

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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PEACE FROM GOD, CHRIST IS BORN!

By the saintly Serbian Patriarch Pavle of blessed memory (+2009); his 1999 Nativity epistle to the Serbian flock.

Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

[Jn 6:68]



Persons and events come and go with the relentless march of time. That which today seems important and crucial may be completely forgotten tomorrow. Persons regarded by their contemporaries as influential and powerful are forgotten, as if they had never existed. History brings and then carries, it concocts and then abandons to oblivion. Everything appears temporary and relative, even us.

Man can carry on in various ways with the pessimism of history, but it is far more important how God sees history. God, by His constant presence and action in history and through what appears as a meaningless course of events, prepares the way that leads toward a pre-determined goal. By His entering into history He has transformed history so that particular events are not relative and temporary; on the contrary, they are unique, un-repeatable and of crucial importance both for God and for man. God's presence in history thus cures

history itself of its natural, perpetual pessimism.

And precisely today, here and now, for the two thousandth time we celebrate and remember the event that divides history in two; the event so significant that we count the years from it as we now complete the second millennium. Two thousand years have passed since that night when history's greatest miracle took place in that cave near Bethlehem, when the Son of God Himself came and put on flesh and became like one of us: *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* (Jn 1:14). He is none other than the eternal and uncreated Son, the Word or *Logos* of God, through Whom all things were made. Since that night nothing in human life and history is as it was before. The *Sun of Righteousness* (Mal 4:2) was born to us and all the depths of human fallenness and struggle against God have been filled by His warmth and light. From that night on, all human life and the history of every nation comes down to only one dilemma, to one simple question: Are you for or against Christ? One simple question, but a question so crucial that our entire life and the future of our people hinges upon it. That question overshadows and defines every historical period of the past twenty centuries.

For or against Him? Earlier periods that were "for Christ" (at least for the most part) brought forth fruit that stands as an example and a starting point for all times. That fruit is called Christian culture. It represents an attempt to Christianize every segment of

The staff of "Orthodox Heritage" and the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wish our readers a blessed Nativity season and a healthy and prosperous New Year. As we complete our twelfth year of publication, we wish to thank our supporters for their prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support. We remind our readers that this periodical is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2014-2015 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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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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personal, social and national life, so that nothing remains outside or apart from Christ. We call it an attempt, since nothing in history is absolute and final. But the value is truly in the deeply Christian attempt, since a basic characteristic of Christianity is its all-inclusiveness—that *Christ be all in all*. (1 Cor 15:28).

Let us simply remember how the writer of the life of the Serbian ruler Stefan Lazarevic said of him; he had wished that “life throughout his land truly be like the Church of God.” The fruits of life directed in this way are magnificent. Christianity was poured into the everyday way of life. It Christianized every soul and created the atmosphere in which all personal and social life developed. No matter what area of life in that period we examine, we always find at its core a Christian vision and understanding of life and the world. It was an inexhaustible source of vitality and, most importantly, optimism for the age that declared itself *for Christ*. Even the tragedies that occurred, such as our Kosovo, could take on a Christian character in the national consciousness.

Historical periods cannot be repeated, neither can models from the past be transplanted into the present. But what remains as an example for all times is the creative effort to base all of life on Christ, so that there are no spheres of life or activities that honor laws or rules other than Christian ones. Epochs that were *for Christ* well understood His words that *no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*. (Mt 6:24). But then come dark times, times that struggle against God and Christ, regardless of whether they come from conquering foreign peoples or from the actions of our own people. The goals and methods are always the same: Kill Christ in the souls of the people, throw Him out of every area of life, and

erect and proclaim new “gods.” In every such time Christians answered in the same way: with their blood. In such times the history of the whole Church, as well as of our Serbian Orthodox Church, is written in blood. From Kosovo to Jasenovac all the martyrs and new-martyrs witnessed that there is no life without Christ, and they did not fear those who could kill only their bodies but could not harm their souls. Their blood is our foundation, and we are accountable to it, that we not betray Christ even at the price of our lives, much less for our positions or careers. Their blood will be the measure of our salvation.

For or against Christ? On the basis of this yardstick, how can we grade the century we are leaving behind? Wars and a whole ocean of spilled blood. Suffering and misfortunes characterize the past century, but its grade can be summed up in only one word—failure. So much war, so much blood, and so little peace. Even the peace we did have during the past hundred years was not really peace, since we used those times to create the groundwork for new conflicts and wars. Governmental and ideological adventurism during the twentieth century cost the Serbian Church and people dearly. And in the end, what is left is that we are beginning the new century and the new millennium in a state of total crisis. Many are the names and characteristics of the crises in which we find ourselves, but fundamentally what we have is that deepest and most difficult of all possible crises—the crisis of humanity. Wrong has become right for us, falsehood has become truth, and we can only cry out with the Psalmist David, *Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbor; with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak*. (Pss 12:1-2).

The twentieth century constantly preached with the lips of its demonic “wisdom” that human lives are the cheapest of

all merchandise. In the number of its victims it far surpassed all other centuries of human history. The tyrannies to which it gave rise have nothing comparable in any other time of history. The ideological dictatorships which arose during this time, especially in Orthodox countries, were unprecedented attacks on human freedom and human life. In the name of ideologies millions lost their lives simply because they wished to think and live differently.

What is man, and what is he worth? The twentieth century said that man is nothing, but this feast today tells us, just as that day two thousand years ago told us, that **man is sacred**. And that applies not only to his spirit or his soul, but also to his body. **The whole of man, body and soul together, is an inviolable shrine of incalculable and eternal worth.** Today's feast tells us this, the day on which the Bodiless becomes embodied and on which the Son of God becomes the Son of man. This precisely is what is radically new in our faith. That the soul is holy is suggested by other religions, but that the body is equally sacred is found nowhere else. During the whole first eight centuries of Christianity, which were characterized by struggles against heresies, the Church unyieldingly defended this truth: that the whole of man, both body and soul, is holy. And that applies to every human being, regardless of his religion or nationality. Every murder, every disrespect for human personality and freedom, is sin, even more so when it is justified on ideological or nationalistic grounds.

In contrast to this dismal picture of the twentieth century, today we see before us a young mother holding her newly-born Child to her bosom, and are moved to feel one of the greatest of human virtues and attributes: a warm heart. The motherly love of the Most Holy Theotokos permeates today its entire event and radiates a warm feeling within us. **Christmas is the feast of warmth and of warm human hearts.** If it seems that there is no place today a person can "warm" himself, it is because human hearts have grown cold. They have become hard and unfeeling even towards the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters who in recent years have been left homeless, exiled from their birthplaces, and some even without their loved ones. That life is hard is not the exception but the rule. Only the twentieth century has brought the simple-minded dream that life should be easy and leisurely, which it never has been throughout history. *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground* the Lord tells Adam (Gen 3:19), and that is the law of human life. But afflictions and difficulties and limitations are easier to bear when we have warmth in us and amongst us. For in the day of His second coming, the Lord will not ask us what kind of times we lived in, but how we related to

our neighbor. Was he our "hell" or our "heaven?" We ourselves build either heaven or hell in our own hearts out of the momentary circumstances we are given, and the warmth of the human heart is able to transform any situation, even to make a cave in Bethlehem the most beautiful palace and birthplace of the King of kings.

It is hard to be a human being. To be a human being who spreads human warmth is even harder, but it is a task to which we are suited and which the Lord Himself has entrusted to us—to be human even in inhuman times. Let us look around us. See how many families are governed by coldness, where there is no more love and which are disintegrating. There are more and more such families. See how many ties of kinship, neighborliness, friendship and *kumstvo* (godparenthood, *Ed.*) have been broken and enveloped in coldness. We will be completely immobilized by the ice of discord and intolerance, of disunity and envy, if we do not bring Christ into our hearts and especially into the hearts of our children. He is the only One able to bring together the disunited and reconcile the alienated, to warm our hearts and give peace to our lives.

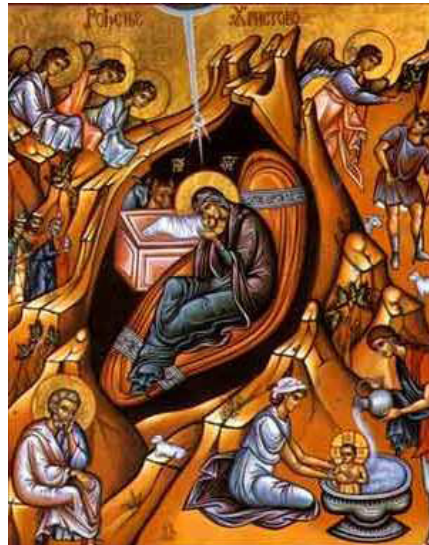
So what is to be done now, in the new century and new millennium? We pose this question to ourselves. We pose this question to our brothers throughout the world who care about us. The future is hidden and unknown. There are many roads before us, but they are not all the right roads. Some of them lead to destruction. But the future which lies before us is not simply something we must await, but it is a road we, first of all, must construct. We are responsible for our future no less than for our past. It is revealed to us as a possibility which we must responsibly and consciously create. And overshadowing the future is the same question we have already asked: For or against Christ?

If the Lord has not revealed the near future to us, leaving it up to us to create it, He has revealed to us the final and ultimate truth—that no matter what, He will triumph. He revealed that good is far stronger than evil, and that every triumph of evil is temporary and illusory. The weeds and the wheat grow together, but only until the harvest. Are we for or against Christ? This is the question that will determine both our future and the future of all nations.

As we gather here today around the Divine Infant Christ celebrating His birth, we hope and we pray to Him that He will be reborn in our hearts, in our neighbors, in our people and our country, and in the hearts of all people and nations.

Peace from God. Christ is Born!

Patriarch PAVLE, Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade
Christmas, 1999



THE BIRTH AND BAPTISM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from Vol. 2 of "Empirical Dogmatics."



When we talk about the birth of Christ we are speaking of two births. One is the pre-eternal birth of the Word from the Father, according to the divine nature, and the other is the birth in time from the All-Holy Virgin, according to the human nature. This refers to Christ's two natures: the divine and the human.

The important thing is that this Word, before His birth in the flesh, is like the Father in every respect. He does not come from nothing. The Word has two births. One birth was before all ages and the other birth was in time, which is the birth as a man, the incarnation. This theological fact is revelational and above all it is empirical, as the glorified flesh of Christ becomes a source of life for the members of the Church, particularly the saints.

It is not only the Old and New Testaments that clearly teach the fact that the Word, the Lord of Glory, Who is God by nature and co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father, truly took flesh and was born in His own normal and separate humanity of the Virgin Mary—who is literally, really and truly the Theotokos or Mother of God. Thus He became man by nature, not just by indwelling, and, as the Word in flesh, He became co-essential with us through His humanity. This truth is clearly revealed to all who have reached *glorification* (*theosis*), from which they learn empirically that Christ is the Word, that He is God by nature and man by nature, and also by nature the source of glory. He passes on to His human nature the existence of the source of glory, by means of which the actual flesh of the Word becomes the source of our life and life-giving; this is because the Word Himself is incarnate, and also because of the union and exchange of natural properties between the divine and human natures of the Word.

In the Old Testament there was the tabernacle of witness, where the pot of manna, the tablets of the covenant and Aaron's rod were kept in the Holy of Holies. Now, in the New Covenant, the tabernacle is the flesh that He took from the All-Holy Virgin. This is why the statement that *the Word became flesh and dwelt* (literally: *tabernacled*) *among us* (Jn 1:14) is so important. This dwelling is the tabernacle. God *tabernacled* among us. How? He became flesh and dwelt among us.

The tabernacle of witness is the created form of the uncreated Temple, because the uncreated Temple is Christ Himself, the Word, this Angel of the Lord. For that reason Christ says, *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me* (Jn 14:10-11) and so on. That Christ is in the Father and the Father is in Christ means, in Hebrew terms, that Christ is the Temple of God. So we have the uncreated Temple, as we have the uncreated Law, which is Christ; and we have a created temple, which is the tabernacle of witness, which they later enclosed in Solomon's temple. This is why the created temple, the temple of Solomon, has been abolished and replaced by the created Temple, the human nature of Christ.

Christ as God-man is like God the Father and the Holy Spirit in every respect according to His divinity, and like man in every respect according to His human nature. The phrase that Christ is *the image of the invisible God* (Col. 1:15) refers to His uncreated divine nature.

This is exactly what the Apostle Paul says in the characterization of *the image of the invisible God*, Christ, that is. When he says *image* he does not mean something created, because there cannot be a created image of God. It is different if we speak about an image of Christ; in that case we have an image of something created, because Christ is man and we have an icon of Christ the man, not of Christ's divinity. But when we say that Christ is the image of God, as God is not incarnate, how can God have a created icon? He is the image of the invisible God as an uncreated reality, not as a created reality.

The incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was in the pre-eternal plan of God, because through the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of the Word, the *glorification* of every human being could come about. From this perspective, the Theotokos was in God's pre-eternal plan. St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain wrote a specific text about our Lady the Theotokos, in which, by quoting the Fathers' words, he asserts that *All the intelligible and perceptible world came into being for this end, that is, on account of the Lady Theotokos, but the Lady Theotokos came into being on account of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The All-Holy Virgin is in the pre-eternal plan of God, as the troparia and the Fathers of the Church say. This is a matter of description. It is not a philosophical question about whether or not the All-Holy Virgin is necessary for the incarnation. It is a fact that the All-Holy Mother of God is ever-virgin. We cannot philosophize about something that is a fact and say that the incarnation could have come about even without the All-Holy Virgin, or from a Mother of God who was not a virgin.

The All-Holy Virgin was the greatest gift of the creation and humanity to Christ. The successive purifications of her forebears, her own struggle and, most of all, the grace of God, made her worthy to become the Mother of the

Son and Word of God. She experienced *glorification* in the Holy of Holies. We know from the Tradition about the *glorification* of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of *glorification*. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God.

Christ is co-essential (*homoousios*) with the Father according to His divine nature and co-essential with us according to His human nature. Some people in the early Church claimed that Christ was co-essential with the Father and with His Mother. He cannot be co-essential with His mother and His mother co-essential with us, without Christ being co-essential with us.

The Church ruled at the Third Ecumenical Council that the All-Holy Virgin was to be called Theotokos, because she did not give birth to a mere man, but to the Word of God. The teaching about the Theotokos is therefore included in the infallible teaching of the Church. Furthermore, the Theotokos occupies a position of utmost importance in the Church. In the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church the whole catholic Church is present: Christ with the Theotokos, the Prophets, the Apostles and the saints.

The faithful have a spiritual relationship with the Church. Anyone who loves Christ also loves the All-Holy Virgin, who assisted in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God and from whom Christ took human nature and glorified it. The relationship of the faithful with the All-Holy Virgin is not, therefore, simply sentimental but spiritual. Furthermore, the glory of the Theotokos is not a theoretical teaching, but empirical, as many saints have seen the glory of the Theotokos.

In any case, the human nature that was assumed by the Word and united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the divine nature, was glorified *at the same time as it was assumed* in the womb of the Theotokos. Christ was not gradually perfected, as human beings are. Christ is God according to essence, whereas man is glorified according to participation. Also, according to the Fathers of the Church, Christ brings about *glorification*: He is Himself the source of man's *glorification* and does not "undergo" *glorification*. Christ is God and glorifies others,

like the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas man is glorified. Christ revealed this glorified human nature to human beings by stages.

There is no question of Christ having passed through the stages of *perfection*, *purification* and *illumination* in order to reach *glorification* or *theoria*. There was no progress towards perfection in Christ, since He had *glorification* or *theoria* or participation in the union of uncreated glory from the very conception of His human nature in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin. He did not possess this by the grace of God, but naturally, seeing that He was God by nature and the actual hypostasis of the Word, Who was the only one of the Holy Trinity to become man by nature, uniting Himself with His own normal human nature, with all its natural properties, including the will and energy that are common to human nature in general.

Christ gradually revealed the stages of perfection in Himself (in other words, the *glorification* of human nature in Himself) to set an example to those who are on the way to perfection. He assumed everything that was common to human nature (except sin) not in external appearance, as the Docetists claimed, in order to delude those observing His human life, but in reality.

After the incarnation of the Word, exactly the same method of revelation and *glorification* that took place with the Prophets is repeated with the Apostles. The difference now is that the Word reveals Himself in the natural and uncreated glory of His nature, which is shared with the Father and the Holy Spirit, by means of His own humanity. This humanity did not advance towards the continuous vision of divine glory, but was glorified through its union—not by grace but by nature—with the Word from the beginning of its existence in the womb of the Theotokos.

Christ did not progress as a human being towards *glorification*, but was conceived as a glorified man, not by virtue of the union that the saints experience with the divine nature, but by virtue of the one unique natural or hypostatic union with the divine nature and energy. Thus Christ, as man, participates by nature in the divine glory and is the natural source of this glory. The *glorification* of the Prophets, Apostles and saints is a union by grace with the natural glory and energy of the divine nature, but the *glorification* of the human nature of the Word is its hypostatic union with God the Word and the resultant union with the divine nature. All glorified creatures see the divine glory and share in it. Only Christ, because He



is the Word by nature, sees and participates by nature in the divine essence.

The saints understand this from their experience. When they reach *glorification*, the *theoria* of Christ's glory in His human nature, they realize that Christ is the source of the uncreated Light, whereas they themselves are participants in the Light. The fact that Christ was perfect from the beginning was made clear on many occasions, even during His struggle with the devil. In Christ this state of perfection was natural and not acquired. For that reason **His struggle with the devil in the wilderness and His forty-day fast were not an achievement but a manifestation of perfection.** At the same time it was a real fight with temptations, not from within but from the devil.

Christ voluntarily assumed the passible and corruptible aspects of human nature because He really took flesh. However, the so-called *blameless* or natural passions—hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep—did not act in Christ by compulsion. Christ's divine nature had authority over them. So Christ was hungry when He wished to be, thirsty when He wished to be, slept or rested when He wished to. The saints understand this to some extent from their experience. They too, when they reach *glorification* according to grace, observe a suspension of the natural and blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and so on. In Christ this happened naturally because He was true God, and the human nature followed the divine nature.

The incarnate Word not only possesses the state of *theoria* naturally, not by grace, but even as man He Himself is the natural source of *glorification* and glory. If some of the natural and blameless passions are suspended in those who by grace are in a temporary state of *glorification*, how much more must those passions have no natural place in Christ, Who is glorified by nature and the source of *glorification* as man.

So one can see why it is a basic doctrine of the Orthodox Church that the Word as man wants to have the natural and blameless human passions, and really to share in them, transforming them into a source of our salvation and a means by which we ourselves can overcome the devil and pass through the stages of *purification* and *illumination* on our way to *glorification*. On the one hand these passions are a result of the Fall, but at the same time, through the glory of the Cross, they become the source of our salvation, perfection and *glorification*, and the means by which the devil is defeated and destroyed. Paradoxically, the devil is destroyed by means of the very passions by which he attempts to destroy man. The most basic weapon with which Satan tries to destroy human beings is death, but through death Christ and the saints destroy the devil.

It should be noted at this point that the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is present everywhere in

the world according to energy but not according to essence. The God-man Christ, however, is absent from the world according to His essence as Word, but *the human nature of Christ is everywhere present according to essence*, by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. This issue is linked with the teaching about the essence and energy of God, but also about the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

The foundation of this teaching is the actual experience of *glorification*. These distinctions that the Fathers of the Church make are not the outcome of philosophical speculation. They know from the experience itself that in the experience of *glorification* the one who is glorified is united with God according to energy.

At Christ's Baptism in the River Jordan, John the Forerunner was accounted worthy to experience the Triune God: *And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* (Mk 1:9-11).

For the Forerunner, at least for the day of the Baptism, this is the experience of *glorification*. When he saw the heavens opened and so on, this means that he had a revelation of the uncreated glory of Christ. That is also why we sing in the troparion of the Feast of Theophany that *the Holy Trinity was revealed* in the Baptism. How is the Holy Trinity revealed in the Baptism? Through the manifestation of the glory of God, which is the experience of *glorification* for John the Baptist.



Let anger be stilled for it disturbs peace and tranquility. This is the day in which God descended to sinners! Let the righteous man be ashamed to exalt himself over sinners. This is the day when the Lord of creation came to servants! Let the master of the house humble himself in similar love to his servants. This is the day on which the Wealthy One became poor for our sake! Let not the rich be ashamed to share their table with the poor.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

The incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

St. Athanasius the Great

IN MEMORY OF FR. JOHN ROMANIDES (+11/1/2001)

By Protopresbyter George Metallinos, Dean of the Athens University School of Theology.

