

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]

Vol. 12, Issue 09-10

September-October 2014

Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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Publisher: St. POIMEN Greek Orthodox Brotherhood

Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis & Kostas Matsourakis

WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Apostle Paul: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.* (2 Cor 5:17). He who is united with Christ is a new creation. For this reason, in Christian terms the Incarnation of God the Word, the redemptive entry of the Eternal and Supratemporal into historical time, is the beginning of a new world—literally, of a “New Age”—which will continue until the end of the ages, in the persons of authentic Christians, that is, the saints. The Church, as the *Body of Christ* and communion in Christ, exists in the world in order to offer salvation, understood as the incorporation of man and society into this process of regeneration. This salvific work of the Church is accomplished through a specific therapeutic method, whereby the Church, in essence, operates in history as a universal infirmary. St. John Chrysostom (†407) thus calls the Church a *spiritual hospital*.

In the ensuing paragraphs we will answer the following questions:

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

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

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

Curing the Sickness

The sickness of human nature is the fallen condition of mankind and at the same time of all of creation, which suffers together with him. This diagnosis pertains to every human being, regardless of whether he is Christian or not. Orthodox Christianity is not confined within the narrow bounds of a religion that is interested only in its own followers. Rather, like God, it *will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*, (1 Tim 2:4) since God is the *Savior of all men*. (1 Tim 4:10). The sickness about which

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)

Orthodox Heritage is published monthly by the "Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen," a laity brotherhood.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Brotherhood at the Phoenix address or the e-mail address above.

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

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

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

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

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (†1809), recapitulating the entire Patristic Tradition in his work "Handbook of Spiritual Counsel," calls the heart a natural center, a supranatural center, and also a para-natural center, whenever the heart's supranatural functioning is inactive on account of its domi-

nation by the passions. The supranatural functioning of the heart is the absolute precondition for the perfection and fulfillment of man, namely, his theosis, his full incorporation into communion in Christ.

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

Noetic functioning is actualized as the *unceasing prayer* (cf. 1 Thess 5:17) of the *Holy Spirit in the heart* (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:26; 1 Thess 5:19), which the Holy Fathers call *remembrance of God*. Having within his heart the *remembrance of God*, man has the sense of God's *indwelling* within him. (Rom 8:11). St. Basil the Great says in his second epistle that the remembrance of God remains unceasing when it is not interrupted by earthly cares, when the *nous* "retreats" to God, that is, has communion with God. This, however, does not mean that the believer who is acted upon by Divine Energy avoids the necessary cares of life, remaining inert or in some

kind of ecstasy. It means, rather, the liberation of the nous from these cares, with which reason is preoccupied.

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

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

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

The Therapeutic Method

The purpose of the Church's presence in the world, as a communion in Christ, is to cure man through the restoration of the communion of his heart with God—in other words, of his noetic functioning. According to late Father John Romanides, "the Patristic Tradition is neither a social philosophy nor an ethical system, nor is it religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic regimen. In this respect, it is very similar to medicine, and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul, which prays mentally and unceasingly inside the heart, is a physiological organ that everyone

possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this organ.... This is why one who is unhealed is not even aware of the existence of this organ."

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

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

The therapeutic method provided by the Church is the spiritual life, a life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as *ascesis* and as participation in the Uncreated Grace bestowed by means of the Mysteries. *Ascesis* is the forcing of our autonomous nature deadened through sin, which is on the way to spiritual or eternal death, i.e., eternal separation from the Grace of God. The aim of *ascesis* is victory over the passions, for the purpose of overcoming internal enslavement to the breeding-grounds of [spiritual] sickness and participating in Christ's Cross and

Resurrection. The Christian who practices self-restraint under the guidance of his spiritual Father (therapist) becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the Mysteriological (Sacramental) life of the Body of the Church. There is no such thing as a non-practicing Christian, just as there is no such thing as a person under treatment who does not follow the therapeutic regimen prescribed by his doctor.

Authentic Christianity

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

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



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

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

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

I would like to ask the medical establishment of our country to pay special attention to the case of incorrupt holy relics, given not only that they have not been tampered with by scientists, but also that the energy of Divine Grace manifests itself in them. For precisely at the moment when the disintegration of the cellular system begins, such disintegration automatically ceases, and instead of any stench, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I confine myself to medical symptoms, and will not venture into miracles as evidence of *theosis*, since that belongs to another domain.

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

merely places the patient on an operating table and reads him the chapter that pertains to his ailment!

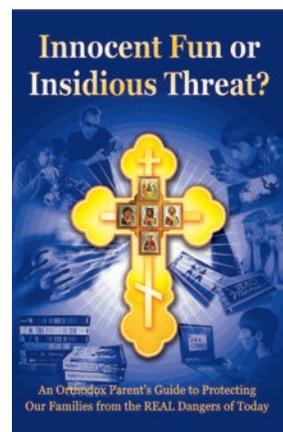
This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It is of no importance whether one accepts it or not. For this reason, I am addressing everyone, including non-Christians and the indifferent, and also [nominal] "Christians." Any other version of Christianity constitutes a falsification and distortion thereof, even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



RECOMMENDED READING FOR THE "SEASON OF HALLOWEEN": INNOCENT FUN OR INSIDIOUS THREAT

AN ORTHODOX PARENT'S GUIDE TO PROTECTING OUR FAMILIES FROM THE REAL DANGERS OF TODAY

Compiled by Mary Christodoulou; published by the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Today evil invades our lives more than ever before. Particularly alarming is how easily it disguises itself as entertainment, religion, and even as a subject in public schools. Unfortunately, the primary targets of this demonic onslaught are our children. The Harry Potter books and movies have initiated millions of young people into witchcraft and wizardry; celebrities promote New Age religions adverse to Christianity; the Twilight books and movies glamorize vampires; the most popular music, video games, television shows, books, and movies not only bombard our children with images and messages of violence, cruelty, and illicit sex, but also portray demonic phenomena, such as witchcraft and psychic powers, in a way that makes them seem acceptable, and even fun.

All this evil may seem insurmountable, but we must fight against it for the sake of our children. A must-read for every Orthodox Christian, this book examines the shocking extent to which evil has infiltrated our lives, and offers guidance and hope for the struggle against it.

The book can be ordered through the Brotherhood of St. Poimen (see page 23) as well as through Amazon.com.

Price: \$10 per copy (144 pages); ePub/kindle: \$8 per copy.

ON HALLOWEEN

By Saint Nikolai Velimirovic.



As Orthodox Christians we must carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world, its activities, holidays and festivals, to be certain whether or not these involvements are compatible with our Holy Orthodox Faith.

For a while now everything in the outside world is reminding us that Halloween is near: at school our children are busy painting pumpkins, cutting and pasting bats, ghosts and witches and planning the ideal costume in which to go trick-or-treating. Most of our schools, local community organizations and entertainment on television, radio and press will share in and capitalize upon the festival of Halloween. Many of us will participate in this festival by going to costume parties, or by taking our children trick-or-treating in our neighborhood after dark on October 31st.

Most of us will take part in the Halloween festivities believing that it has no deeper meaning than fun and excitement for the children. Most of us do not know the historical background of the festival of Halloween and its customs.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Britain, Ireland and Northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall, on the eve of October 31st and into the day of November 1st, when, as they believed the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began.

Instructed by their priests, the Druids, the people extinguished all hearth fires and lights, and darkness prevailed. According to pagan Celtic tradition, the souls of the dead had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death and made total communion with Samhain, the Lord of death, who could be appeased and cajoled by burnt offerings to allow the souls of the dead to return home for a festal visit on this day. The belief led to the ritual practice of wandering about in the dark dressed in costumes indicating witches, hobgoblins, fairies and demons. The living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by this ritual act of imitation, through costume and the wandering about in the darkness. They also believed that the souls of the dead bore the affliction of great hunger on this festal visit. This belief brought about the practice of begging as another ritual imitation of the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. The implication was that any souls of the dead and their imitators who are not appeased with

"treats", i.e., offerings, will provoke the wrath of Samhain, whose angels and servants could retaliate through a system of "tricks", or curses.

In the strictly Orthodox early Celtic Church, the Holy Fathers tried to counteract this pagan new year festival by establishing the feast of All Saints on that same day (in the East, this feast is celebrated on another day). The night before the feast (on "All Hallows Eve"), a vigil service was held and a morning celebration of the Eucharist. This custom created the term Halloween. But the remaining pagan and therefore anti-Christian people reacted to the Church's attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening, so that the night before the Christian feast of All Saints became a night of sorcery, witchcraft and other occult practices, many of which involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs.

Costumes of skeletons, for example, developed as a mockery of the Church's reverence for holy relics. Holy things were stolen and used in sacrilegious rituals. The practice of begging became a system of persecution of Christians who refused to take part in these festivities. And so the Church's attempt to counteract this unholy festival failed.

This is just a brief explanation of the history and meaning of the festival of Halloween. It is clear that we, as Orthodox Christians, cannot participate in this event at any level (even if we only label it as "fun"), and that our involvement in it is an idolatrous betrayal of our God and our Holy Faith. For if we imitate the dead by dressing up or wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose Lord is not a Celtic Samhain, but satan, the evil one, who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of "trick or treat," our offering does not go to innocent children, but rather to satan himself.

Let us remember our ancestors, the Holy Christian Martyrs of the early Church, as well as our Serbian New Martyrs, who refused, despite painful penalties and horrendous persecution, to worship, venerate or pay obeisance in any way to idols who are angels of satan. The foundation of our Holy Church is built upon their very blood.

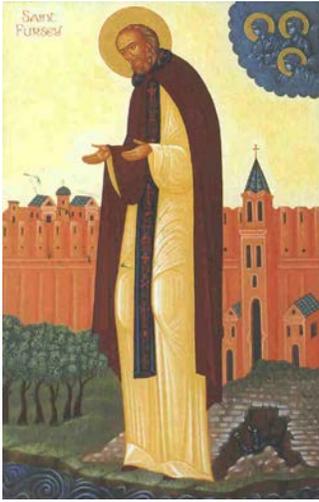


That which is asked of every Orthodox person is to instill a "good uneasiness" into the heterodox, that they might understand that **they are in delusion**. This is so they will not falsely calm their conscience and thus be deprived in this life of the rich blessings of Orthodoxy and in the life to come of the even greater and eternal blessings of God.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite (†1989)

THE VISION OF ST. FURSEY (†650)

By St. Bede the Venerable (†735).



From the Editor: *Saint Furseus (also known as Fursa, Fursy, Forseus, and Furseus) was an Irish monk who did much to establish Christianity throughout the British Isles and particularly in East Anglia (a small independent Anglo-Saxon kingdom that comprised what are now the English counties of Norfolk and Suffolk and perhaps the eastern part of the Cambridgeshire Fens). St. Furseus experienced several angelic visions of the afterlife.*

† † †

Whilst Sigebert (Germanic king of Austrasia, 561-575; Austrasia formed the northeastern section of the Kingdom of the Merovingian Franks, comprising parts of the territory of present-day France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, *Ed.*) still governed the kingdom, there came out of Ireland a holy man called Furseus, renowned both for his words and actions, and remarkable for singular virtues, being desirous to live a stranger for our Lord, wherever an opportunity should offer. On coming into the province of the East Saxons, he was honorably received by the aforesaid king, and performing his usual employment of preaching the Gospel, by the example of his virtue and the efficacy of his discourse, converted many unbelievers to Christ, and confirmed in his faith and love those that already believed.

In short, he built himself the monastery, wherein he might with more freedom indulge his heavenly studies. There, falling sick, as the book about his life informs us, he fell into a trance, and quitting his body from the evening till the cock crowed, he was found worthy to behold the choirs of angels, and to hear the praises which are sung in heaven.

He was wont to declare, that among other things he distinctly heard this: *The saints shall advance from one virtue to another.* And again, *The God of gods shall be seen in Zion.* Being restored to his body at that time, and again taken from it three days after, he not only saw the greater joys of the blessed, but also extraordinary combats of evil spirits, who by frequent accusations wickedly endeavored to obstruct his journey to heaven; but the angels protecting him, all their endeavors were in vain.

Concerning which particulars, if any one desires to be more fully informed, that is, with what subtle fraud the devils represented both his actions and superfluous words, and even

his thoughts, as if they had been written down in a book; and what pleasing or disagreeable things he was informed of by the angels and saints, or just men who appeared to him among the angels; let him read the little book of his life which I have mentioned, and I believe he will thereby reap much spiritual profit.

But there is one thing among the rest, which we have thought may be beneficial to many if inserted in this history.

When he had been lifted up on high, he was ordered by the angels that conducted him to look back upon the world. Upon which, casting his eyes downward, he saw, as it were, a dark and obscure valley underneath him. He also saw **four fires in the air**, not far distant from each other. Then asking the angels, what fires those were, he was told, they were **the fires which would kindle and consume the world**. One of them was of **falsehood**, when we do not fulfil that which we promised in baptism, to renounce the Devil and all his works. The next of **covetousness**, when we prefer the riches of the world to the love of heavenly things. The third of **discord**, when we make no difficulty to offend the minds of our neighbors even in needless things. The fourth of **iniquity**, when we look upon it as no crime to rob and to defraud the weak.

These fires, increasing by degrees, extended so as to meet one another, and being joined, became an immense flame. When it drew near, fearing for himself, he said to the angel, "Lord, behold the fire draws near me." The angel answered, "That which you did not kindle shall not burn you; for though this appears to be a terrible and great fire, yet it tries every man according to the merits of his works; for every man's concupiscence (*lust, Ed.*) shall burn in the fire; for as every one burns in the body through unlawful pleasure, so when discharged of the body, he shall burn in the punishment which he has deserved."

Then he saw one of the three angels, who had been his conductors throughout both visions, go before and divide the flame of fire, whilst the other two, flying about on both sides, defended him from the danger of that fire. He also saw devils flying through the fire, raising conflagrations (*infernus, fire storms, Ed.*) of wars against the just. Then followed accusations of the wicked spirits against him, the defense of the good angels in his favor, and a more extended view of the heavenly troops; as also of holy men of his own nation, who, as he had long since been informed, had been deservedly advanced to the degree of priesthood, from whom he heard many things that might be very salutary to himself, or to all others that would listen to them.

When they had ended their discourse, and returned to heaven with the angelic spirits, the three angels remained with the blessed Furseus, of whom we have spoken before, and who were to bring him back to his body. And when they approached the aforesaid immense fire, the angel divided the flame, as he had

done before; but when the man of God came to the passage so opened amidst the flames, the unclean spirits, laying hold of one of those whom they tormented in the fire, threw him at him, and, touching his shoulder and jaw, burned them. He knew the man, and called to mind that he had received his garment when he died; and the angel, immediately laying hold, threw him back into the fire, and the malignant enemy said, "Do not reject him whom you before received; for as you accepted the goods of him who was a sinner, so you must partake of his punishment." The angel replying, said, "He did not receive the same through avarice, but in order to save his soul." The fire ceased, and the angel, turning to him, added, "That which you kindled burned in you; for had you not received the money of this person that died in his sins, his punishment would not burn in you." And proceeding in his discourse, he gave him wholesome advice for what ought to be done towards the salvation of such as repented.

Being afterwards restored to his body, throughout the whole course of his life he bore the mark of the fire which he had felt in his soul, visible to all men on his shoulder and jaw; and the flesh publicly showed, in a wonderful manner, what the soul had suffered in private. He always took care, as he had done before, to persuade all men to the practice of virtue, as well by his example, as by preaching. But as for the matter of his visions, he would only relate them to those who, from holy zeal and desire of reformation, wished to learn the same.

An ancient brother of our monastery is still living, who is wont to declare that a very sincere and religious man told him that he had seen Fursey himself in the province of the East Angles, and heard those visions from his mouth; adding, that though it was in most sharp winter weather, and a hard frost, and the man was sitting in a thin garment when he related it, yet he sweated as if it had been in the greatest heat of summer, either through excessive fear, or spiritual consolation.



Be careful with your mouth, but primarily with your mind; do not let evil thoughts start talking with you. Do not let your mouth say words that could perhaps wound your brother. Let your mouth put forth words which are fragrant: words of consolation, courage, and hope. It is a person's mouth that reveals his interior, his inner man.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ON RAISING OUR CHILDREN

By our Holy Father St. John Chrysostom, from St. Theofan the Recluse's "The Path to Salvation."

We have been given an important security—children. Therefore we shall take care of them, and take every precaution that the evil one may not steal them from us. Meanwhile, we do everything backward. We make every effort to insure that our fields be in good hands. We seek out the most experienced mule drivers and overseers, but we take no such precautions for what is the most precious to us and through which all other good things come, namely, that we might entrust our son to a man that would preserve his chastity. We take care to provide him with property, but take no care for him himself. Do you see what insanity has taken control of us! First of all educate your son's soul, and he will acquire possessions later. If his soul is bad he will not receive the slightest benefit from money. And vice versa, if he has been given the proper upbringing, then poverty will not harm him in the least. Do you want to leave him wealthy? Teach him to be good. For children who have not received the proper upbringing poverty is better than wealth; it will keep them even against their will within the bounds of virtue. However, wealth, even for one who does not wish it, does not allow one to live a chaste life, but lures him into a countless multitude of crimes.

You, mothers, look after your daughters. This should not be difficult for you. Watch that they sit at home. First of all teach them to be pious, modest, disdaining money, and not worrying too much about fancy dress. Give them thus to marriage. If you raise your daughter this way, you will save not only her, but the husband who takes her; and not only her husband, but the children; and not only the children, but the grandchildren. If the root is good the branches will spread out more beautifully, and you will receive your reward for this. Therefore let us do everything as though we are caring for the good not of one soul alone, but of many through the one. For at the time of marriage, they (daughters) should go forth from their father's house's as fighters from the place of competition; that is, they should know precisely the entire science, by which they might, like a leaven, raise all the ingredients to the increase of them.

Sons should also be so modest that they might be recognized by their good morals and chastity, and might earn great praise from men and from God. Let them learn to refrain themselves from extravagant possessions, to be thrifty and tenderly loving; let them learn to submit to authority. For they can in this way obtain a great reward for their parents. Then everything will be directed towards the glory of God and our salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom with the Father and Holy Spirit be glory, dominion and honor now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from his book "The Path to Salvation."



It would seem that everything is already done once one has resolved to abandon sin, and all that is left is the action. Precisely—one can act—but what kind of activity will this be, and what kind of spirit will it contain? The person is only left with himself so far. If he begins to act, beginning from this point, then he will be acting from himself and for him-

self, even though it be morally right. This will be an egotistical, pagan morality.

There are people who say that they do good for goodness' sake—that is, they do it because human dignity requires it, or because it would be ignoble and imprudent to act any other way. All such people who act in this spirit retort that their education is internal, and the moral human being has not been completely formed—they have returned to themselves, but they have not turned from themselves to God and brought themselves as sacrifices to Him, which means they have stopped halfway.

The goal of human freedom is not in freedom itself, nor is it in man, but in God. By giving man freedom, God has yielded to man a piece of His divine authority, but with the intention that man himself would voluntarily bring it as a sacrifice to God, as a most perfect offering. Therefore, if you have mastered yourself, now give yourself to God. When you sinned, you not only lost yourself, but in losing yourself you took yourself away from God. Now, having returned from the captivity of sin, after you have mastered yourself, return yourself also to God.

