

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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REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION

By Elder Thaddeus (+2003), from "Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives," pp163-170.

I thank the Lord and the Most Holy Mother of God that He has willed to embellish this feast day of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos through the angelic voices of the children who sang so beautifully. This reminds me of the days of my youth, before the war, when I was a monk in the holy Patriarchate of Pech, the Serbian Zion as some call it. The choir from Pech used to sing the responses at Holy Liturgy every feast day at the monastery. It was a mixed choir, very well organized, and the choir director was a remarkable person. I have heard many choirs from Belgrade and other places, but that choir from Pech was quite extraordinary. Today, when I said, *Blessed is the Kingdom ...*, the children responded with *Amen*. This reminded me of those days of my youth and it touched my heart.

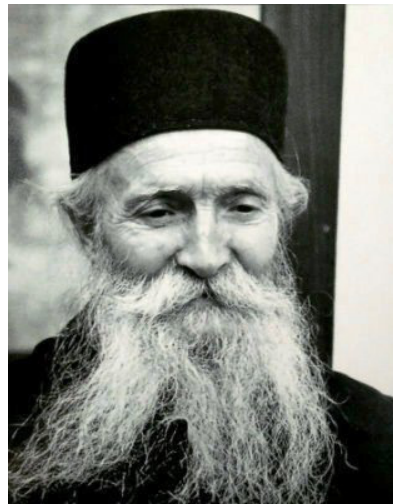
When the chanting is as beautiful as this, we are freed from all our cares and our interest for earthly things and we ascend into eternity with the Lord, His angels, and the saints, where our true Fatherland and our Kingdom is. If our Fatherland were of this world, then we would live here in a state of wellbeing, peace, and joy. However, this life for us Christians is, so to say, an *epitimia*. ("Epitimia" is to be understood as an interdiction which, according to

Church canons, the priest as a spiritual physician may apply in certain cases in order to treat the moral diseases of his spiritual children. Similar to "penance," albeit not quite the same. *Ed.*) In this life we must prepare ourselves for life in the Heavenly Kingdom and we must attain divine peace. No one can give us that peace; only God can give peace to created beings and to us if we seek Him and long for Him with all our heart and if we desire to become one with Him. He wants our souls to be united with Him, with His divine will. He wants our entire being to become one

with Him in order that we may feel the joy of living. We, on the other hand, get very involved in this material life and we have no time to think about our soul, about our inner peace. We are always shattering our inner peace.

We have many examples by which we can learn. The Lord gave us first of

all the Most Holy Theotokos. It was His will that the Most Holy Theotokos remain with the holy Apostles to comfort and encourage them after His Resurrection and Ascension. One of the God-bearing Fathers, a native of Athens, St. Dionysios the Areopagite, wished to see the Most Holy Mother of God. When he arrived in Jerusalem, they took him to the home of St. John the Theologian, where the Most Holy Theotokos lived. When he entered her chamber, he was at once free of all cares and worries and was overcome with ineffable joy and peace. This is how he describes his meeting with the Most Holy Theotokos: "Had I not learned



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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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in my youth about the True God, for me the Most Holy Theotokos would have been God.”

See what peace, stillness, and joy radiate from the Most Holy Theotokos? God has allowed peace and joy to radiate from every soul that is one with Him. Divine peace and joy emanate from such a person and we feel good in his presence. Do you see what the Kingdom of Heaven means? The Kingdom of God is *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. (Rom 14: 17).

The Most Holy Mother of God prays for us ceaselessly. She is always visiting us. Whenever we turn to her in our heart, she is there. After the Lord, she is the greatest protection for mankind. We have dedicated a plethora of churches, throughout this world, to the Most Holy Mother of God. How many healing springs where people are cured of their ailments have sprung up in places where the Most Holy Theotokos appeared and blessed those springs to heal both the sick and the healthy! She is constantly by our side, and all too often we forget her.

You have seen that in this life anyone, even our closest of kin, can abandon us. We all have our weaknesses and often hurt the people closest to us. They can turn their backs on us because of our rudeness, or they can forgive us but still be hurt. But the Lord and His Most Holy Mother ... oh, how many times have we insulted God and the Most Holy Theotokos, but when we repent and turn to them in our hearts, they forgive us everything, never remembering our sins and evil deeds!

You have already realized how unbelievably quickly life goes by. One does not notice this as much in one’s youth, but when the years bear down upon us, we see that a lot of time has passed and that very little is left of this life. Where

do we go when the end of our life comes? We know where we are going while we are still here, but what happens afterwards? Where are we going? Have we prepared for the Heavenly Kingdom, for our true homeland? Only the meek and those with pure hearts will enter it. Have we taken care to cleanse our heart while in this life, the heart that gives us such a hard time in this life? Have we said to ourselves, “Heart, you have caused me enough pain; humble yourself and be a patient, long-suffering heart!”

The Lord has said that we save our souls by patient long-suffering. We know that many misfortunes and sorrows come upon both the pious and the impious, both the righteous and the sinful. We all receive our share of misfortunes—this is a means of learning to accept everything in peace. On our own we have no strength, but God has strength. It is to Him that we must turn, deep down in our heart, and He will give us the strength to overcome all difficulties, for it is very important to rise above all those little things that take away our inner peace. We rarely pay any attention to this but allow the injustice that we come across everywhere in our lives to shatter our inner peace. Often we are the ones who do injustice to others. It may seem to us at the time that we are doing the right thing, but later it turns out that we were very wrong. We must learn to overcome all these little things with peace, united with the Lord, so that disquiet will not enter us from the outside, and so that we will always have our inner peace.

God is at the center of every person’s life. He is in our heart whether we accept Him or not. He never separates Himself from us because He is the Giver of life Who gives life to every created being. We have buried Him with our worries and worldly cares, which destroy the peace within us,

and that is why we have no peace or rest. No one on earth can give us unshakable inner peace. Money cannot give us peace, neither can fame, honor, a high-ranking position, nor even our closest friends and family. The only Giver of peace and life is the Lord. He gives peace, stillness, and joy to the angels and the saints, to us and to every created thing. Therefore we must repent and turn to the Lord.

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of one's way of life; it is discarding the old man and all of his evil habits and turning toward God, toward the Truth. Repentance means becoming quiet, peaceful, humble, and meek. Everyone knows that it is very pleasing to be in the company of a person who is meek, peaceful, and kind. A person who has no peace generates restlessness and radiates it all around, so that in the company of such a person we feel unsettled, and we too become restless. This is because we have not united with the Lord through unceasing prayer. We have peace when we are with the Lord and His Most Holy Mother; she is always here to help whenever we call upon her. In her we have unshakable support, which remains the same for all ages and which will not change. We cannot find this support anywhere else on earth, not even among our family members, let alone in things like riches, earthly power, and honor. We can be left without all these things, but the Lord and His Most Holy Mother will never leave us.

And so, my children, as we celebrate the great feast day of the Most Holy Theotokos, let us prepare ourselves for the Heavenly life, let us teach our hearts to always long for God as the angels do, and for the Most Holy Theotokos, for she is our Intercessor and prays unceasingly for us weak ones before the throne of her Son. Whenever we turn to her in our hearts, she is always there to help. Countless are those on this earth whom she has comforted, and countless are the souls she has led from the depths of Hades to the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us, therefore, learn to become accustomed to the Heavenly Kingdom while we are still in this life. The Heavenly Kingdom is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We need to humble our hearts, which take insults so deeply, and also our so-called dignity, for we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven in pride, as when we take to heart each slander our neighbor casts. We must accept our lessons from everyday life, for each day brings us cares, worries, and insults. We must learn not to take insults to heart, for who knows what awaits us during the course of our earthly

lives? God is merciful to us and has concealed our future from us. Otherwise, not one among us would be able to go on, knowing what the future holds for him. We must live through many misfortunes and sorrows in order that we learn how to rise above all these problems that disturb our inner peace. We must learn to acquire the divine peace and joy of the angels and saints; **the Kingdom of Heaven is acquired while we are still in this life.**

In this life we are in Heaven one moment and in Hades the next. You can see this for yourself and learn from it. When our thoughts are quiet and kind, when we forgive every slander and insult, we have divine peace, joy, and stillness! But when we become angry because of someone's unkind words, we are at once in Hades! Everything collapses, and we lose all the joy of living that we had before. Can you see how terrible living in Hades is? Here, in this life, we are given the chance to taste both the Heavenly life and the life of Hades. We should choose that which gives us peace, the Heavenly Kingdom. We all desire this, without any exceptions, whether our lives are good or bad. All people long for peace and goodness, for ineffable love that never changes, and only God is this kind of love. He alone is unchangeable. He is always the same, and He is the basis of all things—preeminently of mankind. He is ever waiting for us to return to His embrace, but all we do is shy away from Him. He wants to



give us peace and to comfort us so that we may experience the joy of living, but all we ever see are the cares and worries of this world.

From the beginning of our lives, we have all sinned gravely. The Lord has warned us to be very careful lest we have a life of hardship and sorrow, and endure much pain until we humble ourselves and realize that we have sinned. For the Lord has said, *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* (Exod 20:12). That is the law. The Lord showed us how to honor our parents by His own example when, as His suffering on the Cross was nearing an end, He entrusted His Most Holy Mother to His beloved disciple, John. He said to His Mother, *Woman, behold thy son.* (Jn 19:26). And to His disciple He said, *Behold thy mother.* (Jn 19:27).

(In the Aramaic tongue in which our Lord spoke, the word “woman” implies greater honor than the word “mother.” Today it is difficult for us to understand how the Lord could have addressed His mother as “woman.” Likewise, when

the Lord was in Cana of Galilee, the Most Holy Theotokos turned to Him and said, *They have no wine* (Jn 2:3). And He said to Her, *Woman, what is that between Me and thee? Mine hour is not yet come* (Jn 2:4). (In our language, when we say “woman” this has a somewhat disrespectful meaning, but when we say “mother” it is much more intimate and affectionate. But in the Aramaic tongue, the word “woman” is much more respectful.)

See how the Lord took care of His Mother in His last hour upon the earth? What do we do with our parents? God forbid that we should continue to treat our parents the way we do. Even from our childhood we do not honor our parents, but we want to live long and well. How can we live well if we have disobeyed this God-given law from our childhood? The law of this world, which is ever changing, punishes every violation against it. How then do we expect not to be punished for disobeying the Heavenly Law—the Word of God, which never changes, but stays the same for all ages, for it is Spirit and Life?

We are the offspring of disobedient parents. When disobedience entered our forebearers Adam and Eve, our nature suddenly changed. It became corrupt, foul smelling, prone to decay, and mortal. Death entered us. Before the Fall our forebearers were immortal. Only God, our Creator, can bring us back to our original state, as He created us. It is for this reason that He Who is love came down to earth and was born of the Virgin as a child. It is for this reason that He lived for thirty three years among men. He wanted to teach us the truth and to show us that He is love. We need to look to the Lord, His Mother, the Apostles and the saints as examples and renew our life. We must repent and leave behind our former way of life with all our bad habits, and we must strive to learn obedience. If anyone has hurt us—our parents, our brother or sister, a neighbor—then we must forgive them all from the heart, and when we have done so, the Lord will know. Our forgiveness must not be confined to words only. The Lord wants us to forgive from the heart. Our neighbor will then feel our forgiveness and no words will be necessary. The person will know in his heart that we have forgiven him.

How does a person know in his heart that he has been forgiven? People have thoughts. We are like a fine thought apparatus. We are connected to each other by our thoughts. When we think of a person, he immediately receives our thoughts. But since we are distracted and our thoughts are scattered, we cannot discern who it is that is sending us thoughts or the kind of thoughts he is sending us. On the other hand, the person who has peaceful thoughts, who is united with the Lord and whom the Lord has freed from distractions, this person knows exactly which thoughts are his own, which ones come from the enemy and which ones are from friends. Feelings and thoughts coming from the

minds of our fellow men reach us. This is why I say to you that **when we forgive from the heart, our neighbor can feel this and the burden that has been oppressing his soul is no more.**

This is the way to learn about the Heavenly life and to acquire inner peace. Let us turn to the Most Holy Theotokos in our hearts and ask her to intercede for us, that the Lord might give us strength and that He might number us among His angels and saints who glorify God throughout all eternity. Amen.



A man takes a walk and sees something. His thoughts say to him, “Go over there and investigate,” and he says to his thoughts, “No! I won’t,” and he cuts off his desire. Again he finds someone gossiping, and his thoughts say to him, “You go and have a word with them,” and he cuts off his desire, and does not speak. Or again his thoughts say to him, “Go up and ask the cook what’s cooking?” and he does not go, but cuts off his desire. Then he sees something else, and his thoughts say to him, “Go down and ask, who brought it?” and he does not ask. A man denying himself in this way comes little by little to form a habit of it, so that from denying himself in little things, he begins to deny himself in great without the least trouble. Finally he comes not to have any of these extraneous desires, but whatever happens to him he is satisfied with it, as if it were the very thing he wanted. And so, not desiring to satisfy his own desires, he finds himself always doing what he wants to. For not having his own special fancies, he fancies every single thing that happens to him. Thus he is found to be without special attachments, and from this state of tranquility he comes to the state of holy indifference.

When God created man, He breathed into him something divine, as it were a hot and bright spark added to reason, which lit up the mind and showed him the difference between right and wrong. This is called the conscience, which is the law of his nature. This is compared to the well which Jacob dug and which the Philistines filled up (cf. Gen. 26:15). That is, to this law of conscience adhered the patriarchs and all the holy men of old before the written law, and they were pleasing to God. But when this law was buried and trodden underfoot by men through the onset of sin, we needed a written law, we needed the holy prophets, we needed the instruction of our master, Jesus Christ, to reveal it and raise it up and bring to life through the observance of the Commandments that buried spark. It is in our power either to bury it again or, if we obey it, to allow it to shine and illuminate us.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

ROCOR STATEMENT ON SAME-SEX “MARRIAGE”

New York, July 11, 2015.

When our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ instructed His Apostles to *render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s* (Mt 22:21), He foretold of the future what was already true in the days in the Roman Empire: that a Christian would never be one who sat dismissively apart from the world and its governance, but neither would a Christian be one for whom the ever-changing whims of social governance would be the chief voice ruling his life. We are, as His followers, children of the *high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3:14); we follow *the Shepherd Whose voice we know* (cf. Jn 10:4), trusting that His guidance will lead us out of all error into the haven of eternal life.

With the June 26th 2015 decision of the United States Supreme Court’s “*Obergefell v. Hodges*” case, every pious Christian has been given cause to consider anew these words of the Saviour. While our faithful living in the United States, and indeed all citizens of this country, are and shall remain thankful—both to God and to the founding ideals of the state—for the freedom in which they reside, which permits as one of its core values the free expression and practice of religion, **neither we nor they can accept principles, created by juridical fiat from an organ of the state, which so blatantly go against the Teaching, Will, Law and Love of God.** While the U.S. Supreme Court may have affirmed in law that a so-called “marriage” between two persons of the same sex is to be recognized, no pious Christian can see this as anything other than **an attempt by the state to render unto itself what rightly belongs to God;** for it is God, not the state, the courts or the electorate, Who fashioned male and female from the dust, Who blessed the *clinging of man and woman* together in marriage both *in Eden* and *in Cana* (cf. Genesis 2:18-25; John 2:1-11), and Who has sole claim over the fundamental nature of this bond. He *Who is the only Lawgiver and Judge* (Jas 4:12) is not bound by the determination of worldly judges, and He *Whose word is truth* (Jn 17:17), Who said to Thomas *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life* (Jn 14:6), is not subject to the redefinition of truth by any social or governmental body.

While we reaffirm today, as we have always done, the unchanging reality of repentance as a path open to all, without qualification, and abhor those who would react to any sin, or any sinner, other than in love and with the promise of new life that true repentance may bring, we nonetheless shall not succumb to the prevalent **social trend of our day, which equates recognition and acceptance of sin with love.** For the legalization of sin is precisely what this judicial act ac-

complishes, whatever may otherwise be its aims or intentions. Marriage has been from creation, is now and will always be a union of a man and a woman, and the Church shall recognize and bless nothing else in the stead of this sacred union that has been established by God Himself.

We deeply regret that the United States Supreme Court has taken a decision which, in so definitively spurning the revealed will of God, opens the peoples of this land to an increase of suffering and sorrow, and a further decrease of moral stability. That which societies from time immemorial have honored—the strong place of the traditional family, the need for children to be reared in the embrace of a father and a mother—has been dismissed through an act of overstepped judicial authority, and we lament the profound trials this act will inevitably bring, since the departure from God’s Will always results in suffering. Yet we are children of a sovereign and unchanging God Whose power is not thwarted by the acts of men, and we encourage the faithful of the Church *not to grow weary of doing good* (Gal 6:9) in the face of worldly trial. The Law of God is sure and steadfast, and against it nothing shall prevail. Our hearts remain calm and unshaken, and we fervently entreat the God of our Fathers to show His mercy upon this land, to guide its peoples and government aright. And to a world that has grown lukewarm to the truth, for which the choice between right and wrong is further greyed by political errors such as this, we exhort the same surety and confidence that has been borne by Christians through the ages, spoken firmly through the mouth of the prophet: *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* (Josh 24:15).



The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read—not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart; not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal—in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others—without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most, he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

BUILDING A LIFE WITH GOD

Hieroschemamonk Seraphim of Holy Mountain, Karoulia (+1981).

A man can live with God—or without God, as some people do. It is possible to live with God by reason of His good pleasure for man to do so, and also by reason of a man's own positive inclination. Here, the circumstances of the man's life appear either favorable or unfavorable; i.e., it becomes evident that what is essential is not outward circumstances, but the person's own predilection, his desire, his intent.

In order to live with God, to make this a reality, one must leave space for Him in one's daily activities—give Him room. The desire to live with God must be joined in the heart by the remembrance of God. A person is free to choose, according to his desire or lack of it, whether or not to incorporate the remembrance of God into his life. From this point, this choosing, the two paths increasingly diverge. One man desires it, another

does not give it a thought; he does not seek it. It may be that outwardly they live side by side, i.e., in similar circumstances, similar surroundings; but one lives with God, the other without God. Thus, the first thing is desire.

Next in order of importance is the extent to which a person is caught up in his external affairs, to what extent he is enslaved by them, how important and urgent he considers them; for exam-

ple the extent to which his work superior make demands of him: "Finish this," and, "Have it done by..." Perhaps he also has certain career needs or chooses ones requiring his attention. Whatever the case, it means being caught up in outward activities; this greatly hinders remembrance of God. And without remembrance of God, how is it possible to live with God? One must set a goal for oneself: to battle for liberation [from this enslavement] in order to maintain within oneself the remembrance of God—no matter what! This is a task which is both lawful for man, right before God, and possible within the conditions of man's earthly life. Try it and see yourself. The obstacles to this goal are only apparent and imaginary.