One of the most significant Orthodox theologians of the 20th century and a revivalist of our theology who strived to restore it to the genuineness of Patristic tradition, the Protopresbyter Father John Romanides was escorted by all of us—his friends, his colleagues and his students—to our eternal and true Homeland.

On behalf of the Department of Theology of the Athens University School of Theology and its President Mr. Demetrios Gonis, I was given the honor of offering a few words of love, respect and honor to the Great Colleague, who was en route to the “higher realms.”

The deceased himself had revealed in one of his rare self-introductions the following:

“My parents came from the Roman city of Kastropolis of Arabessus of Cappadocia, birthplace of the Roman Emperor Mauritios (582-602), who had appointed Saint Gregory the Great (590-604) as Pope of Rome, who in turn appointed Augustine as the first Archbishop of Canterbury (597-604).

I was born in Piraeus on 02/03/1927. I left Greece and migrated to America on the 15th of May 1927 (just 72 days old) with my parents and was raised in the city of New York, in Manhattan, on 46th Street, between Second and Third Avenue.

I am a graduate of the Hellenic College of Brookline, Massachusetts, the School of Theology of Yale University, a Doctor of the School of Theology of the National Capodistrian University of Athens, the School of Philosophy of Harvard University (School of Arts and Sciences); Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki and Visiting Professor of the Theological School of Saint John the Damascene of the Balamand University of Lebanon since 1970.”

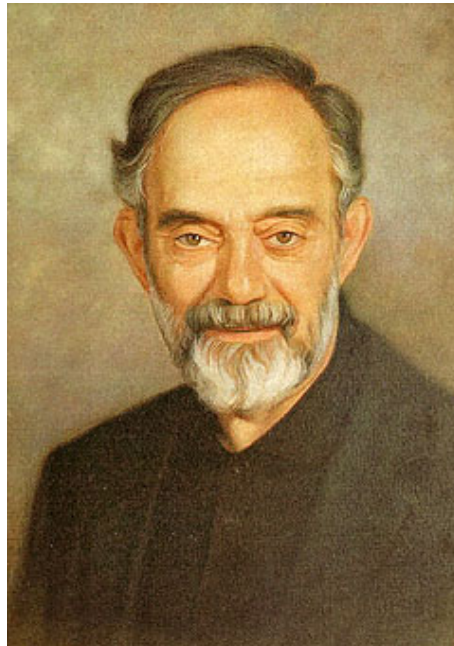
To these we will add that he also studied at the Russian Seminary of Saint Vladimir in New York; the Russian Institute of Saint Sergius in Paris and Munich, Germany. He was ordained a presbyter in 1951 and from then on, was ministering in various dioceses of the United States of America. Between the years 1958 and 1965 he served as a professor in the Theological School of the Holy Cross, but

resigned in 1965, protesting against the removal of Father George Florovsky from the School.

His appointment to the Seat of Dogmatics in the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki took place on June 12th 1968, but he was not finally assigned there, because he was accused of being a “communist”!... His assignment finally took place in 1970. In 1984 he resigned for personal reasons, was given full pension, but it was not deemed appropriate to award him the title of Professor Emeritus—something that comes to reveal the dysfunctions of our theological comrades.

His Work

He had written a plethora of studies, many of which are still unpublished and should be published altogether, in a series of volumes. These relics must be safeguarded, because they have much to offer and reveal.



Fr. John Romanides
(1927-2001)

His doctorate dissertation on the “Ancestral Sin” which was a literary revolutionary treatise, opened new paths in our theology, followed by his equally significant books on Romanity in the area of History. Father John revived both these areas—of research and of understanding.

His work and his contribution to science have been systematically scrutinized in the doctorate dissertation of Andrew Sopko, “Prophet of Roman Orthodoxy—The Theology of John Romanides,” Canada, 1998.

Equally important was his participation and contribution in our Church, with his participation in the Theological Dialogues with heterodox participants, especially Anglicans, but with other religious representatives also (Judaism, Islam). The fact that his native tongue was

American (English) provided him the ease that he needed to expound with precision the positions of our Church. In the Dialogue with the Worldwide Lutheran Federation (1978), I had the opportunity to become better acquainted with him, and become close friends with him, and, more importantly for me, to truly become his student, beyond the extensive and continuous study of his works. In those Dialogues, his broad knowledge of the Patristic tradition became very apparent—along with the forgeries it had suffered both in the East and the West—and especially his knowledge of the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas, the cornerstone of Orthodox tradition.

Father John was a supporter of the association between theology and experience in the Holy Spirit, and the stages of the Saints’ spiritual course of *purification, illumination*

and *theosis* as prerequisites of the Ecumenical Synods and the wholehearted acceptance of them—something that has been discarded in the West—but also in our own, westernizing theological thought. This turn toward patristic mentality as a form of ecclesiastical genuineness was the continuation and the supplementing of the respective movement by Father George Florovsky, whose course he pursued in ecumenical dialogue, himself likewise becoming an annoyance and not easy to converse with. Some day, all of this will be put in writing, so that the outstanding character of the deceased will become apparent, along with his true contribution towards the international and ecumenical presence of Orthodoxy, even though he often kept to himself.

The Period Before and After Romanides

When reviewing his theological opus—educative, literary and militant—we are naturally compelled to refer to a pre-Romanides and post-Romanides era, because he introduced a real section and a rift in our scholastic past, which resembled a Babylonian captivity for our theology. His dissertation decisively sealed this revivalist course, to the degree that even those who for various reasons criticized or ideologically opposed him, betrayed in their writings the influence of Father John in their theological thought. Specifically, Father John:

(a) Reinstated the priority of patristic empirical theologizing in the academic theological arena, pushing aside the intellectual-meditative-metaphysical way of theologizing.

(b) He linked academic theology to worship and the patristic tradition of the *Philokalia*, proving the inter-embracing of theology and spiritual living, and the *poemantic* (shepherd-like, *Ed.*)-therapeutic character of dogmatic theology.

(c) He discerned and adopted in his theological method the close link between dogma and history, thanks to which, he was able to comprehend—as few could—the estrangement and the demise of theology in Western Europe, which came about with the Frankish occupation and imposition. Besides, his capable knowledge of history, Frankish and Roman (he was destined to be a History professor at Yale), helped him determine and analyze the diametric difference between the Frankish and the Roman civilizations with the introduction of Roman criteria for examining our history and civilization.

(d) He thus assisted in the comprehensive research of Hellenism as well, beyond the manufactured western scenarios, with his upright-to-absolutely-justified use of our historical names, their significance and their potential in the course of our history.

The Heterodox

It is a fact, that the heterodox acknowledged—more than we did—the personality of Father John and his significance to Orthodoxy. He was considered Augustine's finest Orthodox researcher, who even assisted western theology in

comprehending him, and was characterized as “most assuredly the greatest of the living Orthodox theologians, whose works comprise a critical study of Augustine's work in the light of Patristic Theology.” And it must be said, that we are indebted to Father John for his weighty assertion that the teachings of Barlaam of Calabria on the prophets' god-perceiving experiences being “natural phenomena, that can be done and undone” are derived from Augustine's treatise “On the Trinity.”

Respected and beloved Father John, your friends, your colleagues and co-spokesmen all express our gratitude, for everything that by the grace of God you gave us, as do the thousands of direct or indirect students also. We hold on to the theological trust that you left us, to be our rod in the darkness that calculation, ignorance, indifference and profit have spawned. You have united us with the patristic element within the realm of academic theology, by constantly urging us towards worship and ascetic exercise, where true theology is cultivated. We thank you!

May your remembrance be everlasting, until we meet again at the celestial altar, my beloved Colleague and Co-Minister.



Joy, not happiness. Happiness is a delusion of this world, a sickness of man's soul. To anticipate happiness in the next life is to expect to be in the condition we call “hell,” not heaven. The Church as a spiritual hospital has first and foremost to heal us of the happiness-seeking sickness of mankind which holds us in bondage to a delusion and prevents us from coming to a knowledge of Truth.

Protopresbyter John Romanides

It is hazardous to take older and more recent [Liturgical] editions and to draw conclusions about modifications and changes in practice. It would be wrong to take such an array of variations and to assemble one's own technique of serving, though one might quote precedents and give convincing arguments for each variation. It is necessary to understand these variations lest we become adamant about practices which have undergone change. It is important to study and to understand the history of liturgies that we might the better distinguish a variation from an innovation which is theologically incorrect, that we might avoid some of the changes one finds in recent editions which seem generated by nothing more than a striving after originality.

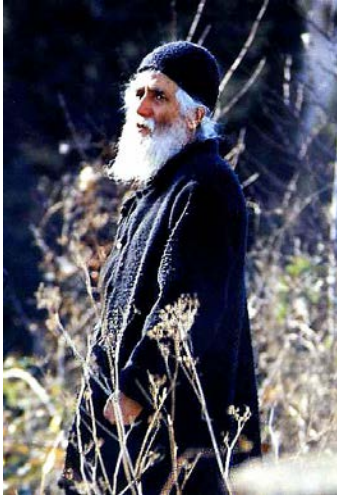
Hieromonk Justin the Sinaite

[*Librarian at St. Katherine's Orthodox Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt*]

SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE FAMILY

From the book "Family Life," by Elder Paisios the Athonite (Souroti, Greece: Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, 2002).

The Practice of Virtue within the Family



—Geronda, how can a husband become practiced in the virtues?

—God will give him opportunities. Many men, however, after asking God to give them opportunities to practice the virtues, grumble when they are faced with a certain difficulty. For example, sometimes the Good God, in His boundless love, and in order to provide practice in humility and patience, will take away His

Grace from the wife, and she will begin acting outlandishly and treating the husband inconsiderately. Then the husband should not complain, but rather rejoice and thank God for the opportunity to struggle which He has given him. Or, a mother asks God to grant her patience. Her little child then comes in, and as soon as she has the table set for dinner, he pulls on the table cloth and everything spills on the floor. At such times it's as if the child is saying to his mother: "Mama, be patient!"

In general, the difficulties which exist today in the world force those who desire to live a little spiritual life to be watchful. Just as, may God protect us, in a war the people are in a watchful state, I see the same thing happening now with whomever strives to live spiritually. Look how tough the poor children have it who are close to the Church! But the war, which exists because of the terrible environment in which they live, helps them, in a way, to stay awake. You see, in times of peace, when there are no difficulties, the majority of people slack off. Instead, they should utilize such serenity for spiritual growth, to cut off their shortcomings and cultivate the virtues.

Silence greatly helps in spiritual life. It is good for one to practice silence for about an hour a day: to test himself, to acknowledge his passions and to fight in order to cut them off and purify his heart. It is very good if there is a quiet room in the house which gives him the feeling of a monastic cell. There, *in secret* [Mt 6:4], he is able to do his spiritual maintenance, to study, and to pray. A little spiritual study done before prayer helps greatly. The soul warms up and the mind is transported to the spiritual realm. That's why, when a person has many distractions during the day, he should rejoice if he has ten minutes for

prayer, or even two minutes to read something, so as to drive away distractions.

—Geronda, is this perhaps too difficult for someone living in the world?

—No, there are laymen who live very spiritually—even like ascetics—with their fasting, their services, their prayer ropes, their prostrations—even with children and grandchildren. On Sunday they go to church, receive Holy Communion, and then return home again to their "cell," just like the hermits who go to the *Kyriakon* on Sunday, and afterwards keep silence in their cells. Glory to God! [*Kyriakon is the main church of a Skete, in which the ascetics from nearby cells gather on Sunday and feast days for common services. The name "Kyriakon" is derived from the Greek word for Sunday, "Kyriaki."*] There are many such souls in the world. As a matter of fact, I know a certain family man who says the Jesus prayer unceasingly, wherever he is, and has continuous tears at prayer. His prayer has become self-activating, and his tears are sweet; they are tears of divine rejoicing.

I also remember a certain worker on the Holy Mountain—Yanni was his name—who worked very hard, doing the work of two men. I had advised him to start saying the Jesus Prayer while working, and slowly but surely he grew accustomed to it. He came to me once and told me that he felt great joy when he said the prayer. *Dawn is breaking*, I told him. Soon after I learned he had been killed by two drunks. How saddened I was! A few days later a certain monk was looking for a tool, but he couldn't find it because Yanni had put it somewhere. That evening Yanni appeared to him in his sleep and told him where he had left it. He had attained such a spiritual state that enabled him to help others from the life hereafter.

How simple spiritual life is! If one loves God, if he acknowledges His great Sacrifice and benefactions and if he forces himself with discernment in imitating the Saints, he will quickly become holy. He attains humility and an understanding of his own wretchedness and his tremendous ungratefulness to God.

Prayer in the Family

—Geronda, should the entire family do compline together at night?

—The older family members should motivate the youngsters with their solemnity. They should do compline and say to the small children: "If you want, stay a little while." When the children are somewhat older they can have a rule—for example, fifteen minutes for the older ones, and two to five minutes for the young children—then after their rule, as much as they want. If the parents make them stay for all of compline they'll resent it. Parents shouldn't pressure their children because they don't yet understand the power and value of prayer. Parents, you could say, are able to eat beans and meat: hearty food. But when a little child

is still only drinking milk, should they tell him to eat meat because it is strengthening? Maybe it is more strengthening, but the poor thing can't even digest it. That's why starting out they should give him little pieces of meat and broth, so that he'll want more.

—Geronda, sometimes even the adults are so tired in the evening that they aren't able to do compline.

—When adults are very tired or sick they should say half of compline or at least one "Our Father." They should not completely bypass prayer. In wartime if you end up on a hill in the evening, surrounded by enemies, you let out a few shots to frighten the enemy, so they will not attack. Adults should also let out a few shots so as to scare the little demons away.

Prayer has great power within the family. I know two siblings who not only kept their parents—who had a big problem between them—from separating, but even caused them to be more in love.

With us, my father used to say: "You don't know what you're going to do? Two times each day you must entrust the future to God, so as to know where you'll end up." Each morning and evening we would all pray together before the icons, father, mother and the children, ending with a prostration before the icon of Christ. When a problem arose in the family we would pray and it would clear up. I remember once, when our youngest brother got sick and my father said: "Come, let's beg God to make him well or to take him, so that he won't suffer anymore." We all prayed together and he recovered.

Even at the table, we all sat together. First we prayed and then we would begin eating. If someone started to eat before the food was blessed we would say "he fornicated." We considered a failure to remain temperate as fornication. It destroys a family if each person comes home, at whatever hour he wants, and eats alone without reason.

Children and the Spiritual Life

—Geronda, if a mother gives holy water to her child and he spits it out, what should she do?

—She should pray for her child. Maybe the way in which she gives the holy water to her child causes a reaction. For the child to be on the path of God the parents must also live right spiritually. Some parents who are religious strive to help their children to become good, not because they are concerned for the salvation of their souls, but because they want to have good children. In other words, they are more worried about what people will say about their child instead of whether they might go to hell. So how can God help? The aim is not for children to go to church through compulsion, but to love the church; not to do good through compulsion, but to feel the need to do good. The holy lives of parents instruct the souls of their children and they naturally follow. In this way they grow up piously, with health of both soul

and body and without spiritual injuries. If parents force their children out of fear of God, He helps and the child is benefited. If, however, they do it out of egoism, then God does not help. Children are often troubled because of their parent's pride.

—Geronda, some mothers ask us what prayer should a child of three or four years old do?

—You should tell them: "You are the mother; see how much your child can handle." They shouldn't give them a rule.

—Geronda, what if the little children get tired when their parents bring them here for vigils?

—During Orthros they should let them out a little to relax, and during Divine Liturgy bring them back into the church.

Without forcing their children mothers must teach them to pray. Villagers in Cappadocia intensely lived the ascetic tradition. They would take their children to hermitages, do prostrations and pray with tears, and in this way, the children learned how to pray. Chetes [*primarily of Turkish and Kurdish descent, were irregular hordes of freed criminals who were organized into loose bands of "killing squads" in the Ottoman army. It was the Chetes who led the attack in the Armenian Genocide and Greek Population Exchange and became known as merciless and blood-thirsty outlaws whose number one joy was the screaming voices of violated women, children and dying Christians*] would sometimes go by night to rob them; and when passing the chapels they would hear crying and stop in surprise. "OK, what's going on?" they would say. "During the day they are all smiles and at night they cry?" They couldn't understand what was going on.

Miracles happen through the prayers of small children. Whatever they ask of God He gives them because they are guileless and He hears their pure prayer. I remember one time our parents had gone out into the field and had left me in the house with my two younger siblings. The sky suddenly darkened and a torrential rainstorm began. "What will our parents do now?," we said. "How will they get back home?" The two little ones began crying. "Come here," I told them, "we will ask Christ to stop the rain." The three of us knelt down before the family's icons and prayed. In just a few minutes the rain stopped.

Parents must use discernment to help their children draw near to Christ from their early years, and from their childhood to live the joy on high—spiritual joy. When they start school they should learn, little by little, to read spiritual books to help themselves live spiritually. In this way they will become little angels, and their prayers will have greater boldness before God. Such children are spiritual heads of the home. The lives of saints especially help small children in their spiritual lives. As a small boy I found a little book of the lives of saints which they had back in those days. I went out into the forest to read and pray. I was flying with joy.

From the age of ten to sixteen, when the Greek-Italian war began, I lived the spiritual life without restraint. Childhood joys are pure; they leave an imprint on a person that greatly affects him when he grows up. If children live spiritually they will live joyfully in this life, and in the next they will rejoice eternally with Christ.

Temptations on Feast Days

—Geronda, why do temptations often occur on feast days?

—Don't you know? On feast days, Christ, the Panaghia, and the Saints are joyful. They distribute spiritual treats to people, giving blessings and spiritual gifts. If parents give gifts when their children celebrate their name days and kings release prisoners when a prince is born, why shouldn't the Saints care for us on special occasions, too? Certainly the joy they give greatly endures and our souls are greatly helped. Knowing this the devil creates temptations in order to deprive people of the Divine gifts: they neither rejoice nor benefit from the feast. Sometimes you even see when a family is preparing to commune on a feast day, that the devil will send them a temptation to fight and then not only do they not commune, but they don't even go to church! That's how the little demon does it, so as to be deprived of all Divine help.

The same thing can be seen in our own monastic life. Many times the little demon—tempter that he is, because he knows from experience that we will be spiritually helped on some feast—will, beginning on the eve of the feast, create an atmosphere of temptation. For example, he might get us to quarrel with another brother, and then afterwards torment us in order to overpower us both spiritually and bodily. In this way he doesn't allow us to benefit from the feast, with its joyous atmosphere of doxology. But the Good God helps us when He sees that we had not given occasion, but that this happened only by the envy of the evil one. And God helps us even more when we humbly reproach ourselves, blaming neither our brother nor even the devil, who hates everything good. For his work is this: to create scandals and spread evil—while man, as the image of God, should spread peace and goodness.



The holy life of parents instructs the souls of their children, and so they naturally obey them and grow up with piety and without psychological problems; and the children are pleased with their parents. The parents are gladdened by their children in this life and in life eternal, where they will once again glory in them.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite, (+1994)

THE AIM OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

From Russian Orthodox Readings, 1990/2, a Moscow Patriarchate publication.

Acquire the Holy Spirit, and a thousand around you will be saved.

St. Seraphim of Sarov

† † †

Saint Seraphim was a great ascetic and wonderworker, but even more important for future generations was his teaching on the essence of the Christian life. Firmly based in the patristic tradition, this teaching emphasizes seeking communion with God as the true purpose of life for every Christian.

St. Seraphim demonstrated that everything else did nothing but offer the means for *acquiring the Holy Spirit*. He stressed that in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the oil which the ten foolish virgins ran out of is to be interpreted as the grace of the Holy Spirit. While engaging in external works of piety, these foolish virgins assumed that this was the essence of Christian life. They did not stop to think whether these acts were really pleasing unto God, whether they helped them gain the grace of the Spirit of God and made them worthy of this grace. In his teaching, St. Seraphim contrasted moralism with genuine spirituality. The Spirit is granted but it can also be taken away. To acquire it one must engage in spiritual struggle.

There is a profound message in St. Seraphim's spiritual counsels, his miraculous transformation in the presence of the young landowner Motovilov, and also in the fact that Motovilov's all-important first-hand account of this experience remained hidden from public view for seventy years. As Divine Providence would have it, his memoirs were recovered only in 1901. It was a time when many had begun to disregard the true purpose of Christian life. In his conversation with Motovilov the wise elder said: *The Lord has revealed to me that as a child you asked many people of high ecclesiastical rank of the purpose of Christian life, but none of them could give you a definite answer. They told you about going to church and praying to God, about abiding by His Commandments and doing good works. Some were even angry with you for your 'impious' questions...*

Thus, some regarded as impious inquisitiveness attempts to get an answer to the central problem facing every Christian. This shows that at that time most Russian Orthodox were preoccupied with the building of this world, confining Christianity to a subordinate role. Then came a time when many became disillusioned with the objectives of such worldly construction, and at that time the Lord reminded His people through His saint of the true purpose of their journey through this world.