It would also seem that turning away from yourself to God ought to be an easy and simple matter, like, for example, turning from west to east. But, after all, the sinner turning towards God is not an entity independent from Him, and he does not approach Him without anything trailing behind. No, like a runaway slave returning to his master, he appears as one guilty before the King and Judge. He needs to approach in such a way that he will be accepted. In human affairs a master accepts his slave, and the king has mercy on the guilty when each of them approaches admitting his guilt, repents of it and gives a sincere promise to be henceforth completely changed.

It is the same for a sinner returning to God. He will be accepted by God if he (a) admits his sins, (b) repents of them, and (c) makes a vow not to sin. These are the necessary

acts for ardent unification with God, upon which depends the steadfastness of the new life, perfection of it, and good hope for faithful action according to its demands. When the Prodigal Son returned to his father, he said: *I will say, I have sinned*—admitting the sin; *I am not worthy*—repenting; *make me as one of thy hired servants*—the promise to work (cf. Lk. 15:18,19).

Know your Sins

Thus, having returned to God, *know your sins*. In the inspiration of the resolve to abandon sin, you knew that you were sinful, for why else would you need to contemplate a change in your life; but this sinfulness then appeared in a confusing way. Now you must discerningly come to know that you are definitely sinful, and you must know to what degree—clearly, individually, and as if quantitatively, know your sins, with all attendant circumstances that diminished or magnified the sinfulness of the action. Critically review your entire life with a strict and impartial judgment.

In doing this, place on one side the Law of God, and on the other side your own life, and look at how they compare and contrast. Take your deeds and place them under the Law, so that you can see whether they are lawful or not. Or take the Law and look at whether or not it is being realized in your life. So that you do not leave anything out of this important work, follow some kind of order.

Sit and recall all of your obligations in relation to God, your neighbor, and to you yourself; and then look through your life with respect to all of these relationships. Or—go through the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes, one after another, with all their applications; and, look—is this your life? Or—read the chapters in the Gospel of Matthew where the Saviour sets down the law of Christian life, the Epistle of the holy Apostle James, the last chapter of the Epistles of the holy Apostle Paul, in which are briefly given the duties of a Christian. For example: in chapter twelve in the Epistle to the Romans, in chapter four in the epistle to the Ephesians, and others. The last verses are particularly important because they elucidate the spirit of Christian life. This spirit is clearly and strongly expressed in the First Epistle of St. John the Theologian. Read all of this and check your own life, whether it is like this. Or, finally, take the prayers before Communion and judge your own behavior according to it. Peruse your life and deeds not only as the deeds of a human being, but as the deeds of a Christian, in a certain calling or station at that.

The results of such a perusal of your life is that a countless multitude of deeds, words, thoughts, feelings, and iniquitous desires that should not have been done were allowed; a multitude of things that should have been done were not done. And a multitude of things that were done according to the law were actually defiled due to the impurity of the motivation behind them. Once all this countless multitude

is collected, perhaps the entire life was actually composed of nothing but these bad deeds.

The main thing that you need to remember at this first stage of coming to know your sinfulness is that it is an exact determination of deeds. Just as a business ledger is written with mathematical accuracy, so should your mental list of each of your deeds portray them accurately—with all the circumstances of time, place, people, obstacles, etc. If our self-examination proves fruitless, it will be because we made only a general review.

We must not, however stop with these particulars, but we should continue further along the path of sin, or more deeply enter into the sinful heart. Beneath the deeds, words, personal thoughts, desires and feelings, lies a constant disposition of heart which composes our character traits. Some of our works fell through accidentally; others came from the heart with such power that we had not the strength to stop them; while others became ceaseless, and turned into something of a law. Such a review will allow us to determine which deeds are inspired by producers hidden within the heart which generate from there a constant urge. This is essentially sinful tendencies. By revealing them we expose the nature of our heart, and the quantity and reciprocity of its inclinations.

When this has been done, the chief governing passion will have nowhere to hide. We know that the root of all sin is self-love. From self-love proceed pride, mercenariness, love of pleasure; and from these proceed all other passions, eight of which are considered to be chief, while the rest are without number. Every sinner has all the passions—some in deed, others in embryo—because everyone who sins conducts his affairs with self-love, the seed of all passions or sinful inclinations. But they do not reveal themselves in everyone to the same degree.

One may be possessed by pride, another by love of pleasure, a third by mercenariness. The proud one is not a stranger to sensual pleasures, but it is all right if he does not have them. The mercenary may also think highly of himself, but it is all right if he sometimes has to lower himself for a profit. The lover of pleasure also loves possessions, but it is all right if he has to lose them in order to purchase pleasures. Thus everyone has his chief passion. All other passions stand in the shadows, in submission to and governed by the chief passion, not daring to act with authority at cross-purposes with it. All tendencies and habitual vices, revealed already by the person within himself, are colored and inspired by one passion. This is what predominantly comprises and embodies in his person the root of all evils—self-love. Knowing it should complete the confession of your own sinfulness.

Thus, finally you come to know the root of your sinfulness, its nearest offspring—inclinations—and its distant offspring—numerous deeds. You can see the entire history of your sinfulness and, as it were, draw a picture of it.

Awaken the Salvific Feeling of Sincere Repentance

Having come to know your sinfulness, do not be its cold observer, but try to awaken a corresponding salvific *feeling of sincere repentance*. It would seem that these feelings would be born in you the moment you come to know your sin, but actually it is not always that way. Sin makes the heart become coarse. Just as a manual laborer becomes coarse from his labor, so does a sinner become coarse, having sold himself to the blackening work of sin—digging through the husks and feeding on them. Therefore work is again required on yourself, in order to instigate a feeling of repentance.

You can come to this feeling through the feeling of *guilt* for sins and an inability to answer for them. The feeling of guilt stands midway between knowing your sins and feelings of repentance, and itself is mediated by *self-reproach*.

Begin first of all to *reproach yourself*—and reproach. Remove everything from your attention and place yourself alone with your conscience before the face of God the Judge All-seeing. Reveal that you knew that you should not have done it, but you wanted to anyway; you could have walked away from what you wanted, but you did not use your self-authority to your own good. Your reason and conscience were against it, and there were even external obstacles, but you disdained all of this good counsel.

Do this with every sin. You will see that each sin was committed according to your own desire, with the consciousness of its sinfulness, and even with effort to overcome obstacles; and your conscience will force you to undefensively admit your guilt. The deceit of a sinful heart will begin perhaps to invent excuses—either it was due to natural weakness, or to strong temperament, or to the course of events, or to the pressures of daily life—do not listen.

All of this could have intensified the attraction to sin, but no one can force you to agree to sin. It is always a matter of will. You could have said: “I don’t want to,” and that would have been the end of all temptation! In opposition to this gainsaying of *guilt for sins*, reveal more completely your personal relationship: who you are, when and where you sinned, so that you might discover how precisely sinful your sin is, in your person and in your circumstances. Then you will see in all this not causes for excuses, but points that magnify your guilt. The limit to which the work of self-reproach should bring you is the feeling of inexcusable guilt, a state in which the heart is saying: “I have no justification—I am guilty.”

In this act of reproach of conscience a person confirms one after another of his sins, and says: “I am guilty of this, and of that, and of a third, and in absolutely everything I am guilty.” He reproaches himself for all his sins and begins to feel that they are weighing upon him with all their heaviness. In coming to know your sins one can even view them from without, but in reproaching them they can be seen inside our

own selves, and they weigh on us. They weigh even more on us because we can make no answer for them. Having reached this point, what can a sinner say but: I am wretched! This is not good, and that is bad. I am myself to blame that it is not good, and that it is within me.

As soon as the person pronounces within his heart: *I am wretched*, immediately one painful feeling after another of repentance for sins is born within him. He is *ashamed* that he has given himself to such low deeds, *upset* that he has pampered himself and betrayed himself to his evil will, *pained* that he has brought himself to such a state of moral decay, and *terrified* that he has offended God and placed himself in such a dangerous position, now and for eternity. These feelings go around from one to another, and the person burns in them as in a fire. He sees himself hanging over an abyss, and in his feelings he descends to the state of the outcasts. This grievous torment provides an opening to a feeling of hopelessness. This is the moment that the demon of despair sometimes grabs a man, suggesting to him that: *your ancient guilt will remain with you*.

Every sinner experiences these feelings to a greater or lesser degree. We must not feel sorry that we are experiencing them, but rather we should desire that they come, and that they come more powerfully. The more a man burns in them and the hotter the burning, the more salvific it is. In the power of this burning is the foundation of his future correction. Now the heart knows how bitter the fruits of sin really are, and it finds the strength through this to turn away from its embrace.

The Feeling of Repentance is a Bridge to a Vow

The feelings of repentance obviously have a sundering effect. The Word passes unto the sundering of soul and spirit, limbs and marrow, and judges the thoughts of the heart. But the goal for which, by God's grace, this has been wrought in a man is not simply to destroy, but so that by destroying the old the new can be created. The new is conceived by a whisper of hope in the possibility of changing.

There is a possibility of changing the unchangeable and retrieving the irretrievable—just take the work in hand. It would seem that the feeling of repentance is a direct bridge to a vow: "Thus, I will turn away from sin and make a vow to work for the one God by fulfilling His commandments." But the one who makes this vow must be sure that on the one hand his former incorrigibility may be forgiven, and on the other hand, that he can receive strength to help him keep his promise. This is why making a vow to work for the Lord is made possible through the good hope of receiving mercy and assistance from on high; and this good hope is produced by faith in the Lord and Saviour, by Whom the handwriting of our sins was torn up on the Cross, and after Whose Ascension all *divine power for life and piety* (cf. II Peter: 1:3) are given.

Without this faith and the good hope that imitates it, the torturous feelings of contrition and repentance go the way of Judas. This is when the Cross of Christ is truly an anchor for man! Tossed about as if over an abyss in painful contrition over sins, he sees it as his only salvation—all strength of faith and hope are contained in it, and from it man draws strength and enthusiasm to make a vow. Just as a drowning man grabs powerfully at a tree, so does the penitent reach for the Cross of Christ, and he feels that now he will not perish. We always knew the power of the Lord's death on the Cross, but one who has passed through this painful regret for his sins feels it, because it becomes an element of his life.

Thus, tormented by feelings of regret and repentance, the sinner reveals in church his incorrigibility and confirms a vow to correct himself. Melted wax pours down indiscriminately, but when you pour it into a mold or press it with a seal, something comes of it. We also need to press a seal into our inner man, so that he will take on a specific image. This happens to him during the Sacrament of Repentance—he is sealed with the divine grace of the Spirit.

Why the Mystery of Repentance is Necessary

What makes the Mystery of Repentance so necessary is on one hand the nature of sin, and on the other hand, the nature of our conscience. When we sin, we think that the traces of sin do not remain on the outside or the inside of us. Meanwhile it is leaving deep marks on the inside and the outside of us—on everything around us and especially in heaven, in the ledgers of divine judgment.

At the hour of sin it is decided there what the one who has sinned has become; in the book of the living he is written in the list of the condemned, and that has been bound in heaven. Divine grace does not descend upon him until he is erased from the list of the condemned in heaven, until he has received absolution there. But it was pleasing to God to make heavenly erasing from the list of the condemned dependent upon the absolution of the sins that have been bound on earth. So, receive the Sacrament of Repentance, that you may be freed by absolution on all sides and open the door within yourself to the Spirit of grace. Now that the conscience has been cleansed and has regained its tenderness and sensitivity to good moral order, it will not give any peace until we are decisively ensured of forgiveness. Thus it is in the usual course of our lives: it will not allow us to show ourselves to the person we have offended until we are sure that he has forgiven us.

With respect to God, the conscience is even more meticulous. Although at that time when a person has raised himself to make a decisive vow, a certain assurance that he is no longer repugnant to God comes down to him; but this assurance is his own, and it cannot be durable. It will soon be toppled by doubts: "Is it really true? Perhaps it is self-delusion?" And this doubt brings inner anxiety, and from anxiety comes a weakening. Then life will have neither firmness nor good

form. Thus, a person needs to hear that all is forgiven from God so that, finally at peace in the assurance in God's mercy, he can then act more decisively and steadfastly in this assurance. Go and confess—and you will receive a pronouncement of God's forgiveness.

How to Prepare for a Salvific Confession

For a salvific confession, one must prepare himself sufficiently. Whoever has read this narrative thus far is ready. Proceed with reverence and faith!

(1) Firmly convinced of the necessity of this Sacrament, go to it—not as though it were some new part of your life or just a simple custom, but with complete faith that for you as a sinner, this is the only possible way to be saved. By skipping it, you will be numbered among the condemned, and, consequently, you will be outside of any mercy. By not entering this clinic, your spirit will not regain its health and you will remain as you were, sick and disturbed. You will not see the kingdom if you do not enter it through the door of repentance.

(2) By these convictions engender the desire for this Sacrament. Go to it not as to the slaughter, but as to a fountain of blessings. Whoever vividly represents to himself the fruit born in us through Confession could not but long for it. A man goes to it all in wounds from head to toe, and he returns from it healthy in all his members, alive, strong, and with a feeling of safety from future infection. He goes there weighed down by a heavy yoke—the whole sum of past sins on him. It torments him and deprives him of all peace. He returns light, joyful, and with a consoling disposition of spirit that he has received a charter of complete forgiveness.

(3) Shame and fear will come up—let them! That is why this Sacrament was created, to bring shame and fear upon us—and the more shame and fear, the more it will save us. Desiring this Sacrament, desire great shame and great trembling. If someone wants to be healed, does he not know how painful the treatment is? He knows, but resolving to be healed, he also determines to endure the attendant pain in the hope of recovering. And you, when you were tormented by the feelings of regret that came upon you and you rushed to come closer to God, did you not say: "I am ready to endure anything, only have mercy on me and forgive me!"

Well, now it is happening according your wish. Do not be upset over this shame and fear; they are bound up with this Sacrament for your own good. By having burned again in them, you will become morally stronger. You burned already

more than once in the fire of repentance—burn some more. Then you burned alone before God and your conscience, but now burn before a witness appointed by God, in witness of the sincerity of that solitary burning, and perhaps to complete its lack. There will be a judgment, and at it will be shame and fear without hope.

Shame and fear at confession pay for the shame and fear then. If you do not want the latter, go through with the former. Besides, it always happens that, according to the measure of the trembling that the penitent goes through, he overflows with consolation at the confession. This is where the Saviour truly shows Himself to be the Comforter of the laboring and heavy laden! By sincerely repenting and confessing the heart learns this truth by experience, rather than by faith alone.

(4) Then, again recalling all the sins you have committed

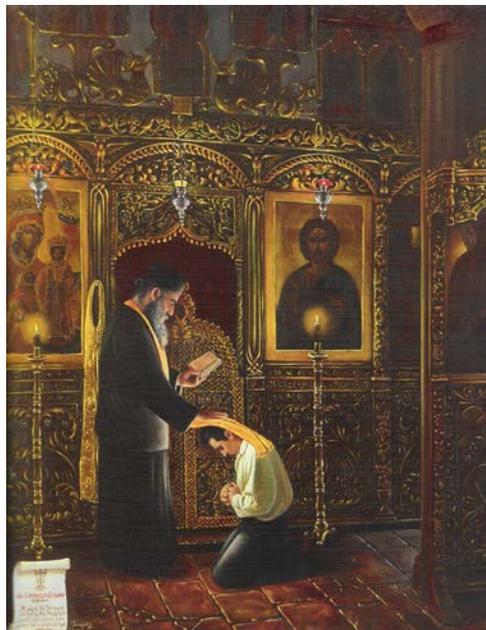
and renewing the now ripened, inner commitment not to repeat them, rise up in the living faith that you stand before the Lord Himself Who receives your confession; and tell everything that burdens your conscience, without holding anything back. If you have approached it with the desire to shame yourself, you will not cover yourself, but will express as fully as possible your disgraceful weakness for sins. This will serve to satiate your humbled heart.

You must be sure that every sin you have told is torn from the heart, for every hidden sin remains there even more to your condemnation, because the sinner stood with his wound near the Doctor that heals all things. By hiding the sin, he closed the wound without

regretting that he torments and disrupts his soul. In the story of Blessed Theodora, who passed through the toll-houses, it is written that her evil accusers did not find in their scrolls those sins that she had confessed. The angels later explained to her that Confession wipes away sin from every place that it had been recorded. Neither in the book of the conscience, nor in the book of the living, nor with the evil destroyer is it attributed to that person—Confession wiped away these lines. Tear out all that burdens you without hiding anything.

The point to which you need to bring the revelation of your sins is so that the spiritual father has a precise understanding of you; so that he sees you as you are, and, in giving absolution he absolves you and not someone else; so that when he says: "Forgive and absolve this penitent for the sins he has committed," nothing remains in you that would come under this category.

He does well who, having prepared for Confession for the first time after a long period of residing in sins, finds some op-



portunity to have a preliminary discussion with the spiritual father, and tells him the entire history of his sinful life. This will remove the danger of forgetting or omitting anything in confusion during the confession. Everyone must concern himself with a complete revelation of his sins. The Lord gave the authority to absolve sins not automatically, but under the condition that they be repented of and confessed. If something is left incomplete, then it could happen that when the spiritual father pronounces: "I forgive and absolve you," the Lord will say: "I condemn you."

(5) Now the confession is over. The spiritual father lifts his *epitrachelion*, covers the head of the penitent with it, and keeping it in his hand, pronounces the absolution of all sins, making the sign of the Cross on the head. What occurs at this moment in the soul is well-known to everyone who sincerely repents. Streams of grace pour from the head into the heart and fill it with joy. This is not from human beings, not from the penitent, not from the absolver—this is the mystery of the Lord Healer and Comforter of souls.

Sometimes it happens at this time that some hear clearly in their hearts a divine word to strengthen and inspire them for future works. This is a sort of spiritual weapon entrusted by Christ the Saviour to the man who now enters the ranks of those warring in His name. Whoever has heard such a word, let him treasure it later, to comfort and inspire him—comfort, because it is clear that the confession has been received when it has pleased the Lord to enter into a sort of discussion with the penitent; inspire, because in the hour of temptation all he has to do is remember it, and strength comes from somewhere to resist! With what do warriors in battle inspire themselves? With a word spoken by the commander that affected him powerfully. It is the same here.

(6) With this everything is done. All that remains is to fall at God's feet with feelings of thankfulness for His unspeakable mercy, and kiss the Cross and Gospels as a sign of your vow. Go unwaveringly along the path shown to you in the Gospels, with the commitment to follow Christ the Saviour, as described in the Gospels, under His blessed yoke, only now taken upon yourself. Having completed this, go in peace, with the intention to intently act according to what you have promised, remembering that the judgment over you from now on will be from your own words. You have made a promise—keep it. It has been sealed by the Sacrament, and therefore you must be ever more faithful to it, so that you do not fall again into the ranks of those who have wasted grace.

(7) If the spiritual father gives you a penance, accept it with joy. If the spiritual father does not give you one, then ask him to. This will be not only a send-off to you as you depart on your good path, but also a shield and protection from outside enemy attacks on your new way of life.

Here is what the Patriarch of Constantinople wrote in answer to the Lutherans: "We accompany the absolution of

sins with penances for many respectable reasons. First of all, so that through voluntary suffering the sinner will be freed here from onerous involuntary punishment there, in the next life, for the Lord grants mercy to nothing more than He does suffering, especially voluntary suffering. Therefore St. Gregory also says that God's love is granted for tears. Secondly, it is in order to destroy in the sinner those passionate desires of the flesh which give birth to sin, for we know that opposites cure. Thirdly, it is so that the penance would serve as a bond or bridle for the soul, and not allow it to again take up those same vices from which it is still being cleansed. Fourthly, in order to accustom it to labor and patience, for virtue is a matter of labor. Fifthly, it is so that we will see and know whether or not the penitent has truly come to hate sin."

