

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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THE GOSPEL ON THE FIRSTBORN

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "Homilies, vol. 1," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1996), pp. 13-23.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called his name Jesus.

[Mt 1:18-25]

He who, in obedience and humility, draws near to the Lord Jesus Christ will never again desire to be separated from Him.

The first exercise for a recruit in Christ's army is practice in obedience and humility. The new world, the new creation, the

new man: all began with obedience and humility. The old world trod obedience to God underfoot, together with humility towards Him, and by this destroyed the bridge linking earth and heaven. The spiritual materials for the rebuilding of this bridge are, before all else, obedience and humility.

While Adam was rich in obedience and humility, it was hardly possible to differentiate between his spirit and the Spirit of God, between his will and thoughts and those of God. He could feel, desire or think nothing that was not in God and of God. As the angels of God stood in the full presence of God, so did Adam (in a direct closeness), and from this closeness gazed on the Source of light, wisdom and love. He had no need to light a candle of his own, living as he did in the Sun Itself. His candle would, in the light of that Sun, neither have burned nor given light.

But when Adam violated obedience and lost humility—and those two are always gained or lost together—then his direct communication with God was cut off, the bridge was demolished and he fell into a fearsome, stagnant darkness, in which he had to light himself with his own candle, the candle that the mercy of God had given him when God's righteousness drove him out of Paradise. He then began not only to make a difference between himself and God, between his will and the will of God, his feelings and those of God, his thoughts and those of God—he not only began to make and see a difference, but was scarcely able (only now and then, in moments of enlightenment) to be aware of his likeness to God.

The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2018. We completed our thirteenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers, worldwide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2018 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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

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Alas, in what a miserable and abysmal state, through his disobedience and pride, does he find himself who was originally created *in the image and likeness* of the Holy and Divine Trinity Itself! (St. Philaret of Moscow says, in his homily on the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple: *In man in a sinless state, the image of God was the source of blessing; in fallen man, it was [only] the hope of blessing*). Alas, we are all descendants of Adam, all low shoots from the stump of the felled cedar that had once majestically been raised up above all God’s creatures in Paradise; low shoots overcome by the tall weeds of cruel, brutal nature, which had grown up like a curtain between him and the Source of immortal love.

Only see how, as at the waving of a magician’s wand, the disobedience and pride of man’s forefather all at once change all creation around him, and he becomes surrounded by an army of the disobedient and the proud!

While Adam was obedient and humble before his Creator, all around him breathed obedience and humility. But what a change came about in the twinkling of an eye! At the moment of Adam’s fall, he was surrounded by the disobedient. Here was disobedient Eve beside him. Here was the chief disseminator of disobedience and pride, the spirit of disobedience—Satan. Here was the whole of nature—disobedient, rebellious and full of fury. Fruit, that had till then melted with sweetness in man’s mouth, began to smite him with its bitterness. Grass, that had wrapped itself around his feet like silk, began to scratch him like needles. Flowers, that had rejoiced in giving their scent for their lord to breathe, began to smother themselves with weeds, to keep him away from them. Wild beasts, that had fawned round him like lambs, began to spring on him with sharpened teeth and eyes aflame with fury. Everything took a wild and aggressive stance towards Adam. And the richest of all creatures felt himself to be the poorest. Clothed formerly in angelic glory,

he now felt himself humiliated, lonely and naked; so naked that he was forced to borrow clothing from nature to cover his nakedness, both physical and spiritual. For his body, he began to borrow skins from the animals and leaves from the trees; and for his spirit, he began to borrow from all creatures—from creatures!—knowledge and skills. He who had formerly drunk from the overflowing Fount of life was now forced to go with the animals, to bend down in the mud and drink at the trough in order to slake his physical and spiritual thirst.

Look now at the Lord Christ. All is obedience and humility. The Archangel Gabriel, the representative of angelic obedience and humility; the Virgin Mary—obedience and humility; Joseph—obedience and humility; the shepherds—obedience and humility; the wise men from the East—obedience and humility. Storms obedient, winds obedient, sun and moon obedient, men obedient, beasts obedient; the grave itself obedient. All is obedient to the Son of God, the New Adam, and all is humble before Him, for He also is unconditionally obedient to His Father, and is humble before Him.