It is true, the beginning is difficult. But this is only because we are not accustomed to it and not because the remembrance of God actually disturbs whatever it is we are doing; not at all. He who so desires and looks into this matter will find the possibility of attaining it within himself. This will both amaze him and convince him that remembrance of

God is of great help in all his endeavors. It even makes him more peaceful and more successful in his undertakings. Life becomes more enjoyable; he is happier. Here calls the words of the Psalmist: *Those who remember God shall rejoice.* (Pss 20:5).

Once the soul's enslavement by outward affairs weakens, it becomes possible to "make room" for God in the midst of these affairs and thereby to live with Him. Man's life is occupied by human affairs, but if among them a place can be found for God, there, too, is life with God. But how, practically speaking, is this accomplished?

Remembrance of God is only the beginning. Next there are the feelings of the heart. These are the very life of a man. Think about it. Throughout a man's life, in all he does, his feelings (such a diversity) move in him; they live, change, accompany his every action, share in every part of his outward life. Pleasure, displeasure, irritation, joy, distress, jealousy,

striving towards or repulsion from something—these inner feelings accompany all the outward activities, his whole life. They exist. They are not imagined!

Among these feelings are those which are akin to the remembrance of God, conducive to it: fear of God, faith, piety, and gratitude towards God (how patient He is with us great sinners, He even showers gifts upon us!), love for Him, hope and trust in Him, a readiness to

entrust oneself to His care (He is good, mercifully kind, even like a tenderhearted mother: *Can a woman forget her sucking child...? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee* (Isa 49:15). These and similar feelings must be found in the heart, singled out from among other feelings, and nurtured. With their help the desired aim can truly be achieved—to live with God!

Together with remembrance of God, one must join these feelings, these good inclinations to one's actions, i.e., to one's outward activities which, like some kind of bubbles or vessels, can be filled (and they do indeed fill up) with these or other feelings from the heart. In remembering God while you work, concentrate also on those feelings which are akin to the remembrance of God. These feelings will be with you as you go about fulfilling your earthly tasks. Here already you have the beginning of your life with God. For this is just what it is!

The Lord desires to be with man: *My delights were with the sons of men* (Prov 8:31), and *they shall be My people and I*



will be their God (Jer 31:33), and *as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isa 62:5). Here is the basis of our hope to live with God. It remains for man to cooperate with this will of God. In his fallen state (and the Lord knows this; He takes it into account, humanly speaking) man can cooperate through remembrance of God, through his feelings towards Him—even though these are weak and confused. What is most important here is desire, and effort (both rest on faith). The Lord will fulfill and strengthen whatever else is necessary. Therefore, begin with confidence!

“Enslavement” comes from the influence of the external world upon a man. You must resist it. What is necessary is necessary, but these externals must never be allowed to control the heart. One can do what is necessary and the heart can be either at liberty or in bondage. Keep your heart at liberty, because a free heart can remember God and give attention to God even as you attend to your tasks. This opens up the possibility to live with God—and gives it a beginning.

The balance can shift: [spiritual] vigilance and a desire to be with God can become strong enough to outweigh the soul’s enslavement to mundane, outward activities. The activities themselves are not eliminated; they remain, but their power over the soul weakens altogether. A shift occurs in the inner life which attends the outward actions. Previously the latter fully occupied the person’s attention, while the inner life passed unnoticed; the person gave it no heed (how it was sustained was quite unknown— “by itself,” like abandoned children left to grow up by themselves.) But when the power of the external world over the man is weakened, there is a shifting of positions: external things become unimportant to the soul; they lose their former significance, while the inner life draws all the attention to itself and acquires preeminence. This allows for the very real possibility to live with God, when the thoughts and feelings of the heart are with Him.

In such a case one shouldn’t race about or overly focus upon one’s affairs, nor be overly concerned about them—all this is only a hindrance. It obstructs the effort to “live with God” while one is about one’s business. Previously the “doing” was everything, and the inner life was, by contrast, some kind of fog which was ignored; all attention focused upon the “doing.” But now these things, these activities, are but a covering, a covering beneath which is carried on the principal activity which is, in essence, life with God. This is a source of joy, happiness, light—here we can now say: *shining upon the world as the light of knowledge* (from the *Nativity Troparion*).

It appears, then, that without outward activity it is more difficult to “live with God”; there’s nothing to secure the attention, and feelings towards Him easily dissipate (after

all, they are weak in the beginner, just as his attention is scattered). Without outward activity a person is left like a plant pulled from the ground—its roots have no firm support, nor do they absorb strengthening juices. So, too, without any outward activity a person’s inner life weakens, and he loses the possibility of life with God.

The Lord established human life. Take heed! God gave men earthly cares so that they would not fall into something worse. “Vanities” are earthly activities undertaken without God, but they are preferable to the actions of irrational and destructive passions and sins to which fallen man is so prone. **And if these “vanities,” i.e., these earthly, human affairs, are undertaken with the thought of God, with the aim of salvation, they become a pathway leading to Heaven.**



THE CONTENTIOUS MAN

The contentious man, “in whom there is no end of strife,” is he who is not content with an initial disturbance, but goads himself to get angry “for a second time.”

Obviously, if one gets angry and immediately comes to his senses, recognizes his mistake, and makes a prostration before the brother at whom he was angry, such a person is not called contentious. In the soul of this man, all strife is at rest, and for the present, by making a prostration to his brother, he has prevented the friendship from being destroyed, while in the future, by practicing repentance, he will come into a state of calm and tranquility.

However, one who gets angry and does not recognize his fault, but becomes still angrier, because “he regrets that he did not say more than he did when he was upset,” is called contentious. In his soul, strife never abates, and at the moment of strife, the agitation of his heart gives way to remembrance of wrongs, distress, and wickedness; and after this, the strife and the agitation caused by anger increase and multiply within him. That is, strife is aroused and it continues spreading until it completely dominates the hapless man and demonizes him. But may Jesus Christ, our good Master and Lord, deliver us from the lot of such people.

From the “Gerondikon”

CONVERSING AND LISTENING TO OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

*From "Thoughts of a Christian Dedicated to the Guardian Angel,"
Jordanville, NY, 1962.*

*Sanctify my mind, O good one, and enlighten me, I pray
thee, O holy Angel, and teach me to think always posi-
tively and profitably.*

*Calm my heart from present disturbance, and strengthen
me to be vigilant in good, O my Guardian, and guide
me miraculously in quietness of life.*

*Have compassion on me, O holy Angel of the Lord, my
Guardian, and leave me not, impure as I am, but il-
lumine me with Divine Light, and make me worthy of
the Heavenly Kingdom.*

[From the Canon to the Guardian Angel]

† † †

I sense the greatest joy, says the Angel to my soul, when I see that you unswervingly follow the path leading to Heaven. Life is a brief arena; the earth is a dark cradle where a person—from the day of his birth until his death—suffers and lives on bread moistened with tears. How is that? You forget about Heaven and cling to earthly vanities? You are captivated by the present moment? You give no thought to eternity?

Let us suppose that Providence was pleased to grant you a hundred years of life. What does this number mean? In comparison with eternity it is a drop in a boundless ocean. And truly, your days pass rapidly and their end is soon to come. The last day is already not far off. But—what is saddest of all—you know neither the day nor the hour when the end of your earthly life will arrive. Death will come to you when you think not and will cut the thread of your life just as an arrow shoots down a bird playing in the air. Nothing is as sure as death; nothing is so concealed from man as the hour of its appearance.

How many more years do you hope to live? Thirty? Forty? You, of course, cannot say this with any certainty. But of the years remaining, one of them will be the year of your death. Death watches over you along the course of your life, at that place where you do not expect it, like a murderer lying in wait in a desolate forest to fall upon a passerby; you

will go by—and it will strike you in the heart. Why do you slumber and do not take any precautionary measures? Why do you not imitate the soldier who, although he does not see the enemy, does not slumber but stands guard at the gate to the city? He does not slumber so as not to be overtaken by a sudden attack on account of negligence. Don't you see with what frightful consequences this unknown threatens you for all your eternity?

We have often seen that a man's life ends with a light movement of the air, a breath of cold wind, the setting of a sun's ray, a single drop of water. Our days, like a shadow, disappear, and glory fades like a flower of the field. And in this fleeting life you want to secure your hope and your happiness! You hope to erect a strong building on a foundation as unstable as a river! What could so captivate and deceive you? The past grieves you with its memories; the present is heavy with misfortunes. Do you not see that those hopes which the future used to seduce you have disappeared like a

shadow, and just as you drew near to them they dissipated like nocturnal visions upon your awakening? Lies, deceit, vanity, grief, physical ills—this is the life you love to such an extent that you forget about eternity!

Unhappy is he who sacrifices the future to the present. Piti-able is that person who, instead of building himself a house in his homeland, builds it in a strange land and does not prepare anything for the homeland in which he is to dwell! How I suffer to see you earnestly busying yourself in seeking sensual and corruptible things, disdain- ing the good things of Heaven; not only do you subject yourself to the danger of losing these good things, but you willingly strive towards eternal torment!

So it is that a foolish man sells the Kingdom of Heaven, and he sells it for a momentary pleasure which the devil gives him, scoffing at his foolishness.

When the Almighty sent me to guard over you, He named me Guardian of the Royal infant, who is destined at some future time to rule together with his Father. I saw on this infant gold apparel adorned with precious stones, and on his head a brilliant crown. After all, are you not an heir of the Heavenly Father and a co-heir with Jesus Christ? But alas! What misfortune! Soon I saw that my young royal son threw his clothing and his crown into the dirt, broke



his scepter, offended his Father the King, and gave himself over to His enemy.

Son of the King Most High! Turn again your eyes to Heaven, gaze upon your Heavenly Father, bend your knee before the throne of the Mother of God, and look upon the glory of the Angels and that glory which is prepared for you. Cease, cease at last your foolish concerns over earthly vanities, and strive to be worthy of your high calling. You are called to reign—begin to reign over yourself, begin to govern your mind and your heart, show your firm authority over the devil, over the world, over your passions. Are your powers growing weak in the battle? Remember that in Heaven you will rest for all eternity. You ask: when will I take pleasure in this rest? Perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow; one thing alone is certain—it will be soon. Yet a little while and I shall accompany you to Heaven.

Thus does a Guardian Angel converse with the soul of a man, and blessed is he who listens and calls out to him in prayer: *Guardian Angel! Rouse my heart with that divine fervor which inflamed the saints who endured all manner of torment and suffering and even death itself with joy. For this, O my holy Angel, remind me constantly of eternity. Remembrance of eternity is true wisdom, higher than any human wisdom. It awakens holy desires, enlightens the mind and strengthens spiritual vigor. But the devil hinders it from penetrating my soul, and when it has penetrated, the enemy tries to darken it. O Angel of God! Grant that the thought of eternity should always occupy my mind; then the pleasures and treasures of this world will not seduce me. I prefer sorrows and downfalls which enlighten and strengthen the soul with grace-filled power. I shall choose a humble life, far removed from the vanities of the world, where, in silence, eternity will be the subject of my thoughts. Here I shall use every moment of my brief existence to acquire those riches in which, together with you, I shall delight for all eternity...*



For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Mt 6:14-15). What a simple and handy means of salvation! Your trespasses are forgiven under the condition that you forgive the trespasses of your neighbor against you. This means that you are in your own hands. Force yourself to pass from agitated feelings toward your brother to truly peaceful feelings—and that is all. Forgiveness day—what a great heavenly day of God this is! If all of us used it as we ought, this day would make Christian societies into heavenly societies, and the earth would merge with Heaven.

St. Theophan the Recluse

ABOUT FOOLS, WISER THAN THE WORLD

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

[1 Cor 4:10]

† † †



Thus speaks the great Apostle Paul who in the beginning was guided by worldly wisdom, which is against Christ, until he recognized the falsehood and decay of the wisdom of the world and the light and stability of the wisdom of Christ. Then, the holy apostle did not become angry with the world because they called him “a fool for Christ's sake” neither did

he, in defiance of the world, hesitate to be called by this name.

It is not of any value to us how the world is going to regard or call us. However, it is important, and extremely important, how the holy angels in the Heavens will regard and call us when, after death, we meet with them. This is of crucial importance and everything else is nothing.

Either we are fools for the world because of Christ or we are fools for Christ because of the world. O how short-lived is the sound of a word of the world! If the world would say to us “fool,” the world will die and its word will die! What then is the value of its word? But if the heavenly, immortal ones say to us “fool,” that will neither die nor is it removed from us as eternal condemnation.

Whoever does not believe in the Living God, nor in eternal life, nor in the Incarnation of the Lord Christ, nor in Christ's Resurrection nor in the truth of the Gospel nor in God's eternal mercy and justice—is it any wonder if he considers that one a fool who does believe in all of this?

O, may every one of us who cross ourselves with the Sign of the Cross not only find it easy to endure but with satisfaction receive the name “fool” for Christ's sake! Let us rejoice and be glad if the non-believers call us such, for that means that we are close to Christ and far away from the non-believers. Let us rejoice and be glad and repeat with a powerful echo in the ears of the world: yes, yes, indeed we are fools for Christ's sake!

O Lord Most Wise, strengthen us by Your power that we not fear the non-believing world neither when they lash us with whips nor when they insult us with words for Your sake. Amen!

BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE

By Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona.

Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.

[Rom 12:14]



My beloved Christians, The Apostle Paul, the mouth of Christ, has left us a paramount, wise, and life-saving commandment: *Bless and do not curse*. Our mouth should not utter bitter words, should not voice curses, should not emit thorns that wound our fellow man and our brother; it should only voice blessed words.

As we all know, a curse is an extremely harsh phrase. Just hearing the word “curse” makes us feel uneasy. Usually, curses are voiced by parents, particularly

mothers, toward their children. During a moment of anger, when they become annoyed, they thoughtlessly direct curses toward their children using a variety of expressions, thus rendering themselves terribly guilty before God. Of course, prior to this their children have been disobedient and defiant; at times, even rude and disrespectful. However, God does not give parents the right to react and respond this way when their children misbehave.

From life experience, we have observed that curses uttered by parents, especially by mothers, oftentimes transpire into a regrettable reality for their child. This occurs because, usually, their wrath is justified. A mother will never become angry with her child if he has not done something wrong. However, instead of becoming enraged, anathematizing, blaspheming, sending her child to the place where she has no right to send him, and expressing herself with harsh language that is unbecoming to a Christian mother, she should kneel frequently and pray fervently to God with tears, asking Him to grant prudence, enlightenment, respect, and obedience to her child.

Who can give a mother the right to send her child to the devil? In an instant, the enemy can fulfill the mother’s request and actually enter and take possession of her child. When a child is sent to Hell during a moment of anger and rage, it is quite natural for the devil to infuriate the child and make him behave even worse. This in turn will annoy the mother even more, and thus a chain reaction is initiated. As a result, the mother becomes guilty before God with her curses, while the child goes from bad to worse, bringing upon himself the consequential evil of the curse and anathema. Mothers, in particular, must realize that this

can often become a terrible habit, and they should implement the other method I mentioned. By doing so, they will fulfill their obligations to their children, in a manner befitting Christian mothers.

Accordingly, they should focus on advising their children with love, instructing them on how to pray, encouraging them to attend Church regularly, teaching them good manners, and edifying them with their own personal example. Thus, with less effort, their children will find the correct path leading to salvation, and later on in life they will be useful to themselves and to society on account of their refined spiritual state.

We have many examples of mothers’ curses that took hold and inflicted serious harm upon their children. I will relate one such incident.

Once, God led my footsteps to a certain island of our homeland Greece, in order to offer the Mystery of Holy Confession. There, in a certain village, I met a mother and her newlywed daughter-in-law, who were both dressed in black—both externally with their clothes, and internally within their souls. They were mourning because the mother’s son and husband of the young bride had been killed. What led to their particular tragedy? When the man who had been killed was still an insubordinate youth, he would secretly take his uncle’s rifle and go hunting. His mother constantly advised him: “My child, don’t go hunting because your uncle hasn’t given you permission ... something bad will happen to you ...” This boy, however, continued to disobey and secretly take the rifle. He would leave the house and take a long time to return. One day his mother completely lost her patience and snapped at him, “My child, since you don’t listen to me and always upset me, may you die by the rifle!” As these words came forth from her mouth, a seed was instantly planted.

Many years passed. The boy grew up and got married. One day, he went out to hunt as usual. He left quite early, but this time he never returned home. His mother, fearing the worst—because her conscience was eating away at her for what she had once said—got up at sunset that evening, and started scrambling through the mountains; however, her son was nowhere to be found. She returned home sorrowful and stayed up all night worrying about her son. At the crack of dawn she set out for the mountains once again. During her frantic search, she came across her son’s hunting dog, which led her to her dead son. Later, it was determined that her son had attempted to jump over a fence, at which time the rifle stock spun upside down, the trigger was accidentally engaged, and he shot himself.

From that very day, his mother and his bride dressed themselves in black, and amongst other things—as is common in villages on account of ignorance and demonic superstition—for six months or a year, I’m not quite certain, they

believed that they should not attend church. This is the methodology of the devil, who desires to deprive people in mourning from God's consolation. He locks them up in their home, isolates them from others, encircles them with a thousand and one destructive thoughts, and in the end, oftentimes, they commit suicide.

The conclusion: Even though these harsh words were sown while the lady's son was still a young lad, they materialized into a reality during his adulthood. This is what happens in many other cases as well. Therefore, we must be extremely careful when we speak. Oftentimes, a heavy word does not materialize the moment it is expressed; it is planted, nonetheless, and it can take root at a later time when God will appoint.

Cursing is an unbearably burdensome sin, which can inflict harm not only upon the person to whom it is directed, but, frequently, upon the person who is voicing it. We will see this clearly in the following story.

A certain bishop and his deacon were preparing to serve the Liturgy at a small village. They set out on their journey, and as they were walking along the road they encountered a poor man who was sitting somewhere off to the side. The bishop greeted him: "Good day, man of God." The pauper did not respond. The bishop repeated, "Good day, man of God." Still no response. The bishop greeted him a third time, and when the man did not reply, the bishop lost his patience and snapped: "May you have my curse!"

Perhaps he reacted this way because he took the pauper's silence as an insult. After this incident, the bishop and the deacon continued on with their journey. The bishop served the Liturgy, and at the conclusion of the service he felt indisposed and said to his deacon: "Deacon, I do not feel well. I think it's because of the heavy words I directed at that pauper."

The deacon replied, "May I tell you something, Your Eminence?"

