ μέρα τοῦ ἱεροῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ βαπτίσματος. Ἐσὺ τότε ἦσουν πολὺ μικρὸ παιδί, νήπιο, ποὺ δὲν καταλάβαινε τί γίνεται γύρω του. Ἀλλὰ οἱ γονεῖς καὶ οἱ συγγενεῖς θυμοῦνται τὴν ἡμέρα αὐτὴ τῆς βαπτίσεώς σου. Ἄν τοὺς ρωτήσης, θὰ μάθης ὅτι τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη τὸ σπίτι ἔλαμπε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἡ μητέρα σὲ πῆρε στὴν ἀγκαλιά της, σὲ πῆγε στὴν ἐκκλησία. Στήθηκε στὴ μέση τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἢ ἱερὰ κολυμβήθρα, καὶ ἕνας ταπεινὸς ἱερεὺς ἔκανε τὸ σταυρὸ του, φόρεσε πετραχήλι, εἶπε τὸ *Εὐλογημένη ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος...* καὶ ἄρχισε ἢ ἀκολουθία τοῦ βαπτίσματος, ποὺ εἶναι μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς ὠραιότερες ἀκολουθίες τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας. Ὑστερα ἀπὸ διάφορες εὐχὲς ὁ ἱερεὺς σὲ πῆρε στὰ δικά του χέρια καὶ λέγοντας *Βαπτίζεται ὁ δούλος (ἢ ἡ δούλη) τοῦ Θεοῦ... εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος* σὲ βύθισε στὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ καὶ σὲ ἀνέσυρε τρεῖς φορές.

Μὰ, θὰ ρωτήσης, ποιά ἢ ἀνάγκη νὰ γίνῃ τὸ βάπτισμα; Ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ποὺ λένε ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ βαπτίζονται τὰ νήπια, γιατί δὲν ἔχουν ἁμαρτίες.

Ναί, παιδί μου, δὲν ἔχουν ἁμαρτίες, δικές τους ἁμαρτίες, ὅπως ἔχουν οἱ μεγάλοι. Ἀλλὰ κάθε νήπιο, κάθε ἄνθρωπος ποὺ γεννιέται στὸν κόσμο, φέρνει μαζί του τὴν ἁμαρτία, τὴν ἐνοχὴ τοῦ πρώτου ἐκείνου ἁμαρτήματος ποὺ διέπραξε ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ποὺ ὀνομάζεται προπατορικό ἁμάρτημα. Αὐτὴ ἢ ἐνοχὴ κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἁμαρτωλό, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κάθε ἄνθρωπος, ἔχει ἀνάγκη νὰ καθαριστῇ. Ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ εἶναι μαύρη σὰν τὰ φτερὰ τοῦ κόρακα. Μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα ὁμως ἢ ψυχὴ πλένεται καὶ καθαρίζεται

μὲ τὴ δύναμι τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, καὶ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ τῆς κολυμβήθρας ἄσπρη σὰν τὸ περιστέρι. Μιὰ μεγάλη μεταβολὴ γίνεται στὸν ψυχικὸ κόσμο, ποὺ δὲν φαίνεται στὰ μάτια τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται στὰ μάτια τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ ἀρχαγγέλων. Τὸ παιδί τῆς ἁμαρτίας γίνεται παιδί τῆς χάριτος, παιδί τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ ἢ Ἐκκλησία τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ ὀνομάζει τὸ *λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας* δηλαδή ἕνα λουτρὸ ποὺ ἔχει τὴ θαυμαστὴ ἰκανότητα νὰ παίρῃ τὸν παλαιὸ ἄνθρωπο, τὸ φθαρμένο αὐτὸ καὶ ἀκάθαρτο σκεῦος, καὶ νὰ τὸν κἀνὴν νέο ἄνθρωπο, σκεῦος πολύτιμο καὶ ἐκλεκτὸ τῆς ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας.

Μόλις τὸ παιδί βαπτισμένο ἀπὸ τὴν ἱερὰ κολυμβήθρα, τὸ ντύνουν μὲ ἕνα λευκὸ χιτῶνα, μὲ ἕνα ἄσπρο ρουχαλάκι, ποὺ κάνει νὰ φαίνεται τὸ παιδί σὰν ἄγγελος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ λευκὸς αὐτὸς χιτῶνας σημαίνει ὅτι αὐτὸς ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε εἶναι πιὰ καθαρὸς ἀπὸ κάθε εἶδους ἁμαρτία καὶ ὅτι στὸ ἐξῆς πρέπει νὰ προσέχη γιὰ νὰ μὴ μολύνῃ τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ ἁμαρτίες. Νὰ προσέχη, ὅπως προσέχει τὸ παιδί ἐκεῖνο ποὺ οἱ γονεῖς του τὸ ἔντυσαν μὲ μιὰ ἀκριβὴ στολή· τὸ παιδί αὐτὸ δὲν πηγαίνει σὲ μέρη ἀκάθαρτα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ λερώσῃ τὴ λαμπρὴ του ἐνδυμασία.

Ἐνδυμα καὶ ροῦχο ἐκείνου ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε εἶναι πλέον ὁ Χριστός. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὴ γλῶσσα. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ μάτια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στ' αὐτιά. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ χέρια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ πόδια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν καρδιά. Ὁ Χριστὸς παντοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὅταν βγῇ τὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὴν κολυμβήθρα, ἢ Ἐκκλησία ψάλλει: *Ὅσοι εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε. Ἀλληλοῦϊα.*

Ἀλλὰ γεννᾶται τὸ ἐρώτημα· Ὑπάρχει παιδί, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε μέχρι τώρα ποὺ μεγάλωσε κατώρθωσε νὰ διατηρήσῃ τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ ἱεροῦ βαπτίσματος καθαρὸ καὶ ἀμόλυντο;

Γιὰ ν' ἀπαντήσῃ ἕνα παιδί ὅτι διατήρησε τὸ χιτῶνα καθαρὸ καὶ ἀμόλυντο, ὅπως τὸν πῆρε τὴν ὥρα τοῦ βαπτίσματος, πρέπει μὲ τὴ γλῶσσα νὰ μὴν ἔχει κάνει καμμιά ἁμαρτία, μὲ τὰ μάτια νὰ μὴν εἶδε τίποτα τὸ αἰσχρὸ, μὲ τ' αὐτιά νὰ μὴν ἄκουσε πράγματα ἀκάθαρτα ποὺ μολύνουν τὴν ἀκοή, μὲ τὰ χέρια νὰ μὴν ἔκλεψε, νὰ μὴ χτύπησε, νὰ μὴ ἔκανε τίποτα κακὸ, μὲ τὰ πόδια νὰ μὴν ἔτρεξε σὲ τόπους ἁμαρτωλοῦς, μὲ τὸ μυαλὸ καὶ μὲ τὴν καρδιά νὰ μὴ σκέφτηκε καὶ νὰ μὴν ἐπιθύμησε τὸ πονηρὸ. Ἐὰν ὑπάρχη τέτοιο παιδί, τότε θὰ ποῦμε ὅτι τὸ παιδί αὐτὸ διατήρησε τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ βαπτίσματος καθαρὸ καὶ ἄσπιλο. Τὶ λέτε, παιδιά μου, ὑπάρχει τέτοιο παιδί στὸν κόσμο; Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό, κανένα ἄλλο τέτοιο παιδί δὲν ὑπάρχει.

Ὅλα ἀνεξαιρέτως τὰ παιδιὰ ἔχουν ἁμαρτήσῃ μὲ διάφορες ἁμαρτίες, ἔχουν λερώσει τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ ἱεροῦ βαπτίσματος. Ὡ, πόσο βρωμερὴ καὶ ἀκάθαρη εἶναι ἢ ψυχὴ! Καὶ λοιπὸν τί θὰ κάνουμε, τί πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ;

Νὰ τὶ πρέπει νὰ γίνη. Τώρα ποὺ πλησιάζουν οἱ ἅγιες ἡμέρες τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ θέλουμε μὲ λαμπρὴ στολὴ νὰ ὑποδεχτοῦμε τὸν ὠραῖο Νυμφίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸν Σωτῆρα μας, πρέπει καὶ ἡμεῖς νὰ ποῦμε βρονταχτιά: *Λάμπρυνόν μου τὴν στολὴν τῆς ψυχῆς, Φωτοδότα, καὶ σώσόν με.*

Ἐπάρχει ὅμως τρόπος, ἡ ψυχὴ νὰ καθαριστῆ καὶ πάλι καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα τῆς νὰ ξαναγίνη καθαρὸ καὶ λαμπρὸ; Ἐπάρχει, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ!

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, γιὰ τὶς ψυχὰς ποὺ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὸ βάπτισμα ἔχουν ἀμαρτήσῃ καὶ αἰσθάνονται τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους ἐλεεινὸ καὶ ἀκάθαρτο, ἔχει μιὰ δευτέρη κολυμβήθρα. Καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἱερᾶς μετανοίας καὶ ἐξομολογήσεως.

Παιδί μου! Ἐλαμπες σὰν τὸν ἥλιο ὅταν βαπτίσθηκες. Ἦσουν καθαρὸ σὰν τὸ χιόνι. Ἀλλὰ ὕστερα ἀμάρτησες. Ἀμάρτησες πολλές φορές. Καὶ τώρα ἔχεις ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ λουτρό, λουτρὸ πνευματικόν. Καί, ὅπως ἀγαπᾷς τὴν καθαριότητα τοῦ σώματος καὶ τακτικὰ κάνεις λουτρὸ καὶ καθαρίζεσαι, ἔτσι ν' ἀγαπᾷς καὶ τὴν καθαριότητα τῆς ψυχῆς. Τώρα ποὺ πλησιάζουν οἱ ἅγιες ἡμέρες, νὰ τρέξῃς στὴν ἱερὰ ἐξομολόγησι, νὰ πλυθῆς καὶ νὰ καθαριστῆς, νὰ λάμπῃς πάλι σὰν τὸν ἥλιο καὶ νὰ γίνῃς καθαρὸ σὰν τὸ χιόνι. Δύναμι ἔχει τὸ νερὸ τῆς κολυμβήθρας νὰ καθαρίζῃ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀλλὰ δύναμι ἔχουν καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

Ἐπὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὴν εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησι ποὺ θὰ κάνῃς, θὰ νιώθῃς μιὰ ἀνείπωτη χαρὰ μέσα σου καὶ θὰ τραγουδάς με κατάνυξι τὸ ὁμορφὸ ἐκεῖνο τραγούδι:

«Δὲς τὰ κρίνα πέρα μέσ' στὸν κάμπο
πὼς ἀνθίσουν καὶ μοσχοβολοῦν.
Μοιάζει ἡ ζωὴ μας μὲ τὸ κρίνο,
ποὺ τὸ πρῶτ' ἀνθεῖ γιὰ λίγο
καὶ τὸ βράδυ ἔχει μαραθῆ.
Πόσο σύντομη εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ!
Δὲς τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ μὲ πίστι.
Εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ μόνος Γυῖός,
ποὺ ῥθε στὴ ζωὴ νὰ μᾶς λυτρῶσῃ
καὶ τὴ χαρὰ σ' ὅλους νὰ δώσῃ.
Ναί, μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ μέσ' στὴν ψυχὴ
πόσο ὁμορφὴ εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ!».

Μὲ πατρικὴ ἀγάπη,

Ὁ πνευματικὸς σου πατέρας.



Τὸ ἄνθος εἶναι ἀπαρχὴ τῆς καρποφορίας, καὶ ἡ ὑποταγὴ, ἀρχὴ τῆς ταπεινώσεως. Ὁ ταπεινόφρων εἶναι κατὰ κανόνα εὐπειθὴς ὑποτακτικὸς, σέβεται μικροὺς καὶ μεγάλους καὶ ἔχει ἐπιείκεια καὶ καλωσύνη.