It is known that, together with much that man sows in the earth and cultivates, other plants and herbs readily spring up, that have been neither sown nor cultivated. So it is with the virtues: you may carefully sow and cultivate obedience and humility in your soul, and you will see that a whole bouquet of other virtues will quickly shoot up beside them. One of the first will be simplicity, both within and without. The obedient and humble Virgin Mary was adorned at the same time with child-like simplicity. This was also true of righteous Joseph, and also of the apostles and evangelists. Only look at the unparalleled simplicity with which the evangelists record the greatest events in the history of man’s salvation, in the history of the universe! Could you imagine in what detail and with what theatricality a secular writer would write, for example, about the raising of

Lazarus, were he to have witnessed that event? Or what sort of prosy and pretentious drama he would have written about all that came to pass in the soul of the obedient, humble and simple Joseph at the moment when he discovered that the girl under the protection of betrothal to him was pregnant? This is recorded by the Evangelist in a few, simple sentences: *But the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.* Before this, the Evangelist had given the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, or, more precisely, that of righteous Joseph, from the Tribe of Judah and the House of David. In this genealogy, the Evangelist listed men, born of men in a natural way, such as all mortal men on earth are born. He then suddenly begins to record the Lord's birth, and says: *But the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise* as though, with this "but", he wants to show the unusual and supernatural nature of His birth, completely divorced from the manner of birth of all Joseph's recorded forebears. Mary, His mother, was betrothed to Joseph. In the eyes of the world, this betrothal was seen as an introduction to married life; but, in the eyes of Mary and Joseph, it could not be seen like this.

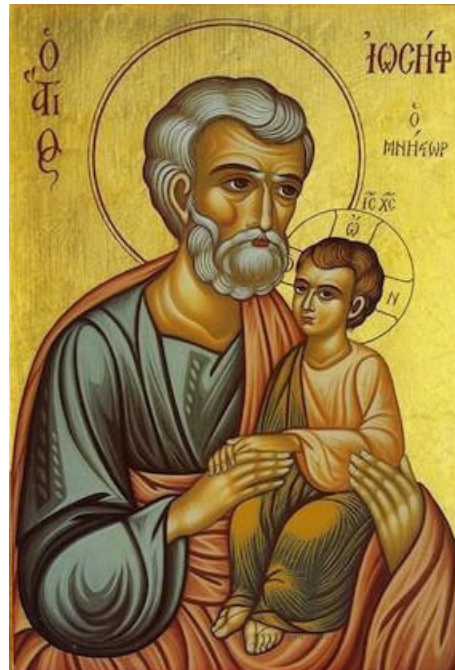
Sought with tears from God, the Virgin Mary was consecrated to God by her parents' vow. She, on her part, voluntarily took this vow made by her parents upon herself, as is seen in her many years of service in the Temple at Jerusalem. Could she have followed her own inclinations, she would undoubtedly have spent the rest of her life in the Temple, like Anna the daughter of Phanuel (Lk 2:36-37), but the law ruled otherwise, and so it had to be. She was betrothed to Joseph, not to live in marriage with him but in order to escape marriage. All the details of this betrothal, and its meaning are to be found in the Church's tradition. And if men were to value tradition with reference to the Mother of God, to righteous Joseph and to all the people involved who are mentioned in the Gospel, as much as they value traditions—some of them of the wildest—about the rulers, leaders and wise men of this world, the meaning of the betrothal of the Most Holy Virgin Mary to Joseph would be clear to all.