"Yes my child, I am listening."

"When you cursed the pauper, I saw a crow come out of your mouth and fly in the direction of the pauper, but then it circled back and entered you again."

"Oh my! I must have cursed him unjustly! Who knows who that poor man was? Get ready, deacon! Quickly, let's go back."

They arose and returned to the spot where they had first met him. When they arrived, they discovered that this person was deaf—he had not heard the bishop's greeting.

A curse that comes forth and does not find fertile ground returns to the person who sent it. When a curse is unjust, the evil returns to the person who voiced it. For this reason, we must always bless; that is, good words must come out of our mouth. In this manner, we will not fall into this grave sin of cursing.

Prayer is the best remedy for this sin, which is so common and which especially burdens mothers, to come to an end. Of course, even if they have been driven into this unfortunate predicament by their children, God's compassion and mercy are infinite. He forgives everything when a person repents and returns.

May our good God pour His mercy and enlightenment upon us all, so that we repent and acquire His Kingdom. Amen.



The Mother of God is so much closer to God than others who draw near to Him, that she is able to intercede more powerfully than any of them; and by this I mean not just human beings, but even all the ranks of angels. Isaiah writes of the highest order of angels in Heaven, *and the Seraphim stood round about Him* (Isa 6:2), whereas David says of the Mother of God, *upon Thy right hand did stand the queen* (Pss 45:9). Do you notice the difference in their standing? You can also see from this the difference in honor between the Seraphim's rank and hers, for the Seraphim are *round about* God; but only the Queen of all stands beside Him. She is more brilliant than light, she blossoms more beautifully than the gardens of divine Paradise, and she is more delightfully adorned than the visible and invisible worlds. It is fitting that she stands not just beside God, but on His right hand; for where Christ sat in Heaven, namely *on the right hand of the majesty* (Heb. 1:3), there she now stands, having ascended from earth to Heaven. Nor is this solely because no one longs for Christ as she does, and no one is so longed for in return, which would be in accordance with the laws of nature, but because she is truly His throne; and where the King sits, there stands the throne.

The chaste Joakim departed to the wilderness and dwelt there, fasting and offering up prayer to God that he might become a father. And before he ceased praying or returning thence, he received full assurance that his request would be granted. Meanwhile, the like-minded Anna shut herself up in a nearby garden and cried to the Lord with pain in her heart, *Hear me, O God of my fathers, and bless me, as you blessed Sarah's womb*. And the Lord heard them and blessed them, and promised them a child. Now He has fulfilled that promise and has granted them a daughter more wonderful than all the wonders down through the ages, the Mother of the Creator of the universe, who made the human race divine, turned earth into Heaven, made God into the Son of man, and men into sons of God. For she conceived within herself without seed, and brought forth in a way past telling, the One Who brought everything that exists out of non-being.

St. Gregory Palamas

NEGLIGENCE, THE UNSLEEPING DANGER FOR THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

From the "Plow" magazine, July 2003.

Negligence is a terrible conspirator against our lives and has wronged us many times, and we must never cease to regard it as our most implacable enemy. The Elder's fervour in protecting us from it and his profound experience of the crafty and intricate ways in which it confuses and entangles its victims makes it imperative for us to say something about this enemy of ours.

In the language of the Fathers this is called listlessness (*ἀκηδία—akethia*) as well as negligence and sloth, which all mean the same thing—spiritual death. We shall not go into what the Fathers have said about this pestilence, except that it is included among the eight evil thoughts as a comprehensive vice. We shall simply give helpful extracts from the Elder's experience, which are of particular use in our own generation.

When we asked about the chief cause of man's failure in his spiritual purpose, he would reply that it was negligence. On one occasion I asked him how it was that the Fathers give self-esteem as the reason, and he replied:

"Yes, that conspires against us too; but not all of us, only those it deceives. And again it affects only a few, because self-esteem corrupts treasures that have been amassed, while negligence does not even let you collect them. Negligence is like a drought in which nothing grows. Self-esteem damages those who have fruit, who have made some progress; whereas negligence harms everyone, because it impedes those who want to make a start, it stops those who have advanced, it does not allow the ignorant to learn, it prevents those who have gone astray from returning, it does not permit the fallen to get up; in general, negligence spells destruction for all those it holds captive."

"Using the pretext of physical needs and weariness from the struggle, this deceiver makes itself credible; and like a conductive material, listlessness transmits us and hands us over to self-love, the more general enemy. Only a courageous soul grounded in faith and hope in God can overthrow this conspiracy. Otherwise, it is difficult for someone inexperienced to escape from these nets. This is a great ordeal for those who live alone and for everyone who avoids a regu-

lated life, whereas it is unable to harm those who are under obedience and have tasks to perform."

"Listlessness begins with despondency and faintheartedness and the prolonged withdrawal of grace. It starts off with the application of economy towards some supposed infirmity or weakness, and ends in total disbelief and shamelessness and ingratitude. For those who live alone as hesychasts, it starts from neglect of the rule and order of their lives, and grows if not attended to in good time. But in those who live with others, it begins with idle talk and backbiting."

As a cure for negligence, the Elder recommended eschatological meditation in ascending and descending form: reward and punishment, the Kingdom of Heaven and hell; and also calling to mind the honorable memory of those who have taken part in the struggle. The means of grace against negligence are prayer, tears and faith. Again, the Elder would

recount many examples from the lives of earlier spiritual warriors who happened to be led astray by negligence and lost the record of spiritual progress which they had gained through great fervour and ascetic labour. The Elder would say:

"In my opinion, the other passions into which spiritual warriors are led astray are complications of indifference, because this erodes our atten-

tion and so opens the way to related and connected passions, and these take men captive."

To wake us up in the morning he would always shout to us, "Don't be negligent, boys, lest you fall into the hands of thieves." He even regarded a pointless occupation as negligence, because he believed that this too could lead to the same bondage.

As David says, *Let not thy foot be moved, and He who keeps thee will not slumber* (Pss 121:3); and again, *if Thy law had not been my meditation, I should have perished in my humiliation.* (Pss 119:92).



For a sheep that is sealed is not easily ensnared, whereas one which is unmarked is easy prey for the thieves.

St. Gregory the Theologian

Many ordinations do not proceed from the grace of God but are due to human ambition.

St. John Chrysostom

Περὶ τῆς Θεομήτορος

Τοῦ Ὁσίου καὶ θεοφόρου Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σιλουανοῦ τοῦ Ἀθωνίτου.



θλίψεις. Ὄταν στεκόταν δίπλα στὸ Σταυρό, τότε ἦταν ἡ θλίψη Της ἀπέραντη σὰν τὸν ὠκεανὸ κι οἱ πόνοι τῆς ψυχῆς Της ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτεροι ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο τοῦ Ἀδάμ μετὰ τὴν ἔξωση ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, γιατί κι ἡ ἀγάπη Της ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Ἀδάμ στὸν Παράδεισο. Κι ἂν ἐπέζησε, ἐπέζησε μόνο μὲ τὴ Θεία δύναμη, μὲ τὴν ἐνίσχυση τοῦ Κυρίου, γιατί ἦταν θέλημα Του νὰ δῆ τὴν Ἀνάσταση κι ὕστερα, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψή Του, νὰ παραμείνῃ παρηγοριὰ καὶ χαρὰ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τοῦ νέου Χριστιανικοῦ λαοῦ.

Ἐμεῖς δὲν φτάνουμε στὴν πληρότητα τῆς ἀγάπης τῆς Θεοτόκου, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἐννοήσωμε πλήρως τὸ βάθος τῆς θλίψεώς Της. Ἡ ἀγάπη Της ἦταν τέλεια. Ἀγαποῦσε ἅπειρα τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Υἱὸ Της, ἀλλ' ἀγαποῦσε καὶ τὸ λαὸ μὲ μεγάλη ἀγάπη. Καὶ τί αἰσθανόταν τάχα, ὅταν ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦσε ἡ Ἰδία καὶ ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ποθοῦσε τὴ σωτηρία τους, σταύρωναν τὸν ἀγαπημένο Υἱὸ Της;

Αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ συλλάβωμε, γιατί ἡ ἀγάπη

Ὄταν ἡ ψυχὴ κατέχεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε, ὦ, πῶς εἶναι ὅλα εὐχάριστα, ἀγαπημένα καὶ ἄκρως χαρούμενα. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ὅμως συνεπάγεται θλίψη κι ὅσο βαθύτερη εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, τόσο μεγαλύτερη εἶναι κι ἡ θλίψη.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος δὲν ἀμάρτησε ποτέ, οὔτε κὰν μὲ τὸ λογισμό, καὶ δὲν ἔχασε ποτέ τὴ Χάρη, ἀλλὰ κι Αὐτὴ εἶχε μεγάλες

μας γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἶναι λίγη. Κι ὅμως ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς Παναγίας ὑπῆρξε ἀπέραντη καὶ ἀκατάληπτη, ἔτσι ἀπέραντος ἦταν κι ὁ πόνος Της ποὺ παραμένει ἀκατάληπτος γιὰ μᾶς.

Ἄσπιλε Παρθένε Θεοτόκε, πῆς σ' ἐμᾶς τὰ παιδιά Σου, πῶς ἀγαποῦσες τὸν Υἱὸ Σου καὶ Θεό, ὅταν ζοῦσες στὴ γῆ; Πῶς χαιρόταν τὸ πνεῦμα Σου γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Σωτῆρα Σου; Πῶς ἀντίκριζες τὴν ὁμορφιὰ τοῦ προσώπου Του; Πῶς σκεφτόσουν ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ Τὸν διακονοῦν μὲ φόβο καὶ ἀγάπη ὅλες οἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν;

Πῆς μας, τί ἐνοιωθε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν κρατοῦσες στὰ χέρια Σου τὸ Θαυμαστὸ Νήπιο; Πῶς τὸ ἀνέτρεφες; Πῶς πονοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Ἰωσήφ Τὸν ἀναζητοῦσες τρεῖς μέρες στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ; Ποιὰν ἀγωνία ἔζησες, ὅταν ὁ Κύριος παραδόθηκε στὴν σταύρωση καὶ πέθανε στὸ Σταυρό;

Πῆς μας, ποιὰ χαρὰ αἰσθάνθηκες γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάσταση ἢ πῶς σπαραγοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου ἀπὸ τὸν πόθο τοῦ Κυρίου μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψη;

Ὁ Αὐγουστος γιὰ τοὺς Ἑλληνορθόδοξους Χριστιανοὺς δὲν εἶναι μῆνας...

Εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν Ἑλλήνων γιὰ τὴν Παναγία...

Εἶναι ἡ δίψα τῶν πιστῶν γιὰ τὸ βλέμμα Της...

Εἶναι ἡ δοξολογία τῆς θάλασσας γιὰ τὸν ὠκεανὸ τῆς ταπεινώσεώς Της...

Εἶναι ἡ παράκληση τοῦ ἡλίου γιὰ τὴν φωτεινὴ σιωπὴ Της...

Εἶναι ἡ μέθη τῶν ἀστεριῶν ἀπὸ τὸ πέρασμά Της...

Ἔναι τὸ ἀντίο τοῦ καύσωνος μπροστὰ στὴν δροσιὰ τῆς παρουσίας Της...

Εἶναι ἡ εὐωδία τῶν προσευχῶν στὸ ὄνομά Της...

Εἶναι ἡ κοίμησις τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τὸ ξύπνημα τῆς ψυχῆς μας...

Εἶναι ἡ μελωδία τῶν μοναστηριῶν ποὺ ἀνυμνοῦν τὴν Προστάτιδά τους...

Ὁ Αὐγουστος εἶναι ἡ ἐνσάρκωση τῆς ἄδολφης ἀγάπης τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὴν Μητέρα τους...

Οἱ ψυχές μας λαχταροῦν νὰ γνωρίσουν τὴ ζωὴ Σου μὲ τὸν Κύριο στὴ γῆ· ἀλλὰ Σὺ δὲν εὐδόκησες νὰ τὰ παραδώσῃς ὅλ' αὐτὰ στὴ Γραφή, ἀλλὰ σκέπασες τὸ μυστήριό Σου μὲ σιγή.

Πολλὰ θαύματα καὶ ἐλέη εἶδα ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο καὶ τὴ Θεοτόκο, ἀλλὰ μοῦ εἶναι τελείως ἀδύνατο ν' ἀνταποδώσω κάπως αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη.

Τί ν' ἀναταποδώσω ἐγὼ στὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, ποὺ δὲν μὲ περιφρόνησε ἐνῶ ἤμουν βυθισμένος στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μ' ἐπισκέφθηκε σπλαγχνικὰ καὶ μὲ συνέτισε; Δὲν Τὴν εἶδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ Τὴν ἀναγνωρίσω ἀπὸ τὰ γεμάτα χάρις λόγια Της καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα μου χαίρεται κι

ἡ ψυχὴ μου παρασύρεται τόσο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτὴν, ὥστε καὶ μόνη ἡ ἐπίκλησις τοῦ ὀνόματός Της γλυκαίνει τὴν καρδιά μου.

Ὄταν ἤμουν νεαρὸς ὑποτακτικὸς, προσευχόμουν μιὰ φορὰ μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Θεομήτορος καὶ μπῆκε τότε στὴν καρδιά μου ἡ προσευχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κι ἄρχισε ἀπὸ μόνη τῆς νὰ προφέρεται ἐκεῖ.

Μια ἄλλη φορὰ ἄκουγα στὴν ἐκκλησία τὴν ἀνάγνωση τῶν προφητειῶν τοῦ Ἡσαΐα, καὶ στίς λέξεις «*Λούσασθε καὶ καθαροὶ γίνεσθε*» (Ἡσ. 1:16) σκέφτηκα: Μήπως ἡ Παναγία ἁμάρτησε ποτέ, ἔστω καὶ μὲ τὸ λογισμὸ; Καί, ὦ τοῦ θαύματος! Μέσα στὴν καρδιά μου μιὰ φωνὴ ἐνωμένη μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ πρόφερε ρητῶς: «*Ἡ Θεοτόκος ποτὲ δὲν ἁμάρτησε, οὔτε κἂν μὲ τὴν σκέψη*». Ἔτσι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μαρτυροῦσε στὴν καρδιά μου γιὰ τὴν ἀγνότητά Της.

Ἐν τούτοις κατὰ τὸν ἐπίγειο βίον Της δὲν εἶχε ἀκόμα τὴν πληρότητα τῆς γνώσεως καὶ ὑπέπεσε σ' ὀρισμένα ἀναμάρτητα λάθη ἀτέλειας. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο· ὅταν ἐπέστρεφε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, δὲν ἤξερε ποὺ εἶναι ὁ Υἱὸς Της καὶ Τὸν ἀναζητοῦσε τρεῖς μέρες μὲ τὸν Ἰωσήφ (Λουκ. 2: 44-46).

Ἡ ψυχὴ μου γεμίζει ἀπὸ φόβο καὶ τρόμο, ὅταν ἀναλογίζομαι τὴ δόξα τῆς Θεομήτορος. Εἶναι ἐνδεὴς ὁ νοῦς μου καὶ φτωχὴ καὶ ἀδύναμη ἡ καρδιά μου, ἀλλὰ ἡ ψυχὴ μου χαίρεται καὶ παρασύρομαι στὸ νὰ γράψω ἔστω καὶ λίγα λόγια γι' Αὐτήν. Ἡ ψυχὴ μου φοβάται νὰ τὸ ἀποτολήμῃ, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀγάπη μὲ πιέζει νὰ μὴν κρύψω τίς εὐεργεσίες τῆς εὐσπλαγχνίας Της.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος δὲν παρέδωσε στὴ Γραφὴ οὔτε τίς σκέψεις Της οὔτε τὴν ἀγάπη Της γιὰ τὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Θεὸ Της οὔτε τίς θλίψεις τῆς ψυχῆς Της, κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς σταυρώσεως, γιὰτὶ οὔτε καὶ τότε θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ τὰ συλλάβουμε. Ἡ ἀγάπη Της γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ ἦταν ἰσχυρότερη καὶ φλογερότερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τῶν Χερουβεὶμ καὶ τῶν Σεραφεὶμ καὶ ὅλες οἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν Ἀγγέλων καὶ Ἀρχαγγέλων ἐκπλήσσονται μ' Αὐτήν.

Παρ' ὅλο ὅμως ποὺ ἡ ζωὴ τῆς Θεοτόκου σκεπαζόταν, θὰ λέγαμε, ἀπὸ τὴν ἅγια σιγή, ὁ Κύριος ὅμως φανέρωσε στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας πῶς ἡ Παναγία μας ἀγκαλιάζει μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη Της ὅλο τὸν κόσμον καὶ βλέπει μὲ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς γῆς καί, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς Της, ἔτσι καὶ Ἐκείνη σπλαγχνίζεται καὶ ἐλεεῖ τοὺς πάντες.

ὦ, καὶ νὰ γνωρίζαμε πόσο ἀγαπᾶ ἡ Παναγία ὅλους, ὅσους τηροῦν τίς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ πόσο λυπᾶται καὶ στενοχωριέται γιὰ κείνους ποὺ δὲν μετανοοῦν! Αὐτὸ τὸ δοκίμασα μὲ τὴν πείρα μου.

Δὲν ψεύδομαι, λέγω τὴν ἀλήθεια ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, πῶς γνωρίζω πνευματικὰ τὴν Ἀχραντὴ Παρθένο. Δὲν Τὴν εἶδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ γνωρίσω Αὐτήν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη Της γιὰ μᾶς. Χωρὶς τὴν εὐσπλαγχνία Της ἡ ψυχὴ θὰ εἶχε χαθῆ ἀπὸ πολὺν καιρὸ. Ἐκείνη ὅμως εὐδόκησε νὰ μ' ἐπισκεφθῆ καὶ νὰ μὲ νουθετήσῃ, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἁμαρτάνω. Μοῦ εἶπε: «Δὲν μ' ἀρέσει νὰ βλέπω τὰ ἔργα σου». Τὰ λόγια Της ἦταν εὐχάριστα, ἤρεμα, μὲ πραότητα καὶ συγκίνησαν τὴν ψυχὴ. Πέρασαν πάνω ἀπὸ σαράντα χρόνια, μὰ ἡ ψυχὴ μου δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ λησμονήσῃ ἐκείνη τὴ γλυκειὰ

φωνὴ καὶ δὲν ξέρω πῶς νὰ εὐχαριστήσω τὴν ἀγαθὴ καὶ σπλαγχνικὴ Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἀληθινά, Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ βοήθειά μας ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μόνο τ' ὄνομά Της χαροποιεῖ τὴν ψυχὴ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλος ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ὅλη ἡ γῆ χαίρονται μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη Της.