Ὅσιος Ἐφραίμ

Οἱ Ἀρχιστράτηγοι τῶν Ἀσωμάτων

Πηγή: *Αποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὴ Συλλογὴ «Σαλιγκάρι στὴν Πέτρα», τοῦ Μιχάλη Λεβέντη.*

Παραμονὴ τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν στὰ Βίλλια. Ἀπόγευμα τοῦ 1965, κρῦο καὶ ἀέρας. Ἡ γρηὰ νεωκόρος μένει ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τοὺς δυὸ ναοὺς: τοῦ Σωτῆρος, ἔργο τοῦ Τσίλερ στὰ 1819, καὶ τοῦ Ταξιάρχῃ. Μόλις ἔχει ἐπιστρέψῃ ἀπὸ τὸν ἑσπερινὸ καὶ ἀνάβῃ τὸ τζάκι. Κάποιος τῆς χτυπᾷ τὴν πόρτα. Ξαφνιάζεται. Μπροστά τῆς στέκεται ἕνας ὁμορφος ψηλὸς ἄνδρας, γύρω στὰ τριάντα, μὲ τσάντα, καπέλο καὶ παλτό.

-Ἐλα νὰ μοῦ ἀνοίξεις, σὲ παρακαλῶ, τῆς λέει. Θέλω νὰ προσκυνήσω τὸν Ἄγγελο.

-Μά, Χριστιανέ μου, μόλις ἔκλεισα. Νὰ βγῶ πάλι ἔξω μὲ τέτοιο καιρὸ;

-Σὲ παρακαλῶ κυρά-Μαρία...

Ἡ γυναίκα ὑπακούει. Ντύνεται καλὰ καὶ βγαίνουν. Προχωροῦν βιαστικά. Μόλις φτάνουν, ξεκλειδώνει τὴν πόρτα καὶ ὁ ξένος προσκυνᾷ μὲ τρόπο παράξενο... δὲν ἔχει ξαναδεῖ κάτι τέτοιο ἢ γυναίκα. Ἐπειτα ἀνάβῃ ἕνα μόνον κερί μὲ μεγάλη προσήλωσι καὶ τὸ ἀφήνῃ στὸ μανουάλι. Μένει γιὰ λίγο ἀκίνητος, κρατᾷ χαμηλὰ τὸ κεφάλι καὶ ἔχει στὸ στήθος τὸ καπέλο του.

-Δὲν θέλω νὰ μοῦ τὸ σβήσεις! Τῆς λέει μὲ ἔμφαση δείχνοντας τὸ κερί. Ἄφησέ το, νὰ καίει μέχρι τέλους!

-Ὅχι, παιδάκι μου, παίρνει γρήγορη καὶ καθησυχαστικὴ τὴν ἀπάντησι.

Ὅμως, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖνη φοβᾷται μήπως πάρει φωτιὰ ἢ ἐκκλησία, μόλις βγαίνει ὁ ἄλλος, τὸ σβήνει. Κι ἐπιστρέφει στὸ σπίτι τῆς. Φτιάχνει ἕνα ζεστὸ φασκόμηλο καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ συνέλθει. Φέρνει πάλι στὴ μνήμη τὸ περιστατικὸ μὲ τὸν ἄγνωστο.

Ξαφνικά, ἐκεῖ ποὺ κάθεται μὲ τὸ βλέμμα προσηλωμένο στὶς φλόγες, ἐμφανίζεται ὁ ἄντρας μπροστά τῆς. Ἐτσι, ἀπὸ τὸ πουθενὰ καὶ ἐνῶ ἡ πόρτα ἦταν κλεισμένη ἀπὸ μέσα μὲ μάνταλο.

-Γιατί, κυρά-Μαρία; Ἐγὼ εἶχα τάμα καὶ ἦρθα ἀπὸ τὰ Δωδεκάνησα, γιὰ νὰ ἀνάψω ἐδῶ τὸ κερί. Κι ἐνῶ σοῦ ζήτησα νὰ μὴν τὸ σβήσεις, ἐσὺ δὲν τὸ ἄφησες.

Ὁ τόνος τῆς φωνῆς καὶ τὸ ὕφος τοῦ εἶναι αὐστηρά. Σηκώνει τὸ χέρι καὶ τὴ χαστουκίζει. Ἐπειτα, τὸ ἴδιο ξαφνικά καὶ παράλογα ἐξαφανίζεται.

Ἡ νεωκόρος, κατάπληκτη καὶ ἔντρομη, προσπαθεῖ νὰ συνέλθει. Τὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ δέχτηκε τὸ χτύπημα πιά δὲν ἀκούει. Κάποια στιγμὴ συνέρχεται, βγαίνει στὸ κρῦο καὶ τρέχει γιὰ τὸ σπίτι τοῦ ἱερέα.

Ὁ παπα-Σωτῆρος τὴν ἀκούει προσεκτικά.

-Πᾶμε γρήγορα νὰ τὸν βροῦμε, τῆς λέει σοβαρά.

Ἀρχίζουν νὰ τὸν ψάχνουν. Παντοῦ, ὡς καὶ στὸ λεωφορεῖο τῆς γραμμῆς ποὺ ἐτοιμάζεται γιὰ τὴν Ἀθήνα. Τίποτε. Κανένας δὲν τὸν εἶδε, κανένας δὲν τὸν ἀπάντησε.

Ὅποτε κάνουν στροφή και γυρίζουν στο ναὸ τοῦ Μιχαήλ. Ἀνοίγουν τὴν πόρτα του. Μπαίνουν στὴν ἡσυχία σὰν σὲ σύννεφο και διαποτίζονται ἀπὸ αὐτὴ σὲ κάθε τους κύτταρο. Κοιτάζονται μὲ νόημα. Σταυροκοπιούνται. Τὸ κερὶ τοῦ ξένου ἦταν πάλι ἀναμμένο και τοὺς κοίταξε.

Μένει ἔτσι, ἄλιωτο, μέχρι τὸ ἄλλο ἀπόγευμα. Ὅταν, πάλι μόνο του ν' ἀνάβει στὸ σύμπαν του ναοῦ και μὲ τὴ νεωκόρο νὰ τὸ κοιτάζει ἐκπληκτη, ἀπότομα σὲ μία στιγμή λιώνει και χάνεται ὅμοιο μὲ δάκρυ στὴν ἄμμο.

† † †

Εἴμαστε γύρω στοὺς 50 κι ἐπιστρέφουμε. Τὸ πλοῖο τῆς γραμμῆς ἔχει τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μεγάλου περιθωριακοῦ «Θεόφιλος».

Εἶναι ἀργὰ τὸ βράδυ, παραμονὴ τῆς 1^{ης} Ὀκτωβρίου. Κάποιος προτείνει στὸν ἱερέα νὰ κάνουμε ἀπόψε τὸν ἁγιασμὸ τοῦ μήνα, μιὰ πού τὸ πρῶτὸ δὲν θὰ μπορούσε. Ἐκεῖνος δὲν φέρνει ἀντίρρηση. Εἶπαμε νὰ συναντηθοῦμε στὴν τραπεζαρία λίγο πρὶν τὰ μεσάνυχτα. Νομίζουμε πὼς θὰ τὸν συντροφεύουμε λίγοι, ἔτσι κουρασμένοι κι ἔτσι φορτωμένοι μὲ πολλὲς συγκινήσεις.

Ὅσοι μαζευόμαστε, ξεπερνᾶμε τοὺς ἑκατὸ. Κάποιος τὸ ψιθύρισε και πολλοὶ ἔσπευσαν. Μαζὶ ὁ πλοίαρχος κι ἄλλη μιὰ δεκάδα βαθμοφόροι στὰ ἐπίσημά τους, χῶρια τὸ ἄλλο προσωπικὸ τοῦ σκάφους.

Ὁ παπα-Μάρκος ξεκινᾶ. Μιὰ σιωπὴ περιέργη γεμίζει τὸ χῶρο. Στὴ μέση τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ, ἡ φίλη μου φέρνει τὴ μικρὴ εἰκόνα μὲ τὸν Ταξιάρχη τοῦ Μανταμάδου πού ἀγόρασε τὸ πρῶτὸ και τὴν κρατᾶ στὸ στήθος της. Τότε ὁ πλοίαρχος, πού δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεπερνᾶ τὰ 40, κάνει νόημα σὲ κάποιον και ἐκεῖνος μ' ἕναν ἄλλον πᾶνε πρὸς τὸ βάθος τῆς αἴθουσας. Ἐπιστρέφουν σὲ λίγο. Κρατοῦν προσεκτικὰ κάτι σὰν πίνακα ζωγραφικῆς, σὰν εἰκόνα. Σιγὰ - σιγὰ ἀφαιροῦν τὰ χοντρά χαρτιά πού τὸ τυλίγουν και ὁ ἱερέας ζητᾶ νὰ τὸ στρέψουν πρὸς τὸν κόσμο.

Και τότε... τότε νιώθουμε τὸ καράβι νὰ γέρνει ἔντονα, ἀργὰ, ὑποβλητικὰ, μεγαλόπρεπα, και νὰ ἐπανερχεται. Τρεῖς φορές. Σὰν κάποιος νὰ τὸ σπρώχνει ἀπ' τὴ μία μεριὰ νὰ γείρει στὴν ἄλλη ἔτσι γιὰ νὰ τονίσει τὴν παρουσία του, κι ἐνῶ ἡ θάλασσα εἶναι ἠρεμὴ και γλυκιὰ και φιλόξενη. Γιὰ δύο-τρὶα λεπτά.

Ἀκούγονται φωνὲς ἐκπληξης. Προσέχω τὸν καπετάνιο. Ἔχει τὸ κεφάλι κατεβασμένο. Ὁ ὑποπλοίαρχος, μελωδικὸς στὴν ψαλτικὴ ὅσο λίγοι, χαμογελά. Οἱ ἄλλοι βαθμοφόροι δὲν σαλεύουν. Κάποιοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπιβάτες σταυροκοπιούνται. Κι ὅταν ὁ ἁγιασμὸς τελειώνει, ὁ πλοίαρχος μᾶς μιλά:

-Καταλάβατε τὸ κούνημα τοῦ πλοίου; Αὐτὸ δὲν ἦταν «θάλασσα», λέει μὲ βεβαιότητα. Ἦταν ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος. Και τὸ κάνει κάθε φορὰ πού τὸν ξεσκεπάζουμε.

Ἀφήνει νὰ ἐννοηθεῖ πὼς ἔχει ζήσει ὁ ἴδιος ἕνα θαῦμα, ἀρνεῖται νὰ τὸ ἀποκαλύψει, μόνο λέει πὼς τὴ συγκεκριμένη εἰκόνα τὴν ἔχει μαζί του πάντοτε, ὅταν ταξιδεύει, ἐνῶ, σὰν γυρίζει στὸν Πειραιά, τὴν παίρνει πάλι στὸ σπῆτι του.

Ἐκεῖνο τὸ βράδυ, ἀνοίγω ἕνα παλιὸ ξεχασμένο στίχο και προσεύχομαι:

*Καθάριε μου Ἄγγελε, Ἄγγελε, Ἄγγελε,
πού διέσχισες μὲ ὑπομονὴ τὴ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ
μέχρι πού σὲ ἄραξε τὸ παρελθόν,
πὼς βρήκες τὴν τοιχογραφία σου κι αἰωνιώθηκες;
Μὲ ποιὸ κρινάκι σὰν φωνῆεν νὰ φέγγει μου
θὰ μὲ δεχθεῖ και μένα κάποιος ξέφωτο ποίημα;
Καθάριε μου ὁμογάστριε, πὼς νὰ σωθῶ;*

† † †

Οἱ πέντε νέοι ἐπισκέπτονται τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ. Δὲν εἶναι ἀκόμη 20 χρονῶν.

Ὅταν φτάνουν στὴ Μονὴ τῶν Ἰβήρων, τοὺς ἐντυπωσιάζει ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας και οἱ μοναχοὶ μὲ τὰ σκυμμένα κεφάλια και τὶς στρωτὲς μετάνοιες. Δυσκολεύονται νὰ δεχθοῦν τὸν ἄλλο τρόπο ζωῆς και οἱ ἱστορίες γιὰ θαύματα πού τοὺς ἀφηγεῖται κάποιος παλιὸς μοναχὸς τοὺς φαίνονται ἀπίστευτες. Ἦταν τὸ καλοκαίρι τοῦ 1979.