Through Motovilov St. Seraphim gave a most important warning to mankind: *Good works bring the fruits of the Holy Spirit only if accomplished for the sake of Christ, because the Holy Spirit came into this world only for Christ's sake. And all manner of good works done for their own sake, and not for Christ, bring no grace of the Holy Spirit* (because all things that are void of faith are sinful).

In these words St. Seraphim reveals the mysteries of the Spirit, re-emphasizing the teaching of the Holy Fathers, such as St. Macarius the Great who called on men *to gain the Lord God the Holy Spirit*. In answer to his questions, Motovilov was told to *abide by God's Commandments and do good Works*, but St. Seraphim calls such answers into question, stressing that the external observance of the Commandments is only the means leading one to the encounter with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

St. Paul warned the Early Church, saying that *a man is not justified by the works of the law* (Gal 2:16). The Christian's ultimate objective is not to emulate the suffering Christ or engage in self-mortification but to gain the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of the personal covenant with God in the Holy Spirit, and this is why the Orthodox do not expect any third covenant or any third revelation to mankind. This revelation is achieved through his personal efforts to acquire the grace of the Spirit. Motovilov's utter perplexity in the face of these counsels indicates that he and his contemporaries had become oblivious of this primary Christian goal: the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

There are many good works to be accomplished in this world. The difficulty is that we cannot start doing them on our own accord, by emulating historical examples or

the lives of saints. One cannot embark on any important acts of faith or ascetic struggles without some Divine command. St. Seraphim warns that otherwise a person cannot really complain that his most well-intentioned efforts were of no avail.

Every person is assigned his or her own place in the Divine Plan, his personal path in Christ. For him this is the only true path upon which he is called by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Other men around him have their own ways in Christ. For God there can be no "inferior" or "superior" ways, but only personal ones. The spirit of competition, of trying to surpass others is most dangerous for the Christian, because then *he seeketh his own glory* (Jn 7:18). But he who really loves the Lord takes care not to offend Him by some willful acts, does not try to surpass others, but humbly admits himself to be the lowest of them all.

At the end of his conversation with Motovilov, St. Seraphim said, as if addressing all Orthodox believers: *"And you have no cause to doubt God's mercy, for you can see the words of God, spoken by the prophets, come true in yourself.. I am a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?"* (Jer 23:23).

Your salvation is in your own mouth. The Lord is near to them that call on Him in truth, and all we need is to have true filial love (love befitting a son or daughter, *Ed.*) for Him, our Heavenly Father. The Lord heeds equally the monk and layman, even the most "ordinary" Christian. All they must do is to love God from the bottom of their hearts, and have faith in Him *as a grain of mustard seed and they shall move mountains*. (Mt 17:20). These words of consolation echo in faithful hearts to this day, increasing our love and veneration of St. Seraphim.



**Christ is born; glorify Him!
Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!
Christ is on earth; be exalted!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!**



**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ,
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί·
ὅτι δεδόξασται!**

Χριστός Γεννάται, Δοξάσατε! Χριστός ἐξ Οὐρανῶν· Ἀπαντήσατε!

Τοῦ πρεσβυτέρου Ἀθανασίου Μηνᾶ, Δεκέμβριος 2013.

Τὸ Παράπονο τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας, ὅπως κατεγράφη στὸ κατὰ Λουκᾶν Εὐαγγέλιον: Ἄραγε, ὅταν θὰ ἔλθω, θὰ εὕρω τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; (Πλὴν ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔλθων ἄρα εὕρησει τὴν πίστιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; Λουκ. ιη', 8), πραγματώνεται στὶς ἡμέρες μας.

Με πόνο, ἀγιορεϊτὴς γέροντας, πρὶν λίγες ἐβδομάδες τόνισε μὲ νόημα τὰ ἑξῆς:

Σήμερα, οὔτε τὰ αὐτονόητα δὲν κηρύττουν καὶ δὲν ὁμολογοῦν, αὐτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι ἐντεταλμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ὀφείλουν νὰ τὸ κάνουν. Σίγησαν οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ συμβιβάσθηκαν. Ἀλλά, δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός, ποὺ στὶς ἔσχατες ἡμέρες μας, ἀναδεικνύει κάποιους ὁ Θεός, οἱ ὁποῖοι, εὐρισκόμενοι στὴν πρώτη γραμμὴ τοῦ πυρός, ὁμολογοῦν τὰ αὐτονόητα πάση θυσίᾳ. Ὡς καλοὶ ἀθλητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐφαρμόζουν πρῶτα οἱ ἴδιοι καὶ μετὰ διδάσκουν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τρεῖς βασικὲς ἐντολὲς Του:

1) **Πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν.** (Ματθ. κη', 19-20).

2) **Ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται.** (Μάρκ., ιστ', 16), καὶ,

3) **Ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ Πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ.** (Ἰωάν. γ', 5).

Οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι εἶναι οἱ πρῶτοι, ποὺ κατενόησαν σὲ ὄλο τὸ βάθος καὶ τὸ πλάτος τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Στὴ συνέχεια ἀγωνίσθηκαν καὶ θυσιάσθηκαν εἰς τέλος, δίνοντας τὸ παράδειγμα πρὸς μίμησην γιὰ ὅλους, ἀλλὰ ἰδιαίτερος γιὰ τοὺς Ἱερεῖς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος

Ἄς δοῦμε προσεκτικότερα τὴν ἀπολογία τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως Ἀγρίππα: **Ἐγὼ δὲ εἶπον. Ποῖός εἶσαι, Κύριε; Καὶ ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ Ἰησοῦς, τὸν ὁποῖον ἐσὺ διώκεις. Ἀλλὰ σήκω καὶ στάσου ἐπὶ τοὺς πόδας σου, ἐπειδὴ διὰ τοῦτο ἐφάνην εἰς σέ, διὰ νὰ σὲ καταστήσω ὑπηρέτην καὶ μάρτυρα καὶ ὅσων εἶδες καὶ περὶ ὅσων θέλω φανερώσει εἰς σέ, ἐκλέγων σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν, εἰς τὰ ὁποῖα τώρα σὲ ἀποστέλλω διὰ νὰ ἀνοίξης τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν, ὥστε νὰ ἐπιστρέψωσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους εἰς τὸ φῶς καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ Σατανᾶ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, διὰ νὰ λάβωσιν ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ κληρονομίαν μεταξὺ τῶν ἡγιασμένων διὰ τῆς εἰς ἐμὲ πίστεως. Ὅθεν, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, δὲν ἔγινα ἀπειθὴς εἰς τὴν Οὐράνιον ὀπτασίαν, ἀλλ' ἐκήρυττον**

πρῶτον εἰς τοὺς ἐν Δαμασκῷ καὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις καὶ εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν τῆς Ἰουδαίας, καὶ ἔπειτα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη, νὰ μετανοῶσι καὶ νὰ ἐπιστρέψωσιν εἰς τὸν Θεόν, πράττοντες ἔργα ἄξια τῆς μετανοίας. (Πράξ. κστ', 15-20).

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος

Ἄς δοῦμε ἐπιπλέον τί λέει ὁ πρωτοκορυφαῖος Ἀπόστολος Πέτρος στὴν Καθολικὴ Β' Ἐπιστολή:

Διὸ οὐκ ἀμελήσω αἰεὶ ὑμᾶς ὑπομνησκὲν περὶ τούτων, καίπερ εἰδὼτας καὶ ἐστηριγμένους ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ ἀληθείας. Δίκαιον δὲ ἠγοῦμαι, ἐφ' ὅσον εἰμὶ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ σκηνώματι, διεγείρειν ὑμᾶς ἐν ὑπομνήσει. (Β' Πέτρου, α', 12-13).

Ἐδῶ διακρίνουμε τὴν ἀγωνία, τὸν πόθο, τὴ λαχτάρα καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκη, ποὺ ἔκλειναν στὶς καρδιές τους οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι, γιὰ τὸν εὐαγγελισμό τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἔπρατταν σὲ δύσκολες συνθήκες, μὲ συνεχῆ κίνδυνο τῆς ζωῆς τους. **Ἐνεκά Σου θανατούμεθα ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν, ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς.** (Ρωμ. η', 36).

Ἀλήθεια, ὅστερα ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔκαναν ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι, ποῦ βρισκόμαστε ἐμεῖς; Πόσοι θὰ βρεθοῦμε ἀναπολόγητοι κατὰ τὴν ὥρα καὶ ἡμέρα τῆς Κρίσεως, ποὺ ὄντως θὰ γίνεῖ μὲ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Μεσσίου Χριστοῦ; Τότε τὸ αἷμα τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν ἀπωλεσθέντων ἀνθρώπων θὰ ζητήσῃ τὸ λόγο ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια ἐκείνων, ποὺ συμβιβάσθηκαν καὶ δὲν ὁμολόγησαν ἐνώπιον ἡγεμόνων, βασιλέων καὶ ἀνθρώπων τὸν Χριστόν, ὡς Μοναδικὸν Σωτήρα καὶ Λυτρωτὴ καὶ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν Του, ὡς τὴν μοναδικὴν κιβωτὸ τῆς σωτηρίας.

Μεγάλῃ Βλασφημίᾳ

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία εἶναι Ἄκτιστος καὶ Αἰώνιος, ἔχει δὲ κεφαλὴν τὸν Μεσσίαν Ἰησοῦν, τὸν Θεάνθρωπον, καὶ μέλη τῆς ὅλους τοὺς ἀπ' αἰῶνος Ἁγίους, ποὺ ὁ Τριαδικὸς Θεὸς τοὺς γνωρίζει αἰδίως μὲ τὰ ὀνόματά τους καὶ ὄχι μὲ ἀριθμούς. Εἶναι, λοιπόν, μεγάλη ἡ βλασφημία, ὅταν δεχόμεθα καὶ διαδίδουμε συγκριτικὲς σκέψεις, συγκρίνοντας τὴ μοναδικὴ Οὐράνια Θρησκεία τῆς Θείας Ἀποκαλύψεως, τὴν Ὁρθόδοξια, μὲ ὅλα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα κατασκευάσματα, εἴτε αὐτὰ εἶναι θρησκείες, ἀκόμη καὶ μονοθεϊστικὲς, ὡς διατείνονται κάποιοι κατὰ κόρον, εἴτε αἰρέσεις. Δὲν ἀλλάζει ἀπλὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἐνὸς μοναδικοῦ Θεοῦ. Πρόκειται γιὰ ἑτέρους θεοὺς, ὅταν ἀναφερόμαστε σὲ θεοὺς ἄλλων θρησκειῶν. Πρόκειται, γιὰ νὰ μιλάμε ξεκάθαρα, γιὰ δαίμονες ποὺ ὑποδύονται τὸν ρόλο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διδάσκουν ξένες διδασκαλίες καὶ φιλοσοφίες, ἄσχετες μὲ αὐτὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου: **Πάντες οἱ Θεοὶ τῶν Ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια.** (Ψαλμ.95, στίχος 5).

Ἀλήθεια, γνωρίζουμε πόσοι Ἅγιοι Πατέρες μας προσπάθησαν κατὰ καιροῦς νὰ ἐπαναφέρουν

ἀλλόθρησκους ἢ αἰρετικούς στὸν εὐθὺ δρόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔκλαψαν μπροστὰ στὸ πείσμα καὶ στήν πλάνη τους περνώντας πολλές φορές καὶ ἀπὸ βασανιστήρια; Ἴδου ὀλίγοι ἀπὸ αὐτούς: ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, ὁ Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος ὁ Στουδίτης, ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός, ὁ Μέγας Φώτιος, ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, ὁ Ἅγιος Μᾶρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός, ὁ Παπουλάκος, ὁ Ἅγιος Νεκτᾶριος.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ σύγχρονοι Ἅγιοί μας καὶ Πατέρες μας, Πορφύριος ὁ Κουσοκαλυβίτης, Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης, Ἐφραίμ ὁ Κατουνακιώτης, μὲ πόνο καὶ ἀγάπη, μίλησαν, ἔγραψαν καὶ κήρυξαν πανταχοῦ ὅτι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία ὑπάρχει μόνον σκοτάδι, μπέρ δεμα καὶ πλάνη. Καὶ εἶπαν εὐθαρσῶς ὅτι τὸ Ὁρθόδοξον Πνεῦμα εἶναι τὸ μόνον Ἀληθές, Δημιουργικόν, Συνεκτικόν καὶ Σωστικόν, Αὐτὸ ποὺ χαρίζει τὴν Ἄκτιστον Τριαδικὴν Χάριν καὶ μεταπλάθει τοὺς πιστοὺς, καθιστώντας τοὺς Ἅγίους καὶ μέλη τίμια τοῦ Σώματος τοῦ Θεανθρώπου Ἰησοῦ.

Ἄν μὲ ταπεινώση ἄνοιγαν τὰ μάτια τῆς ψυχῆς τους ὅλοι οἱ ἐκτὸς Ὁρθοδοξίας, εἴτε ἀλλόθρησκοι εἴτε αἰρετικοί, θὰ διέκριναν τὴν Ἀλήθεια, τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἀληθές. Διότι ὁ Θεός, ποὺ ἀγαπάει ὅλους καὶ θέλει πάντας ἀνθρώπους σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἔλθειν, εὐεργετῆ καθημερινὰ καὶ ἀλλόθρησκους καὶ πλανημένους, δίδοντας εὐκαιρίες μετανοίας σὲ ὅλους. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς Κρίσεως νὰ ὑπάρχει ἀπόλυτη δικαιοσύνη, δηλαδή ὅτι ἄκουσαν τὸν λόγον καὶ πῆραν θέση εἴτε ὑπὲρ εἴτε ἐναντίον.

Εἶναι τοῖς πᾶσι γνωστόν: ὁ Ἅγιος Γεώργιος στὴ Λύδδα, ἐπιτελεῖ θαύματα σὲ ἀλλόθρησκους μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα, μετὰ ἀπὸ τὰ θαυμαστά σημεῖα καὶ τὴν εὐεργεσία, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτούς πίστεψαν, ἐβαπτίσθησαν καὶ κάποιοι ἔφθασαν ἀκόμη καὶ στὸ μαρτύριο. Ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὶ αἰρετικοί, παπικοὶ καὶ προτεστάντες, δέχθηκαν εὐεργεσίες, μετενόησαν καὶ ἀφοῦ πρῶτα ἀρνήθηκαν τὴν πλάνη τους, στὴ συνέχεια ἐβαπτίσθησαν Ὁρθόδοξοι. Εἶναι ἀξιοσημείωτο τὸ γεγονός τῆς σωτηρίας τῆς πόλεως τοῦ Ὁρχομενοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν Παναγία μας, θαῦμα ποὺ ὁμολόγησε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς γερμανικῆς φάλαγγας Χόφμαν, ὅταν εἶδε τὴν σῶτριά του Ἔθνος μας Ἀειπάρθενον

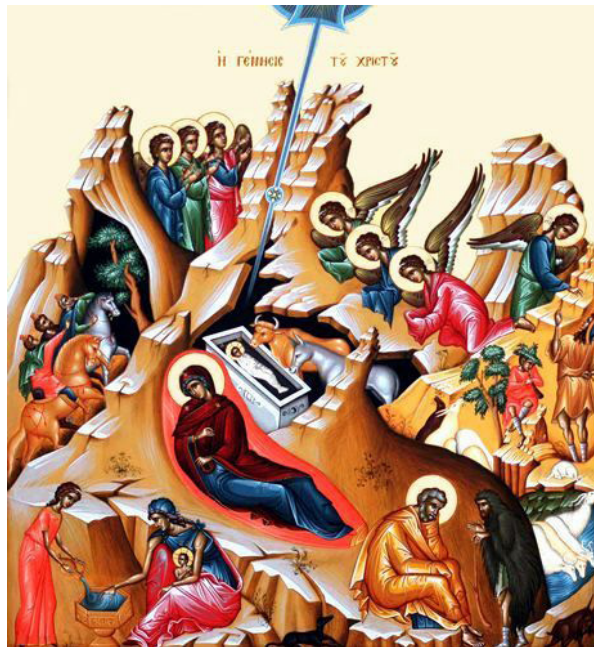
Θεοτόκον Μαρία νὰ στέκεται μπροστὰ στὰ γερμανικὰ τάνκς ἐμποδίζοντας τὴν προέλασή τους πρὸς τὴν πόλη. (10 Σεπτεμβρίου 1943), ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ ἡ διάσωση τῶν Φιλιατρῶν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Χαράλαμπο (19 Ἰουλίου 1944).

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκείνους, ποὺ βεβήλωσαν τὴν Διαθήκη τοῦ Μεσσίου Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἀρνήθηκαν τὸν Ἀληθινὸν Πατέρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ καὶ δέχθηκαν ἕτερο «πατέρα» τὸν σατανᾶ, πολλοὶ, βλέποντες διαχρονικὰ τὰ θαυμαστά, ποὺ συμβαίνουν στὸν Πανάγιο Τάφο, ὁμολόγησαν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ πίστεψαν ἱκανοὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸ. Ὅντως, μεγάλη ἢ εὐλογία!

Πρὸς Ἐτεροδόξους

Σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ στοὺς παπικοὺς καὶ στοὺς προτεστάντες, ποὺ ἀκόμη καὶ σήμερα προπαγανδίζουν τὸ **πρωτεῖο**

ἐξουσίας καὶ τὸ ἀλάθητο καὶ ὅτι εἶναι δῆθεν ἐκκλησία, ἄς ἐρμηνεύσουν μὲ πνεῦμα ταπεινώσεως, τὴν στάση καὶ τὸ ἦθος τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Πέτρου, ὅταν ἐβάπτισε τὸν Κορνήλιο, πῶς ἀπολογήθηκε μὲ πνεῦμα μαθητείας καὶ ἰσότητος πρὸς τὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων, ὅταν τοῦ ζητήθηκαν ἐξηγήσεις: Ἀρξάμενος δὲ ὁ Πέτρος ἐξετίθετο αὐτοῖς καθεξῆς λέγων: **... ἐμνήσθη δὲ τοῦ ῥήματος Κυρίου ὡς ἔλεγεν Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ. Εἰ οὖν τὴν ἰσὴν δωρεὰν ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ**



Θεὸς ὡς καὶ ἡμῖν, πιστεύσασι ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ἐγὼ δὲ τίς ἤμην δυνατὸς κωλύσαι τὸν Θεόν; ἀκούσαντες δὲ ταῦτα ἠσύχασαν καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν Θεόν... (Πράξ. ια', 1-18).

Ὅντως τὸ γεγονός αὐτὸ εἶναι θαυμαστὸν, γιατί ἐκεῖ διακρίνουμε καθαρὰ τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὅπως, ἐπίσης, καὶ τίνι τρόπῳ δέχθηκε τὴν ἐπίπληξη τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου, ὅταν ὁ τελευταῖος διέγνωσε ἴχνη ὑποκρισίας στὴ στάση τοῦ Πρωτοκορυφαίου: **Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθε Πέτρος εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν. Πρὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἔλθειν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου μετὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν συνήσθιεν ὅτε δὲ ἦλθον, ὑπέστειλε καὶ ἀφώριζεν ἐ αὐτόν, φοβούμενος τοὺς ἐκ περιτομῆς. Καὶ συννυπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὥστε καὶ Βαρνάβας συναπήχθη αὐτῶν τῇ ὑπο κρίσει. Ἄλλ' ὅτε εἶδον ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθοποδοῦσι πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, εἶπον τῷ**

Πέτρῳ ἔμπροσθεν πάντων εἰ σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὑπάρχων ἐθνικῶς ζῆς καὶ οὐκ ἰουδαϊκῶς, τί τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἰουδαΐζειν; (Γαλ. β', 11-14).

Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν πρώτη Ἀποστολικὴ Σύνοδο, ὁ ἐπίσκοπος Ἱεροσολύμων εἶπε τὸν τελευταῖο λόγο, σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ στὴν ἐπιστολή, πὺρ ἐστάλη στὶς ἐκκλησίες (Πράξ. ιε', 13-20).

