

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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BEGINNING OF THE NATIVITY FAST

By Metropolitan Longin Of Saratov and Volsk, Russian Orthodox Church.

Dear brothers and sisters! We have entered the days of the Nativity Fast, that period of preparation for one of the greatest feasts of the Orthodox Church: the radiant and joyful day of the Nativity of Christ. In his daily life, modern man is immersed in his usual earthly deeds, cares, and concerns. It can be difficult for him to put aside all earthly things and turn to the heavenly, eternal, and Divine. The law of the Gospel is known and accessible to all, but man in his weakness often stumbles and commits sin. The more his soul is burdened, clinging to the earth, the more difficult it becomes for him to perceive the spiritual.

The Church, therefore, has wisely established a time of fasting for Christians: a time of penitential introspection, of work on oneself, and of conforming oneself to the traditions, foundations, and rules of the Church, including the ecclesiastical canons. In this regard, modern society's attitude towards the fast is no exception: one hears questions about whether it is necessary, about whether one can forego, mitigate, or shorten it. But it is characteristic of the true Christian to be completely obedient to the Mother Church, accepting that which it has established and which

has been observed by its faithful children for centuries.

People with an inadequate conception of church life often perceive the fasts as being concerned exclusively with limitation in food, in both quantity and quality. But fasting is primarily a spiritual matter. Today the spirit of sacrifice and the capacity for self-denial are dying out. Fasting is the best means of reviving this spirit, through restraining the flesh and resisting its insistent demands.

Yet it should go without saying that bodily fasting alone, such as abstaining from foods of animal origin, is incomplete and incorrect. Spiritual fasting is essential: the rejection of entertainments, amusements, and of everything that in ordinary, non-fasting, times might sting a Christian's conscience. In order to understand

the fast's essence, its true content, one should spend as much time as possible in church throughout the duration of the fast and be more diligent in fulfilling one's personal rule of prayer. During this time, it is especially important to live to the fullest possible extent within the mysteriological, grace-filled life of the Church by approaching the Mysteries of Confession and Communion more frequently.

I know well how difficult fasting can be for Christians living amidst the world. They often meet with incomprehension from friends and colleagues – and not only incomprehension, but rejection



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Please visit our website for our mission and other useful information.

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

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate **\$24 per annum (\$48 for those outside of the US)**. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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and even ridicule. This sometimes causes the cowardly desire to abandon the fast, so as not to appear strange in people's eyes or to stand out from their surroundings. But it should be firmly understood that the steadfast observance of church rules by Christians, although it might seem unusual to non-churchgoers, will command their involuntary respect. Our fasting itself can become a wordless sermon for many, reminding them of our faith and of that great and majestic event for which we are preparing by means of this fast.

I sincerely wish you to complete the course of this fast with spiritual profit, peering attentively into your souls and hearts during these days in order to cleanse them of everything that could hinder God—Who became Man for our sake and our salvation by descending from heaven to earth—from entering and making His abode in them. We will render to the Lord only the small labor of abstinence that is within our powers, and He will grant us His great and incomparable spiritual joy—the joy of the living knowledge that God has appeared unto us in order to be with us always, never leaving those who have put their trust in Him, through the joy of Christ's radiant Nativity.



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

FROM THE EDITOR...

The Presidential election is upon us at a time that our Nation is as polarized as it has ever been, allegations of improper behaviors are abundant, the world is in social and economic upheaval, wars rage, and uncertainty among all is apparent, irrespective of political persuasion or social status. The continuing degradation of morals, ethics, and values has fully penetrated the campaigns of politicians throughout our Nation. The electorate is no longer surprised by ANY revelation of impropriety and, for the most part, struggles to determine who might be the candidate that will allow our Nation to return back to its glory days and the Founders' values.

It is likely that this *Orthodox Heritage* issue will not make it to our readers until after the election is held; we anticipate some to be disappointed. We shall, once again, reiterate a self-reflective anecdote from our Church's Holy Tradition, which we uncovered within the Greek periodical *Athonite Witness*, in one of their 1990 issues:

When the Emperor Fokas the Tyrant had taken over the reins of Byzantium (602 AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil "Vonnoso the Tormentor." During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, *Lord, why did You give us such a king?* And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said: *Because I could find none worse...*

We continue to insist that our humble publication cannot and will not engage in political matters. We are reminded by His Divine Word: *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.* (Rom 13:1).

WHY DO WE GO TO CHURCH EVERY SUNDAY?

By Hieromartyr Daniel Sisoyev, translated by Priest Sergii Alekseev.

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. [Pss 121:1]

People often ask priests: “Why should we go to church every Sunday?” And then they begin to justify themselves: “We need our sleep, then, we need to spend time with the family, do things around the house, etc. And you want us to get up and go to church. What for?”

Of course, in order to justify one’s laziness one can come up with various objections. But first we have to understand the meaning behind the weekly trips to church and only then to measure it against our self-justification. It is so obvious that the requirement of frequent church attendance is not man-made, but it was one of the Ten Commandments: *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exod 20:8-11).*

In the Old Testament, violation of the fourth commandment was punishable by death, as was murder. In the New Testament, Sunday became the greater holy day because Christ, having risen from the dead, sanctified that day. According to the church rules, whoever violates this commandment is subject to excommunication. As stated in the 80th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council: *In case any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or anyone else on the list of the clergy, or any layman, without any graver necessity or any particular difficulty compelling him to absent himself from his own church for a very long time, fails to attend church on Sundays for three consecutive weeks, while living in the city, if he be a cleric, let him be deposed from office; but if he be a layman, let him be removed from Communion.*

It is rather unlikely that the Creator would give us ridiculous commands, or that the church canons were written to make people’s lives unbearable. Then what is the meaning of this commandment?

Everything in Christianity has its origin in the self-manifestation of God the Trinity, Who is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Entering His inner life and participation in His Divine glory is the goal of our life. Since *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him,* by the word of Apostle John (1 Jn 4:16), we can enter into communion with Him only through love.

As affirmed by the word of the Lord, the entire Divine Goal can be reduced to two commandments: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mt 22:37-40).*

Can we truly fulfill these commandments without going to church? If we love someone, do not we try to see this person as often as possible? Is it possible to imagine two people in love who are avoiding seeing one another? Yes, they can talk on the phone; but it is far better to talk face to face. The same goes for the person who loves God—he wants to come closer to God. May King David be an example for us. He, being a ruler of his people, fighting numerous wars with enemies, executing judgment, used to say: *How beloved are Thy dwellings, O Lord of hosts; my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For the sparrow hath found herself a house, and the turtledove a nest for herself where she may lay her young. Even Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; unto ages of ages shall they praise Thee. Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee; he hath made ascents in his heart, in the valley of weeping, in the place which he hath appointed. Yea, for the lawgiver will give blessings; they shall go from strength to strength, the God of gods shall be seen in Sion. O Lord of hosts, hearken unto my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. O God, our defender, behold, and look upon the face of Thine anointed one. For better is one day in Thy courts than thousands elsewhere. I have chosen rather to be an outcast in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of sinners. (Pss 83).*

When he was in exile, he would tearfully cry every day over the fact that he cannot enter the house of God: *These things have I remembered, and I poured out my soul within me, for I used to go to the place of the wondrous tabernacle, even to the house of God, with a voice of rejoicing and thanksgiving, yea, of the sound of them that keep festival. (Pss 41:5).*

It is exactly this attitude that gives rise to the need of going to God’s temple and makes it essential for the person.

And this is not surprising! The eyes of the Lord are always directed towards God’s temple, the church. In the church, He Himself is present in His Body and Blood. In the church, He revives us in Baptism, therefore the church is our lesser motherland. In the church, God forgives us our sins in the Mystery of Confession, He gives us His own self in the most holy Communion. Where else can we find such sources of incorruptible life? According to the word of an ancient ascetic, they who throughout the week fight against the devil, hasten on Saturdays and Sundays to church to partake from the sources of the living water of Communion, in order to quench the thirst of their hearts and to be cleansed of the filth of their defiled conscience.

Ancient legends tell us that deer hunt snakes and eat them; but when the poison starts burning their interior parts they run to a spring of clear water. So also we have to hasten to the church, in order to cool the irritation of our hearts with the communal prayer. As Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer said: *Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God's Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan's powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace, by which all strife in heavenly and earthly spirits is cast out.* (Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, Epistle to the Ephesians, 13).

People forget that only church prayer can save man from the devil's attacks, for he is trembling before the power of God and is unable to harm the person who abides in Divine love.

King David chanted: *Though a host should array itself against me, my heart shall not be afraid; though war should rise up against me, in this have I hoped. One thing have I asked of the Lord, this will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that I may behold the delight of the Lord, and that I may visit His holy temple. For He hid me in His tabernacle in the day of my troubles, He sheltered me in the secret place of His tabernacle, upon a rock hath He exalted me. And now, behold, He exalted my head above mine enemies. I went round about and I sacrificed in His tabernacle a sacrifice of praise and jubilation; I will sing and I will chant unto the Lord.* (Pss 26:3-6).

Besides the fact that in His temple the Lord protects us and gives us strength, He also teaches us, for the Divine Service in its entirety is a true school of Divine love. In God's holy temple, we hear His word, we bring to mind his marvelous acts, we learn about our future; indeed, *In God's temple everything uttereth His glory.* (Pss 28:9); as if before our very eyes there takes place feats of the martyrs, the victories of the ascetics, courage of kings and priests; we learn about the mystical nature of God, about the salvation which Christ has granted us; here we rejoice at Christ's Radiant Resurrection. It is not accidental that we refer to Sunday Divine Service as a "lesser Pascha." Often it seems to us that everything around us is terrible, awful and hopeless, but the Sunday Divine Service reveals to us our extreme hope. It was not without reason that Prophet David said that: *We have thought, O God, of Thy mercy in the midst of Thy temple.* (Pss 47:10).

Sunday Divine Service is the best weapon against those numerous depressions and sorrows which inhabit our gray everyday life. This service is a brightly shining rainbow of God's covenant amidst the fog of the everyday bustle.

In the heart of our festal Divine Service is prayer and contemplation of the Holy Scripture, the reading of which in the church possesses a unique power. One ascetic saw tongues of fire rising up from the mouth of the deacon reading the word of God at the Sunday Divine Service. They were purifying the

souls of the praying people and were ascending to Heaven. Those who say that reading the Bible at home is sufficient and, therefore, they do not need to go to church to hear the Word of God are mistaken. Even if they do open the Book at home, their distancing themselves from the assembly of the faithful in the church will prevent them from fully understanding the sacred text. It has been confirmed that those who do not partake of the Holy Communion are practically unable to understand God's will. No wonder!

The Scripture is nothing other than instruction on how to receive Heavenly Grace. But if we simply read a set of instructions and do not try to, let us say, put a bookcase together or use a computer program, the set of instructions will remain un-mastered and will be soon forgotten. It is well-known that our mind quickly filters out any unused information. Therefore, the Scripture is inseparable from the church community, for it was given solely to the Church.

And vice versa, those who attend the Sunday Divine Liturgy and then read the Scripture at home will comprehend meaning in it that they would never have comprehended otherwise. Often, it is precisely on the Church Feast Days that people learn the will of God about themselves. According to the words of St. John of the Ladder: *Although God always endows His servants with gifts, He does even more so on the yearly feasts of the Lord and the Mother of God.* ("To the Pastor," 3:2).

It is not surprising that those who regularly attend church are somewhat different, both in outward appearance and in the disposition of their souls. On one hand, to them virtues become natural, while on the other hand, frequent confessions prevent them from falling into serious sins. In the life of a Christian, passions can intensify, for Satan does not want us—who were made from dust—to ascend to Heaven from which we had been cast down. For this reason, Satan attacks us as his enemies. We, however, should not fear him; we should fight him and overcome him, for only *he that overcometh shall inherit all things, says the Lord.* (Rev 21:7).

If the person says that he is a Christian but does not pray with his brothers, what kind of Christian is he? In the words of the greatest expert on Church canons, Patriarch Theodore Balsamon of Antioch: *Such a person either does nothing regarding fulfillment of the Divine commandment about prayer and singing hymns to God, or he is not a believer. Otherwise, why would he for twenty days not want to be in church with Christians and have communion with God's faithful people?* (This is reference to Church canons which stipulate that Christians who were absent from church on three consecutive Sundays are to be excommunicated. **Trans.**).

It is no accident that people we consider model Christians: Christians of the apostolic Church in Jerusalem, were together, and had all things common... *And all that believed were together, and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man*

had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:44-47). Their inner strength was a result of their being in one accord. They abided in the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit which was poured forth upon them in response to their love.

It is no coincidence that the New Testament directly forbids one to neglect assembling in church: *We shall not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but we shall exhort one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day [of the assembly] approaching.* (Heb 10:25).

All the best things which made Russia holy, and which sustain other Christian nations, are provided by the Divine Services. In church we are delivered from the yoke of our vanity and we can break through from the shackles of crises and wars into God's peace. And this is the only correct decision: not curses and revolutions, not malice and hatred, but church prayer and virtues can change the world. *For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* (Pss 10:3-4), and the righteous one flees to the Lord to find refuge. This is not cowardice but wisdom and courage. Only a fool is going to try to stand up by himself against the onslaught of the evil of the entire world, be that terrorism or a natural disaster, revolutions or wars. Only the Almighty God can defend His creation. This is why a church has always been considered a place of safety.

Indeed, a church is Heaven's embassy on the Earth where we pilgrims looking for the Heavenly city, receive support: *How Thou hast multiplied Thy mercy, O God! Let the sons of men hope in the shelter of Thy wings. They shall be drunken with the fatness of Thy house, and of the torrent of Thy delight shalt Thou make them to drink. For in thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light.* (Pss 35:8-10).

I think it is clear that love for God is the reason for one's striving to frequently visit the house of the Lord. But the second commandment demands the same—to love our neighbor. Where else can we give our attention to what is most beautiful in a person? In a store, in a movie theater, or in a hospital? Obviously not. Only in the house of our common Father can we meet our brothers. Our communal prayer is going to be heard by God sooner,

too, than any prayer of a proud loner. For Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself said: *That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* (Mt 18:19-20).

In church we distance ourselves from the hustle and bustle and are able to pray both about our own troubles and about the entire universe. In church, we pray to God asking Him to heal the diseases of our relatives, to free the captives, to preserve the travelers, to rescue the perishing. In church we are also in communion with those who have left this world but have not left Christ's Church. Whenever the departed visit the living they beg them to pray for them in churches. They say that every such a commemoration is like a birthday to them, but we often neglect that. Where then is our love? Let us imagine their condition. They have no bodies, they cannot receive communion, and they cannot do any good

deeds (alms), either. They are waiting for support from their friends and relatives, but what they are getting are just excuses. It is the same as saying to your hungry mother: "Please forgive me, I am not going to give you anything to eat, because I badly need a nap." Do we not know that the church prayer is true food to the departed?

Besides, holy righteous men and women, worthily glorified, await us in the temple.

Holy icons allow us to see them, their words are proclaimed during the service, and they themselves often visit the house of God, especially on their feast days. They pray together with us to God, and their powerful hymnology like eagles' wings bring up the church prayer directly to the Divine altar. And not only people but bodiless angels also participate in our prayer. People chant angelic hymns, such as the *Trisagion*, while angels chant along with us, *It is truly meet to bless Thee, O Theotokos.*

According to the Church Tradition, an angel always stands over the Altar within any consecrated church, sending the prayer of the Church up to God, while a blessed spirit stands at the church entrance, watching over the thoughts of people entering and exiting the church. This presence is rather palpable. For it is not without reason that many unrepentant sinners do not feel good in the temple—it is the power of God rejecting their sinful will and the angels punishing them for their lawlessness. Such people, instead of ignoring the church, must repent and receive forgiveness in the Mystery of Confession and then remember to thank the Creator.



THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ABSURD

By Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982).

The present age is, in a profound sense, an age of absurdity. Poets and dramatists, painters and sculptors proclaim and depict the world as a disjointed chaos, and man as a dehumanized fragment of that chaos. Politics, whether of the right, the left, or the center, can no longer be viewed as anything but an expedient whereby universal disorder is given, for the moment, a faint semblance of order; pacifists and militant crusaders are united in an absurd faith in the feeble powers of man to remedy an intolerable situation by means which can only make it worse. Philosophers and other supposedly responsible men in governmental, academic, and ecclesiastical circles, when they do not retreat behind the impersonal and irresponsible facade of specialization or bureaucracy, usually do no more than rationalize the incoherent state of contemporary man and his world, and counsel a futile “commitment” to a discredited humanist optimism, to a hopeless stoicism, to blind experimentation and irrationalism, or to “commitment” itself, a suicidal faith in “faith.”

But art, politics, and philosophy today are only reflections of life, and if they have become absurd it is because, in large measure, life has become so. The most striking example of absurdity in life in recent times was, of course, Hitler’s “new order,” wherein a supposedly normal, civilized man could be at one and the same time an accomplished and moving interpreter of Bach (as was Himmler) and a skilled murderer of millions, or who might arrange a tour of an extermination camp to coincide with a concert series or an exhibition of art. Hitler himself, indeed, was the absurd man par excellence, passing from nothingness to world rule and back to nothingness in the space of a dozen years, leaving as his monument nothing but a shattered world, owing his meaningless success to the fact that he, the emptiest of men, personified the emptiness of the men of his time.

Hitler’s surrealist world is now a thing of the past; but the world has by no means passed out of the age of absurdity, but rather into a more advanced—though temporarily quieter—stage of the same disease. Men have invented a weapon to express, better than Hitler’s gospel of destruction, their own incoherence and nihilism; and in its shadow men stand paralyzed, between the extremes of an external power and an internal powerlessness equally without precedent. At the same time, the poor and “underprivileged” of the world have awakened to conscious life, and seek abundance and privilege; those who already possess them waste their lives in the pursuit of vain things, or become disillusioned and die of boredom and despair, or commit senseless crimes. The whole world, it almost seems, is divided into those who lead meaningless, futile lives without being aware of it, and those who, being aware of it, are driven to madness and suicide.

So it is too with absurdism; it is the negative side of a positive reality. There is, of course, an element of incoherence in our world, for in his fall from Paradise man brought the world with him; the philosophy of the absurd is not, therefore, founded upon a total lie, but upon a deceptive half-truth. But when Camus defines absurdity as the confrontation of man’s need for reason with the irrationality of the world, when he believes that man is an innocent victim and the world the guilty party, he, like all absurdists, has magnified a very partial insight into a totally distorted view of things; and in his blindness has arrived at the exact inversion of the truth. Absurdism, in the end, is an internal and not an external question; it is not the world that is irrational and incoherent, but man.

If, however, the absurdist is responsible for not seeing things as they are, and not even wishing to see things as they are, the Christian is yet more responsible for failing to give the example of a fully coherent life, a life in Christ. Christian compromise in thought and word and negligence in deed have opened the way to the triumph of the forces of the absurd, of Satan, of Antichrist. The present age of absurdity is the just reward of Christians who have failed to be Christians.

And the only remedy for absurdism lies at this, its source: we must again be Christians. Camus was quite right when he said, “We must choose between miracles and the absurd.” For in this respect Christianity and absurdism are equally opposed to Enlightenment rationalism and humanism, to the view that reality can be reduced to purely rational and human terms. We must indeed choose between the miraculous, the Christian view of things, whose center is God and whose end is the eternal Kingdom of Heaven, and the absurd, the Satanic view of things, whose center is the fallen self and whose end is Hell, in this life and in the life to come.’