Τὴν ἐπόμενη μέρα, μὲ ζέστη, νεῖατα και ἄγνοια, κατευθύνονται ὅλοι τους πρὸς τὴ θάλασσα. Λένε ν' ἀψηφήσουν τὴν ἀπαγόρευση και νὰ κολυμπήσουν. Ὁ Κώστας ξανοίγεται λίγο περισσότερο και κάποια στιγμή νιώθει τὸ Αἰγαῖο νὰ τὸν παίρνει μέσα. Φοβάται, πίνει νερὸ και ζητᾶει βοήθεια. Οἱ φίλοι τὸν πλησιάζουν, κινδυνεύουν ὅμως και βγαίνουν στὴν ξηρὰ δύσκολα.

Στρέφονται πρὸς τὴ Μονή, μήπως κάποιος ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ τοὺς συντρέξει. Τοὺς πλησιάζει ἕνας ἄντρας ψηλός, γύρω στὰ 30. Δείχνει σίγουρος. Κάνει νόημα νὰ μὴν ταραζόνται. Φυσικὰ και θὰ βοηθήσει. Πέφτει στὸ νερὸ, πολὺ γρήγορα και εὐκόλα φτάνει τὸ νέο πού μισοπνίγεται και τὸν τραβάει στὴ στεριά. Οἱ φίλοι του τὸν τριγυρίζουν και τοῦ δίνουν τὶς πρῶτες βοήθειες.

Μόλις ἐκεῖνος συνέρχεται, διαπιστώνουν πὼς ὁ ξένος δὲν εἶναι μαζί τους. Κι ὄχι μόνο αὐτό. Ἀλλά, ἐνῶ και οἱ πέντε ἐπιμένουν πὼς εἶχε πολὺ ἰδιαίτερη φυσιογνωμία, δὲν τὴ θυμοῦνται παρὰ θαμπά. Ὁ ἕνας ἀπὸ τὴν παρέα λέει πὼς ἦταν μελαχρινός, μ' ἕνα χακὶ στρατιωτικὸ σάκο κι ἐντελῶς γυμνός, πού αὐτὸ ὅμως δὲν τὸν σοκάρισε. Ὁ ἄλλος τὸν εἶδε ξανθό, νὰ φοράει



μαῦρο ξιβάγκο καὶ παντελόνη τζήν. Ὁ τρίτος, ποὺ κινδύνεψε, ἰσχυρίζεται πὼς δὲν τὸν ἄγγιξε καθόλου σὰν τὸν πλησίασε, ἀλλὰ ἔνωθε σὰν νὰ ὑπῆρχε ἕνα μικρὸ κενὸ ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ χέρια τοῦ σωτήρα του καὶ μία δύναμη περιέργη νὰ τὸν ἔλκει πρὸς τὰ ἔξω.

Ψάχνουν παντοῦ τὸ ἀπόγευμα στὴν Ἱβήρων, γιατί στὸν ἕνα φάνηκε πὼς ἐκεῖ κατευθύνθηκε. Πουθενά. Ἐξαφανισμένος. Ρωτοῦν τοὺς μοναχοῦ κι ἐκείνοι τοὺς ἀπαντοῦν πὼς δὲν ἔχουν ἐξήγηση, ἄς δώσει ὁ καθένας τὴ δική του. Ἔτσι, τὸ ἄλλο πρωὶ συνεχίζου τὴν ἀναζήτηση σὲ διπλανὰ Μοναστήρια.

Φθάνουν στὴ Μονὴ τῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας. Κι ἐκεῖ, σ' ἕνα μικρὸ ναὸ ποὺ μπαίνουν γιὰ νὰ προσκυνήσουν, ὁ Κώστας συναντᾷ τὸ σωτήρα του στὴ μία πόρτα τοῦ ἱεροῦ. Εἶναι ὁ Γαβριήλ. Ὅποτε, γιὰ ἕνα λεπτὸ δὲν ὑπάρχει κανεὶς ἄλλος στὴν πλάση, μόνο ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος κι αὐτός. Γιὰ μία αἰωνιότητα δὲν ὑπάρχει κανεὶς ἄλλος στὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὸ θάμβος, μόνο τὰ μάτια στὴν τοιχογραφία ποὺ γελοῦν καὶ τὰ δικά του ποὺ καίνε.

-Αὐτὸς μὲ ἔσωσε, ψελλίζει μόνο καὶ πέφτει στὰ γόνατα. Κι ἔτσι πεσμένο, τὸν τυλίγει ἡ ἴδια δύναμη, ἐκεῖνη ποὺ τὸν τράβηξε ἀπ' τὸ σκοτεινὸ νερὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ πνιγόταν. Πνίγεται πάλι. Μετὰ τὸ φυσικὸ, νιώθει καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸ πνιγμό. Ἀλλὰ τώρα πιά εἶναι πλάι του κάποιος μὲ φτεροῦγες, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν ὀδηγεῖ σὲ διαφορετικὴ ὄχθη.

Καὶ δὲν περνάει πολὺς καιρὸς, ὅταν στὸν παλιό του κόσμο μαθεύτηκε πὼς ὁ νέος ἀποφάσισε νὰ μὴ γυρίσει. Ἀπὸ τότε ὅμως ποὺ ἄλλαξε ὄνομα, φόρεσε ράσο κι ἀπόμεινε στῆς δεύτερης σωτηρίας του τὴν ὄχθη, κανεὶς δὲν γνωρίζει ποῦ βρίσκεται. Οἱ παλιοὶ του φίλοι τὸν προφυλάσσουν, διηγοῦνται ὅλα τοῦτα μὲ δέος καὶ ἰσχυρίζονται πὼς λίγο μετὰ θὰ βεβαιώσει τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Γαβριήλ στὸ συγκεκριμένο γεγονός καὶ ὁ Γέρον Παΐσιος.

† † †

Στὶς 22 Ἀπριλίου 1994 (διηγεῖται ὁ π. Δανιὴλ Σάπικας, Ἀρχιμανδρίτης καὶ γιατρός), εἰσήχθηκα στὸ Εὐγενίδειο Θεραπευτήριον μὲ 4,5 κιλά ἐμπύημα δεξιοῦ ἡμιθωρακίου, μὲ συμπτώματα ἀπολύτου ἄπνοιας, ἀδυναμία βάδισης, 41,5 πυρετό, ἐνῶ ὑπέστην καὶ διαβητικὸ σδκ ἀγνώστου αἰτιολογίας.

Μέσα ἀπὸ ἕνα σύννεφο ἔβλεπα καὶ ἄκουγα τὰ συμβαίνοντα μέσα στὸ χειρουργεῖο, καὶ τὸ βάσανο τὸ μεγάλο ἦταν, ὅτι, σὰν γιατρὸς γνώριζα πολὺ καλὰ τὴν κρίσιμη κατάστασή μου. Γνώριζα, ὅτι τὸ ποσοστὸ κατάληξης (θανάτου μου) ἦταν γύρω στὸ 95%. Καὶ δὲν εἶχα ἄδικο. Μάλιστα ἤμουν καὶ ἐπιεικῆς στὴν κρίση μου, γιατί ἡ ἰατρικὴ ὁμάδα ποὺ ἀποτελεῖτο ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη Μπελένη, διευθυντὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ, τὸν καθηγητὴ Χρυσόστομο Μελισσινό, διευθυντὴ πνευμονολογικῆς κλινικῆς στὸ Νοσοκομεῖο Ἰγεία, καὶ μὲ τὴν Εἰρήνη Μπατάλη, ἀναισθησιολόγο, νὰ φοβᾶται

νὰ μοῦ δώσει νάρκωση γιὰ τὸν κίνδυνον ἀνακοπῆς τῆς καρδιάς λόγω βάρους μου· συζητοῦσαν δυνατὰ γιατί δὲν πίστευαν ὅτι ἄκουγα τὰ λεγόμενά τους. Τοὺς ἄκουγα νὰ μοῦ δίνουν ζωὴ μόνο 2%!

-Θὰ κάνουμε ὅ,τι μποροῦμε, ἔλεγαν, γιατί οἱ πιθανότητες ζωῆς εἶναι ἐλάχιστες, μὲ ποσοστὸ κατάληξης 98%! Ἔτσι κι ἄλλιῶς καταδικασμένοι εἶναι...

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα αἰσθάνθηκα μόνος, κατάμονος... Ἔκανα μὲ κόπο τὸν σταυρό μου καὶ προσευχήθηκα στὸν προστάτη μου, τὸν Ταξιάρχη:

-Ταξιάρχη μου, Ἀρχάγγελε Μιχαήλ, μὴ μὲ ἀφήνεις, μὴ μὲ ἐγκαταλείπεις. Ἐσένα μόνο ἔχω τώρα, σ' ἔσένα ἐμπιστεύομαι τὴν ζωὴ μου...!

Ἔνας μεταλλικὸς θόρυβος διέκοψε τὴν νοερὰ προσευχή μου. Φοβήθηκα ὅτι μὲ τὴν κίνηση τῶν χειρῶν μου ἔριξα κάποιο ἐργαλεῖο, καὶ προσπάθησα νὰ γυρίσω τὸ κεφάλι μου πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση τοῦ θορύβου. Καὶ τότε... ὦ Θεέ μου... Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ, ὁ Ταξιάρχης, μὲ τὴν πανοπλία του καὶ τὸ σπαθὶ στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι του, στεκόταν πλάι μου, χαμογελαστὸς καὶ ὀλοζώντανος!

-Δανιήλ, εἶμαι ἐδῶ, μοῦ εἶπε. Δὲν σὲ ἐγκατέλειψα. Σὲ προστατεύω. Ἐγὼ θὰ σὲ χειρουργήσω, καὶ θὰ γίνεις καλά. Μὴ φοβᾶσαι!

Ἦταν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ καθὼς μοῦ μιλοῦσε ἀκούμπησε τὸ ξίφος στὸ στήθος μου!...

Σὲ λίγο ἦλθε ὁ καθηγητῆς Μπελένης.

-Ἄς προσευχηθοῦμε μαζὶ πάτερ Δανιήλ, μοῦ εἶπε, καὶ μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅλα θὰ πᾶνε καλά.

Καὶ πράγματι πῆγανε. Ἡ ἐγχείρηση πέτυχε. Τὸ χέρι τοῦ γιατροῦ ποὺ τὸ ὀδηγοῦσε ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος, εἶμαι βέβαιος γι' αὐτό, μοῦ ξανάδωσε πάλι τὴν ζωὴ ποὺ εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ φεύγει ἀπὸ μέσα μου.

Τροπάριον

*Τῶν οὐρανίων στρατιῶν Ἀρχιστράτηγοι,
δυσωποῦμεν ὑμᾶς ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀνάξιτοι,
ἵνα ταῖς ὑμῶν δεήσεσι τειχήσετε ἡμᾶς,
σκέπη τῶν πτέρυγων τῆς αὔλου ὑμῶν δόξης,
φρουροῦντες ἡμᾶς προσπίπτοντας,
ἐκτενῶς καὶ βοῶντας.*

*Ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων λυτρώσασθε ἡμᾶς,
ὡς Ταξιάρχαι τῶν Ἄνω Δυνάμεων.*

Κοντάκιον

*Ἀρχιστράτηγοι Θεοῦ, Λειτουργοὶ θείας δόξης,
τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὀδηγοὶ καὶ Ἀρχηγοὶ Ἀσωμάτων,
τὸ συμφέρον ἡμῖν αἰτήσασθε καὶ τὸ μέγα ἔλεος,
ὡς τῶν Ἀσωμάτων Ἀρχιστράτηγοι.*

Μεγαλυνάριον

*Δεῦτε ἐυφημήσεων οἱ πιστοί, τοὺς δυὸ φωστήρας,
τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ φωταυγεῖς,
Μιχαὴλ τὸν Μέγαν, καὶ Γαβριὴλ τὸν θεῖον,
τοὺς δυὸ Ταξιάρχας, τοῦ Παντοκράτορος.*

Μὴν Ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου...