St Ignatius says that the Virgin was betrothed *that His birth should be concealed from the devil; that the devil should think of Him as born of a married woman, and not of a virgin.* This is also found in Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* and in Gregory of Neocaesarea's *Second Talk on the Annunciation.*

Before they came together... These words do not mean that they afterwards came together as man and wife, or that this was in the Evangelist's mind. The Evangelist is, in this case, interested only in the birth of the Lord Jesus, and nothing else, and he

writes the above words in order to show that His birth was without the coming together of man and woman. Therefore understand the wise words of the Evangelist, as though he had written: *and without their coming together, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.* Only by the Holy Spirit could He be conceived who was, in the midst of the kingdom of darkness and evil, to found the Kingdom of the Spirit of light and love. How would He be able to fulfill His divine mission on earth if He had come on earth through all the usual earthly channels, blocked as they are by sin and stinking of mortal corruption? In that case, new wine would have stunk of old wineskins, and He who had come to save the world would have been in need of salvation. The world could only be saved by a miracle from God; this was the belief of all men on earth. And when God's miracle is wrought, it must not be doubted but venerated, and healing sought from it, and salvation.

How did Joseph react to the knowledge of the Virgin Mary's



pregnancy? *And Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.* He acted, we see, in obedience to God's law. He was obedient to God's will insofar as it had, up till then, been revealed to the Israelites. He also acted in humility before God. *Justify not thyself,* warns wise Solomon (Sir 7:5). That is: do not force too much justice on those who sin, but feel your own weakness and your own sins, and strive with mercy to lighten justice towards sinners.

Imbued with this Spirit, Joseph did not consider giving the Virgin Mary over to justice for the suspected sin: *and not willing to make her a public example (he) was minded to put her away privily.* This plan of his shows us what an exemplary man Joseph was, exemplary in justice and in

mercy, such a one as the Spirit of the old Law was able to instruct. With him, all was as simple and clear as it could be in the soul of a God-fearing man.

Righteous Joseph had only just found a suitable way out when heaven intervened in his plan with an unexpected command: *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."* The angel of God, who had earlier proclaimed to the most pure Virgin the coming into the world of the God-Man, now comes to clear the way before Him and level it out beneath His feet. Joseph's doubt was a hindrance on His way—a very great and dangerous hindrance that must be removed. In order to show how easy it is for the heavenly powers to do things that are very difficult for men, the angel did not appear to Joseph in a vision, but in a dream. With these

words to Joseph the son of David, the angel wanted both to reward him and to warn him. As a descendant of King David, you should rejoice at this divine mystery more than other men, and you should also understand better than others.

But how is it that the angel refers to the Virgin as his wife: *Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife?* In the same way that the Lord said from the Cross to His mother: *Woman, behold thy son!* and to His disciple: *Behold thy mother!* (Jn 19:26-27). Indeed, heaven is sparing with words, and says nothing superfluous. If it had not been necessary to say this, why did the angel say it? If this calling Mary the wife of Joseph is a stumbling block to some unbelievers, it is a defense of purity against the impure powers. For God's words are not listened to only by men, but by all worlds, both good and evil. He who wishes to penetrate to the heart of all God's mysteries, the same must have God's view of all things, visible and invisible.

That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. This is God's act, and not man's. Don't look to nature, or be fearful of the law. This is the action of Him who is greater than nature and stronger than the law, without Whom nature would have no life, nor the law force.

From this that the angel announced to Joseph, it is clear that the Virgin Mary had told him nothing of her earlier encounter with the great archangel, as it is clear that now, when Joseph intended to put her away, she did not justify herself in any way. The angel's message, as all the heavenly mysteries that were gradually revealed to her, she kept, and pondered in her heart (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). In her faith in God and obedience to Him, she shrank from no humiliation at the hands of men. *If my sufferings are pleasing to God, why should I not endure them?*, said some of the Christian martyrs later. Living in constant prayer and pondering on God, the Most Pure was also able to say: *If my humiliation is pleasing to God, why should I not endure it? Only let me be righteous before God, who knows the heart, and the world can do what it likes with me.* She knew this: that the world could do nothing to her unless God allowed it. What gentle humility before the living God this is, and what wonderful devotion to His will! And further—what a heroic spirit is seen in this delicate maiden: *The secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him.* (Pss 24/25:13). While sinners, in our day as in all days, bring even false witnesses to testify for them, the Virgin Mary, who had no man to testify for her, but God almighty, did not justify herself; she was not disturbed, but remained silent—and waited for God, in His good time, to justify her. And God hastened to justify His chosen one.