We must again be Christians. It is futile, in fact it is precisely absurd, to speak of reforming society, of changing the path of history, of emerging into an age beyond absurdity, if we have not Christ in our hearts; and if we do have Christ in our hearts, nothing else matters.

It is of course possible that there may be an age beyond absurdity; it is more likely, perhaps—and Christians must always be prepared for this eventuality—that there will not be, and that the age of absurdity is indeed the last age. It may be that the final testimony Christians may be able to give in this age will be the ultimate testimony, the blood of their martyrdom.

But this is cause for rejoicing and not for despair. For the hope of Christians is not in this world or in any of its kingdoms—that hope, indeed, is the ultimate absurdity; the hope of Christians is in the Kingdom of God which is not of this world.

ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

Source: "In General About the Close of the Age, the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ," Orthodox Kypseli Publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Prior to the Second Coming of Christ to the world, according to the Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, the Antichrist will precede—a most impious man activated by Satan. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem informs us that the Antichrist *is coming... when the close of the world is approaching*, that he will reveal all his murderous disposition against the Church, and *against all (people) especially against us Christians*. According to Saint John Chrysostom, the Antichrist will be a person accepting all the energy of Satan. *What will he not work then? He will move all, he will disturb all..., for he will work a million things and prepare others to work hardships.* (P.G. 62, 482). "When the Antichrist becomes prevailing," says the sacred Chrysostom, *he will persecute the Church of God and reveal his wickedness...* Among many other things, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem makes known to us the following also about the Antichrist: *Daring such things for only three and a half years, he will then be abolished by the second glorious coming from the heavens of the only begotten Son of God, of our true Lord and Savior Christ Who, defeating the Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, will hand him over to the fire of Gehenna.* (Catech. 15, Ch. 12).

Hate amongst brothers, according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, will give ground to the Antichrist; because the Devil prepares the schisms of peoples, so that he who is coming can become acceptable. St. Cyril places above all martyrs, those who at the time of the Antichrist will witness with piety for the name of Christ; this is because the former struggled only with people, whereas the martyrs of the Antichrist's time will fight with Satan himself in person!

The temptation to define the time of the events of the revelations is limited by the terms of Saint Irenaeus, who says: *It is safer and less dangerous, to await the outcome of the prophecy, rather than to ponder and guess at the name.* (Contra Hares. 30:3). And, elsewhere he tells us: *Every prophecy before being fulfilled is an enigma and something irrational to people. When, however, the time comes and that which has been prophesied is realized, then it achieves*

the most precise explanation. While Saint Andrew of Caesarea says: "Time and experience will reveal to those who are vigilant."

The Antichrist will precede the Second Coming of Christ. He will preach on earth a worldwide persecution against the faithful, and for this reason great attention and spiritual wakefulness is demanded; so that *we not be deceived* in any way, as the Apostle Paul proclaims to the Thessalonians. The Antichrist will be a natural person, who will place himself against the God-man Christ, His teaching and His Orthodox Church. Antichrist means he who is coming instead of Christ and is opposed to Christ. He is essentially the opponent, according to the Apostle Paul, of Christ and His world-saving work.

The Evangelist John tells us: *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.* (1 Jn 2:22). While Saint John Damascene assures us, that *he who does not confess the Son of God having come in the flesh and that he is perfect God and has become a perfect man, after being God, is Antichrist* (P.G. 94, 1216). Whoever, that is, rejects the incarnation of Christ is Antichrist. Whoever again are enemies of Christ's Faith, opponents of the Gospel of the Lord, are Antichrists. There existed many forerunners of the Antichrist in the past, but also very many who are working today in his own plans, as are the heresies (especially ecumenism), sorceries, and many international political and financial organizations.

Additional signs of the last days will be: the appearance of many false prophets; the increase of destructive wars; hunger; dreadful and mortal illnesses; earthquakes in places; and the scandals of lay people and clergymen. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes in relation: *Bishops against bishops and clergymen against clergymen and peoples against peoples unto blood.* The Holy Father urges us not to pay attention to those things which are happening, but to those which have been written; nor should the per chance evil conduct of the clergy be a cause for our own perdition.

Another eschatological sin is the lessening of love and the increase of hating brothers before the coming of the Antichrist. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold,* as the Evangelist Matthew mentions (Mt 24:12). Another sign is the preaching of the Gospel to



all the world, independently of whether the people believe or not: *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* (Mt 24:14).

The rumored planned super-inflation will aid in the nations being subjected to the electronic money system. All exchanges and buying/selling will occur through the electronic means of exchanging values, and will be conducted with the *mark*: *And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.* (Rev 13:16-18).

The Antichrist's coming is being prepared by his forerunners, who with impious and sinful works will lead humanity to great apostasy and uselessness; and to idolatry, in order to accept the Antichrist. They will pursue the joining of the currents of politics, of economy and of religion with the aim of the creation of a worldwide state with a worldwide Governor-Dictator, and a pan-religion with the Antichrist as God.

The heresies, many satanic organizations, as well as the atheistic material systems are all forerunners of the Antichrist; they all cause confusion, disbelief in Christ's Church, and lead unsupported people to perdition. With all these things they strive to wound Orthodoxy, in order to work un-battered for Satan and his ungodly instruments. The most effective manner of facing the forerunners of the Antichrist, and of the Antichrist himself, are to know Christ and place Him correctly inside us with such intensity, that we will love Him first and above all; so that, henceforth, it is not possible for anything to separate us from Him.

The par excellence Antichrist will be him whom God will allow to appear to the world a little prior to the Second Coming of Christ *he who is coming during the close of the world*, according to St. John Damascene, *to fight the Church of Christ and the faithful disciples of Christ*. He will perform

in a word whatever Satan dictates to him, as if Satan is acting in person through him. He will be the person through whom Satan will act.

God will allow the Antichrist to come for the unbelieving, the Jews and the believers. According to Saint John Chrysostom he will not be powerful on the believers alone, but also on all those who follow the road of perdition, as well as all "unrepentant" believers. Saint Ephraim the Syrian tells us in relation, that *by the allowance of Holy God, he (the Antichrist) will receive authority to deceive the world; because the impiety of the world has multiplied and everywhere he works hardships*.

Let us forbear, beloved, the satanic violence with bravery in our wicked days, to avoid the Antichrist's deception.



Saint Cyril of Jerusalem stresses to us: *So man, guard your own self. You now have all the signs to know before hand of the Antichrist. And do not just think about it, but also tell them and inform the others, as many more as you can.* And, *while the Son of God*, according to Athanasios the Great, *coming will destroy him.* (BEPES 35, 150). So, while we don't know the precise year of the coming of the Antichrist, we know from the Holy Scriptures and the God-bearing fathers quite a few things about his dark person and his actions.

In our wicked generation many international organizations work for the more general plan of people being governed by the Antichrist. The complete giving over of people to the demons is being pursued by the dark powers. So let us be wakeful, because faith is a delicate thing and we should not deny it either with words or actions; so that we not lose the Grace of Holy Baptism.

We are called to pay attention, because whoever accepts the *mark* denies holy Baptism, the faith of Christ; and he can no longer repent. For this reason, a careful Christian life is demanded and great attention; so that we never accept the deceiver Antichrist as true. It is necessary that we be in a state of repentance and spiritual readiness. And we must not forget such sacred words of our Lord as: *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.* (Mt 11:12);

and *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* (Mt 5:13). The Lord will come again suddenly to judge the world as we also say in the Symbol of Faith: *And He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, Whose kingdom shall have no end...*

The Lord will come as the flood of Noah, that is, suddenly: *But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* (Mt 24:37). He shall also come like a thief: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* (2 Pet 3:10). His coming shall be seen as lightning: *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.* (Mt 24:27) That is, it will be felt like lightning, and will be seen all over the earth and to all people.

The Lord will come again on earth with the same manner that He left. The angels Who were present with the disciples of the Lord in His Ascension assured this: *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* (Acts 1:11). Until then, let us cultivate inside us this sweet expectation, with worthy works of repentance and virtue, love and holiness. In chapter 24, verse 30 of the Evangelist Matthew we read: *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven (the precious Cross); and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* While within Revelation is written: *Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.* (Rev 1:7).

Christ will not leave His faithful people, so long as we walk the path of the Saints of our Church: To live with the fear of God, with humility, with prayer, with charity, with repentance, with patience, with love. Let us walk the path of truth, of light, of grace, of sanctification, studying the Holy Scripture, patristic works, the lives of our Saints, partaking worthily in the sacramental life of our Church; and the philanthropic and soul-saving Lord will not leave us helpless. Our Lord assured us of this with the following consoling words of His: ***And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*** (Mt 28:20).

We are called completely to entrust ourselves to God, to strive to serve the truth, to do that which pleases God; and to never forget, neither God's Judgment nor the Recompense. Then, and only then, the peace of God and His divine protection will accompany us and guard us always.

GIVE AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN TO YOU!

From "Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters," Thessaloniki, 1999.

An Athonite elder said: "It is a good thing for people to read spiritual books, but it is even better to apply them by living spiritually."

Elder Savvas of the Monastery of Philotheou (on Mt. Athos) had told me that during the great famine of 1917, the monks of the Monastery of Iveron, seeing stocks in the storehouses running low, had reduced their commitments to hospitality. In fact, there was one miserly supervisor who insisted on putting a stop to hospitality altogether. It was only to be expected that Christ would put a stop to all His blessings, as well.

The fathers then began to starve and complain to Christ and our Most Holy Lady for not taking care of their monastery. Unfortunately, they hadn't realized their mistake.

One day, Christ appeared to the door-keeper of the monastery in the guise of a pauper asking for bread. The door-keeper said to him sorrowfully, "We haven't got any, my brother. That is why we stopped offering hospitality to people. But just wait here a minute and I will go to my cell and bring you the bit I have for myself." He went running off to his cell and returned with his bread and handed it over. He saw the face of the Pauper shining. When the Pauper had taken the bread, He said to the door-keeper, "Do you know why misfortune has befallen the monastery? Because you have cast out two people: the one is called "give" and the other one "it shall be given unto you." Having said this, He disappeared from sight leaving a brightness which blinded the door-keeper.

The monk was astonished and ran off in fear to tell the supervisors of the monastery about the incident. At first, the fathers cudged their brains trying to remember the people they had turned away. Then they realized that the Pauper was Christ Himself and also recognized His words from the Gospel, *Give and it shall be given unto you.* They immediately repented for their error, and as soon as they began to give to the poor some of the little they had left, they were showered by the rich blessings of God.



You should secretly give from what you have to those in need, so that you receive from God, *Who sees in secret, a hundred times more*, as well as life eternal in the age to come (Mt 6:4; Mk 10:30)."

St. Gregory Palamas

THE MYSTERY OF LOVE

A Sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Nativity of Christ.

Great is the mystery of piety: God is manifested in the flesh

[1 Tim 3:16]

† † †

It is on this day that, throughout the entire inhabited world, the Holy Church brings to our remembrance and observes that most majestic and sublime of mysteries: the Incarnation of God the Word from a Most-pure Virgin through an outpouring of, and an overshadowing by, God's Holy Spirit.

Wondrous, inexpressible and awesome is this mystery, both for the exalted and all-contemplating celestial minds of those who dwell in the heavens: the ranks of the angels. It is equally wondrous, inexpressible and awesome for the minds of all men enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Imagine: the unoriginate God from Whom everything received the commencement of its existence: the Angels, and the human race, and the entire world, both visible and invisible, takes a beginning in His humanity. He Whom the heavens cannot contain is contained in a virginal womb. God becomes an infant, and is borne upon the arms of a Mother. He Who nourishes every breath is now nourished by paps.

The science of astronomy has learned and affirms that, in the order of creation, our earth is but a barely-noticeable point; that millions of worlds around our own fill up the vastnesses of space. And, lo! This single point, this barely-noticeable globe of God's creation, being inhabited by men, has been accounted worthy of the inexpressible honour of bearing upon itself God-in-the-Flesh, the God-Man, Who did deign to dwell amongst men, to teach erring mankind the knowledge of God, to work innumerable miracles of good, to preach repentance and complete forgiveness of sins; to suffer and to die as a holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world, to be resurrected through the power of Divinity from amongst the dead, having vanquished death, which is natural to all men, and to make a gift of resurrection to the entire human race.

Not a single one of the visible worlds, save the earth, has been deemed worthy of this greatest of all honours: for it was only upon the earth that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the heavenly Father, had a Virgin-Mother, and He alone was Her Son by way of humanity. Why was the earth given such preference? Why was it only on earth that God appeared in the flesh? This is a great Divine mystery, a mystery of im-

measurable loving-kindness and of God's condescension to perishing mankind.

Thus, God did appear in the flesh: *rejoice and be exceeding glad, O earth; rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born.* The Creator Himself did come to you, in order to create you anew; to restore you, who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come: the almighty Physician Himself—powerful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin—in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, all of the which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.

Thus, greet Him joyfully, with pure minds and hearts, with bodies chaste and restrained by fasting and abstinence, which the Holy Church has thoughtfully instituted prior to this great feast in order to prepare us worthily to meet the heavenly King, Who comes to us in order to abide in us.

He came to us with the mercy and good will of His heavenly Father, and from us He demands mercy toward our neighbors; He is the righteous King, and He demands of us all righteousness; for He, too, as a man, *fulfilled all righteousness* (Mt 3:15), showing us an example and providing us with grace and the strength to carry it out. He Himself did suffer for us, having borne the cross; and He taught us to deny ourselves—or our sins and our passions—and to fol-

low after Him, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* (2 Cor 7:1). He came to heal our souls, ailing from sin, and commanded all to repent; let us ever, then, be earnestly contrite, correcting ourselves and striving toward holiness and perfection. The holy Angels, at the Nativity of the God-man, did declare *peace unto the world; and unto men, the good will of the Heavenly Father.* Let us then, ourselves, have within us a peaceful conscience, and let us be at peace with everyone, if possible. *Be at peace and be holy with all,* sayeth the apostle (Heb. 12:14), for without this shall none see the Lord. Amen.



My heart only has entrances. It doesn't have exits. Whoever enters remains there. Whatever he may do, I love him the same as I loved him when he first entered into my heart. I pray for him and seek his salvation.

Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)

THE MEANING OF FASTING

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.

[Lk 21:34]

† † †

It is good for the salvation of our souls during the Nativity Lent not only to oppress our bodies by fasting, but also to speak about fasting; it is for the salvation of our souls for us to direct all the necessary attention to the warning against over-eating and satiation made to us by the Lord Himself: *Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life.*

The institution of fasting is a divine institution. The first commandment given by God to man was the commandment of fasting. (*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat; Gen 2:17*). It was indispensably necessary for us in Paradise prior to our fall; it is even more necessary after the fall. The commandment of fasting was given in Paradise; it is repeated in the Gospel. Let us lift up our thoughts to the divine institution of fasting and by a consideration of this institution, let us revitalize with our soul the effort of fasting itself.

The effort of fasting neither belongs exclusively nor is it useful and necessary only for the body; it is useful and necessary primarily for the mind and the heart. *Take heed of yourselves that your hearts not be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* (Lk 21:34). The Savior of the world showed us in these words something worthy of special attention, the effect of the excessive use of food and drink, a terrible consequence, a soul-destroying after-effect. The heart is hardened, coarsens, is weighed down, from pleasing the stomach; the mind is deprived of its lightness and spirituality; man becomes fleshly.

What is meant by a "fleshly man?" Holy Scripture calls fleshly that unfortunate man who is nailed to the earth, who is incapable of spiritual thoughts and feelings. *My Spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is flesh* (Gen 6:3), testifies God. The fleshly man is incapable of the worship of God. Even the spiritual man, once he has subjected himself to satiation, loses his spirituality, loses in some way the very ability to know God and to serve Him. *And Israel waxed fat,*

says Holy Scripture, calling Jacob the true servant of God, *and became stubborn; you became fat, you grew thick and became sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the rock of his salvation.* (Deut 32:15). The saint comes to such a condition when he excludes from his efforts the effort of fasting. Plumpness and laziness passed on to the body by excess and lack of discrimination in food, little by little are passed on by the body to the heart and by the heart to the mind. These spiritual eyes, the heart and the mind, are then deadened; eternity is hidden from them; earthly life appears to the unhealthy sight as endless. Our earthly life is guided by these ideas and feelings and the ill-fated, blinded traveler, together with the serpent who was cast out, walks *on his belly and eats dust all the days of his earthly life.* (Gen 3:14). Breaking the fast threatens the disciple of Christ with falling away from Christ.



Such an effect of intemperance or even imprudent and careless use of food on man, explains the reason why man, in the very state of his innocence, in the midst of the enjoyments of Paradise, needed the commandment of fasting. It was intended to preserve the newly created creation, composed of two natures, the bodily and the spiritual, in a spiritual state. It was intended to keep in balance the two natures and give the preference to the

spiritual nature. With its help, man could always stand in thought and heart before God, could be unapproachable to thoughts and dreams of vanity.

The commandment of fasting is even more necessary for fallen man. A weakness for the earth, for the transitory earthly life, its sweetness, greatness, glories, the very inclination to sin have become the way of life for our fallen nature, just like the feelings and attractions proper to an illness. We are nailed to the earth, attached to it with all our soul and not only with the body: we have become completely fleshly, deprived of spiritual feeling, incapable of heavenly thoughts. The commandment of fasting again is the first commandment necessary for us. Only with the help of fasting can we tear ourselves away from the earth. Only with the help of fasting can we withstand the attractive power of earthly enjoyments. Only with the help of fasting can we break the bond with sin. Only with the help of fasting can our spirit free itself from the heavy chains of the flesh. Only with the help of fasting can our thoughts arise from the earth and look toward God.

As far as we take upon ourselves the blessed yoke of fasting does our spirit acquire greater freedom; it aspires to the realm of spirits akin to it, and begins to turn often to the contemplation of God, to submerge itself in this measureless and wonderful contemplation, to acquire a skill in it. If things in the natural world, enlightened by the rays of the sun, without fail borrow brilliance and shine from it, then how shall our spirit be enlightened once it, having overthrown by means of fasting the coarse and thick curtain of fleshiness, shall stand directly before the Sun of Truth, God? It is enlightened! It is enlightened and changed! In it arise new thoughts, divine ones, to it are opened up mysteries, which before were unknown to it.

The Heavens declare to it *the glory of God*; the firmament proclaims the omnipotence of the Hand which created it; all creation, both seen and unseen, loudly proclaim the unspeakable mercy of the Creator. It tastes spiritually and sees spiritually *how good is the Lord!* The blessed lightness and fineness of the spirit is passed on to the body; the body, after the spirit, is attracted to spiritual feelings and prefers imperishable food for which it was created to the perishable food to which it has fallen. At first it submits with difficulty to the healing and violence of fasting; at first it rebels against the institution of fasting, sets our spirit against it, arms itself against it by various rationalizations drawn from falsely-called reason; but, being tamed and healed by fasting, it already feels and thinks differently. Its relationship to satiation is similar to the feelings of a man, who is healed, towards harmful foods, which he used to desire violently during the illness. His relation towards eating are like the attitude towards a detected and evident poison by which mastery over the flesh is taken away from the spirit, by which man is reduced from his likeness and kinship to the Angels to a likeness and kinship with unreasoning animals.