Whoever finishes this course of spiritual treatment as given and, most importantly, confesses his sins without hiding anything, returns from the house of God the way criminals return from court who have received mercy and acquittal of their crimes instead of a death sentence. He returns with a deep feeling of thankfulness to the Saviour of our souls, with the firm resolve to dedicate himself to Him and to the fulfillment of His commandments all the rest of his life, with extreme disgust for all of his former sins, and with an unrestrainable desire to wipe away all traces of his former error. The one who has received absolution feels within himself that he is not useless, that he has been visited by a special power. Divine grace, which has thus far only acted on him from without in helping him conquer himself, now with the words: *I forgive and absolve* has entered into him, mingled with his spirit and filled it with a burning and longing, with which he now proceeds into action until the evening of his life.



The devil demonstrates simultaneously his weakness and his wickedness. He is unable to harm anyone who does not harm himself. In fact, anyone who denies heaven and chooses the earth is, as it were, rushing towards a precipice, even though running of his own accord.

The devil, however, starts working as soon as he sees someone living up to faith's commitments, someone who has a reputation for virtue, who does good works. He tries to worm vanity into him, to make it possible for him to be puffed up with pride, become presumptuous, lose trust in prayer and not attribute to God the good that he does but to take all the credit himself.

St. Ambrose of Milan,

Ἐαυτοὺς καὶ Ἀλλήλους καὶ Πᾶσαν τὴν Ζωὴν Ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ Παραθώμεθα

Ἀπὸ τὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Ταξιαρχῶν Πηλίου.

Στὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Μαξίμοβιτς ὑπάρχει ἕνας διάλογος ἐνὸς ζητιάνου μὲ ἕνα διάσημο θεολόγο. Ὁ θεολόγος ἐπὶ ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἀκατάπαυστα παρακαλοῦσε τὸ Θεὸ νὰ τοῦ φανερώσει κάποιον ἄνθρωπο, ποῦ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ τοῦ δείξει τὸν πιὸ σίγουρο δρόμο γιὰ τὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Κάποια μέρα ποῦ ἔφθασε στὸ ἀποκορύφωμα τῆς προσευχῆς ἄκουσε μιὰ φωνή: «Πήγαινε καὶ στήν ἔξοδο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ βρεῖς τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποῦ ζητᾷς». Πηγαίνει βιαστικά στήν Ἐκκλησία, ὅπου βρίσκει ἕνα γέρο ζητιάνο μὲ κουρελιασμένα ροῦχα καὶ πληγωμένα γόνατα καὶ τὸν χαιρετᾷ:

- Καλὸ καὶ εὐτυχισμένο πρωινό, γέροντα.
- Ποτὲ δὲν εἶχα κακὸ καὶ δυστυχισμένο πρωινό.
- Ὁ ἄλλος ἐν ἀμηχανία διορθώνει:
- Εἶθε νὰ σοῦ στείλει ὁ Θεὸς κάθε ἀγαθό!
- Οὐδέποτε μου ἐστάλη κάτι μὴ ἀγαθό!
- Ὁ θεολόγος παραξενεύεται καὶ τοῦ λέει:
- Τί συμβαίνει μὲ σένα, γέροντα; Ἐγὼ σοῦ εὐχομαι

κάθε εὐτυχία.

- Μὰ ποτὲ δὲν εἶμαι δυστυχῆς. Ζῶ σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γιὰ τὸ ζυγὸ ποῦ μοῦ ἔδωσε

ὁ Θεὸς ποτὲ δὲν δυσανασχέτησα καὶ εἶμαι πάντοτε εὐχαριστημένος.

- Ἀπὸ ποῦ ἦλθες ἐσύ, γέροντα, ἐδῶ;
- Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.
- Καὶ ποῦ τὸν βρῆκες;
- Ἐκεῖ ποῦ τὸν ἄφησα, στήν ἀγαθὴ θέληση.
- Ποιὸς εἶσαι, γέροντα, καὶ σὲ ποιά τάξη ἀνήκει;
- Ὅποιος κι ἂν εἶμαι, εἶμαι ἱκανοποιημένος μὲ τὴν κατάστασή μου, γιατί βασιλεὺς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποῦ κυβερνᾷ καὶ διευθύνει τὸν ἑαυτό του.

Ὁ θεολόγος ἀποδέχθηκε τελικὰ πῶς ὁ δρόμος τοῦ ζητιάνου ἦταν ὁ μόνος σίγουρος γιὰ τὸν Οὐρανό, δηλαδή ἡ τελεία παράδοση στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

- Τί σημαίνει πιστεῦω στὸν Χριστό;
- Ἐμπιστεύομαι τὸν Χριστὸ, δηλαδή τὰ λόγια Του, τὶς ὑποσχέσεις Του καὶ τὰ τηρῶ. Τηρῶ τὶς ἐντολές Του ποῦ εἶναι συνταγὲς ζωῆς, εἶναι οἱ προδιαγραφές μας, οἱ προδιαγραφές τοῦ κατασκευαστῆ μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁ Κύριος ποῦ μᾶς ἔπλασε κατ' εἰκόνα καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὄρισε καὶ τοὺς κανόνες καλῆς λειτουργίας ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνέλιξης στήν τελειότητα: ἀπὸ τὸ λίκν καλῶς στὸ ἄριστα ποῦ εἶναι ἡ θέωση (=ἡ ὁμοίωση μας μὲ τὸν Θεό).

- Ποιὲς εἶναι οἱ κύριες ἐντολές;

- Μία εἶναι ἡ κύρια ἐντολὴ καὶ ἔχει δύο σκέλη: Ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν συνάνθρωπο. «Ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου. Αὕτη ἐστὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη ἐντολὴ. Δευτέρα δὲ ὁμοία αὐτῇ: ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. Ἐν ταύταις ταῖς δυσὶν ἐντολαῖς ὅλος ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται.» (Ματθ. 22:37-40). Αὐτὴν τὴν ἀπάντηση ἔδωσε ὁ Κύριος στὸν πλούσιο νεανίσκο ὅταν ἐρωτήθηκε γιὰ τὸ ποιά εἶναι ἡ πρώτη καὶ μεγαλύτερη ἐντολὴ.

- Ἡ τήρηση τῆς πρώτης ἐντολῆς συνδέεται μὲ τὴν προτροπὴ τοῦ λειτουργοῦ: «ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ παραθώμεθα»;

- Βεβαίως. Ὁ Κύριος μᾶς εἶπε νὰ μὴν ἔχουμε κανένα ἄγχος καὶ καμμία μέριμνα, δηλαδή καμμία ἀγωνιώδη φροντίδα γιὰ τίποτε. «Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσησθε. Οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶ τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; Κατανοήσατε τοὺς κόρακας, ὅτι οὐ σπείρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν, οἷς οὐκ ἐστὶ ταμῆιον οὐδὲ ἀποθήκη, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τρέφει αὐτοὺς

πόσω μᾶλλον ὑμεῖς διαφέρετε τῶν πετεινῶν; Τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ

πῆχυν ἕνα; Εἰ οὖν οὔτε ἐλάχιστον δύνασθε, τί περὶ τῶν λοιπῶν μεριμνᾶτε; κατανοήσατε τὰ κρίνα πῶς αὐξάνει οὐ κοπιᾷ οὐδὲ νήθει λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν, οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. Εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ, σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον, ὁ Θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιέννυσι, πόσω μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι; καὶ ὑμεῖς μὴ ζητεῖτε τί φάγητε καὶ τί πίητε, καὶ μὴ μετεωρίζεσθε ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τοῦ κόσμου ἐπιζητεῖ ὑμῶν δὲ ὁ πατήρ οἶδεν ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων πλὴν ζητεῖτε τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.» (Λουκ. 12:22-31). Ἐδῶ ἀκριβῶς θεμελιώνεται ἡ λειτουργικὴ προτροπὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας: «Ἐαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ παραθώμεθα». Τὸν ἑαυτό μας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ ὅλη μας τὴ ζωὴ νὰ τὰ ἀφήσουμε στὸν Χριστό.

- Πρακτικὰ πῶς θὰ γίνει αὐτὸ τὸ ἄφημα, αὐτὴ ἡ παράθεσις ὅλης τῆς ζωῆς μας στὸν Χριστό; Πῶς θὰ ἀφήσουμε ὅλους καὶ ὅλα στὸ Χριστό;

- Μὲ τὴν ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχῇ, τὸ ἀδιάλειπτο κοίταγμα πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, τὴν σταθερὰ προσανατολισμένη ἀγάπη μας στὸν Χριστό. Τίποτε νὰ μὴ μᾶς ἀποσπᾷ, τίποτα νὰ μὴ μᾶς ταράξει, τίποτα νὰ μὴ

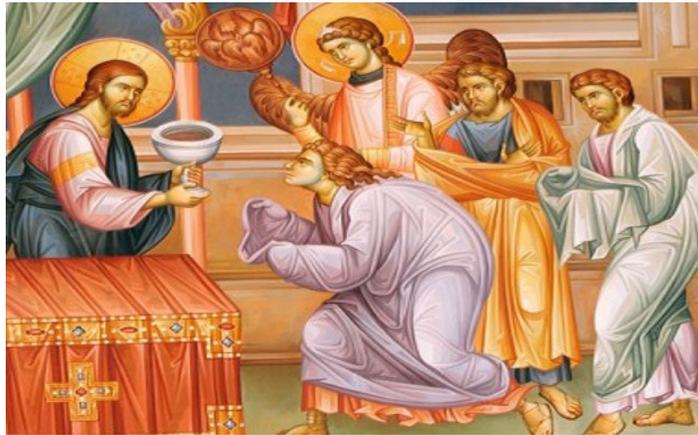
**Οἱ κτήρων καὶ ἐλεήμων ὁ Κύριος, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος
οὐκ εἰς τέλος ὀρθίσθησεται, οὐδὲ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μνηεῖ.
Οὐ κατὰ τὰς ἀνομίας ἡμῶν ἐποίησεν ἡμῖν,
οὐδὲ κατὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν ἀνταπεδῶσκεν ἡμῖν.**

μᾶς κάνει νὰ ἀγωνιοῦμε. Ἔχουμε Κύριο ποὺ μᾶς νιάζεται, μᾶς ἀγαπάει ἄπειρα, μᾶς φροντίζει στοργικά, μᾶς ἀγκαλιάζει πατρικά. Ἔχουμε Πατέρα Πανάγαθο καὶ Πάνσοφο καὶ Παντοδύναμο. Αὐτὸς μᾶς ὑποσχέθηκε ὅτι «Ἐγὼ θὰ σᾶς τὰ τακτοποιήσω ὅλα, ὅλες τὶς ἀνάγκες σας τὶς πραγματικές. Ἔσεῖς μόνο μία ἔννοια νὰ ἔχετε: νὰ ζητᾶτε Ἐμένα, τὴν Βασιλεία μου, τὴν ἀρετὴ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν ποὺ εἶμαι Ἐγώ. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ προδιαγραφή σας. Ἔτσι θὰ ζήσετε εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς Ἐμένα εἶναι ἡ προδιαγραφή τῆς ζωῆς. Εἶναι ἡ ἰκανὴ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα συνθήκη γιὰ νὰ ζήσετε πραγματικά.»

Ὅταν δὲν ἐμπιστευόμαστε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, τὸν λογισμό μας, τὶς δυνάμεις μας, τὴν ἐξυπνάδα μας, τὴν ἐνεργητικότητά μας, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀναθέτουμε τὰ παραθέτουμε ὅλα τὰ ζητήματά μας στὸν Χριστὸ τότε τηροῦμε τὴν λειτουργικὴ προτροπή: «Ἐαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ παραθώμεθα».

Ὅταν δὲν σκεφτόμαστε μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη κοσμικὴ λογικὴ καὶ δὲν ἀντιμετωπίζουμε μὲ τὶς φτωχὲς καὶ οὐσιαστικὰ ἀνύπαρκτες ἀνθρώπινες δυνάμεις τὸ κάθε μας πρόβλημα ἀλλὰ προσευχόμαστε, ἀνοιγόμαστε ἀγαπητικὰ στὸν Θεὸ τότε ἐπίσης γινόμαστε ὑπάκουοι στὸν Χριστό. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν δὲν ἔχουμε κάποιο συγκεκριμένο, ἄμεσο καὶ πιεστικὸ πρόβλημα πάλι δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνοῦμε τὴν πρώτη ἐντολή τῆς «ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας καὶ διανοίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ ἰσχύος ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεόν» ἀλλὰ νὰ ἐμμένουμε στὴν προσευχή, στὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸν Κύριο. Χωρὶς αὐτὴν τὴν ἄμετρη ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸν Θεό, στὴν Θεία Πρόνοια, στὴν Θεία Ἀγάπη δὲν μπορούμε νὰ βροῦμε εἰρήνη καὶ ἀνάπαυση στὴν ψυχὴ μας.

Ὁ Κύριος μᾶς εἶπε ὅτι: «**Δεῦτε πρὸς με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι, καὶ γὰρ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πρῶτός εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ὃ γὰρ ζυγός μου χρηστός καὶ τὸ φορτίον μου ἑλαφρόν ἐστιν.**» (Ματθ. 11:28-30). Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ προσεύχεται μιμνῆται τὸν ταπεινὸ Χριστὸ ὃ ὁποῖος καὶ ὡς ἄνθρωπος προσήυχετο ἀδιάλειπτα καὶ κοινωνοῦσε μὲ τὸν ἐν Οὐρανοῖς Πατέρα Του γιὰ νὰ μᾶς διδάξει πρότυπο ζωῆς. Μᾶς δίδαξε ἐπίσης τὴν παραβολὴ «τῆς χήρας καὶ τοῦ ἄδικου κριτοῦ» γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀποκάμνουμε στὴν προσευχή. Ἡ ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχὴ εἶναι ἕνας ἀπὸ



τούς τρεῖς δρόμους ποὺ μᾶς ὀδηγοῦν στὴν ταπεινώση ἢ ὁποῖα φέρνει τὴν ἀνάπαυση στὴν ψυχὴ μας. (Οἱ ἄλλοι δύο δρόμοι ποὺ ὀδηγοῦν στὴν ταπεινώση εἶναι νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε τὸν σωματικὸ κόπο καὶ νὰ βάζουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας κάτω ἀπὸ ὄλους). Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ προσεύχεται σωστα «κρέμεται» ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἀφήνει τελείως τὸ θέλημά του καὶ λέγει: «Κύριε ἐσὺ τακτοποίησέ τα ὅλα. Ἐγὼ τίποτα δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τακτοποιήσω. Ἄν εἶναι θέλημα Σου νὰ γίνουν ἔτσι τὰ πράγματα ἅς γίνουν ἂν δὲν εἶναι θέλημά Σου ἅς μὴν γίνουν. Ἐγὼ θὰ εἶμαι τὸ ἴδιο χαρούμενος ἂν γίνουν ὅπως τὰ σκέπτομαι καὶ ἂν δὲν γίνουν, διότι θὰ ξέρω ὅτι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ θέλημά Σου, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον».

Βέβαια ἡ ἀσφάλεια εἶναι ὁ πνευματικὸς μας ὀδηγὸς τὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει πάντα νὰ συμβουλευόμαστε. Αὐτὸ εἶναι πιδὶ ταπεινὸ καὶ ἀπολύτως ἀσφαλὲς διὰ νὰ διακριθῶνουμε σὲ κάθε περίσταση τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

θὰ πρέπει νὰ τὸν ρωτᾶμε ἔχοντας ἀρνηθεῖ τελείως τὸ δικὸ μας θέλημα. Πρέπει νὰ εἶμαστε ἔτοιμοι νὰ ἀκούσουμε τὰ πάντα καὶ νὰ ὑπακούσουμε μὲ χαρὰ. **Ὁ πνευματικὸς μας εἶναι κατὰ τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες «θεὸς μετὰ Θεόν».** Εἶναι ἡ μεγάλη δωρεὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Εἶναι τὸ ὄργανο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν προσωπικὴ μας

πορεία πρὸς τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μακάριος ἐκεῖνος ποὺ σὰν τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένα δὲν λογαριάζει κόπους γιὰ νὰ πάει νὰ βρεῖ τὸν πνευματικὸ πατέρα καὶ νὰ τὸν ἐρωτήσῃ ἀποκαλύπτοντας πλήρως ὄλους τοὺς λογισμοὺς του. Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμένας κάποτε ξέχασε νὰ πεῖ ἕναν λογισμὸ στὸν Γέροντά του. Τὸν θυμήθηκε βάζοντας τὸ κλειδί στὴν πόρτα τοῦ κελλιοῦ του ποὺ ἀπεῖχε ἀρκετὲς ὥρες ἀπὸ τὸ κελλὶ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ του. Ἀμέσως γύρισε πίσω κάνοντας τὸν ἴδιο πολὺωρο δρόμο γιὰ νὰ ρωτήσῃ περὶ τοῦ λογισμοῦ ποὺ εἶχε λησμονήσει. Τότε ὁ πνευματικὸς του θαύμασε γιὰ τὴν ἐπιμέλειά του, τὸν μακάρισε καὶ προέβλεψε ὅτι θὰ γίνῃ πρᾶγματι μέγας στύλος τῆς ἐρήμου καὶ διακριτικότητος πνευματικὸς δάσκαλος.

Ἔτσι γίνονται οἱ ἅγιοι. Κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο ἀρνήθηκαν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους, ἔκοψαν τὸ θέλημά τους, ἀρνήθηκαν κάθε προσωπικὴ τους ἐπιθυμία καὶ ὑπάκουσαν στὸν Χριστὸ ὃ ὁποῖος μᾶς διδάσκει: «**Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι.** Ὅς γὰρ ἂν

θέλη την ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σώσαι, ἀπολέσει αὐτήν ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἔνεκεν ἐμοῦ, εὕρησει αὐτήν. Τὶ γὰρ ὠφελεῖται ἄνθρωπος ἐὰν τὸν κόσμον ὅλον κερδήσῃ, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ζημιωθῆ; Ἡ τὶ δώσει ἄνθρωπος ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ;» (Ματθ. 16:24-26). Γιὰ νὰ τὰ κατορθώσουμε ὁμως ὅλα αὐτὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐνταχθοῦμε πραγματικὰ μέσα στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ νὰ διατηρήσουμε αὐτὴν τὴν ἐνταξὴ μὲ τὴν ἀδιάλειπτη μετάνοια.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὁ χώρος ὅπου ἀφηνόμαστε καὶ ἀφήνουμε τὰ πάντα στὸν Χριστό. Εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ καλούμαστε νὰ τὴν ζητᾶμε καὶ νὰ τὴν ἔχουμε ἐνεργὸ μέσα μας προσωπικὰ ὁ καθένας. Ζώντας ἐντὸς Τῆς πραγματώνουμε τὴν θεραπεία τῆς ἀλλοτριωμένης ὑπαρξῆς μας καὶ ζοῦμε τὴ σωτηρία καὶ τὸν Παράδεισο «ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα». Ἡ ἐνταξὴ μας ἔγινε διὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος. Ἡ διατήρησις καὶ διαφύλαξις αὐτῆς τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι δικό μας προσωπικὸ θέμα καὶ ἐγκεῖται στὴν τήρησις τῆς ἐντολῆς τῆς ἀγάπης ἡ ὁποία συνεπάγεται τὴν τήρησις ὅλων τῶν ἐντολῶν. Ὁ Κύριος μᾶς εἶπε ὅτι: «Ὁ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς, ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με ὁ δὲ ἀγαπῶν με ἀγαπηθήσεται ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, καὶ ἐγὼ ἀγαπήσω αὐτὸν καὶ ἐμφανίσω αὐτῷ ἐμμαντόν.» (Ἰωάν. 14:21).