Ἀπὸ τὰ παραπάνω φαίνεται καθαρὰ πόσο ἀνόητο καὶ βλάσφημο εἶναι νὰ ἰσχυρίζεται οἰοσδήποτε ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὅτι κατέχει τὸ πρωτεῖο ἐξουσίας καὶ τὸ ἀλάθητο στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Σὲ ὅ,τι δὲ ἀφορᾷ στὴν πλάνη τοῦ φιλιόκβε, ἃς μελετήσουν τὸ λόγο τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, πὺρ εἶπε ὅτι **μόνον ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα ἐκπορεύεται ὁ Παράκλητος!** (Ἰωάν., ιε', 26).

Πόνος ἐκ τῆς Ἀποστασίας

Ἄς συνέλθουμε, λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου καὶ οἱ ἐγγὺς καὶ οἱ μακρὰν. Ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστὶ. Πολὺς ὁ πόνος, τὸ αἶμα καὶ ἡ δυστυχία σὲ ὅλο τὸν πλανήτη ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀποστασίας. Ὁ γλυκύτατος Ἰησοῦς, ὁ Μεσσίας, μὲ ἀνοιχτές τὶς ἀγκάλες ἀναμένει τὴν ἐπιστροφή ὅλων καὶ τῆ μετάνοιά μας. Στὸν φρικτὸ Γολγοθᾶ ἔδωσε τὸ αἶμα Του γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας καὶ λίγο πὺρ πέρα στὸν κῆπο (στὸν Πανάγιο Τάφο) ἀναστήθηκε γιὰ τὴν δικαίωσή μας. Ἐκατομύρια ἄνθρωποι κάθε χρόνο προσκυνοῦν τὸν Φρικτὸ Γολγοθᾶ καὶ τὸν Πανάγιο Τάφο. Ἄς γινόταν ὅλοι αὐτοί, ἀφοῦ πιστέψουν στὸν Ἰησοῦ, νὰ βαπτιστοῦν Ὁρθοδόξως καὶ νὰ τύχουν τῆς Σωτηρίας... Τί χαρά, εἰρήνη καὶ ἀγαλλίαση!

Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Παρθένου, ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Μεσσίας, μὲ πολὺ ἀγάπη καὶ σεβασμὸ στὴν προσωπική μας ἐλευθερία, ἀναμένει νὰ ἀνοιξοῦμε τὶς καρδιές μας, γιὰ νὰ φανερώσει σὲ ὅλους τὸ ἀπ' αἰῶνος μυστήριον τῆς σωτηρίας μας. Σήμερον τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν τὸ κεφάλαιον, καὶ τοῦ ἀπ' αἰῶνος μυστηρίου ἡ φανέρωσις. Ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ υἱὸς τῆς Παρθένου γίνεται. Ἀπολυτίκιον τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ).

Τότε καὶ μόνον τότε, σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως καὶ στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὡς μία ποιμένα μετ' Ἐνα Ποιμένα, τὸν Χριστό μας, ἡ γῆ σιγὰ-σιγὰ θὰ καταστῆ ἐπίγειος παράδεισος, ἀφοῦ ὅλοι θὰ νοιώθουμε ὅ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλον ἀδελφό μας καὶ θὰ βαστάζουμε ὅ ἕνας τὰ βάρη τοῦ ἄλλου ὡς μέλη τοῦ ἰδίου Σώματος, ὥστε ὁ κοινὸς Πατέρας μας, ὁ Δημιουργὸς Τριαδικὸς Θεός, καὶ ὁ Σωτήρας μας Μεσσίας Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, θὰ δέχονται ἔτι καὶ ἔτι τὸ πανηγύρι τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ ἀρχαγγέλων, πὺρ ἀκαταπαύστως γίνεται στὸν οὐρανό, ἐξαιτίας τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀδελφῶν τους ἀνθρώπων δηλαδὴ ὅλων ἡμῶν.

Γένοιτο Κύριε. Ἀμήν.

Πατερικοί Λόγοι Σοφίας

Ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁσία Γερώντισσα Μακρίνα (+1995).

Προσέχετε πάρα πολὺ στὸ θέμα τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Νὰ μὴ ψιθυρίζετε στὰ ἀναλόγια, μὲ νεῦμα νὰ συννοηθῆτε. Ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα εἶστε νοερῶς στὸν θρόνον τοῦ Θεοῦ σὰν τοὺς Ἀγγέλους, καὶ ὑμολογεῖτε τὸν Κύριο. Γι' αὐτό, ὅπως οἱ ἅγιοι Ἄγγελοι στέκονται μετὰ φόβου, ἔτσι κι ἐσεῖς νὰ προσπαθῆτε νὰ τοὺς μιμηθῆτε. Τὸ στασιδί συμβολίζει τὸν τάφο. Με πολὺ θεῖο φόβο νὰ στεκώμαστε, νὰ σκύβουμε τὸ κεφάλι καὶ νὰ χουμμε τὸ νοῦ μας στὸν Θεό, στὴν «εὐχή». Νὰ τραβᾶμε κομποσχοῖνι, ὅταν μᾶς πολεμάει ἡ ὑπνηλία, γιὰτί ὁ διάβολος τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς κοιτάζει νὰ κερδήσει κάτι.

Χρειάζεται πολλὴ προσοχή καὶ πολλὴ προσευχή, νὰ μὴ μᾶς κλέβει ὁ διάβολος τὸν νοῦ. Οἱ νεώτερες πὺρ δὲν ἔχουν ἀσθένειες, καλὸ εἶναι νὰ στέκονται στὴν ἐκκλησία. Σὲ ἕνα ψαλτηράκι νὰ καθῆσουν, ὄχι ὅμως ὅλη τὴν ὥρα. Ἄν καμμιὰ εἶναι ἄρρωστη, δικαιολογεῖται. Ὁρθιες λοιπόν, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσετε νὰ νοιώσετε τὴν προσευχή. Γιατί καὶ ἡ ὀρθοστασία βοηθεῖ πάρα πολὺ, ναρθῆ ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα στὴν ψυχή. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος στέκεται, αὐτὸ εἶναι ἕνας κόπος, μία θυσία γιὰ τὸν Θεό, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἐπισκιάζει.

Μία Θεία Λειτουργία δὲν ἐξαγοράζεται μὲ δισεκατομύρια. Μπορεῖ βέβαια νὰ κάνης τὸ ἕνα, τὸ ἄλλο, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι τίποτε μπροστὰ στὸ Μυστήριον. Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία εἶναι ἡ Θεία Θυσία. Ὅταν γίνεται ἡ Θυσία καὶ λέει ὁ ἱερεὺς μυστικὰ **μνήσθητι Κύριε, μνήσθητι... Κύριε, ζώντων καὶ τεθνεώτων...**, καὶ μεις ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα μποροῦμε νὰ μνημονεύουμε ὀνόματα ζώντων καὶ τεθνεώτων. Ἐκείνη τὴν στιγμή ἐνώνεται ἡ γῆ μετὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ γίνονται θαύματα!

Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπόν, πολλὴ προσοχή. Νὰ προσέχετε τὶς συζητήσεις, τὸν θυμὸ, τὰ λόγια, τὴν ἀργολογία, τὴν μεμψιμοιρία, γιὰτί ὅλα αὐτὰ ζημιώνουν τὴν ψυχή. Ὁ νοῦς σας νὰ εἶναι οὐρανός, ἡ καρδιά σας θρόνος Θεοῦ, τὸ στόμα σας ἐκκλησία. Νὰ τηρήσουμε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον πὺρ λέει **μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε.** Ὅποιος τηρήσῃ αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο, οὔτε τελώνια θὰ περάσῃ οὔτε τίποτε.

Ἡ κατάκριση εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἁμάρτημα πὺρ μᾶς χωρίζει ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μόλις ἔρχεται στὸ μυαλό μας, νὰ βάζουμε τὸν νοῦ μας στὸν Ἄδη καὶ νὰ λέμε, «ἔλα νὰ σὲ πάω στὸ σκόληκα τὸν ἀκοίμητο, ἔλα νὰ σὲ πάω στὸ σκότος τὸ ψηλαφητό, στὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιο, γιὰ βάλῃ τὰ δάχτυλά σου στὴν φωτιά...». Πάρα πολλὴ προσοχή, γιὰτί ἔχουμε νὰ κάνουμε μετ' ἕνα λέοντα, πὺρ δὲν μποροῦσαν οὔτε οἱ ἅγιοι νὰ τὰ βγάλουν πέρα μαζί του. Καὶ νὰ ἔχουμε πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν μας τὸ **ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε**, καὶ τὸ **γρηγορεῖτε καὶ προσεύχεσθε, ἵνα μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς πειρασμόν.**

Ἀρετὴ Ἀρετῶν

Τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, «Διδαχὲς Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου», Πρεσβ. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πρέπει νὰ ἔχουν ἐνάρετη ζωὴ καὶ νὰ δίνουν τὴ μαρτυρία τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν κοινωμία. Ἰδιαίτερα ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ βρίσκονται ἀνάμεσα σε ἀπιστους, ἀσεβεῖς, κακὸδοξοὺς κι αἰρετικούς, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι στολισμένοι μὲ εὐαγγελικὰ ἤθη καὶ χριστιανικὲς ἀρετές.

Μὲ τὴν ἐνάρετη ζωὴ τους βοηθοῦν νὰ μεταβάλλονται πρὸς τὸ καλύτερο οἱ ἄπιστοι καὶ οἱ αἰρετικοὶ καὶ ἀντὶ νὰ κατηγοροῦν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὡς κακοποιοὺς καὶ νὰ διαβάλλουν τὴν πίστη τους ὡς πλάνη, παρακινοῦνται στὸ νὰ τοὺς ἐπαινοῦν, νὰ μιλοῦν μὲ καλὰ λόγια γιὰ τὴν πίστη τους καὶ νὰ δοξάζουν τὸ Θεό, ὁ ὁποῖος παρέδωσε στὸν κόσμον τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη κι ἔχει ἀνθρώπους στολισμένους μὲ τόσες ἀγαθοεργίες.

Ὁ Ἅγιος τονίζει: **Ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη εἶναι θησαυροφυλάκιο ὄλων των ἀρετῶν καὶ χωρὶς αὐτὴ δὲν κατορθώνεται κανένα ἀγαθό.**

Γιὰ νὰ πνευματικὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὴν αἰώνια μακαριότητα, ποὺ πρόκειται ν' ἀπολαύσουν ὅλοι οἱ ἐνάρετοι καὶ κατὰ Θεὸν ζῶντες, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μιλήσει κανεὶς μὲ πληρότητα καὶ ἀκριβεία. Οὔτε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος μπόρεσε νὰ μᾶς περιγράψει αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶδε, ὅταν ἠρπάγη στὸν τρίτο οὐρανό.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος, σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ θαῦμα αὐτὸ λέει: **Ἐὰν ὁ θαυμάσιος Παῦλος, ποὺ ἠρπάγη ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἄκουσε ἄρρητα ῥήματα, δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ διηγηθεῖ ἱκανῶς τὴν ἐνδοξὴ ἐκείνη μακαριότητα, πῶς νὰ τολμήσω ἐγὼ ὁ ἀνάξιος νὰ διαπλεύσω τόσο μεγάλο πέλαγος χωρὶς κίνδυνον, ποὺ εἶμαι ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ ἀγράμματος; Τί λέω; Κι ἂν ὅλες οἱ γλῶσσες τῶν ἀνθρώπων μπορούσαν νὰ ἐνωθοῦν, ὅλα τ' ἀστέρια τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κι ὅλα τα φύλλα τῶν δένδρων γίνονταν εὐλαλες γλῶσσες, σοφότερες τῶν εὐγλωττάτων ρητόρων, πάλι δὲν θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ διηγηθοῦν μὲ πληρότητα τὰ ἀκατάληπτα καὶ ἀνεκλάλητα ἐκεῖνα ἀγαθὰ, τὰ ὁποῖα μάτι δὲν εἶδε, αὐτὴ δὲν ἄκουσε καὶ νοῦς ἀνθρώπου δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ καταλάβει. Ὡστόσο, γιὰ νὰ λάβουμε κάποια αἴσθησις αὐτῶν καὶ κάποια μικρὴ εὐωδία, ἀξιώθηκαν μερικοὶ ἐνάρετοι καὶ εἶδαν μὲ ὀπτασίες, ὁράσεις κι ἐκστάσεις, μέρος ἐκείνης τῆς ἀνέκφραστης ἡδονῆς καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου κάλλους καὶ μᾶς τὸ ἄφησαν μὲσω τῶν κειμένων τους, γιὰ νὰ πληγώσουν τὴν καρδιά μας πρὸς ἐκεῖνον τὸν σωτήριον ἔρωτα.**

Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος δὲν περιορίζει τὸ καθήκον τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης στὴν προσφορὰ ὑλικῶν ἀγαθῶν στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Τὸ διευρύνει καὶ μιλάει γιὰ ἐπτὰ σωματικὰ ἔργα τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης καὶ ἐπτὰ πνευματικὰ. Τὰ σωματικὰ εἶναι: **Νὰ θρέψει πεινασμένο. Νὰ ποτίσει**

διψασμένο. Νὰ λυτρώσει φυλακισμένο ἢ σκλαβωμένο. Νὰ ντύσει γυμνό. Νὰ δεχτεῖ ξένο. Νὰ ἐπισκεφτεῖ ἀσθενῆ. Καὶ νὰ ἐνταφιάσει νεκρό. Καὶ τὰ πνευματικὰ εἶναι: **Νὰ συμβουλέψει ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Νὰ διδάξει τὸν ἀμαθῆ. Νὰ παρηγορήσει τὸν λυπημένο. Νὰ διορθώσει τὸν ἁμαρτωλό. Νὰ συγχωρήσει ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔσφαλε. Νὰ ὑπομείνει τὴ βρισιὰ. Καὶ νὰ προσεύχεται γιὰ ὅλους.**

Λέει ὁ Ἅγιος: Νὰ σκέφτεσαι ὅτι μία ἀνύψωση τοῦ νοῦ στὸ Θεὸ καὶ μία ταπεινὴ μετάνοια στὴ γῆ, ὅταν γίνονται πρὸς τιμὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀξίζουν περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅ,τι ὅλοι οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς γῆς. Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἀφήνεις τὴν ἀμέλεια καὶ βιάζεις τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου μὲ ἐπιμελῆ ἔργα, οἱ ἄγγελοι φέρνουν στὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἓνα στεφάνι ἐνδοξῆς νίκης.

Τί ἐννοοῦμε ὅταν λέμε πνευματικὴ ζωὴ; Σὲ τί συνίσταται; Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόδημος ἀπαντᾷ: **Στὴν ἐπίγνωσις τῆς ἀγαθότητος καὶ μεγαλειότητος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς δικῆς μας μηδαμινότητος καὶ κλίσης σὲ κάθε κακό. Στὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ στὸ μῖσος τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας. Στὴν ὑποταγὴ στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σ' ὅλα τα κτίσματα, γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Στὴν ἀποστροφὴ ὄλων των δικῶν μᾶς ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ στὴν τέλεια ὑπακοὴ στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐπιπλέον, στὸ νὰ θέλουμε ὅλα αὐτὰ νὰ τὰ κάνουμε καθαρὰ, μόνο γιὰ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ.**



Ἡ Πεταλούδα...

Μία μέρα ὁ μαθητὴς ἀποφάσισε νὰ προκαλέσει τὸν δάσκαλό του. Ἔτσι σκέφτηκε νὰ τοῦ στήσει μία παγίδα. Ἔπιασε μία πεταλούδα καὶ τὴν κράτησε στὴ χούφτα του. Ὅταν θὰ πήγαινε στὸ δάσκαλο θὰ τὸν ρώταγε τί εἶχε στὸ χέρι του. Κι ἂν ὁ δάσκαλος τὸ ἔβρισκε, τότε θὰ τὸν ρωτοῦσε ἐὰν ἡ πεταλούδα ἦταν ζωντανὴ ἢ νεκρὴ. Στὴν περίπτωσις ποὺ ἀπαντοῦσε ὅτι ἡ πεταλούδα ἦταν ζωντανή, τότε θὰ ἔσφιγγε τὸ χέρι του καὶ θὰ τὴ σκότωνε καὶ τὸ ἀντίστροφο.

Ὅταν εἶχαν μάθημα λοιπόν, πλησίασε τὸν δάσκαλο, μπροστὰ σε ὅλους τοὺς ὑπόλοιπους μαθητὲς, ἔτεινε τὸ χέρι πρὸς τὸ μέρος του καὶ τὸν ρώτησε:

-Δάσκαλε, τί ἔχω στὸ χέρι μου;”

-Τὴν ψυχὴ σου ἔχεις παιδί μου, ἀπάντησε ἀτάραχος ὁ δάσκαλος.

Ὁ μαθητὴς προβληματίστηκε γιὰ λίγο σκεπτόμενος τὴν ἀπάντησις. Κατέληξε ὅτι ὁ δάσκαλος εἶχε δίκιο. Ἡ πεταλούδα ἦταν μία ψυχὴ ποὺ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι καὶ δική του. Ὡστόσο, συνέχισε:

-Καὶ εἶναι ζωντανὴ ἢ ψυχὴ μου δάσκαλε ἢ ὄχι;

Ὁ δάσκαλος τὸν κοίταξε μὲ καλοσύνη στὰ μάτια καὶ τοῦ εἶπε χαμογελαστά:

-Ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι σου ἐξαρθᾶται!...

Ὁ Αἴσωπος καὶ ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης κ. Βαρθολομαῖος

Οἱ Δηλώσεις τοῦ Κ. Βαρθολομαίου στὸ Σουφλί καὶ ὁ Μῦθος τοῦ Χταποδιοῦ

Τετὰ Μητρόπολις Πειραιῶς, Γραφεῖο ἐπὶ τῶν Αἰρέσεων καὶ τῶν Παραθρησκευτῶν, Ἀκτὴ Θεμιστοκλέους 190, 185 39 ΠΕΙΡΑΙΕΥΣ, Τηλ. +30 210 4514833 (19), Fax +30 210 4518476 e-mail: impireos@hotmail.com.

Ἐν Πειραιεῖ τῇ 29ῃ Σεπτεμβρίου 2014.

Ἐναγνώσαμε στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ εἰδησεογραφία τὴν πρόσφατη ἐπίσκεψη τοῦ Παναγιωτάτου Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου κ. Βαρθολομαίου στὸ Σουφλί καὶ τὶς δηλώσεις του κατ' αὐτήν. Ἰδιαίτερα μᾶς ἐντυπωσίασε ἡ διαβεβαίωσή του πρὸς τὴν ἀντιπροσωπεία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ δι' αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν πιστὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅτι «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε, οὔτε προδώσαμε κάτι μέχρι σήμερα ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας μὲ τοὺς διαλόγους καὶ τὶς ἐπαφές καὶ οὔτε πρόκειται νὰ τὸ κάνουμε στὸ μέλλον», μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἐδήλωσε ὅτι στοὺς δὲ μέχρι τώρα γενομένους διαλόγους μὲ τοὺς ἑτεροδόξους οὐδεμία προδοσία τῆς πίστεως ἔγινε, οὔτε θὰ γίνεῖ στὸ μέλλον.

Καθὼς διαβάζαμε τὶς παρὰ πάνω δηλώσεις, μᾶς ἤρθε στὸ νοῦ «Ὁ Μῦθος τοῦ Χταποδιοῦ» τοῦ ἀείμνηστου Φώτη Κόντογλου, μὲ κάποια παραλλαγή, βέβαια, προσαρμοσμένη στὰ δεδομένα τῆς σύγχρονης ἐκκλησιαστικῆς πραγματικότητος:

Καθόταν τὸ χταποδάκι μὲ τὴν μητέρα του τὴν χταπόδα στὸν πάτο τῆς θάλασσας. Κάποια στιγμή τὸ χταποδάκι πιάστηκε στὸ ἀγγίστρι τοῦ ψαρᾶ καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἀνεβαίνει πρὸς τὰ πάνω.

- Μὲ πιάσανε μάνα!, φωνάζει τὸ χταποδάκι τὴ μάνα του.

- Μὴ φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου, οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχεις, τοῦ ἀποκρίνεται ἡ μάνα. Τὸ χταποδάκι φωνάζει πάλι:

- Μὲ βγάλανε ἀπ' τὸ νερὸ μάνα!

- Μὴ φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου, οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχεις, τοῦ ἀποκρίνεται πάλι ἡ μάνα.

- Μὲ κόβουνε μὲ τὸ μαχαίρι μάνα!

- Μὴ φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου, οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχεις.

- Μὲ βράζουνε στὸ τσουκάλι μάνα!

- Μὴ φοβᾶσαι παιδί μου, οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχεις.

- Μὲ τρῶνε μάνα!

- Ἄχ παιδί μου τώρα σ' ἔχασα...