This same angel who had revealed to her the great mystery of her conceiving, made haste to speak now in place of the silent Virgin. Explaining, then, to Joseph that which had already come to pass, the angel of God went further, and explained to him that which was to be: *And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for he shall save His people from their sins.* Chrysostom says: *He does not say: "she will bear you a son," but simply "will bear," because she does not bear for*

him alone, but for the whole world. The angel told Joseph to behave towards the Newborn as though he were His real father, and he therefore says: *"and thou shalt name Him Jesus.* "Jesus" means "Savior", and so the next sentence begins with "for", meaning: *thou shalt name Him "Savior", for He shall save His people from their sins.*

The Archangel is God's true messenger. He speaks that which he learns from God; he sees the truth in God. For him, nature with all its laws is as though it did not exist. He knows only the almighty power of the living God, as Adam once knew it. In saying: "He shall save His people from their sins", the Archangel foretold the greatest of Christ's acts. Christ was to come and save men, not from some external evil but from the greatest evil, from sin, that is the source of all the evil in the world. He is to save the tree of humanity, not from a host of caterpillars that descends on it one year, but from the worm at its roots, from which the whole tree withers. He comes, not to save man from men, or people from peoples, but to save all men and all peoples from Satan, the sower and lord of sin. He comes, not like the Maccabee brothers, or Barabbas or Bar-Kohba, to stir up rebellion against the Romans, who had descended like a host of caterpillars on the Israelite people to devastate them, but like an immortal and universal doctor, before whose coming the Israelites and the Romans, the Greeks and the Egyptians, and all the peoples on earth, sick and more than sick, were fading away from one and the same virus - from sin. Christ was later perfectly to fulfil the archangel's prediction. "Thy sins are forgiven" was His victorious pronouncement throughout the whole of His earthly ministry among men. These words contained both the diagnosis of the sickness and the medicine. Sin: the diagnosis of the sickness; the forgiveness of sins: the medicine. And Joseph was the first of mortal men in the New Creation to be made worthy to know the real purpose of the Messiah's coming, and the true nature of His ministry.

That which the Archangel has told Joseph up to now is enough for the latter, in obedience to this new and direct command from God, to break off his thoughts and also his plan to put Mary away. Heaven commands—Joseph obeys. But it is not heaven's usual way to give commands to men without an appeal to their understanding and free response. It was, from the beginning, God's will that man act as a free being. In freedom, in man's free decision, rests all the beauty of man's being. Without freedom, man would only be an artificial, mechanical thing of God's making, held and activated by God solely by His will and power. There are plenty of such things made by God in nature, but He destined a special place for man, giving him freedom to decide for God or against Him, for life or for death. A position full of honor, and at the same time full of danger. The command that God gives to Adam is not, therefore, just a simple one: *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it,* and God immediately adds: *or in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.* (Gen 2:16-17). In this last sentence, God

gives man a reason for his understanding, and a motive for his will, not to eat of the forbidden tree—for *in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. The angel acts in the same way now with Joseph. Having given this command to take and not put her away, and having explained that the fruit of her virgin womb was of the Holy Spirit, the Archangel reminds Joseph of the clear prophecy by the great prophet: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel*. (Isa 7:14), and Matthew adds this further clarification: *which being interpreted is "God with us."*

That which has already been said: *And thou shalt call His name Jesus*, does not stand in opposition to what is said here: *and shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is: "God with us."* In the first case, Joseph is told to give Him the name Jesus (Savior), and in the second case, it is stated that the young child shall be called, by peoples and nations, Emmanuel (God with us). The one name and the other, each in its way, gives profound expression to the reason for Christ's coming into the world and His ministry within it. He will come to forgive sins, to have mercy on men and save them from sin, and so will be called the Savior—Jesus. "*Who can forgive sins but God only?*" (Mk 2:7). No-one in the world: no-one either in heaven or on earth has the right to forgive sins and save from sin but God Himself, for sin is the worm at the heart of this world's sickness. No-one knows the abysmal horror of sin as God, who is sinless; and no-one can dig out the worm of sin but God. So, as Jesus forgave sin and thus made men whole, He is God among men. If one were to place the names in order of causality, the name "Emmanuel" would come before the name "Jesus." For the Newborn to be able to carry out the work of salvation, He had to be Emmanuel—to come as God among us. But, whichever way round, they have the same meaning: Emmanuel is the Savior, and the Savior is Emmanuel. In any case, one thing is clearer than anything else in the world, and that is that there is no salvation in this world if God does not come into it, and that there is neither healing nor salvation for us men if God is not with us, not as some idea or lovely dream, but with us as we are—with a soul as we have, a body as we have, in poverty and suffering as we are and finally, in that in which we are most different from God—in death as we are.