Τοῦ Ἀείμνηστου Στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη.

«Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνας».

† † †

Τότε, ἐκεῖ πὸν καθόμουν εἰς τὸ περιβόλι μου καὶ ἔτρωγα ψωμί, πονώντας ἀπὸ τὶς πληγές, ὅπου ἔλαβα εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ περισσότερο πονώντας διὰ τὶς μέσα πληγές ὅπου δέχομαι διὰ τὰ σημερινὰ δεινὰ τῆς Πατρίδος, ἦλθαν δύο ἐπιτήδειοι, ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, μισομαθεῖς καὶ ἄθρησκοι, καὶ μοῦ ξηγῶνται ἔτσι: «Πουλᾶς Ἑλλάδα, Μακρυγιάννη».

Ἐγώ, στὴν ἄθλιαν κατάστασίν μου, τοὺς λέγω: «Ἀδελφοί, μὲ ἀδικεῖτε. Ἑλλάδα δὲν πουλᾶω, νοικοκυραῖοι μου. Τέτοιον ἀγαθὸν πολυτίμητον δὲν ἔχω εἰς τὴν πρᾶματιαν μου. Μὰ καὶ νὰ τὸ ἴχα, δὲν τὸ ἴδινα κανενός. Κι' ἂν πουλιέται Ἑλλάδα, δὲν ἀγοράζεται σήμερις, διότι κἀνατε τὸν κόσμον ἐσεῖς λογιώτατοι, νὰ μὴν θέλει νὰ ἀγοράσει κάτι τέτοιο».

Ἐφυγαν αὐτοί. Κι' ἕκατσα σὲ μίαν πέτραν μόνος καὶ ἔκλαιγα. Μισὸς ἄνθρωπος καταστάθηκα ἀπὸ τὸ ντουφέκι τοῦ Τούρκου, τσακίστηκα εἰς τὶς περιστάσεις τοῦ ἀγῶνα καὶ κυνηγιέμαι καὶ σήμερον. Κυνηγῶνται καὶ ἄλλοι ἀγωνιστὲς πολὺ καλύτεροί μου, διότι ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ τελευταῖος καὶ ὁ χειρότερος. Καὶ οἱ πῖο καλύτεροι ὄλων ἀφανίστηκαν.

Αὐτοὶ πὸν θυσιάσαν ἀρετὴ καὶ πατριωτισμὸν, γιὰ νὰ εἰπωθεῖ ἐλεύτερη ἡ Ἑλλάδα κι' ἐχάθησαν φαμελιές ὀλωσδιόλου, εἶπαν νὰ ζητήσουν ἓνα ἀποδειχτικὸν πὸν νὰ λέγει ὅτι ἔτρεξαν κι' αὐτοὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπηρεσίαν τῆς Πατρίδος, καὶ Τούρκου δὲν ἄφηκαν ἀντουφέκιγο. Πῆγε νὰ ἱεργήσῃ ἡ Κυβέρνηση καὶ βγήκαν κάτι τσασίτες καὶ σπιγοῦνοι, πὸν δουλεύουν μῖσος καὶ ἰδιοτέλεια, καὶ εἶπαν «ὄχι». Καὶ εἶπαν καὶ βροσιᾶς παλιᾶς διὰ τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς. Γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάρουν τὸ ἀποδειχτικόν, ἓνα χαρτὶ πὸν δὲν κάνει τίποτε γρόσια.

Πατρίδα νὰ θυμᾶσαι ἐσὺ αὐτοὺς ὅπου, διὰ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν λευτερίαν σου, δὲν λογαρίασαν θάνατο καὶ βάσανα. Κι' ἂν ἐσὺ τοὺς λησμονήσεις, θὰ τοὺς θυμηθοῦν οἱ πέτρες καὶ τὰ χῶματα, ὅπου ἔχυσαν αἵματα καὶ δάκρυα.

Θεέ, συχώρεσε τοὺς παντίδους, πὸν θέλουν νὰ μᾶς πάρουν τὸν ἀγέρα πὸν ἀναπνέομεν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν πὸν μὲ ντουφέκι καὶ γιαταγάνι πήραμε. Ἐμεῖς τὸ χρέος, τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἐπράξαμεν. Καὶ αὐτοὶ βγήκαν σήμερον νὰ προκόψουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Μᾶς γέμισαν φατρία καὶ διχόνοιαν. Καὶ τὴν Πατρίδα δὲν τὴν θέλουν Μητέρα κοινή. Ἀμορῶζα εἰς τὰ κρεβάτια τους τὴν θέλουν. Γι' αὐτὸ περνοῦν καὶ ρεθίζουν τὸν κόσμον μὲ τέχνες καὶ καμώματα.

Καὶ καζαντίσαν αὐτοὶ πουγγιὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀφήσαν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς, τὶς χῆρες καὶ τὰ ὄρφανὰ εἰς

τὴν ἄκρην. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἀνθρώπινοι λύκοι, πὸν φέραν δυστυχήματα καὶ κίντυνον εἰς τὸν τόπον. Ἄς ὄψονται.

Τότε πὸν ἡ Τουρκία ἐκατέβαινε ἀπὸ τὰ ντερβένια καὶ ὀλίγοι ἔτρεχαν μὲ ὀλίγα ντουφέκια, μὲ τριχιᾶς δεμένα, νὰ πολεμήσουν, θέλοντας λευτερίαν ἢ θάνατον, οἱ φρόνιμοι ἀσφάλιζαν τὶς φαμελιές τους εἰς τὰ νησιὰ κι' αὐτοὶ τρέχαν εἰς ρεματιᾶς καὶ βουνὰ, μὴ βλέποντας ποτὲ Τούρκου πρόσωπον. Κι' ὅταν ἀκοῦγαν τὰ ντισμπάρκα τῶν Τούρκων, τρέχαν μακρύτερα. Τώρα θέλουν δικὴν τους τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ κυνηγοῦν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς.

Ἐγίναμε θηρία πὸν θέλουν κριγιάτα (κρέατα) ἀνθρωπινὰ νὰ χορτάσουν. Καὶ χωρίζουν τὸν κόσμον σὲ πατριῶτες καὶ ἀντιπατριῶτες. Αὐτοὶ γίναν οἱ σημαντικοὶ τῆς Πατρίδος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ χαθοῦν. Δὲν ξηγιῶνται γλυκότερα νὰ φυλάξωμεν Πατρίδα καὶ νὰ δοῦμεν λευτερίαν πραγματικὴν. Ρωμαίικον δὲν φτιάχνεται χωρὶς οὔλλοι νὰ θυσιάσουν ἀρετὴν καὶ πατριωτισμὸν. Καὶ χωρὶς νὰ πάψῃ ἡ μέσσα, ἡ δικὴ μας τυραγνία.

Καὶ βγήκαν τώρα κάτι δικοὶ μας κυβερνήτες, Ἑλληνας, σπορὰ τῆς ἐβραίουργιάς, πὸν εἶπαν νὰ μᾶς σβήσουν τὴν Ἁγία Πίστη, τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, διότι ἡ Φραγκιά δὲν μᾶς θέλει μὲ τέτοιο ντύμα Ὁρθόδοξον. Καὶ ἐκάθησα καὶ ἔκλαιγα διὰ τὰ νέα παθήματα. Καὶ ἐπῆγα πάλιν εἰς τοὺς φίλους μου τοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄναψα τὰ καντήλια καὶ ἐλιβάνισα λιβάνιν καλὸν ἀγιορεῖτικον. Καὶ σκουπίζοντας τὰ δάκρυά μου τοὺς εἶπα:

«Δὲν βλέπετε πὸν θέλουν νὰ κάμουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα παλιοψάθα; Βοηθεῖστε, διότι μᾶς παίρνουν, αὐτοὶ οἱ μισοἙλληνας καὶ ἄθρησκοι, ὅ,τι πολυτίμητον τζιβαῖρικὸν ἔχομεν. Φραγκεμένους μᾶς θέλουν τὰ τσογλάνια τοῦ τρισκατάρατου τοῦ Πάπα. Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνας, κἀνοντας περισσότερα κακὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ πὸν καταδέχθηκεν ὁ Τούρκος ὡς τίμιος ἐχθρός μας».

Ἐνας δικός μου ἀγωνιστῆς μοῦ ἔφερε καὶ μοῦ διαβασεν ἓνα παλαιὸν χαρτὶ, πὸν ἔγραψεν ὁ κοντομερίτης μου Ἅγιος παπᾶς, ὁ Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός. Τὸν ἐκρέμασαν εἰς ἓνα δέντρον Τούρκοι καὶ Ἑβραῖοι, διότι ἔτρεχεν ὁ εὐλογημένος παντοῦ καὶ ἐδίδασκεν Ἑλλάδα, Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Γράμματα. Ἐγραψεν ὁ μακάριος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι:

«Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὲ ὑβρίσει, νὰ φονεύσῃ τὸν πατέρα μου, τὴν μητέρα μου, τὸν ἀδελφόν μου καὶ ὕστερα τὸ μάτι νὰ μοῦ βγάλει, ἔχω χρέος σὰν Χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συγχωρήσω. Τὸ νὰ ὑβρίσει τὸν Χριστόν μου καὶ τὴν Παναγία μου, δὲν θέλω νὰ τὸν βλέπω»...

Είκοσι Πρακτικές Συμβουλές για την Ταπείνωση

Πρωτ. Στεφάνου Κ. Αναγνωστοπούλου.

1. Σε ξέχασαν; Δε σε πήραν ούτε ένα τηλέφωνο; Δεν πειράζει. Καί προπαντός μὴν παραπονεῖσαι.
2. Σε ἀδίκησαν; Ξέχασέ το.
3. Σε περιφρόνησαν; Νὰ χαίρεσαι.
4. Σε κατηγοροῦν; Μὴν ἀντιλέγεις.
5. Σε κοροϊδεύουν; Μὴν ἀπαντᾷς.
6. Σε βρίζουν; Σιωπὴ καὶ προσευχή.
7. Σε ἀφαιροῦν τὸ λόγο; Σε διακόπτουν; Μὴ λυπᾶσαι.
8. Σε κακολογοῦν; Μὴν ἀντιμάχεσαι.
9. Σοῦ μεταδίδουν εὐθύνες τὰ παιδιὰ σου; Οἱ συγγενεῖς σου, οἱ δικοὶ σου οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Μὴ διαμαρτύρεσαι.
10. Θυμῶνουν μαζί σου; Νὰ παραμένεις ἤρεμος.
11. Σοῦ κλέβουν φανερά; Κἄνε τὸν τυφλό.
12. Σε εἰρωνεύονται; Νὰ μακροθυμεῖς.
13. Δὲν ἀκοῦνε τίς συμβουλές σου; Ἰδίως δὲν ἀκοῦνε τίς συμβουλές σου τὰ παιδιὰ σου; Πέσε στὰ γόνατα καὶ κἄνε προσευχή.
14. Ἐκνευρισμὸς στὸ ἀντρώγυνο; Ἐσὺ φταῖς. Κι ἐσὺ φταῖς. Ὅχι ὁ ἄλλος.
15. Ἐφταιξες; Ζήτησε συγγνώμη.
16. Δὲν ἔφταιξες; Πάλι ζήτησε συγγνώμη.
17. Ἐχεις ὑγεία; Δόξαζε τὸν Θεόν.
18. Ἐχεις ἀρρώστια; Ἐχεις καρκίνο, ταιλαιπωρεῖσαι, ὑποφέρεις, βασανίζεσαι, πονᾷς; Δόξαζε τὸν Θεόν.
19. Γκρίνια, ἀνεργία, φτώχεια μέσα στὸ σπίτι; Νήστευσε. Ἀγρύπνησε. Κἄνε προσευχή.
20. Γιὰ ὅλους καὶ γιὰ ὅλα προσευχή. Πολλὴ προσευχή. Πολλὴ προσευχή. Νηστεία καὶ προσευχή διότι τοῦτο τὸ γένος τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων οὐκ ἐκπορεύεται παρὰ μόνο μὲ νηστεία καὶ προσευχή.
Εἶθε ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ ἀκολουθήσουμε ὅλοι μας, καὶ πρῶτος ἐγώ, τίς ταπεινὲς αὐτὲς συμβουλές, καὶ νὰ εἴστε βέβαιοι ὅτι θὰ σωθοῦμε!