Ἄξιοθαύμαστο καὶ ἀκατανόητο πράγμα. Ζῆ στοὺς οὐρανούς καὶ βλέπει ἀδιάκοπα τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ δὲν λησμονεῖ καὶ ἐμᾶς τοὺς φτωχοὺς καὶ ἀγκαλιάζει μὲ τὴν εὐσπλαγχνία Της ὅλη τὴ γῆ καὶ ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς.

Κι Αὐτὴ τὴν Ἀχραντὴ Μητέρα Του ὁ Κύριος τὴν ἔδωσε σ' ἐμᾶς. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα μας. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ πνευματικὴ μας Μητέρα καὶ βρῖσκεται κοντά μας κατὰ τὴ φύση σὰν ἄνθρωπος καὶ κάθε Χριστιανικὴ ψυχὴ ἐλκύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτήν.



Παιδιά μου πολὺ σᾶς παρακαλῶ, ντυθεῖτε μὲ τὴν πανοπλία ποὺ δίνει ὁ Θεός, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσετε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσετε τὰ τεχνάσματα τοῦ διαβόλου. Δὲν μπορεῖτε νὰ φανταστεῖτε πόσο πονηρὸς εἶναι. Δὲν ἔχουμε νὰ παλαίψουμε μὲ ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ μὲ «*ἀρχὲς καὶ ἐξουσίες*» (Ἐφεσ. 6:12), δηλαδή μὲ τὰ πονηρὰ πνεύματα. Προσέξτε! Τὸν διάβολο δὲν τὸν συμφέρει νὰ δεχθεῖ κάποιος τὴν ὑπαρξὴ του, νὰ σκέφτεται καὶ νὰ αισθάνεται ὅτι εἶναι κοντὰ στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ἕνας κρυφὸς καὶ ἄγνωστος ἐχθρὸς εἶναι πιὸ ἐπικίνδυνος ἀπὸ ἕναν ὁρατὸ ἐχθρὸ. ὦ, πόσο μεγάλος καὶ τρομερὸς εἶναι ὁ στρατὸς τῶν δαιμόνων! Πόσο ἀμέτρητο εἶναι τὸ μαῦρο τους πλῆθος. Ἀμετάβλητα, ἀκούραστα, μέρα καὶ νύχτα ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ σπρώξουν ὅλους ἐμᾶς ποὺ πιστεύουμε στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, νὰ μᾶς παρασύρουν στὸ δρόμο τῆς ἀπιστίας, τῆς κακίας καὶ τῆς ἀσέβειας! Αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀμέτρητοι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχουν βάλλει ὡς μοναδικὸ τους σκοπὸ, μέρα καὶ νύχτα νὰ ἐπιδιώκουν τὴν καταστροφὴ μας. Ὅμως μὴ φοβάσθε! Πάρτε δύναμη ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἁγίου Λουκᾶ (+1961)
Ἀπὸ τὸ τελευταῖο κήρυγμα τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ
θαυματοουργοῦ ἱατροῦ, ἀρχιεπισκόπου
Συμφερουπόλεως τῆς Κριμαίας

Τους Μισεῖ ὁ Κόσμος...

Ένα αείμνηστο κείμενο τοῦ κ. Φώτη Κόντογλου (+1965), ἔφημερῆς «ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ», 16 Φεβρουαρίου, 1964.

Καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου. [Ματθ. 10:22]

Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσχετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν. [Ἰωάν. 15:18]

† † †

Ἡ κίνηση ποὺ ἄρχισε νὰ γίνεται ἀνάμεσα στὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο καὶ στὸ Βατικανό, μετὰ τὴ συνάντηση τοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἀθηνῶνα καὶ τοῦ πάπα Παύλου, ἔστρεψε κατὰ κεί τὴν προσοχὴ τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι ὄλο θεαματικὲς σκηνοθεσίαι, γιατί ὁ κόσμος σήμερα ἔχει μανία μετὰ τὸ θέατρο, κι ὅλοι, εἴτε πολιτικοὶ εἶναι, εἴτε ἐπιστήμονες, εἴτε καλλιτέχνες, ἀκόμα καὶ κάποιοι παπάδες, παρουσιάζονται σὰν νὰ εἶναι ἠθοποιοί, καὶ τοὺς παίρνουνε φωτογραφίες καὶ κινηματογραφικὲς ταινίες, καὶ ποζάρουνε μέσα στὶς ἔφημερίδες, ποὺ τοὺς ιστορίζουνε μετὰ ὅλα τὰ καθέκαστα. Ἔτσι ἔγινε καὶ μετὰ τοὺς δύο μεγάλους ἀρχηγούς τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, ποὺ πήγανε μετὰ πομπή, σὰν ἄρχοντες, ἐκεῖ ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστός, πάμφτωχος μέσα σὲ ἓνα παχνί, σ' ἓνα φτωχικὸ μαντρί. Ἡ συνάντηση αὐτὴ ἔγινε ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολλὰς τυμπανοκρουσίαις, ἀληθινὰ μετὰ σεμνότητα ποὺ θύμιζε τὴν ταπείνωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Κι ὁ κόσμος «χειροκρότησε» τοὺς δύο ἀρχηγούς ποὺ διακηρῦξαν, πὼς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πρέπει νὰ ἐνωθοῦνε, καὶ πὼς αὐτοὶ δίνουνε τὸ σύνθημα, παραμερίζοντας κάθε... ἐχθρότητα ποὺ εἶχε φυτρῶσει ἀνάμεσά τους στα περασμένα χρόνια, καὶ πὼς «τὸ μεσότειχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ διαλέλυται». Ὁ κόσμος θέλει καὶ ποθεῖ τὴ συμφιλίωση ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Χριστιανούς, καὶ θαρρεῖ πὼς ἔχει δίκιο νὰ πιστεύῃ πὼς κάθε ἄνθρωπος ποὺ δὲ θέλει αὐτὴ τὴ συμφιλίωση, εἶναι κακὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἐχθρὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, ἔρμημος ἀπὸ ἀγάπη, κι' ἂν λέγῃ μάλιστα πὼς εἶναι καὶ Χριστιανός, μ' αὐτὸ ποὺ κάνει δείχνει πὼς εἶναι ὑποκριτὴς καὶ θεομπαίχτης, ἀφοῦ δὲν ἔχει μέσα του τὴν ἀγάπη, ποὺ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός. Ἀλλὰ πόσο διαφορετικὰ εἶναι τὰ πράγματα! Πόσο ἄδικα κρίνουνε οἱ πολλοὶ ἐκείνους ποὺ δὲν ἐπικροτοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐναγκαλισμούς!

Ὁ πολὺς ὁ κόσμος κρίνει χωρὶς νὰ ξέρῃ, καταδικάζει χωρὶς νὰ ρωτήσῃ γιατί φέρεται ἔτσι σ' αὐτὸν τὸν

ὁποῖον καταδικάζει. Βέβαια, μετὰ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ, δὲ μπορεῖ παρὰ νὰ παραδεχτῆ κανένας πὼς ὅλοι μας πρέπει νὰ ἐπικροτήσουμε μετὰ ἐνθουσιασμό αὐτὴ τὴν «εὐλογημένη» κίνηση, καὶ νὰ εὐχόμεσθε νὰ φτάξῃ στὸ ποθητὸ ἀδελφωμα ὅλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Ὡστόσο, οἱ πολλοὶ δὲν ξέρουνε ἂν ὑπάρχῃ κάποιο μεγάλο ἐμπόδιο στὸ νὰ γίνῃ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀδελφωμα, τὸ πιὸ μεγάλο ἐμπόδιο.

«Καὶ ποῖο ἐμπόδιο μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχῃ, ἐκεῖ ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἡ ἀγάπη;», θὰ ποῦνε πολλοί, σχεδὸν ὅλοι. Μιλοῦνε ἔτσι, γιατί δὲν ξέρουνε πὼς αὐτὴ ἡ λεγόμενη συμφιλίωση γίνεται μετὰ τὴ θυσία τῆς ἀλήθειας τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ μέρος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχῃ στὴ μέση καθόλου ἀγάπη. Ἀλλὰ κι' ἂν ὑπῆρχε ἀγάπη, ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀπατηλὴ ἀγάπη τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει καμμιά σχέση μετὰ τὸν Χριστό.

Ὁ Χριστὸς ξεχώρισε τὴ μία ἀγάπη ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, καθὼς ξεχώρισε καὶ τὴν εἰρήνη ποὺ νοιώθει ὁ κόσμος, ἀπὸ τὴν δική Του τὴν εἰρήνη. Καὶ ποῖα λοιπὸν εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Τὴν εἶπε ὁ ἴδιος μετὰ τὰ λόγια τούτα: «Ὁ ὅ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς, ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με... Ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με, τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτόν». (Ἰωάν. 14:21, 23). Καὶ φύλακας καὶ ἐρμηνευτὴς τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ εἰρηὶ Κιβωτός, ποὺ μέσα σ' αὐτὴ φυλάχθηκε ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου.

Φυλάχθηκε ἀμίαντη ἀπὸ τὶς αἰρέσεις, καὶ θὰ φυλαχθῆ ἄσπιλη καὶ ἀναλλοίωτη ἕως τὴ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου. Κι' αὐτὴ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ Μία Ἁγία Καθολικὴ καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ λεγομένη Ὁρθόδοξη. Εἶναι αὐτὴ, γιατί μονάχα αὐτὴ διατήρησε ἀνόθευτο κι' ἀνάλλαχτο τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, κράτησε ἀνεγγυχτα τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τὰ δόγματα, ἐπικυρώνοντας τὰ μετὰ τὶς ἑπτὰ Οἰκουμενικὲς Συνόδους, κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἐπιχειροῦσαν οἱ αἵρετικοὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξηγήσουν κατὰ τὴν διαστρεμμένη διάνοιά τους.

Ἡ παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ρώμης δὲν τὰ κράτησε ἀδιάφθορα, ἀλλὰ κατάντησε αἵρετικὴ, γιατί ἄλλαξε καὶ μυστήρια καὶ δόγματα, σὲ σημεῖο ποὺ ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ γίνῃ ἀγνώριστη. Τὸ κοσμικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς, νόθεψε τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, κι' ἡ ἀλαζονεία τῆς τὴν ἀποξένωσε ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀληθινῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ τὸ θεμέλιό τῆς εἶναι ἡ ταπείνωση.

Λοιπὸν, καλὰ εἶναι τὰ ἔμορφα λόγια τῆς ἀγάπης, καὶ εὐχάριστα ἀκούγονται ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνύποπτα αὐτὰ



τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ ἀποροῦν πῶς ὑπάρχουν ἀνθρώποι ποὺ δὲν ἐπικροτοῦν αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Χριστιανούς. Καὶ τοῦτο γίνεται ἐπειδὴ οἱ πολλοὶ εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, κι' ὅσοι πάλι δὲν εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι, δὲν εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουνε ὅλοι μὲ ποιά πληρωμὴ θὰ γίνῃ αὐτὴ ἢ συμφιλίωση. Ἡ πληρωμὴ θὰ γίνῃ μὲ τὴ θυσία τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἴδια ἡ ἀγάπη. Τί εἶδους λοιπὸν συναδέλφωση μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι αὐτὴ ποὺ πληρώνεται μὲ τὴ θυσία τῆς ἀληθινῆς Ἀγάπης;

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ χτίσθηκε μὲ τὸ τίμιο αἷμα Του, καὶ στερεώθηκε μὲ τὸ αἷμα τῶν μυριάδων μαρτύρων. Σὰν λείψανε οἱ ἀρχαῖοι τύραννοι, οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες ἐχθροὶ τῆς θρησκείας μας, οἱ Διοκλητιανοὶ κι' οἱ Μαξέντιοι, φανερωθήκανε οἱ αἰρετικοὶ κι' οἱ ἀποστάτες, ποὺ λεγότανε μὲν Χριστιανοί, μὰ χτυπούσανε τὴ θρησκεία μὲ πλέον ὑπουλον τρόπο, καὶ τότε λάμπανε οἱ νέοι μάρτυρες, οἱ λεγόμενοι ὁμολογηταί. Καὶ τοῦτο ἔγινε κατὰ θεία παραχώρηση, γιὰ νὰ βρισκεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία πάντα σὲ κίνδυνο, ὥστε νὰ εἶναι ἄγρυπνοι νύχτα καὶ μέρα οἱ κυβερνήτες της κι' ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοί, σὰν ἐκείνους τοὺς στρατιῶτες ποὺ φυλάγουν θησαυρὸ μέγανον.

Γιὰ τοῦτο λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ πὼς σὲ ὅσους κατοικεῖ μέσα τους τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, δὲν τοὺς ἀφήνει νὰ συνηθίσουν στὴν ὀκνηρία καὶ νὰ νυστάξουν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς βάζει παντοτινὰ σὲ φροντίδες καὶ σὲ ἀγώνα σκληρόν. Τώρα ποὺ γίνεται αὐτὴ ἡ κίνησι νὰ ἐνωθοῦν οἱ Χριστιανοί, μὰ κι' ὅσοι δὲν εἶναι Χριστιανοί, κινημένοι ἀπὸ τὴν κοσμικὴ ἐπιθυμία τῆς καλοπέρασης καὶ τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀναισθησίας, κι' ὄχι ἀπὸ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οἱ πολλοὶ ποὺ εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι, καὶ ποὺ δὲν τοὺς μέλλει γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, χειροκροτοῦνε αὐτὴ τὴν κίνησι, γιατί δὲν ἐνδιαφέρονται γιὰ ἄλλο τίποτα, παρὰ μονάχα γιὰ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισή της. Γι' αὐτούς, θρησκεία, δόγματα, μυστήρια, ἀλήθεια, μέλλουσα ζωὴ, εἶναι ἀνοησίες καὶ γελοῖες δεισιδαιμονίες, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ σαρωθοῦν μπροστὰ στὸ ὑψηλὸ καὶ κοσμοεπιθύμητο ιδεῶδες τῆς ψεύτικης συναδέλφωσης ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους.



Γι' αὐτοὺς μία ἀλήθεια ὑπάρχει, κι' εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλήθεια τούτη ἡ σαρκικὴ ζωὴ ποὺ ζοῦμε, χωρὶς πίστη, χωρὶς ἐλπίδα πέρα ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο. Καὶ γι' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ πρέπει νὰ θυσιαστοῦνε τὰ πάντα, καὶ πολὺ περισσότερο ἡ ἀλήθεια ποὺ μᾶς παρέδωσε ὁ Χριστός, καὶ ποὺ γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι ἓνα ψέμα, μία ἀνοησία. Αὐτὸ τὸ πλῆθος ποὺ εἶναι ἀδιάφορο γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, βογγάει φοβερικὰ καταπάνω σὲ κείνους ποὺ ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ νὰ φυλαχτῇ ὁ θησαυρὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, καὶ νὰ μὴ θυσιαστῇ στὸ παζάρεμα ποὺ θὰ γίνῃ γιὰ τὴν κοσμικὴ συμφιλίωση ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ πλῆθος, εἶναι ἀκατανόητο τὸ πείσμα ποὺ φανερώνουν «οἱ φανατικοὶ θρησκόληπτοι, οἱ ἐχθροὶ τῆς προόδου, οἱ μισαλλόδοξοι, οἱ μνησίκακοι».

Πόσο εὐκόλο πράγμα εἶναι νὰ τὰ βλέπη κανένας ὅλα, καὶ θρησκεία, καὶ Χριστό, καὶ πίστη μὲ τέτοιο μακάριον τρόπο! Νὰ μὴ σκοτίζεσαι γιὰ τίποτα, καὶ ὅμως νὰ φαίνεσαι πὼς εἶσαι καὶ γεμάτος ἀγάπη, ταπεινὸς κι' ἀμνησίκακος περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους! Σήμερα ποὺ ἤμαστε ἔτοιμοι νὰ σπαράξουμε ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον γιὰ τὸ συμφέρον, γέμισε ὁ κόσμος ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους ποὺ περνοῦν γιὰ ψυχοπόνοι καὶ γιὰ κήρυκες τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ταπεινώσεως, ἐπειδὴ φωνάζουνε νὰ σαρωθοῦνε «τὰ μίση τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ νὰ λησμονηθοῦν οἱ δογματικὲς ἀνοησίες ποὺ ἐμπόδιζαν ἐπὶ αἰῶνας τὴν προσέγγισιν τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς καὶ τῆς Δυτικῆς Ἐκκλησίας».

Γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς καλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουνε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλοὶ ἀνθρώποι, οἱ ὁμολογητὲς ποὺ βασανισθήκανε γιὰ τὴν πίστη μας ἀπὸ τοὺς αἰρετικούς, καὶ ποὺ προτιμήσανε νὰ θανατωθοῦνε παρὰ νὰ τὴν ἀρνηθοῦνε, ἦτανε κάποιοι στενόμυαλοι πεισματάρηδες, κακοὶ καὶ μοχθηροί, ποὺ δὲν εἶχανε καθόλου ἀγάπη μέσα τους, κι' ἄς τοὺς εἶπανε ἁγίους. Ἅγιοι εἶναι οἱ σημερινοὶ κράχτες τῆς συναδελφώσεως μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς, κι' ὄχι ὁ Ἀθανάσιος, ὁ Βασίλειος, ὁ Σπυριδών, ὁ Νικόλαος, ὁ Εὐστάθιος, ὁ Μάξιμος, ὁ Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης, ὁ Θεοφάνης ὁ Γραπτός, ὁ Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, ὁ Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, ὁ Νικόδημος

Ἄγιορείτης, κ' οἱ ἄλλοι φανατικοὶ καλόγηροι. Μὰ γιὰ τοὺς ἔξυπνους ποὺ δὲν δίνουνε πεντάρα γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, κ' οἱ μάρτυρες ἀκόμα ποὺ χύσανε τὸ αἷμα τους γιὰ νὰ στερεωθῇ ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καὶ κείνοι ἄδικα σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμασθήκανε καὶ χάσανε τὴ ζωὴ τους γιὰ ἓνα ἀνόητο πείσμα, ἐπειδὴ πιστέψανε σὲ κάποιον ψέμα ποὺ τὸ νομίσανε γιὰ ἀλήθεια. **Τὸ «πρακτικὸ μυαλὸ» τοῦ σημερινοῦ κόσμου τὰ περιπαίζει ὅλα, θρησκεία, πίστη, δόγματα, μυστήρια, σωτηρία, μέλλουσα ζωὴ.**

Πῶς νὰ θυσιάσης, λέγει, τούτη τὴ ζωὴ τὴ χειροπιαστή, γιὰ τὴν ἄλλη, ποὺ δὲν γύρισε κανένας ἀπὸ τὸν ἄδη γιὰ νὰ μᾶς πῆ πῶς ὑπάρχει! «Κάλιο πέντε καὶ στὸ χέρι, παρὰ δέκα καὶ καρτέρει». Ἔτσι συλλογίζεται ὁ φρόνιμος, ὁ πρακτικὸς ἄνθρωπος, καὶ πορεύεται ἀναλόγως. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ ἐνθουσιάσθηκε γιὰ τὴν Ἑνωσιὴ τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, «γιὰ νὰ πάψουν τέλος πάντων αὐτὲς οἱ ἀνοησίες μὲ τὰ σχίσματα, μὲ τὰ δόγματα καὶ τοὺς βυζαντινισμούς». Τί ὠραία! Τί καλά! Τὴ δουλειά μας νὰ κάνουμε. «Νὰ γίνουμε καὶ στὴ θρησκεία Εὐρωπαῖοι, ὅπως γινήκαμε Εὐρωπαῖοι σὲ ὅλα. Νὰ συγγενέψουμε μὲ τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους Χριστιανούς, νὰ παρατήσουμε πιά τούτη τὴ βλάχικη θρησκεία μὲ τοὺς λυγδιασμένους καλόγερους. Νὰ συγχρονισθοῦμε. Νὰ ἀποκτήσουμε ἰερωμένους εὐπαρουσίαστους, ὄχι τσελιγκάδες ἀχτένιστους, σὰν τὸν Κοσμά τὸν Αἰτωλὸ μὲ τὴν κλίτσα. Ἐκεῖ θὰ βρισκόμαστε αἰωνίως; Ὑπανάπτυκτοι θὰ μένουμε καὶ στὴ θρησκεία;».