Spiritual soldiers who have gained victory over the flesh by means of fasting, who have stood before the face of the Lord to learn the greatest mysteries and the highest virtues, hear from His lips the teaching of the highest virtue of fasting and are shown the mystery of that condition which little by little takes shape from over-eating and satiation: *Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* These conquerors are reminded of carefully keeping near them that weapon by which the victory was won. And the victory is won and the spoils gained by that victory by the very same weapon—fasting.

The ascetic, the hero of Christ, illumined from above and learning from his religious experiences, as he examines the effort of fasting in itself, finds really necessary not only abstinence from satiation and constant eating, but also a strict discrimination in food. The discrimination seems to be excessive only upon a superficial and fleeting look; but, in essence, the quality of food is especially important. In

Paradise, only the quality was forbidden. In our valley of tears on earth, we find that lack of discrimination in the quality produces many more spiritual distresses than excess in quantity. It should not be thought that a cluster of grapes has a way of acting on our mind, on our soul, but every kind of food has its own effect on the blood, the brain, the whole body and through the body, on the soul. Whoever looks after himself attentively, exercising himself in the effort of fasting, will find it really necessary to practice abstinence of the body and soul from the continuous use of meat and even fish; he will greet the regulations of the Church concerning fasting with love and will obey them.

The Holy Fathers called fasting the foundation of all the virtues since our mind is kept in the necessary purity and sobriety, while our heart is preserved in fineness and spirituality by it. He who shakes the foundation of the virtues, shakes the entire building of the virtues.

Brethren! Let us run the course of the holy fast with sincerity and thoroughness. The deprivations to which our body is apparently subjected by the rule of fasting are really nothing in the face of the spiritual worth which the fast is capable of bringing. By means of fasting, let us tear our bodies away from the luxuries and rich table and our hearts from the earth and corruption, from that deep and destructive forgetfulness, by which we separate ourselves from eternity which stands before us and is ready to embrace us. Let us aspire both in body and in soul to God. Let us fear that fleshly condition caused by breaking the fast. Let us fear the complete inability of worshipping God and the Knowledge of God produced by despising the fast. This destructive inability is the beginning of eternal death. This fatal inability is shown in us when, due to scorning the Divine commandment of fasting, we allow *ourselves and our hearts to be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness.* Amen.



The eyes can distract the mind very quickly and cause it in a flash to slip into the place of sin. The eyes look upon something passionately; they fondly dwell upon the idol of beauty; in an instant it is impressed upon the mind; the soul is pleased by the sight of the idol; the mind transmits its appetite and desire to the heart, and the sin is committed without a witness, according to St. Basil. This then is what the Lord meant when He said: *Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). This is why Solomon reminded us: *Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, Nor let her allure you with her eyelids.* (Prov 6:25).

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain

Τὰ Χριστούγεννα ὡς Ἀφορμὴ γιὰ Πνευματικὸ Προβληματισμὸ

Γράφει ὁ Φώτης Μιχαήλ.

Καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς τὸν πρωτότοκον, καὶ ἔσπαργάνωσεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ, διότι οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ κατάλυματι.

[Λουκ. 2:7].

† † †

Κανένα πανδοχεῖο καὶ κανένας συγγενῆς δὲν φιλοτιμήθηκε νὰ προσφέρει στὸν Νεογέννητο Χριστὸ τόπο γιὰ φιλοξενία. Στὴν μικρὴ Βηθλεέμ, γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ὑπῆρχε χῶρος. Γιὰ τὸν Πλάστη ὅμως καὶ Σωτήρα, οὔτε μία μικρὴ γωνιά δὲν βρέθηκε, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο καὶ τὴν φάτνη!

Σήμερα, στὸ δικό μας κατάλυμα, δηλαδή, στὴν Πατρίδα μας, στὸ χωριό μας, στὶς οἰκογενεῖές μας, στὶς καρδιές μας, ὑπάρχει ἄραγε διαθέσιμος τόπος γιὰ τὸν Ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Χριστό;

(1) Καὶ πρῶτα-πρῶτα ἂς ρωτήσουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας. Ἐμεῖς, οἱ βαπτισμένοι Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί, ἔχουμε ἄραγε τόπο γιὰ τὸν Κύριό μας στὸ κατάλυμα τῆς καρδιάς μας; Καθαριζόμαστε ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, ὥστε νὰ γίνει ἡ καρδιά μας φάτνη ἄνετη καὶ ζεστή γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, πού γεννιέται;

(2) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς τόπο στὸ κατάλυμα τοῦ δικοῦ μας σπιτιοῦ; Ἐχει θέση ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν οἰκογενειακὴ μας ζωὴ;

(3) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα μέσα στὸν χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Εὐρίσκει τόπο νὰ σταθεῖ στοὺς διαθηρησκειακοὺς διαλόγους καὶ στὶς σχέσεις μας με τοὺς... παπικοὺς καὶ τοὺς προτεστάντες;

(4) Εὐρίσκει σήμερα ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὸ πνευματικὸ πανδοχεῖο τοῦ Γένους μας, πού εἶναι τὸ σχολεῖο τὸ Ἑλληνικό; Ποιὰ εἶναι ἡ θέση τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν ἀγωγή καὶ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση τῆς νεότητος;

(5) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὸ μεγάλο «φροντιστήριο» τῆς σύγχρονης Ἑλληνικῆς οἰκογένειας, πού εἶναι ἡ τηλεόραση; Ἐχει τόπο ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ ἀναπαυθεῖ στὰ τηλεοπτικὰ προγράμματα καὶ ιδιαίτερα στὰ προγράμματα ψυχαγωγίας τῶν παιδιῶν;

(6) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὶς ὀλόφωτες πλατεῖες τῶν ἡμερῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων με τοὺς κλόουν, με τὰ ξωτικά καὶ με τοὺς μάγους;

(7) Εὐρίσκει ὁ Χριστὸς κατάλυμα στὴν Βουλὴ τῶν Ἑλλήνων; Ὑπάρχει τόπος γιὰ τὸν Σαρκωθέντα Λόγο μέσα στὶς καρδιές τῶν πολιτικῶν μας ἀνδρῶν, στὶς ἀποφάσεις τους καὶ στοὺς νόμους, πού ψηφίζουν;

Ἐὰν ἀποπειραθοῦμε με στοιχειώδη εἰλικρίνεια, νὰ ἀπαντήσουμε στὰ παραπάνω ἐρωτήματα, τότε θὰ καταλήξουμε στὴν θλιβερὴ διαπίστωση, ὅτι καὶ σήμερα στὴν πολύπαθη Πατρίδα μας παραμονές

Χριστουγέννων, συνεχίζουμε κατὰ τὰ φαινόμενα καὶ μιλάμε τὴν γλῶσσα τῆς Βηθλεέμ:

- Δὲν ἔχουμε χῶρο γιὰ Σένα, Χριστέ, στὴν οἰκογένεια.
- Δὲν μπορούμε νὰ Σε φιλοξενήσουμε στὴν κοινωνικὴ μας ζωὴ.

- Δὲν ἔχουμε γιὰ Σένα κατάλυμα στοὺς νόμους μας καὶ στὰ βουλευτήριά μας.

- Δὲν ἔχουμε τόπο γιὰ Σένα μέσα στὰ σχολεῖα μας.

- Σε θέλουμε ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴ μας ζωὴ.

- Δὲν μπορείς νὰ μείνεις μαζί μας.

Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὀφείλουμε νὰ παραδεχθοῦμε ὅτι, ὅπως πάντοτε, ὑπάρχει καὶ σήμερα ἡ μικρὴ μαγιά, πού λαβώθηκε μὲν, ἀλλὰ δὲν πειράχτηκε θανάσιμα ἀπὸ τὰ μικρόβια τοῦ μισόκαλου, δηλαδή τὰ πάθη, τὸν εὐδαμονισμό, τὴν φιλαυτία, τὴν ἐκκοσμίκευση καὶ τὸν οἰκουμενισμό.

Αὐτὴ ἡ μαγιά, με τὴν χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, δίνει στὶς ἡμέρες μας τὶς πρῶτες μαρτυρίες, ὅτι ὁ Λαὸς μας, **καθήμενος ἐν σκοτει καὶ σκιὰ θανάτου ἐπὶ ἔτη πολλά**, ἀρχίζει τώρα καὶ βλέπει **φῶς μέγα**. Ἀρχίζει καὶ δείχνει τὴν ἀπογοήτευσή του ἀπὸ τὶς φαῦλες ἐπιλογές τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ στρέφει σιγὰ-σιγὰ τὶς ἐλπίδες του πρὸς τὸν Ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Χριστό.

Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς συνανθρώπους μας ἐκείνους, πού φέρονται τάχα ἀδιάφορα ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ ἐχθρικά ἀπέναντι στὸ γεγονός τῆς Βηθλεέμ, φαίνεται πὼς τώρα ἀρχίζουν καὶ αὐτοὶ—κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς ἀπειλές τοῦ πορτοφολιοῦ— νὰ προβληματίζονται καὶ νὰ συσπειρώνονται γύρω ἀπὸ ἀξίες πατροπαράδοτες, πού λησμονήθηκαν: τὴν ἀλληλεγγύη, τὸ φιλότιμο, τὴν συμπόνια, τὴν ἀνθρωπιά. Ἄλλωστε—ὅπως ἔγραψε κάποιος—**τώρα πού μᾶς τελείωσαν τὰ λεφτά, τί μᾶς μένει ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ ἀκουμπήσουμε ἐπάνω Του;**

Ὁ πολυαγαπημένος μας Ἅγιος Παῖσιος, σὲ κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ Χριστούγεννα πού μᾶς πέρασαν, εἶπε:

Μέγα καὶ παράδοξον θαῦμα τετέλεσται σήμερον. Ἄμα ὁ νοῦς μας εἶναι ἐκεῖ, στὸ «παράδοξον», τότε θὰ ζήσουμε καὶ τὸ μεγάλο μυστήριον τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εὐχομαι ἡ καρδιά σας νὰ γίνει Ἁγία Φάτνη καὶ τὸ Πανάγιο Βρέφος τῆς Βηθλεέμ νὰ σᾶς δώσει ὅλες τὶς εὐλογίες Του.

Καλὰ καὶ εὐλογημένα Χριστούγεννα σὲ ὅλους μας.



Μὴ στεναχωρεῖσαι στὶς θλίψεις καὶ τοὺς πειρασμούς, ἀλλὰ με τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μας νὰ ἐλαφρύνεις τὸν θυμὸ καὶ τὴν ἀθυμία. Οἱ πειρασμοὶ ὅσο λίγη εἶναι ἡ ὑπομονή, τόσο μεγάλοι φαίνονται. Καὶ ὅσο συνηθίζει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ τοὺς ὑπομένει, τόσο μικραίνουν καὶ τοὺς περνᾷ χωρὶς κόπο, καὶ γίνεται στερεὸς σὰν βράχος.

Ἅγιος Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστὴς (+1959)

Πρέπει να Έχουμε Απόλυτο Σεβασμό προς την Γλώσσα που Έχει ή Εκκλησία μας!

Τοῦ π. Γεωργίου Δ. Μεταλληνού, Ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθοδοξία Ἀλήθεια».

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ὡς ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἔχει σώσει τὴν Ἑλληνική μας γλώσσα σ' ὅλη τὴν ἱστορική διαχρονία της, ἀπὸ τὸν Ὅμηρο ἕως σήμερα, στὴ Θεολογία καὶ τὴ λατρεία της. Ἄλλωστε ὁ ἀποστολικὸς καὶ πατερικὸς λόγος διαχέεται συνεχῶς στὰ λειτουργικά μας δρώμενα, ὥστε νὰ γίνεται «ἄκουσμα καὶ λάλημα» τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος.

Ἡ διάκριση μεταξὺ «ἀρχαίας» καὶ «νέας» Ἑλληνικῆς γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν εἶναι πρόβλημα, διότι τὸν 16^ο αἰώνα, μὲ τὴν ἐξάπλωση στὴν «καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολή» τῶν δυτικῶν προπαγανδῶν, παπικῆς καὶ προτεσταντικῆς, ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν τὴ «δημοτική», τὸ ἔθναρχικὸ μας Κέντρο (Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο) ἔλαβε μιὰ σημαντικὴ ἀπόφαση: Ἡ μὲν λατρεία νὰ διατηρήσει τὴ γλωσσικὴ μορφή της, τὸ κήρυγμα ὅμως νὰ γίνεται στὴν καθημερινὴ γλώσσα τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἄλλωστε καὶ ἡ γλώσσα τῆς λατρείας, λόγω τῆς συνέχειας τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας, προσφέρει γλωσσικὸ πλοῦτο, ποὺ ἡχεῖ στὰ ὦτα τοῦ λαοῦ ὄχι ὡς κάτι τὸ ξένο καί, συνεπῶς, ἀκατανόητο.

Οἱ Ἑλληνόφωνοι ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία νὰ ἔχουμε τοὺς μάρτυρες τῆς πίστεώς μας στὴ γλώσσα μας. Καὶ ἐδῶ ἀκριβῶς τίθεται τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς εἰσηγούμενης ἀπὸ πολλοὺς μετάφρασης τῶν λειτουργικῶν κειμένων μας. Ἡ γλώσσα μας, ἐξάλλου, εἶναι βασικὸς φορέας τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μας, στὸν ὁποῖο ἀνήκει καὶ ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς χώρος μας. Κάποιος ἔλεγε ὅμως ὅτι σ' αὐτὸ τὸν τόπο εἴμαστε ὅλοι γιατροὶ καὶ θεολόγοι. Γιατί εἴμαστε ἀνὰ πάσα στιγμή ἐτοιμοὶ νὰ ἀποφανθοῦμε γιὰ ἱατρικὰ καὶ θεολογικὰ - ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα, δίνοντας συνταγὲς καὶ ἀπαντήσεις.

Ὅλοι οἱ Ρωμηοί, δηλαδή οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, νιώθουμε τόσο δεμένοι μὲ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ μας, ὥστε θεωροῦμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας ἰκανὸ νὰ χρησιμοποιεῖ «εὐκαιρῶς ἀκαιρῶς» (Β' Τιμ. 4:2) ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἐκφράσεις, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ γνωρίζει τὸ ὀρθὸ νόημά τους, προδίδοντας τὴν ἄγνοιά του. Γι' αὐτὸ τέτοια γλωσσικὰ ὀλισθήματα δὲν περιποιοῦν, ἀσφαλῶς, τιμὴ

κυρίως σὲ ἐπιστήμονες, ποὺ ὀφείλουν νὰ ἔχουν γνώση τοῦ στοιχειώδους ἐπιστημονικοῦ δόγματος, ὅτι κανεὶς δὲν εἰσέρχεται σὲ χώρους ἕξω ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδικότητά του.

Θὰ προσπαθήσω νὰ γίνω σαφέστερος μὲ συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα:

α) Πανεπιστημιακὸς καθηγητὴς, μιλώντας γιὰ νεκρὸ, γνωστὸ γιὰ τὴν ἄστατη ζωὴ του, ἀπεφάνθη: «Νεκρὸς δεδικαίωται (δηλαδή συγχωρήθηκε), ὅπως λέγει καὶ ἡ Γραφή». Καὶ ἡ μὲν Γραφή (συγκεκριμένα, ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, Ρωμ. 6:7) πράγματι τὸ λέγει, ἀλλὰ ὄχι μόνο αὐτό, συμπληρώνοντας: «Ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας». Ὁ «νεκρὸς δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας» σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετὰ θάνατον παύει πιά νὰ ἁμαρτάνει καὶ ὄχι «τοῦ συγχωροῦνται ὅλες οἱ ἁμαρτίες»!

Καὶ θὰ ἔλεγε κανεὶς, μικρὸ το κακό, ἀφοῦ ἀκόμη καὶ θεολόγοι ἔτσι χρησιμοποιοῦμε συχνά τὸ παύλειο αὐτὸ χωρίο. Πιστεύω ὅμως ὅτι τὸ πρόβλημα εἶναι βαθύτερο: Πῶς θὰ δώσω ἐμπιστοσύνη ἐγὼ σὲ κάποιον ποὺ μὲ τόση ἐπιπολαιότητα ἀποφαίνεται περὶ παντὸς

ἐπιστητοῦ; Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονται μὲ κάποιον σεβασμὸ καὶ τὰ θέματα τῆς πίστεώς μας; Κάτι ἀνάλογο παρατηρεῖται σὲ συζητήσεις μὲ ἐπιστήμονες ποὺ διατείνονται σὲ ἡμᾶς τοὺς κληρικοὺς ἢ θεολόγους ὅτι διάβασαν ὅλο το Εὐαγγέλιο, τὴν Ἁγία

Γραφή καί, στὸ τέλος, διαπιστώνεται πῶς οὔτε καν τὰ ἔχουν ποτὲ ἀνοίξει.

β) Ἄλλος Συνέλληνας, μέλος τῆς «ὑψηλῆς» λεγομένης κοινωνίας, σὲ συνέντευξή του εἶπε τὰ ἀκόλουθα: «Ὅπως ἤθελε καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔλεγε «πίστευε καὶ μὴ ἐρεῦνα», κάτι ποὺ γιὰ μένα εἶναι ἀντιχριστιανικὸ». Καὶ ἂν τὸ ἔλεγε αὐτὸ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος δὲν θὰ ἦταν οὔτε Παῦλος οὔτε Ἀπόστολος τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀληθείας. Κανεὶς Ἀπόστολος ἢ Ἅγιος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας δὲν εἶπε ποτὲ τέτοιο πράγμα. Εἶναι εὕρημα πολὺ μεταγενέστερο, καὶ μάλιστα δυτικὸ. Θὰ ἤθελα ὅμως νὰ ἐρωτήσω: Ἄν κάποιος κληρικὸς διατυπώσει ἀπόψεις γιὰ κάποιον εἰδικὸ ἐπιστημονικὸν ὄχι, δὲν θὰ τοῦ ὑποδείξουν νὰ περιορισθεῖ στὰ παπαδικὰ του; Τὸ ἴδιο, συνεπῶς, ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ κείνον, ὅταν ἀποφαίνεται γιὰ εἰδικὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα, ἀστοχώντας προκλητικότερα.