Ἐπομένως ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ζωῆς μας εἶναι ἡ θεραπεία τῆς ψυχοσωματικῆς μας ὑπαρξῆς διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ λειτουργικὴ προτροπὴ «Ἐαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους...» συγκεφαλαιώνει ὅλες τὶς ἐντολές ἀφοῦ συνεπάγεται μιὰ ζωντανὴ πίστις, μιὰ ὀλοκληρωτικὴ ἀφοσίωσις καὶ ἓνα ὀλοκληρωτικὸ ἄφημα στὸν Παντοδύναμο Θεὸ τῆς Ἀγάπης.



Ρώτησαν ἓνα Γέροντα, ἂν ὠφελοῦνται αὐτοὶ ποὺ ζητοῦν τὶς εὐχές τῶν πατέρων, ὅταν οἱ ἴδιοι ἀμελοῦν (γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους). Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας ἀποκρίθηκε:

- Ὅπως εἶναι γραμμένο, «πολὺ ἰσχύει δέσις δικαίου», πλὴν ὁμως «ἐνεργουμένη» (Ἰακ. 5:16), ὅταν δηλαδὴ τὴ βοηθάει καὶ ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ζητᾶ τὴν προσευχή, φυλάσσοντας τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ κάθε ἐπιμέλεια καὶ πόνο καρδιάς ἀπὸ πονηρὰς πράξεις καὶ λογισμοῦς. Γιατί, ἂν ζεῖ μὲ ἀμέλεια, καθόλου δὲν ὠφελεῖται, καὶ ἂν ἀκόμα ἅγιοι εὕχονται γι' αὐτόν. Γιατί, ὅπως λέει τὸ ρητό, «εἶς οἰκοδομῶν καὶ εἶς καθαιρῶν, τὶ ὠφέλησαν πλεῖον ἢ κόπους;» (Σοφ. Σειρ. 34:23).

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸ

Ἀνεχώρησε διὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς θεολόγος Νικόλαος Ἰ. Σωτηρόπουλος

Τοῦ κ. Χρήστου Σαλταούρα.



Ἀναχώρησε γιὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα ὁ ζηλωτὴς Θεολόγος, ὁ ἀκάματος ἐργάτης τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ὁ πύρινος κήρυκας τοῦ θείου λόγου, ὁ σφοδρὸς πολέμιος τῶν αἰρετικῶν, ὁ φόβος καὶ ὁ τρόμος τῶν Οἰκουμενιστῶν, ὁ δεινὸς ἐρμηνευτὴς τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, τὸ κόσμημα τῆς Θεολογίας, ὁ ἱκανὸς συζητητὴς, ὁ πλούσιος συγγραφέας καὶ ἄριστος φιλόλογος, ὁ ἐμπνευστὴς ἡμῶν, ὁ Διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν. Τὸ καύχημα καὶ γαυρίαμα τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων ἀγωνιστῶν τῆς σύγχρονης ἐποχῆς. Ἀναχώρησε γιὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα τὸ πλέον πιστὸ τέκνο τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτη!

Τώρα μοῦ ἔρχονται στὸ μυαλὸ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Νικόλαου Σωτηρόπουλου, ὅταν κάποτε τοῦ εὐχήθηκα μετὰ ἀπὸ μία ἀπὸ τὶς πολλὲς περιπέτειες τῆς υἱείας του «νὰ εἶναι πάντα καλά». Τότε ὁ Νικόλαος Σωτηρόπουλος μοῦ εἶπε: «ΜΟΝΟ ΣΤΟΝ ΟΥΡΑΝΟ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΚΑΛΑ!»

Ὁ Σωτηρόπουλος ἀναχώρησε γιὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα καὶ ἡ σύγχρονη Θεολογία εἶναι πλέον φτωχότερη! Πολὺ φτωχότερη! Καὶ ἂν ἡ Θεολογία δὲν θέλει νὰ παραμείνει φτωχὴ, καλὰ θὰ κάνει νὰ ἀξιοποιήσῃ τὸ συγγραφικὸ ἔργο τοῦ μεταστάντος. Ἰδιαιτέρως πρέπει νὰ προσεχθῆ ἀπὸ τοὺς Θεολογικοὺς κύκλους ἢ μετάφρασις τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης ποὺ ἐκπόνησε ὁ Νικόλαος Σωτηρόπουλος καὶ τὸ τετράτομο ἔργο του ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ ΔΥΣΚΟΛΩΝ ΧΩΡΙΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΓΡΑΦΗΣ καθὼς καὶ τὰ περίφημα Ὁ ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΓΙΑΧΒΕ καὶ ΤΟ ΑΓΙΟΝ ΠΝΕΥΜΑ ΓΙΑΧΒΕ.

Ὁ Σωτηρόπουλος κοιμήθηκε ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔργο του λάμπει σὰν χρυσός. Τὸ ἔργο του ἐμπνέει νέους ἀγωνιστὲς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στοὺς χαλεποὺς καιροὺς ποὺ ζοῦμε. Ὁ Σωτηρόπουλος ὑπῆρξε κραταῖος πολέμιος τῶν αἰρετικῶν ἰδίως τῶν ψευδομαρτύρων τοῦ Ἰεχωβά ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ Προτεστάντισμο γενικὰ. Ἐνθυμοῦμαι κάποτε πού μοῦ εἶπε γιὰ τὸ βιβλίον του ΑΝΤΙΧΙΛΙΑΣΤΙΚΟΝ ΕΓΧΕΙΡΙΔΙΟΝ ὅτι δὲν ἀνατρέπει μόνον τὸν Χιλιασμὸ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Προτεστάντισμὸ γενικότερα.

Ὅλες τὶς αἰρέσεις πολέμησε ὁ Σωτηρόπουλος. Πολέμησε καὶ τὸν Παπισμὸ καὶ ἐπειδὴ δὲν συμβιβάστηκε μὲ τὴν φιλοπαπικὴ-οὐνιτικὴ στάση ἀναξίων Οἰκουμενιστῶν λυκοποιμένων διώχθηκε ἀπεινώς!

Διδάσκαλε Νικόλαε Σωτηρόπουλε, ΣΕ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΩ. Πρέσβευε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν τῶν ἀκροατῶν τῶν κηρυγμάτων σου στὸν Δεσπότη Χριστὸ!

Αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη!

Ἡ Μετάνοια τῆς Τσιγγάνας

Μία ἀληθινή ἱστορία ποῦ ἀφυπνίζει συνειδήσεις!

Τερέας Βιορέλ Κοζοκάρου-Κίσιβο, ἀπόδοση στὰ Ἑλληνικά ἀπὸ τὸν π.Γεώργιο Κονισπολιάτη, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Familia Ortodoxa», τεύχος 39, Ἀπρίλιος 2012.

Ἐδῶ καὶ ἑπτὰ χρόνια εἶμαι ἱερέας στὸ παρεκκλήσι τῶν φυλακῶν Προυνκού στὸ Κίσιβο (Δημοκρατία τῆς Μολδαβίας). Ἐπειδὴ παρὰλληλα ὑπηρετῶ καὶ στὴν ἑνορία μου κάνω ἐκεῖ ἀκολουθίες τῆς Τετάρτης καὶ τῆς Παρασκευῆς. Μὲ βοηθοῦν κάποιοι κρατούμενοι ὡς ἐθελοντές. Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ καθήκοντά τους εἶναι νὰ προετοιμάσουν τοὺς κρατουμένους ποῦ θὰ συμμετάσχουν στὴν Ἀκολουθία τῆς ἐπομένης ἡμέρας, δινοντάς τους νὰ διαβάσουν εἴτε τὸ Ὁρολόγιο εἴτε κάποιο ἀπὸ τὰ βιβλία ποῦ ἔχουμε στὴν μικρὴ μας βιβλιοθήκη.

Θέλω ὁμως νὰ σὰς διηγηθῶ κάτι ποῦ συνέβη τὸ φθινόπωρο τοῦ 2008.

Οἱ φυλακὲς Προυνκού εἶναι οἱ μοναδικὲς φυλακὲς-νοσοκομεῖο στὸ ὁποῖο βρίσκονται καὶ ἄντρες καὶ γυναῖκες. Σὲ ἓνα κελὶ τοῦ χειρουργικοῦ τμήματος βρισκόταν καὶ ἡ Ζαμφίρα ἢ τσιγγάνα. Ὅταν ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐθελοντές πῆγε στὸ κελὶ γιὰ νὰ ρωτήσῃ ποιὸς θὰ συμμετεῖχε στὴν Ἀκολουθία τῆς ἐπομένης ἡμέρας ἢ Ζαμφίρα τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἐγὼ θὰ ἔρθω ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχω ἀνάγκη τὰ βιβλία σου». Ἡ Ζαμφίρα ἦταν περίπου 36 ἐτῶν, ὁμορφὴ καὶ ἀπ' ὅσα εἶχα καταλάβει «ἐλαφρῶν ἡθῶν». Ἦταν στὴν φυλακὴ ἀπὸ τὰ δεκαῆξι τῆς χρόνια ἐπειδὴ εἶχε σκοτώσῃ τὸ παιδί τῆς ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ ἄλλα σοβαρὰ παραπτώματα.

Τὴν ἐπομένη λοιπὸν ἢ Ζαμφίρα ἦρθε στὴν ἀκολουθία στὸ παρεκκλήσι. Τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη διαβάσαμε τὸν Ἰκετήριο κανόνα πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, τὴν Παράκληση τῆς Παναγίας καὶ τὸν κανόνα τῆς Θείας Μεταλήψεως. Ἡ Ζαμφίρα ὁμως στὸ πίσω μέρος τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπαντοῦσε σὲ κάθε προσευχὴ κοροιδευτικὰ καὶ ἔκανε ἄσχημες χειρονομίες. Φυσικὰ ἐνοχλοῦσε καὶ ἐμένα ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους κρατουμένους οἱ ὁποῖοι ἦταν περίπου 35, ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες. Κανεὶς δὲν τολμοῦσε νὰ τῆς κάνει παρατήρηση ἐπειδὴ εἶχε ἓνα κάποιο «κῦρος» στὸν ὑπόκοσμο. Παρότι ἦταν 36 ἐτῶν ἦταν ψηλὰ στὴν ἱεραρχία, κάτι ποῦ ὅλοι οἱ κρατούμενοι σέβονταν ἀπολύτως. Ἐδωσε ὀλόκληρη παράσταση καὶ κάποιους τοὺς διασκεδάζε με τὰ ἀστεία τῆς. Τὴν ἄφησα ἡσυχῇ, μόνο τὴν ρώτησα:

- Πῶς σὲ λένε;

- Ζαμφίρα, μοῦ ἀπάντησε.

Τῆς εἶπα νὰ ἡσυχάσει.

- Καλά, μοῦ ἀπάντησε αὐτὴ, συνέχισε ὁμως τὰ ἴδια.

Μετὰ τὴν ἀκολουθία τοὺς ἐξομολόγησα ὅλους. Σὲ μία γυναῖκα—ἢ ὁποῖα ζοῦσε στὸ ἴδιο κελὶ με τὴν

Ζαμφίρα—εἶπα:

- Δὲ μπορῶ νὰ σὲ κοινωνήσω τώρα. Θὰ κάνεις τὸν κανόνα ποῦ θὰ σοῦ δώσω καὶ θὰ ἔρθεις σὲ δύο ἐβδομάδες νὰ κοινωνήσεις.

Μόνο ἢ Ζαμφίρα δὲν ἐξομολογήθηκε. Τότε τὴν ρώτησα:

- Ἐσὺ θὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖς;

- Ὅχι δὲν θὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ, γιατί ἂν θὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ θὰ σοῦ πέσουν οἱ τρίχες ἀπὸ τὴν μύτη.

- Τότε γιατί ἦρθες στὴν ἐκκλησία ἀφοῦ οὔτε ἐξομολογεῖσαι, οὔτε προσεύχεσαι, οὔτε ἀκοῦς τὴν Ἀκολουθία. ἦρθες γιὰ βόλτα;

- Ὅχι ἦρθα γιὰ νὰ δῶ πόσο ὁμορφος εἶσαι.

Σὲ ὅλα ἀπαντοῦσε πολὺ ἀπότομα. Τότε εἶπα:

- Ἄς γίνει τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ δύο ἐβδομάδες ἔστειλα ἓναν ἐθελοντὴ στὴν γυναῖκα στὴν ὁποῖα εἶχα βάλει κανόνα καὶ ἢ ὁποῖα ἔμεινε στὸ ἴδιο κελὶ με τὴν Ζαμφίρα, γιὰ νὰ τῆς θυμίσει ὅτι θὰ κοινωνήσῃ καὶ νὰ ἐτοιμαστῆ. Πάει ὁ ἐθελοντὴς στὸ κελὶ καὶ τῆς λέει:

- Ὁ ἱερέας εἶπε πῶς ἐπειδὴ αὔριο θὰ κοινωνήσετε νὰ ἐτοιμαστῆτε καὶ νὰ διαβάσετε τὴν προσευχὴ πρὸ τῆς Θείας Μεταλήψεως.

Τῆς ἔδωσε ἓνα Ὁρολόγιο καὶ ἀμέσως πετάχτηκε ἢ Ζαμφίρα:

- Θέλω καὶ ἐγὼ νὰ πάω αὔριο στὴν ἐκκλησία.

- Ὅχι δὲν θὰ πᾶς ἐπειδὴ δὲν κάθεται ἡσυχῇ, τῆς εἶπε ὁ ἐθελοντὴς.

- Σὲ παρακαλῶ, θέλω νὰ πάω, ἐπέμεινε ἢ Ζαμφίρα.

- Δῶσε μου ἓνα βιβλίον νὰ διαβάσω.

Τῆς ἔδωσε τὸ Ψαλτήρι. Δὲν ξέρω τί διάβασε καὶ πόσο διάβασε ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐπόμενη ἡμέρα ἦρθε καὶ με βρῆκε μία συγκρατούμενὴ τῆς καὶ μοῦ εἶπε:

- Πάτερ ἢ Ζαμφίρα δὲν εἶναι καλὰ στὸ μυαλό τῆς.

- Δηλαδή, τί θέλεις νὰ πεῖς; ρώτησα ἐγώ.

- Ὅλη νύχτα ἔκλαιγε. Διάβαζε καὶ ἔκλαιγε. Δὲν ξέρω τί διάβασε ἀλλὰ ἔκλαιγε πάρα πολὺ.

Ἄφοῦ τοὺς ἐξομολόγησα ὅλους πῆγα στὴν Ζαμφίρα. Ἦταν γονατισμένη σὲ μία γωνία. Φαινόνταν κλαμμένη. Δὲν ἔλεγε τίποτα.

- Θέλεις νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖς;

- Ναὶ πάτερ θὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ, ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι.

- Πές μου πῶς θέλεις.

- Θέλω νὰ ἐξομολογηθῶ με δυνατὴ φωνή, μπροστὰ σε ὅλους.

Καὶ ὅπως στεκόμουν ἐγὼ με τὸ πρόσωπο πρὸς τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γύρισε πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους κρατουμένους καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἐξομολογεῖται δημόσια!

Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις κράτησε 45 λεπτά. Σὲ κάθε ἁμαρτία ἔκλαιγε, ἔκανε μία μετάνοια καὶ ἔλεγε:

- Παρακαλῶ συγχωρέστε με.

Ἄφου τελείωσε σκέφτηκα: «Νὰ τὴν κοινωνήσω;»

Σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς κανόνες τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου ἔπρεπε νὰ μὴν τῆς ἐπιτρέψω νὰ κοινωνήσει γιὰ τριακόσια χρόνια μὲ τόσο βαριὲς ἁμαρτίες ποὺ εἶχε κάνει... Αὐτὸ ποὺ κατάφερα νὰ μάθω ἦταν πὼς ἡ γιαιγιά τῆς τὴν εἶχε βαπτίσει ὅταν ἦταν μικρὴ ἀλλὰ ποτὲ δὲν εἶχε κοινωνήσει. Συνεπὼς θὰ ἦταν ἡ πρώτη φορὰ.

Δὲν εἶχε φάει τίποτα ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρωινό. Σκεφτόμουν τί θὰ ἔκανε ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ ἀπὸ μία τέτοια ἐξομολόγηση προσευχόμενος ὡς ἔξῃ:

- Κύριε ἐὰν τὴν κοινωνῶ ἀναξίως παίρνω ἐγὼ ἐπάνω μου αὐτὴν τὴν ἁμαρτία.

Τὴν κοινωνήσα. Μετὰ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία ἔλαμπε ἀπὸ χαρὰ καὶ ἔψελνε « Ἀλληλούια». Βρισκόνταν σὲ μία τέτοια κατάσταση χαρᾶς ποὺ σπάνια συναντᾶς καὶ σὲ Χριστιανοὺς ποὺ ζοῦν ἐλεύθεροι στὸν κόσμο.

Τὸ βράδυ μου τηλεφώνησε ἕνας φύλακας:

- Πάτερ, ἡ Ζαμφίρα πέθανε, μοῦ λέει!

Στὶς ἑννέα τὸ βράδυ ἔφτασα στὴν φυλακὴ καὶ ρώτησα μία φυλακισμένη ποὺ εἶχε κοινωνήσει μαζί της, τι συνέβη καὶ μοῦ εἶπε:

- Πάτερ, ἦταν πολὺ χαρούμενη ποὺ κοινωνήσε. Ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶτὸ προσευχόνταν στὸ Θεό, μοῦ μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὸ Θεό, γιὰ τὴν μετάνοια, γιὰ τὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ ἔκλαιγε γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες της. Κατὰ τῆς ὀκτώ το βράδυ μου λέει: «Δὲν αἰσθάνομαι καλά, κάτι ἔχω».

Πῆγε στὸ μπάνιο, πλύθηκε, ἔβαλε τὰ πιὸ καλά της ρούχα καὶ εἶπε: «Ἐγὼ θὰ πεθάνω τώρα, δώστε μου ἕνα κερί» (σ.ό. Σὲ ἄλλες ὀρθόδοξες χώρες ὅταν κάποιος ξεψυχᾷ πάντα κρατοῦν δίπλα του ἕνα αναμμένο κερί). Τῆς ἔφεραν τὸ κερί, γύρισε τὸ κεφάλι της πρὸς τὸν τοῖχο καὶ πέθανε!