Ἡ ἐφαρμογὴ τοῦ μύθου στὴ σύγχρονη ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πραγματικότητα εἶναι προφανής: Μετὰ τὴν ἄρση τῶν Ἀναθεμάτων τὸ 1965, (ὅπου στὸ Γαλλικὸ κείμενο τῆς Ρωμαιοκαθολικῆς πλευρᾶς ἀναφέρονται ὡς «Ἄρσις τῆς Ἀκοινωνησίας»), ξεσηκώθηκε τὸ Ἅγιον Ὁρος, ἅγιοι καὶ θεοφόροι Πατέρες (ὅπως ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος

ὁ Πόποβιτς, ὁ Ἅγιος γέρον Φιλόθεος Ζεφβάκος κ.ἄ.), ἀκαδημαϊκοὶ διδάσκαλοι, ὁ πιστὸς λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, διαμαρτυρόμενοι γιὰ ὅσα ἀπαράδεκτα ἔγιναν. Ὡστόσο τὸ Φανάρι ἔσπευσε νὰ καθησυχάσει τοὺς πάντες: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Στὴ συνέχεια τὸ κακὸ προχώρησε ἀκόμη περισσότερο. Φθάσαμε στὶς συμφωνίες τοῦ Μπαλαμάντ. Καὶ πάλι οἱ πάντες ξεσηκώθηκαν. Θύελλα διαμαρτυριῶν ξέσπασε ἀπὸ παντοῦ, (Ἅγιον Ὁρος, κ.λ.π.). Καὶ πάλι τὸ Φανάρι ἀπήντησε: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Μετὰ τὸ Μπαλαμάντ ἤρθε τὸ Πόρτο Ἀλέγκρε. Καὶ πάλι τὸ Φανάρι: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Μετὰ τὸ Πόρτο Ἀλέγκρε ἦλθε ἡ Ραβέννα. Καὶ πάλι τὸ Φανάρι: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Μετὰ τὴν Ραβέννα ἡ προσφορὰ τοῦ Κορανίου ἀπὸ τὸν Παναγιώτατο Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριάρχη κ. Βαρθολομαῖο ὡς ἀναμνηστικὸ δῶρο στὸν πρόεδρο τῆς Κόκα Κόλα κ. Μουχτάρ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἐπίσκεψή του στὴν Ἑβραϊκὴ Συναγωγὴ τῆς Νέας Ὑόρκης. Καὶ πάλι τὸ Φανάρι: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Στὴ συνέχεια τὸ Πουσαὶν τῆς Νοτίου Κορέας τὸν περασμένο Νοέμβριο. Καὶ πάλι τὸ Φανάρι: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Τέλος μετὰ τὸ Πουσαὶν ἡ δήλωση τοῦ Παναγιωτάτου Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου στὸ Σουφλί: «Οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε, οὔτε προδώσαμε κάτι μέχρι σήμερα ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας μὲ τοὺς διαλόγους καὶ τὶς ἐπαφές καὶ οὔτε πρόκειται νὰ τὸ κάνουμε στὸ μέλλον».

Καθόλου δὲν θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐκπλαγοῦμε, ἂν στὸ προσεχὲς μέλλον, στὴν μέλλουσα νὰ συνέλθει Πανορθόδοξο Σύνοδο τοῦ 2016, ὅχι μόνον δὲν προχωρήσουν στὴν καταδίκη του Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ στὴν πλήρη νομιμοποίησή του. Ὅποτε καὶ πάλι θὰ ἀκουσθεῖ τὸ ἴδιο ποτό: Μὴ φοβᾶστε, «οὐδένα κίνδυνο διατρέχουμε».

Καθόλου ἀπίθανο νὰ φθάσουν καὶ στὸ κοινὸ ποτήριο μὲ τοὺς Ρωμαιοκαθολικοὺς καὶ στὴν πλήρη ἐκκλησιαστικὴ κοινωνία μὲ τοὺς Προτεστάντες. Στὴν περίπτωση αὐτὴ καλὸ θὰ εἶναι νὰ βροῦν κάποιο ἄλλο σύνθημα γιὰ νὰ πείσουν τοὺς ἀφελεῖς, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸ ὡς χιλοειπωμένο δὲν θὰ «πιάνει» πλέον.

Εἰλικρινᾶ πιστεύουν ὅτι μὲ τέτοιου εἴδους δηλώσεις θὰ πείσουν τὸν πιστὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ; Ὁ πιστὸς λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχει ἤδη εὐαίσθητοποιηθεῖ ἀπέναντι στὴν αἵρεση καὶ ἐπαγρυπνεῖ στὴν διαφύλαξη τῆς πίστεως. Ἄς δοκιμάσουν νὰ φθάσουν στὸ κοινὸ ποτήριο καὶ θὰ τὸ δοῦν στὴν πράξιν!

Κύριε ὦσον τοὺς ἑσπερεῖς!

Τὸ Ἀνάγνωσμα...

Πηγή: Φώτη Κόντογλου, «Μυστικά Ἄνθη», Ἐκδόσεις Παπαδημητρίου.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι σὲ ὅλα ἀχόρταγος, θέλει ν' ἀπολάβει πολλά, χωρὶς νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ τὰ προφτάξει ὅλα. Καὶ βασανίζεται. Ὅποιος ὅμως φτάξει σὲ μιὰ κατάσταση ποὺ νὰ εὐχαριστεῖται μὲ τὰ λίγα, καὶ νὰ μὴ θέλει πολλά, ἔστω κι ἂν μπορεῖ νὰ τ' ἀποκτήσει, ἐκεῖνος λοιπὸν εἶναι ὁ εὐτυχημένος. Δὲν τὸ κάνει ἀπὸ οἰκονομία, εἴτε γιατί ἔχει τὴν ἰδέα πὼς τὰ πολλά τὸν βλάπτουνε στὴν ψυχὴ ἢ στὸ σῶμα. Ἀλλὰ γιατί στὰ λίγα καὶ στὰ ἀπλὰ βρίσκει πιδ ἄγνη ἱκανοποίηση. Καὶ περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλα, ἐπειδὴ μὲ τὰ ἀπλὰ καὶ μὲ τὰ λίγα δὲν χάνει τὸν ἑαυτό του.

Τις ἔστι πλούσιος; Ὁ ἐν ὀλίγῳ ἀναπαυόμενος

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι δὲν βρίσκουνε πουθενὰ ἡσυχία, γιατί ἐπιχειροῦνε νὰ ζήσουνε χωρὶς τὸν ἑαυτό τους. Τρέχουνε ἀπὸ δῶ κι ἀπὸ κεῖ νὰ βροῦνε τὴν εὐτυχία, μὰ εὐτυχία δὲν ὑπάρχει ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτό μας. Θέλουμε νὰ εὐχαριστηθοῦμε μὲ συμπόσια ἀπ' ὅπου λείπουμε. Ὅποιος ἔχει χάσει τὸν ἑαυτό του, ἔχει χάσει τὴν εὐτυχία. Εὐτυχία δὲν εἶναι τὸ ζάλισμα ποὺ δίνουνε οἱ πολυμέριμες ἡδονὲς κι ἀπολαύσεις, ἀλλὰ ἡ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ ἡ σιωπηλὴ ἀγαλλίαση τῆς καρδιάς. Μ' αὐτὸ τὸ βύθισμα στὸν ἑαυτό του βρίσκει ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν Θεό. Γιὰ τοῦτο εἶπε ὁ Χριστός: **Ὁὐκ ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρατηρήσεως, οὐδὲ ἐροῦσιν ἰδοῦ ὧδε ἢ ἰδοῦ ἐκεῖ. Ἴδοῦ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν.** «Μὴν ψάχνετε, ζαλισμένοι ἄνθρωποι, ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ νὰ βρῆτε τὴν εὐτυχία. Γιατὶ ἡ εὐτυχία βρίσκεται μέσα σας».

Μέγας λόγος, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ Θεϊκὰ λόγια. Μέσα μας εἶναι ὁ θησαυρός. Ἀπ' ἔξω εἶναι ξέρακας, κι ἂς μὴ μᾶς ξεγελᾷ ἡ φασαρία καὶ τὰ ψεύτικα πυροτεχνήματα. Ὅποιος ζεῖ ἔξωτερικά, ζεῖ ψεύτικα. Ὅποιος ζεῖ ἐσωτερικά, ζεῖ ἀληθινά.

Ξέρω καλὰ τί εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ ποὺ ζοῦνε οἱ λεγόμενοι κοσμικοὶ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ διασκεδάζουνε, ποὺ ταξιδεύουνε, ποὺ ξεγελοῦνται μὲ λογιῆς-λογιῆς θεάματα, μὲ ἀσημαντολογίες, μὲ σκάνδαλα, μὲ διάφορες ματαιότητες, ποὺ ἀπὸ μακρυνὰ φαντάζονε γιὰ κάποιο πρᾶγμα σπουδαῖο καὶ ζηλευτό, ἐνῶ σὰν τὰ δεῖ κανένας ἀπὸ κοντὰ, ἀπορεῖ γιὰ τὴ φτώχεια ποὺ ἔχουνε καὶ τὸ πόσο κούφιοι εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ψευτογελοῦνται μ' αὐτὰ τὰ γιαιτροσόφια τῆς εὐτυχίας. Ξέρω λοιπὸν καλὰ αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ, γιατί, ἀναγκαστικά, ἔζησα, κάποιες φορὲς, μὲ ἄνθρώπους πλούσιους, ποὺ μὲ προσκαλοῦσανε στὰ σπίτια τους, στίς ἐπαύλεις τους, στὰ κότερά τους καὶ στίς ἄλλες διασκεδάσεις τους.

Μελαγχολία μ' ἔπιανε ἀπὸ κείνη τὴν κατάσταση. Ἐβλεπα δυστυχημένους ἄνθρώπους, ποὺ κάνανε τὸν εὐτυχημένο, κατάδικους ποὺ κάνανε τὸν ἐλεύθερο. Ἀλλὰ, ἂν δὲν καταγινόντανε μὲ τόσες ψεύτικες

χαρὲς, θὰ πέφτανε στὴ βαρεμάδα, στὴ λεγόμενη ἀνία. Ἡ τὸ ἓνα, ἢ τὸ ἄλλο. Ἄδειοι ἀπὸ κάθε οὐσία, τρισδυστυχημένοι. Ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι ἀνύπαρκτη κι ἀνύπαρκτη ἢ εὐτυχία, ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πῶς νὰ γίνε ψωμί, σὰν δὲν ὑπάρχει προζύμι; Πῶς νὰ μὴν εἶναι ὅλα ἄνοστα, ἀφοῦ δὲν ὑπάρχει τὸ ἀλάτι;

Λοιπὸν, ὅποτε ἀναγκαζόμουνε νὰ πάγω γιὰ λίγο κοντὰ σὲ τέτοιους κοσμικοὺς ἄνθρώπους, πρᾶγμα ποὺ γινότανε σπάνια, γιὰ νὰ μὴν τοὺς προσβάλω, ἀφοῦ μὲ προσκαλοῦσανε μὲ εὐγένεια, δὲν ἔβλεπα τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὴ στιγμή νὰ ἀποτραβηχθῶ στὸ καβούκι μου, νὰ γυρίσω στὸ φτωχὸ σπίτι μου καὶ στ' ἀγαπημένα πρᾶγματα ποὺ βρίσκονται γύρω μου. Ἐβλεπα πὼς ἀντὶ νὰ πάρω κάτι ἀπὸ ὅλη ἐκείνη τὴν τυμπανοκρουσία, ὅπως πιστεῦει ὁ πολὺς ὁ κόσμος, ἐγὼ ἔδινε, ἔδινε ξύπνημα στοὺς κοιμισμένους, ξεμούδιασμα στοὺς μουδιασμένους, ζωὴ στὴ μονοτονία τους.

Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ποὺ γράφω, μ' ὄλο ποὺ εἶμαι προσκαλεσμένος σὲ πολλὰ μέρη ἀπὸ κάποιους εὐγενεῖς ἄνθρώπους, ὄχι μονάχα στὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ μακρυνὰ μέρη, κάθουμαι στὸ μικρὸ περιβολάκι μας μὲ τὰ λίγα δεντράκια καὶ μὲ τὰ ταπεινὰ λουλούδια. Ξεκουράζομαι κι εἰρηνεύει ἡ ψυχὴ μου. Τοῦτο τὸ μικρὸ κηπάριο εἶναι γιὰ μένα ὁ Κῆπος τῆς Ἐδέμ. Ὁ ἀγέρας μοσχοβολᾷ, κι ὁ νοῦς μου ταξιδεύει. Ταξιδεύει ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ, μὰ περισσότερο βυθίζεται μέσα μου, ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἀναβρῦζει τὸ μυστικὸ νερό, ἐκεῖ ποὺ βρίσκονται τὰ «ριζώματα» τοῦ κόσμου.

Εὐχαριστῶ τὸν Θεὸ ποὺ βρέθηκε αὐτὸ τὸ καταφύγιο. Νοιώθω μεγάλη εὐτυχία ποὺ εἶμαι μοναχιασμένος, πού, ἐδῶ ποὺ κάθουμαι, δὲν μὲ ξέρει κανένας, δὲν μὲ θυμᾶται κανένας. Σὰν νὰ εἶμαι καρaboτσακισμένος ποὺ γλύτωσε ἀπὸ τὴ φουρτούνα, κι ἀκούγει τὸ μούγκρισμα τῆς θάλασσας ἀπὸ τὸ σίγουρο καταφύγιό του. Σὰν νὰ γλύτωσε ἀπὸ ληστές. Ἀνατριχιάζω συλλογισμένος τὴν ἀνεμοζάλη ποὺ τὴ λένε ζωὴ οἱ ὅμοιοί μου, κοινωνικὴ ζωὴ, ζούγκλα γεμάτη σκορπιούς, φίδια καὶ λύκους. Ἀναπαύομαι μοναχὰ μὲ δυὸ-τρεις ἄνθρώπους ἀπλοῦς καὶ καλοκάγαθους, ποὺ ἔχουνε ἀγάπη μέσα τους καὶ εἰρήνη στὴν καρδιά τους. Δὲν θέλω μήτε θαυμασμούς, μηδὲ δόξες, μήτε ἄλλες τέτοιες συμφορὲς θέλω νὰ εἶμαι ξεχασμένος κι ἀσήμαντος.

Ἦ λησμονιά, τί μπάλαμο εἶσαι γιὰ ὅσους ποθοῦνε τὴν εἰρήνη! Κατάρρα εἶναι ἡ δίψα ποὺ ἔχουνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ κατασταθοῦνε ξακουσμένοι, νὰ τοὺς δοξάζει ὁ κόσμος καὶ νὰ βασανίζονται μέσα στὴ ματαιότητα κι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ θαυμάζονται κι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ θαυμάζουνε. Ἐδῶ ποὺ κάθουμαι, νοιώθω πὼς εἶμαι μακρυνὰ ἀπ' ὅλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς βραχνάδες ποὺ τοὺς ἔχουνε γιὰ εὐτυχία οἱ δυστυχημένοι ἄνθρωποι.

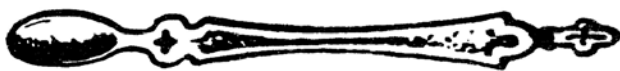
Φυσᾷ στὸ πρόσωπό μου τὸ δροσερὸ ἀγεράκι, μπαίνει ἀπαλὰ στ' αὐτιά μου, σὰν νὰ μὲ χαιρετᾷ.

Σιγοσαλεύουνε τὰ κλαδιά κι οἱ κορφές τῶν δέντρων. Μαμούνια περπατοῦνε στὸ μοσχοβολημένο χῶμα, τὸ κάθε ἓνα τραβᾷ τὸν δρόμο του κι ἔχει τὸν σκοπὸ του. Ποῦ πηγαίνουνε; Μυστήριο. Πεταλούδια καὶ μυγάκια λογιῆς-λογιῆς, ἄλλα μακρουλά, ἄλλα στρογγυλά, πετάνε καὶ μαζεύονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ φῶς ποὺ εἶναι ἀναμμένο ἀπὸ πάνω μου. Ὅλα εἶναι σπουδαῖα, ὅλα ἀξιαγάπητα. Κι ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἓνα ἀπ' αὐτά.

Δὲν ἀκούγεται τίποτα, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς σταλαγματιές τὸ νερὸ ποὺ πέφτουνε ἀπὸ τὴ βρύση, κάνοντας τὴ σιωπὴ ἀκόμα πιὸ βαθειά. Σὰ νὰ γίνεται γύρω μου κάποια μυσταγωγία. Τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ κόσμου τὸ νοιώθω καὶ μέσα μου κι ἀπέξω. Μυστικὲς θύρες ἀνοίγουνε ἀπὸ παντοῦ. Τὸ κάθε δέντρο, τὸ κάθε χορτάρι, τὸ κάθε λουλουδί, σὰν νὰ μὲ βλέπει μὲ τὰ μυστηριώδη μάτια του.

Εἶμαι μακάριος στὸ μικρὸ τοῦτο περιβολάκι μας. Τύφλα νᾶχουνε μπροστά του οἱ μεγάλοι κῆποι καὶ τὰ πολυέξοδα παλάτια, τὰ φανταχτερὰ κόττερα. Ὅσα εἶναι γύρω μου εἶναι ἀγαπημένα, γιατί δὲν εἶναι ἀγορασμένα μὲ λεφτὰ πολλά, ὅπως εἶναι ὅσα ἔχουνε οἱ πλούσιοι. Ἀγορασμένα πράγματα μποροῦνε νὰ δώσουνε εὐτυχία στὸν ἄνθρωπο;

ὦ, ἐσεῖς ποὺ ἔχετε τὰ πλούτη καὶ ποὺ μόνο τί λογιῆς εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ χαρὰ δὲν ξέρετε. Ἄνθρωποι βασανισμένοι, σαστισμένοι ἀπὸ τὶς ἔγνοιες κι ἀπὸ τὶς σκουτοῦρες, σκλάβοι στὴ φιλοδοξία καὶ στ' ἄλλα πάθη, ὦ ἄσωτοι γυιοί, ποὺ φάγατε τὰ ξυλοκέρατα καὶ δὲν χορτάσατε, γυρίστε πίσω στὸ σπίτι τοῦ πατέρα σας τοῦ πονετικοῦ, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλο παρὰ ἡ καρδιά ἡ δική σας, καὶ μπεῖτε μέσα νὰ ξαποστάσετε, νὰ εὐφρανθῆτε καὶ νὰ νοιώσετε τὴν ἀληθινὴν χαρὰ!



Ὁ Ἅγιος Νέος Ἱερομάρτυς Φιλούμενος ὁ Ἀγιοταφίτης

29 Νοεμβρίου: Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος κατακρεουργεῖται στὸ Φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ ἀπὸ τοὺς Σιωνιστές.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος, κατὰ κόσμον Σοφοκλῆς Ὁρουντιώτης, γεννήθηκε στὴν Λευκωσία τῆς Κύπρου στὶς 15 Ὀκτωβρίου 1913, ἡ καταγωγή του ὅμως ἦταν ἀπὸ τὸ χωριὸ Ὁρούντα. Γονεῖς τοῦ Ἁγίου ἦταν οἱ εὐσεβεῖς Γεώργιος καὶ Μαγδαληνή, οἱ ὅποιοι συνολικὰ ἀπέκτησαν 13 παιδιά. Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος ἦταν δίδυμος μὲ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο καὶ μετέπειτα π. Ἐλπίδιο.

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν εὐσέβεια τῶν γονέων τους, καταλυτικὸ ὑπῆρξε γιὰ τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν πρόοδο καὶ τῶν δύο (π. Φιλούμενο καὶ π. Ἐλπίδιο) τὸ παράδειγμα καὶ ἡ βιωτὴ τῆς γαργιάς τους Λωξαντροῦς (Ἀλεξάνδρας), ἡ ὁποία δημιουργοῦσε τὶς βάσεις καὶ τὶς προϋποθέσεις γιὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ τῶν ἐγγονῶν της.

Τὰ δύο δίδυμα ἀδέρφια, ἀπὸ μικρὰ ἀπέκτησαν ἰδιαίτερη ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὴν Ἁγία Του Ἐκκλησία. Ἔτσι ὁ πόθος γιὰ τὴν ὀλοκληρωτικὴ ἀφιέρωση στὸν Θεό, ὀδήγησε τὰ βήματά τους στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Σταυροβουνίου, ὅπου καὶ ἐντάχθηκαν ὡς δόκιμοι στὴν μοναστικὴ ἀδελφότητα σὲ ἡλικία 14 ἐτῶν, ἔχοντας τὴν εὐλογία τόσο τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ ὅσο καὶ τῶν γονέων τους. Τὸ 1934, μετὰ ἀπὸ προτροπὴ τοῦ ἐξάρχου τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου π. Παλλαδίου, οἱ δύο νέοι καλόγεροι ἐγγράφονται στὸ Γυμνάσιο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Κοινοῦ τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου, στὴν Ἁγία Πόλη Ἱερουσαλήμ. Καὶ ἐκεῖ ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος ξεχωρίζει γιὰ τὴν ἀρετὴ του.