γ) Ὑπάρχει καὶ μιὰ ἄλλη πρόσφατη περίπτωση, μέσα στὶς πολλὲς φυσικά. Γνωστὸς δημοσιογράφος σχολίαζε σὲ ἄρθρο του καυστικὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία γιὰ



τή συχνά χρησιμοποιούμενη φράση «Άγιος Ἀθηνῶν», «Άγιος Πειραιῶς», προκειμένου νὰ δηλωθεῖ κάποιος Ἐπίσκοπος χωρὶς τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὸν τίτλο του. Καὶ διερωτᾶτο ἂν μπορεῖ κανεὶς πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου του νὰ ὀνομάζει ἔτσι κάποιον, ἔστω καὶ Ἐπίσκοπο! Βέβαια, ἐπειδὴ σέβομαι τὸ πρόσωπο καὶ διαβάζω συχνά τὰ κείμενά του, ἔσπευσα—γιὰ νὰ τὸν βοηθήσω νὰ σώσει τὸ κύρος του, κυρίως ὡς ἐπιστήμονος— νὰ τοῦ ὑποδείξω μὲ φιλικὸ σημείωμά μου ὅτι ἡ παρατήρησή του ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι ἔχει πλήρη ἄγνοια τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ζωῆς καὶ γλώσσας. Τοῦ ἐξήγησα, λοιπόν, ὅτι, πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν καθιερωμένη ἔννοια τοῦ ὄρου «Άγιος», ποὺ χαρακτηρίζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ ἔφθασε στὴ θέωση καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τιμᾶται ἀπὸ τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ σῶμα ὡς κατοικητήριον τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος, ὑπάρχει καὶ μιὰ ἄλλη, καθημερινή. Εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια τοῦ ἀνήκοντος στὴ διακονία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ του, τοῦ ἀφιερωμένου, δηλαδή, στὸν Θεὸ ἄνθρώπου. Καὶ τοῦ ὑπενθύμισα προσφωνήσεις τόσο γνωστὲς ἀλλὰ τελείως ἄγνωστες σ' αὐτόν: «Άγιε ἱεροψάλτα», «Άγιε νεωκόρε», «Άγιε ἐπίτροπε» κ.λπ., ὅπου τὸ «Άγιε» ἀντικαθιστᾶ τὸ κοσμικὸ «κύριε» καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀποφεύγει, ἔτσι, τὴ γλωσσικὴ ἐκκοσμίκευσή της.

Δὲν θὰ ἐπικαλεσθῶ ἄλλα παραδείγματα, μολονότι θὰ μποροῦσε κανεὶς καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα νὰ ἀναφέρει. Συμπερασματικά, θὰ ἔλεγα ὅτι ὑπάρχει χώρος στὸν ὁποῖο αἰσθάνονται ἐλεύθεροι νὰ ἀσυδοτοῦν οἱ πάντες. Καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς ἀγάπης της, ποὺ δέχεται τοὺς πάντες μὲ τὴν ἴδια ἀγάπη. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, ἐπιβεβαιώνουν καὶ πόσο ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς λόγος ἔχει διαποτίσει τὸν λαὸ μας σ' ὅλα τα ἐπίπεδά του. Σὲ τελευταία ἀνάλυση, τόσο ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἀφελῶς διαστρεβλώνουν τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ λόγια καὶ πράγματα ὅσο καὶ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ σκοπίμα τὸ κάνουν λησμονοῦν ὅτι κάθε χώρος ἔχει τὴ γλώσσα του, ἱερὴ καὶ ἀπαραβίαστη ἀπὸ κάθε ἀμύητο. Ὑπάρχει, λοιπόν, καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ - θεολογικὴ γλώσσα, ποὺ θὰ ἔπρεπε καὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες σχέση μαζί της νὰ τὴ σέβονται. Εἶναι, τὸ λιγότερο, ζήτημα αὐτοσεβασμοῦ καὶ ἀξιοπρέπειας ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοπροστασίας.



Διῶχνε μακρὰ σου τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πολυλογίας. Γιατὶ σ' αὐτὴν βρίσκονται φοβερὰ πάθη, τὸ ψεῦδος, ἡ θρᾶσύτητα, ἡ ἀστειότητα, ἡ αἰσχρολογία, ἡ μωρολογία καὶ γενικῶς ἔχει λεχθῆ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυλογία δὲν θὰ ξεφύγῃ τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὁ σιωπηλὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι θρόνος τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως.

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Ἐδέσσης

Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος κ' ὁ Παραμορφωμένος Χριστιανισμὸς

Ἀπὸ τὸν κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ ἐλὼ νὰ μιλήσω γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Βασίλειο, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴν πῶ τὰ συνηθισμένα ποὺ λένε ὅσοι γράφουνε γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ἀληθινὰ Μέγαν ἅγιο. Προπάντων κάποιον θεολόγοι φραγκοδιαβασμένοι, ποὺ δὲν τοὺς ἐνδιαφέρει σχεδὸν καθόλου ἡ ἀγιότητά του κ' ἡ κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία του, ἀλλὰ ἡ **θύραθεν** σοφία του, ἡ γνώση ποὺ εἶχε στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα, στὴ ρητορικὴ καὶ στάλλα ἐφήμερα καὶ ἐξωτερικὰ στολίδια αὐτῆς τῆς βαθειᾶς ψυχῆς, λησμονώντας τί γράφει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος γιὰ τὴν κοσμικὴ σοφία, ποὺ τὴ λέγει **μωρίαν παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ**.

Γιὰ τοὺς τέτοιους, ἡ φιλοσοφία εἶναι σεβαστή, μάλιστα περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴ θρησκεία κ' ἂς θέλουμε νὰ τὸ κρύψουμε, ἡ ἐπιστήμη πιδ πειστικὴ ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη, ἡ ἀρχαιότης πιδ σπουδαῖο οἰκόσημο ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ. Γι' αὐτὸ, ὅλα τα μετρᾶνε μ' αὐτὰ τὰ μέτρα. Ἡ ἀξία τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων δὲν ἔγκειται στὴν ἀγιότητά τους, ἀλλὰ στὸ κατὰ πόσον εἶναι δεινοὶ ρήτορες, δεινοὶ συζητηταί, δυνατοὶ στὸ μυαλό, μ' ἕνα σύντομον λόγο, κατὰ πόσον ἔχουνε ὅσα ἐκτιμοῦσε καὶ ἐκτιμᾶ ἡ ἁμαρτωλὴ ἀνθρωπότητα κ' ὅσα εἶναι ἢ περιττὰ γιὰ τὸ χριστιανό, ἢ βλαβερά, κατὰ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο.

Μὰ δὲν πάει νὰ λέγῃ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο! Αὐτοὶ οἱ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ λαοῦ δὲν ρωτᾶνε τίποτα, αὐτοὶ τραβᾶνε τὸ χαβά τους. Τὸν Παῦλο, ποὺ εἶχε πῆ χίλιες φορὲς καὶ κατὰ χίλιους τρόπους πῶς ἡ γλωσσικὴ ἐπιτηδειότητα δηλ. ἡ ρητορεία, εἶναι ψεύτικη καὶ δὲν τὴ θέλει ὁ Χριστός, αὐτοί, σώνει καὶ καλά, μὲ τὸ ζόρι, τὸν ἀνακηρύξανε «μέγαν ρήτορα», αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶπε λ.χ. **οὐ γὰρ ἀπέστειλε μὲ ὁ Χριστὸς βαπτίζειν, ἀλλ' εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, οὐκ ἐν σοφία λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῆ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, καὶ ποὺ γράφει στοὺς Κολοσσαεῖς: **Βλέπετε (προσέξετε) μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἔσται ὁ συλαγωγῶν διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ κενῆς ἀπάτης, κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν**. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ποὺ ἐξηγοῦνε στὸ λαὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, εἶναι κουφοὶ καὶ τυφλοὶ, ἡ κάνουνε πῶς δὲν ἀκοῦνε καὶ δὲν βλέπουνε, κ' αὐτὸν ποὺ εἶπε πῶς ἡ φιλοσοφία εἶναι **κενὴ ἀπάτη**, τὸν ἀνακηρύξανε μέγαν φιλόσοφον, στοχαστὴν, τετραπέρατον ἐγκέφαλον **κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν**. Θέλουνε νὰ τὸν κάνουνε **ἐφάμιλλον τῶν ἀρχαίων φιλοσόφων οἵτινες ἐδόξασαν τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα**, ὥστε νὰ ἔχη κ' ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς κάποιους μεγάλους νόας κ' ὄχι μοναχὰ τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ πνεύματι, τὰ

φτωχαδάκια, τοὺς ἀγράμματους Ἀποστόλους, τοὺς ἀπλοϊκοὺς ἀσκητάδες, τοὺς εὐκολόπιστους μάρτυρες καὶ ἁγίους.

Τοὺς τέτοιους ψευτοχριστιανούς τοὺς τρώγει ἡ περηφάνια, ἡ κοσμικὴ ματαιοδοξία, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποὺ λέγει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Παῦλος **εἰκὴ φυσιοῦμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες καὶ τὰ σαρκικὰ τιμώντες, θέλουν Θεῷ ἀρέσει.** Τὸν Παῦλο ποὺ εἶπε τὸν φοβερὸ τοῦτον λόγο **πᾶν ὃ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως, ἁμαρτία ἐστίν,** δηλ. **ὅ,τι δὲν προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη, εἶναι ἁμαρτία,** μετὴ μικρολογη διάνοιά τους, τὸν κατεβάσανε στὰ μέτρα τους, κάνοντας τὸν λογοκόπο ρήτορα, φιλόσοφο, κοινωνιολόγο, πολιτικό, διοργανωτὴ, ψυχολόγο, παιδαγωγό, καιροσκοπό, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὰ καταλαβαίνουνε, κι' αὐτὰ εἶναι οἱ πιὸ μεγάλοι τίτλοι ποὺ μποροῦνε νὰ φανταστοῦνε.

Μὲ πιὸ γερὰ λόγια καὶ πιὸ καθαρὰ, ζωηρὰ καὶ τρανταχτὰ, δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς πῆ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα κανένα στόμα, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Παῦλο, καὶ ὅμως δὲν πήρανε χαμπάρι οἱ καινούριοι γραμματεῖς. Ἄς εἶναι τὰ λόγια του σὰν σφυριὰ ποὺ κοπανᾶνε τὰ ξερὰ καύκαλά τους, ἐκεῖνοι: τὸ γουδὶ τὸ γουδοχέρι. Ἄκουσε πῶς μιλά ὁ Παῦλος γιὰ τὴν ἀρχαία σοφία: **Ἐπειδὴ (γὰρ) ἐν τῇ σοφίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔγνω ὁ κόσμος διὰ τῆς σοφίας (φιλοσοφίας) τὸν Θεόν, εὐδόκησεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας. Ἐπειδὴ καὶ Ἰουδαῖοι σημεῖον αἰτοῦσι, καὶ Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν, ἡμεῖς δὲ κηρύσσομεν Χριστὸν ἐσταυρωμένον, Ἰουδαίους μὲν σκάνδαλον, Ἕλλησι δὲ μωρίαν...** Λοιπὸν, ἰδοὺ τί λέγει ὁ Παῦλος καὶ τί διδάσκουνε οἱ ἐξηγητὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τοῦ ἴδιου του Παύλου, δηλαδὴ τὴ μεμωραμένη σοφία, ποὺ θεωρεῖ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μωρία.

Δείχνω μεγάλη ἐπιμονὴ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ζήτημα, γιατί αὐτοὶ ποὺ θέλουνε νὰ νοθέψουνε τὸ κατακάθαρο νερὸ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, **τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν τὸ ἀλλόμενον εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον,** μετὰ βαλτόνερα τῆς γνώσης καὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας φιλοσοφίας ποὺ πίνανε κείνον τὸν καιρὸ οἱ ταλαίπωροι ἄνθρωποι, **οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα,** χωρὶς νὰ ξεδιψάσουνε, αὐτοὶ λοιπὸν οἱ τυφλοὶ ὁδηγοὶ στραβώνουνε τὸν κόσμον, καὶ γίνονται αἰτία μετὰ τίς θεωρίες τους νὰ πέφτουνε οἱ νέοι στὴν ἀπιστία, γιατί ψυχῆς ποῦ θρέφονται μετὰ τὴν **κενὴ ἀπάτη,** ποῦ θὰ

καταντήσουνε παρὰ στὴν ἀπιστία, ὁμολογημένη ἢ ἀνομολόγητη;

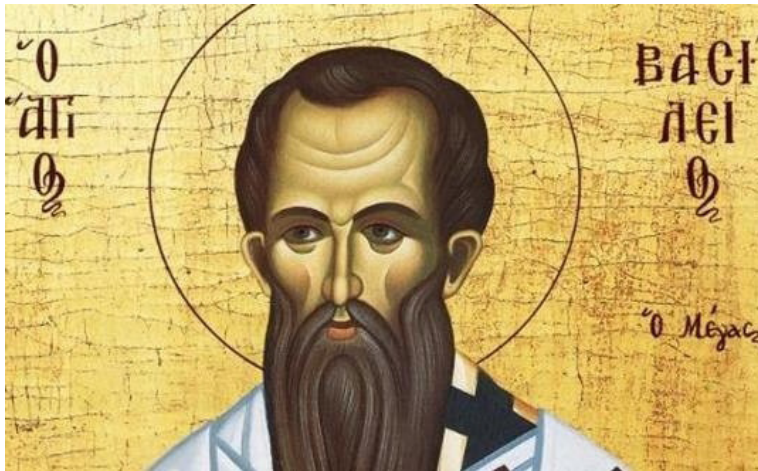
Ἔλα αὐτὰ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸν παραμορφωμένο Χριστιανισμὸ ποὺ μαθαίνουν ὅσοι δασκαλεύονται στὰ πανεπιστήμια τῆς Δύσης, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ πατρίδα τοῦ ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ οὐμανισμοῦ, κ' ὕστερα τὸν φέρνουνε αὐτὸ τὸν ὀρθολογιστικὸ Χριστιανισμὸ σ' ἐμᾶς. Γιατί ἔχουμε τὴν κατάρα νὰ μαθαίνουνε ὅλα τα δικά μας ἀπὸ τοὺς ξένους, ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ἀρχαία γλώσσα.

Γυρίζω πάλι στὸν Παῦλο, γιὰ νὰ πάρω ἀπ' αὐτὸν κι' ἄλλα θεόπνευστα λόγια ποὺ βγάζουνε ψεῦτες αὐτοὺς τοὺς φραγκοσπουδασμένους οὐμανίστες ψευτοχριστιανούς. Καὶ παίρνω ὅλο λόγια τοῦ Παύλου, γιατί σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἅγιο φανερώσουνε τὴν περισσότερη ἐκτίμησή τους, ἐπειδὴ, μετὰ τὰ μέτρα ποὺ τὸν κρίνουνε, βρίσκουνε σ' αὐτὸν περισσότερη ἐγκόσμια γνώση, κοινωνικὴ δραστηριότητα, ρητορικὴ δεινότητα,

μεθοδικότητα, ψυχολογικὴ εἰσότητα, κι' ἕνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια ποὺ τὰ ἐκτιμοῦνε πολὺ, χωρὶς νὰ μποροῦνε νὰ δοῦνε οἱ θεότυφοι πῶς ὁ Παῦλος εἶναι ὁ μεγαλύτερος καὶ σφοδρότερος ἐχθρὸς καὶ κατακριτὴς τῆς στραβῆς ἀντίληψης ποὺ ἔχουνε γιὰ τὴν χριστιανικὴ θρησκεία. Γράφει λοιπὸν ὁ

θεογλωσσὸς Παῦλος καὶ ρωτᾷ: **Ποῦ σοφός; Ποῦ γραμματεὺς; Ποῦ συζητητὴς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου;** (δηλ. τῆς κοσμικῆς σοφίας). **Οὐχὶ ἐμώρανεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου;** Σὰν νὰ λέγη: «Ποιὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς σοφοὺς τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ἀπὸ τοὺς φιλοσόφους καὶ τοὺς δεινοὺς συζητητᾶς, μετὰ τὴν διαλεκτικὴν τους, θὰ μπορέση νὰ συζητήση, ἢ καν νὰ καταλάβη αὐτὰ ποῦ λέμε ἐμεῖς οἱ μωροί, ἐμεῖς ποῦ δὲν γνωρίζουμε τὰ μαστορικὰ γυρίσματα τῆς διαλεκτικῆς, ἐμεῖς οἱ ἀπαιδευτοὶ ἀνατολίτες, κι' ὄχι κατὰ βάθος ἐμεῖς, ἀλλὰ αὐτὰ ποῦ λέγει τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον μετὰ τὸ στόμα μας;».

Καὶ παρακάτω γράφει: **Σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις, σοφίαν δὲ οὐ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, οὐδὲ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, τῶν καταργουμένων.** Ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, οἱ καταργούμενοι, παρὰ οἱ φιλόσοφοι κ' οἱ ρήτορες κ' οἱ ἄλλοι λογιῆς-λογιῆς μαστόροι τῆς κοσμικῆς λογοτεχνίας, ποῦ τὰ σκοτεινὰ φῶτα τους, λένε οἱ τυφλοὶ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ λαοῦ πῶς χρειάζονται στὸ Χριστιανό,



σάν να μὴν τοὺς φθάνη τὸ φῶς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ποὺ λέγει *ἂν τὸ φῶς ποὺ ἔχουνε μέσα τους (οἱ τέτοιοι) εἶναι σκοτάδι, τὸ σκοτάδι τοὺς πόσο πρέπει νὰ εἶναι;*

Λοιπὸν, κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τοῦ καταργουμένου ἐορτάζουνε καὶ δοξάζουνε καὶ τὸν ἅγιον Βασίλειον, ὄχι σάν ἅγιον καὶ ἀγωνιστὴ τῆς ἀληθινῆς θρησκείας, ἀλλὰ σάν συγγραφέα *καλλιεπῶν συγγραμμάτων, σοφὸν ἠθικολόγον καὶ παιδαγωγόν, λάτρην τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς σοφίας.*

Ἀλλὰ πόσο σύμφωνος εἶναι ὁ ἅγιος μὲ κείνους ποὺ τὸν δοξάζουνε γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνομάθειά του καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐκτίμησή ποὺ εἶχε στὴν ἀρχαία σοφία, τὸ φανερῶνουνε τὰ παρακάτω λόγια ἀπὸ μία ἐπιστολὴ ποὺ ἔγραψε στὸν Εὐστάθιο ἐπίσκοπο Σεβαστείας:

«Ἐγώ, γράφει, ἀφοῦ ξόδεψα πολλὴν καιρὸν στὰ μάταια πράγματα, κι' ἀφοῦ ὅλη σχεδὸν τὴ νεότητά μου τὴ χάλασα μὲ τὸ νὰ κοπιᾶζω γιὰ πράγματα ἀνώφελα (ἀδιαφόρετα), καταγινομένου νὰ μελετῶ τὰ μαθήματα τῆς *παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ μωρανθείσης σοφίας,* ἐπειδὴ κάποτε ξύπνησα σάν νὰ κοιμόμουνα σὲ βαθὺν ὕπνο, καὶ ἄνοιξα τὰ μάτια μου στὸ θαυμαστὸ φῶς τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου κ' εἶδα καλὰ πὼς ἦτανε ἄχρηστη *ἡ σοφία τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου τῶν καταργουμένων,* ἀφοῦ ἔκλαψα πολλὴ γιὰ τὴν ἐλεινὴ ζωὴ μου, παρακαλοῦσα τὸ Θεὸ νὰ μὲ χειροκρατήσῃ γιὰ νὰ φωτισθῶ στὰ δόγματα τῆς εὐσέβειας. Καὶ πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα προσπάθησα νὰ ἀποκτήσω κάποια ἠθικὴ διόρθωση, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε πάθει μεγάλη διαστροφή ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἀπὸ τὴ συναναστροφή μου μὲ τοὺς κακοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Διάβασα λοιπὸν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, καὶ σάν εἶδα πὼς ἐκεῖ μέσα εἶναι γραμμένο πὼς συντείνει πολλὴ σωτηρία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου το νὰ πουλήσῃ τὰ ὑπάρχοντά του καὶ νὰ τὰ μοιράσῃ στοὺς φτωχοὺς ἀδελφούς του καὶ νὰ ζῆ χωρὶς νὰ φροντίζει καθόλου γιὰ τούτη τὴ ζωὴ, καὶ νὰ μὴν προσηλώνεται ἡ ψυχὴ στὰ ἐπίγεια ἀπὸ καμμιὰ συμπάθεια, παρακαλοῦσα νὰ εὕρω κάποιον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς ποὺ νὰ διάλεξε αὐτὸν τὸ δρόμο στὴ ζωὴ του, ὥστε, μαζὶ μ' αὐτόν, νὰ ταξιδέψω καὶ νὰ περάσω τούτη τὴν περαστικὴ φουρτούνα τῆς ζωῆς».