Τὴν ἐπομένη ἡμέρα οἱ γιατροὶ ἔκαναν συμβούλιο. Ἐπρεπε νὰ χειρουργηθεῖ γιὰ κοίλη ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔβρισκαν μία αἰτία γιὰ τὸν ξαφνικὸ θάνατό της. Ἐγὼ πιστεύω πὼς ὁ Θεὸς περμένει τὸν καθένα νὰ ἐπιστρέψει κοντὰ Του καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸ γίνεῖ καὶ εἶναι καθαρὸς τότε ὁ Θεὸς κρίνει ἐὰν θὰ τὸν πάρει δίπλα Του...



Ἄδικαιολόγητος Ἄγνοια

Τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Διονυσίου Τάτση, «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος» ἀ.φ. 2018, 11 Ἀπριλίου, 2014.

Στοὺς κύκλους τῶν σοφῶν οἰκουμενιστῶν παρατηροῦνται μερικὰ φαιδρὰ καὶ ἀπίστευτα πράγματα. Λὲς καὶ δὲν γνωρίζουν τὸ ἀλφάβητο τῆς

Ὁρθοδόξου θεολογίας. Τονίζουν καὶ ξανατονίζουν ὅτι οἱ Παπικοὶ καὶ οἱ Προτεστάντες ἀποτελοῦν ξεχωριστὲς «ἐκκλησίες» καὶ δὲν εἶναι αἰρετικοί. Ἐὰν ὅμως συμβαίνει κάτι τέτοιο, γιὰτὶ διαλέγονται μαζί τους; Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀντικείμενο καὶ ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ σκοπός; Μήπως ἡ προσπάθειά τους εἶναι γιὰ ἀσήμαντα καὶ ἐπουσιώδη θέματα, μιὰ καὶ δὲν βλέπουν τὶς μεγάλες δογματικὲς διαφορὲς; Ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὰ ἀσήμαντα τόσος θόρυβος, τόσος κόπος καὶ τόσα ἔξοδα; Δὲν εἶναι παιδαριῶδες αὐτό;

Φοβοῦμαι ὅμως ὅτι οἱ οἰκουμενιστὲς δὲν βρίσκουν πνευματικὴ ἀνάπαυση στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ ψάχνουν νὰ τὴ βροῦν στοὺς ἑτεροδόξους, στοὺς φιλελεύθερους καὶ ἐκσυγχρονιστὲς «ἀδελφούς» τους, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὅμως βρίσκονται πολὺ μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴ σὴζουσα ἀλήθεια. Χωρὶς νὰ δηλώνουν κάτι τέτοιο δημοσίως, τὸ ἀποδέχονται πλήρως καὶ τὸ πετυχαίνουν μερικῶς μὲ τὶς συχνότατες ἐπαφὲς μὲ τοὺς ἑτεροδόξους. Δυστυχῶς, ἔχουν διαβρωθεῖ τόσο πολὺ, ποὺ δὲν ἀντέχουν νὰ βρίσκονται μακριὰ τους, κλεισμένοι στὴν παραδοσιακὴ Ὁρθοδοξία. Θέλουν τὸν κοσμικὸ χριστιανισμό, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει προέκταση στὴ μετὰ θάνατο ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ ἀπλῶς ρυθμίζει τὰ ἐφήμερα προβλήματα καὶ διευκολύνει τὴν ἱκανοποίηση τοῦ πάθους τῆς φιλοδοξίας, τῆς φιλοχρηματίας καὶ τῆς φιληδονίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἄκοῦν γιὰ παραδόσεις καὶ ἀσκητικὸ φρόνημα καὶ χάνουν τὴν εὐθυμία τους. Εἶναι κοσμικοὶ ποιμένες κοσμικῶν προβάτων, μὲ συμβιβασμοὺς καὶ ιδιόρρυθμοὺς ἠθικοὺς κανόνες, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν πολλὴ σχέση μὲ τὴν χριστιανικὴ ἠθικὴ.

Οἱ οἰκουμενιστὲς δὲν ἀποδέχονται ἐκεῖνο, ποὺ τόνιζε ὁ ἀείμνηστος Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀμερικῆς Μιχαὴλ (†1958) γιὰ τοὺς ἑτεροδόξους, παρόλο ποὺ εἶναι ἀπλὸ καὶ αὐτονόητο καὶ δὲν χρειάζεται φιλοσοφικὴ σκέψη, γιὰ νὰ τὸ κατανοήσει κανεὶς. Ἐλεγε. «Τὸ Βατικανὸν εἶναι ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν μεγάλων πλανῶν καὶ τῶν ἐσκεμμένων αἱρέσεων. Ἐχουν τόσον διαστρέψει τὴν ἀμώμητον θρησκείαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὥστε τὴν ἔχουν καταστήσει ἀγνώριστον. Δὲν ὑπάρχει, δι' ἐμὲ τοῦλάχιστον, οὐδεμία ἀμφιβολία, ὅτι ἡ μοναδικὴ ἐλπίς σωτηρίας τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία. Καθολικισμὸς καὶ Προτεστάντισμὸς ὁμοῦ ἀποτελοῦν τὴν πλήρη διαστροφὴν τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, τὸν ὁποῖον ἀλώβητον διατηρεῖ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ὁμολογία πίστεως. Δημοσίως μιᾶς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ δὲν διστάζεις νὰ χαρακτηρίσεις αἰρετικὸς ὅλους ἐκείνους, ποὺ τὴν ἀρνοῦνται. Εἶναι ἀδιανόητο νὰ χαρακτηρίζεις τοὺς ἑτεροδόξους «ἀγαπητοὺς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφούς», ὅπως χωρὶς καμία ἀναστολὴ κάνουν οἱ οἰκουμενιστὲς.

Οἱ Δώδεκα Ἀναχωρητῆς

Ἀπὸ τὸ Μέγα Γερωντικὸν.

Δώδεκα ἀναχωρητῆς ἅγιοι, σοφοὶ καὶ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι, συγκεντρώθηκαν κάποτε καὶ ζήτησαν νὰ ὁμολογήσει ὁ καθένας ὅσα κατόρθωσε στὸ κελί του καὶ ποῖα ἦταν ἡ πνευματικὴ του ἄσκηση.

Ὁ **πρῶτος**, ὁ μεγαλύτερος στὴν ἡλικία, εἶπε:

«Ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἄρχισα νὰ ζω ἡσυχαστικὴ ζωὴ σταύρωσα ὅλο τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀπέναντι στὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πράγματα, ἔχοντας στὸν νοῦ μου αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι γραμμένο: *Νὰ σπάσουμε τοὺς δεσμούς ποὺ μᾶς συνδέουν μαζί τους καὶ νὰ ρίξουμε ἀπὸ πάνω μας τὸν ζυγὸ τους.*

Ἔτσι, ἔκανα ἓνα τεῖχος ἀνάμεσα στὴν ψυχὴ μου καὶ στὰ σωματικὰ πράγματα καὶ ἀναλογίσθηκα ὅτι, ὅπως αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ τεῖχος δὲν βλέπει αὐτὸν ποὺ στέκεται ἔξω, μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ σὺ μὴ θελήσεις νὰ βλέπεις τὰ πράγματα ποὺ ἔχουν σχέση μὲ τὰ ἔξω. Ἀλλὰ νὰ ἔχεις στραμμένη τὴν προσοχὴ σου στὸν ἑαυτό σου, ἀναμένοντας κάθε μέρα μὲ ἐλπίδα τὸν Θεό.

Ἔτσι θεωρῶ τὶς πονηρὲς ἐπιθυμίες φίδια καὶ ἀπόγονους ἀπὸ ὄχιές, καὶ ὅταν τὶς αἰσθάνομαι νὰ ξεφυτρώνουν στὸ νοῦ μου, τὶς ξηραίνω μὲ φοβέρες καὶ ὀργή. Ἀκόμη, δὲν σταμάτησα ποτὲ νὰ τὰ βάζω μὲ τὸ σῶμα μου καὶ μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ μου, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἐκτραποῦν σὲ τίποτε ἀνάρμοστο».

Ὁ **δεύτερος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ ἀρνήθηκα τὸν κόσμον, εἶπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Σήμερα ἀναγεννήθηκες, σήμερα ἄρχισες νὰ δουλεύεις στὸν Θεό, σήμερα ἄρχισες νὰ κατοικεῖς ἐδῶ σὰν ξένος. Ἔτσι κάθε μέρα νὰ αἰσθάνεσαι, σὰν ἓνας ξένος καὶ ὅτι αὐριο θὰ φύγεις».

Ὁ **τρίτος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὸ πρωὶ ἀνεβαίνω στὸν Κύριό μου, καὶ ἀφοῦ τὸν προσκυνήσω, πέφτω μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο κάτω καὶ ἐξομολογοῦμαι τὰ ἁμαρτήματά μου. Ἔπειτα κατεβαίνοντας προσκυνῶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους του καὶ τοὺς παρακαλῶ νὰ ἱκετεύουν τὸν Θεὸ γιὰ μένα καὶ γιὰ ὁλόκληρη τὴν κτίση. Ἀφοῦ τὸ κάνω αὐτό, κατεβαίνω στὴν ἄβυσσο καὶ ὅ,τι κάνουν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὅταν πηγαίνουν στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, ποὺ σχίζουν τὰ ἐνδύματά τους καὶ κλαῖνε καὶ πενθοῦν γιὰ τὴ συμφορὰ ποὺ βρῆκε τοὺς πατέρες τους, αὐτὸ κάνω κι ἐγώ. Περιπλανιέμαι στοὺς τόπους τῆς κόλασης, βλέπω τὰ δικά μου μέλη (δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἐκεῖ ἄλλους Χριστιανούς) νὰ βασανίζονται καὶ κλαίω μ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ κλαῖνε».

Ὁ **τέταρτος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἔτσι νιώθω, σὰν νὰ κάθομαι μὲ τὸν Κύριο καὶ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους του στὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν. Εἶπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ πέρα κανέναν συγγενὴ νὰ μὴν ξέρεις, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε νὰ βρίσκεσαι μ' αὐτούς, νὰ τοὺς ἀναζητᾶς καὶ νὰ μιμῆσαι τὸν καλὸ τρόπο τῆς ζωῆς τους, ὅπως ἡ Μαρία ποὺ καθόταν κοντὰ στὰ πόδια τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ ἄκουγε τὰ λόγια του: *Νὰ γίνετε ἅγιοι, γιὰτὶ ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἅγιος. Νὰ γίνετε σπλαχνικοὶ καὶ τέλειοι, ὅπως ὁ Πατέρας σας εἶναι τέλειος. Νὰ διδαχτεῖτε ἀπὸ μένα ὅτι εἶμαι πρᾶος καὶ ταπεινὸς στὴν καρδιά».*

Ὁ **πέμπτος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ κάθε φορὰ βλέπω ἀγγέλους νὰ ἀνεβαίνουν καὶ νὰ κατεβαίνουν γιὰ τὴν πρόσκληση τῶν ψυχῶν. Καὶ πάντοτε, περιμένοντας τὸ τέλος μου, λέω: Εἶναι ἔτοιμη ἡ καρδιά μου, Θεέ μου;».

Ὁ **ἕκτος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ καθὼς κάνω τὴν πνευματικὴ μου ἐργασία στὸ κελί, νομίζω ὅτι ἀκούω ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια: *Νὰ κοπιᾶστε γιὰ μένα κι ἐγὼ θὰ σᾶς ἀναπαύσω, ἀκόμη λίγο νὰ ἀγωνιστεῖτε καὶ θὰ σᾶς δείξω τὴ σωτηρία καὶ τὴ δόξα μου. Ἄν μὲ ἀγαπᾶτε, ἂν εἴσαστε παιδιὰ μου, σὰν Πατέρα ποὺ παρακαλάει, νὰ αἰσθανθεῖτε γιὰ μένα σεβασμὸ, ἂν εἴστε ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ μὲ σεβαστεῖτε ὅπως ἐκείνον ποὺ ὑπέμεινε πολλὰ*

γιὰ σᾶς. Ἄν εἴσαστε πρόβατά μου, νὰ ἀκούστε τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ποιμένα, ἂν εἴστε δοῦλοι μου, νὰ ἀκολουθήσετε τὰ παθήματα τοῦ δεσπότη σας».

Ὁ **ἕβδομος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ αὐτὰ τὰ τρία μελετῶ συνεχῶς καὶ λέω ἀδιάκοπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: πίστη, ἐλπίδα, ἀγάπη, γιὰ νὰ χαίρομαι μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα, νὰ στηρίζομαι μὲ τὴν πίστη, καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη νὰ μὴ λυπήσω ποτὲ κανένα».

Ὁ **ὄγδοος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ βλέπω τὸν διάβολο νὰ πετάει ζητώντας ποιὸν νὰ καταπιεῖ. Ὅπου κι ἂν πάει, βλέπω μὲ τὰ ἐσωτερικὰ μάτια, καὶ ἀναφέρομαι ἱκετευτικὰ στὸν Δεσπότη μου Χριστὸ ἐναντίον του, ὥστε νὰ μείνει ἄπρακτος καὶ νὰ μὴν μπορέσει νὰ κάνει τίποτε σὲ κανέναν, ἰδίως σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ φοβοῦνται τὸν Θεό».

Ὁ **ἐνάτος** εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ὅταν κάνω τὴν πνευματικὴ μου ἐργασία, βλέπω τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τῶν νοερῶν δυνάμεων κι ἀνάμεσά τους τὸν Κύριο τῆς δόξας νὰ λάμπει περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους. Ὅταν μὲ βρεῖ ἀκηδία, ἀνεβαίνω στοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ βλέπω τὴν ἐξοχὴ ὠραιότητα τῶν ἀγγέλων κι ἀκούω τοὺς ὕμνους ποὺ ἀνυψώνουν ἀκατάπαυστα στὸν Θεό,



καθώς και τὴ μελωδία τους. Ὑψώνομαι μὲ τοὺς ἤχους και τὴ φωνὴ και τὴ μουσικότητά τους, ὥστε νὰ νιώσω αὐτὸ πὸν εἶναι γραμμμένο: *Οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγούνται τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ και ὄλα τὰ ἐπίγεια τὰ θεωρῶ στάχη και σκουπίδια».*

Ὁ δέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ πάντοτε βλέπω κοντά μου τὸν φύλακα ἄγγελό μου και προσέχω τὸν ἑαυτό μου, ἔχοντας στὸ μυαλό μου αὐτὸ πὸν ἔχει γραφεῖ: *Ἔβλεπα μπροστά μου τὸν Κύριο πάντοτε, ὅτι στέκεται στὰ δεξιά μου, γιὰ νὰ μὴν κλονισθῶ ἀπὸ τὴ θέση μου.* Φοβοῦμαι λοιπὸν αὐτὸν πὸν παρακολουθεῖ τὴν πορεία μου. Διότι τὸν βλέπω κάθε μέρα νὰ ἀνεβαίνει στὸν Θεὸ και νὰ παρουσιάζει τὰ ἔργα και τὰ λόγια μου».

Ὁ ἐνδέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ προσωποποίησα τὶς ἀρετές, ὅπως π.χ. τὴν ἐγκράτεια, τὴ σωφροσύνη, τὴ μακροθυμία, τὴν ἀγάπη και ἔστησα τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀνάμεσά τους ὥστε νὰ μὲ περικυκλώσουν αὐτές. Κι ὅπου κι ἂν πάω, λέω στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Ποῦ εἶναι οἱ παιδαγωγοί σου; Μὴν ἀδιαφορήσεις, μὴν ἀκηδιάσεις, ἀφοῦ παντοινὰ αὐτὲς τὶς ἔχεις δίπλα σου, ὅποια ἀρετὴ θέλεις κοντά σου εἶναι, και καλὰ λόγια θὰ ποῦν στὸν Θεὸ γιὰ σένα, ὅτι δηλαδὴ βρῆκαν σὲ σένα ἀνάπαυση».

Ὁ δωδέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐσεῖς, Πατέρες, ἔχοντας φτεροῦγες ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανό, ἀποκτήσατε οὐράνια ζωὴ. Κι αὐτὸ καθόλου παράξενο δὲν εἶναι, σὰς βλέπω νὰ στέκεστε ψηλὰ λόγω τῶν ἔργων σας και νὰ ἐπιδιώκετε τὰ οὐράνια. Μὲ δύναμη μάλιστα μετακινεῖστε ἀπ' τὴ γῆ ἐσεῖς πὸν ἀποξενωθήκατε ἐντελῶς ἀπ' αὐτήν. Πῶς νὰ σὰς ὀνομάσω; Ἐπίγειους ἀγγέλους ἢ οὐράνιους ἀνθρώπους; Ἐγὼ κρίνοντας τὸν ἑαυτό μου τόσο ἀνάξιο ἀκόμη και νὰ ζεῖ, βλέπω μπροστά μου τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου. Ὅπου κι ἂν πάω, ὅπου κι ἂν στραφῶ τὶς βλέπω νὰ προχωροῦν πρὶν ἀπὸ μένα.

Στὰ καταχθόνια καταδίκασα τὸν ἑαυτό μου. Λέω: Θὰ εἶμαι μαζί μ' αὐτοὺς πὸν μοῦ ἀξίζει. Μ' αὐτοὺς ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο θὰ μὲ κατατάξουν. Βλέπω ἐκεῖ θρηνητικὲς κραυγὲς και δάκρυα, πὸν δὲν σταματοῦν ποτὲ και εἶναι ἀνεκδιήγητα. Βλέπω κάποιους νὰ τριζοῦν τὰ δόντια και νὰ πηδοῦν μ' ὄλο τους τὸ σῶμα και νὰ τρέμουν ἀπ' τὸ κεφάλι μέχρι τὰ πόδια. Πέφτω μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο κάτω και ρίχνοντας στάχη στὸ κεφάλι μου ἱκετεύω τὸν Θεὸ νὰ μὴ δοκιμάσω ἐκεῖνες τὶς συμφορές.

Βλέπω και μία θάλασσα ἀπὸ φωτιὰ νὰ παφλάζει και νὰ φουσομανάει ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ και νὰ βρुχιέται, σὲ σημεῖο πὸν νὰ νομίζει κανεὶς ὅτι τὰ κύματα τῆς φωτιᾶς φτάνουν μέχρι τὸν οὐρανό. Καὶ μέσ' τὴ φοβερὴ αὐτὴ θάλασσα ἀμέτρητους ἀνθρώπους ριγμένους ἀπὸ ἄγριους ἀγγέλους, και ὄλοι μαζί ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ μιὰ φωνὴ νὰ βγάζουν δυνατὲς κραυγὲς και νὰ κραζοῦν μὲ ἰσχυροὺς θρηγῶνους και φωνὲς τέτοιες, πὸν κανεὶς δὲν

ἔχει ἀκούσει. Σὰν ξερὰ χόρτα ὄλοι νὰ καίγονται, και οἱ οἰκτιρμοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ φεύγουν μακριὰ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς, γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους.

Τότε θρηγῶ τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πῶς τολμᾷ νὰ μιλήσει ἢ νὰ δίνει τὴν προσοχή του σὲ κάτι ἐφήμερο, ἀφοῦ τόσο μεγάλα κακὰ περιμένουν τὸν κόσμο. Μὲ τέτοιους λογισμοὺς κρατῶ τὸ πένθος στὴν καρδιά μου, κρίνοντας τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀνάξιο γιὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ και τὴ γῆ, και πραγματοποιεῖται σὲ μένα ὁ λόγος τῆς Γραφῆς: *Τὰ δάκρυά μου ἔγιναν γιὰ μένα ψωμὶ μέρα και νύχτα».*

Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ κατορθώματα τῶν σοφῶν και πνευματικῶν Πατέρων. Μακάρι κι ἐμεῖς νὰ δεῖξουμε στοὺς ἄλλους μιὰ ζωὴ ἄξια νὰ τὴν θυμῶνται, γιὰ νὰ εὐχαριστήσουμε τὸν Δεσπότη μας Χριστό, ἀφοῦ γίνουμε τέλειοι και ἀψεγάδιαστοι.