Τὸ 1937 ὁ Πατριάρχης Τιμόθεος (Θέμελης) τοὺς κείρει μοναχοῦς, καὶ τὴν ἴδια χρονιά τους χειροτονεῖ διακόνους. Ἀργότερα ὁ π. Ἐλπίδιος θὰ ἀναχωρήσει ἀπὸ τὴν Σιωνίτιδα Ἐκκλησία, τὴν ὁποία ὅμως ὁ π. Φιλούμενος θὰ υπηρετήσῃ γιὰ 45 συνεχῆ χρόνια, μέχρι τὸ μαρτυρικὸ του τέλος.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος ὑπηρέτησε τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο Ἱεροσολύμων ἀπὸ διάφορες θέσεις-διακονήματα: Ἀρχικὰ ὡς ἐργοδηγὸς, ἀργότερα ὡς ἐπιμελητὴς τῶν Πατριαρχικῶν Γραφείων, ὡς βοηθὸς φροντιστῆς στὸ Κεντρικὸ μαγειρεῖο, ὡς Ἡγούμενος στὴν Τιβεριάδα, στὴν Ἰόππη, ὡς διευθυντὴς τοῦ Οἰκοτροφείου τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς Σχολῆς, ὡς Ἡγούμενος τῆς Μονῆς Ἀρχαγγέλου, ὡς τυπικάρης τοῦ Πατριαρχικοῦ Ναοῦ τῶν Ἁγίων Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Ἐλένης, ὡς Ἡγούμενος τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Μεταμορφώσεως στὴ Ραμάλλα, στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Ἀββᾶ Θεοδοσίου, στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Προφήτου Ἡλίας καὶ τέλος στὴν Ἱ. Μονὴ Φρέατος τοῦ Ἰακώβ στὴν πόλη Νεάπολη (Nablus) τῆς Σαμάρειας, ὅπου καὶ μαρτύρησε στὶς 29 Νοεμβρίου 1979 (ν.ἡ).

Ἀπ' ὅπου καὶ νὰ πέρασε, ἡ διακονία τοῦ Ἁγίου ἦταν ἀγλαόκαρπος! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἦταν ἀγαπητὸς ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς μουσουλμάνους. Στὸ τελευταῖο του διακόνημα στὴν Νεάπολη τῆς Σαμάρειας, στὸ Φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, ὁ Ἅγιος εἶχε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει πολλές δυσκολίες, κυρίως ἀπὸ φανατικούς Σιωνιστές, οἱ ὁποῖοι καὶ δικεδικούσαν τὸ Προσκύνημα.

Ὁ Ἅγιος ἀνέφερε συχνὰ τὶς δυσκολίες του αὐτές, σὲ ἄνθρωπους μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους συνδεόταν στενά, ὅπως ὁ συμμαθητὴς καὶ φίλος του (μακαριστὸς πλέον) Μητροπολίτης Βόστρον Ὑμέναιος. Σχετικὰ μὲ τὰ ὅσα συνέβησαν τὴν ἡμέρα τοῦ Μαρτυρίου χαρακτηριστικὴ εἶναι ἡ διήγησή του ἱερομ. π. Σωφρονίου:

«Ὁ μακαρίτης ὁ πατὴρ Φιλούμενος μᾶς ἔλεγε, ὅτι κάθε Παρασκευὴ πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς μισαλλόδοξους καὶ φανατικούς Ἑβραίους πήγαιναν γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθοῦν στὸ φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ. Συνέχεια τοῦ ἔλεγαν, νὰ σηκῶσαι ὅλες τὶς εἰκόνες καὶ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο ἀκόμα καὶ νὰ τὶς πάρει καὶ νὰ φύγει, διότι τὸ Φρέαρ εἶναι

δικό τους και όχι τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Εἰδάλλως θὰ τὸ μετανιώσει πικρά, ἀλλὰ θὰ εἶναι ἀργά.

Ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ πῆγε ἐκεῖ ὅλο καὶ τὸν φοβέριζαν. Αὐτὸς ὁμως ἤξερε τὰ ἐβραϊκὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀποστόμωσαν. Δὲν εἰδοποίησε ποτὲ τὴν Ἀστυνομία νὰ τὸ ἔχει ὑπ' ὄψιν της καὶ οὔτε τὸ φαντάζονταν ὅτι θὰ τὸν σκότωναν. Στὶς 16 Νοεμβρίου (29 μὲ τὸ νέο ἡμερολόγιο) εἶχε μεγάλη βροχή, ἀσταπές, βροντές, χαλασμοὶ Κυρίου ὅλη τὴν ἡμέρα. Βρῆκαν τὴν εὐκαιρία, ποὺ δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανένας, λόγω τῆς κακοκαιρίας, πῆγαν καὶ τὸν σκότωσαν μέσα στὸ φρέαρ τοῦ Ἰακώβ, μεταξὺ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, ὅπως ἔκαμαν καὶ στὸν προφήτη Ζαχαρία, τὸν πατέρα τοῦ Τιμίου Προδρόμου.

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἔκανε ἔσπερινό, ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα ὄριμαν. Κύριος οἶδε πόσοι ἦσαν, καὶ τὸν σκότωσαν μὲ τὸ τσεκούρι στὰ μούτρα καὶ στὸ δεξι χέρι, κόβοντας τὰ δάκτυλά του. Ἐπίσης, ἡ σιαγόνα του καὶ τὸ ἕνα μάτι του βγαλμένο καὶ τὸ ἄλλο κτυπημένο. Τὸ πῶς μπῆκαν στὸ Μοναστήρι, Κύριος οἶδε, διότι ὁ φύλακας εἶχε φύγει ἀπὸ τὶς 4.00 τὸ ἀπόγευμα καὶ ἔκλεισε τὸ Μοναστήρι. Ὁ φόνος ἔγινε μετὰ τὶς 5.00 μ.μ.. Τὸ πρῶτο πηγαίνει ὁ φύλακας στὶς 7.00 π.μ., φωνάζει: «Πάτερ Φιλούμενε;». Στὸ δωμάτιό του δὲν τὸν βρίσκει. Πηγαίνει στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸν βλέπει σκοτωμένο, μέσα στὰ αἵματα. Ἀμέσως εἰδοποίησε τὴν Ἀστυνομία καὶ ἡ Ἀστυνομία τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο.

Ἀλλὰ ἀφοῦ τὸν σκότωσαν ἔριξαν καὶ χειροβομβίδα ἔξω στὴν προσκομιδὴ καὶ τὰ ἔκαμαν ὅλα κομμάτια. Οὔτε μανουάλια ἄφησαν γερά, οὔτε εἰκόνες. Καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου ἔκοψαν τὸ χέρι του τὸ ἀριστερό. Τὰ Ἅγια Ποτήρια χαμένα. Ἦταν τόσο τρομερὴ ἡ κατάσταση ὡς νὰ μὴν κατοικοῦσε ἄνθρωπος μέσα ἀπὸ χρόνια.

Τὸν πῆραν στὸ νεκροτομεῖο, καὶ μετὰ τὸν ἔκαμαν νεκροψία στὸ Τὲλ Ἀβίβ καὶ μᾶς εἰδοποίησαν. Ἐγὼ πῆγα μαζί μὲ ἄλλους τρεῖς πατέρες τοῦ Πατριαρχείου καὶ μᾶς τὸν ἔδωσαν γυμνό. Ὅταν τοὺς ρωτήσαμε ποῦ εἶναι τὰ ροῦχα του, μᾶς εἶπαν εἶναι στὴ Νεάπολη. Ἀλλὰ δὲν φαντάζεστε, ὅταν μᾶς τὸν παρέδωσαν κομματισμένο, τὸ πρόσωπό του ἀγνώριστο, φέρον τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Μαρτυρίου, ὅπως οἱ Πέρσες ἔσφαξαν τοὺς Πατέρες τοῦ Ἁγίου Σάββα καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν μοναστηριῶν. Ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα. Ἀκολούθησε νὸ μαρτύριο στὸν πατέρα Φιλούμενο.

Πέντε μέρες τὸν εἶχαν στὸ ψυγεῖο. Καὶ ὁμως ἦταν μαλακώτατος, ὡς νὰ μὴν εἶχε πεθάνει. Ὅταν ἄρχισα νὰ τὸν ντύνω—διότι οἱ ἄλλοι δὲν μπορούσαν, δὲν ἄντεχαν νὰ τὸν βλέπουν ἀπὸ τὶς κακουχίες ποὺ εἶχε—τοῦ λέγω ὡς νὰ ἦταν ζωντανός: «Γέροντά μου, τώρα θὰ μὲ βοηθήσεις νὰ σὲ ντύσω, διότι βλέπεις εἶμαι μόνος μου». Ὅταν ἄρχισα καὶ τοῦ ἔβαλα τὴ φανέλλα, τὸ πρῶτο χέρι ἀμέσως τὸ κατέβασε μόνος του. Ὅπως καὶ τὸ ἄλλο χέρι. Καὶ τὰ πόδια ὁμοίως. Τοῦ μάζευα

τὰ πόδια νὰ τοῦ φορέσω τὰ ροῦχα καὶ ὅταν τελείωνα τὰ ἄπλωνε μόνος του. Στὸ ἀριστερὸ πόδι ἀπὸ κάτω, εἶχε κτύπημα μὲ τὸ τσεκούρι.

Ἀπὸ τὸ νεκροτομεῖο. τὸν φέραμε στὸ Πατριαρχεῖο. Ἔγινε ἡ νεκρώσιμος ἀκολουθία ἐν μέσῳ Ἁγιοταφίτων πατέρων, καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν. Ἦλθαν πολλοί, μέχρι καὶ ξένων δογματῶν διότι, ὅλοι τὸν ἀγαποῦσαν καὶ ἦλθαν νὰ τοῦ δώσουν τὸν τελευταῖο ἀσπασμό. Τὶ ὀδυρμός! Τὶ θρήνος! Τὶ κοπετός ἦταν αὐτός!

Τὸν π. Φιλούμενο ὅλοι τὸν κλάψαμε, διότι ἦταν ἕνας καλὸς καὶ ἅγιος πνευματικός. Ὁ Πατριάρχης τὸν ἀποκαλοῦσε «Πτωχοπρόδρομο». Καὶ ὄντως, ἦταν. Οἱ τέλειοι κληρονομοῦν τὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Ἐπέμεινε λίγο μαρτύριο καὶ βρῖσκεται μεταξὺ τῶν ἱερομαρτύρων καὶ τῶν Ὀσιομαρτύρων ὧν ταῖς πρεσβείες, εἶθε νὰ ἀξιωθοῦμε καὶ ἐμεῖς τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν.»

Μετὰ τὰ γεγονότα αὐτά, τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο Ἱεροσολύμων ἔστειλε ὁμάδες πατέρων γιὰ νὰ ἐπανδρώσουν τὸ Προσκύνημα, ἀλλὰ κανένας ἀπ' αὐτοὺς δὲν παρέμεινε στὸ Μοναστήρι γιὰ μεγάλο χρονικὸ διάστημα. Τὸ 1983 ὁ τότε Πατριάρχης Διόδωρος κάλεσα τὸν π. Ἰουστῖνο νὰ ἀναλάβει τὴν Ἡγουμενία στὸ Φρέαρ. Ἐκεῖνος ἂν καὶ ἀρχικὰ ἀρνήθηκε, κατόπιν διαφόρων ὁραμάτων ποὺ εἶχε, δέχτηκε καὶ πῆγε στὸ Φρέαρ, ὅπου καὶ διακονεῖ μέχρι καὶ σήμερα.

Ὁ π. Ἰουστῖνος κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς διακονίας του δέχτηκε πολλὲς ἐπιθέσεις ποὺ εἶχαν στόχο νὰ τὸν σκοτώσουν ἢ τουλάχιστον νὰ τὸν κάνουν νὰ ἐγκαταλείψει τὸ Προσκύνημα. Ὁ Ἅγιος Φιλούμενος τὸν ἔσωσε πολλὲς φορές. Χαρακτηριστικὴ εἶναι ἡ περίπτωση ποὺ τὸν σήκωσε ἀπὸ τὸ κρεβάτι καὶ τοῦ ἀποκάλυψε ἕνα ὥρολογιακὸ ἐκρηκτικὸ μηχανισμό!

Στὴν τρίτη ἐπίθεση ποὺ δέχτηκε ὁ π. Ἰουστῖνος, κατάφερε—ἂν καὶ τραυματισμένος—νὰ ἀκίνητοποιήσει τὸν δράστη χρησιμοποιώντας ἕνα μανουάλι πού βρισκόταν δίπλα του. Ὁ δράστης συνελήφθη καὶ ἀποδείχθηκε ὅτι ἦταν ὑπεύθυνος καὶ γιὰ τὸν μαρτυρικὸ θάνατο τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλουμένου. Ἡ Ἀστυνομία τὸν ἔφερε καὶ πάλι στὸ Προσκύνημα, ὅπου καὶ ἔγινε ἀναπαράσταση τῆς δολοφονίας τοῦ Ἁγίου. Τότε ἔγινε γνωστὸ σὲ ὅλους τὸ πῶς μπῆκαν στὸ Μοναστήρι, πῶς κρύφτηκαν καὶ τέλος πῶς δολοφόνησαν τὸν ἅγιο Φιλούμενο.

Ὁ π. Ἰουστῖνος μὲ πολλὲς προσευχὲς καὶ ἀγῶνες, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴν ἔμπρακτη βοήθεια τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλουμένου, ἔχει ἀποπερατώσει τὴν ἀνέγερση τοῦ Ἱ. Ν. τῆς Ἁγίας Φωτεινῆς, ἡ στάμνα τῆς ὁποίας φιλοξενεῖται πλέον στὸ Προσκύνημα τοῦ Φρέατος. Ἐπίσης τὸ **ἄφθαρτο σκήνωμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλουμένου** μεταφέρθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Ναὸ τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς Σχολῆς καὶ φυλάσσεται στὸ Ἱερὸ Προσκύνημα τοῦ Φρέατος στὴν Νεάπολη.

WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON NOW?

By Patrick J. Buchanan. Mr. Buchanan is the author of "Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?" To find out more about Patrick Buchanan and read features by other Creators writers and cartoonists, visit the "Creators" web page at www.creators.com.

In his Kremlin defense of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Vladimir Putin, even before he began listing the battles where Russian blood had been shed on Crimean soil, spoke of an older deeper bond.

"Crimea," said Putin, "is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus."

Russia is a Christian country, Putin was saying. This speech recalls last December's address where the former KGB chief spoke of Russia as standing against a decadent West:

"Many Euro-Atlantic countries have moved away from their roots, including Christian values. Policies are being pursued that place on the same level a multi-child family and a same-sex partnership, a faith in God and a belief in Satan. This is the path to degradation."

Heard any Western leader, say, Barack Obama, talk like that lately?

Indicting the "Bolsheviks" who gave away Crimea to Ukraine, Putin declared, "May God judge them."

What is going on here? With Marxism-Leninism a dead faith, Putin is saying the new ideological struggle is between a debauched West led by the United States and a traditionalist world Russia would be proud to lead. In the new war of beliefs, Putin is saying, it is Russia that is on God's side. The West is Gomorrah.

Western leaders who compare Putin's annexation of Crimea to Hitler's Anschluss with Austria, who dismiss him as a "KGB thug," who call him "the alleged thief, liar and murderer who rules Russia," as the Wall Street Journal's Holman Jenkins did, believe Putin's claim to stand on higher moral ground is beyond blasphemous. But Vladimir Putin knows exactly what he is doing, and his new claim has a venerable lineage. The ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers who exposed Alger Hiss as a Soviet spy, was, at the time of his death in 1964, writing a book on "The Third Rome."

The first Rome was the Holy City and seat of Christianity that fell to Odoacer and his barbarians in 476 A.D. The second Rome was Constantinople, Byzantium, (today's Istanbul), which fell to the Turks in 1453. The successor city to Byzantium, the Third Rome, the last Rome to the old believers, was—Moscow.

Putin is entering a claim that Moscow is the Godly City of today and command post of the counter-reformation against

the new paganism. Putin is plugging into some of the modern world's most powerful currents.

Not only in his defiance of what much of the world sees as America's arrogant drive for global hegemony. Not only in his tribal defense of lost Russians left behind when the USSR disintegrated.

He is also tapping into the worldwide revulsion of and resistance to the sewage of a hedonistic secular and social revolution coming out of the West.

In the culture war for the future of mankind, Putin is planting Russia's flag firmly on the side of traditional Christianity. His recent speeches carry echoes of John Paul II whose *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995 excoriated the West for its embrace of a "culture of death."

What did Pope John Paul mean by moral crimes?

The West's capitulation to a sexual revolution of easy divorce, rampant promiscuity, pornography, homosexuality, feminism, abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, assisted suicide—the displacement of Christian values by Hollywood values.

Washington Post columnist Anne Applebaum writes that she was stunned when in Tbilisi to hear a Georgian lawyer declare of the former pro-Western regime of Mikhail Saakashvili, "They were LGBT."

"It was an eye-opening moment," wrote Applebaum. Fear and loathing of the same-sex-marriage pandemic has gone global. In Paris, a million-man Moral Majority marched in angry protest.

Author Masha Gessen, who has written a book on Putin, says of his last two years, "Russia is remaking itself as the leader of the anti-Western world."

But the war to be waged with the West is not with rockets. It is a cultural, social, moral war where Russia's role, in Putin's words, is to "prevent movement backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state."

Would that be the "chaotic darkness" and "primitive state" of mankind, before the Light came into the world?

This writer was startled to read in the Jan-Feb newsletter from the social conservative World Council of Families in Rockford, Ill., that, of the "ten best trends" in the world in 2013, number one was "Russia Emerges as Pro-Family Leader."

In 2013, the Kremlin imposed a ban on homosexual propaganda, a ban on abortion advertising, a ban on abortions after 12 weeks and a ban on sacrilegious insults to religious believers.

"While the other super-powers march to a pagan worldview," writes WCF's Allan Carlson, "Russia is defending Judeo-Christian values. During the Soviet era, Western communists flocked to Moscow. This year, World Congress of Families VII will be held in Moscow, Sept. 10-12."

Will Vladimir Putin give the keynote?

In the new ideological Cold War, whose side is God on now?

MANY CONFESS, FEW REPENT

From the book "Repentance and Confession," by Monk Moses of the Holy Mountain, "Orthodox Kypseli" publications, Thessaloniki, Greece (edited for length).

Confession is a God-given commandment, and it is one of the Sacraments of our Church. Confession is not a formal, habitual ("to be on the safe side," or, "in view of upcoming feast-days"), forced and unprepared act, springing from an isolated duty or obligation and for psychological relief only. Confession should always be combined with repentance. A Holy Mountain Elder used to say: "Many confess, but few repent!"

[Elder Aemilianos of the Simonopetra Monastery, Mt. Athos]



What Is True Repentance?

Repentance is a freely-willed, internally cultivated process of contrition and sorrow for having distanced ourselves from God through sin. True repentance has nothing to do with intolerable pain, excessive sorrow and relentless guilty feelings. That would not be sincere repentance, but a secret egotism, a feeling of our "ego" being trampled upon; an anger that is directed at our self, which then wreaks revenge because it is exposing itself and is put to shame—a thing that it cannot tolerate.

Repentance means a change in our thoughts, our mentality; it is an about-face; it is a grafting of morality and an abhorrence of sin. Repentance also means love of virtue, benevolence, desire, willingness, and a strong disposition to be re-joined with Christ through the Grace of the almighty Holy Spirit. While repentance begins in the depths of the heart, it culminates necessarily in the sacrament of divine and sacred Confession.

The Confessor as a "Spiritual Father"

During confession, one confesses sincerely and humbly, as though in the presence of Christ. No scientist, psychologist, psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, sociologist, philosopher or theologian can replace the confessor. No icon—not even the most miracle-working one—can provide what the confessor's stole can: the absolution of sins. The confessor takes the person under his care; he adopts him and ensures he is reborn spiritually, which is why he is called a "spiritual father."