Ἀλλὰ ποῖος δίνει σημασία σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ λέγει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος; Ἡμεῖς κάναμε ἓνα δικό μας Χριστιανισμό, ἓνα βολικό, ἓναν ἀνθρωπινὸ καὶ λογικὸ Χριστιανισμό, ὅπως λέγει ὁ μέγας Ἱεροεξεταστὴς τοῦ Ντοστογιέφσκη, γιατί ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ποὺ δίδαξε ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἀνεφάρμοστος, ἀπάνθρωπος. Ἡμεῖς, ἀντὶ ν' ἀνέβουμε πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ποὺ λέγει *ἐγὼ σάν ὑψωθῶ, θὰ σαῶς τραβήξω ὅλους πρὸς ἐμένα,* τὸν κατεβάσαμε ἐκεῖ ποὺ βρισκόμαστε ἡμεῖς, καὶ κάναμε ἓνα Χριστιανισμὸ σύμφωνο μὲ τὶς ἀδυναμίες μας, μὲ τὰ πάθη μας, μὲ τὶς κοσμικὲς φιλοδοξίες μας, καὶ δώσα-

με καὶ στοὺς ἁγίους τα προσόντα ποὺ ἐκτιμοῦμε καὶ ποὺ θαυμάζει ἡ ὑλοφροσύνη μας, τοὺς κάναμε φιλοσόφους, ρήτορας, πολιτικούς, ψυχολόγους, κοινωνιολόγους, παιδαγωγούς, ἐπιστήμονες κ.λ.π. Ὁ μέγας Ἱεροεξεταστὴς, σάν πήγανε μπροστὰ του τὸν Χριστὸ (ποὺ πρόσταξε νὰ τὸν πιάσουνε, ἐπειδὴ ξανακατέβηκε στὴ γῆ καὶ τὸν ἀκολουθοῦσε ὁ κόσμος), τοῦ εἶπε: «Τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ ἦρθες στὸν κόσμο ἔφερες στοὺς ἀνθρώπους μία θρησκεία σκληρὴ, ἀνεφάρμοστη, ἀπάνθρωπη. Ἡμεῖς τὴν κάναμε βολικὴ, ἀνθρωπινὴ. Τί ξαναἦρθες νὰ κάνης πάλι στὸν κόσμο; Νὰ μᾶς τὴ χαλάσης, μόλις τὴ βάλουμε στὸ δρόμο; Γι' αὐτό, θὰ διατάξω νὰ σὲ κάψουνε ἐν ὀνόματί σου, σάν αἰρετικόν».

Ὁ βολικός, ὁ ἀνθρωπινὸς Χριστιανισμὸς, αὐτὸ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο κατασκευάσμα, εἶναι ἡ συχαμερὴ παραμόρφωση ποὺ ἔπαθε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τὴν πονηρὴ ὑλοφροσύνη τῆς σαρκός.



ΟΙ «ΦΙΛΟΙ» ΤΟΥ ΜΑΚΡΥΓΙΑΝΝΗ

Αὐτὰς τὰς κρισίμους στιγμὰς, ποὺ ἡ Πατρίς μας περνᾶ, μᾶς θυμίζουν τὸν Μακρυγιάννη ποὺ λέγει εἰς τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματά του:

«Καὶ βγήκαν τώρα κάτι δικοί μας κυβερνήτες, Ἑλληνες, σπορὰ τῆς ἐβραιοφυγίας, ποὺ εἶπαν νὰ μᾶς σβήσουν τὴν Ἁγία Πίστη, τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία, διότι ἡ Φραγκιά δὲν μᾶς θέλει μὲ τέτοιο ντύμα' Ὀρθόδοξον.

Καὶ ἐκάθησα καὶ ἔκλαιγα διὰ τὰ νέα παθήματα. Καὶ ἐπῆγα πάλιν εἰς τοὺς φίλους μου στοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄναψα τὰ καντήλια καὶ ἐλιβάνισα λιβάνιν καλὸν ἁγιορεϊτικόν. Καὶ σκουπίζοντας τὰ δάκρυά μου τοὺς εἶπα: «Δὲν βλέπετε, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα παλιόψαθα; Βοηθεῖστε, διότι μᾶς παίρνουν, αὐτοὶ οἱ μισοἕλληνες καὶ ἄθρησκοι, ὅ,τι πολῦτιμον τζιβαῖρικόν ἔχομεν.

Φραγκεμένους μᾶς θέλουν τὰ τσογλάνια τοῦ τρισκατάρατου τοῦ Πάπα. Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἁγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνες, κάνοντας περισσότερο κακὸ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ καταδέχθηκε ὁ Τοῦρκος ὡς τίμιος ἐχθρὸς μας».

Εἰς αὐτοὺς λοιπὸν τοὺς φίλους πρέπει καὶ ἡμεῖς νὰ καταφεύγωμεν μετανοημένοι, διότι αὐτοὶ μόνον μποροῦν νὰ μᾶς γλυτώσουν ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν σπορὰν τῆς «φραγκιάς καὶ ἐβραιοφυγίας», ποὺ τείνει νὰ μᾶς καταβροχθίσῃ.

Θείον Όραμα

Τοῦ Ἀνδρέα Καρκαβίτσα. Τὸ διήγημα περιέχεται στὴ συλλογὴ «Λόγια τῆς Πλώρης» (1899).

Δὲ λέτε, ρὲ παιδιά, τίποτα νὰ ζεσταθοῦμε;
Καὶ μὲ τὸ λόγο φάνηκε μαῦρο κορμὶ στὴν ἀνοιχτὴ θυρίδα, κύλησε ἀπὸ τὴ σκάλα κάτω ὁ Κώστας ὁ θερμαστής, βαρτυλιγμένος στὴν πατατούκα του. Ἔκανε κρύο δυνατό. Βοριάς ἐξύριζε τὰ πέλαγα, πάγωνε τ' ἀκρογιάλια, κρουστάλλιαζε τὰ στοιβαγμένα χιόνια στὰ βουνά. Καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα, ναῦτες καὶ θερμαστές, συναγμένοι ὀλόγυρα στὴ θερμάστρα, φρόντιζαν νὰ ζεσταθοῦν μὲ τὴ φασκομηλιά καὶ τὸ ψωμοτύρι.

Ὁ λύχνος, καρφωμένος στὴ μέση ἐνὸς στύλου, φώτιζε καὶ κάπνιζε μαζὶ τὰ περιγύρα σωθέματα. Διπλὰ-τριπλὰ τὰ κρεβάτια κολλημένα στὰ πλευρά, μὲ τὰ μαῦρα τους στρωσίδια, θύμιζαν νεκροθήκες στ' ἀνήλιαστα βάθη τῆς γῆς ταιριασμένες. Κοντὰ ἢ καμαρούλα τοῦ ναύκληρου, ἀνοιχτόπορτη, ἔδειχνε ἄλλο κρεβάτι στρωμένο, δύο-τρεῖς φωτογραφίες παλιές, μιὰ χρωμολιθογραφία χανούμισσας, χρυσοφορεμένης καὶ ξαπλωμένης σὲ πουπουλένια προσκέφαλα. Καὶ ὀλοῦθε κρεμασμένα τὰ ροῦχα, στὸ λάδι καὶ στὸ κάρβουνο βουτημένα. Οἱ μουσαμάδες ξεσχισμένοι καὶ μυριοπαλωμένοι.

Τὰ χοντὰ ποδήματα καὶ τὰ κασκέτα καὶ οἱ χρωματιστοὶ σκοῦφοι ἔδειχναν τὸ χῶρισμα καλογερικὸ κελλί. Ἄλλα τὸ φλίφλισμα τοῦ νεροῦ ποὺ ἀκούσταν στὰ πλευρά, ἢ μυρωδιὰ τοῦ κατραμιοῦ καὶ τὰ ψημένα πρόσωπα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔδειχναν πὼς ἡ ζωὴ ἐδῶ ἀγωνίζεται τὸν τελευταῖο ἀγῶνα τῆς. Γιὰ τοῦτο καὶ κανένας δὲν πρόσεξε... τώρα στὸ ἀστεῖο κατρακύλημα τοῦ θερμαστή.

– Δὲ λέτε, ρὲ παιδιά, καὶ τίποτα νὰ ζεσταθοῦμε; ξαναδευτέρωσε ἐκεῖνος, ἀγκαλιάζοντας τὴ θερμάστρα σὰν ἐρωμένη.

– Τί νὰ εἰποῦμε; ρώτησε μελαγχολικὸς ὁ Κώστας ὁ Ἀξιότης.

Νυχτιὰ σὰν τὴν ἀποψινὴ δὲ θέλει παραμύθια. Ὅχι, δὲ θέλει παραμύθια! Ἐδῶ στὸν ἄγριο κόρφο ποὺ εἴμαστε κλεισμένοι, τριγυρισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ μούγκρισμα τῆς Μαύρης Θάλασσας, σαβανωμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν πουπουλένιο θυμὸ τ' οὐρανοῦ, ἄς ποῦμε κατιτὶ Θεϊκὸ καὶ παρήγορο. Στὰ παλιὰ χρόνια οἱ γέροντές μας δὲν εἶχαν τὴν καταδίκη ποὺ ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς τώρα. Περνοῦσαν τὶς ἅγιες ἡμέρες κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ στέγη τους, κοντὰ στὴ φωτιά, ἀνάμεσα στὴ φανίλια τους. Ὅπως ὁ ἀμπελοφυτευτὴς τ' ἀμπέλι του, τρυγούσανε καὶ κεῖνοι τὸ καλοκαίρι τὴ θάλασσα καὶ χαίρονταν τὸ χειμῶνα τὰ καλὰ τῆς ἄφοβα. Ἦξεραν τὴ γιορτὴ καὶ τὴν καματερὴ τους. Εἶχαν καιρὸ γιὰ τὴ χαρὰ καὶ

γιὰ τὴ θλίψη τους. Ἐμεῖς τίποτ' ἀπ' αὐτά! Χειμῶνα-καλοκαίρι τ' ὀργώνουμε τὸ κύμα.

Βόδια καματερὰ στὴ βουκέντρα τῆς Ἀνάγκης, ὑποταχτικὰ θ' αὐλακώνουμε τ' ἄρμυρὸ χωράφι, μονάχα τὴ φάκνα μας ἔχοντας γιὰ πληρωμὴ. Γιὰ τοῦτο καλὰ ποὺ ἔτυχε ἢ κακοκαιρία ν' ἀφήσουμε λίγο τὸν κάματο. Δὲ λέω πὼς θὰ μείνουμε τώρα ἡσυχoi. Ὁ ἀφέντης θέλει δουλειὰ ἀπὸ τὸ δουλευτὴ, γιατί φοβᾶται μὴν ὀκνέψη μὲ τὴν ἀκαμωσιά. Φαντάσου ὅμως, ἂν ἦταν καλωσύνη, τί δρόμο θὰ παίρναμε τώρα. Ἔτσι τουλάχιστο ἔχω ἐλεύθερο τὸ νοῦ νὰ συλλογιστῶ τὸ σπίτι μου.

Ἄχ, τὸ σπίτι μου! Ἄρχισα τὸ παραπὸνο καὶ κοντεῦω νὰ δακρῶσω σὰν ἄπραγο παιδί. Μὰ δὲ φταίω γῶ. Φταίει αὐτὴ ἡ νύχτα. Φταίει τὸ ἀποψινὸ ἀποσπέρισμα, τ' ἀστέρι τὸ λαμπρὸ ποὺ ἔτρεμε βασιλεύοντας πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ χιονισμένα βουνὰ καὶ τάραξε τὸ εἶναι μου. Ὅπως τοὺς Μάγους ὠδήγησε καὶ μένα πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὰ πέλαγα στὴ Νάξο, στὸ Γρίτι μου τὸ πρασινοντυμένο, τὸ ταπεινὸ μὰ ὀλόχαρο σπιτάκι μου. Καὶ ὄχι ὡς ἐδῶ. Παραμπρός, παραμπρός ἀκόμη. Μ' ἔφερε στὰ παιδιάτικα χρόνια μου, πρὶν ἀφήσω τὴ στεριὰ καὶ πρὶν ταξιδέψω στὴ θάλασσα.

Καθόμαστε ὅλοι στὸ παραγῶνι, διπλοπόδι στὰ μάλλινα στρωσίδια, ντυμένοι μὲ τὰ ζεστὰ φορεματάκια μας, ποὺ τὰ ἔρραψε τῆς μάννας μας ἢ φροντίδα καὶ τῆς ἀδερφῆς μας, τῆς ὁμορφούλας τὰ πιδέξια χέρια. Ὁ πατέρας μου, θεριακωμένος καὶ νιοφάνταχτος γέροντας, καθότανε στὶς προσκεφαλὰδες ψηλὰ καὶ ρουφοῦσε ἀπολαυστικὰ τὸ τσιμποῦκι του.

Ὅταν μας ἔβλεπε ἔτσι συναγμένους, τοῦ ἄρσεσε νὰ διηγέται παραμύθια καὶ ἱστορίες τῆς ζωῆς του. Τῆς θάλασσας οἱ κίνδυνοι, τῆς στεριᾶς οἱ χαρές, ὁ τρόμος τῶν κουρσάρων, τὰ ναυτικὰ κατορθώματα τῆς Ἐπανάστασης διάβαιναν ζωντανὰ καὶ ὀλοφώτιστα μπροστὰ μας. Μὰ κεῖνη τὴ νύχτα δὲ θέλησε νὰ μιλήσῃ οὔτε γιὰ παραμύθια, οὔτε γιὰ ταξίδια του. Μόλις βάλαμε τὸ λύχνο στὸ λυχνοστάτη καὶ φάγαμε τὴ λειψόπητα, μᾶς ἄρχισε θρησκευτικὲς κουβέντες. Ἦταν θρησκὸς ὁ ἀγιοχώματος καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ βιβλία δὲν τ' ἄφηνε ἀπὸ κοντὰ του. Ἀλήθεια, στὰ ταξίδια του εἶχε πρόχειρα τὰ τροπάρια καὶ τὶς βλαστήμιες. Μὰ τώρα ποὺ ἔπαψε τὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς ζωῆς, φρόντιζε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς του.

– Δὲ μοῦ λές, εἶπε στὸν ἀδερφό μου τὸ μικρότερο, τί ὄραμα εἶδε ἢ Παναγία τὴ νύχτα ποὺ γέννησε τὸν Κύριο ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό;

Κόκκαλο ἐκεῖνος. Ρωτάει ἐμένα, τὸ ἴδιο.

– Ἄ, δὲν τὸ ξέρετε! πρόσθεσε μὲ ἡρεμὴ φωνή. Μὰ δὲν φταίτε σεῖς, φταίω γῶ ποὺ δὲν σᾶς τὸ ἔμαθ' ἀκόμη. Ἔγινε πέρα στὴν Ἀνατολή, στὸν τόπο τὸν παράδοξο. Ποιὸ χρόνο δὲ σᾶς λέω. Φτάνει νὰ μετρήσετε τὸ

φτεινὸ καὶ τὸ βρῖσκετε ἀμέσως. Ἐκεῖνη τὴ νύχτα μία γυναίκα, συντροφιασμένη ἀπὸ τὸν τέχτονα τὸν ἄντρα της, στάθηκε μισοστρατὶς σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ καὶ γέννησε ἓνα παιδί. Φτωχὰ ἦταν τὰ ροῦχα της, ἡ ὄψη της πικραμένη· μὰ εἶχε κατιτὶ τόσο λαμπρὸ στὴ ματιά, ποῦ ἔλεγε θ' ἀναστήσει καὶ τὴν πέτρα. Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ γαλάζιο φόρεμα καὶ τὸ κόκκινο στηθοπάνι, τὸ κορμὶ φάνταζε λυγερό, ἄξιο γιὰ νὰ θροιάσει μία πάναγνη ψυχὴ. Καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ἄσπρο της κεφαλοδέτη τὰ μυγδαλωτὰ μάτια, τὰ φρύδια τὰ σμιχτά, τὸ λεφαντένιο μέτωπο, λαμπρότερο κι ἀπὸ τὰ χρυσὰ στολίδια του, φανέρωναν τὴν αἰσθαντικὴ πηγὴ ποῦ θὰ σάρκωση τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν Καλωσύνη.

Γέννησε τὸ παιδί, τὸ βύζαξε, τὸ τύλιξε στὸ σάλι της καὶ τ' ἀπίθωσε στὴ φάτνη πάνω στ' ἄχυρα νὰ κοιμηθῆ. Σὲ λίγο ὁ ἀνασσαμὸς ἔβγαινε ἀπὸ τὸ στηθάκι τοῦ ἥσυχος, σὰν ἀνασσαμὸς βαλσαμόδεντρου. Γύρω τὸ σκοτάδι ἀπλωνόταν πίσσα. Κάτω στὸ χῶμα πλαγιασμένα τὰ ζωντανά, βόδια καὶ πρόβατα καὶ ἄλογα μαζί, ἔνιωθαν κάποια φρίκη νὰ χαμοπετᾶ πάνω τους, σύγκρου νὰ τὰ περιγλείφῃ κ' ἔμεναν ἄγρυπνα. Μὰ οὔτε βέλαιμα, οὔτε χλιμντρισμα, οὔτε βούγεμα ἠχολογοῦσε. Ἡ φάτνη ἔτριζε κάποτε. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κείνη ἔμενε ξερομασσημένη στὸ στόμα τους. Ἀπάνω ἢ σπηλιὰ μὲ τὸν οὐρανὸ τῆς νεροστάλαχτο, μὲ τὰ πλευρὰ τῆς αὐλακωμένα ἀπὸ τὶς νεροσυρμές, πράσινα ἀπὸ τὰ πολυτρίχια, σκισμένα ἀπὸ τὰ νύχια τοῦ ὄρνιου, τρύπια ἀπὸ τοῦ σφαλαγγιοῦ τὸ κεντρί, κλεισμένα μὲ τὸν πλοκὸ τῆς ἀράχνης, ξεθεμελιωμένα ἀπὸ τὸν ποντικὸ, ψήλωνε βουβὴ κι ἀτάραχη. Καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ χαμηλὴ ἔμπατή, τὸ φῶς ἀστροστόλιστης νύχτας χυνόταν στὶς πλαγιὲς καὶ τὰ λακκώματα.