Ὁ διάβολος πάντα τάξει πολλὰ σὲ κείνους ποὺ θέλει νὰ μπλέξῃ στὰ δίχτυά του. Στους πρωτόπλαστους εἶπε πῶς θὰ γίνουμε θεοί, ἂν τὸν ἀκούσουνε καὶ φᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸ Δένδρο τῆς Γνώσεως. Ἔτσι καὶ τώρα, σὲ ὅλους αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἐπικροτοῦνε τὴν «ἰερὴ συμμαχία» τοῦ πάπα μὲ τὸν Πατριάρχη, στοὺς ἀδιάφορους γιὰ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ, στοὺς ἄθεους καὶ στοὺς ψευτοχριστιανούς, λέγει γιὰ νὰ τοὺς σαγήνῃ, πῶς θὰ φανοῦνε στὰ μάτια τοῦ κόσμου φιλάδελφοι, ἀμνησίκακοι, ταπεινοί, μὰ καὶ προοδευτικοί, φιλελεύθεροι, χωρὶς φανατισμούς καὶ δεισιδαιμονίες. Καὶ πῶς, μὲ τὸ νὰ ἐγκρίνουνε ὅ,τι γίνεται γιὰ τὸ ἀδέρφωμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν, συνεργοῦνε στὸ καλὸ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, γιὰ νὰ ζήσῃ ἡσυχία καὶ ν' ἀπολάψῃ τὰ καλά τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, χωρὶς νὰ μολοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν «καταραμένη διδασκαλία» του, ποὺ χωρίζει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τοὺς κάνει νὰ ἐχθρεύονται μεταξὺ τους.

Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε πῶς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον γιὰ νὰ τὸν κἀνῃ ἄνω-κάτω, νὰ χωρίσῃ γονιοὺς ἀπὸ τὰ τέκνα, ἀδελφὰ ἀπὸ ἀδελφός: «Μὴ νομίσητε, λέγει, ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν. Οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. Ἦλθον γὰρ διχᾶσαι

ἄνθρωπον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ νύμφην κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς.» (Μάτθ.10, 24). Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο μέρος λέγει πάλι: «Πῦρ ἦλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν.» (Λούκ. 12, 49). Πῶς γίνεται, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστὸς ποὺ μιλοῦσε ὁλοένα γιὰ εἰρήνη, καὶ χαιρετοῦσε λέγοντας «Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν», πῶς λέγει πάλι πῶς ἦρθε στὴ γῆ γιὰ νὰ βάλῃ φωτιὰ νὰ τὴν κάψῃ;

Καὶ λέγει ὁ διάβολος στ' αὐτὸ τοῦ κόσμου: «Λοιπὸν, ἐσεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρέπει νὰ βάλετε ἓνα τέλος στὴ φαγομάρα ποὺ ἔρριξε ἀνάμεσά σας αὐτὸς ὁ ταραχοποιὸς ποὺ λέγεται Χριστὸς, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσετε νὰ ζήσετε ἡσυχία καὶ μονιασμένοι. Ἐκεῖνος εἶπε πῶς θὰ φέρῃ στὸν κόσμον τὴν ταραχὴ καὶ τὴ διχόνοια, καὶ τὴν ἔφερε. Ἐγὼ σᾶς φέρνω τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ ἄς μὲ λένε διάβολο, σατανᾶ καὶ ἄνθρωποκτόνο. Ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ καταλάβετε ποῖος εἶναι ὁ ἐχθρὸς σας καὶ ποῖος ὁ εὐεργέτης σας. Εὐεργέτης σας εἶμαι ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδικοκατηγορημένος, ὅπως τὸ βλέπετε καθαρὰ σήμερον ποὺ καθάρισαν τὰ μάτια σας μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ γνώση. Τόσους αἰῶνες σᾶς τύφλωνε ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὰ παραμύθια του.»

Ἀνάθεμά τον τὸν ἀρχιψεύτη καὶ ἀλήτη τὸν ἐώσφορο!



Στὴ γειτονιά μας ἦταν κάποιος Κύπριος καὶ εἶχε ἓναν ὑποτακτικὸ, ὁ ὁποῖος τοὺς γονεῖς του δὲν εἶχε ἀναπαύσει, νὰ ποῦμε. Ὅταν καλογέρευσε, καὶ τὸν Γέροντά του δὲν τὸν ἀνέπαυσε. Κι' ἐκεῖ ποὺ καθόμαστε στὴ Μικρὴ Ἁγία Ἄννα, τὸν ἔστειλε ὁ Γέροντάς του στὸν Γέροντα, τὸν γερο-Ἰωσήφ, νὰ πει τὸν λογισμό του καὶ ὅ,τι μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει. Ὅταν ἦρθε ἐκεῖ, ἤμαστε γύρω ἔτσι μὲ τὸν Γέροντα, λέει: «Ἄντε ἐσύ, πήγαινε ἐσύ, πήγαινε στὰ δωματιά σας ἔλα ἴδω, πάτερ Ἰωάννη». Ἀνεβαίνει, πήγαινε στὸ δωμάτιό του.

- Γέροντα, λέει, ἡ ψυχὴ μου κλαίει, κλαίει, κλαίει σὰν μικρὸ παιδί.

- Γιατί, παιδί μου, ἡ ψυχὴ σου κλαίει;

- Διότι, λέει, δὲν ἀνέπαυσα τὸν Γέροντά μου.

- Ἔ, ποῦ καταλαμβάνεις ὅτι δὲν ἀνέπαυσε τὸν Γέροντα;

- Νά, λέει, ἔτσι στὴν ὑπακοή.

- Ἄκουσε, παιδί μου. Ἐκεῖ ποὺ γκρέμισες, ἐκεῖ νὰ διορθώσεις. Ἐχαλάρωσε τὸ «νά ἴναι εὐλογημένο», τὴν ταπεινὴν καὶ τὴν αὐταπάρνηση στὸν Γέροντα. Μὴ ζητᾶς τώρα μὲ τὴν εὐχὴ ἢ μὲ τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη, πάτερ μου, νὰ διορθώσεις τὸ λάθος σου. Ἐκεῖ ἔσφαλες, ἐκεῖ νὰ βάλεις μετάνοια, ἐκεῖ νὰ διορθώσεις.

Γέρον Ἐφραίμ Κατουνακιώτης (+1998)

Σήμερα Ξεχάσαμε Τὸν Θεό, Τὸν Εἰρω- νευόμαστε, Τὸν Ὑβρίζουμε... καὶ νὰ Ποῦ Φτάσαμε!...

Μητροπολίτου Μεσογαίας Νικολάου, σὲ ὁμιλία του πρὸς
μαθητὰς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐνάρξεως νέου σχολικοῦ ἔτους.

Αγαπητά μου παιδιά,
Σὰς εὐχομαι ΚΑΛΗ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΗ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ
μὲ πρόοδο στὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς μόρφωσής σας καὶ
ὁμορφες ἐμπειρίες σχολικῆς ζωῆς! Μόλις πρὶν ἀπὸ
λίγο ὀλοκληρώθηκε ὁ ἀγιασμός. Ἦλθε ὁ ἱερέας,
ιδιόμορφα ντυμένος, διάβασε μερικὰ λόγια ποὺ
λίγοι τὰ κατάλαβαν, ἔκανε κάποιες κινήσεις στοὺς
περισσότερους ἀκατανόητες καὶ τέλειωσε.

Ὅλο αὐτὸ μοιάζει μὲ κατάλοιπο ἄλλων παλαιότερων
ἐποχῶν. Οἱ πολιτικοὶ μας δὲν τὸ πιστεύουν, ἀλλὰ
διστάζουν νὰ τὸ καταργήσουν. Ἐσὰς δὲν σὰς ἐνδιαφέρει,
γιατὶ σὲ λίγο θὰ τελειώσει καὶ μετὰ τοῦ χρόνου πάλι.
Κάποιες Ἀνεξάρτητες Ἀρχές ἀντιδρῶν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς
τὸ παρὸν ἄκαρπα. Κανεὶς δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνει ὅπως
γίνεται. Οὔτε καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἀπλῶς, αὐτὴ τὸ δέχεται
ὡς κεκτημένο δικαίωμά της ποὺ δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νὰ τὸ
χάσει. Δὲν ὑπάρχει κανένας λόγος νὰ συντηροῦμε στὴν
οὐσία νὰ ἐξευτελιζοῦμε κάτι ἱερό, ποὺ ὅμως εἶτε δὲν
καταλαβαίνουμε εἶτε δὲν θέλουμε εἶτε δὲν σεβόμαστε.
Σκέφθηκα λοιπόν, ἔτσι ποὺ καταντήσαμε τὸν ἀγιασμό,
φέτος νὰ μὴν τὸν κάνουμε. Νὰ πῶ στοὺς Ἱερεῖς νὰ
καθήσουν στοὺς Ναοὺς καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ νὰ προσευχηθοῦν
γιὰ σὰς. Ἴσως ἔτσι ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τοὺς ἀκούγε περισσότερο.
Ἵποχώρησα, πρῶτον γιατί κάποιοι δὲν εἶναι ἔτοιμοι
νὰ τὸ δεχθοῦν καὶ δὲν θέλησα ὡς Ἐπίσκοπος νὰ τοὺς
λυπήσω, καὶ δεύτερον γιατί πρὶν τὸ κάνω ἔπρεπε νὰ
σὰς εἰδοποιήσω.

Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ποὺ ἔβαλαν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀγιασμοὺς στὴ ζωὴ
μας τὸ πίστευαν. Πίστευαν ὅτι μαζί μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη
προσπάθεια χρειάζεται καὶ ὁ φωτισμὸς καὶ ἡ βοήθεια
τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πίστευαν στὸν Θεό. Εἶχαν σχέση ζωντανὴ
μαζί Του. Τὸν ἠθελαν στὴ ζωὴ τους ὡς ὅ,τι πολυτιμότερο
ὑπάρχει. Ἦθελαν ὅλα νὰ τὰ ἀρχίζουν μὲ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ
Θεοῦ. Ἄν εἶναι ἔτσι, φυσικὰ νὰ γίνεται ὁ ἀγιασμός. Θὰ
εἶναι ἡ πιὸ σημαντικὴ στιγμή τῆς χρονιάς.

Σήμερα ὅμως Τὸν ξεχάσαμε Τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀπλῶς
Τὸν διατηροῦμε γιὰ νὰ Τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦμε, νὰ Τὸν
εἰρωνευόμαστε ἢ δυστυχῶς καὶ νὰ Τὸν βρίζουμε. Καὶ
νὰ ποῦ φτάσαμε! Νὰ μὴν θέλουμε οὔτε τὰ σύμβολά
Του. Καὶ νὰ ποῦ καταντήσαμε! Χωρὶς Αὐτόν, ἡ ζωὴ
μας νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ κρίση, ἀδιέξοδα, σύγχυση,
αὐτοκαταστροφικότητα, βία καὶ παραλογισμό.

Στὸ σχολεῖο ποὺ ἔρχεστε μπορεῖ νὰ γεμίσουν τὰ
κεφάλια σας μὲ πληροφορίες ποὺ οἱ περισσότερες νὰ
μὴν χρειάζονται μὲ γλώσσες ποὺ δὲν εἶναι δικές μας·
μὲ ἱστορία ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἀληθινή· μὲ θρησκευτικὰ

ποὺ δὲν πείθουν. Νὰ σὰς δώσουν βαθμοὺς χωρὶς
ἀντίκρισμα. Αὐτὸ ὅμως ποὺ τελικὰ χρειάζεστε εἶναι
ἀξίες γιὰ νὰ πλημμυρίσουν τὴν καρδιά σας. Ἀλλὰ
αὐτὸ δὲν τὸ δίνει ἡ ἐποχή.

Ἡ κατάσταση στὸν τόπο μας εἶναι σὲ ἀδιέξοδο.
Κάτι πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ ἄμεσα. Καὶ ἡ ἀλλαγὴ πρέπει
νὰ ἀρχίσει ἀπὸ τὸ σχολεῖο. Ἄς ξεσηκωθοῦμε ὅλοι.
Δάσκαλοι, γονεῖς καὶ παιδιά ἀρνηθεῖτε τὸ ψέμμα καὶ
πολεμήστε τὸ σὰν τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἐχθρό. Χτυπήστε
τὴ μετριότητα, τὸν συμβιβασμὸ καὶ τὴ μιζέρια σὰν
τὴ χειρότερη ἀρρώστια. Μὰς κοροϊδεύει τὸ σύστημα,
ποὺ αὐτὸ ὑπαίτιο γιὰ ὅλα, μὰς ὁδηγεῖ σὲ ὑπαρκτικὸ
ἐκφυλισμὸ. Διεκδικήστε τὴν πνευματικὴ ἐλευθερία
σας μὲ ὅποιο κόστος. Ξαναφέρετε τὴν ἱστορία καὶ
παράδοσή μας, τὴ γλῶσσα καὶ τὰ ἦθη μας στὴ ζωὴ
σας. Ἀγωνιστεῖτε γιὰ κοινωνία μὲ εἰλικρίνεια, ἡρωισμό,
καθαρότητα καὶ ἐξυπνάδα. Ἀπαιτήστε πολιτικούς
ποὺ νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸν τόπο περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὰ στενὰ
μυαλὰ καὶ συμφέροντά τους, ποὺ νὰ σέβονται τὴν
ἱστορία περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅσο προσοδοκοῦν τὴν ψήφο,
ποὺ νὰ πονοῦν γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας περισσότερο ἀπ’
ὅσο ὑποτάσσονται σὲ ξένες σκοπιμότητες.

Ἄξιῶστε Ἐκκλησία ὄχι μὲ ἀδικαιολόγητους
συντηρητισμούς, νεκροὺς συμβολισμούς καὶ πομπώδεις
τελετουργίες, ὄχι Νομικὸ Πρόσωπο Δημοσίου Δικαίου
μὲ δικαιώματα, περιουσίες καὶ διεκδικήσεις, ἀλλὰ
Ἐκκλησία μὲ πονεμένο προφητικὸ λόγο, μὲ αὐθεντικὴ
πίστη, μὲ θυσιαστικὴ μαρτυρία καὶ ἅγια ζωὴ Ἐκκλησία
ποὺ νὰ ἐμπνέει καὶ νὰ ἔχει πρόταση ζωῆς. Τότε θὰ βρεῖτε
τὸν Θεὸ ὀλοζώντανο μέσα σας. Τότε ὁ ἀγιασμός δὲν θὰ
επιβάλλεται μὲ ἐγκύκλιο τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Παιδείας,
ἀλλὰ θὰ ἀποτελεῖ δικό σας αἶτημα. Τότε τὸ σχολεῖο
θὰ ξαναγίνει ἡ ἐλπίδα τῆς ἐθνικῆς καὶ πνευματικῆς
ἐπιβίωσής μας. Τότε ἡ νέα χρονιά θὰ εἶναι καλὴ χρονιά.
Σὰς τὸ εὐχομαι μὲ ὅλη μου τὴν καρδιά.

Ὁ Θεὸς μαζί σας, ἀγαπητά μας παιδιά.

Μὲ πατρικὲς εὐχὲς καὶ ὅλη μου τὴν ἀγάπη,

† Ὁ Μεσογαίας καὶ Λαυρεωτικῆς ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ



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

Πώς Πρέπει νὰ Γίνεται Ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ τί Σημαίνει

Τοῦ Ἀγγελοῦ Ἀσημινάκη, θεολόγου.

Πρὶν ἀπὸ εἴκοσι αἰῶνες ὁ σταυρὸς ἦταν ὄργανο ἀτιμωτικῆς τιμωρίας καὶ φρικτοῦ θανάτου. Οἱ Ρωμαῖοι καταδίκασαν στὴν ποινὴ τῆς σταυρώσεως τοὺς πιὸ μεγάλους ἐγκληματίες. Σήμερα ὁ σταυρὸς κυριαρχεῖ σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ τῶν πιστῶν Χριστιανῶν, σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὡς ὄργανο θυσίας, σωτηρίας, χαρᾶς, ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ χάριτος.