Normally, spiritual paternity is lifelong, sacred and powerful, **even more powerful than the bond of any blood relatives.** Spiritual birth is a painful process. The confessor must keep track of the confessing soul, with a fear of God (as one who is "accountable to God"), with understanding, humility and love, and guide him with discretion in the ever-upward course of his in-Christ life.

The confessor-priest has been given a special blessing by his bishop for the undertaking of his confessional opus. However, this gift of "binding and un-binding" sins is initially acquired only through his ordination as presbyter, when he is rendered a successor to the Apostles. Thus, validity and canonicity in Apostolic succession, through bishops, is of central and great importance. Confession is performed (and bestows divine Grace upon the faithful), not in conjunction with the skill, the scientism, the literacy, the eloquence, the energy and the artfulness of the priest; not even with his virtue and holiness—but through the canonicity (validity) of his priesthood and through the "Master of Ceremonies"—the Holy Spirit.

The possible sins of the priest do not obstruct divine Grace during the Sacraments. Woes betide, if the faithful were to doubt (on account of the unworthiness of the priest) that the bread and the wine actually become the Body and the Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy! This of course does not mean that the priest should not have to constantly concern himself with his own "cleanliness."

Thus, there is no such thing as "good" or "bad" confessors. Each and every confessor provides the exact same absolution.



However, **we do have the right to choose our confessor**; and of course we have the right to turn to the one who truly makes us feel at ease with him, spiritually. To constantly change our confessor however, is not a very sober decision; this kind of tendency does not reveal spiritual maturity.

The confessor's opus is not just the superficial hearing of a person's sins and the reciting of the prayer of absolution afterwards. Nor is it restricted to the hour of confession. Like a good father, the confessor continuously cares for his child; he listens to it and observes it carefully, he counsels it appropriately, he guides it along the lines of the Gospel, he highlights its talents, he does not place unnecessary burdens on it, he imposes canons with leniency only when he must, he consoles it when it is disheartened, weighed down, resentful, exhausted, and he heals it accordingly, without ever discouraging it, but constantly pursuing the struggle for the eradication of its passions and the harvesting of virtues; constantly shaping its eternal soul to be Christ-like.

This ever-developing paternal and filial relationship between confessor and spiritual child eventually culminates in a feeling of comfort, trust, respect, sanctity and elation. When confessing, one opens his heart to the confessor and discloses the innermost, the basest and most unclean—in fact, all of his—secrets, his most intimate actions and detrimental desires, even those that he would not want to confess to himself, nor tell his next-of-kin or his closest friend. For this reason, the confessor must have an absolute respect

for the unlimited trust that is being shown to him by the person confessing.

This trust most assuredly builds up with time, but also by the fact that the confessor is strictly bound (in fact to the death) by the divine and Sacred Canons of the Church, to the confidentiality that confession entails.

“Economy,” Canons, and Guidance

In Orthodox confession there are of course no general instructions, because the spiritual guidance that each unique soul requires is entirely personalized. Each person is unprecedented, with a particular psychosynthesis, a different character, differing potentials and abilities, limitations, tendencies, tolerances, knowledge, needs and dispositions. With the Grace of God and with divine enlightenment, the confessor must discern all these characteristics, in order to decide what he can utilize best, so that the person confessing will be helped in the best possible manner. At times, leniency will be required, while at other times, austerity.

What is required of the spiritual father is a fear of God, discernment, honesty, humility, deliberation, understanding and prayer. “Economy” (*Oekonomia: to make allowances for something, exceptionally*) is not demanded of the person confessing, nor is it proper for the confessor to make it a rule. “Economy” must remain an exception. “Economy” must also be a temporary measure (Archmandrite George Gregoriates). When the reasons for implementing it no longer exist, it must naturally be retracted. The same sin can be confronted in numerous ways.

A canon is not always necessary. A canon is not intended as a form of punishment. It is educative by nature. A canon is not imposed for the sake of appeasing an offended God and an atonement of the sinner in the face of Divine Justice; that is an entirely heretical teaching. A canon is usually implemented during an immature confession, with the intent to arouse awareness and a consciousness of the magnitude of one’s sin. According to Orthodox teaching, “sin” is not so much the transgression of a law, as it is a lack of love towards God. *Love, and do whatever you want*, the blessed Augustine used to say. A canon is implemented for the purpose of completing one’s repentance in view of confession, which is why Fr. Athanasios of Meteora rightly says: *Just as the confessor is not permitted to make public the sins being confessed to him, so must the person confessing not make public the particular canon that the confessor has imposed in his specific case, as it is the resultant of many parameters.*

A confessor acts as the provider of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. During the hour of the Sacrament of Confession, he does not function as a psychologist and scientist. He functions as a priest, as an experienced doctor, as a caring father. When listening to the sins of the person confessing, he prays to God to give him enlightenment, to advise him what the best “medication” for cure will be, and to gauge the degree and the quality of that confession.

The confessor does not place himself opposite a confessing person with curiosity, suspicion, envy, excessive austerity, power and arrogance; but equally not with indifference, thoughtlessly, carelessly and wearily. The humility, love and attention of the confessor will greatly help the person confessing. He should also not ask too many, too unnecessary and too indiscreet questions. He must especially interrupt any detailed descriptions of various sins (especially the carnal ones) and even the disclosure of names, to safeguard himself even more. But the person confessing should also not feel afraid, or hesitate and feel embarrassed; he should feel respect, trust, honor and show reverence to the confessor. This climate of sanctity, mutual respect and trust must be mainly nurtured, inspired and developed by the confessor.

Our holy Orthodox Church is the Body of the Resurrected Christ; She is a vast infirmary, for the healing of frail, sinning faithful from the traumas, the wounds and the illnesses of sin; from pathogenic demons and from the venomous demonic traps and the influences of demonically-driven passions. She is not a branch office of the Ministry of Social Services, nor does She compete against the various societies for social welfare. The Church is mainly a provider of a meaning to life, of redemption and salvation of the faithful *for the sake of whom Christ died*, through their participation in the sacraments of the Church.

The priest’s stole is a planing instrument—as the Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain used to say —*that planes and straightens out a person; it is a therapeutic scalpel that excises passions, and not a trowel for workaholics, or a symbol of power. It is a servant’s apron intended for ministering to people, for providing therapy and salvation.* God uses the priest for the forgiveness of His creature. It is plainly stated in the absolution blessing: *May God forgive you—through me the sinner—everything, both in the present age and in the future one, and may He render you blameless, before His awesome Seat of Judgment; having no longer any worry for the crimes that have been confessed, may you go forth in peace.* Sins that have not been confessed will continue to burden a person, even in the life to come.

Confessed sins should not be re-confessed; it would be as though one doesn’t believe in the grace of the Sacrament. God is of course aware of them, but it is for the sake of absolution, humbling and therapy that they need to be outwardly confessed. As for the occasional penance imposed for sins, one must realize that it does not negate the Church’s love for the person, but that it is simply an educative imposition, for a better awareness of one’s offenses.

Elements of a Sound Confession

According to Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain, *confession is a willed, verbal revealing of one’s evil deeds and words and thoughts; solemn, accusatory, direct, without shame, decisive, to be executed before a legitimate spiritual father.* This God-bearing saint has succinctly, fully and meaningfully clarified that confession must be willed, free, effortless, without

the confessor straining to extract the person's confession. It should be with solemnity, in other words, with an awareness of the sorrow that he caused God with his sin, and not with sentimental, hypocritical, fainthearted tears.

Genuine "solemnity" implies an inner collapsing, remorse, a hatred towards sin, a love of virtue, and a feeling of gratitude to the Gift-Giver God. "Accusatory" implies a responsible confession, without attempts of justification, subterfuge, chicanery, irresponsibility and scapegoating; with sincere self-reproach and genuine self-humiliation that carries the so-called "happy-sorrow" and the "joyous bereavement" defined by the Church. "Direct" implies a confession with all sincerity, directness and precision, valour and courage, severity and bravery.

It often happens that during the hour of confession, one avoids admitting his defeat, his fall and his weakness and by means of eloquent and long-winded descriptions attempts to deflect his share of responsibility, with twists and turns and half-truths—or even by accusing others—all for the sake of preserving (even at that hour) a prim and proper ego. A confession "without shame" implies a portrayal of our true, deplorable self.

Furthermore, confession should be continuous, so that the *willingly recurring passions* (according to Saint John of the Ladder) *are not strengthened, but rather, are cured sooner*. Thus, old sins will not be entirely blotted out from memory, there will be a regular self-monitoring, self-observation, self-awareness and self-reproach; Divine Grace will not abandon; demonic entrapment will be averted much more easily, and reminiscence of Death will not seem as horrid and terrible.

A basic prerequisite is a purity of heart; a purity that is rid of the spirit of avarice and blissfulness inspired by today's hyper-consumerist society; the spirit of God-despised pride in a world of narcissism, individualism, non-humility, non-philanthropy, arrogance and the bizarre; the demonic spirit of mischievous thoughts, fantasies and imaginations and unclean and obscure suspicions and envy.

Purity of heart has become a rare ornament—in brotherly and conjugal relations, in obligations towards colleagues, in friendships, in conversations, in thoughts, in desires, in pastoral callings. Forgotten are neptic awareness, ascetic sobriety, traditional frugality, simplicity and gallantry. This has led to a polluting of the soul's rationalizing ability, an arousal of its desirous aspect towards avarice, while its willpower has become severely blunted, thus drawing a weakened person towards evil, without any impediments or limitations.

Nowadays prevail self-justification, excuses for our passions, beautification of sin, and its reinforcement through mod-

ern psychological supports. The admission of mistakes is regarded as belittlement, weakness and generally improper. The constant justification of our self, and the meticulous transfer of responsibilities elsewhere have created a human being that is confused, divided, disturbed, worn-out, miserable and self-absorbed, taunted by the devil, and captured in his dark meshes.

In view of all the above—none of which I believe has been exaggerated—it is our belief that the opus of a confessor is not an easy one. Ordinary coercion to repent and the cultivating of humility are nowadays inadequate; the fold requires catechesis, re-evangelizing, spiritual training, as well as a spiritual about-face, in order to acquire powerful antibodies. Resistance, reaction and the confronting of the powerful current of de-sanctification, of secularization, of demoting heroism, of eudemonism and of amassing wealth are imperative. The

young generation is in need of special attention, instruction and love, given that their upbringing has not proven to be of any help in their becoming aware of the meaning and the purpose of life, or of the void and the indecorousness, the lawlessness and the darkness of sin.

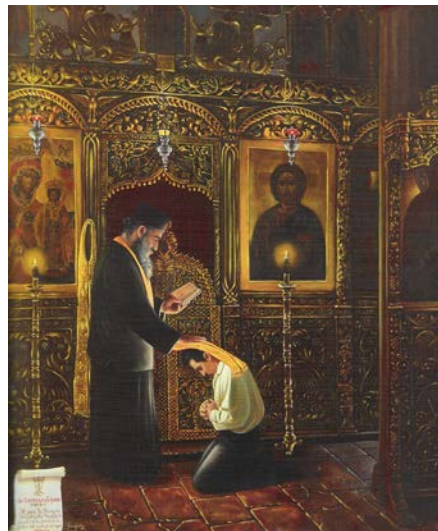
Obstacles in Modern Times

Another serious problem—even for our Christians—is the often over-zealous quest for a labor-less, toil-free and grief-free life. We are in search of Cyreneans to carry our crosses. We refuse to lift up our own personal cross. We have no idea of the depth and breadth of our own cross. We bow in reverence before the Cross in

church, we cross ourselves, but we do not embrace our personal cross. In the long run, we would like a non-crucified Christianity. But there cannot be Pascha Sunday without a Good Friday.

We honor martyrs and saints, but we ourselves do not want to suffer any hardships, any postponements, any difficulties. Fasting is too difficult a task to accomplish; we feel resentful during an illness; we cannot tolerate any harsh words, not even when we are to blame, therefore how could we possibly tolerate injustice, slander, persecution and exile, the way our saints did? Our contemporary, secular spirit of convenience, leisure and excessive consumerism has greatly affected the measure of spiritual living.

One other serious problem of our time is man's morbid and undue reliance on logic, intellect, knowledge, and personal judgment—we are referring to rationalization. Neptic Orthodox theology teaches us to *consider our nous a tool, and to lower it, into the heart*. Our Church does not cultivate and produce intellectuals. Rationalization is for us a clearly sin-oriented life view—a form of atheism—since it goes contrary to the commandment of placing our faith, hope, love



and trust in God. A rationalist judges everything using the filter of his own mind and only with his finite mind, with his sovereign ego as the epicenter, placing no trust in divine Providence, divine Grace and divine Assistance in his life.

By often regarding himself as infallible, a rationalist does not allow God to intervene in his life and thus becomes convinced that he is not in need of confession. Saint Symeon the New Theologian says however that, **for one to believe he has not fallen into any sins is the greatest of falls and fallacies, and the greatest sin of all.** Certain newer theologians speak of “missing the target” and not of “sinning,” in their desire to blunt the natural protesting of one’s conscience. The self-sufficiency displayed by certain churchgoers and fasting Christians can at times be hiding a latent pharisaic stance, i.e., that “they are not like the others” and therefore are not in need of confession.

The Delusion Arising from Our Passions

The greatest of evils is pride. It is the mother of many offspring, the first ones being vainglory and self-vindication. Pride is a form of denial of God; it is an invention of wicked demons, the result of too much praise, which in turn results in God-despised censure, anger, rage, hypocrisy, the lack of compassion, misanthropy, and blasphemy. Pride is a passion that is formidable, difficult, powerful and hard to cure. Pride manifests itself as vainglory, boastfulness, conceit, arrogance, presumptuousness, swell-headedness, insolence, self-importance, megalomania, ambition, self-love, vanity, avarice, flesh-loving, a love for leadership, accusations and arguments. Also as smugness, favouritism, insolence, disrespect, outspokenness, insensitivity, contradiction, obstinacy, disobedience, sarcasm, stubbornness, disregard, indignity, perfectionism and hypersensitivity. Finally, pride can lead to impenitence.

The tongue often becomes the instrument of pride, through unchecked, long-winded, useless talking; gossiping, silliness; vain, insincere, indiscreet, two-tongued, diplomatic, pretended and mocking conversations.

Out of the seven deadly sins many other passions spring forth. Having mentioned the offspring of pride, we then have avarice, which gives birth to the love of money, greed, stinginess, lack of charity, hardheartedness, fraud, usury, injustice, deceitfulness, simony, bribery, gambling. Fornication manifests itself in myriads of ways, for example, envy—with its underhanded and evil spite, insatiable gluttony, anger, as well as suspect negligence and lack of care.

Special attention should also be paid to many un-Orthodox elements in family life. The avoidance of childbearing, the idolizing of one’s children (when regarded as the extension of the parents’ ego); overprotecting them, or constantly watching their moves and savagely oppressing them.

Marriage is an arena for exercising humility, mutual leeway and mutual respect, and not the parallel journey of two egotisms despite a lifelong coupling and coexistence. The devil

dances for joy whenever there is no forgiveness in human weaknesses and in everyday mistakes.

Parents will help their children significantly with their peaceful, sober and loving example in the home, on a daily basis. The participation of the children together with the parents in the sacrament of confession will fortify them with divine Grace in an experiential life in Christ.

When parents ask for forgiveness with sincerity, they simultaneously teach their children humility, which destroys all demonic plots. In a household where love, harmony, understanding, humility and peace bloom, there the blessings of God will be bounteous and the home becomes a castle that is impervious to the malice of the world around. The upbringing of children with the element of forgiveness creates a healthy family hearth, which will inspire them and strengthen them for their own futures.

One other huge matter that constitutes an obstacle for repentance and confession is self-vindication, which plagues many people of the Church also. Its basis is, as we mentioned earlier, demonic pride. A classic example is the Pharisee of the Gospel parable. The self-vindicating person has apparently positive elements, which he will over-praise and for which he would like to be honoured and praised. He is happy to be flattered and to demean and humiliate others. He has excessive self-esteem, he vindicates himself to excess and believes that God is necessarily obliged to reward him. In the long run, he is a poor wretch, who, in his wretched state makes others wretched. He is possessed by nervousness and agitation and he is demanding, thus imprisoning himself; these are tendencies that will not allow him to open the door to divine mercy, through his repentance.

An offspring of pride is censure, which is unfortunately also a habit of many Christians, who tend to concern themselves more with others than themselves. This is a phenomenon of our time and of a society that pushes people into a continuous observation of others, and not of the self.

Modern man’s myriad occupations and activities do not want him to ever remain alone to study, to contemplate, to pray, to attain self-awareness, self-critique, self-control and to be reminded of death. The so-called mass media are incessantly preoccupied with scandal-seeking, persistently and at length, with human passions, with sins, with others’ misdemeanors. These kinds of things provoke, impress, and, even if they do not scandalize, they nevertheless burden the soul and the mind with filth and ugliness and they actually reassure us, by making us believe that “we are better” than those advertised. Thus, a person becomes accustomed to the mediocrity, the tepidity and the transience of superficial day-to-day life, never comparing himself to saints and heroes. Censure in our times gives man the impression that he is justly imposing a kind of cleansing, by mud-slinging at others, albeit contaminating himself by generating malice, hatred, hostility, resentfulness, envy and frigidity.

St. Maximos the Confessor in fact states that the one who constantly scrutinizes other's sins, or judges his brothers based on a suspicion only, has not even begun to repent, nor has he begun any research into discovering his own sins.

Conclusion

Many and various things can be said; but in the end, only one thing is opportune, significant and outstanding: Salvation is attained, only through sincere repentance and clean confession.

Repentance not only opens the celestial Paradise, but also the terrestrial one, with the foretasting -albeit partial- of the ineffable joy of the endless reign of the heavens and of wonderful peace, in the present time. Those who uphold the practice of confession can be the truly and genuinely happy people; pacifist and peace-bearing; heralds of repentance, of resurrection, of transformation, freedom, grace, and with the blessing of God in their souls and their lives. "God's bounteous Grace turns the wolf into a lamb," says Saint John the Chrysostom.

No sin can surpass God's love. There is not one sinner who cannot become a saint, if he desires to. It has been proven, by the innumerable names that are recorded in the Book of Saints.

The confessor listens to confessions and absolves those confessing, under his blessed stole. He cannot however confess himself and place the stole over his own head to obtain forgiveness in the same manner. He must necessarily kneel underneath another stole to confess and be absolved.

That is the way the spiritual law functions; that is the way God's Wisdom and Mercy have ordained. We cannot confess others, but not submit ourselves to confession; to not practice what we preach; to talk about repentance, but not to repent; to talk about confession, but not confess ourselves regularly. None of us can dethrone himself, and none can absolve himself. The unadvised, the disobedient, the unconfessed are a serious problem for the Church.

Dear brothers and sisters, the confessor's stole can be a miraculous scalpel for the removal of malignant tumors; it can raise the dead, renew and transform the indecorous world, and bring joy to earth and heaven. Our Church has entrusted this grand ministry, this sacred service, to our priests and not to the angels, so that we might be able to approach them with ease and without fear, as fellow-sufferers and corporeal counterparts.

All the above have been deposited with sincerity and not at all pretentiously, by a co-sinner, who did not aspire to play the teacher, but a co-struggling, co-student, together with you. It was merely his desire to remind you with simple and inartistic words the Tradition of our holy mother, the Church, on the ever-opportune matter of divinely-spun and divinely-blessed Repentance and the divinely-delivered and God-favored, blessed sacrament of Confession.

NOTHING SMELLS WORSE THAN PRIDE

By St. Kosmas Aitolos.



There was a virtuous hermit who frequently prayed to God, and who received revelations of many divine mysteries. One day he set out from his hermitage to travel to a distant region. Along the way, he met another man who was journeying in the same direction. This individual was actually an angel, but the hermit did not realize this and assumed he was a regular human being.

As they journeyed together, along the path they encountered a dead horse. The hermit covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did not. A short while later, they came across a dead calf. The hermit again covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did not. Not long after, they found a dead dog in their path. The hermit covered his nose and held his breath; the angel did nothing.

Eventually they approached a certain village where they crossed paths with a beautiful young lady, who was wearing extravagant clothing and ornate jewelry, and taking great pride in her appearance. The angel then immediately covered his nose. When the hermit witnessed this, he stopped and asked, "Who are you? Are you an angel, a human being, or a demon? ... We passed by a dead horse that stunk, but you did not cover your nose. We also passed by the dead calf and dog, and I did not see you cover your nose. Now that we passed by such a beautiful young lady you decided to cover your nose and hold your breath?"

Then the angel revealed himself to the hermit and replied, "Nothing smells as bad as pride does to God." Having said this, the angel disappeared.