Οἱ κουρμάδες ἐκεῖ ψήλωναν λαμπάδες, μὲ τὰ καμαρωτὰ κλωνιὰ καρποφορτωμένα. Ἐκεῖ τ' ἀμπέλια ἔδειχναν κλαδιὰ ἔτοιμα ν' ἀνοιξοῦν μάτια χλωροπράσινα στὸ πρῶτο φύσημα τῆς ἀνοιξης. Ἐκεῖ ἀσπραργυρανθισμένες οἱ ἐλιὲς λαγάριζαν ἀπὸ τώρα τὸ χυμὸ ποῦ θὰ καὶ θυσία στὸ νεογέννητο. Ἐκεῖ καὶ τὰ σπῖτια τῆς Βηθλεὲμ μικρά, τετράγωνα, μὲ τὸ δῶμα πάνω καὶ τὴν πόρτα στὸ πλάγι, ἔλαμπαν στὸν ἀσβέστη, λὲς καὶ στολίσθηκαν νὰ καλωσορίσουν Ἐκεῖνον ποῦ θὰ τοὺς χαρίσει τὴ δόξα. Βαθιὰ ὁ Ἰορδάνης στέναζε μέσα στὴ χαλκοστρωμένη κοίτη του καὶ πρόσμενε μὲ τρόμο τὸ Θεϊκὸ κορμὶ ποῦ θ' ἁγιαζε

τὰ νερά του. Δεξιὰ στὴ χούνη σὰν κατάρατο πνεῦμα βρουχιόταν ἡ Νεκρὴ θάλασσα, λὲς κ' εἶχε ἀκόμη μέσα της τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορα. Ἀριστερά, ἀπάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς ζυγούς, ἐκεῖ ποῦ δὲν ἔφτανε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο μάτι, ἦταν ὅμως ἀσήκωτος ὁ λογισμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴ χαρὰ καὶ στὴν ἀκολασία παραδομένα οὐρλιαζαν τὰ Γεροσόλυμα, τὸ ἄσμα τῶν Προφητῶν κ' ἡ λατρεία λαοῦ μεγάλου.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ, μόλις εἶδε κοιμισμένο τὸ παιδί, κατέβηκε στὸ χωριὸ νὰ φροντίσει γιὰ τὴ λεχῶνα. Καὶ κείνη ὀλομόναχη, ἀδυνατισμένη, μὲ τὴ μητρικὴ λαχτᾶρα στὰ στηθὴ, σταύρωσε τὰ χέρια, ἀκούμπησε τὸ κορμὶ σ' ἓνα στύλο κ' ἔκλεισε τὰ ματόφυλλα. Μὰ στάθηκε ἀδύνατο νὰ κοιμηθῆ. Ἡ τύχη τοῦ θεόσταλτου ἦρθε νὰ τῆς τυραννήσει τὴν ψυχὴ. Τί θ' ἀπογένη στοῦ κόσμου τὴν ἀντάρρα ὁ τρυφερός της Κρίνος, Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ τῆς δόθηκε μὲ τὸ χέρι ἀσπροντυμένου Χερουβεὶμ; Ποιὰ θὰ εἶνε ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ποιοὶ τὸ τέλος του; Θὰ περάσει



δρόμο πορφυρόστρωτο ἢ θὰ βάψῃ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ τ' ἀγκάθια καὶ τὶς στουραρόπετρες;

Ὁ κόσμος παραλυμένος δὲν προσέχει πιά στὰ λόγια τῶν Προφητῶν. Ὁ Ἰσραὴλ στενάζει κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ ψέμα τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ τῶν Ρωμαίων τὸ ζυγὸ. Δὲν κιθαρίζει ὁ Δαβὶδ οὔτε ἡ Δεβόρρα δικάζει τὸ λαὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τοὺς κουρμάδες. Τοῦ Ἀαρὼν

τὰ τέκνα ληστεύουν. Ἀπιστίας σύγνεφο κάθε-ται στὴν Ἰερὴ Κιβωτὸ καὶ στοῦ Μεγάλου Ναοῦ τὰ ἄδυτα. Πίνει τὸ αἷμα τῶν Μακκαβαίων ἢ γῆ, χωρὶς ν' ἀποδώσει ἐλευθερία καὶ δικαιοσύνη. Ὁ Γαυλωνίτης Ἰούδας χάθηκε χωρὶς ν' ἀνορθώσει τὸ Νόμο. Ἡ Γῆ τῆς Ἐπαγγελίας, χωρισμένη σὲ βασιλεία καὶ τοπαρχίες, φθίρεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἐμφύλιο σπαραγμὸ, σὰ νὰ τὴ βαραίνῃ ἀκόμη ἢ ἀπειθία τῶν προγόνων στὴν ἔρημὸ τοῦ Σίν. Κόλαση ἔγινε ὁ κάποτε Παράδεισος! Ἐγωιστὴς καὶ ἐκδικητικὸς καὶ ἄδοξος ὁ περιούσιος λαὸς τοῦ Κυρίου! Πῶς θὰ ζήσει σὲ τέτοιον κόσμῳ τὸ παιδί της;

Ἄξαφνα λύχνος ἡλιοστάλαχτος κρεμάστηκε μπρὸς στῆς μάννας τὴν ψυχὴ, ἔτοιμος νὰ δείξῃ τὸ μέλλον τοῦ νιογέννητου, ὅπως ἡ νεφέλη ἔδειξε ἄλλοτε τὸν ἄγνωστο δρόμο στὴ φυλὴ της. Καὶ τὸν εἶδε τριαντάχρονο λεβεντονιὸ νὰ μαγνητίζει τὶς ψυχὲς τοῦ λαοῦ. Ψηλός, λυγερός, μὲ σεβαστὴ μελαγχολία στὸ ροδοζύμωτο πρόσωπο, μὲ τὰ καστανὰ μαλλιά

κυματιστά στοὺς ὄμους, μὲ τὸ στόμα γλυκοστάλαχτο καὶ τὰ γαλανὰ μάτια, μιλοῦσε στὸ λαὸ καὶ τὸν ἔπειθε. Ἐκήρυττε στὶς συναγωγὰς καὶ χίλιοι τὸν ἄκουαν ἀνέβαινε στὸ βουνὸ καὶ μύριοι τὸν ἀκολουθοῦσαν. Διαβαίνει ἀνάλαφρα τὴ λίμνη τῆς Γενησαρὲτ καὶ ρίχνονται λαμνοκοπώντας οἱ κόσμοι στὰ βήματά του. Οἱ Προφῆτες ποὺ τὸν προσπερνοῦσαν, τώρα πισωδρομοῦν ὑποταχτικοί του. Ὁ Νόμος τοῦ Μωυσῆ ἀναζῆ στὰ λόγια του καὶ συμπληρώνεται.

Ἡ ἔρημη γῆ ἀναδροσιζέται τ' ἀπελπισμένα στήθη ξαναθαρορεύουν τὰ πλανημένα πρόβατα γυρίζουν πάλι στὴ μάντρα τους. ἡ ἀγάπη τρέχει ἀδαπάνητη ἀπὸ τὰ πλατεῖα στέγνα του καὶ δροσιζέει τὸ καμίνι τῆς κακομοιριάς. Οἱ ἄπιστοι πιστεύουν καὶ σηκώνονται οἱ ταπεινοί, τυφλοὺς φωτίζει, χωλοὺς ὀδηγεῖ. Τὰ Γεροσόλυμα στρώνουν τοὺς δρόμους μὲ βάρια νὰ τὸν δεχτοῦν. Σύγκαιρα ὁμως καρφώνουν τὸ σταυρό. Ὁ φθονερός μαθητὴς τὸν παραδίνει μὲ φίλημα. Ὁ δειλὸς φίλος του τὸν ἀρνιέται πρὶν λαλήσῃ ὁ πετεινός. Μὰ Ἐκεῖνος, ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τὰ τέκνα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, συγχωρεῖ τὴν ἄρνηση καὶ τὴν προδοσία, διαβαίνει πρᾶος μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς κοροϊδίες καὶ τὰ φτυσίματα, πίνει τὸ ξίδι καὶ τὴ χολή, φορεῖ τὸ ἀγκαθερὸ στεφάνι, τὴν περιφρονητικὴ χλαμύδα, κρατεῖ τὸ καλαμένιο σκῆπτρο καὶ ἀνεβαίνει στὸ μαρτύριο.

– Γυναίκα, νὰ ὁ γιός σου, λέει τὴν τελευταία στιγμή.

Καὶ ἀποχαιρετᾶ, μ' ἓνα βλέμμα μελαγχολικό, τὴ μάννα ποὺ τὸν γέννησε, τοὺς φίλους ποὺ τὸν πίστεψαν, τὸ λαὸ ποὺ τὸν τυράννησε, τὴ Γῆ ποὺ εἶδε τὶς πίκρες του καὶ τὸν Οὐρανὸ ποὺ θὰ δεχόταν τὸ Σῶμα του.

Ἡ μάννα ἦταν ἐκεῖ καὶ τὰ ἔβλεπε ὅλα. ἤθελε νὰ φωνάξῃ, νὰ τρέξῃ γιὰ νὰ τὸν σώσῃ ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν κακούργων ἀλλὰ δὲ μποροῦσε νὰ βγάλῃ φωνή. Τὸ σῶμα δὲν ἀκολουθοῦσε τοὺς πόθους τῆς ψυχῆς. Μὰ ὅταν εἶδε ἓνα στρατιώτη ἀγριοπρόσωπο, ἔτοιμο νὰ λογχίσῃ τὰ πλευρά του,

– Μή! ... Ἐφώναξε μὲ ὅλη της τὴ δύναμη.

Καὶ μὲ τὸ «μή!» ξύπνησε. Δὲν εἶδε ὀλόγυρα της τίποτα ἀπὸ τὸ φριχτὸ δράμα. Τὸ βρέφος κοιμότανε ἀκόμη πλάγι της, μέσα στὴ φάτνη, ἀπάνω στὸ ἄχυρο. Μὰ δὲ βασίλευε ἡ σιγὴ καὶ τὸ σκοτάδι, ὅπως πρὶν. Ἀγγελικὴ ἀρμονία κατέβαινε ἀπὸ ψηλὰ καὶ λαμπρομέτωπο ἀστέρι ἔχυνε θάλασσα τὸ φῶς του στὴ σπηλιά.

Καὶ μπρὸς στὰ πόδια της, οἱ Μάγοι γονατιστοὶ μὲ τὰ δῶρα τους, τὴ σμύρνα καὶ τὸ μόσχο καὶ τὸ λιβάνι, ὠνόμαζαν τὸ γιὸς τῆς βασιλέα καὶ Θεοῦ.

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα φάνηκε στὴν ἐμπατὴ χλωμὸς ὁ Ἰωσήφ.

– Νὰ φύγουμε, λέει τρέμοντας στὴ γυναίκα του. Ὁ Ἡρώδης θέλει τὸ παιδί κ' οἱ ἀνθρώποι τὸν ψάχνουν στὴ χώρα. Γλήγορα νὰ φύγουμε!

Ἐκεῖνη ἄρπαξε ἀμέσως τὸ βρέφος, τὸ ἔσφιξε στοὺς κόρφους της καὶ πῆραν δρόμο γιὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο. Ἡ νύχτα τοὺς ἔκρυψε. Μὰ τὰ αἵματα τῶν ἄλλων παιδιῶν καὶ ὁ θρήνος τῶν μαννάδων ἀνέβαιναν ἀπὸ τὰ σπίτια τῆς Γαλιλαίας, πρωτόλουβη θυσία στὸν ἀναμορφωτὴ τοῦ κόσμου.

– Πόσα αἵματα θὰ χυθοῦν ἀκόμη! ψιθύρισε προφήτης ἢ γυναίκα. Πόσα αἵματα!...

Τέλειωσε ὁ Ἀζιώτης τὸ διήγημά του κ' οἱ σύντροφοι ἔμειναν ἀκόμη ἀκίνητοι σὰν ὄνειροπλανεμένοι. Μερικοὶ σταυροκοπήθηκαν ἄλλοι στέναξαν βαθιὰ σὰ νὰ ξύπνησε κάτι παρήγορο μέσα τους. Μὰ ὁ Κώστας ὁ θερμαστής, ἴδιος στ' ἀστεῖα καὶ στὰ σοβαρά, ρώτησε πονηρὰ τὸ σύντροφό του:

– Δὲ μοῦ λές, βλάμη. Εἶδε ἡ Παναγία στ' ὄνειρό της καὶ τὸν πατριώτη σου τὸ Βαραββᾶ;

Ἐκεῖνος χολοταράχηκε. Φοβερὴ βλαστήμια ἀνέβηκε στὰ χεῖλη του. Μὰ τὴν κατὰπτε. Δὲν ἦταν καιρὸς τώρα νὰ κολαστῇ κανεῖς! Χαμογέλασε, ἔκαμε τὸ σταυρό του καὶ ξαπλώθηκε στὸ ἔρημο κρεβάτι του.

– Καὶ τοῦ χρόνου, παιδιά, στὰ σπίτια μας! Εὐχήθηκε.

– Στὰ σπίτια μας, μὰ θὰ μᾶς θερίζῃ ἡ πείνα, εἶπε ὁ θερμαστής.

Καὶ γέλασε δυνατὰ.



Ὁ Θεός, ποὺ πρόσταξε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ τὸ κάνουν αὐτό, πιδὸ πολὺ δὲν θὰ τὸ κάνῃ ὁ ἴδιος; Διότι ἐπρόσταξε τὸν Πέτρον, λέγοντας: «Ἔως ἔβδομηκοντάκις ἑπτὰ ἄφες τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου». Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς συγχωρεῖ πάντοτε ὅσον καὶ ἂν ἁμαρτήσουμε. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ μετανοήσουμε εἰλικρινὰ καὶ νὰ ζητήσουμε συγχώρηση.

Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν ὁ Μέγας

Ὅπως ἡ βροχὴ, ὅσον περισσότερο πέφτει πάνω στὴ γῆ, τόσο τὴν μαλακώνει, ἔτσι καὶ τὴν γῆ τῆς καρδιάς μας τὴν χαροποιεῖ καὶ τὴν εὐφραίνει τὸ ἅγιον ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσον περισσότερο τὸ φωνάζουμε καὶ ὅσον συχνότερον τὸ ἐπικαλούμεθα. Καὶ αὐτὸ γίνεται μὲ τὴν νοερὰ ἢ καρδιακὴ προσευχή, ποὺ λέγεται σιωπηλὰ μέσα μας: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με».

Ἅγιος Ἡσύχιος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος

Ἄγνός δὲν θεωρεῖται ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ἐφύλαξε ἀρρύπαντον τὸ πῆλινο σῶμα του, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ ὑπέταξε τὰ σωματικὰ μέλη στὴν ψυχὴ, ἐκεῖνος εἶναι τελείως ἄγνός.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+2003).

There is anguish when a woman is in labour, but all this is forgotten when the child is born, because a man has come into the world. Someone has come into the world to live, someone has entered into the realm of transitory life in order to grow into life eternal, and the birth of a child is always perceived as the beginning of life and as the beginning of eternity, once more incarnate, once more made real, visible, tangible, become part of human joy and human simplicity.

And yet, when we think of the nativity of Christ, the birth on earth of the Son of God, we see it in a quite different way.

One of the ancient miniatures representing the birth of the Lord, shows us, apart from the habitual features of a cave, of the Mother Virgin, of Joseph, of the familiar animals, the manger standing by, deposited on an altar of sacrifice. And the child is lying on it as probably Isaac laid on the altar which Abraham had built in order to bring him as a blood offering to the Lord. Every one of us is born through temporary life into eternal life; the Eternal One, He who is life itself, is born into the world in order to enter into the realm of death. Eternal, Immortal God enters into the realm of man, not only the created world, but to enter the fallen world where death is the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

When we look at this image of the new-born child, lying on an altar of stones, ready for a sacrifice, brought as an offering, we can well ask ourselves, "Who is he who sacrifices this child?" And we have an answer: it is the Father who gives us His Son that through His death we may live. We see here incarnate, clearly expressed, divine Love, and the measure of this love divine. The Only-Begotten Son is given unto death, delivered unto death for our sakes. Saint Paul ponders on the event, and he exclaims: Hardly would anyone die for a friend, and Christ died for us while we still were enemies of God. [*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom 5:8).]

God called us into existence, it was a one-sided act, not of His own powerful will, but of His immeasurable love. He

called us into existence, that we may share with Him not only existence, but life, become partakers of all that He is; we are called, in the words of Saint Peter, to become partakers of divine nature; we are called to be brethren and sisters of Christ, sons and daughters of the Living God. He created us in an act of love and in this act of love, from the first, He gave Himself as an offering to us. And this offering is always a sacrifice. In order to make this offering meaningful, He gave us freedom, the freedom to accept love and to reject love, to love Him in response to His love, or discard His love and, through our deeds, through all our attitude to Him and to life, to proclaim to Him that His love is of no avail to us, that we do not want it, that it is in vain that he has loved us first, it is in vain that He had loved us so much as to give His Only Begotten Son for us.

God gives us the freedom, and we ask very often, "Why?!"



Why have we not been made in such a way that, compelled by a blessed necessity, we would be unable to go wrong, that we should be made in such a way that we always and in all things would respond to the best. But is it not simply because where there is no freedom of love and rejection of love, there is no love? If we gravitated towards one another without any choice, it would be a law of nature, it would not be an act of free gift of oneself and of acceptance of the other. This freedom means love, at least the possibility of love, as it means also the possibility for us to reject

God. But God in His freedom does not reject us. He remains faithful to the last, perfectly generous, heroically faithful.

And when the freedom of man is misused, He uses His freedom to come to us, and to reach out towards us at the very depth of ourselves, at the extreme distance which we reach when we die to love. He enters this very realm which is the realm where there is no love, where there is only dividedness, brokenness and separation, both from God and from one another and within ourselves, the inner brokenness and conflict between mind and heart, between conscience and action: Christ is born into the realm of death we have made through the misuse of freedom, because we have forgotten that freedom culminates, is fulfilled in that love which gives itself perfectly, which is forgetfulness of self, which is the laying down of one's life for the other.

Let us then look at this crib not as we do when we are small children, seeing only an image of a child's birth, miraculous, wonderful; let us look at it with an earnest and adult gaze, and see that this crib is an altar of sacrifice, that this cave where He was born is an image of that cave in which He will be deposited, a young man, killed for God's sake after the agony of the Garden and the agony of the Cross, and let us ask ourselves, "Are we, each of us, a response to love revealed in such a way, revealed to such degree?" Will we find in ourselves a response, or shall we only say, "It was His choice, I have chosen against Him. He has chosen life for me, I have chosen death for Him."

Is that the answer which we will give? Oh, not in words, but in deeds, through our life, through our attitude to our own self, in which our own dividedness is not overcome, through our attitude to one another in which those people for whom Christ lived and died remain to us strangers, irrelevant and can be brushed out of our way, or through our attitude to Him Whom we do not treat as our ever-present invisible neighbor, for Whom we have no thought, no compassion, no charity, no love.

Or are we going to respond to this revelation of love in which the frailty of love is made visible, perceptible to us in the frailty of this little human body deposited on the straw of a crib, respond to the frailty of God by a mature love?

This is the question which now the day of Christmas sets before us, and we have days and months of liturgical unfolding of the year, to grow through it towards a definitive and final answer when we will see love sacrificed on Calvary. We have got this liturgical year to follow step by step, in this year we will discover how the saints of God have responded, and at every step the question will stand before us: "And what about you, what about thee personally, what about us in our togetherness, what is our answer to love?" Amen.