Μία ἐρμηνεία, θεολογικὴ μας δίνει στὴν πέμπτη διδασχὴ τοῦ ὁ Ἱεραπόστολος Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός:

«Ἀκούσατε, Χριστιανοί μου, πῶς πρέπει νὰ γίνεται ὁ σταυρὸς καὶ τί σημαίνει. Μᾶς λέγει τὸ ἅγιον Εὐαγγέλιον πῶς ἡ ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεός, δοξάζεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους. Τί πρέπει νὰ κάμῃς καὶ ἐσύ;

Λοιπὸν, σμίγεις τὰ τρία σου δάκτυλα μὲ τὸ δεξιὸν το χέρι σου καί, μὴν ἠμπορώντας νὰ ἀνεβῆς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν νὰ προσκύνῃς, βάνεις τὸ χέρι σου εἰς τὸ κεφάλι σου, διότι τὸ κεφάλι σου εἶναι στρογγυλὸ καὶ φανερώνει τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ λέγεις μὲ τὸ στόμα: Καθὼς ἐσεῖς οἱ ἄγγελοι δοξάζετε τὴν ἁγίαν Τριάδα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ἔτσι καὶ ἐγώ, ὡς δοῦλος ἀνάξιος, δοξάζω καὶ προσκυνῶ τὴν ἁγίαν Τριάδα. Καὶ καθὼς αὐτὰ τὰ δάκτυλα εἶναι τρία—εἶναι ξεχωριστά, εἶναι καὶ μαζί—ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεός, τρία πρόσωπα καὶ ἓνας μόνος Θεός.

Κατεβάζεις τὸ χέρι σου ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι σου καὶ τὸ βάνεις εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν σου καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ λατρεύω, Κύριέ μου, ὅτι κατεδέχθης καὶ ἐσαρκώθης εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς Θεοτόκου διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας μας. Τὸ βάζεις πάλιν εἰς τὸν δεξιὸν σου ὦμον καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ παρακαλῶ, Θεέ μου, νὰ μὲ συγχωρήσης καὶ νὰ μὲ βάλῃς εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μὲ τοὺς δικαίους. Βάνοντάς το πάλιν εἰς τὸν ἀριστερὸν ὦμον, λέγεις: Σὲ παρακαλῶ, Κύριέ μου, μὴ μὲ βάλῃς εἰς τὰ ἀριστερὰ μὲ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς.

Ἔπειτα, κύπτοντας κάτω εἰς τὴν γῆν: Σὲ δοξάζω, Θεέ μου, σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ λατρεύω ὅτι, καθὼς ἐβάλλθης εἰς τὸν τάφον, ἔτσι θὰ βαλθῶ καὶ ἐγώ. Καὶ ὅταν σηκῶνσαι ὀρθός, φανερώνεις τὴν Ἀνάστασιν, καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ δοξάζω, Κύριέ μου, σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ

λατρεύω, πῶς ἀναστήθης ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς, διὰ νὰ μᾶς χαρίσης τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὁ πανάγιος σταυρὸς.»

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὁ Χρυσόστομος λέει: «Αὐτὸ τὸ καταραμένο καὶ ἀποτρόπαιο σύμβολο τῆς χειρότερης τιμωρίας τώρα ἔχει γίνει ποθητὸ καὶ ἀξιαγάπητο. Παντοῦ το βλέπεις. Στὴν ἁγία Τράπεζα, στὶς χειροτονίες τῶν ἱερέων, στὴ θεία λειτουργία. στὰ σπίτια, στὶς ἀγορές, στὶς ἐρημιές καὶ στοὺς δρόμους. στὶς θάλασσες, στὰ πλοῖα καὶ στὰ νησιά. στὰ κρεβάτια καὶ στὰ ἐνδύματα. στοὺς γάμους, στὰ συμπόσια, στὰ χρυσὰ καὶ τ' ἄσημνια σκεύη. στὰ κοσμήματα καὶ στὶς τοιχογραφίες... Τόσο περιπόθητο σ' ὅλους ἔγινε τὸ θαυμαστὸ αὐτὸ δῶρο, ἢ ἀνέκφραστη αὐτὴ χάρη.»

Τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ εἶναι σημεῖο σωτήριο, σημεῖο ζωοποιό, σημεῖο ἁγιαστικό, «νικοποιὸν ὄπλον»

(Ἅγιος Σωφρόνιος Ἱεροσολύμων), «τῶν κακῶν ἀλεξιτήριον» (Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης), «κεφάλαιον τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων» (ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος) γιὰ τοὺς Χριστιανούς.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Λουκάς ὁ ἰατρός καὶ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Συμφερουπόλεως Κριμαίας ἀναφέρει ὅτι: «Γιὰ ὅλους ἐμᾶς κήρυγμα γιὰ τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κήρυγμα γιὰ τὸν

ἐσταυρωμένο Κύριο Ἰησοῦ εἶναι κήρυγμα γιὰ τὴν δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν σοφία του. Ἄς μὴν ἔχουμε καμία κοινωνία μ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς δυστυχημένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ βλασφημοῦν τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Κυρίου. Ἄς ἔχουμε πάντα μπροστὰ μας τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ! Ἄς μὴν ὑπάρχει μεταξὺ μας κανεὶς ποὺ νὰ μὴν φορᾶει σταυρό».

Ἄς προσέξουμε τί μᾶς συμβουλεύει ὁ Ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἱεροσολύμων: «Μὴ ντρεπόμαστε τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κι ἂν ἄλλος ντρέπεται καὶ τὸν κρύβει, ἐσὺ κἄνε φανερὰ τὸν σταυρὸ σου, γιὰ νὰ δοῦν οἱ δαίμονες τὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ τοῦ Βασιλέως Χριστοῦ, καὶ νὰ φύγουν μακριά, τρέμοντας. Κἄνε μάλιστα τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ συχνά, εἴτε τρῶς, εἴτε πίνεις, εἴτε κάθῃσαι, εἴτε ξαπλώνεις, εἴτε σηκώνῃσαι, εἴτε μιλάς, εἴτε περπατᾷς, δηλαδὴ σὲ κάθε περίστασι. Γιατί ὅποιος σταυρώνεται ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ, βρίσκεται νοερὰ πάνω στὸν οὐρανόν... Εἶναι μεγάλο το φυλακτήριο. Δωρεὰν τὸ παίρνουν οἱ φτωχοὶ καὶ ἄκοπα οἱ ἄρρωστοι, ἐπειδὴ ἡ χάρη τοῦ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Σημάδι εἶναι τῶν πιστῶν καὶ φόβος τῶν δαιμόνων.»



Ὁ Ἅγιος Μακάριος Μόσχας ἀναφέρει ὅτι «πολλὲς φορὲς ἓνα καὶ μόνον σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, ποῦ γίνεται μὲ πίστη καὶ ἔντονα βιώματα, εἶναι ἰσχυρότερο ἀπὸ πολλὰ λόγια προσευχῆς μπροστὰ στὸν θρόνον τοῦ Ὑψίστου. Σ' αὐτὸ ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς, ποῦ καταυγάζει τὴν ψυχὴ, ἡ ἱαματικὴ δύναμη, ποῦ θεραπεύει τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων, ἡ μυστικὴ δύναμη, ποῦ ἀντιδρᾷ σὲ κάθε βλάβη. Ταράζουν τὴν ψυχὴ σου ἀκάθαρτοι λογισμοὶ καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι; Περιτειχίσου μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, διπλασίασε καὶ τριπλασίασε αὐτὸ τὸ τεῖχος, καὶ οἱ ἀκάθαρτοι λογισμοὶ θὰ δαμαστοῦν. Κατατυραννιέται ἡ καρδιά σου ἀπὸ τὴ μελαγχολία καὶ τὴ θλίψη; Σὲ κυριεύει ὁ φόβος ἢ σὲ περιοριζοῦν οἱ πειρασμοί; Αἰσθάνεσαι τὶς πονηρίαι τῶν ἀοράτων ἐχθρῶν; Καταφύγε σ' αὐτὴ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ, καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς θὰ ξαναγυρίσει, οἱ πειρασμοὶ θὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν, ἡ παρηγορία τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ εὐφροσύνη θὰ πλημμυρίσουν τὴν καρδιά σου.»

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κρονστάνδης γράφει: «Ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ σημεῖο του, καὶ ἡ σκιά του ἀκόμα μόνη, προκαλοῦν τρόμο στοὺς δαίμονες, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἡ σκέπη τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀρκεῖ νὰ βυθίσει κανεὶς τὸν σταυρὸ στὸ νερό, γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἀγιάσει. Μετὰ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ γίνεται ἱαματικὸ, καὶ διώχνει τὰ δαιμόνια.»

Γιὰ νὰ αἰτιολογηθεῖ μὲ περισσότερα στοιχεῖα ἡ τιμὴ, ποῦ ἀποδίδει στὸν Σταυρὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καὶ γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ παραστατικὰ ἡ δύναμη τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ὡς σημείου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ διηγηθοῦμε παρακάτω μερικὰ σποραδικὰ θαύματα—τὰ πιὸ πολλὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς Βίους τῶν Ἁγίων—ποῦ ἔγιναν κατὰ καιροὺς μ' αὐτὸ τὸ πανίερο σύμβολο.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος θεράπευσε στὴν Πάτμο τὸν παράλυτο εἰδωλολάτρη ἱερέα τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα, σφραγίζοντας τὸν μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος ὁ Μέγας, θέλοντας νὰ καταισχύνει κάποιους εἰδωλολάτρες σοφοὺς, ποῦ πῆγαν νὰ τὸν πειράξουν, ἔφερε μπροστὰ τους μερικοὺς δαιμονισμένους καὶ εἶπε: «Ἡ καθαρῖστε τους ἐσεῖς μὲ τοὺς συλλογισμοὺς σας καὶ μ' ὅποιαδήποτε ἄλλη τέχνη ἢ μαγεία θέλετε, ἐπικαλούμενοι τὰ εἰδωλά σας· ἂν δὲν μπορεῖτε, παραιτηθεῖτε ἀπὸ τὴν πολεμικὴ ἐναντίον μας, καὶ θὰ δεῖτε τὴ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ!». Καὶ τὴν ἴδια ἀκριβῶς στιγμὴ ἐπικαλέστηκε τὸν Κύριο, σφραγίζοντας τοὺς δαιμονισμένους τρεῖς φορὲς μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνοι ἐλευθερώθηκαν ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ σηκώθηκαν θεραπευμένοι, ὅλοι τους δοξάζοντας τὸν Θεό.

Ὅταν ὁ Ἅγιος Ἐπιφάνιος, Ἐπίσκοπος Κύπρου ἦταν ἀκόμα μικρὸ δεκάχρονο παιδί, ἓνα ἀτίθασο μοσχάρι τὸν τραυμάτισε σοβαρὰ στὸν μηρὸ καὶ τὸν ἔριξε χάμω, ἀνίκανο πιά νὰ σηκωθεῖ. Τότε ἓνας εὐσεβὴς Χριστιανός, ὁ Κλεόβιος, τὸν σταύρωσε τρεῖς φορὲς στὸ χτυπημένο μέλος καὶ ἀμέσως ὁ μικρὸς Ἐπιφάνιος γιαιτρεύτηκε καὶ σηκώθηκε. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἅγιος, πολὺ ἀργότερα, σταύρωσε τρεῖς φορὲς ἐπίσης τὴ θυγατέρα τοῦ βασιλιᾶ τῆς Περσίας, καὶ τὴν ἀπάλλαξε αὐτοστιγμὴ ἀπὸ τὸ δαιμόνιο, ποῦ τὴ βασάνιζε.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος ὁ Μέγας, ὅταν ὁ ἄρειανὸς βασιλιᾶς Οὐάλης διέταξε νὰ παραδοθεῖ ὁ καθεδρικός ναὸς τῆς Νίκαιας στοὺς ἄρειανούς, ζήτησε ν' ἀφήσουν τὸν Θεὸ ν' ἀποφανθεῖ γιὰ τὸ ζήτημα. Πρότεινε νὰ κλείσουν τὸν ναό, κι ἔπειτα νὰ προσευχηθοῦν, τόσο οἱ ἄρειανοί, ὅσο καὶ οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι. Κι ἂν ἀνοίξει μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων, νὰ παραμείνει σ' αὐτοὺς. Ἀλλιῶς, ἂν δηλαδὴ ἀνοίξει μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ τῶν ἄρειανῶν ἢ ἀκόμα κι ἂν δὲν ἀνοίξει καθόλου, νὰ τὸν πάρουν οἱ Ἄρειανοί. Ἔτσι κι ἔγινε. Ἀλλὰ οἱ προσεχές τῶν αἰρετικῶν δὲν καρποφόρησαν. Ἀντίθετα, μόλις ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος σχημάτισε τρεῖς φορὲς τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ πάνω στὴν κλειστὴ πύλη τοῦ Ναοῦ, λέγοντας, «Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων», ἀμέσως ἔσπασαν οἱ μοχλοὶ καὶ ἀνοίχθηκαν τὰ θυροφύλλα. Ἔτσι ἡ ἐκκλησία παρέμεινε στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους.

Ἡ Ἁγία Βασίλισσα ὅταν ὁ ἡγεμόνας τῆς Νικομηδείας Ἀλέξανδρος τὴν ἔριξε μέσα σ' ἓνα καμίνι, σφραγίστηκε μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ, καὶ δὲν πειράχτηκε καθόλου ἀπὸ τὴ φωτιά.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Θαλλέλαιος μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ γιάτρευε ὅλους τοὺς ἀρρώστους, ποῦ ἔτρεχαν κοντὰ του, γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὴν υἰεῖα τους.

Μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ ὁ Ὅσιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ διὰ Χριστὸν σαλὸς καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ζαχαρίας ὁ σκυτοτόμος ἄνοιγαν τὶς νύχτες τὶς κλειδωμένες πύλες τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ὅπου πῆγαιναν καὶ προσεύχονταν κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο τὶς ἐκλείναν πάλι, φεύγοντας.

Ἀναφέρουμε τὶς Ἐορτὲς ἀφιερωμένες στὸν Τίμιον Σταυρό:

(α) Ἐορτὴ τῆς Ὑψώσεως τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—14 Σεπτεμβρίου.

(β) Ἐορτὴ τῆς Σταυροπροσκυνήσεως—Κυριακὴ Γ' Νηστειῶν.

(γ) Μνήμη τοῦ ἐν Οὐρανῷ φανέντος σημείου τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—στὶς 7 Μαΐου τὴν Ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου (337-361), Υἱοῦ τοῦ Μ. Κωνσταντίνου.

(δ) Ἡ Πρόοδος τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—1 Αὐγούστου
(ε) Τέλος ἀφιερωμένες στὸν Τίμιον Σταυρὸ εἶναι δύο ἡμέρες τῆς ἐβδομάδας, ἡ Τετάρτη καὶ ἡ Παρασκευή.

THE SNAKES OF PANAGHIA

From the "Mystagogy" weblog, <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/>.

In the middle of the month a horde of non-venomous snakes, unknown to science, embellished with black crosses upon their heads and skin like velvet, had wriggled out of apparent nothingness at Markopoulo. They had filled the streets with their writhing and creeping, had approached the silver icon of the Virgin, had installed themselves upon the bishop's throne, and at the end of the service had disappeared as quietly and unaccountably as they had come.

[*Corelli's Mandolin*, ch. 12—a novel of 1994 by the British writer Louis de Bernières, set on the Greek island of Kephallonia]

† † †

Such is the description of the annual appearance of the Holy Virgin's snakes given by De Bernières. It is a common description, yet not entirely true on certain fine points. One case in point is that De Bernières chronicles this event to 1940, yet as was pointed out earlier, there was no such appearance in 1940. Another issue is whether or not these snakes are venomous; whether they are unknown to science or known; whether or not they appear only in Markopoulo or any place else on the island; and whether the crosses on the head and tongue of the snakes are black in color or, as reported by others, white. These are only a few of the typical contradictions and outdated information I encountered in my research that needed clarification.

As a sign posted on the bell tower written in both Greek and English informs the visitor, the snakes of the Holy Virgin make their annual appearance at Dormition Church between the Feasts of the Transfiguration of Christ and the Dormition of the Theotokos from August 6th to the 15th. As the days close in towards the Feast of the Dormition, so do the number of snakes increase, until finally they disappear at the close of the Feast not to be seen until the same time next year. Where they come from and where they go after the Feast is unknown. (One local priest relates how many people have searched the entire island for these snakes, but they cannot be found at any time of the year. Other snakes are found, but not these.)

Though Markopoulo is most famous for this phenomenon, it is not the only village in Kefallonia where this occurs. A little further up Mt. Ainos is another small village called Arginia. (A

fork off the main road of Markopoulo leads to Mt. Ainos. The road passes through the village of Kolaiti with its astonishing view of the sea, and, a little further up is Arginia. The road from Arginia leads to a plateau in Ainos where the charming Zoodochos Pege Monastery is located. Arginia is a popular stop due to the cooling moments offered by the tall plane trees that shade the village's natural water spring.) During this same time, from August 6th to the 15th, snakes appear in that village church as well with similar type festivities, since the church there is also dedicated to the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos. The church is built next to the village's natural water spring. In fact, many of the pictures of the snakes posted on the internet and circulated are the ones that make their appearance in Arginia. Scientists who have tried to unravel the mystery of the snake's appearance believe the wet damp route that runs from the fresh water spring in Arginia down the ravine to Markopoulo is a migratory path for the snakes, though there is no evidence for this. It could just be that they have their nests there year around.

The church of Markopoulo is built in the depths of a ravine. The bell tower on the other hand stands away from the church next to the street. It is very old with a strong foundation, grey in color and eroded by time, full of holes at its base. The style is Venetian, and the bells are unique to the island, jumping when they ring. It has been observed the snakes first emerge through the holes created for the bell ropes and those at its base. For this reason, some consider it a wonder the bell tower did not collapse during the great earthquake of 1953, being that

it is from where the snakes emerge. (Markopoulo suffered the most damage overall on Kefallonia in 1953.)

In olden times it used to be the snakes would enter the church during the service on their own and slither towards the wonderworking icon of Panagia Fidousa. On the way, faithful pilgrims would pick some up to venerate them and place them on their bodies for a blessing. Some would go to the bishop and crawl up his episcopal staff, and during the Gospel reading they would crawl up the arm of the clergyman, rest on the pages of the Gospel book, and even bow their head until the reading was over. As one local priest, Father Ioannis Messoloras has explained:

"Today you don't see as many snakes crawling around on the ground. The pilgrims simply pick them up before they reach the church, but in earlier days when there were more



snakes and less pilgrims they had plenty of time to crawl into the church and honor the icon. The snakes used to be more numerous than today, especially before the Second World War, I don't know why. Some years they did not appear at all. These were bad years, such as the year in which the Germans exterminated all the Italian soldiers that before had been their allies. It has always been a bad sign if the snakes do not appear." [Fr. Ioannis Messoloras was interviewed in the documentary *Holy Snakes of the Virgin Mary* (International Vision Production).]