Therefore, every faith that teaches that God did not come in the flesh, and that He cannot come in the flesh, is false, as it presents God as both weak and uncaring: it presents Him as a stepmother, and not as a mother. It presents Him as weak, because it always keeps Him back from the greatest battle—the battle with Satan, sin and death. Satan must be bound; the first growth of sin must be uprooted from the human soul; the snake's tongue of death must be crushed—a labor must be undertaken that is greater and harder than that of Atlas in bearing the world on his shoulders. Our God fought this battle, and did so victoriously. Men of other faiths fear, even in their thoughts, to allow their gods such a battle, in which their opponents might be victorious. What sort of a mother

would it be who would not bend down to the earth out of love for her child, to comfort it, rock it and croon over it? And how much the more if the child were in danger of fire or wild beasts? O Lord, forgive us such questions! How couldst Thou be the compassionate Creator of the world and not have come down in Thy mercy among us? How couldst Thou, only from a misty and painless distance, have looked on our wretchedness and placed no cool finger on us in the flames nor moved into the den where we are attacked by wild beasts? In truth, Thou hast come down among us, even lower than any sort of earthly love demands. Thou wast born in the flesh, to live and save those in the flesh; Thou didst drink of the cup of all Thy creatures' suffering, sharing with none this cup of bitter communion, but Thyself draining it. Thou art therefore our Savior, for Thou hast been God among us: Thou hast been God among us because Thou wast able to be our Savior. Glory to Thee, o Jesus our Emmanuel!

To go back to Joseph: he, with fear and trembling, saw more and more clearly that a tapestry was being woven around him, more penetrating than the sun's light and more all-embracing than the air; a tapestry of which the canvas is the Almighty, and the angels and all creation the silken strands. It fell to his lot to serve as God's instrument in the center of the tapestry of the New Creation. While a man is unaware that God acts through him, he is weak and feeble, hesitant and cautious. But when a man senses that God has taken him into His hands, as a blacksmith takes iron to make a shoe, he feels at the same time both strong and humble, decisive in his actions and upheld by his God.

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel had commanded him, and took the Virgin Mary to himself again, *and knew her not until she had brought forth her Firstborn Son, and he called His name Jesus*. When we read the Gospels, we must enter into the Evangelist's mind, and not project our mind into the Gospel. The Evangelist himself marvels as he speaks of the wonder of the Savior's birth. His main task is to show that this birth came about in a wondrous manner. This that the Evangelist Matthew emphasizes is already the fourth proof of this. **Firstly**, he says that the Virgin Mary was only betrothed to Joseph; **secondly**, that she found herself *with child of the Holy Ghost*; **thirdly**, that the angel, in a dream, showed that her pregnancy was wondrous and supernatural and, **fourthly**, we see here that the angel now repeats this same thought with the words that Joseph *knew her not until she had brought forth her Firstborn Son*. It is, therefore, as clear as day that the Evangelist has no thought of saying that, after this birth, Joseph had carnal relations with Mary. That which was not so until she had brought forth her Son was not so afterwards, when she had borne Him. If we say of someone that, during the celebration of the Liturgy in church, he paid no attention to the priest's words, we do not mean that, once the service was over, he became attentive to them. Or, when we say that a shepherd sings while the sheep graze, we do not think that he stops singing when the sheep stop grazing. St. Theophylact