Σήμερα οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζητοῦν νὰ τοὺς ἀγαπήσουν καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἀποτυγχάνουν. Τὸ σωστὸ εἶναι νὰ μὴν ἐνδιαφέρεσαι ἂν σε ἀγαποῦν, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἐσὺ ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μόνο ἔτσι γεμίζει ἡ ψυχή.

Νὰ ξέρεις, παιδί μου, ὅτι τὰ πάντα ἐναποθηκεύονται μέσα στὴ μνήμη μας καί, ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς κρίνει κατάλληλη τὴν ὥρα, μᾶς τὰ ἀποκαλύπτει...

Γέρων Πορφύριος Καυσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Γιὰ τὰ Πλούτη

Ἀγίου Νικολάου Βδελεμιρόβιτς.

Ὅλα τὰ πλούτη μας, ἡ δόξα καὶ οἱ τιμές, δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα φευγαλέο ὄνειρο, ποὺ τελειώνει μὲ τὸν θάνατο. Κάνεις δὲν παίρνει τίποτε μαζί του στὸν ἄλλο κόσμο, οὔτε ἓνα ἔστω ψιχουλάκι ἀπὸ τὸ ἐπίγειο συμπόσιο! Εἶναι μακάριος ὅποιος κατανοεῖ πὼς ἡ ψυχή εἶναι τὸ μοναδικὸ ἀπόκτημά του, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀπὸ τίποτε δὲν φθείρεται, οὔτε καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν τὸν θάνατο! Ἐνας τέτοιος ἄνθρωπος σκέπτεται τρεῖς μόνον πραγματικότητες: τὸν θάνατο, τὴν ψυχή καὶ τὸν Θεὸ-Κριτὴ. Ὁ ἄββᾶς Εὐάγριος διδάσκει: *Κράτα διαρκῶς στὸ νοῦ σου τὸν ἐπικείμενο θάνατό σου καὶ τὴν Κρίση κι ἔτσι θὰ διαφυλάξεις τὴν ψυχή σου ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία.*

Ὅλες οἱ βιοτικές μας μέριμνες σὲ τούτη τὴ ζωὴ εἶναι σὰν ἄσκοπες φροντίδες γιὰ ἓνα γεῦμα ποὺ πρέπει σύντομα νὰ διακοπεῖ. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἡσαΐας ὁ Ἀναχωρητὴς λέει χαρακτηριστικά: *Ἔχε μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια σου τὸν θάνατο, κάθε μέρα συνεχῶς νὰ σκέπτεσαι τὸ πὼς θὰ χωριστεῖς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα σου, πὼς θὰ περάσεις ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ τῶν δυνάμεων τοῦ σκότους ποὺ θὰ σε συναντήσουν στὸν ἀέρα καὶ πὼς θὰ παρουσιαστεῖς ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ! Προετοιμάσου γιὰ ἐκείνη τὴ Φοβερὴ Ἡμέρα, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία θὰ σε βρεῖ ἡ Κρίση τοῦ Θεοῦ, σὰν νὰ τὴν βλέπεις ἤδη ἀπὸ τώρα!*

Κάποια μέρα ἓνας πλούσιος ἔμπορος, ὁ Ἰωάννης, πῆγε στὸν ὄσιο Σαββάτιο τοῦ Σολόφσκι καὶ τοῦ προσέφερε πλούσια ἐλεημοσύνη. Ὁ Σαββάτιος δὲν δέχθηκε νὰ λάβει τὸ παραμικρὸ καὶ εἶπε στὸν δωροδοκτὴ νὰ τὰ μοιράσει ὅλα στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Ὁ Ἰωάννης πολὺ λυπήθηκε γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ὄσιος, γιὰ νὰ τὸν παρηγορήσει καὶ νὰ τοῦ ἀποκαλύψει ὀρισμένα πράγματα, τοῦ εἶπε:

-Ἰωάννη, παιδί μου, μείνε ἐδῶ καὶ ἀναπαύσου μέχρι αὔριο καὶ τότε θὰ δεῖς τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Ἰωάννης ὑπάκουσε. Τὴν ἐπαύριο, πράγματι ὁ Ἰωάννης μπῆκε στὸ κελλὶ τοῦ Σαββατίου καὶ εἶδε τὸν γέροντα ὀριστικὰ ἀναπαυμένο, ἐνῶ μία γλυκεῖα εὐωδία πλημμύριζε τὸ κελλί.

Αὐτὸς ποὺ προβλέπει τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του, αὐτὸς δὲν μεριμνᾷ γιὰ τὰ ἐπίγεια ἀγαθὰ!...

Παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας νὰ μὴ λησμονοῦν τὴν παραβολὴ τῆς ἐτήσιας συνδρομῆς πρὸς κάλυψη τῶν σχετικῶν ἐξόδων γιὰ τὴν ἔκδοση τοῦ παρόντος φυλλαδίου. Ἐπίσης, ὅσοι ἔχουν τὴν οἰκονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE

By St. Justin Popovich.



The invisible is the heart of the visible, the kernel of the visible. The visible is nothing compared to the invisible. Countless are the forms in which the invisible appears. It appears and disappears.

The sun is visible, but the force that gives it its warmth is invisible. The numerous constellations are visible, but the force that wisely guides them through the infinity of space, which pre-

vents them from colliding, is invisible. A magnet is visible, but its force is invisible. The earth is visible, but its gravitational field is invisible. The nightingale is visible, but the life force that gives it its being is invisible. Many creatures on the earth are visible, but the force that from the same earth brings forth a variety of herbs, a diversity of flowers and different fruits is invisible.

The earth! The most interesting and most mysterious workshop, and at the same time the most ingenious creator. She unceasingly produces from herself animals, and plants, and minerals. In her are simultaneously produced both roses and thorns, wheat and tare, basil and wormwood, incense and stinkweed. This is evidently so. But, that same obviousness raises a question: who works through her, and who creates through her, who acts through her? There, basil and wormwood grow side by side on the same square of land. And while the earth produces in the seed of basil its pleasant smell, at the same time the earth enacts in the seed of wormwood its own unpleasant odor.

The same holds for physical laws, the same conditions, the same phenomena; and the sun, and moon, and the stars, and the earth, and snow, and wind, and rain, and frost, and droughts, all the same and the results are all diametrically opposed. How is it that sunlight and drops of rain should become a pleasing aroma in basil but a foul odor in stinkweed? And furthermore: how is it that the earth's fluids become sweet in a cherry and bitter in wormwood? Who performs this unusual differentiation? On the same ground, under the same conditions, a vast variety of fruits and vegetables sprout, grow, and ripen, a diversity of animals live, and the most adverse things coexist.

Who infuses this vast secret of life and existence into all creatures and all things? In one and the same, there exist opposites; in one, there are many. Any of the thoughts of man cannot but be humbled before the truth of the Holy Bible; "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb

yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind...and God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after his kind: and it was so." (Gen 1:11-12, 24).

It is clear: the earth received its creative, life-giving power from God. God has transferred to the earth one part of his divine omnipotence, and the earth in a mysterious way extends God's creative, life-giving work. Hence, the many inexhaustible forces and supremely wise adaptations in the earth's creations. The word of God has fertilized the earth and has granted it creativeness, fertility, and life-giving power for all time. Not only in the beginning but now and forever the earth creates, produces, and gives life according to the word God.

There is a fact that holds true in the visible world; the things that are most important in life are invisible. The air is invisible. Yet is there anything more essential for the life of men, animals, and plants? Molecules are invisible, as are atoms and electrons. And is not the visible world built up from these invisible elements? Invisible particles make up the visible world. How does the invisible become the visible? In what manner does the invisible become the visible? How is it that these invisible particles become objective and appear as the visible material world? From where do these invisible particles receive their visible, tangible, and numerous forms? Visible matter is composed of invisible particles. This is a paradox, yet it is also a fact. And on that paradox rest the world and its existence. The visible rests on the invisible and is composed of the invisible. The fact of the matter is that in the visible we ceaselessly observe and look up the objectification and manifestation of the invisible. Such is the law that governs the visible, world; at the same time it is an endless enigma and an infinite mystery.

Man is the best example of how the invisible is transformed into the visible; his invisible thoughts, his invisible feelings, his invisible desires and wishes are transformed into visible works, visible actions, and visible achievements. No matter from what angle he is observed, man, every man, is a miracle-worker simply because he is a man. He endlessly works miracles; he transforms the invisible into the visible. If he defends his honor, look! He defends something that is invisible, and he is ready to sacrifice for that invisible thing that which is visible in him; his own body.

Like all feelings, love is something invisible, yet how many lives have been sacrificed for her, the invisible? In its own nature, conscience is the most inner and most invisible thing; but by the reality of its manifestation, what is more evident and tangible?

Men hold to their convictions, suffer death for them; but are they not something invisible? And in general, all of man's thoughts and feelings, desires and beliefs are essentially invisible, even though their manifestations may be evidently perceptible. The visible man is just a manifestation, a projection of the invisible man: the outer man a projection of the inner. The visible man rests on the invisible, he exists through the invisible and of the invisible.

The bottom line is that the foundation of everything that is visible is the invisible; of man, his invisible soul; of the world, the invisible God. The invisible is the hypostasis of everything, the basis of everything, the substance of all things, that is, it is that upon which the world and everything in it rests. Every man who seriously inquires into the mysteries of this world and this life has to feel this. At the bottom of all that is visible, an invisible force is at work. The invisible is the strongest thing in our world of earthly perception; electricity, radium. The gravitational force is invisible, yet is stronger than all of the planets. It moves them like children move marbles.

The law that presides over all other laws in this world is the following: the invisible is the core of the visible; the invisible governs the visible. This world is God's laboratory in which the invisible is manufactured into the visible, but only up to a certain point. For there are limits to the transformation of the invisible into the visible. This is because the invisible is always larger, infinitely and profoundly broader, than the visible. Just as the spirit is incomparably wider and larger and more profound than the body it inhabits, so too the invisible core of every substance is wider, larger, and more profound than the matters it finds itself in.

In fact, the visible is the materialization of the invisible. But around the visible, and behind the visible, there extends the endless sea of the invisible.



In order for a nation to be straightened out, evil habits and sin must cease. Unfortunately people today, aside from a few, are deaf in soul; they don't hear. They are blind; they don't see; they walk in the darkness of sin.

As at the time of Noah, thus also the flood of sin, of corruption, of disbelief and impiety, threatens to drown everyone...people run with eagerness along the path of perdition.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

FIT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By St. Cyril of Alexandria, from his "Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke."

No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

For just as the husbandman, who has begun to break up his land by the plough, if he grow weary, and leave his labour half done, sees not his field thick set with ears, nor his threshing-floor full of sheaves, and suffers of course the loss which is the natural result of idleness; the absence, I mean, of produce, and the consequent penury, and incurs also the ridicule of those that see him; so he who wishes to cleave unto Christ, but does not bid farewell to the things of the world, and abandon all love of the flesh, and even deny his earthly relatives, is not fit for the kingdom of God. One who cannot attain to this resolution, because his mind is fettered with indolence, is not acceptable unto Christ, nor fit for His company, and necessarily is refused permission to be with Him.