The hermit then returned back to his hut and began weeping for his sins, beseeching God to protect him henceforth from the devil's traps, and not allow him to fall into the sin of pride and thus lose his soul.



Today the Lord is born, the life and salvation of mankind; today a reconciliation is made of Divinity to humanity, and of humanity to Divinity; today all creation has leapt for joy; those above sent toward those below; and those below towards those above; today occurred the death of darkness and the life of humanity; today a way was made toward God for man and a way for God into the soul.

St. Macarius the Great

CURING THE POISON OF GOSSIP

By Saint Theophan the Recluse.

A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. [Prov 18:7]

† † †

The Poison

Evil speech is worse than all poisons. All other wounds may be healed, but the wound of the tongue has no cure. The tongue of the dragon is less evil than that of the whisperer, which in turn comes from a most evil demon: for it provokes quarrelling and bitter strife between brethren, sows evil and discord among the peaceful, scatters many communities. If you permit the whisperer to approach you, he will strip you of every merit you possess. Whosoever becomes involved with him has already become a confederate in his bloodshed, in his murders, and in his slayings! For a whisperer and a murderer spawn the same whelp: if they do not slay you with the sword, they will bring the same disaster on you with the tongue.

Because of these things I charge you severely, that you separate yourself from a whisperer as speedily as you can. Let him be a monk, let him be an anchorite, let him be a champion of virtue or but a novice, whoever he is, as long as he is a whisperer, fly from him. Though he should be your own father, or your brother, if he is a whisperer keep far away from him. For it is better to dwell with a lion or with a lioness than with one who is a whisperer. And do not be ashamed to fly from him; so that he shall not infect you with the poison of his sin.

So then, my sons, have no part in murmuring. Do your work earnestly and in silence; for he who is devoted to silence is close to God and His angels and dwells in heaven. For the Lord tells us that: *He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.* (Prov 13:3).

And then in the day of our visitation He shall say to us: *Blessed art thou, O Israel,* because you kept watch on your tongue; *who is like unto thee.* (Deut 33:29).

May the Lord preserve you in His grace and peace. Amen.

The Cure

Set, O Lord, a watch before my mouth, and a door of enclosure round about my lips. The greatest necessity of all is to control and curb our tongue. The mover of the tongue is the heart: what fills the heart is poured out through the tongue. And conversely, when feeling is poured out of the heart by the tongue, it becomes strengthened and firmly rooted in the heart. Therefore the tongue is one of the chief factors in building up our inner disposition.

Good feelings are silent. The feelings which seek expression in words are mostly egotistical, since they seek to express what flatters our self-love and can show us, as we imagine, in the best light. Loquacity mostly comes from a certain vainglory,

which makes us think that we know a great deal and imagine our opinion on the subject of conversation to be the most satisfactory of all. So we experience an irresistible urge to speak out and in a stream of words, with many repetitions, to impress the same opinion in the hearts of others, thus foisting ourselves upon them as unbidden teachers and sometimes even dreaming of making pupils of men, who understand the subject much better than the teacher.

When you have to speak, before expressing what has entered your heart and letting it pass to your tongue, examine it carefully; and you will find many things that are better not let past your lips. Know moreover that many things, which it seems to you good to express, are much better left buried in the tomb of silence. Sometimes you will yourself realize this, immediately the conversation is over.

Silence is a great power in our unseen warfare and a sure hope of gaining victory. Silence is much beloved of him, who does not rely on himself but trusts in God alone. It is the guardian of holy prayer and a miraculous helper in the practice of virtues; it is also a sign of spiritual wisdom. St. Isaac says: *Guarding your tongue not only makes your mind rise to God, but also gives great hidden power to perform visible actions, done by the body. If silence is practiced with knowledge, it also brings enlightenment in hidden doing.* In another place he praises it thus: *If you pile up on one side of the scales all the works demanded by ascetic life, and on the other side—silence, you will find that the latter outweighs the former. Many good counsels have been given us, but if a man embraces silence, to follow them will become superfluous.* In yet another place he calls silence *the mystery of the life to come; whereas words are the instruments of this world.* It can be said in general that: *One that keepeth silence is found wise: and another by much babbling becometh hateful.* (Sir 20:5).

I shall indicate to you the most direct and simple method to acquire the habit of silence: undertake this practice, and the practice itself will teach you how to do it, and help you. To keep up your zeal in this work, reflect as often as you can on the pernicious results of indiscriminate babbling and on the salutary results of wise silence. When you come to taste the good fruit of silence, you will no longer need lessons about it.



Many abstain from meat, milk and other food which God has not forbidden and which was even given as a blessing of people who have learned the truth and know how to *partake of these things with thanksgiving* (I Tim 4:4). But the same abstemious, devout-living people, give scandal by their action, and spread scandal with their tongue like an incendiary fire.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

THE TWO KINDS OF MUSIC

By Photios Kontoglou.



The beloved iconographer Photios Kontoglou (+1965) is the greatest icon painter of modern Greece and one of her most important theologians and literary writers. He played a major role in the glorious return of traditional Byzantine iconography to the Greek Orthodox world in the twentieth century. He was also an accomplished chanter and a spiritual writer who inspired

countless souls to embrace the unadulterated traditions of the Orthodox faith. He was a man of adamantine Orthodox faith and impeccable character, adorned with the virtues of great humility, long-suffering, courage, wisdom, purity, hope and love. He was a devout man, a holy man, a man of God. All that he did bears the impress of these qualities.

In Kontoglou's writings, we encounter a man who has unshakable religious faith, free from all skepticism and metaphysical anguish. We encounter a man who is steeped in the Holy Scriptures and writings of the Eastern Church Fathers, particularly the great mystics such as Saint Macarios the Egyptian, Saint John Climacos, Saint Isaac the Syrian, Saint Symeon the New Theologian, and Saint Gregory the Sinaite. We find a man who has the profoundest respect for the Sacred Tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, including all its dogmas, canons and sacred arts (architecture, iconography, music), tolerating no deviations. Orthodoxy was for him the sacred *Kivotos*, the sacred Ark, and these its precious contents, which must be carefully guarded and not cast away, or exchanged for counterfeits.

Kontoglou was strongly opposed to the participation of Orthodoxy in "ecumenism," seeing in such participation the dangers of compromise on matters which admit of no compromise. He was especially critical of the maneuvers of Patriarch Athenagoras, in whom he saw an apostate... a betrayer of Greece and Orthodoxy. In his last book, entitled *Ti Einai he Orthodoxia kai ti Einai ho Papsimos* ("What Orthodoxy Is and What Papsim Is") Kontoglou stressed the abyss that separates Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism, which renders utterly absurd Athenagoras's assertions that there are no real differences between the two.

As during his life, so at his death, it was evident that Kontoglou was free from worldly attachments, a citizen of the City of God, not of the earthly city, whose glory is temporary and whose power is doomed to pass away. He died poor, ignored

by the State. His body was not accompanied to the grave by any State dignitaries, but only by friends and admirers, who loved him deeply.

† † †

Music is of two kinds (as are the other arts also)—secular and ecclesiastical. Each of these has been developed by different emotions and different states of the soul. Secular music expresses worldly (i.e., carnal) feelings and desires. Although these emotions may be very refined (romantic, sentimental, idealistic, etc.), they nevertheless continue to be exclusively carnal. Many people, however, are misled in believing that these emotions are spiritual. In reality, spiritual emotions are expressed only by ecclesiastical music. Only ecclesiastical music can truly express the secret movements of the heart, which are entirely different from those inspired and developed by secular music. That is, it expresses contrition, humility, suffering and godly grief, which, as St. Paul says, *worketh repentance to salvation*. (II Cor 7:10). Ecclesiastical music can also evoke feelings of praise, thanksgiving, and holy enthusiasm. Secular music, on the other hand—even the purest—expresses carnal emotions, even when it is inspired by suffering and affliction. This type of suffering, Paul calls *worldly grief*, which *worketh death*. (II Cor 7:10).

Thus two kinds of music were formed, the secular, which arouses emotion—any kind of emotion—and ecclesiastical music, which evokes contrition. St. John Chrysostom strongly condemns the attempts that were made by some of his contemporaries to introduce into the Church secular music, the music of the theatre and the mimes. Only the arts which were developed by devout motives since the early years of Christianity have given expression to the spiritual essence of the religion. These alone can be called liturgical, that is, spiritual, in the sense that religion gives to the term spiritual. The *spiritual odes* of which Paul speaks (Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16) were works of such art. All the liturgical arts express the same thing: architecture, hymnody, iconography, embroidery, and even writing, the manner of walking, and in general the movements and gestures of the priests, the chiming of the bells, and so forth.

That these arts are truly of unique spirituality has been realized by many non-Orthodox, especially clergymen, whose senses and physical body have been exposed, from youth on, to formative influences different from those in which Orthodox Christians have been brought up. Nevertheless, they confess that our icons and psalmody evoke in them contrition—of course, when executed by inspired and pious artists.

Thus, the value of the liturgical arts is not merely conventional, but real, extending beyond the limited conceptions that are due to nurture, habit, and taste, since even persons who are not of the Orthodox faith recognize that the arts of the Orthodox Church reflect the spirit of the Gospels and

for this reason lift the soul above the earthly realm. And how could it be otherwise, in as much as these arts have been developed by sanctified hearts, which felt deeply the liturgical element in speech and music?

Liturgical music is the natural musical garb of liturgical speech. Both sprang up together; they are one and the same thing. Essence and expression here have an absolute correspondence, even more exact than that of an object and its reflection in a mirror, for the objects of which we speak here belong to the spiritual realm. The profound and apocalyptic spirit of Christian religion and its mysteries could not be expressed faithfully and worthily except by these arts, which are called liturgical and spiritual, and which were developed by that same profound spirit. Only this music, and none other, uniquely expresses the spirit of our religion, because only this music has an absolute and most exact correspondence with it. This is testified to, I repeat, by certain men whose spiritual upbringing, religious training, whose spiritual upbringing, religious training, and social development have no relation to that of the Orthodox. *The Spirit bloweth where it wills* (Jn. 3:8) and is transmitted to souls by means of sounds which the same Spirit formed, by illuminating the souls of the holy writers of hymns.

The Fathers of the Church ordained that Christians use the voice alone in execution of hymns, chanting as did our Lord Himself and His disciples. St. John Chrysostom says: *Our Savior chanted hymns just as we do*. The Apostolic Constitutions forbid the use of musical instruments in the church. From the time of the Apostles, psalmody was monophonic, or homophonic, as it is to this day in our churches [in Greece].

The Western Church, in order to gratify people and flatter their tastes, put instruments inside the churches, disobeying what was ordained by the Fathers. They did this because they had no idea what liturgical music was and what secular music was, just as they did not know the difference between liturgical painting and secular painting. But the Byzantines distinguished the one from the other, and this shows how much more spiritual they were in comparison with the Westerners and how much more truly they experienced the spirit of Christianity. Byzantine music is, in comparison with the music of the West, exactly as Orthodox iconography is in comparison with the religious painting of the West.

How divine, indeed, is the psalmody of the Orthodox Church! It seems sweeter and sweeter each year to the Christian—a new wine that fills the heart with joy and makes it soar to the ethereal region of immortal life.

Byzantine music is peaceful, sad but consoling, enthusiastic but reserved, humble but heroic, simple but profound. It has the same spiritual essence as the Gospels, the hymns, the psalms, the books of the lives of the saints, and the iconography of Byzantium. That is why Byzantine music is monotonous for one to whom the Gospels are monotonous, naive

for one to whom the Gospels are naive, circumscribed for one to whom the Gospels are circumscribed, mournful for one to whom the Gospels are mournful, antiquated for one to whom the Gospels are antiquated. But it is joyful for one to whom the Gospels are joyful, filled with compunction for one to whom the Gospels are filled with compunction, enthusiastic but humble for one to whom the Gospels, are enthusiastic but humble, and peaceful for one who experiences the peace of Christ.

Byzantine art is spiritual, and it is necessary that a man have spiritual depth in order to understand its mystical treasures. Byzantine music expresses *gladdening sorrow* (*The Ladder*, Step 7:9) that is, that spiritual fragrance which only the spiritual senses are capable of experiencing. Its melody is not unholy, ostentatious, despondent, shallow, tasteless, or aimless; it is meek, humble, sweet with a certain bitter-sweetness, and full of contrition and mercy. It bestows an unwaning spiritual glory upon souls that have become worthy of the eternal mysteries and the compassion of God. It expresses thanksgiving; it causes the flow of tears of gratitude and spiritual joy. This music is the warmest, the most direct, and the most concise expression of the religious feeling of faithful Orthodox people.



We have made our own Christianity, a convenient, humane and reasonable Christianity, as the “Grand Inquisitor” of Dostoevsky says, because the Christianity taught by Christ is inapplicable, inhumane.

Instead of rising towards Christ, who said *if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself*, we have brought Him down to where we are, and have made a Christianity that agrees with our weaknesses, with our passions, with our worldly ambitions, and we have given our saints qualifications that our materialistic minds appreciate and admire, making them philosophers, orators, politicians, psychologists, sociologists, educators, scientists, etc.

The Grand Inquisitor, speaking as if Christ was standing before him (he had commanded His capture, since He once again descended to the earth and people were following Him), said to Him: “At the time you came into the world you brought people a harsh religion, impractical and inhumane. We made it convenient, humane. Why did you come again into the world? Will you spoil it, just as it has taken off? Therefore, I command that you be burned in your name, as a heretic.”

A convenient, a humane Christianity, this human construct, **is a pitiful deformation of the Gospel by the wicked materialism of the flesh.**

Photios Kontoglou (+1965)

ON THE SPIRIT OF PARISH LIFE

From a parish bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, San Francisco, October 1990.

In parish life, everything has deep meaning, if only one understands this meaning. And for this reason a proper attitude should be established towards all this meaning.

Everything in church life should foster a genuinely Christian, angelic and truly Orthodox attitude towards it. We must take great care that everything lead us to the Kingdom of Heaven, that everything contributes to the growth of this Kingdom within us, and not draw it away from our souls. Church life should open to us the laws of this Kingdom. This is its very purpose. The Church of Christ is not only a ladder to the Kingdom of God; it is also a school, instructing the thoughts, feelings, and will of a person in the ways of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Today church life appears unsettled. The evil laws of this world have penetrated church life, and have even begun at times to direct it. The results are evident.

Everything living on earth must submit in some degree to life's natural laws, and by virtue of its existence on earth, even Christ's Church—that which is most holy on earth—is not exempt from the weight of material considerations. Even though the Lord could turn water into wine and make bread to multiply, His Apostles carried with them a money box where they collected donations which people freely gave for their daily needs and the needs of their divine Teacher. This was not a sin; it was simply following the law governing the material life of fallen man. At the same time, it evoked noble feelings of love, of charity and of sacrifice in those people who were instructed about these feelings by the Apostles' preaching. But that man who carried the money box became inflamed by a spirit of materialism, avarice, and self-interest. He regretted the fragrant myrrh used for the Saviour of the world, and he died as a traitor. Found unfaithful in this small matter, he turned out to be unfaithful in that which was great.

For us this serves as an important lesson: anyone who is attached to money will betray Jesus Christ. A Christian's attitude towards money must be sober, free, unrestrained, without any emotional attachment. If one ought not to be foolishly tied to earthly life, then all the more must one remain free of attachment to its wealth, material wealth in particular. Only a soul free from materialism can be truly believing and enter the other world, when its time comes, without distress.

In the church foyer, i.e., as though in a courtyard (the church foyer connotes the court of the Old Testament "skinia") the sale of various church-related goods is permissible as a service to the faithful, since for them to buy bread or candles elsewhere to bring to church would be more troublesome.

But one must clearly understand that all material effects in the church, just as what is experienced spiritually, possesses a free

and voluntary character. Unity in the parish, just as unity in the Kingdom of God, has a wholly voluntary character, foreign to any compulsion. Each believer determines how much he donates to the church and does so without compulsion. Articles which cost money—candles, *prospophora*, etc.—are purchased voluntarily. The collection plate is passed around the church for voluntary contributions. And everything which has to do with prayer must likewise rest upon the same clear and strictly voluntary terms.

It is customary to pay for a service of "need" (*moleben*, *pan-ikhida*, house blessing, etc.). But not everyone realizes that this is a donation on the occasion of this service, and not a fee paid for the service. To "pay for" the service is not right, since every service is effective only by virtue of the Holy Spirit, which is present in it, and it is not possible to receive or to give the Spirit of God for any price; only through selfless prayer, through faith and love does it descend upon men. A genuine "service of need" is worth infinitely more than any material payment, more than all worldly treasure. Conversely, an insincere, hypocritical service of need not only is worth nothing, but it is a sin before God, both for the layman and, even more so, for the priest.

How can one put a price on a priest's blessing, a blessing which gives grace to the world, health, and repels evil spirits? Quite clearly, it is a gift of God, and it can only be regarded as a gift, just as all prayer is a gift, *for the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with utterances...*, testifies the Apostle. All attempts to buy the Spirit, or to pay for it, are doomed not only to failure, but are rejected outright by God. It is enough to remember Simon Magus, who wanted to pay the Apostles for grace—and what did he hear from the Apostle?

For this reason, in every case one must clearly distinguish between 1) prayer, mystery, blessing, i.e., "need" (need of the spirit), and 2) monetary donation, connected to this need.

May no one fall into despondency and end this earthly life on account of poverty, of material failure; may no one attach profit motives of any kind to voluntary contributions and acts of love for one's neighbor. Let people give whatever they are able to the Church, but let them keep in mind that the Church gives everything free of charge, for it gives what cannot be bought—eternal life in a new, imperishable world. If we understand this, our struggle will indeed be a struggle against militant materialism. And we shall strike the ancient serpent squarely on the head. Otherwise, if we should merely sprinkle this serpent with verbal husks, without Christian deeds and feelings, he will swallow even that remnant of the faithful that still remain on earth.

In the Church and near the Church—this is the field of spiritual battle, a battle of God against the worldly antagonist, who reigns over valuables and over people of this dying age. At the foundation of our Orthodox parish life, may there lie not only a common spirit of sacrifice, but also our common service to God: in our actions and in our hearts.

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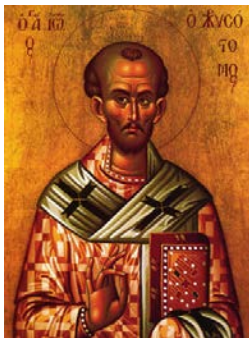
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LIFE'S DIFFICULTIES ARE ALWAYS BENEFICIAL FOR US!

St. John Chrysostom.



Every temptation, every sorrow, every demonic assault can prove to be of great benefit for us, if we are careful and patient. The invisible enemy (the devil) pounced on Job with fierce rage and malice. But did he harm him in the end? Not at all! On the contrary, he helped Job acquire greater holiness and more glory.

When we are alert and vigilant, the devil cannot harm us. Rather, he can unintentionally help us to increase in virtue. Observe what takes place when someone blows on a fire: initially, it seems as though he is blowing it out; ultimately, however, not only does he not put out the fire, but he actually intensifies it.

Without problems, without adversities, without illnesses, without sorrows, what would man do? He would indulge in pleasure and drunkenness, he would roll in the mire of sin, and he would completely forget about God and His holy commandments. Conversely, life's fears, uncertainties, sorrows, and trials keep him attentive, serve as lessons of philosophy, and act as exercises for his soul.

Just as a goldsmith places gold in the furnace and lets it remain in the fire until it is purified, similarly, God allows

our souls to remain in the furnace of hardships until they acquire purity.

If you have committed murder, adultery, or some other grievous ("mortal") sin that precludes you from the Kingdom of Heaven, then you should be sorrowful and cry. If however, with the grace of God, you have done no such thing, why do you become distraught and grumble at the first sight of difficulty? God did not give us the feeling of sorrow to be used untimely and injudiciously, but when necessary and beneficial. We should be sorrowful not when others harm us, but when we harm others; not when we are wronged, but when we wrong others; not when we ourselves feel pain, but when we cause pain to others. This is what our Creator has ordered. We, however, do the opposite. We hurt others without the slightest remorse or feeling of guilt. But when others hurt us, we become upset, unhappy, and discouraged—sometimes we even feel like ending our lives.

We must understand once and for all: for the Christian, there are only two causes of sadness. The first is when he opposes God and acts contrary to His holy will; the second, when he sees his fellow man disregarding God's will.

Let us learn, therefore, to be men of wisdom and to honor Christ as he desires. For a person being honored finds greatest pleasure in the honor he desires, not in the honor we think best. Peter thought he was honoring Christ when he refused to let him wash his feet; but what Peter wanted was not truly an honor, quite the opposite! Give him the honor prescribed in his law by giving your riches to the poor. For God does not want golden vessels but golden hearts.