The excited tourists prevent the full experience of the miracle from being realized these days. Today, it is common on the 6th of August to see the locals search for the snakes throughout the night with flashlights. Before the snakes even enter the church, the faithful take them and bring them to the icon and to the bishop as well. The locals say they do this to prevent them from being trampled on by the excited and numerous crowds that are unfamiliar with them, and also of course to receive a blessing. Whereas in the olden days the snakes preferred to stay in proximity to the icon, today the faithful prefer to handle them, since they are harmless and serene, and be photographed with them. When the service ends, it is customary that wherever the snakes are picked up from initially, there they are returned. (Also, a few snakes are usually placed in jars for the ten days to avoid anyone from taking, killing, or stepping on them.) This is repeated every day until the 15th.

Pilgrims are always amazed how friendly the snakes are and how at home they are in the church amidst the crowd. The snakes have no fear during these days. They are small in size (no more than three feet in length), adorable, calm, harmless, and bear four mysterious dots in the shape of a cross on their head as well as the tip of their narrow tongue. Some wrap around the wrists, shoulders and chest of young and old alike, where few even allow them to enter their sleeves and escape through the other side. Others decorate the icons of the church, the crucifix, and even the bread offerings used during the services, with their presence. And, as mentioned earlier, they climb up the bishop as well as the priest who reads the Gospel as if they also are participating in the celebration. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, when the first formed man and woman lived peacefully with all the wild animals.

To prepare the visitors for this close interaction, the villagers say: "They will crawl to your chest, but by the Holy Virgin's power they will not harm you. You will hold them in your hand and they will lick you like cats." As it is also written in a famous verse sung by the villagers concerning a man who strongly desired to commit suicide because his heart was broken, but remembered the benevolence of the snakes: "I call upon the snakes from Markopoulo to eat me, but they are the Holy Virgin's and so they only caress me."

A PARABLE OF LIFE

By bestselling author Wayne W. Dyer.



In a mother's womb were two babies. One asked the other: "Do you believe in life after delivery?" The other replied, "Why, of course. There has to be some-

thing after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense" said the first. "There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?" The second said, "I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now."

The first replied, "That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded." The second insisted, "Well I think there is something and maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore."

The first replied, "Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere." "Well, I don't know," said the second, "but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us."

The first replied "Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That's laughable. If Mother exists then where is She now?" The second said, "She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of Her. It is in Her that we live. Without Her this world would not and could not exist."

Said the first: "Well I don't see Her, so it is only logical that She doesn't exist." To which the second replied, "Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive Her presence, and you can hear Her loving voice, calling down from above."



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THE JESUS PRAYER

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+2003), from "Living Prayer," Templegate Publishers, Springfield, IL, 1966, p. 84 – 88.



Those who have read "The Way of a Pilgrim" are familiar with the expression *The Jesus Prayer*. It refers to a short prayer the words of which are: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,*

constantly repeated. The Way of a Pilgrim is the story of a man who wanted to learn to *pray constantly* (1 Thess 5:17). As the man whose experience is being related is a pilgrim, a great many of his psychological characteristics, and the way in which he learned and applied the prayer, were conditioned by the fact that he lived in a certain way, which makes the book less universally applicable than it could be; and yet it is the best possible introduction to this prayer, which is one of the greatest treasures of the Orthodox Church.

The prayer is profoundly rooted in the spirit of the gospel, and it is not in vain that the great teachers of Orthodoxy have always insisted on the fact that the Jesus Prayer sums up the whole of the gospel. This is why the Jesus Prayer can only be used in its fullest sense if the person who uses it belongs to the gospel, is a member of the Church of Christ.

All the messages of the gospel, and more than the messages, the reality of the gospel, is contained in the name, in the Person of Jesus. If you take the first half of the prayer you will see how it expresses our faith in the Lord: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*. At the heart we find the name of Jesus; it is the name before whom *every knee shall bow* (Isa 45:3), and when we pronounce it we affirm the historical event of the incarnation. We affirm that God, the Word of God, co-eternal with the father, became man, and that *the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in our midst* (Col 2:9) bodily in his Person.

To see in the man of Galilee, in the prophet of Israel, the incarnate Word of God, God become man, we must be guided by the spirit, because it is the spirit of God who reveals to us both the incarnation and the lordship of Christ. We call him Christ, and we affirm thereby that in Him were fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. To affirm that Jesus is the Christ implies that the whole history of the Old Testament is ours, that we accept it as the truth of God. We call him Son of God, because we know that the Messiah

expected by the Jews, the man who was called *Son of David* by Bartimaeus, is the incarnate Son of God. These words sum up all we know, all we believe about Jesus Christ, from the Old Testament to the New, and from the experience of the Church through the ages. In these few words we make a complete and perfect profession of faith.

But it is not enough to make this profession of faith; it is not enough to believe. *The devils also believe and tremble.* (Jas 2:19). Faith is not sufficient to work salvation, it must lead to the right relationship with God; and so, having professed, in its integrity, sharply and clearly, our faith in the Lordship and in the Person, in the historicity and in the divinity of Christ, we put ourselves face to face with Him, in the right state of mind: *Have mercy on me, a sinner.*

These words *have mercy* are used as the response of the people to all the petitions suggested by the priest. Our modern translation *have mercy* is a limited and insufficient one. The Greek word which we find in the gospel and in the early liturgies is *eleison*. *Eleison* is of the same root as *elaion*, which means olive tree and the oil from it.

If we look up the Old and New Testament in search of the passages connected with this basic idea, we will

Pray with each breath, thus:
Lord Jesus Christ (breathing in),
Have mercy on me, (breathing out).
 Elder Joseph the Hesychast

find it described in a variety of parables and events which allow us to form a complete idea of the meaning of the word. We find the image of the olive tree in Genesis. After the flood Noah sends birds, one after the other, to find out whether there is any dry land or

not, and one of them, a dove—and it is significant that it is a dove—brings back a small twig of olive. This twig conveys to Noah and to all with him in the ark the news that the wrath of God has ceased, that God is now offering man a fresh opportunity. All those who are in the ark will be able to settle again on firm ground and make an attempt to live, and never more perhaps, if they can help it, undergo the wrath of God.

In the New Testament, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, olive oil is poured to soothe and to heal. In the anointing of kings and priests in the Old Testament, it is again oil that is poured *on the head* as an image of the grace of God that *comes down and flows on them* (Pss 133:2) giving them new power to fulfill what is beyond human capabilities. The king is to stand on the threshold, between the will of men and the will of God, and he is called to lead his people to the fulfillment of God's will; the priest also stands on that threshold, to proclaim the will of God and to do even more: to act for God, to pronounce God's decrees and to apply God's decision.

The oil speaks, first of all, of the end of the wrath of God, of the peace which God offers to the people who have of-

fended against Him; further it speaks of God healing us in order that we should be able to live and become what we are called to be; and as He knows that we are not capable with our own strength of fulfilling either His will or the laws of our own created nature, *He pours His grace abundantly on us* (Rom 5:20). He gives us power to do what we could not otherwise do.

The words *milost* and *pomiluy* in Slavonic have the same root as those which express tenderness, endearing, and when we use the words *eleison*, *have mercy on us*, *pomiluy*, we are not just asking God to save us from His wrath—we are asking for love.

If we turn back to the words of the Jesus Prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, we see that the first words express with exactness and integrity the gospel faith in Christ, the historical incarnation of the Word of God; and the end of the prayer expresses all the complex rich relationships of love that exist between God and his creatures.

The Jesus Prayer is known to innumerable Orthodox, either as a rule of prayer or in addition to it, as a form of devotion, a short focal point that can be used at any moment, whatever the situation.

Numerous writers have mentioned the physical aspects of the prayer, the breathing exercises, the attention which is paid to the beating of the heart and a number of other minor features. *The Philokalia* is full of detailed instructions about the prayer of the heart, even with references to the Sufi technique. Ancient and modern Fathers have dealt with the subject, always coming to the same conclusion: never to attempt the physical exercises without strict guidance by a spiritual father.

What is of general use, and God given, is the actual praying, the repetition of the words, without any physical endeavor—not even movements of the tongue—and which can be used systematically to achieve an inner transformation. More than any other prayer, the Jesus Prayer aims at bringing us to stand in God's presence with no other thought but the miracle of our standing there and God with us, because in the use of the Jesus Prayer there is nothing and no one except God and us.

The use of the prayer is dual, it is an act of worship as is every prayer, and on the ascetical level, it is a focus that allows us to keep our attention still in the presence of God.

It is a very companionable prayer, a friendly one, always at hand and very individual in spite of its monotonous repetitions. Whether in joy or in sorrow, it is, when it has become habitual, a quickening of the soul, a response to any call of God. The words of St. Symeon the New Theologian, apply to all its possible effects on us: *Do not worry about what will come next, you will discover it when it comes.*

UNIFORMITY IN CHURCH SERVICES

By St. John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco, *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July-Aug 1991), pp. 42-45; explanations of various terms inserted by the Editors of "Orthodox Heritage."



The divine services and rites of the Orthodox Church, having as their foundation one *typikon* ("that of the prescribed form," as contained within Orthodox liturgical book, *Ed.*) and preserving commonality in all that is substantially important, are extremely different one from another in practice. Not only are the customs of different countries and local Churches

different, but even in the bounds of a single region, sometimes even in a single city, the customs vary greatly in churches located close to each other.

More than once the question has arisen regarding the introduction of a single common abbreviated *typikon* which would be mandatory for all churches. However, what may be only a theoretical decision may be in reality impossible to carry out and even harmful if attempted. The difference in the carrying out of the Church *typikon* comes about as a result of the strength of customs that have taken root. Sometimes these customs have deeply sensible meanings, but sometimes the meanings are quite nonsensical; thus, they remain because of the zeal and determination of those who carry them out.

Without a doubt, we must take into consideration that which has been accepted as sanctified custom; that is, what has been accepted from antiquity as having been established and which has entered into the consciousness, not only of the clergy that carry it out, but of the laity as well. However, we must give considerably less weight to that which is only common practice; that is, to that which is merely a habit of those who carry it out, not having an inner meaning and not having entered into the consciousness of the laity.

We must hold onto the first as long as they are of benefit to our activity, as long as they do not contradict the Church *typikon*. As for the latter, one may give only a common rule: the closer it is to the Church *typikon*, the better. Our Church *typikon* is not a compilation of dead rules and it is not the fruit of some abstract desk work; it was imprinted on the spiritual experience of holy ascetics who came to fully understand the depths of the human spirit and the laws of the spiritual life. The Holy Fathers themselves experienced the battle with the infirmities of soul and body, as well as the means for their healing; they came to understand very well the path of

prayerful *podvig* (usually defined as “spiritual struggle,” *Ed.*) and the power of prayer.

The Church *typikon* is a guidebook for training and schooling in prayer and the more it is adhered to the more benefit is derived from it. In the case of the inability to fulfill all that is laid out in the *typikon*, we must fulfill all that is in our power, preserving its general structure and main content. It is necessary, on the one hand, to fulfill the principal characteristics for a given service unchanged in its composition and that which maintains its identity separate from others. On the other hand, we must try as much as we can to fill in those parts of the service, which, changing according to the day, express the meaning and reason of the commemoration of the day’s event.

Divine Services combine in themselves prayer, which is lifted up to God by the faithful, the receiving of God’s grace in communion with Him, and the instruction of the faithful. The latter consists of teaching through reading in the divine services and hymns, catechism, and instruction in the Christian life. The divine services in their composition contain all the fullness of the dogmatic teaching of the Church and set forth the path to salvation. They present invaluable spiritual wealth. The more fully and precisely they are fulfilled, the more benefit the participants receive from them. Those who perform them carelessly and who shorten them by their laziness rob their flock, depriving them of their very daily bread, stealing from them a most valuable treasure. The shortening of the services which comes about through lack of strength must be done wisely and performed circumspectly in order not to touch that which should not be tampered with.

Specifically, at Vespers, Psalm 103 must be read in its entirety; if it is sung it is allowable to sing only a few verses, but with majesty. Preferably, the verses of Psalms 140, 141, 129, and 116, which begin with the words *Lord, I have cried*, will be always sung in full, all of the *stichera* absolutely (type of hymns used mainly in Vespers and Matins—Orthros, *Ed.*). On the prescribed days it is necessary to read the Old Testament readings and to perform the *Litya* (*artoclasia* in Gk, meaning “breaking of bread,” a service held at the end of Vespers and Matins, *Ed.*).

Matins must be served in the morning. Serving Matins in the evening, except for when the all-night Vigil service is held, is not allowable because, by doing this, essentially the morning service, which is very necessary for the faithful, is abolished; even a short church attendance in the morning has a beneficial effect on the soul, while sanctifying and giving direction to the whole day. The Six Psalms are not to be shortened; also it is necessary to read the Lauds psalms in their entirety. Reading should not take the place of singing except when there is absolutely no one who is able to sing, since the effect of singing is much stronger than reading and very seldom is reading able to substitute for singing. Do not dare

to leave out the *Theotokia* (hymns to the Theotokos, which are read or more likely chanted during the Divine Services, *Ed.*) after the *Troparia* and other hymns, for in them is given the foundation of our faith -- the teaching of the incarnation of the Son of God and of the Divine Economy.

The Hours must be served exactly without omissions, as they are already so short. All three psalms of each Hour must be read, as well as the assigned *Troparia* and other prayers. At the end of each Hour special attention must be given to the prayer, which expresses the meaning of the sacred event commemorated at the given hour.

Liturgy must be served, if impossible daily, then at least on all Sundays and on all Church Feast days, without taking into account the number of faithful that are able to attend the service. The Liturgy is the Unbloody Sacrifice for the whole world and it is the priest’s duty to serve it when required. It is positively forbidden to skip any part of the Service Book (*sluzhebnyk*—“book of the priest,” *Ed.*). It is also necessary to fulfill the given hymns for the Liturgy. Included therein are Psalms 103, 145, and 33. Psalm 33 is replaced only during Bright Week by the singing of *Christ is Risen*. As for the rest of the year, it is to be read or sung in view of its edification and there is no justification for its omission.

Those *troparia* which are appointed for each given Liturgy are to be sung and in their proper order, since they are the festive part of the Liturgy. The Church *typikon* also refers to preserving accurately the order of the Epistle and Gospel readings. If this is adhered to, then throughout the whole year, in those churches where the services are held daily, the Gospel, as well as Epistles, will be read in its entirety. That order requires that the cyclic reading be read necessarily; its replacement by the festive readings happens only on great feast days, but even then the cyclic reading is not omitted; it is read on the preceding day, together with the ordinary readings. On “medium rank” Feast days the consecutive and festive readings are read. The reading of only the festive readings, that is, with the omission of the ordinary, is called “irrationality” by the *typikon* because when this is done the whole meaning of the division of the readings in the specific order is transgressed and those who do this show their lack of understanding (of the meaning of the divisions).

The remaining Sacraments, as in all of the order of services in the Book of Needs, also must not be shortened except for dire need, and even then only by adhering to all that is essential and the order of the service, remembering one’s accountability before God for the damage done to the souls of the flock by one’s negligence. Everyone, while celebrating divine service, must fulfill it more precisely and with better execution so that, bringing spiritual benefit to others, he himself in the Day of Retribution may be likened to the servant who brought forth the ten talents and hear: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things.*

THE THREE LEVELS OF APOSTASY

By Fr. Damascene Christensen, from "One Man in the Face of Apostasy,"
Orthodox Word Magazine, #130, Sept. - Oct. 1986.

In studying Archbishop Averky's writings on the apostasy, one can discern three levels of which he spoke, these levels progressing from the most obvious to the most difficult to detect.

The First Level

At the first level is the loss of Christianity's "savour" by Christendom in general. The roots of this are found in the schism of East and West and in the medieval West's gradual formation of a "new Christianity," in which man's fallen reason—rather than divinely revealed tradition—became the criterion of truth. In essence, it was this change in perspective from the spiritual to the natural that led, through the Renaissance and "Enlightenment," to the blatant materialism of our own times—a materialism that has spiritually blinded modern man. "There can be discerned," wrote Archbishop Averky, "some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all."

Materialism, Archbishop Averky understood, corrupts the faith of Christians without their even knowing it. Even their ostensible stand "against worldliness" or their talk of Heaven may be filled with worldly conceptions if they have lost the right understanding of the "world" that is opposed by basic Christianity. Moreover, that which would, from an Orthodox viewpoint, be considered immoral, becomes permissible to a Christianity infected with worldliness. Wrote Archbishop Averky:

"Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can we speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless 'balls,' various kinds of 'games,' 'dances' and amusements, toward which, despite their immoral and anti-Christian

nature, even many modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them."

In losing touch with the essence of its faith—which is, in a word, *otherworldliness*—Christendom deprives believers of living contact with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Christians must therefore find substitutes for this grace by inducing, through self-persuasion, "spiritual experiences." At the same time they seek a substitute, in this world, for the other world that is no longer tangible to them. Of these "neo-Christians," Archbishop Averky wrote:

"They want blessedness here in this world, burdened with its multitude of sins and iniquities; and they await this blessedness with impatience. They consider one of the surest ways to attaining it to be the 'ecumenical movement,' the

union and unification of all peoples in one new 'church' which will comprise not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews, Moslems and pagans, each retaining its own convictions and errors. This imaginary 'Christian' love, in the name of the future blessedness of men on earth, cannot but trample upon the Truth."

Archbishop Averky termed the belief in future blessedness on earth "neochiliasm"—chiliasm being the ancient heretical belief in a thousand-year reign of Christ as an earthly king. He foresaw that the outward "ecumenical unity" sought by the "neochiliasts" would be nothing else than an official unity supported and approved of by Antichrist.

For Archbishop Averky, the modern "ecumenical movement" was indicative of something else: the widespread disbelief in absolute Truth. Through this comes an unwillingness to take a stand for anything and a weak-willed acceptance or even justification of evil, all in the name of the most superficial ideas of "Christian love" and "peace." Archbishop Averky expressed it thus:

"In our times, when there are such strong doubts about even the existence of Truth, when every 'truth' is considered relative and it is considered legal for each person to hold to 'his own truth,' the struggle for the Truth acquires a particularly important meaning. And the person who does not sympathize with this struggle, who sees in it only a manifestation of 'phariseism' and suggests 'humbling oneself' before falsehood by falling away from the Truth, should naturally be recognized as a betrayer of the Truth, whoever he might be, whatever he might call or consider himself."



Those who place all their hope in this world must of necessity either give into despair or blind themselves to the rising degeneracy in all forms of public life. Their relativistic and irresolute attitude only helps to unleash the forces of Satan in the last times. As Archbishop Averky pointed out:

“The ‘ministers of Satan,’ or, which is the same thing, the servants of the coming Antichrist, make use of this spiritual blindness of the majority of modern people and stubbornly and insistently do their work with genuinely satanic energy. With special efforts and with all available means, with the aid of all the resources under their control, they bind forcibly to themselves adepts who are wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly, cooperating with them in creating in the world circumstances and conditions appropriate for the very near appearance of the Antichrist as the ruler of the whole world and the master of all mankind.”