Such were those of whom Christ spake, when forming that similitude in the Gospels. For He said, *A rich man made a banquet for his son; and sent therefore his servants to call them that were bidden, saying, My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and everything is ready: come to the banquet. But they, it says, would not come: but one said, I have bought a field, and I cannot come. And another, I have bought a yoke of oxen: and another, I have taken a wife, hold me excused.*

Thou seest that they were called, and while it was in their power to partake of the feast, they excused themselves, and gave themselves up without restraint to those temporal and earthly matters, which rapidly fade, and the possession of which must quickly be abandoned. And yet surely it was their duty rather to have understood, that a wife and lands, and those other possessions, are but finite pleasures, short in duration, and fleeting like the shadows, and, as it were, a bitterness mingled with honey. But to be members of the church of God, from which they, I know not how, foolishly fled, would have procured for them an eternal and unchanging joy.

Whoever would follow Christ, let him be thoroughly constant, and intent solely upon this end; let him not be divided; let him not be possessed by timidity and slothfulness; let him be free from all carnal lust, and prefer nothing to his love unto Him. But if he be not so disposed, nor so affected in his will, even if he do draw near, he will not be accepted.

As a man whose head is under water cannot inhale pure air, also a man whose thoughts are plunged into the cares of this world cannot absorb the sensation of the world to come.

St. Isaac the Syrian

ON THE VIRTUE OF THE PERFECT, AMBIDEXTROUS MAN

By St. John Cassian (+430).

There are persons, who are referred to in Holy Scripture as ambidextrous. Ehud, *who used either hand as if it were his right hand*, is described as such in the Book of the Judges (3:15). We shall also be able to possess this quality in a spiritual way if by a good and correct use we put the things which are considered fortunate and right-handed and the things which are called unfortunate and left-handed on the right side, so that whatever befalls may become for us, in the words of the Apostle, “the arms of righteousness.” For we see that our inner man consists in two parts or, as I might say, two hands. No holy person can be without what we call the left hand, but perfect virtue is discerned in the fact that by proper use he turns both into a right hand.

Let us make what we are saying more understandable: The holy person has a right hand—namely, his spiritual achievements. He has this, when fervent in spirit, he masters all his desires and lusts; when, safe from every diabolical attack, he rejects and cuts off the vices of the flesh without effort or difficulty; when, raised from the earth, he contemplates all present and earthly realities as mere smoke and an empty shadow and disdains them as soon to disappear; when, with ecstatic mind, he not only ardently desires future realities but even sees them with clarity; when he is effectively fed by spiritual theoria; when he sees unlocked to himself the heavenly sacraments in all their brightness; when he sends prayers purely and swiftly to God; and when, inflamed with spiritual ardor, he passes over to invisible and eternal realities with such utter eagerness of soul that he cannot bring himself to believe that he is in the flesh.

He also has a left hand—when he is involved in the turmoil of trials, when the desires of the flesh are seething emotions and impulses; when the fire of aggravations enkindles or vainglory; when he is depressed by a death-dealing sadness; when every virtuous practice takes on a certain unbearable and darkly loathsome quality.

Whoever, then, is on what we have referred to as the right side is not elated at the approach of vainglory and, courageously struggling with the things on the left side, is not disheartened by any despair. Rather he seizes the arms of patience from adversity for the sake of exercising his virtue, uses both hands as right hands, and having triumphed in both respects, and snatches the palm of victory from the left as much as from the right.

Take Joseph the Patriarch as an example of being ambidextrous. In prosperity he was more thankful than his

father, Jacob, more devout than his brothers, and more acceptable to God. In adversity he was chaste, faithful to the Lord, more gentle to those who were imprisoned, heedless of insults, kind to his enemies, and not only respectful of his jealous and very nearly murderous brothers but even exceedingly kind in their regard.

Joseph, and others like him, for example Job the Long-Suffering, are rightly called ambidextrous. For they used either hand as if it were their right hand and passing through those things which the Apostle enumerates, they could all say alike: *By the arms of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonor, by bad reputation and good reputation*, and so forth.

We shall be ambidextrous ourselves, therefore, when neither an abundance nor a lack of present things change us—when the former does not push us into harmfully lax pleasures and the latter does not draw us into despair and complaining, but when in either case we are thankful to God and draw similar fruit from both successes and failures.



The Magi brought gold, incense and myrrh. Gold befits a King; incense is offered in sacrifice to God; the bodies of the dead are embalmed with myrrh. ... Accordingly, let us also offer gold to the Lord, Who has been born, that we may say that He rules everywhere. Let us offer incense, that we may believe that He, Who appeared in time, existed as God before time. Let us offer myrrh, that we may believe that He, Who [in His divinity] is unable to suffer, was a human being with a body like ours.

We offer gold to the new-born King, if we shine in His sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on high. We offer Him incense, if we enkindle—on the altar of our hearts—the thoughts of our human minds, by our holy pursuit of prayer; so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire. We offer Him myrrh, if we mortify the vices of our bodies by our self denial.

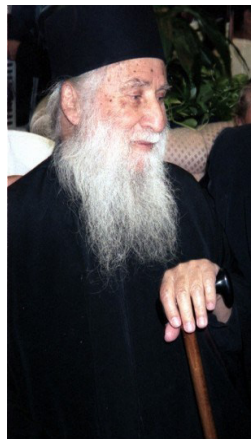
St. Gregory the Dialogist



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THE FAITHFUL HUSBAND THAT WOULD NOT ABANDON HIS UNFAITHFUL WIFE

By Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi.



I will tell you of another characteristic of a proper spouse, which is extremely difficult to find in our day. But we did encounter one such person.

He was in every way a perfect character, a Christian, and completely social. He married late, around thirty years old, not because he was averse to marriage, but because he thought that was how it should be. So he said his prayers with faith, and found himself a young girl and married her.

The girl was young, ten years younger than him. Soon after he married her, she began her mischief. He pretended not to notice; he regarded her as his daughter and himself as her father. However, they had important business interests overseas and they had to go there, even if only temporarily. So he took her and they went abroad. When they arrived, she became very obstinate, and would say to herself: “He did this on purpose, to estrange me from my environment. I will desert him.” So she abandoned and left him. She came back to Greece, and where do you think she went? To one of those “casino” places, and began to live the life of a free woman—one who is paid.

The husband however, from the day that she left him, never stopped praying with tears and insisting, in fact exhorting God: “All Good One, I will not retreat, I will not leave You alone; You were the One who gave me my wife. ‘By the Lord is a man and woman harmonized’ (according to the Bible). I want my wife. If the young girl has been deceived, must she be lost? Why did You come down to earth? Didn’t You come to find the lost ones, to heal the sick, to resurrect the dead? I will not retreat. I will not let You rest. I want my wife; bring her back to me.” He wept for two whole years.

His prayer was eventually heard and the young woman came to her senses. “Oh my,” she confessed, “God will have to create another Hell, because this one is too small for me!” So she sat down and wrote him a letter, saying: “I dare not address your name; I have no such right. If I return, will you accept me as your servant?” He replied: “My love, why did you mention that word and hurt my feelings? Wasn’t it me who sent you on a vacation and I was longing for my love to return to my open arms?”

So, he went and waited for her at the airport, as they had arranged. When she arrived, she fell down and began to beat herself and cry. He took her in his arms. “My love, why are

you like this and hurt my feelings? I was longing to see you again. Let’s go home now; we never parted—I was always with you.” And this young girl proved herself to be a faithful wife from then on.

And that is the stance that a man—a husband—should take.



BEARING THE SHAME OF CONFESSION

From “Remember thy First Love” by Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou.

Question: In taking the steps which you have presented to us, the most difficult thing, I think, is to overcome the fear of shame. This is what I try to do in my parish. People will not come to confession although their souls are burdened and things are driving them crazy, because they cannot overcome the shame to admit their sins. How do you lead people in this direction?

Answer: I think that the strength to bear shame is a gift from God. When I was a young and inexperienced spiritual father, Elder Sophrony told me to encourage the young people to confess precisely the things of which they are ashamed, for if they learn to do so, shame is transformed into strength against the passions, and they will overcome sin. This is precisely what occurred in the person of Zacchaeus. He bore shame voluntarily, and the Lord, Who was on His way to Jerusalem in order to suffer the Cross of shame, saw Zacchaeus bearing shame for His sake and recognized in him a kindred spirit. Zacchaeus had put himself prophetically in the way of the Christ, in the way of the Cross, and in a prophetic way the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ was activated in the heart of Zacchaeus. His heart was enlarged and he was able to enter into the power of faith. Christ has saved us through the Cross of shame, so when we suffer shame for His sake He considers this as gratitude, and in return He transmits to us His grace which regenerates our life.

This is exactly what happens in confession. Those who confess sincerely and take upon themselves the shame for their sins are regenerated. But those who shrug their shoulders and say, ‘Nothing special, the usual things...’ they do not bear any shame, their heart remains unmoved, and they hardly receive any benefit. But those who, with shame and a contrite heart, strip their souls naked before God and before another mortal, ‘of like passions’ (Acts 14:15) with them—that shame of theirs really finds the heart, humbles it and brings it to the surface. This then, opens the heart to receive the grace of regeneration, of consolation. We see this in the life of many that come to us: the greater the shame they bear with contrition, accusing themselves before God, the greater the grace they receive to amend their lives and make a new beginning.

THE INCLUSIVE WISDOM OF THE CHURCH

By St. Nikolaj Velimirovic, from his book "The Agony of the Church," published in 1917.

The most magnificent sanctuary of the Eastern Churches is called *Aghia Sophia* (Holy Wisdom), whereas the most magnificent sanctuaries of the Western Churches are called St. Peter's, St. Paul's, or St. John's, etc. As every hair on our head and every line on the palm of our hand have certain significance, so these dedications of the Church have doubtless certain significance. And this significance is typical of the religion of the East and the West.

Western Christianity, grown upon the soil of a youthful individualism, preferred this or that apostle's personality and dedicated their best temples accordingly. The aged East, tired of individualistic ambitions, tired of great men, flagellated by the phantom of human greatness, was thirsty for something higher and more solid than any human personality. Adoration of great personalities being the very wisdom of this world, the East stretched its hands to a superhuman ideal, to the Holy Wisdom.

It is a psychological fact that youth sees his ideal in personal greatness, progressed age in holiness. The East asked for something more eternal than Peter, Paul or John. There is wisdom, and there is Holy Wisdom that entered the world with Jesus Christ. Christ was the embodiment of God's wisdom, the very incarnation of Holy Wisdom. This Wisdom stands above all human wisdom and revives and illuminates it. Holy Wisdom includes the essential wisdom of Peter, Paul, John, and any other apostle or seer, or any other thing or creature, as the ocean includes the water of many rivers.

In the darkest times of dissension, uncertainty or suffering, the Christian East looked beyond time and space to the Eternal Christ, The *Logos* of God, and asked for Light. And it looked to Eternity through this church in Constantinople, *Aghia Sophia*, as the all-embracing and all-reconciling, holy symbol. It was in the Holy Wisdom that they sought refuge and healing from their intellectual one-sidedness and ill-will.

The Inclusive Wisdom of the Church's Founder

By His birth our Lord included and bound together the lowest and the highest, the natural and the supernatural: stable, manger, straw, sheep and shepherds on the one hand; stars, angels, magi and Davidic royal origin on the other. By His life He included the austerity of the Indian monks, of John the Baptist and the Nazarenes on the one hand; and on the other the Confucian moderate feasting, in the houses of friends, at the marriage feast and on other solemn occasions.

His life-drama was interwoven into the lives of all classes of people: men, women and children, Judaists and heathen,

King Herod and the proconsul Pilate, priests and soldiers, merchants and beggars, learned sophists and ignorant fools, the sick and the healthy, the righteous and the sinful, Jews and Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, and all others who could be met in Palestine, the very market of races and creeds.

He was by no means part of the establishment like the Pharisees and the doctors of law. He called both the Pharisees and their enemies to follow Him. He went to the temple to pray, but He also prayed alone in the desert. He kept the Sabbath and He broke the Sabbath by healing the sick and doing good on this sacred day. He came not to destroy the Law, but He brought something which was higher than the Law and even included the law itself, i.e., love and mercy.

He rebuked people who used to pray and say. "Lord, Lord!" And yet He prayed very often Himself. He rebuked those who were fasting, and yet He used to fast Himself. What He really looked for was neither prayer nor fasting, but the spirit in which one prayed or fasted.