- Tell me, which has greater strength, water or fire?
 - Uh ... water, Elder, answered a pilgrim.
 - If we have a great fire, and you pour out a glass of water, will it be put out?
 - No, Elder. The fire has greater strength.
 - If you have a little fire, and you pour out a big can of water, will it be put out?
 - Yes, Elder.
 - It is neither water nor fire that has the greater strength, but the quantity. So it is also with spiritual things. If the worldly way of thinking prevails within you, that will overcome the spiritual. But if your mind is turned to the spiritual, it will overcome the carnal.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

TALKING ABOUT THE DEVIL

Tribute to Fr. John S. Romanides, by Thomas Shaw, "The Orthodox Reader," January, 1999, no. 17.

Two decades ago, while still a young Orthodox Christian, I had the privilege of hearing Fr. Alexander Schmemmann speak. I cannot clearly remember now the topic of his talk, but one sentence still rings in my ears: "What surprises those in the ecumenical movement is that, while they are discussing the great project of unification of the churches, the Orthodox are still talking about the Devil."

Orthodoxy is still talking about the Devil because we continue to see his effect on the culture around us and we continue to experience his war upon the Church. Because we are engaged in this unseen warfare, Orthodox theology has always been dynamic. Each generation must discover the truths of the Holy Tradition anew, and in that process of discovery there will be differing understanding of the content of the Tradition. This dynamism has always brought forth controversial theologians within the Church. They are those who step outside the safe formulas and attempt to rephrase the Tradition using unfamiliar guideposts.

One such theologian is Fr. John Romanides. His work, in contrast to today's micro-specialist, presents a strong unified thesis that he applies over vast periods of time and place. His boldness is dismissed as simplistic and overly dogmatic by some. I first encountered Fr. Romanides as a student of theology at the University of Thessaloniki. I was in the last course he taught in Orthodox Dogmatics before his retirement. I took classes from him for three years and have read most of his works including *Franks, Romanism, Feudalism and Doctrine*.

Fr. Romanides is every bit the absentminded professor. His nickname at Holy Cross was Fr. Midnight because he seemed so unaware of his surroundings when he talked. He would always begin a lecture the same way. Sitting down, he would speak in a soft, almost inaudible, voice. Beginning almost in mid-thought, it seemed as if the lecture were already going on in his head. As he warmed to his subject his voice would raise and his eyes would flash. Sometimes he would become very quiet and would even seem to nod off for brief periods. His lectures were always well attended because he was a man with something to say. It seemed odd that even though his area of expertise was dogmatics, his lectures always seemed to be history. The details of the goings-on in 9th and 10th century France and Italy were constantly being related, or the details of 18th century France and Russia. He was criticized for this. After all, he was not a trained historian! But as a patristic theologian, he taught that the Fathers cannot be understood without understanding their history.

Fr. Romanides has an over-arching thesis: the purpose of the Church is to heal man of spiritual illness brought on by

the Fall (this spiritual illness is characterized by the quest for happiness) and enable him to know God. His secondary thesis is that dogmatic controversies throughout the history of the Church are caused by those who do not understand the function of the Church as a spiritual hospital. Thus, the real difference with the West is their loss of this understanding which occurred because the Western ecclesiastical institutions were subverted by political forces into mere political institutions. As political institutions they became concerned with man's happiness instead of his glorification; with mere forgiveness of sins, rather than purification.

It is this thesis that is controversial. It is accepted in ecumenical circles that the explanation for the schism of East and West is cultural. According to this concept, the Western, Latin-speaking, Roman Church and the Eastern, Greek-speaking, Byzantine Church became estranged due to cultural and political factors. The essential elements of the "undivided Church" remain the same in both East and West. The task of ecumenical theology is to regain this lost common understanding.

Romanides' thesis attacks these concepts. There never was a "Byzantine" Empire. This was an invention of 18th century Western historians. The Roman political institutions remained intact from the founding of New Rome, Constantinople, in the 4th century to its fall in the 14th century. Romanides, then, tells a different story. Not the story of the Greek East and the Latin West, but the story of Romans and Franks. His is a story not of people drifting apart, but of the Romans struggling to assert the truths of Orthodoxy even when faced with impossible opposition. His understanding of the crucial centuries leading up to the schism and the crusades is one of the systematic subjection of the Roman population of the West to the Frankish overlords who eventually were able to capture even the Roman papacy and conform it to their feudalistic scheme.

The truth of his thesis is captured in our language where franchise (to have the rights of a Frank) means to be able to vote and villain (Roman town dwellers) means an evil man. It was not the Roman Empire in the East that was estranged from its roots and traditions, but the Roman Empire in the West which was replaced by feudalism. So, while other theologians discuss the great project of unifying the churches, Romanides keeps talking about the Devil.

It is the story of warfare, seen and unseen. It is the story of the Babylonian Captivity of the Church in the West and the threat to us as Orthodox if we do not understand our

history, our heritage, and our Holy Tradition rightly. If we allow the Holy Orthodox Church to become simply another cultural institution with its peculiar rites and practices, if we allow the Holy Orthodox Church to become a religion, we will be playing the Devil's own game and will subject ourselves to our overlords without a peep.

Because of the controversy surrounding Romanides' secondary thesis, many lose track of his first and primary thesis. Let Fr. John state it himself:

"We are obliged to have a clear picture of the context within which the Church and the State viewed the contribution of the glorified to the cure of the sickness of religion which warps the human personality by means of its search for happiness both in this life and after the death of the body. It is within this context that the Roman Empire legally incorporated the Orthodox Church into its administrative structure. Neither

the State nor the Church saw the mission of the Church as the simple forgiveness of sins of the faithful for their entrance into heaven in the next life. Both the Church and the State knew well that the forgiveness of sins was only the beginning of the cure of the happiness seeking sickness of humanity. This cure begins by the *purification* of the heart, it arrives at the restoration of the heart to its natural state of *illumination* and the whole person

begins to be perfected beyond one's natural capacities by the *glorification* of body and soul by God's uncreated glory (*shekinah*—the English transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "dwelling" or "settling" and denotes the dwelling or settling of the divine presence of God, *Ed.*). The result of this cure and perfection was not only the proper preparation for life after the death of one's body, but also the transformation of society here and now from a collection of selfish and self-centered individuals to a society of persons with selfless love *which does not seek its own.*"



When the evil spirit of pride fights against us, we shall never stop falling. But falls make us aware of our wretchedness and help us attain humility. Then Christ comes, who is humble of heart and meek in soul. Then joy, peace, and sweetness will reign in our soul, and blessedness will warm our heart.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona



A RECENT GOA OF AMERICA EVENT OF GREAT CONCERN

THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA CONTINUES TO “RECOGNIZE” AND DISSEMINATE AWARDS TO THE ARCHITECTS OF THE PRO- ABORTION MOVEMENT

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, October 2016.

*In these difficult days, each must do what is in their power,
and leave what is out of their power to the will of God.*

[St. Paisios the Athonite]

† † †

My Dear and Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, The above words of St. Paisios the Athonite have convicted this impure and passion-filled soul. I am just a sinful and unworthy priest, but it is indeed within my power to ask the following question: **Why was New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo recently given the Patriarch Athenagoras Human Rights Award by my Holy Archdiocese?** See the website below:

http://www.uocofusa.org/news_161017_2.html

To those of us active in the pro-life movement, Governor Cuomo is well known for his outspoken, tenacious and proactive advocacy in support of the pro-death philosophy (erroneously called, pro-choice, since the “choice” involves killing the pre-born child—a living ikon of Jesus Christ). On July 17, 2014, Governor Cuomo referred to the defenders of the pre-born child as: “these extreme conservatives who are right-to-life ... they have no place in the state of New York.”

In 2013, he presented—and worked hard to pass—one of the most expansive abortion bills in American history: the so-called **Woman’s Equality Act**. In the abortion section, a woman would be guaranteed a right to an abortion **throughout the entire nine months that the baby was in her womb**, without restrictions, and a medical person who was not a doctor could even perform the abortion. In his State of the State message in January of 2013, he defended this bill by saying “Because it is her body! It’s her choice!” Governor Cuomo also stated that this law was needed in New York, in case the *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion was overturned. I assume that he wants New York to become a safe haven for anyone seeking an abortion, if federal law no longer protected it. Fortunately, for the citizens of New York and the Governor himself, that provision did not pass.

Please forgive me, but I am trying to understand why such a person was awarded one of the highest honors of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. Based on my little and simple

knowledge of the teachings of our holy Church Fathers, if Andrew M. Cuomo was an Orthodox Christian, out of true love for his severely wounded soul, he would be excommunicated, until he was blessed with tears of repentance for all the innocent blood that is on his hands.

Last year, it saddened me that Vice President Biden, another politician who is openly supportive of abortion, received this prestigious award. I remained silent at that time, but now I feel compelled to speak out.

Today in our Nation, the God-established traditional family unit is being attacked on all fronts: abortion, euthanasia, the adoption of children by gay couples, same-sex marriage and the recent creation of **multiple** genders (a group in New York recently published a list of 31 genders, and placed male and female as numbers 17 and 18 respectively!). May God send down upon us a double helping of his Grace—particularly upon our clergy—so that we will have the courage to be in His “*front lines*” in defense of His Truth, especially within a nation where lie has become its truth, evil has become its good, and darkness has become its light. In the words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: *If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness?* [Mt 6:23].

And may the next recipient of the Patriarch Athenagoras Human Rights Award be someone whose words and actions are in harmony with the Orthodox Church’s teachings on the sanctity of **all human life**, which He created in His image, from conception to natural death. The words in this letter belong to me, and no one else is responsible for them.

Your servant in Christ Jesus,

Unworthy priest,

+Demetrios

P. S. – May these additional, Spirit-filled words of St. Paisios the Athonite inspire all of us to do our part and leave the rest to God: *If Christians don’t begin to witness their faith, to resist evil, then the destroyers will become even more insolent. But today’s Christians are not warriors. If the Church keeps silent, to avoid conflict with the government, if the Metropolitans are silent, if the monks hold their peace, then who will speak up?*



Cowardice is a passion of a sickly soul which is overcome by fear. It is spinelessness, faintheartedness, a lack of the fighting spirit, an instability of the soul that is in turmoil because of coming trials. It makes free people slaves, and it makes those bound to it traitors to their country. It is timidity in the face of danger, a lack of moral fiber, a weakness of the mind and a consent to foul deeds.

St. Nektarios the Wonderworker (+1920)

STAYING TO THE END OF THE DIVINE SERVICES

By St. Gregory Palamas.

Only John the Virgin acquired as his mother by grace the only Virgin among mothers (*Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.* Jn 19:27). He was especially beloved of Christ, and, more than the other evangelists, he was called *the son of that thunder* with which the Lord went up to heaven and thundered (Mk 3:17). Therefore, he preached more loudly to make absolutely clear to us everything about the Master's resurrection from the dead and to relate how He appeared after His resurrection. Last Sunday in church we heard Him saying through the Gospel he wrote, *The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.* (Jn 20:1-2).

Now we have heard him saying, *But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre.* (Jn 20:11). When John, together with Peter, listened to Mary and ran to the tomb where life began, they saw what they saw, **believed because of the signs**, and went away astonished to their own homes. Mary, on the other hand, remained standing outside the tomb and weeping. This proves that she had not yet received any assurance of the Master's resurrection, even though she had come twice to the tomb with different people. The first time was with the Mother of God, as Matthew relates, writing, *In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre,* and so on. (Mt 28:1). Then she came with Peter and John, who went away marveling, having believed because of what they saw. So she had come twice to the tomb with others, and whereas all her companions had believed and been given assurance, she was crying inconsolably because she had received no assurance at all.

We can see the same happening with regard to virtuous struggles. Grace comes immediately to meet some of those

who strive, giving them assurance of the *earnest of their inheritance* (Eph 1:14), letting them taste the promised prizes, as if stretching out a loving hand to welcome them and anointing them for further struggles. With others, however, grace waits for the end of the struggle, and prepares for them the crown of patience as well. As one of the God-bearing Fathers says, *Some receive holy rewards before their labors, some during labors, and some when they depart.*

This happens because the wise providence of God orders our affairs in many different ways and lovingly bestows on each one of us what is appropriate and profitable both for virtuous deeds and the mysteries of faith. Arranging matters for Mary Magdalene in His love and wisdom, the Master deemed it right that she should not yet at that point have received assurance of His resurrection, leading and encouraging future generations in the direction of patience through her example. Let us hear what she was afterwards accounted worthy of because she persevered and continued to wait by the tomb. *As she wept,* it says, *she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.* (Jn 20:11-12).



Her act of bending down and turning her eyes with extreme longing to the tomb was the result of her excellent disposition. Firstly, we must consider that, although it was still dark, as the evangelist said earlier (Jn 20:1), she clearly distinguished, even from outside, everything and everyone inside the cave. This shows that even though it was still dark outside, since the full light of day, as visible to our eyes, had not yet come, that cave was full of the light of the resurrection. Mary saw this light with God's help, and it increased her longing for Christ even more, and enabled her eyes to perceive a vision of angels. Not only did she see them but she was also able to speak with them. Such was that light.

She saw them arrayed in white, not just because of the purity and brilliance of their angelic nature, but because they were illuminating and clarifying the mystery of the resurrection, while at the same time actually celebrating with us the truly radiant day of the Master's resurrection. They were sitting down so that she would realize that they had not just come, but had been there before, even though previously they had not been visible. In this way she would understand their rank as she considered who these who had

been invisibly present could be. I think it was the desire to be as near as possible to the place where the Master's body had lain that made them sit down. As if they were clinging lovingly to the tomb, they were sitting one at the head and the other at the feet, showing that Christ's divinity, as symbolized by the place where His head lay, was equally beloved and precious to the angels as His incarnation, represented by the place of His feet. *And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?* (Jn 20:13).

You see that the cave has become heaven, or rather a heavenly temple, instead of an earthly tomb and a prison. Instead of human guards it is full of heavenly angels who magnify it exceedingly as the place of the life-giving God, and joyfully tend it now that it is empty. But you, woman, why are you weeping? They did not ask because they were unaware of what was the matter with her, but to alleviate her grief, make her the mistress of her thoughts and find an opportunity to accomplish their own work. The task of the angels sitting by the tomb of the giver of life was to proclaim the glory of the risen Lord. But when she was asked by the angels, she replied, *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back.* (Jn 20:13-14). What made Mary suddenly turn around? Obviously that the angels bowed like servants to the Lord as He appeared and paid heed to Him. Mary called Him just **"my" Lord**, and suspected that His body had been stolen and taken away showing that her soul was inclined towards Him, but she did not think of Him in a way worthy of God. They, by contrast, proved by their actions that He was Lord even of God's angels. Before He arrived they were sitting beside the tomb, but when the Master suddenly appeared opposite them, they immediately arose and earnestly turned their attention to Him with piety and admiration, in the manner of servants.

When Mary turned round to see what had amazed the angels just by appearing, she *saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus* (Jn 20:14), not having heard yet about the resurrection and finding it difficult to accept. Since the daylight outside was still dim and the Lord did not yet reveal to her His divine radiance that He might be recognized as He who had suffered, Mary did not know who He was, but thought that the Husbandman of our souls, the Creator of all, was the gardener for the plants in that place. When He made Himself known by calling her by name, *Mary*, she changed her mind and replied, *Rabboni*, which means, Teacher. Though she saw Him alive, no thought of His divinity occurred to her, and she regarded Him simply as a man of God and a teacher. She was inspired by love not just to fall down before Him but to lay hold of His feet, and heard the words, *Touch me not.* (Jn 20:17). *Since, He said, your mind has not grasped the height of the mystery concerning me, that,*

being God, I am appearing now for your sake in a body which is now Godlike, do not touch me.

The honor of being the only woman after the resurrection to touch the body of Him who for our sake was made man of her, had to be reserved for the Mother of God, and Matthew relates how this happened. He says of her that she came and *held Him by the feet* (Mt 28:9), whereas the Lord said to Mary Magdalene, *Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.* (Jn 20:17). These words are closely linked with the words He subsequently spoke to His disciples, *I ascend unto my Father, for I am not yet ascended.* (Jn 20:17). He said this to make them concerned and more earnest, and to stir them up to long and seek to see Him. This applies to Mary Magdalene too for He says, *Touch me not, for this body in which I am now clothed surpasses fire in its upward haste and power, and can not only ascend to heaven, but to the Father above the heavens. However, I have not yet ascended to my Father, because He had not yet shown Himself to His disciples after rising from the dead.*

Go to those brethren of mine, for we all come from the one Father, although not in the same way. I am His True Son, of one nature with Him, whereas they have been made sons of His through Me. Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. (Jn 20:17). He is our Father by grace through *the Spirit of adoption* (Rom 8:15), but His Father by nature on account of His divinity. Similarly, He is our God as the Creator of our human nature, but His God by reason of the dispensation whereby He became man. He made these distinctions so that we might understand the difference. By this message, that He was ascending to the Father, He led them to understand that His body was such that it could go about on earth forever as it had before, and be with them always.

Mary Magdalene, whom we extol in hymns as one of Christ's myrrh-bearers, into whom, once the *seven evil spirits had been cast out* by Christ (Mk 16:9), the sevenfold operation of the Spirit's grace clearly entered and was counted worthy to see and talk to angels, **because she continued to stand by the tomb**. She saw the Lord Himself and became His apostle to the apostles. Having been taught by His divine mouth and having finally found full assurance, she went to the apostles and told them, *that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.* (Jn 20:18).

Let us consider, brethren, how far Mary Magdalene was from the dignity of Peter, the leader of the apostles, and John, Christ's beloved theologian, and yet at that time she was counted worthy to experience much greater things than they did. When they ran to the tomb, they saw only the linen cloths and the napkin, whereas she, **by reason of the determined and patient endurance with which she remained to the end standing at the door of the cave**, saw not just the angels but also the Lord of the angels risen from the dead in

the flesh, before the apostles saw Him. She heard Him with her own ears and became a minister of the commandments from His divine mouth.

This temple, this Orthodox church, is a figure of that cave. Or rather, it is more than a figure, being almost another such cave, for it has a place where the Master's body is laid, the area within the veil and the most holy table there. Anyone who is determined to hasten to that truly divine cave that holds God, stand there and remain to the end, gathering his thoughts and lifting them up to God, will not only recognize the words of divinely inspired Scripture proclaiming, like angels, the divinity and humanity of the Word made man for our sake, **he will also certainly see the Lord with the eyes of his mind and, we can say without exaggeration, his bodily eyes.** For if anyone looks with faith at the mystical table and the bread of life placed upon it, he sees the person of the Word of God, *Who was made flesh for our sake and dwelt among us.* (Jn 1:14). If he shows himself a worthy receptacle, he will not only see but become a partaker of Him, receive Him to dwell within him, and be filled with His divine grace. Just as Mary saw what the apostles at that time longed to see, so he is accounted worthy to see and enjoy things that *the angels*, according to the apostle, *desire to look into* (1 Pet 1:12), and by contemplating them and sharing in them, he is rendered completely Godlike.

Wherefore, brethren, lift up towards virtue the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, *and make straight paths for your feet*, walking in the Lord's straight roads of righteousness, chastity, love, humility and truth (cf Heb 12:12-14). Hatred, falsehood, deception, envy, acquisitiveness, pride and their like are, by contrast, distorted, winding roads. Even if someone does not do these things but just loves them and thinks about them with his mind, they make him worthy of God's aversion. For whereas man regards the outward person, *God looks at the heart*, and He it is who searches hearts and thoughts (cf Rev 2:23).