Ὁ Ὀρθόδοξος ἀσκητισμὸς δὲν εἶναι μόνο γιὰ τὰ μοναστήρια, ἀλλὰ και γιὰ τὸν κόσμο.

Πολλοὶ λένε ὅτι ἡ χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ εἶναι δυσάρεστη και δύσκολη, ἐγὼ λέω ὅτι εἶναι εὐχάριστη και εὐκόλη, ἀλλὰ ἀπαιτεῖ δυὸ προϋποθέσεις: Ταπεινὼση και ἀγάπη.

Ἄν ἔρθει ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὄλοι και ὄλα ἀλλάζουν, ἔλα ὁμως πὸν γιὰ νὰ ἔρθει, χρειάζεται πρῶτα νὰ ταπεινωθοῦμε!

Μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ μιλάει γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες του και νὰ εἶναι ὑπερήφανος κι ἄλλος νὰ μιλάει γιὰ τὶς ἀρετές του και νὰ εἶναι ταπεινός.

Νὰ εἴμαστε ταπεινοί, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴν ταπεινολογοῦμε. Ἡ ταπεινολογία εἶναι παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου, πὸν φέρνει τὴν ἀπελπισία και τὴν ἀδράνεια, ἐνῶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ ταπεινὼση φέρνει τὴν ἐλπίδα και τὴν ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Δὲ γίνεται κανεὶς Χριστιανὸς μὲ τὴν τεμπελιά, χρειάζεται δουλειά, πολλὴ δουλειά.

Τὸ πᾶν εἶναι νὰ ἀγαπήσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ Χριστὸ και ὄλα τὰ προβλήματα τακτοποιοῦνται.

Και τώρα τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα θέλει νὰ μπεῖ στὶς ψυχὲς μας, ὅπως και τότε, ἀλλὰ σέβεται τὴν ἐλευθερία μας, δὲ θέλει νὰ τὴν παραβιάσει. Περιμένει νὰ τοῦ ἀνοίξουμε μόνοι μας τὴν πόρτα και τότε θὰ μπεῖ στὴν ψυχὴ μας και θὰ τὴν μεταμορφώσει. Ὅταν ἔρθει και κατοικήσει σ' ὄλο τὸ χῶρο τῆς ψυχῆς μας ὁ Χριστός, τότε φεύγουν ὄλα τὰ προβλήματα, ὄλες οἱ πλάνες, ὄλες οἱ στενοχώριες. Τότε φεύγει και ἡ ἁμαρτία.

Ὁσίου Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου (†1991)

Ὁ Πόθος τοῦ Ἀπειροῦ

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου, Ἀγίου Ιουστίνου Πόποβιτς.

Τὸ ἀνθρώπινον πνεῦμα ἀδιακόπως ποθεῖ τὴν ἄπειρον γνῶσιν, τὴν ἄπειρον ζωὴν, τὴν ἄπειρον ὑπαρξιν. Καὶ διὰ μέσου ὅλων αὐτῶν ἐν μόνον ἐπιδιώκει: νὰ νικήσῃ τὸ πρόσκαιρον, τὸ πεπερασμένον, τὸ περιορισμένον, καὶ νὰ καταστήσῃ δυνατὸν καὶ ἐξασφαλίσῃ τὸ αἰώνιον, τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ ἀπεριόριστον.

Εἰς ὅλας τὰς κουλτούρας καὶ τοὺς πολιτισμοὺς ὅλοι οἱ κόποι τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνεύματος, εἰς τὸ τέλος, συγκεντρῶνται εἰς μίαν γιγαντιαίαν προσπάθειαν: Νὰ ἡττηθῇ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ θνητότης καὶ νὰ ἐξασφαλισθῇ ἡ ἀθανασία καὶ ἡ αἰωνία ζωὴ, νὰ ἐξασφαλισθῇ ὅπωςδήποτε.

Ἀλλὰ δὲν μᾶς παροτρύνουν ἄραγε τὰ πάντα νὰ θέσωμεν τὴν ἐρώτησιν: Πόθεν εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου αὐτὴ ἡ νοστολογία καὶ ἡ φορὰ πρὸς τὸ ἄπειρον εἰς ὅλας τὰς κατευθύνσεις; Τί εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖον ὠθεῖ τὴν ἀνθρώπινην σκέψιν ἀπὸ πρόβλημα εἰς πρόβλημα καὶ ἀπὸ ἀπεραντοσύνην εἰς ἀπεραντοσύνην; Ἐὰν αὐτὸς ὁ πόθος διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον ἐπιβάλλεται ἔξωθεν εἰς τοὺς ἀδυνάτους ἀνθρώπους, πῶς τότε εὐρίσκεται οὗτος καὶ εἰς τοὺς πλέον ἀνεξαρτήτους τῶν φιλοσόφων; Εἰς τοὺς μάλιστα ἔχει ἀναπτυχθῆ οὗτος εἰς πολυσύνθετον προβληματολογία.

Πάντα ταῦτα ἀποδεικνύουν ὅτι ὁ πόθος διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον εὐρίσκεται εἰς αὐτὴν ταύτην τὴν φύσιν τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνεύματος. Ἡ φύσις αὐτῆς ταύτης τῆς γνώσεως τείνει πρὸς τὴν ἄπειρον γνῶσιν ἢ φύσις αὐτῆς ταύτης τῆς αἰσθήσεως τείνει πρὸς τὴν ἄπειρον αἴσθησιν ἢ φύσις αὐτῆς ταύτης τῆς ζωῆς τείνει πρὸς τὴν ἄπειρον ζωὴν.

Ὅλον τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ διὰ τῆς γνώσεως καὶ διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως καὶ διὰ τῆς θελήσεως καὶ διὰ τῆς ζωῆς θέλει νὰ εἶναι ἄπειρον, δηλαδὴ νὰ εἶναι ἀθάνατον. Ἡ δίψα τοῦ ἀπειροῦ, ἢ δίψα διὰ τὴν ἀθανασίαν, εἶναι ἡ παμπалаία, ἢ μεταφυσικὴ δίψα τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνεύματος. Αὐτὴ ὠθοῦσε τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸ ἄπειρον διὰ τῶν πολυαριθμῶν θρησκευτῶν, φιλοσοφιῶν, ἐπιστημῶν, ἀγώνων καὶ ἀγωνιῶν. Μὲ μίαν λέξιν: Τὸ ἀνθρώπινον πνεῦμα θέλει τὴν ἀθανασίαν, τὴν θέλει καθ' οἷονδήποτε τρόπον καὶ ὑπὸ οἵανδήποτε μορφῇ.

Εἶναι καταφανὲς ὅτι αὐτὸν τὸν πόθον διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ τὸν ἔχη ἐπιβάλλει εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον

ἢ ὑλικὴ φύσις, διότι ἡ ἰδίᾳ εἶναι πεπερασμένη καὶ περιορισμένη καὶ δὲν ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῇ αὐτὸν τὸν πόθον. Ἐξ ἴσου πρόδηλον εἶναι ὅτι οὔτε τὸ ἀνθρώπινον σῶμα ἔχει ἐπιβάλλει εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον αὐτὸν τὸν πόθον, διότι καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι πεπερασμένον.

Ὡς μοναδικὴ λογικὴ λύσις παραμένει ἡ ἐξῆς θέσις: Ὁ πόθος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον, διὰ τὴν ἀθανασίαν, εὐρίσκεται εἰς αὐτὴν ταύτην τὴν οὐσίαν τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνεύματος. Κτισθεὶς κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, εὐρίσκεται ὁλόκληρος μέσα εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν πόθον. Διότι τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα (τὸ θεοειδές) τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖον ποθεῖ τὰς ἀπείρους ἀληθείας τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς ὅλους τοὺς κόσμους. Ἐνυπάρχον εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὸ θεοειδές (τὸ κατ' εἰκόνα), ὠθεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον νὰ τείνῃ πρὸς ὅλας τὰς ἀπεραντοσύνας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ τὰς ποθῇ.

Εἶναι φυσικὸν διὰ τὴν κατ' εἰκόνα, τὴν θεοειδῆ ψυχὴν, νὰ ποθῇ τὸν Θεὸν ὡς τὸ πρωτότυπόν της. Τοῦτο δὲν εἶναι συμπεράσμα a priori, ἀλλὰ μιὰ διαπίστωσις κατὰ πάντα a posteriori, διότι ὅλη ἡ πείρα τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ μυστικῆς νοσταλγίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνεύματος διὰ τὸ ἄπειρον, διὰ τὴν ἀθανασίαν, διὰ τὴν αἰωνίαν ζωὴν, εἴτε εἰς αὐτὸν εἴτε εἰς τὸν ἄλλον κόσμον.

Ἐὰν στηριχθῶμεν εἰς τὴν κοινὴν πείραν τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους καὶ συνοψίσωμεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἰς τὰ βασικὰ συστατικά του, θὰ εὐρωμεν ὅπωςδήποτε αὐτὸν τὸν πόθον διὰ τὴν ἀθανασίαν ὡς τὸ βασικώτατον στοιχεῖον ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁποῖου θεμελιόυται καὶ εἰς τὸ ὁποῖον ὄντολογικῶς ἔγκειται ὁ ἄνθρωπος.



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

THE MIRACLE AT CHONAE BY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

COMMEMORATED ON SEPTEMBER 6TH

Source: *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, Sept., pp. 219-226, Trans. from Greek by the Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista, CO.*

Michael, the great and chief commander of God's bodiless hosts, both before the incarnation and after, showed compassion and solicitude toward the race of man (Josh 5:13-15; Dan 10: 13, 12: 1; Jude 1:9; Rev 12:71). He bestowed many benefits on earth before the coming of Christ, and afterward he showed even greater care and love toward the Christians.

Colossae was an ancient city of southern Phrygia, the extensive western part of Anatolia, overhanging the Lykos (a tributary of the Meander) on the upper part of its course. The city was some ten miles from Laodikeia and thirteen from Hierapolis (Col 2:1, 4:13, 15,16; Rev 1: 11). The three cities formed a single sphere of missionary labor for Epaphras, an inhabitant of Colossae (Col 1:7, 4:12, 13). The city originally lay on the main trade route from Ephesus to the Euphrates and the East, at the junction of the highways to Sardis and Pergamon. Colossae was catastrophically weakened in the 7th and 8th centuries with the gradual breakdown of Byzantine power in Asia Minor, leaving the Colossians exposed to Saracen raiders. The remaining population moved to Chonae (the modern Chonas), a fortress about three miles further south, with an impregnable castle upon the steep slope of Mount Cadmus (the summit stands at 8,013 feet). Final destruction came in the 12th century with the Turkish invasion. The site is presently unoccupied.

When St. John the Evangelist went to a city of Asia named Ephesus, between the borders of Ionia and Lydia, he found many people deceived by the error of idolatry. They especially revered Artemis, who in ancient myth was a courageous woman who was a hunter. The Greek pagans of that time named her a goddess and worshipped her with great sacrifices. While the Evangelist John was in the city with Saint Prochoros, he raised his hands to heaven and silently besought God at length with sighs. Behold! The idol of Artemis in her temple toppled, but no one was injured. Then the rest of the temple collapsed. Saint John worked many signs and wonders in that place.

In one of the villages of Lydia, Saint John the Theologian met with the Apostle Philip and his sister, Saint Mariamne. They departed with him into the land of Phrygia. There they entered into a city, also known as Hierapolis (Pamukkale), on

the borders between Phrygia and Lydia, and they preached Christ. This city, famous for its hot spring and deposits of calcium, was the home of countless idols, which were worshipped by all the people; and besides these false gods they also had a viper for which they had constructed a special temple. They brought food to this viper and offered up manifold and divers sacrifices thereto. And the foolish people also worshipped other vipers and serpents.

Saint Philip and his sister first armed themselves against the viper with prayer, wherein they were aided by Saint John the Theologian, who was with them at the time. And together they slew the viper with prayer, as with a spear, putting it to death through the power of Christ. At length, the pagans crucified Saint Philip, and he received the crown of martyrdom. Christ shook Hierapolis to its foundations with a devastating quake. The profane people of Hierapolis, seized with great terror, repented of their impiety. Failing before the feet of the Apostle John, they begged mercy. He baptized them in

the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and taught them the truth. The substantial ruins of the Church of Saint Philip, on the site of his martyrdom, may still be seen today in Hierapolis.

Thereafter, Saint John determined to go away. He came to a place called Herotopon, which lies nearby Hierapolis, where he brought the pagan Greeks to the knowledge of the true God. In that place, the divine Elder John prophesied that at a later time there would spring forth there a great abundance of holy water in honor of the Archangel

Michael, who would perform awesome wonders and miracles.

Saint John then left that place and continued preaching the Gospel. Not many days passed before water gushed up out of the earth. Whosoever partook of the water with faith received deliverance from every sickness. In fact, not only the Christians enjoyed this divine favor, but also even unbelieving Greeks, who went and drank from the waters found healing. Harken to the following account.

There was a certain rich Greek pagan in the city of Laodikeia. He had an only daughter who suffered with speechlessness and was dumb from her mother's womb. The father experienced great sorrow concerning this, and would gladly have given her his soul just to behold her speak. One day, he beheld a favorable vision. In his sleep he observed a certain man telling him to go to the holy waters (*Agiasma*) of the Archangel Michael; for he would not return embittered. Indeed, he was told that his daughter would receive healing, and that he himself would gain the salvation of his soul. Now he beheld this vision not because he was found worthy (since



he was benighted utterly with the impiety of idolatry), but rather because God, Who wishes to save all men and have them come to a full knowledge of the truth, dispensed in His economy this vision, so that through the working of the miracle the Greek pagan would be converted and others, too, would be strengthened in godliness. When that Greek pagan awoke, with fear and trembling, he took along his daughter and went to the holy waters of the Archangel. Having arrived, he found many people had gathered who were afflicted with various illnesses. Straightway, only by drinking the water or pouring it over their afflicted bodies, they were delivered from whatever ailment possessed them.

The Greek father, observing all these wonders, asked certain of the people what name they were invoking while drinking or pouring the water over themselves that they should find healing. They said to him, "We utter the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one in essence, and the chief commander Michael, the slave of the Trinity." As he heard this, without hesitation, he believed with all his heart. Thus, entreating the God Who is praised in the Holy Trinity and His Archangel Michael, he took up that holy water with faith and gave it to his daughter to drink. Immediately—O the wonder—not only was the girl delivered from the bond of speechlessness, but both father and daughter were loosed from the bond of disbelief. They began in uplifted voices to offer thanksgiving and praise to the true God and to magnify His servant Michael.

What happened after this? The Greek nobleman and his daughter, and all those with them, were baptized and became Christians; in addition, the nobleman built a costly temple. He also erected at the site of the sanctified waters a beautiful building with vaulted roof, so that he might say with the Prophet David, *O Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy house* (Pss 25:7). Hence, after showing much faith and gratitude for the benefaction he received from the Archangel, he returned to his own house, glorifying God not only for the wonder-working which he beheld in his daughter, but more so for his own conversion.

After the passage of ninety years, a certain child of Hierapolis, the offshoot of good Orthodox parentage, at ten years old, left for the Church of the Archangel, so as to be directed by divine

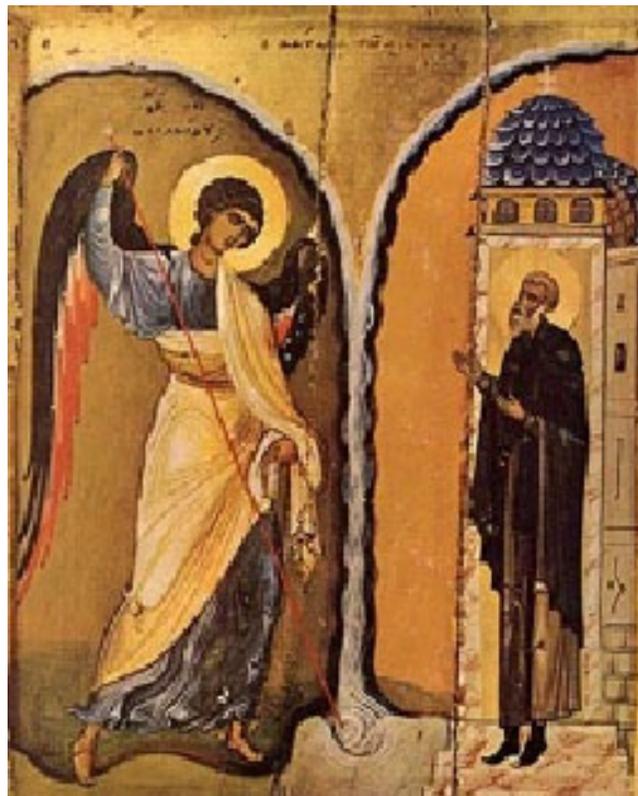
providence from above. His name was Archippos, after the apostle (Col 4:17; Phil 1:2). He became the church's sexton. Possessed of much self-mastery and other virtues, he was vouchsafed divine gifts. He not only controlled those bodily desires that injure the soul, but also disciplined his body and brought it into bondage by neither partaking of bread nor ever bathing, nor did he give his flesh rest in sleep. He took nourishment once a week, faring on wild herbs without salt. His sole drink was from the holy waters. His only two garments were of a coarse cloth of hair; he wore one, and covered himself with the other at night. Every year he alternated the garments, wearing one and covering himself with the other. This was always the dress of Archippos. He filled his bedding with cut stone. As for where

he laid his head, he had another haircloth filled with thorny and prickly plants. This afforded him little sleep, but just enough to sustain him. He maintained this regimen even into manhood and until the day of his repose. When a soul is possessed of such fear of God and love for those future good things, what we deem a harsh conduct of life, requiring strength beyond nature, is sweetness and repose to such a person. We have as further examples the martyrs and righteous one who underwent all forms of torture, affliction, and straits, enduring all that they might gain the kingdom of the heavens. Let us now return to our account.

Archippos, now ecclesiarch at the Church of the Archangel, with such a mode of life, never ceased to have before his eyes

the working out of his salvation, *having a heart that is broken and humbled* (Pss 50:17). He ever strove that God might create in him a clean heart and that the meditation of his heart might be pleasing before the Lord, for the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart. He entreated God: *May my eyes never behold the dainties of this world, nor may my mind be confounded with temporal vanities. Only Thou, O Lord, most compassionate, fill my eyes with spiritual tears; make humble my heart and make straight my steps in Thy law. For what gain have I from this clay body which, on the one hand, today is, but, on the other hand, tomorrow perishes, even as the grass withers with the coming evening? O Lord Almighty, grant me to be striving for the everlasting good and the salvation of the soul.*

Such were the daily thoughts and meditations of Archippos, and God hearkened readily to his entreaty. Living at that time



in the neighborhood of the holy waters was a multitude of unbelievers who daily witnessed the wonderworkings. Envy and malice mounted in them on account of the miracles and the virtuous manner of life of righteous Archippos. Maddened by the holy man's asceticism and struggles, they were speaking evilly of him. Then, one day, those pagans, of one accord, gathered together and, in a maniacal rage, charged against the righteous man. They intended to put him to death and utterly destroy the holy waters. While some were dragging Archippos by force, by the hairs of his head and beard, and beating him with rods and pieces of wood, others were attempting to cover up and choke the course of the holy waters. But, *O Thine indescribable judgments, O Christ!* A flame emitted therefrom and frightened all of them so that they left running; thus, they departed unsuccessful.