He commanded the people to give to Caesar things which were Caesar's, and to God that which was God's. He did not criticize this or that form of government, nor did He accentuate Monarchism, Republicanism, or Socialism as one form preferable to another. Under His scheme all forms of government were included as equally good or evil according to what place they reserved for God, what gifts they duly gave to God, and by what spirit they were inspired.

He followed the customs of His nation, and did not break them or evade them purposely. He took food according to the Law, and washed hands according to the Law, and went to the Holy City and took part in worship in the temple (though He was *greater than the temple*), according to the Law. It seems that He excluded no form of worship or social life, though He despised the unclean and petty spirit with which the hypocrites filled these forms.

He embraced all nationalities and races. Nothing was for Him unclean that God had created, nothing but unclean spirits. When the Roman centurion asked help from Him, He gave it. And when the people beyond the Israelitish boundaries, from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, cried after Him, He did not listen to the exclusivistic warnings of His disciples, but He distributed even there His divine mercy. He was mindful even of the people of Nineveh. And when He sent His disciples, He sent them to *all nations*.

Finally, He included the natural and the supernatural. He talked with spirits. He saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. He stood amongst Peter, John and James on one side, and Moses and Elias on the other. All the people saw lilies in the field and sparrows upon the roof, but He saw more, He saw how His Father clothed the lilies and how He fed the sparrows. He united the natural and the supernatural in His teaching.

Love those who love thee was a natural teaching. But He added *and those who hate and persecute thee*, which was supernatural. *Give to them who give to thee* was a natural teaching. But

He added: *and to them who do not give to thee*, which was supernatural. *Bless those who bless thee*. But He added: *and those who curse thee*, which was supernatural.

And He united the natural and supernatural in His death. He suffered and died in agony. He rose from the dead, descended to Hell and ascended to Heaven. For Him there was as little boundary between heaven and earth, between nature and supernature, as between Israel and Canaan, or as between man and man, or form and form.

His wisdom was inclusive from the beginning to the end. What did He ever exclude—save unclean spirits? He was the Holy Wisdom, in which everyone could find a mansion for himself, every disciple, every nation, every form of worship, everything—but the unclean spirit.

The Inclusive Wisdom in the Church's Organization

Jesus Christ gave the largest possible scheme on which to work and the largest foundation to build upon. There is no other name in history upon which more has been constructed than upon His name. The ancient Church realized it from the beginning, and declared it. She was inclusive from the first, inclusive in her teaching and worship.

Inclusive in Teaching: Christ was put in the centre of the world's history. He represented what was the best and highest in Eastern and Western thought. The dream of Messiah was the best and highest in the Jewish conception. Well, Jesus was the Messiah. The expectation of a second Adam, the redeemer of the first, sinful Adam, was common among the peoples in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Well, Jesus was the second Adam, the expected Redeemer, and God's Messenger.

Egypt had an intuition into the mystery of the Divinity as a Trinity. However rough may have been that idea, the Trinity being thought of as a human family of Father, Mother, and Son, still it existed very vividly in Egypt. And the people expected the coming of God's only Son, the third person of their Trinity, not an imaginary being like Horus, but the real son of Osiris in flesh and blood who would bring happiness to men. Well, Jesus of Nazareth was this Son of God, and He as Christ was the eternal sharer of the Divine Trinity.

India was the cradle of the teaching of the Incarnation. The supreme God, Brahma, had already been incarnated in many persons since the dawn of history. But the highest incarnation of Him was still to come. Well, Jesus Christ was this highest incarnation of Brahma in human shape.

The cultivated polytheists did not like the idea of a monotonous theology of one solitary God. They liked rather

a divine company upon Olympus. Well, Christianity with its Trinity-teaching presented to them a limited polytheism. God was not physically one, as in Judaism, nor many, as in Hellenism. He was a Trinitarian Plurality in Unity. He was not a grim hermit, but He had the riches of an eternal life.

The intellectual Greeks and Hellenists climbed to the idea of one God and of Logos, the Mediator between God and the world, through whom God created whatever He created, and who may be incarnated for the salvation of the fallen, suffering creation. Well, Jesus Christ could include in His person this wonderful doctrine of Neoplatonism.

The mountainous Asia under Caucasus and Ararat, plunged into the mystery of Mithras, which was born out of the Zoroastrian dualistic religion of light and darkness, of Ormuzd and Ahriman. Well now, Christ, the friend of humanity, revealed Himself as the God of light struggling against Satan, the enemy of humanity.

Rome, politically ruling the world, was longing for a sacred King, for a Prince of Peace, who should come from the East and bring to the people some higher and truer happiness than that deceiving chimera of political bigness. Well, Christ should be this universal, sacred King, this Prince of Peace, and Messenger of a durable happiness. It is not true that Christ had His prophets among the people of Israel only. His prophets existed in every race and every religion and philosophy of old.

That is the reason why the whole world could claim Christ, and how He can be preached to everybody and accepted by everybody. Behold, He was at home everywhere!

Inclusive in Worship: Inclusive in doctrine, the primitive Church was wisely inclusive in worship too. It would be nonsense to speak of Christian worship as of something quite new and surprising. There was very little new and very little surprising in it indeed; almost nothing. The first Church met for prayer in the Jewish temple. Wherever the apostles came to preach the new Gospel they went to the old places of prayer, to the temples of Jehovah. Their Christian spirit did not revolt against the old forms of worship. Later on the naked Christian spirit needed to be clothed, and it was clothed. But when Israel looked to Christian worship they recognized much—forms, signs, vestments and administration—to be like their own. And not only Israel, but even Egypt, India, Babylon and Persia, Greece and Rome, yea, the Pagans of North and South. If Nature could speak, it could say how much it lent of its own to Christian worship.

A student of ancient history one day asked me: "How can I recognise the Christian religion as the best of all, when I



know how much it borrowed from the ancient religious forms of worship? How poor it looks without all that!”

I said: “Just this wonderful power of embracing and assimilating gives evidence of the vitality and universality of Christianity. It is too large in spirit to be clothed by one nation or one race only. It is too rich in spirit and destination to be expressed by one tongue, by one sign, or one symbol, or one form. In the same sense as Christian doctrine was prepared and prophesied by the religions and the philosophies before Christ, in the same sense Christian worship was prepared and prophesied as well. Whenever the Christian spirit is strong the Church is not afraid of worship being strange, and ample, and even grotesque. The weaker the Christian spirit, the greater exclusiveness in worship.

Some people say: “It is wicked to use pagan architecture for the Church, and incense and fire, and music, or dance, or bowing, or kneeling, or signs and symbols, in Christian worship, because it is pagan.” Yes, all this is pagan indeed, but it is Christian too if we wish it to be. The Latin language was pagan, but now it is Christian too. The English language was a vehicle of Paganism as well, now it is a vehicle of Christianity. The human body was itself pagan too, but the Eternal Christ, God’s Holy Wisdom, entered it and filled it with a new spirit, and it ceased to be pagan.

We in the East sometimes use for our sacerdotal vestments Chinese silk made by pagan hands in China, or chalices and spoons and little bells and chains made by the Moslems, or precious stones gathered and scents prepared by the fire or stone-worshippers of Africa, and no one of us should be afraid to use them when worshipping Christ, as Christ Himself was not afraid to touch the most wretched human bodies or souls with His pure hands. Christianity cannot be defiled, using for its worship the works of pagan hands, but pagan people are hereby taking a share in Christian worship, physically and unconsciously, waiting for the moment when they will share in it spiritually and consciously as well. Every piece of Chinese silk in our vestments is a prophecy of the great Christian China.

The Inclusive Wisdom in the Church’s Destination

Judaism was destined for the people of Israel only. The Christian Church was destined for the people of Israel too, but not for them only. She included Greeks as well.

The Greek polytheism of Olympus was destined for the Hellenic race only. The Christian Church was destined for the Hellenic race too, but not for it only. She included Indians as well.

Buddha’s wisdom was offered to the monks and vegetarians. Monks and vegetarians the Christian Church included in her lap, but also married and social people too.

Pythagoras founded a religious society of intellectual aristocrats. The Christian Church from the beginning included intellectual aristocrats side by side with the unlettered.

The Persian prophet, Zoroaster, recruited soldiers of the god of light among the best men to fight against the god of darkness. His religious institution was like a military barracks. The Christian Church included both the best and the worst, the righteous and the sinners, the healthy and the sick. It was a barracks and a hospital at the same time. It was an institution both for spiritual fighting and spiritual healing.

The Chinese sage, Confucius, preached a wonderful ethical pragmatism, and the profound thinker, Lao-Tse, preached an all-embracing spiritualism. Christian wisdom included both of them, opening Heaven for the first and showing the dramatic importance of the physical world for the second. Islam—yes, Islam had in some sense a Christian ambition: to win the whole world. The difference was that Islam wished world-conquest; the Church, the world’s salvation. Islam intended to subdue all men and bring them before God as His servants; the Church intended to educate all men, to purify and elevate them, and to bring them before God as His children.

And all others: star-worshippers, and fire, and wood, and water, and stone, and animal-worshippers had a touching sense of the immediate divine presence in nature. The Church came not to extinguish this sense but to explain and to subordinate it; to put God in the place of demons and hope instead of fear.

The Church came not to destroy, but to purify, to aid and to assimilate. The destination of the Church was neither national nor racial, but cosmic. No exclusive power was ever destined to be a world-power. The ultimate failure of Islam to become a world-power lies in its exclusiveness. It was with religion as with politics. Every exclusive policy is foredoomed to failure: the German as well as the Turkish and the Napoleonic.

The policy of the Church was designed by her Divine Founder: *He that is not against us is for us*. Well, there is no human race on earth wholly against Christ and wholly unprepared to receive Him. The wisdom of the Christian missionaries therefore is to see first in what ways Providence has prepared a soil for Christian seed; to see which of the Christian elements a race, or a religion, already possesses, and how to utilize these elements and weld them into Christianity. All that in order to make Christianity grow organically, instead of pushing it mechanically.

Conclusion

In summary let me repeat again: the wisdom of the Church has been inclusive. Inclusive was the wisdom of her Founder, inclusive the wisdom of her organization and of her destination. Exclusiveness was the very sickness and weakness of the Church. That is why we in the East, in the time of sickness of the Church, looked neither towards Peter, nor Paul, nor John, but towards the Holy Wisdom, the all-healing and all-illuminating. For *Aghia Sophia* in Constantinople, the temple dedicated to Christ the Eternal, includes in itself the sanctuaries of Peter, Paul and John; moreover, it is supported

even by some pillars of Diana's temple from Ephesus and has many other things, in style or material, which belonged to the Paganism of old. Indeed, *Aghia Sophia* has room and heart even for Islam. The Mohamedans have been praising it as the best of "their" sanctuaries!

I speak thus to you because I am sure you will not misunderstand me. And because I know all of you in the West to be a race of the world-wide spirit, I dare to make this appeal to you. Look to the Holy Wisdom! Look beyond Peter, and Paul, and John—through them and still beyond them! Every Church has her prophet, her apostle, her angel. Look now over them all to the very top of the pyramid, where all the lines meet!

Either Christianity is one, or there is no Christianity. Either the Church is universal, or there is no Church.

There lived once upon a time twelve men as different as any twelve men could be. And the Holy Wisdom united all of them into one spiritual body. Such was the first Church of the twelve, and such ought to be the last Church of the millions: different in all her parts, but cemented by the Holy Wisdom into one glorious building.

Christ, God's Holy Wisdom, includes all of us, why should we exclude each other? He was sent for the salvation of China and Japan and India as well as for that of the Jews and Greeks. Well, let us quarrel no more about the "circumcision" while a milliard of human beings are still waiting to hear for the first time the name of Jesus Christ—yea, for the first time after two thousand years!

Let the present time be the new Pentecost for us all. I speak to you, the British: don't look around you and wait; it is yours to start. All the peoples of earth are looking towards you and listening to you. Don't be too shy to start. To start what? To start a revival of the primitive wisdom of the Church, i.e., to confess and declare:

—That Christianity in its integrity is one and indivisible.