While we are gathered together in Christ's Temple, *Gird up the loins of your mind*, as Peter, the chief apostle, says, *be sober to the end, and hope for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* (1 Pet 1:13). It is impossible for anyone who stands in God's holy Church collecting his thoughts, lifting His mind to God, occupying his understanding with the sacred singing from the beginning until the end and waiting patiently, not to undergo a

divine change, in accordance with his attention to God and His teachings. Through this attention a certain warmth is born in the heart which chases away evil thoughts like flies, creates spiritual peace and comfort in the soul and bestows sanctification on the body, according to him who said, *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned.* (Pss 39:3). One of the God-bearing Fathers also taught us this, saying, *Strive as hard as you can to ensure that your inner labor is according to God's will, and you will conquer the outward passions.* The great Paul, too, urged us towards this, saying, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.* (Gal 5:16).

Somewhere else Paul exhorts us, *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.* (Eph 6:14). When our thoughts revolve around divine subjects and abide in God's truth, holding back and taking care of the desiring part of the soul and driving away the body's desires, carnal thoughts leave us.



Then the grace of the Spirit takes possession of the quiet soul, and gives it a taste of the unspeakable good things to come, which no passionate and negligent *eye has seen, nor ear hear*, neither have entered into the heart of such a man (cf 1 Cor 2:9). This taste is the earnest of these good things, and the heart which accepts these pledges becomes spiritual and receives assurance of its salvation. So

anyone who wishes to gain this assurance and understand exactly about these spiritual pledges should conduct himself as today's words have guided and taught him. In this way he will become a fellow citizen with God's saints and share in the eternal unspeakable good things promised to them.

To which may we all attain by the grace and love for mankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory, might, honor and worship, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Never confuse the person, formed in the image of God, with the evil that is in him: because evil is but a chance misfortune, an illness, a devilish reverie. But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE DESERT AS SPACE

Protodeacon John Chryssavgis, "In the Heart of the Desert."

Why did so many saintly elders choose the desert as their area of domicile in the first place? What was the significance of the desert? What is the power of its suggestion?

"Desert" (ἔρημος) literally means "abandonment;" it is the term from which we derive the word "hermit." The areas of desertedness were where the demons bred. In the Book of Leviticus, the desert is the place that is accursed (Lev 16:21-22). There is no water in the desert, and in the mind of the Jews that was the ultimate curse. No water also meant no life.

The desert signified death: nothing grows in the desert. Your very existence is, therefore, threatened. In the desert you will find nobody and nothing. In the desert, you can only face up to yourself and to every aspect of yourself, to your temptations, and to your reality. You confront your own heart, and your heart's deepest desires, without any scapegoat, without any hiding place. It is in the desert that Jacob battled; and it is in the desert that you do battle with the unruly forces of your nature within and without. The desert was filled with the presence of the demonic.

Abba Elias informs us that an old man was living in a temple of the desert, and the demons came to him, saying: "Leave this place; it belongs to us!"

Yet, the desert was also endowed with sacred significance for Jews and Christians alike. The Israelites had wandered in the desert for forty years. It was there that Moses saw God. It was there that John the Baptist preached the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, it was in the desert that Jesus Himself began His ministry; it was in the wilderness that He was first tempted by the demons (Mt 4:1-10); and it was in the craggy areas of the Judaeen mountains that He periodically withdrew to be alone and to pray (Mt 14:23). In fact, the early monks believed that a reference in the Letter to the Galatians may also imply a brief sojourn by Paul in the desert of Arabia immediately following his conversion: *When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.* (Gal 1:15-17)

So the desert, while accursed, was never seen as an empty region. It was a place that was full of action. It was not an area of scenic views, in the modern sense of a tourist attraction. It was a space that provided an opportunity, and even a calling, for divine vision. In the desert, you were invited to shake off all forms of idolatry, all kinds of earthly limitations, in order to behold—or, rather, to be held before—an

image of the heavenly God. There, you were confronted with another reality, with the presence of a boundless God, whose grace was without any limits at all. You could never avoid that perspective of revelation. After all, you cannot hide in the desert; there is no room for lying or deceit there. Your very self is reflected in the dry desert, and you are obliged to face up to this self. Anything else would constitute a dangerous illusion, not a divine icon.

Abba Alonios states this quite simply: "If one does not say in one's heart, that in the world there is only myself and God, then one will simply not gain peace."

The desert is an attraction beyond oneself; it is an invitation to transfiguration. It was neither a better way, nor an easier way. The desert elders were not out to prove a point; they were there to prove themselves. Anthony the Great advises complete renunciation in this effort to hold God before one's eyes at all times: "Always have the fear of God before your eyes. Remember Him who gives death and life. Hate the world and all that is in it. Hate all peace that comes from the flesh. Renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God. Remember what you have promised God, for it will be required of you on the Day of Judgment. Suffer hunger; suffer thirst; suffer nakedness; be watchful and sorrowful; weep and groan in your heart; test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God; despise the flesh, so that you may preserve your souls."

Nothing should be held back in this surrender. It is all or nothing. The abandonment to God is absolute. As a result, the rewards are either fruitful or else frightening.

A brother renounced the world and gave his goods to the poor. However, he kept back just a little for his personal expenses and needs. He went to see Abba Anthony. When he told him of this, the old man said to him: "If you want to be a monk, go into the village, buy some meat, cover your naked body with this meat, and then come here like that." The brother did so. And the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. When he came back, the old man asked him whether he had followed his advice. The brother simply showed Abba Anthony his wounded body. Saint Anthony said: "Those who renounce the world but choose to keep back even a little for themselves are torn in this way by the demons."

The desert is a place of spiritual revolution, not of personal retreat. It is a place of inner protest, not outward peace. It is a place of deep encounter, not of superficial escape. It is a place of repentance, not recuperation. Living in the desert does not mean living without people; it means living for God. Saint Anthony the Great and the other desert dwellers never forgot this. They never sought to cut off their connections to other people instantly. They sought rather to refine these relationships increasingly.

Of course, the desert was, on a deeper level, always more than simply a place. It was a way. And it was not the desert

that made the Desert Fathers and Mothers, any more than it was the lion that made the martyrs. The various stories we read contain many examples that reveal the desert as a spiritual “locale” that was present everywhere, including the large and busy cities.

It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was someone who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession. Whatever he had beyond his needs, he would give to the poor; and every day he sang hymns with the angels.

It is the clear understanding of these elders that one does not have to move to the geographical location of the wilderness in order to find God. Yet, if you do not have to go to the desert, you do have to go through the desert. The Desert Fathers and Mothers always speak from their experience of the desert, even if they do not actually come out of that desert. The desert is a necessary stage on the spiritual journey. To avoid it would be harmful. To dress it up or conceal it may be tempting; but it also proves destructive in the spiritual path.

Ironically, you do not have to find the desert in your life; it normally catches up with you. Everyone does go through the desert, in one shape or another. It may be in the form of some suffering, or emptiness, or breakdown, or breakup, or divorce, or any kind of trauma that occurs in our life. Dressing this desert up through our addictions or attachments—to material goods, or money, or food, or drink, or success, or obsessions, or anything else we may care to turn toward or may find available to depend upon—will delay the utter loneliness and the inner fearfulness of the desert experience. If we go through this experience involuntarily, then it can be both overwhelming and crushing. If, however, we accept to undergo this experience voluntarily, then it can prove both constructive and liberating.

The physical setting of the desert is a symbol, a powerful reminder of a spiritual space that is within us all. In the United States, the grand desert of Arizona can assist us in recalling that inner space where we yearn for God. In Australia, the frightening outback can also guide us in our search for that heavenly “dream-time.” In Egypt, the sandy dunes of the desert resembled the unending search of these abbats and ammas for *abundant life* (Jn 10:10) and *a living spring of water*. (Jn 4:14).



A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

Abba Poimen the Great

SAINT GEORGE THE ELDER, A CONTEMPORARY SAINT COMMEMORATED ON NOVEMBER 4TH

Source: Elder Moses the Athonite, Saint George the Elder with the Gift of Precognition. The text refers to Saint George as “Elder,” because, at the time when Fr. Moses wrote it, the former had not yet been recognized as a saint of the Orthodox Church.

The blessed Elder George Karslides came from the Black Sea and was orphaned and left on his own very early in life. After being persecuted and imprisoned by the atheist regime in Georgia, he came to Greece where the humble man lived with such asceticism and zealous faith that he was granted the gifts of discretion, perception, precognition and prophecy.

Father George was born in Argyroupolis (Gümüşhane), in the Black Sea region, in 1901. He was orphaned at an early age and his upbringing fell to his devout grandmother. After the death of his grandmother and sister, he and his grandfather left for Erzurum in Greater Armenia. The death of his grandfather and the abuse of his brother took him to the Caucasus. Alone, poor, hurt and needy, accompanied by saints in dreams and visions, he arrived in Tiflis, in Georgia, and was taken by the bishop there to the Holy Monastery of the Life-Receiving Spring. He was clothed in the honorable monastic habit at the age of only nine (that is, he entered a pre-novitiate mode of existence) and would wear it for over half a century.

His Tonsure

He had loved the ascetic life and prayer since his childhood. On July 20th 1919, he was tonsured a monk and his name changed from Athanasios to Symeon. It is reported that at the moment when he was tonsured, the bells began ringing of their own accord.

At the monastery, he met an uncle of the bishop, who helped him spiritually. The atheist regime of the Revolution of 1917 persecuted the Church, the clergy and monasticism. Together with other monks of the monastery, he was imprisoned in a sunless, underground room, through which sewers ran. He withstood dreadful privations, trusting in God. Many of the brethren died martyrs’ deaths there. He himself escaped certain death through the aid of the Mother of God. On September 8th 1925, he was ordained to the priesthood and renamed *Giorgi* (George). He conducted services in Georgian.

He soon acquired the reputation of a discerning, perceptive Elder, who had the gift of precognition. Many people came from far and wide to make the young hieromonk’s acquaintance and seek his advice. In 1923 he left Tiflis for Sukhumi. In his frequent liturgies he would commemorate a great many names. In his cell, he studied and prayed continually. Abstinence, asceticism, vigils and fasting were

a constant part of his life. His prophecies were fulfilled, and people began to regard him as a saint. In 1929, he was able to come to Greece.

Arrival in Greece

He glorified God for his survival and successful escape away from the Communists. The Black Sea region, Georgia and Russia remained in his memory as places of struggles, hardships and sacrifices. From Thessaloniki, where he arrived on October 19th, 1929, he moved on to Katerini and then on further to the villages of Alonia, and Koukkos, Mikro Dasos near Kilkis, and finally, in 1930, to Sipsa near Drama. The maltreatment in the prison in Georgia had left him half-paralyzed, very weak and he often had great difficulty in walking; thus, he had to be carried to wherever he needed to go.

His only possessions were a few Church books in Georgian, priest's vestments, icons, and a part of the relics of his sister, Anna. Many people started to come to him for help. Father George, who loved God, the saints, his brethren and all other people, conducted services of intercession, confessed people and admonished them. In 1938, he built the little monastery of the Ascension. There, he would celebrate, confess, preach, foretell, work miracles for twenty years. His cell and the church became a true pool of Siloam for the bodily and spiritual ailments of many people.

He travelled to Jerusalem as a pilgrim and then to the Holy Mountain, where he met holy figures who convinced him to stay where he was, because the faithful had great need of his presence and witness. In 1941, he was miraculously saved from certain death at the hands of the Bulgarians, who had arrested him and wanted to execute him. The whole of his life passed as a continuous series of miracles. With the aid of Saint Nicholas, he was partially cured, at least to the extent that he could support himself.

He was always sparing, simple, fasting, vigilant, sickly and prayerful. He spoke little, was careful, strict and serious. He visited the sick and poor in great need, because he himself had been helped and he knew how to help others.

At the holy *proskomidi* (Office of Oblation), he would remember thousands of names of the living and the departed. Some of them he would make a note of, and, at the end of the Divine Liturgy would summon the relatives privately

and tell them the problems facing their loved ones, living or dead. If they were dead, he would tell the relatives how they had ended their lives.

Pure and innocent people saw him celebrate the Liturgy without his feet touching the ground. At the divine services he was luminous, peaceful and joyful. He co-celebrated with saints. "I rarely celebrate alone" the Elder would say. He was particularly devoted to the Mother of God, the Honorable Forerunner and Saint George. He would send ill and needy people to different saints and, through his prayers, everything would turn out well. Out of humility, he did not wish his unworthiness to be honored, but that God should be glorified by his saints. He used to call the saints "visitors," and he had the gift of being able to see the state of the souls in church.

The Elder observed the Canons of the Church very strictly and was not indulgent as regards inadmissible "dispensations." He was even stricter with the unrepentant. He held the vocation of Spiritual Father in very high esteem and took his responsibilities seriously. He had no desire to surround himself with supporters who would flatter him, but retained a discriminatory severity. His aim was always to bring humility to the persons confessing, along with genuine contrition and repentance, for the salvation of their immortal souls.

The Charismatic Pastor

His fervent faith, ascetic existence and pure life brought the humble and worthy servant of the highest gifts of discernment, perception, precognition and prophecy. God enlightened the blessed Elder to the extent that he could see things far away and in the past as if they were close and in the present, even, sometimes, things which were in the future, as many of his spiritual children relate. Some doubted the Elder's gifts, but when they got to know him they were not slow to recognize that he was truly a man of God. The Elder used his gifts for the assistance and salvation of souls, not to expose or shame people or to promote and boast about himself. He spoke with tears about imminent hardships in Greece: the German occupation in 1940, the Bulgarian incursion, and the Civil War. He read people's hearts like an open book. In order to retain his humility, he sometimes feigned stupidity, like foolishness for Christ. Such a virtue takes a great deal of effort to acquire and ample skill to preserve.

In his pastoral work, the Elder showed particular attention to women, who, because of their wealth of sensibili-



ity easily exaggerate the honor to be paid to others. He was “quietly” strict with them. However, he concealed a heart that was full of love for everyone. His almsgiving was always in secret. Once it got dark, he would send some of his confidantes off with clothes and food for the poor. He comforted those who were grieving and cared conscientiously for the departed. He loved children, gave them affectionate advice and shared little gifts with them unstintingly. He always tried to conceal himself and never wanted to be in the limelight or to be honored. The Elder never wanted anyone to leave his monastery hungry. He would cook and bake bread and share his efforts with everyone as a “blessing.” He was hard-working, tireless, charitable and open-handed.

For all of this, the faithful harbored great respect and love for the Elder. He accepted the love of his children, but did not provoke or desire it. He was humble and liked specially to talk about holy humility. In the end, he lived in sacred isolation. Most people did not understand him and some, indeed, misunderstood him. There were only a few who could understand the depth of his spirituality.

His Earthy End

He foresaw and foretold exactly the date of his departure from this life. Having been prepared for some time, he awaited it with even greater prayer, giving his final instructions to his spiritual children. Three days before his death, the sacrament of Divine Unction was celebrated. He made his communion. He forgave, blessed and made his farewells to everyone. He fell asleep on November 4th, 1959. The last words which passed his lips were: *Open to me the gate of loving-kindness, blessed Mother of God.*

An orphaned, grieving and inconsolable body of people accompanied him to his final resting place, behind the church of the Ascension, where he had served for about thirty years. His face was peaceful, joyful and radiant. His dead body was supple, just as is the case of those saintly monks on the Holy Mountain. The two cypress trees at his grave bent, as though in veneration, as he had foretold, and lots of birds gathered at the time of his burial, with no fear of the large crowd of people. Everyone was now certain that they were burying a saint. He had been asked to be buried in his vestments, with his cross and the liturgical books that he had brought from Georgia.

In 2008, Saint George was inscribed among the Saints of the Orthodox Church, in the city of Drama, Greece, and is commemorated on November 4th. He is one of few saints known to bear a very clear imprint of the sign of the cross on his skull.

Quotes

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

Strive to intensify your faith, and during the Divine Liturgy be un-distracted and attached to the celebration of the service so that you might be granted to behold the majesties of God.

Neither should wealth impress you, nor honor, but always walk justly. Eat your bread with your honorable sweat and not through unjust means. The things you gain honorably, do not squander aimlessly. Live honorably and humbly, and as much as possible extend your hands in charity. Knock on the doors of the poor, the sick, the orphans. You should prefer the homes of the afflicted to the homes of the joyous. If you do good works, you will have a great reward from God.

God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith. Love all your fellow men, even your enemies. This is the most basic thing. Always love not only those who love us, but also those who hate us. Let us forgive them and love them all even if they have done us the greatest evil; then we are truly children of God. Then our own sins are also forgiven. Always preach love. This is the most basic law of God: love and love alone.

Our Panaghia does not want big candles, she wants charity shown to the poor!



The prideful person has no inner substance. He is hollow—like an unripened stalk of wheat that stands tall, while the ripened stalk bends its little head. Not only is he in the dark, he is also inwardly disquiet and outwardly agitated and clamorous. For when there is pride, everything one does is merely a balloon inflated by the devil—who then pierces it with a needle, so that it breaks and makes a lot of noise. Pride is dishonorable, such a terrible thing, as it even turned angels into demons! Pride brought us down from Paradise to earth; and from earth, it is now trying to send us to hell...

St. Paisios the Athonite



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ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΑΤΑΙ, ΔΟΣΑΓΑΤΕ!

CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST IS AT HAND

By St. John of Kronstadt.



Beloved, the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is now at hand. Let us take care to meet it in Christian manner, spiritually. I already know how you intend to meet it: you will soon be going to the market place, where you will concern yourselves and prattle about much, about the manifold pleasures of the table; or you will take care only to adorn your body with festive clothing. *But as for the one thing needful* (Lk 10:42), about how

to sweeten your soul for the coming feast with spiritual food, or about how to adorn your soul with luminous thoughts—in short, how to meet and spend the feast worthily—this but rarely comes to anyone's mind.

But, beloved, food is always with us and our clothing is always with us, but the Lord's feast is not always with us; therefore, let us concern ourselves not with food and clothing, but rather with preparing ourselves to meet our Most-Pure Heavenly King. Let us concern ourselves with meeting the approaching feast worthily and spiritually. We have long since been chant-

ing *Christ is born*, which we chant in order to fathom beforehand the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, that is, why the Son of God descended to earth; why He was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, becoming man without ceasing to be God.

To what end? *To this end God descended to earth, that He might raise us to Heaven, says the Holy Church.* (*Akathist to the Sweetest Jesus*, Kontakion 8.) Remember this thought, and drive it into your hearts: that the Son of God descended to earth in order to save us from sin and eternal death and to raise us to heaven, that is, to where there is eternal life and eternal blessedness. If Christ descended to us in order to raise us to heaven, then we should ascend thereto beforehand in our thoughts and heartfelt desires, gradually turning our souls away from everything that binds us to the earth, to this country of exile in which there are so many temptations, afflictions, sicknesses, sorrows, with all its brevity, where we see only sin, allurements, and death with all its horrors.

Thus, before the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ arrives, let us adorn our souls with sobriety and purity of heart, that when Christ appears from heaven we might worthily meet His birth. Be attentive to yourselves: soon Christ will be on earth. Then raise your thoughts and hearts from earth to God and let us joyfully sing of the great mystery of the Nativity of the God-Man. If we meet this feast with such thoughts, and with such disposition of heart, then we will meet it worthily, in Christian manner, with benefit to our souls. Amen.