After this, they devised something worse: A plan to destroy the church to its foundation and usher in death for the righteous man. What did they contrive? Nearby the Church of the Archangel, where the holy waters were located, from the left side, there ran a river named Chryssos. The unbelievers wished to divert the river, so that the deluge might come down upon the holy waters and the church. They believed that by mixing the waters of the river with the holy water they could dissolve its therapeutic powers utterly, so that the Christians might not drink and find healing.

Having considered how this might be engineered, they cut off the first current of the river that it might flow into the holy waters. But, *Who shall tell of the mighty acts of the Lord? Who shall make all His praises to be heard? (Pss 105:2).* The river, as though it were animate, fearing the grace of the Archangel, straightway turned far over toward the right part of the Church; and there the course of the river remains to this day, thus certifying the miracle. When those most profane ones beheld their unjust enterprise taking the opposite course from that intended, the words of the Prophet David applied: *The Lord scattereth the plans of the heathens, He setteth aside the devices of the peoples. (Pss 32: 10).* The unrelenting pagans, nonetheless, conspired a second time; indeed, something more terrible than before, which we shall explain to you from the beginning.

Two great rivers gush forth from out of the east: one is called Lykokastro, and the other Kouphos. They run separately in the direction of the church and then encircle it from afar, as an island. Then they converge and travel a long distance, as one river, until they separate in Lycia and pour out into the sea against the island of Rhodes. The devil, envious of all good, plotted to let loose the waters of these two rivers. He sowed in the minds of his minions that the rivers could be made to flood the church and the holy waters of the Archangel, so that not even a trace might remain. This seemed very plausible to the pagans, because the land where the church stood sloped downward. Thus, by employing the downward tendency of water, they could fulfill their aim.

Now, at a distance from the church, there was a massive and high rock. The impious hewed the stone and dug down deep in one place, so that the waters would divert and collect with great force. Then, after they dug huge irrigation ditches and fortified collecting basins, they closed off the area. They dammed the waters that collected by the rock, until they were ready to break the seals of the gates. With malignant glee they anxiously awaited for the water level to rise that they might discharge its mighty power against the church, the sanctified healing waters, and Archippos.

Night and day, men, women, and children labored to accomplish their murderous desire. The slave of God, Archippos, beheld the madness of the impious. Mindful of how great the peril

was that awaited him, he fell prostrate on the bare earth, entreating God and the Archangel Michael that the counsel of the ungodly might prove vain and unworkable against the strength and power of God. Thus, Archippos supplicated night and day.

After the passage of ten days, the waters collected in abundance. It was about midnight when the godless broke the gates of the blocked-up waters. They chose that late hour to loosen the turbulent waters, so as to surprise Archippos and plunge him into despair when both he and that holy place would be swept away and submerged in the destruction. The impious stood to the left of the church awaiting the outcome. Archippos heard the clamor of the people and the roaring of the approaching waters. With greater fervency, he gave himself

The miracle at Chonae reminds us that healing is in the church and there is no need for Christians to search for wonder-workers and healers outside of their own parish. There, in the local church, in one's own parish is the fullness of salvation and all gifts of the Holy Spirit are present there. And every form of healing is present there. Of course, when a parishioner comes to their parish's **Orthodox-minded priest**, he can send that person to go to another priest for counseling, someone considered to be more spiritually developed. But, again, not to expect that other spiritual father to solve their problems in a hocus-pocus, magical method. **Everything that happens in our lives happens by God's will, and this applies to our temptations and problems, and when we pray that we might defeat our temptations, for our spiritual well being, we always end our prayer with the words *may it be as the Lord wills for He knows better than we do what is good for us.*** And so on this day and on this feast let us pray that God grant unto us a pure faith which above all means that we might place our trust in Him and His Church and those who have been appointed by the Church to concern themselves with our spiritual well being.

Bishop Porfirije of Jegar (Serbia)

over to prayer, reciting the words of the Prophet David: *The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea. Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever.* (Pss 92:3-5).

Thus did the saint pray, and a divine vision was made manifest. He heard a voice descending from out of the heavens and calling him by name, "Archippos." He was unable to gaze long at the vision of the Archangel, and fell on his face to the ground. Then the one speaking said, "Rise and stand on thy feet and come here outside in order to behold the invincible might of God." Regaining courage then from the voice, he exited and beheld a fiery column which went from earth to heaven. He heard a voice from thence telling him to stand to the left side and not to fear. Then the Archangel raised his right hand and made the sign of the Cross upon the rock, the one above the church, saying, "Up to this point is thy flux." Then, with what appeared as a javelin in his hand, he struck the place mightily and sundered the rock from the top to the bottom. O Thy power, Christ God! We cry with the Prophet David: *The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water; the skies sent out a sound; thine arrows also went abroad.* (Pss 76:16-17). The waters then halted and stood still as a wall.

The Archangel, again, made the sign of the Cross, and said, "Funnel the waters here." A great earthquake occurred and instilled fear. The waters of the rivers forthwith poured down into that deep ravine. Thus, the Archangel subdued the raging flow and the thundering of the river. This phenomenon may be seen to this day. The rivers pour into the funnel in the rock which lies above the church, toward the bema (pulpit). Thus this place, formerly called Colossae, from then was named *Chonae*, a Greek word signifying the funneling of the rivers in that place.

Archippos, through the assistance of the Archangel Michael, was delivered from a bitter death. With a loud and clear voice he praised and glorified God, and also greatly magnified His minister, the Archangel Michael. Archippos continued living a God-pleasing life in that sacred precinct for seventy years. He was then laid to rest from the labor of his virtues and hastened to his beloved Christ rejoicing, even as the good cultivator sows with godly tears that he might reap the fruits of his toils in the joy of everlasting life.

To the glory of the Trinity and the chief commander, Michael, a boundless number of wonders took place daily at the place of the holy waters; which wonders, if we were to describe in detail, should make us appear like him who wishes to count the stars or the sands of the sea. O supreme commander of the armies of heaven, we, the unworthy ones, entreat thee, that by thy prayers thou dost ever surround us with the protection of the wings of thine immaterial glory!

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

From the Conversations and Homilies of Elder Paisios.



Our duty and concern must be how to please God and our fellow men; we should not be preoccupied with our needs, as God will take care of them. There is a silent spiritual agreement between God and man. He will look after us, while we will concentrate on how to live our lives according to His will. *Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you.* (1 Pet 5:7).

One day, Mr. I.F. visited me from Germany. He had just completed a study for the construction of a fish pound in Komotini (a city in Northern Greece), and asked me to pray that he get the state's approval for it. I asked him out of curiosity to tell me about the method of the fishes' reproduction and their growth in the fish pound. He replied:

-The small fishes, Father, when they are born have a small sack in their abdomen called "lecithin utricule." The sack contains all the vitamins and necessary substances for the fishes' self-preservation during the first crucial days of their life. By the time the sack empties, the abdomen of the small fishes has grown enough to be able to take in food from the sea.

When I heard this I was deeply moved. During that time, I was in a state of constantly glorifying God and this became one more reason for me to be doing so. I thought to myself:

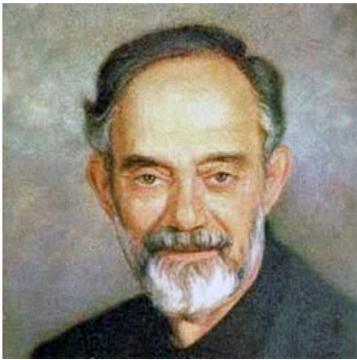
God is so kind that although He created the small fishes for us to eat, He takes care of them in such a wise way, that they can fearlessly grow up. Yet, we are so miserable, that we get distressed and do not trust everything in Him. This is terrible! God looks after the tiniest detail of the smallest of His creatures. How much more He cares for us, His own images, for whom He did everything! Since we are blind, however, we are unable to see His providence which covers every aspect of our life.

Providence is the care that comes from God. Everything which is done with God's providence is done in the best possible way, that is, in a godly manner. The fact that God takes care-indeed very good care-of mankind could very well result from the following logical reasoning:

God is kind; therefore, He takes care and looks after His children (for the one who doesn't provide care is considered evil). Since God is also omniscient, He demonstrates His providence for the whole creation in the most perfect way. When we witness and examine the acts of God's providence, we admire His kindness. We must glorify Him and accept all the acts of divine providence without questioning them, even if sometimes they seem unjust or incomprehensible to us.

ON HUMAN THOUGHTS AND CONCEPTS

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (†2001).



Now what is the origin of human thoughts and concepts? Are the categories of human thought, words and concepts innate to the human mind or are they acquired, gained through external impressions? Although this was discussed in ancient Greek philosophy, it still contin-

ues to be discussed today. We know that Aristotle explicitly thought about this problem. This same question was reexamined later during the Middle Ages. And when we reach the age of the Enlightenment, John Locke and David Hume again returned to these metaphysical categories in their highly cogent studies. And this brings us to the modern era.

Today, the exact sciences are also wrestling with this question. We can see psychologists, psychiatrists, biologists, doctors, biochemists, and others applying the empirical method of research in order to explore the question of how thoughts originate and are created in the human mind. Today this topic is not so much a question of logical processes on man's part (as examined by philosophy and metaphysics) or of philosophical reflection, as it is a matter of empirical investigation.

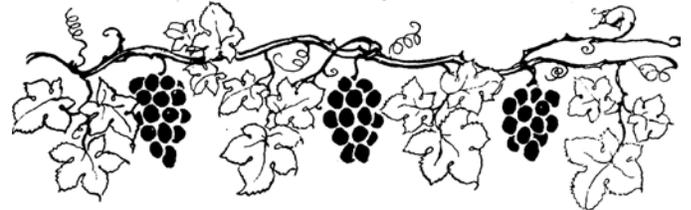
Currently, (*the year was 1983*) scholars are discussing whether human language is innate or acquired. From linguistics, we learn that every language has such a remarkable development with the passage of time that a linguist can attest to important differences in the same language from one century to the next. So when you read ancient texts from an earlier age, you cannot be certain that you fully comprehend those texts or even the vocabulary of that period. In other words, you cannot be sure how specific words were used then and what they meant.

For example, when you compare ancient Greek with modern Greek in this way, you discover a large number of words that are preserved in modern Greek, but have a different meaning today. So these words no longer signify precisely what they did in antiquity. At any rate, what matters for us is that the Church Fathers are quite familiar with the fact that expressions convey specific concepts. Thus, in order to understand the Fathers properly, we must know not only the expressions that they used, in other words, what they said and taught, but we must also know the corresponding concepts. And when we say *the Fathers*, we do not mean only the Fathers in the New Testament, but the Fathers in

the Old Testament as well. The New Testament Fathers refer to the Old Testament prophets as *the fathers of our fathers*. This is also why we celebrate the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. So the aim is not merely to know the Fathers' sayings or expressions, but also the concepts they used and the particular expressions or sayings they used to communicate them.

Now when we examine the entire Patristic tradition, we note that the Fathers stress that idolatry begins when someone identifies expressions or concepts about God with God Himself. They make this claim because God cannot be identified with any human concept. The uncreatedness of God literally cannot be expressed through concepts. Although we can attribute names to God (for example, we say that God is Good, Bountiful, Merciful, and so forth), this practice is, strictly speaking, improper. And we know that it is inappropriate because of the prophets' and the Fathers' experience of glorification or *theosis*. During *theosis*, concepts about God have to be set aside. This experience discloses the fact that no created concept corresponds to the uncreated reality of God. There is absolutely no identity or similarity between our concepts or names for God and the reality that is none other than God Himself.

And this explains what is ascertained during the experience of *theosis*—that God is not Unity, He is not One, He is not Trinity. There are some lovely passages on precisely this issue by St. Dionysios the Areopagite and St. Gregory of Nyssa. All the other Church Fathers agree with these passages, because **all the Fathers share the same experience.**



Every greedy man pretends to be virtuous, presenting himself as supposedly pious in the eyes of the world. But as soon as he secures the money which is the goal of his desires, he then immediately disavows the way of life that he heretofore (supposedly) followed; and by virtue of which he was reckoned as a disciple of the Word.

St. Maximos the Confessor

Greedy is a worm that eats at the bones of a man by way of the thought of money—rendering him sleepless, as he thinks about how to hide his money. He who wishes, however, can easily overcome greed; since it is not a passion that arises from the nature of man, but from his intention. For this very reason, he who strengthens his faith in God—and who places his hope in Him alone, without wavering—can easily conquer the passion of greed and save himself from great danger.

Abba Antiochos

THE “DIFFICULT” FR. NATHANIEL

Source: “Everyday Saints and Other Stories,” by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov); edited for length.



If, during the time that I was living there, someone had asked for the name of the most difficult person in the Monastery of the Pskov Caves, the answer without doubt would have been only one name: the Treasurer of the Pskov Caves Monastery, Archimandrite Fr. Nathaniel. What’s more, this choice would have been made unanimously by all the priests, novices, monks, ordinary civilians, Communists from the local administration of the KGB, and even by all the local dissidents. As a matter of fact, Fr. Nathaniel was not merely difficult. He was extremely difficult!

His Life and Traits

When I met him, he was a thin, elderly man with the keen, owlsh, penetrating gaze of an elder. All year round he was dressed in an old and bedraggled monastic cassock with a torn hem. He usually carried an old canvas bag over his shoulders, in which just about anything might be found, ranging from moldy crumbs of dried bread given to him ages ago by some old grandmother, to perhaps one million rubles in cash. Either of these items in the eyes of this Treasurer of our monastery represented an extraordinary value that had been entrusted to our community by the Lord God Himself; he would drag back and hide away somewhere in his innumerable secret cells and storerooms.

The finances of the monastery were completely under the control and management of Fr. Nathaniel. And there were plenty of funds that needed to be spent: every single day up to 400 pilgrims and 100 monks sat down at our tables to be fed—and fed well. An incalculable quantity of repairs and construction and restoration to the monastery always needed to be conducted. On top of this, our brotherhood had constant daily needs. Moreover, we needed to help the poor, to receive our guests, and to give gifts to officials and bureaucrats...

How Fr. Nathaniel all by himself, without assistants, without computers or accountants or calculators, was able to deal impeccably with these numerous financial problems was something that no one could understand. Furthermore, he alone was responsible for all the many businesses conducted by the monastery, and all their paperwork. On top of that, he was responsible for the creation of the schedules and programs for the long daily services, for setting forth the duties of the monastery secretary, for answering the many letters of persons who were in correspondence with the monastery, often for all kinds of different reasons. As if this were not enough, he shared, together with the abbot of the monastery, all the generally unpleasant work involved in dealing with the official

organs of the Soviet government.

Yet in addition to all of these duties, our Treasurer was also responsible for the general supervision of us, the novices. And you may rest assured that he executed these duties as well with his invariable meticulousness: he snooped, he spied, he listened in on conversations, and in every way possible he diligently tried to discern whether we were worthy, whether we had committed some violation of the rules or otherwise harmed the monastery in any way. To be fair, it must be admitted that it was truly necessary to keep an eagle eye on us novices: most of us had come to the monastery from the outer world as typical good-for-nothings.

Fr. Nathaniel also had one more fantastic quality about him: he always used to turn up exactly at the moment when we least expected him. If, for example, some of the young monastic novices were evading their duties and were hanging around somewhere by the ancient walls of the monastery to relax, chatter, and warm themselves in the sun—suddenly, as if out of thin air, Fr. Nathaniel would appear. Shaking his beard, he would begin in an unbearable grinding voice to scold. And by scold, I mean scold—so severely that the novices would wish that they could just disappear into the bowels of the earth, if only just to stop the torture.

In his zeal, Fr. Nathaniel scarcely ate or slept. He was far more than a mere ascetic: for example, no one ever saw him have even so much as a cup of tea. He would simply drink cold water. And indeed at meals he would barely eat a fifth portion of whatever it was that was served to him.

All the while his energy was simply incredible. We had no idea when, if ever, he slept. Even at night we could see the light coming out through the shutters of his cell. The old monks said that when he was in his cell he either prayed or counted the heaps of rubles (mostly one-ruble notes and three-ruble notes collected during the day’s prayer services). All of these limitless riches he needed to accurately tie up in labeled packets of cash, while all of the coins also had to be sorted accurately into their own separate labeled pouches. As soon as he was finished with this, he would begin to write the program and the commentary for the next day’s service.

Yet even if it so happened that the light in his cell was out, in no way whatsoever did this mean that we had the right to consider ourselves free of his strict supervision for even a moment. Not a chance! All night long, at any moment, Fr. Nathaniel might swoop down on us, here and there and everywhere, checking to make sure nobody was simply strolling around the monastery, which was absolutely strictly forbidden!

I remember how one winter night we were sitting together in a group on the name day of one of our brotherhood. Our gathering went on till quite late. As we were all going back to our cells, suddenly out of the darkness emerged the dreaded figure of Father Nathaniel. We all froze in terror. But then we quickly all realized that on this particular occasion our Treasurer had not even seen us. In fact, his behavior was quite

out of the ordinary. He could barely drag one foot after the other, and was staggering, barely able to keep up his canvas sack. Then we saw him climbing through a low fence of the forecourt—and... suddenly he lay down in the snow right on top of the flowerbed!

“He’s dead!” Some of us thought. We waited a little bit, and then cautiously, almost holding our breath, we approached him. Fr. Nathaniel was lying there in the snow—sleeping. Just sleeping. Evenly and smoothly breathing and even snoring a little bit... Under his head was his sack, which he embraced with both hands.

We decided not to go anywhere and not to leave him alone in that bitter cold until we saw what would happen next. We hid ourselves by the chapel over the holy well and started to wait. About an hour later, having nearly frozen ourselves, we saw how Fr. Nathaniel suddenly cheerfully lifted himself up, brushed the snow off of his sack and cassock, lifted his sack back up onto his back, then dashed off as if nothing had happened.

At the time, we absolutely didn’t understand. It was only later that monks who had known the Treasurer a long time explained to us that Fr. Nathaniel had simply gotten tired and wanted to sleep more comfortably. More comfortably—in other words, for him. Meaning... with the wild luxury of lying down. Because in his own cell he would only sleep sitting. And in order not to indulge in this sinful luxury of lying in bed, if he had to lie down to sleep, he would only allow himself to sleep in the snow.

Just about everything that had to do with Fr. Nathaniel remained for us a total mystery. He would never let anyone into his beloved interior world. Never mind his interior world—he wouldn’t even let anyone into his cell! This rule included even the all-powerful Father Superior of the monastery himself. You would have thought it completely unheard of for such an authority as our monastery head, Fr. Gabriel, to be unable to go wherever he pleased within his own monastery—especially considering the fact that the Treasurer’s cell wasn’t just located in any old place, but right on the first floor of the building in which the abbot himself resided—in fact, right below his lodging.