In another place, Archbishop Averky wrote more on this same theme:

“The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist is to destroy the old world with all its former concepts and ‘prejudices,’ in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching ‘new owner’ who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them... One must be completely blind spiritually, completely alien to true Christianity, not to understand all this!”

The Second Level

At the second level of the apostasy described by Archbishop Averky, the Orthodox churches—in “keeping in step with the times”—leave behind some of the Church’s traditional forms and ecclesiological positions which they consider “outdated,” and thus they too cut themselves off from the tradition that retains the “savour” of basic Christianity. This is one of the ways in which Orthodoxy becomes a worldly “pseudo-Orthodoxy.” The essence of Orthodoxy cannot be transmitted when the very context of receiving it is all but gone.

Archbishop Averky explained why the Orthodox Church, as St. Athanasius the Great once said, *must not serve the times*:

“The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord said to His disciples at the Last Supper, *You*

are not of this world. We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept her unchanged, that is, *like the immutable God Himself.*”

Once in the early 1960’s, a seminarian heard Archbishop Averky pacing for a long time in the monastery corridor. Finally he went up to the bishop and asked him what was wrong. “Brother,” replied the righteous hierarch, contemplating, “the term ‘Orthodoxy’ has become meaningless because *unorthodoxy* is disguising itself behind the external

mask of Orthodoxy. Thus there is a need to coin a new phrase for that which we call Orthodoxy, just as there once had been a need to coin the term ‘Orthodox.’ And that is not so easy.”

Archbishop Averky perceived that, for whatever reason, Orthodox churches and church leaders have not treasured the other worldly basis of Orthodox tradition as passed on from father

to son uninterruptedly through the centuries. About this he wrote:

“Wherever the inherited spiritual link of grace going back to the Holy Apostles and their successors the Apostolic Men and Holy Fathers has been broken, wherever various innovations have been introduced in faith and morals with the aim of ‘keeping step with the times,’ of ‘progressing,’ of not getting out-of-date and of adapting to the demands and fashions of this world lying in evil—there can be no talk of the true Church.”

These “innovations” are sometimes introduced in order to make Orthodox life less of a struggle or to make it appear less “odd” in the eyes of the world. Archbishop Averky wrote that the very concept of doing this is heterodox, since “the Orthodox Faith teaches *how to construct life according to the demands of Christian perfection*, whereas heterodoxy takes from Christianity only those things which are, and to the degree to which they are, *compatible with the conditions of contemporary cultural life.*” To lower Orthodoxy’s standard of ascetic struggle is to deny Christians a means of self-purification, to deny them even the chance of soul-saving



The Three Pillars of Orthodoxy

repentance when they fall short of this standard—in spirit if not in letter. It is to weaken the very foundation of Orthodoxy, which, as Archbishop Averky stated, “is an *ascetic* faith that calls to ascetic labor in the name of the uprooting of sinful passions and the implanting of Christian virtues.”

In other cases, traditions are dissected and changed in order to feed the pride of contemporary “theologians” who, cut off from the direct, living transmission of tradition, strive to find “new ways of Orthodox theology,” to intellectually “master history” and “restore” Orthodox practice to some kind of artificial purism. They clamor, Archbishop Averky wrote, “about how essential it is to ‘renew the Orthodox Church,’ about some sort of ‘reforms in Orthodoxy,’ which allegedly has become ‘set in its ways’ and ‘moribund.’ These new breeds of ‘Orthodox’ are really no more than modern ‘scholastics.’” They “theologize” without the proper “feel” for the traditional church atmosphere in which saints have been raised.

By *their fruits ye shall know them* (Mt 7:20): Traditional Orthodoxy, with all its alleged “cultural accretions” and “impurities,” has nurtured saints even in our own times; “restored” or “rediscovered” Orthodoxy, with all its claims of being more pure and better informed, has produced, at best, clever men. The spiritual impotence of the latter is the result of its “theologians” “knowing better” than the modern, living repositories of Orthodox sanctity.

Churches, in “keeping step with the times,” can also lose the savour of Orthodoxy by being caught up in the spirit of the fashionable “ecumenical movement” which, as we have seen, is a manifestation of the process of world apostasy. Thus, Archbishop Averky stated in different places:

“The destructive spirit of Apostasy has already penetrated even our Orthodox Church, extremely prominent hierarchs of which openly are proclaiming the approach of some sort of ‘new era’ and cynically are proposing being done with all the past as they assemble to create some kind of completely ‘new Church’ in close ‘ecumenical’ contact and unanimity with all apostates from the true faith and Church. For a long time we have heard that they [Orthodox clergy] belong to this movement in order ‘to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy,’ but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than ‘throwing powder in our eyes.’ Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.”

The Third Level

Finally, the third level of the apostasy that Archbishop Averky warned about is reached when Orthodox churches, even while preserving all the traditions of what they call “true Orthodoxy,” also lose the precious savour of their faith and become infected with a worldly spirit disguised as spirituality. This occurs through:

(1) The loss of basic Christian love, without which all the traditions become condemning rather than grace-bearing, and

(2) The use of outward forms and supports of faith (which are intended to evoke remembrance of the other world) for worldly ends.

Through these factors arises another form of “pseudo-Orthodoxy,” this time more subtle because it may be cloaked in all the right externals.

† † †

From the Editor: The symptoms found within this apostatic state of “pseudo-Orthodoxy” will be presented in our next issue.



I see your struggle; I am counting the crowns; I envy your medallions; I plunge my mind into the age to come to hear the triumphant melodies that the angelic beings will compose; I am amazed and bemoan myself because I have not struggled as you struggle!

My children, just think about what the martyrs went through for our Christ! And the more martyrs were killed, the more did Christians flourish; our Church has been watered with the blood of martyrs. We are martyrs in this corrupt society of ours, for with our chaste—by God’s grace—lifestyle, we censure the immorality of mankind and its estrangement from the worship of God.

Abide, my children, in this chaste lifestyle; abide close to our Jesus, and may you resemble Him by enduring slander and false accusations. This is what our Lord endured from the Scribes and the Pharisees and the chief priests; unjustly did He suffer on the Cross. Therefore, those who want to be His followers will undergo similar trials.

Kneel at the holy feet of our Jesus and shed tears of love, follow Him with loyal dedication till death, and if the waves rise up to Heaven and descend to the abyss, so be it. Our Christ, the true God, with a dreadful, divine nod will calm all the waves, as long as we have faith. Believe truly and steadfastly in Him Who said, *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Mt 28:20). Jesus is with us; do not lose heart. He will fight for us, throughout the intercessions of the invincible Theotokos, and grant us the victory.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona

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

THE ORTHODOX THERAPIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

Rekindling the Spiritual Gift

The priesthood is a great gift given to those who have been healed of passions and are placed in the position of physicians to cure the passions of the people. Any physician, however, needs continual renewal. Otherwise he cannot cure men's diseases with new methods. The same applies to some degree in the case of priests. It requires vigilant attention and a great struggle to maintain this gift of the priesthood at all times. The priest bears within him the priesthood of Christ and must keep it undefiled. This has a deep meaning.

There are priests who have not been dethroned (deposed) and consequently can celebrate the Liturgy and perform the sacraments by the grace of God. Outwardly their priesthood is unhindered, because they have not been condemned by the Church. But their priesthood has no power because they defile it by their lives. They can consecrate the gifts, but they themselves cannot be sanctified by them, as Nicholas Cavasilas says.

Where does this spiritual powerlessness appear? It appears mainly in the fact that they cannot heal and do not know how to heal. To perform the sacraments is of God's grace which is given in the sacrament of the priesthood. But **to cure people's sicknesses is of God's grace which is given to that person who makes [synergistically] productive the gift of [his] baptism, who puts to use the kingly gift of grace.** This explains why many priests do not know how to heal men's passions and are unable to do it. They simply do not know what method to apply. They have no idea of what the *heart* and *nous* are, how the *nous* is taken captive or how the *heart* dies. They often regard these teachings as "referring only to monks." Thus they divide the teachings of Christ and the Fathers into monastic and secular. But no such distinction exists in the teaching of our Orthodox Church.

In what follows we would like to set forth the teaching of the Church, through the Holy Apostles and Fathers, on the necessity for the priest to nurture the gift of priesthood, to rekindle the grace received at the sacrament of ordination, for otherwise he cannot heal men's spiritual illnesses.

Basic Qualities of Priest-Therapists

St. Paul advised his disciple Timothy: *Do not neglect the gift that is in you.* (1 Tim 4:14). This exhortation is analogous to the exhortation to the Christians: *As a fellow-worker we urge you not to let the grace you received come to nothing.* (2 Cor 6:1). And the same apostle's words: *The grace he has shown me has not been without fruit.* (1 Cor 15:10). He also instructs the Apostle Timothy: *That is why I would remind you to fan the flame of that special grace which God kindled in you when my hands were laid upon you.* (2 Tim 1:6).

In the Pastoral Epistles the Holy Apostle Paul often refers to this subject. The bishop and the clergy in general must, through

their struggle to preserve the gift of the priesthood, serve God and men in a worthy manner and guard the sacred heritage.

We would like to cite a few of the many characteristic passages: *Train yourself for godliness.* (1 Tim 4:7). *You will be a good minister of Jesus Christ nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.* (1 Tim 4:6). *Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* (1 Tim 4:12). He requests Timothy to fulfill his charge *without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing.* (1 Tim 6:14). He exhorts him to keep the tradition: *That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.* (2 Tim 1:14). This keeping of the tradition must be done through the Holy Spirit who dwells within Timothy. He exhorts him to have watchfulness, attentiveness, vigilant care to live up to the great calling of God: *Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* (2 Tim 4:5).

The patristic teachings refer to all the essential qualities which should adorn the priest in order for him to be able to live up to his great task and high calling. In what follows we shall try to make a selection from those teachings, mainly from St. John Chrysostom and St. Theognostos. The teaching of these two Fathers expresses that of the holy Orthodox Church.

According to St. Theognostos (*The Philokalia*, vol. 2), the priest must not only be filled with the human traditions but have the grace of God mystically hidden in him. *Make sure that you do not rely only on human traditions in celebrating the divine mysteries, but let God's grace inwardly and invisibly fill you with the knowledge of higher things. And, the priestly dignity, like the priestly vestments, is full of splendor, but only so long as it is illumined from within by purity of soul.* Therefore the priest must guard this divine gift *as he would the pupil of his eye* and keep its honor unsullied.

These things show that great watchfulness is required on the part of the priest. And this requires much suffering. The priest should celebrate the Divine Liturgy first of all on his own behalf *watchfully and diligently.*

St. John Chrysostomos ("On the Priesthood") insists on this constant attention to guarding the priestly grace. He says that a priest must be sober and clear-sighted and *possess a thousand eyes looking in every direction.* He should resemble the many-eyed Cherubim in order to worship the Lord of hosts in purity. He should be encircled with walls all round, and *have intense zeal and constant sobriety of life* in order not to be harmed. According to St. John Chrysostom, just as fire requires fuel, *so grace requires our alacrity that it may be ever fervent.* This grace is in our power to quench or kindle. The grace *for presiding over the Church* is quenched *by sloth and carelessness* but is kept alive *by watchfulness and diligence.*

Watchfulness is indispensable for keeping oneself pure and thus for the priestly grace and blessing to remain. According to St. Theognostos, the priesthood *requires of us an angelic*

purification, and a degree of discretion and self-restraint greater than in our previous life. According to St. John Chrysostom, the priest must be as pure as if he were standing in Heaven itself, in the midst of the angelic powers. The priest's soul must be purer than the rays of the sun, *in order that the Holy Spirit may never leave him desolate.*

Repentance is another spiritual quality indispensable for a priest. "With streams of tears" let him become whiter than snow, and then, with a clear conscience, let him "in holiness touch holy things".

The purity of a priest should shine and beam on the Christians. A priest should be pure from passions, *especially unchastity and rancor, and should keep his imagination passion-free.* Many Fathers emphasize that these two passions (unchastity and rancor) should not come near priests, because otherwise the grace of God does not work for the healing of his spiritual children. Then the priest is sick, as we have indicated. He must have committed himself *sacrificially to die to the passions and to sensual pleasure.* Besides, according to Abba Dorotheos, *everything which is offered as a sacrifice to God, whether it be a sheep or a cow or something of the sort is a Victim.* He must be wholly consecrated to God.

The Gospel, which describes the journey of the Christian struggling to reach communion with God should be applied first of all by his servant, the priest. The ascetic life of the Church which we describe in this book should be known to the pastors of the Church. And when we say "known," we do not mean that it should be known in the head through lectures or reading, but it should be their living experience. For what passes through the heart helps faithful Christians. One person offers his blood for another to be nourished. It is shared out and the people are filled.

However, in addition to his purification and repentance, sobriety and watchfulness, the priest must be filled with all the graces of the Spirit, all the virtues. The basic virtue is holy humility which, according to St. Isaac the Syrian, is the raiment of divinity, since Christ, in order to save man, *humbled himself,* as the Apostle says. Besides, the Eucharist which the priest celebrates shows us this humility of Christ. Through the Eucharist we may enter into holy humility and acquire that sacrificial way of life.

Therefore in celebrating the Divine Liturgy we are not simply looking for the bread and wine to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ but seeking to acquire Christ's way of life. And this is humility. We seek to clothe ourselves in the spirit of the Eucharist, which is self-emptying.

Within this perspective St. Theognostos advises: *Humble yourself like a sheep for the slaughter, truly regarding all men as your superiors.* Indeed the same Father exhorts characteristically: *Regard yourself as dust and ashes, or as refuse, or as some cur-like creature...* One should perform the priestly service *with fear and trembling,* and in this way rightly divide the

word of truth and work out one's salvation. However, the Fathers recognize the actual reality. They are not unaware of the existence of many unworthy priests who, without having these essential qualities, dare to minister the Holy Sacrament. According to St. John Chrysostom, the priesthood, far from covering over man's passions, exposes them, makes them manifest. As fire tests metals, *so the touchstone of the ministry distinguishes men's souls. If a man is hot-tempered or conceited or boastful or anything like that, it soon uncovers all his shortcomings and lays them bare. Not only does it lay them bare, but it also makes them more tough and intractable.*

On Unworthy Priests

St. John of the Ladder says that he has seen aged priests *mocked by demons.* (Step 14). Furthermore, the Fathers do not hesitate to expose the punishment of unworthy priests, those who practice this great office without the proper testing, preparation and life. This is because instead of healing the souls of the flock, they tempt them.

St. Isidore of Pelusium writes (quoted by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain): *Let us not trifle with divine things.* St. John Chrysostom says: *The priestly office might well accuse us of not handling it rightly.* St. Theognostos addresses the incorrigible priest who does not renounce the sacred ministry: *Expect to fall into the hands of the living God and experience his wrath. God will not spare you out of compassion.* He informs us that *many unworthy priests have been snatched away by sudden death and sent to the halls of judgment.*

St. Theognostos has in mind two examples of unworthy priests with different consequences. There was one who seemed outwardly honorable among men but nevertheless *within he was licentious and defiled,* and so at the time of the cherubic hymn when he was reading *no one is worthy...*, he suddenly died. The other priest had fallen into the passion of unchastity. Therefore he became incurably sick and was near death. When he came to realize his unworthiness and took a vow that he would desist from celebrating the mysteries, *he recovered at once so that not even a trace of his illness remained.*

Conclusion

We emphasize again that the priesthood is a pastoral service to the people. The priest and bishop have this great honor of serving the people. Serving the people is healing first and foremost. The Church does not exist simply to do social work and to serve the social needs of the people, but to guide them to salvation, that is, to the healing of their souls. This work demands many qualities. The priest must be indwelt by the uncreated grace of God. He is not there simply to perform the sacraments, but also in order to be sanctified by them so that, being sanctified, he can sanctify men by his being. This work is very high, and therefore St. John Chrysostom declares: *I do not think that there are many of the priests who are saved but many more that perish; this is because the matter requires a great soul.*

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A MOTHER'S LOVE . . .

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

Death has one characteristic in common with love: it, like love, works a profound change in many that experience it and go on living.

A mother after a funeral goes to the graves of her children. Who goes there? The children in the mother's soul, with the mother, go to their graves. In a mother's soul, the mother lives only in one little corner; all the rest is a palace for the souls of the children taken from her. So it is with Christ, though to an immeasurably greater extent. He submitted to the confines of the grave so that men, His children, should know the spaciousness of the limitless palace of Paradise.

A mother goes to the graves of her children, as though to raise them to life in her soul, to redeem them by her tears, to have compassion on them by her thoughts. A mother's love saves her children from disappearance and annihilation in this world, at least for a time. The Lord, humiliated and spat upon, succeeded, through bowing to His Cross and Tomb, in truly raising the whole human race by His love, and saving it forever from vanishing away and being annihilated. Christ's act is incomparably greater than the act of any lonely mother in the world, His love for the human race being immeasurably greater than the love of any mother in the world for her children.

Although a mother, out of her great love and sorrow, always has tears to shed, she takes her remaining tears with her when she herself goes down into the grave. The Lord Jesus, though, shed all His tears for His children, to the last drop—and all

His blood to the last drop. Never, O sinner, will more precious tears be shed for you, neither living nor dead. Never will a mother, or wife, or children, or homeland, pay more for you than Christ the Saviour paid.

O poor and lonely man—do not say: who will mourn for me when I die? Who will weep over my dead body? Lo, the Lord Christ has mourned for you and wept over you, both in life and in death, more whole-heartedly than your mother would for you. It is not fitting to call those dead for whom Christ, in His love, suffered and died. They are alive in the living Lord. We shall all know this clearly when the Lord visits the graveyard of this world for the last time, and the trumpets sound.

A mother's love cannot separate her dead children from those living. Still less can Christ's love. The Lord is more discerning than the sun: He sees the approaching end of those still alive on earth, and sees the beginning of life for those who have entered into rest. For Him who created the earth from nothing, and man's body from the earth, there is no difference between the earth's, or his body's, being a man's grave. Grain lying in the field or stored in a granary—what difference does this make to the householder, who is thinking in both cases of the grain, and not of the straw or the granary? Whether men are in the body or in the earth—what difference does this make to the Householder of men's souls?

Coming on earth, the Lord paid two visits to men: the first to those living in the grave of the body and the second to those in the grave of the earth. He died in order to visit His dead children. Ah, how very truly a mother dies when she goes to the graves of her children!