—That Christianity is not a precious stone preserved in a box called the Church of England, or the Church of the East, or Rome, but that it is the common good of mankind, destined for all continents and all races.

—That there is no constituent of the present European civilization, but the Christian religion, which could stop the brutal struggle among men, in one form or another, and guarantee a Godlike peace profitable for the whole of mankind.

All of us, small or great nations, are now looking to you with respect, not only for the victory over a revived anachronical Paganism in Central Europe, but also for a formulation of the new ideal, of saving power for all men.

Great is our expectation indeed, but it is justified by your gifts, given to you by Providence. Therefore let your hearts be larger than your Empire and your national Church, and the respect of mankind towards you will be warmed by love. Surely there can not be built a greater Empire than yours,

humanly speaking. The only greater Empire than yours will be Christ's Empire. And if you are longing for something greater than your present possession, you are indeed longing for this universal, pan-human Empire of Christ. Otherwise you would be sticking either at a stagnancy or at something impossible. Both would be unwise: nature tolerates no stagnancy and punishes experiments with the impossible.

But who am I to teach you? *A reed* (from the wilderness) *shaken with the wind*? Not I but the present despair of the world teaches you. I am only a loud amongst many suffocated cries from West and East, from North and South, directed to you: lift up your hearts and listen! God is now doing a great thing through you, and the whole world is expecting a great thing from you. What is this great thing? How to reach it? Pray and listen!

One thing only is sure, that this great thing will come neither from any Foreign Office nor from any War Office, but from the living Christian Church. Yes, she is still living, although she looks dead. She is only sleeping. But Christ is standing beside her now, calling: *Rise, ye daughter! Talitha Cumi!*



Always seek in your prayers first and foremost that God grant you humble-mindedness. Persist in this request of yours, for without true humble-mindedness nothing good or worth a reward is achieved.

Just as the apostle Paul says: "*What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?* (1 Cor 4:7). *Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.* (Prov 16:5). Therefore, my child, struggle against this miserable passion by being humble-minded and contemplating what **great humility the Lord of glory showed in becoming man and humbling Himself to the point of abuse, slander, and the Cross.** But also all the holy people of God showed exceptional humility, by which they became holy and attested to us that there is no road leading to salvation other than this. Espouse whatever gives you humility, even if it hurts and makes you feel as if you were dying. The outcome of the pain will be a blessing from God and progress towards the most excellent of virtues, humility.

I pray that our God, Jesus, will grant you this indelibly in your soul.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*"

A TRUE STORY...

Translated from "Raiskie Tsveti Russi Zmli," initially printed by the Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, Baldwin Place, N.Y., 1984.

Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. [Pss 100:6]

† † †

During his stay in Moscow in the spring of 1707, Tsar Peter Alexeevich commissioned Prince Feodor Yurevich Romodanovsky to organize the penitentiary system. And so, Romodanovsky set out on an inspection of the Moscow prisons. In the convict prison, accompanied by an inspector and a guard, he walked along all the corridors, looking into each cell and inquiring about the prisoners.

Suddenly, one of the convicts addressed him: "Esteemed Prince! We know that you are a pious and God-fearing man, that you venerate the memory of the saints, especially that of our hierarch St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. For his sake, the merciful one, show thy generous mercy and let me go home for a visit, just for two days."

"What?!" Exclaimed the astonished Romodanovsky. "Are you crazy to think of asking such a thing?"

"I am fully aware and of sound mind," replied the convict. "I shall add that in my part of the country the feast of St. Nicholas is particularly honored. There in the village church is an altar dedicated to him. And besides, I long to see my young wife and my little children. I want to embrace and to kiss them. Let me go..."

"What kind of a man is this?" Asked the prince.

"He murdered one of the tsar's soldiers," answered the guard.

"What kind of soldier?"

"One of the Preobrazhensk regiment. True," added the guard, "it was committed in a fit of anger."

The prisoner continued: "Merciful prince! It's true, I'm a great criminal. I repent of my deed before God and man. Nevertheless, I'd like to go home for a visit. I'm asking for two days only, and be assured that on the third day I shall return here on my own."

The convict's frankness impressed the prince, and he asked him, "Who will act as surety for you?"

"St. Nicholas the Wonderworker," answered the prisoner. "He will secure me against any temptation."

Here Romodanovsky looked the prisoner straight in the eyes, and something warmly compassionate moved in his soul.

"Unfetter him and release him for two days," he ordered, pointing to the prisoner.

"Your honor," said the inspector, "I dare say he will deceive you. He has only to make it out of the prison and there'll be no trace of him. Nothing in the world is sacred for these criminals. They are masters of fine speech."

Romodanovsky pondered these words...

"It's true," he thought. "Once he leaves the prison where would one look for him? Maybe he isn't even interested in going home but just wants to be released and do what he pleases... Obviously, I wasn't thinking when I gave the order. But once said, there's no turning back; a Romodanovsky doesn't take back his words."

The prince looked once again into the open face of the convict and repeated: "Release him from prison for two days! I have faith that he will return at the appointed time. His holy surety will guarantee it."

The prisoner threw himself at the feet of the kind prince, while the inspector, sullen and pessimistic, ordered the guard to unfetter him.

† † †

Twenty *versts* from Moscow (a *verst* is Russian unit of length of approximately one kilometer, *Ed.*), in the village of Nikolsk, the feast for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was in full swing. At the end of the Liturgy the people spilled out from the church onto the market square. There a colorful picture of a fair presented itself. The temporarily released prisoner mingled happily in the midst of the crowd. In his arms he held a beautiful child who clung tightly with his pudgy arms around the neck of his father. Beside them walked a slender young woman, holding by the hand a lively boy.

"My poor, unfortunate husband," said the woman, "don't leave us orphaned. See how agreeable life is in freedom. But there—prison, fetters. True, you killed one of the tsar's soldiers. But you did so without evil motive, unintentionally, by accident. Why must you torment yourself in eternal imprisonment and ruin your unhappy family!"

"I can't, my dear," answered the prisoner. "I promised..."

"As a prisoner, I'm sure you promised many things," continued his wife. "If you don't return, no one will be able to do anything. Let's hurry away from here, let's go to the Don. There we can live a free life. Our sons will grow up to be brave Cossacks and will serve our Tsar-batiushka for you."

The prisoner considered the tempting words of his wife. To go away to the Don, to live in freedom... But will it be like that? Will it really be good there? And the conscience? That holy sponsor, who is more powerful than any prison or earthly exile... What shall I do if I deceive his sacred memory? Everything will be lost: there will be neither success, nor joy, nor happiness. I shall pine away worse than a captive slave. It was not in vain that the prince said the Saint would not permit deception.

Under the persuasive arguments of his beloved wife, however, the unfortunate man again began to waver, and he was close to giving in to the decision to run away with his family. But there in the depths of his soul something powerful stopped him, turning his mind towards what was just and true. The prisoner listened to this and thought, "No, Saint

Nicholas won't allow it! I must act according to my conscience."

Taking leave of his family the next day, he said to them: "Although it is difficult for me to part with you, I nevertheless feel that my conscience is at peace. And I trust that he who is my surety will save me from further troubles and misfortunes."

† † †

In two days time he was already in Moscow and arrived at the prison an hour before Rodomanovsky drove up. "I was passing by," said the prince to the inspector who met him, "and I remembered about the convict who called upon Saint Nicholas to act as his surety. His term of release is up. Has he returned?"

"Yes, your honor," replied the inspector. "An altogether extraordinary case. He returned within the allotted time and is back in prison."

"Most commendable!" Exclaimed the prince. "Today I'm to see the Tsar and I shall tell him about this rare case."

The next day the convict prison was buzzing with the news that in the morning a messenger had come from the Tsar and had taken the prisoner to the palace. When the prisoner returned everyone impatiently asked him what the Tsar-batiushka had said to him.

"Our majesty," replied the prisoner, "wished to know about the crime for which I was sentenced. Then, having mercifully heard my admission, he said that he is reducing my term."

Here the prisoner crossed himself and added with emotion: "Glory to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker who, in a critical moment, helped me to vanquish my temptation."

And within a short time the prisoner was set at liberty...



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LONG HAIR ON MEN

From the "Life of Elder Paisios the Athonite"



One time a young man with long hair in a ponytail came to see the elder. The elder asked him,

"Hey, young man, what work do you do?"

"I'm a student," he answered.

"Do you have any classes left to pass?" Asked the elder.

"I have eight."

"If you want to pass them, come over here so I can give you a haircut," he told him smiling.

He went into his cell, brought his scissors and cut his hair. The young man considered it a blessing, and he told others about it, and they went to receive a similar blessing. "I've tonsured many people," he would say laughing.

"Elder, what do you do with their hair?"

Smiling, he would answer, "I keep it and give it to the bald."

Another time he mentioned humbly, "If there's a chance that I'll be saved, it will be through the prayers of mothers. Do you know how many letters I receive in which, being moved, they thank me, since I convinced their children to cut their hair and take out their earrings?"

He didn't want men to have long hair, because he considered it effeminate, and quoted the passage by the Apostle Paul, *if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him.* (1 Cor II:14)

When he would see young men with long hair he would ask them, "The dedicated (monastics) and the absent-minded [1] let their hair grow out. Which of the two are you?"

† † †

[1] This is another clever witticism of the elder's. The words that he chose, "*αφιερωμένοι*" (those dedicated) and "*αφηρημένοι*" (the absent-minded), are phonetically similar – *Ed.*



With regard to self-control in eating, we must never feel loathing for any kind of food, for to do so is abominable and utterly demonic. It is emphatically not because any kind of food is bad in itself that we refrain from it. But by not eating too much or too richly we can to some extent keep in check the excitable parts of our body. In addition we can give to the poor what remains over, for this is the mark of sincere love.

St. Diadochos of Photiki (5th century ascetic)

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FOOL'S WATER

By the Theologian and Iconographer Photios Kontoglou.



Once upon a time there was a Sultan who was good and just. This Sultan had a Vizier (chief adviser) who was equally good and just. The Vizier also happened to be an astrologer. One day the Vizier said to the Sultan that he had seen a sign in the heavens which said that it was going to rain “fool’s water,” and whosoever drinks from that water will become foolish. All the people in the land

will drink from that water and they will lose their reasoning, they will no longer have a good sense of anything, they will not be able to tell right from wrong, nor truth from falsehood, or sweet from sour, not even justice from injustice.

When the Sultan heard this he turned to the Vizier and said, “Since everybody will lose their minds we must take care not to lose ours, for otherwise how will we make just judgments?”

The Vizier told him that he was quite right and that he should order that the good water they now drank was collected and kept in special reservoirs, so that they wouldn’t drink from the ruined water and make foolish and unjust judgments, but rather just ones, as they were obliged to. That is what happened.

A little while later it really did rain, and the rain that came down really was fool’s water, and the people really did become

fools. The poor things had no longer any idea of what was happening to them. They thought that falsehood was truth, good was bad, and injustice was justice. However, the Sultan and his Vizier drank from the good water which they had stored away and so did not lose their reasoning, but rather judged everybody with justice and righteousness. However everybody took this the wrong way, and they were not pleased with the Sultan’s and the Vizier’s judgments. They shouted that they had been wronged; they nearly caused a revolution.

Sometime later, when they had seen more than enough, the Sultan and the Vizier lost their courage, and the Sultan said to the Vizier, “Those poor fellows really have lost their minds, and they see everything the wrong way around. If we carry on like this they will kill us because we want to judge them correctly with justice. Therefore my dear Vizier, let’s throw away the good water and let us also drink the fool’s water. We will become like them and then they’ll understand us and they’ll love us again.”

That’s what happened. They also drank from the fool’s water, they lost their minds and started to make foolish and unjust judgments, and all the people were happy and congratulated the Sultan for his wisdom...

For us, my fellow Orthodox Christian, let us not throw away the small amount of water that we have still kept in the reservoir of tradition. Let us rather drink from this good water, and let us call others to drink from it... Let them drink and be refreshed by the water that flows from the rock, from our good and immortal water, from the *Water of Life*.