Well, one day the abbot of the monastery, after some feast day, while in a wonderful frame of mind, announced to Fr. Nathaniel that he would be dropping by immediately to have a cup of tea with Fr. Nathaniel in his cell. Several of our brotherhood who happened to be nearby at that moment immediately understood that something remarkable was about to take place, something that would dazzle the mind, soul,

and entire human imagination.

The abbot solemnly and determinedly crossed the courtyard of the monastery, proceeding implacably towards the cell of Fr. Nathaniel. But the Treasurer dragged his heels with a mincing gait behind, begging the abbot of the monastery to please change his mind about this plan. He begged him instead to do something for the salvation of his soul, to do something useful, rather than wasting his time traipsing about dusty, old, miserable, and totally uninteresting dingy clerics’ rooms. He eloquently described the disorder in his cell, exclaimed that he had not cleaned it in twenty-six years, and warned that there was an unbearably moldy stink in the air.

At last, in absolute despair Fr. Nathaniel began to utter what amounted to threats, ostentatiously thinking out loud how it would be absolutely wrong under any conceivable circumstances to subject the priceless life of the abbot to the dangers that might lurk for him in the frightful mess of the

dwelling place of the Treasurer.

“Now that’s enough, Father Treasurer!” Growled the abbot, interrupting yet another litany of horrors as he stood before the very door of Father Nathaniel’s cell. “Enough! Open up and let’s see what you’ve got in there!”

In spite of the irritation in his voice, it was clear that the abbot was truly just wracked by curiosity. Fr. Nathaniel understood at last that he had no way out, and therefore, he resigned himself. Indeed, unaccountably he suddenly cheered up, and with a merry tone in his voice said, “You are most welcome, Father Abbot.” Then he rattled his key chain and opened up before his boss that mysterious door which by now for over four decades had only been just sufficiently barely opened so as to briefly allow the slim figure of Fr. Nathaniel to slip through . . .

Pitch-black darkness like a complete abyss lurked beyond the threshold of the door. Both night and day the windows of Fr. Nathaniel’s cell remained completely shuttered. Fr. Nathaniel disappeared into the gloom. Indeed, it seemed as if he had been swallowed up by it. The abbot cautiously stepped over the threshold and cautiously intoned in his deep bass voice: “Why is it so dark in here? Don’t you have electricity? Where is the light switch?”

“It’s on your right, Father Abbot,” out of nowhere emerged the courteous voice of the Treasurer. “Just turn the handle.” In the next moment a horrible cry rent the air, as if some unknown force had cast the abbot straight out of the pitch-black darkness of the Treasurer’s cell into the corridor. Speeding out after him into the light came Fr. Nathaniel. Within one second, he closed and triple-locked the door of his cell once



again. Then he raced over to the severely shocked abbot. The Treasurer fussed about brushing off the dust and adjusting the frock of the abbot, murmuring as he did so:

“Lord have mercy! How unfortunate! One has to get used to that light switch. It broke way back in 1964 on the occasion of the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God. And since that day I have never gotten around to putting that light switch back... No electricians! I took care of it myself. Two wires are sticking out of the wall: Just put them together, and there’s light in the cell; pull them apart and the light goes out. But I do admit, it does take some getting used to at first... That’s all right. Never you mind, dear Father Abbot, you are most welcome! Come. Right now I’ll just open up the door again, and we’ll slip back in! There’s nothing to worry about now that you know how to use my light switch... Come on. You’ll see I really have lots of interesting things in there...”

But our abbot had long since vanished, well before this rambling speech had come to its end.

Fr. Nathaniel, in spite of this incident, was an absolute model of obedience and wrote extremely long verse odes in honor of the Abbot and dear Father Superior of the glorious Pskov Caves Monastery. Indeed, he even wrote five-page sermons and moral teachings—also in verse.

With the Communists

Fr. Nathaniel proved difficult to handle even for the mighty Soviet government, especially when it rudely attempted to interfere with our monastic life. It is said that none other than Fr. Nathaniel gave support and subtle advice to the great Father Superior and savior of the monastery Archimandrite Alipius, when the latter was under particularly heavy pressure from the crude persecutions of the Soviet authorities.

This took place at the end of the 1960s. As you may know, all citizens of the Soviet Union were required to take part in “elections.” They brought a ballot box into the refectory of the monastery, where after dinner the brotherhood, under the discontented grumbling supervision of the abbot, rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar’s.

But it turned out that the First Secretary of the Regional Communist Party Secretary for Pskov Province had found out that unheard of privileges were being given to these “savage” monks: they were being allowed to vote (unanimously, of course) for the one and only slot on the ballot, the Communist Party, not at the local polling place like everyone else, but in their obsolete historical ruin of a monastery! He immediately demanded that from now on and forever those “black beetles” must come and “vote” for the members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR like all good Soviet citizens, at their polls in their electoral districts strictly according to their place of residence!

It was then, so people say, that Fr. Nathaniel whispered into the ear of the monastery’s abbot, Archimandrite Alipius, a piece of advice that was both innocent and extremely subtle in its defiance. On election day (and, as always, it was a Sunday), after the festal Liturgy was served in the monastery,

from the monastery gates came streaming forth a magnificent procession of the cross, with priests bearing crosses and icons. Paired into two columns, in a long line singing hymns and in full ceremonial dress, the troops of monks paraded through the entire town towards the polling place. Their ancient banners fluttered in the wind as they marched, carrying their traditional crosses and ancient icons. But this was not all. As is the required custom before any important action, right in the middle of the polling place the entire clergy began to pray out loud. The bureaucrats were frightened to death and tried to protest against this, but Father Alipius firmly interrupted them, lecturing that they were interfering with citizens’ rights to express themselves and carry out their constitutional duties as they were required to do! Having “voted,” the monks marched back with similar ostentatious ceremony into their holy monastery.

Needless to say, when the next elections came around, the ballot box was once again waiting for the monks on the table in the monastery refectory.

Yet, by the same token, in his ceaselessly vigilant looking after us, Fr. Nathaniel always stopped us from uttering any outright expression of opposition to the Soviet regime, or from getting involved in any attempts at being a dissident. At first this seemed to us to be disgraceful. Gradually we began to find out that Fr. Nathaniel had been tested on numerous occasions by spies and agent provocateurs or plainclothes KGB operatives, ever seeking any excuse to do real damage to the monastery. Fr. Nathaniel would always interrupt our beloved free opinions. He was thinking of how to protect the monastery, and, more likely, he was protecting us from ourselves, from our temptation to be too passionate or fanatical in our youthful excess, which was chiefly mixed up with nothing more than pride.

Fr. Nathaniel had a very sober and yet personal relationship to Soviet authority—perhaps because of the fact that his own father, the priest Nikolai Pospelov, had been shot to death for his faith in 1937. Fr. Nathaniel had served as a simple soldier throughout all of World War II, and then had served as a novice of the Great Abbot of our monastery, Archimandrite Alipius. He had also been the spiritual son of the holy elder and miracle worker of the Pskov Caves Monastery, Hieroschema-monk Symeon. Both of them, seeing in him a man of impeccable honesty and remarkably lively intelligence, had appointed him, even during those most difficult years of the persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church under Khrushchev, the Treasurer and presiding secretary of the monastery, effectively entrusting him with its most valuable secrets.

Here’s another memory about his attitude towards Soviet authority. One summer night it was my duty to be the monk on the vigil in the square before the monastery’s Cathedral of the Dormition. The stars were twinkling dimly in the northern sky. Peace and quiet. The clock sounded three in the morning.

And suddenly I felt that somebody was standing right behind me. Startled, I turned around. It was Fr. Nathaniel, staring intently up into the starry heavens. Then he asked thoughtfully: “What do you think about the main principle of communism?”

Not waiting to hear any answer, Fr. Nathaniel continued as thoughtfully as he had begun: “The main principle of communism is ‘from each according to his capabilities, to each according to his needs.’ But who is going to decide what each person’s capabilities or needs are? Probably it’ll be some commission as usual. But what kind of commission? Probably a ‘troika’ (that is, a group of three judges carrying out the Party’s will). So they will summon me and say, ‘All right, Nathaniel, what are your capabilities? You can chop twenty cubic meters of wood per day. And what are your needs? A bowl of gruel. There.’ That is their main principle.”

His Spirituality

Although Fr. Nathaniel always tried as hard as he could to stress that he was no more than a dry and stern ecclesiastical bureaucrat, even we novices after a while began to grasp that his modesty carefully concealed his considerable spiritual gifts. This modesty was something, by the way, that all the real monks in the monastery were endowed with. Our Father Treasurer had never become an official spiritual father in our monastery. Only a very few elderly people from the town of Pechory (or from even remoter regions, in the case of a few old-timers) ever came to say their confessions to him. Except for these few, he would not accept anyone else as his spiritual child, and would claim that he was not up to such a thing.

But once, for a brief moment he slightly opened up a priceless part of his own soul—although he once again immediately hid it, with his usual curmudgeonly strictness.

It happened when I made a mistake in performing one of my tasks. It seems I had been unforgivably casual in doing my duties. As a punishment for this, the Father Superior of the monastery himself had assigned me for three days to sweep away the snow from the entire area of Dormition Square. At this, I became considerably annoyed—especially because snow just kept coming down. By the third day I wasn’t just tired, but bone tired. I could barely drag one foot in front of another. I felt so sorry for myself that I took out my anger on the entire world, and was even beginning to nurse a plan for revenge. Of course, what sort of revenge can a novice take on the abbot of the monastery? Nonetheless, as with my last bit of strength I lifted up my shovel, I tenderly nursed within myself the following imaginary scene: the abbot would be walking past me on his way to dinner in the refectory and

would sarcastically ask me, as he saw me shoveling snow:

“Well, how are you doing?”

And here I would answer cheerfully and casually as if I hadn’t been doing hard convict’s labor these past three days:

“Never better, Father Superior!” Then he would know that I was not broken so easily!

This little scene of terrible revenge began to so truly warm my heart that even amidst my weariness during the ceaseless snowfall I began to feel significantly more cheerful. And when Fr. Nathaniel passed by I even smiled at him, hoping for a blessing in return. His reply was a wry grin and a surprisingly gentle sign of the cross, as if warding off evil. I bowed to kiss his hand and suddenly heard his reproachful voice.

“So, you say, ‘Never better, Father Superior—thanks to your prayers?’”

I bent over in shock as if paralyzed with arthritis. When I finally dared to lift up my eyes to the elder, I noticed him looking at me with undisguised irony. However, noticing my fear, he then added with genuine kindness: “Have a care, young Georgiy, remember: Sarcasm and defiance never brought up

anyone to virtue.”

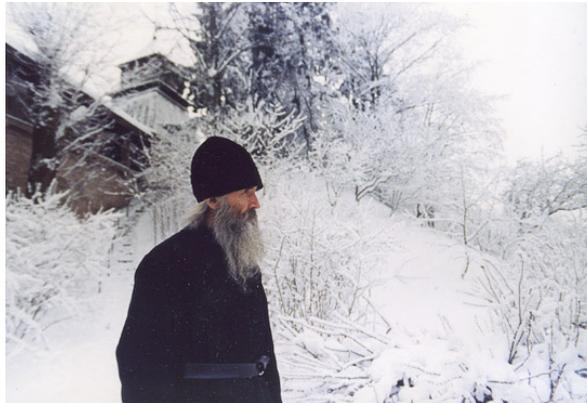
Lifting up his old sack full of one million rubles in cash, or perhaps just moldy old bread crumbs, he scraped along through the bitter frost and snow towards the main campus of the monastery. I was left standing with my mouth open. And you could only see how at each step the torn shoe sole of our Treasurer was flapping open.

Oh! He was a real Scrooge! Except that he was a saint. As one very respected elder of the Church in St. Petersburg said once: “Spending one year in the Pskov Caves Monastery is the same thing as spending fifty years in some seminary or theological academy.” Of course, whether we really learned our lessons—that is another, and to be honest, sometimes far more bitter question.

His Fiscal Astuteness

Fr. Nathaniel truly was, a man of legendary miserliness. Not only did he literally quiver over every last kopeck (penny) belonging to the monastery, but with a fury he would turn out any electric lights which he felt had no purpose to be lit, and would perpetually save water, gas, tea, biscuits, and indeed just about anything that could be scrimped and saved.

He was also an absolute stickler for the upkeep of the age-old rituals, as vital to the survival of the monastery as the upkeep of the buttresses and foundations of the medieval buildings of the monk’s hermitages. He absolutely could not abide, for example, if any of our brotherhood ever went on vacation; he could not and would not accept it. He himself, of course, throughout all his fifty-five years of residence in



the monastery, never once in his life took a single day off. I do remember one time when our abbot gave his blessing to one monk who wished to take some time off for summer vacation. Well... that is, he gave his blessing. However, he instructed the poor hapless monk who had received it to go get money for his journey from our Treasurer. I happened to witness the scene.

It began with this monk who was planning to take off for vacation knocking for a long, long, long time at the door of the cell of Father Nathaniel, and receiving no answer. Our Treasurer, having understood right away what the matter was, simply hid, and didn't open the door. At this point the young priest decided to wait the Treasurer out. He sat down on a bench outside and began to wait. Four hours later, Father Nathaniel, with a wary glance around him, sneaked out onto the square. He was immediately overtaken by the young priest, who showed him the written blessing of the abbot to give him money for his journey.

When he saw the paper, Fr. Nathaniel froze as if he was being murdered, and then with a shriek collapsed onto the floor, nervously jerking his arms and legs towards the sky. At this the soles of his tattered shoes flapped open, and the holes in his weather-beaten long johns underneath his cassock were visible. He then began to scream: "Help, help, help! Robbery! Thieves! They want money! For vacation! Oh! They're tired of the monastery! Tired of the Mother of God! Help, help, help! Robbery! Thieves!"

The poor priest was so shocked he couldn't stand up, and so squatted back down. Various foreign tourists who were in the square froze in amazement. Utterly horrified, the poor young priest dashed off to his cell. Meanwhile, the wise Father Superior, as he observed this scene from his window, watched with a very contented smile indeed.

But we always received particular pleasure whenever we were given the task of helping Fr. Nathaniel in guiding excursions around the monastery. Generally, he was entrusted with taking extremely important people around the grounds. Our tasks as novices only involved opening and closing doors, and sometimes opening and unlocking the heavy church doors on the watchtowers and cathedrals. All the rest of the time we would just listen to Father Nathaniel.

And there was plenty to listen to. Fr. Nathaniel eloquently carried on the tradition inherited from his teacher, the great Archimandrite Alipius, retired abbot of the monastery, who had defended it throughout years of persecution with unquenchable faith in God. Father Alipius's gift of wise, if sometimes mercilessly accurate, words had been inherited by Father Nathaniel.

In those atheistic years, the Soviet bureaucrats who visited the monastery were itching for any excuse to close it down: any sign of insanity, illness, psychological inadequacy, just about anything or anyone would have served except what

they actually found: unique but extremely interesting, erudite scholars, remarkably daring and internally free men who actually knew far more about life than anything of which their guests had the least inkling. Within a few minutes the tourists generally realized that they had never met such men in their entire lives.

Once in 1986 the Party bosses of the province of Pskov brought some big shot from the Ministry of Transportation to the monastery. He was actually a surprisingly calm and decent fellow. For example, he didn't ask idiotic questions about where the monks' wives live. And he wasn't interested in asking us how it was that Yuri Gagarin had flown into space and hadn't seen God there. But in the end, after spending two hours with Father Nathaniel, this bureaucrat, being impressed by his new acquaintance, could not help himself:

"Listen! I'm amazed talking to you! I don't think I've ever met such an interesting and unusual man in my entire life! But forgive me—how can you with your intelligence possibly believe in... I mean, after all, science keeps opening newer and newer horizons for humanity! And all without God! The fact is there is no need for him. This year Halley's Comet will be approaching us. And the scientists have totally been able to calculate its orbit and its speed and its trajectory. And for this, forgive me, absolutely no concept of God is needed!"

"Halley's Comet, you say?" Fr. Nathaniel rubbed his beard. "You mean to say that if it's possible to calculate the orbit of a comet, that makes God unnecessary? Hmm! Just imagine this then: put me by a railroad and give me a piece of paper and a pencil. Within a week of observation I will be able to tell you exactly when and in what direction the trains will be running. But does that mean that there are no conductors, no dispatchers, no station workers, and no minister of transportation even? Of course not! Everything needs direction."

His Repose

Difficult Fr. Nathaniel died with remarkable peace and tranquility. When the cardiologist suggested giving him a pacemaker, he begged the Father Superior not to allow it.

"Father, just imagine," he said, "my soul wishes to go to God, but some tiny electric gadget is violently forcing my soul involuntarily back into my body! Let my soul go, now that its time has come!"

I had the happiness of visiting Fr. Nathaniel not long before his demise, and was amazed by the ceaseless goodness and love now pouring out of that elder. Rather than hoarding the very last ounces of his strength, this incredibly miserly (in all other aspects of his life) and dry ecclesiastical pedant gave the very last ounce of himself to whatever person who, even for a few minutes, had been sent to him by the Lord God. Actually, come to think of it, this is how he had lived his entire life. Only we hadn't understood it at the time.

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THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

By Metropolitan Meletios of Nikopolis and Preveza (†2012).

Once, in a certain Russian monastery, as Staretz Sampson tells us, a monk remembered that, during the Divine Liturgy, he was told to sweep the entrance of the Monastery's Katholikon very well. "I might as well do it now," he thought, "since this part of the Divine Liturgy is not as important." Therefore, the monk took the broom and started sweeping. He was saying the *Jesus Prayer* silently and in a noetic way, and from time to time, he would watch that which was being served.

Not even five minutes had gone by when he turned to look up to see the domes of the Church (like the ones in Russia) suddenly opening and the *Triumphant Church* appearing with all its majesty before him: it was an awesome sight! In the center, there was a Holy Table as big as the sky. In front of it, three Archpriests were on their knees. Many others surrounded them and a multitude of priests and deacons surrounded the former. On the right and left sides Angelic choirs were standing in indescribable and glistening beauty.

There was inexpressible glory and light... Moreover, the thousands of honey-flowing, inconceivable melodies of the Heavenly Commanders who were present filled him with divine blessedness and joy. A heavenly Divine Worship was being ministered! Nevertheless, it was being ministered in a strange way, which

resembled the Divine Liturgy on earth. It was ministered by Holy Hierarchs, such as, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory the Theologian and Saint John Chrysostom (three). Like, Saint Athanasius the Great, Saint Photius the Great and Saint Gregory Palamas (three). Alternatively, like Saint Nicholas, Saint Spyridon and Saint Nektarios (three).

Yet there, in the heavenly Triumphant Church of Jerusalem Above, they received Holy Communion. He saw that they were partaking, in a never-ending way, of the glory and the uncreated triune light, of the *ambrosia* of divine blessedness, of the cup of God's ineffable mysteries...

The monk remained motionless, rooted to the spot until the Divine Liturgy had been completed. When the monks exited the Church, they saw him and he was still standing motionless; he was rooted to that spot and in floods of tears. Not only was he wet inside out but also his cloak was soaking from the unstoppable flood of tears.

Very carefully, they took hold of him and without saying a word; they brought him very gently to his cell where he remained for a long time in a state of total amazement; divine revelation had overwhelmed him. When he recovered, his Spiritual father also arrived. The latter brought him round from all the weeping he went through and then they went together to the Abbot of the Monastery to whom they narrated the monk's exceptional divine vision with a sense of awe and extreme humility.