says: *As it was said at the time of the Flood, that the raven did not return to the Ark while the earth had not dried out, it naturally did not return to it afterwards, or as Christ said: "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," does that mean that He will not be afterwards.* The word "firstborn" therefore applies exclusively to the Lord Jesus (Pss 88/89:28; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-16; Heb 1:5-6; Rom 8:29), who is the first among all kings and *the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom 8:29), which means: among all saved and adopted men. If the word "firstborn" were to be written with a capital letter, as a special title, there would be no doubt of its meaning. Or, if a comma were placed before the word "firstborn, there would be no doubt or confusion. This is how it must be read: as though "Firstborn" were a title, with a comma before it: *and she brought forth her Son, the Firstborn.* The Lord Jesus is the Firstborn as the Creator of the New Kingdom, as the New Adam.

It is said of St. Ammon (Oct. 4th) that he spent eighteen years in wedlock without having physical relations with his wife. The holy martyr Anastasia (Dec. 22nd) also spent a number of years married to Publius, a Roman senator, without consummating the marriage. We quote here only two instances among thousands of others. By her most pure virginity, before, during and after giving birth, the Virgin Mary has turned thousands of girls and young men to a life of virginity throughout the Church's history. Looking to her virginity, many married women have broken off their marriage and devoted themselves to virginal purity. Looking at her, many leading a deeply immoral life have turned from their immorality, cleansing their mired souls with tears and prayer. How, then, could it be imagined that the most pure Virgin, the pillar and inspiration of Christian purity and virginity through the ages, was on a lower level of virginity than that of Anastasia, Thecla, Barbara, Katharine, Paraskeve and all the rest, without number? Or, how would it be possible to imagine that she who bore in the flesh her passionless Lord could ever have known the shadow of physical passion? She who carried and gave birth to God *was a virgin, not only in the flesh but in the spirit*, as St. Ambrose says. And Chrysostom compares the Holy Spirit with a bee, saying: *As a bee will not enter a stinking vessel, so the Holy Spirit will not enter into an impure soul.*

Let us stop speaking about this, about which we should speak less and marvel more. There where obedience and humility towards God have their abode, there is purity. The Lord heals His obedient and humble servants of every earthly passion and lust. Let us give ourselves over to the cleansing of our consciences, our souls, our hearts and our minds, that we may be made worthy of the blessed power of the Holy Spirit; that the earth may once more stop sowing its seed in our inner man, so that the Holy Spirit may begin in us new life and a new man, like to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit—the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.

A REFLECTION ON HIS NATIVITY...

By Fr. Dcn. Charles Joiner, December 2014.

The Lord of David and Son of David hid His glory in swaddling clothes. His swaddling clothes gave a robe of glory to human beings.

[St. Ephraim the Syrian]

He came in a most humble way delivered in a stable and wrapped in simple clothing. Yet as St. Ephraim says, this simple beginning gave to all mankind robe of glory. What is this robe of glory?

When we think of this robe of glory that He gave us we must first think back to His nature and the way He was brought into the world. He came in humility and left this world in humility. His robe was not made of golden threads. His birth and subsequent life had nothing to do with material well being. He lived with a pure heart, one that glorified God, one that shone for all to see.

We must begin our reflection on this day with total humility. We must admit our weaknesses, our ways that deviate from what He taught and demonstrated to us. We must acknowledge our pride and our desire to hide our dirty inner clothing with fancy outer clothing. We must admit that we do not have this robe of glory that He brought for all humankind. We must make ourselves feel His humility.

With this reflection we must also remember the unending and limitless love He has for all His children. Acknowledging His love for us we can be joyful that we are held in His loving and merciful arms. We can be joyful that we are so important to God and in our knowledge that He will do anything to guide us towards His perfection. He holds for us a robe of glory.

Let us rejoice in this glory that awaits us. Let us recognize Jesus for Who He really is, God Incarnate. Let us lay aside all our doubts about God and His Church. Let us for a short moment try on that robe of glory. Let us experience His peace and love of all humankind. Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Glorify Him. Follow Him.

† † †

This Christmas night bestowed peace on the whole world; let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Gentle One; let no one be cruel. This is the night of the Humble One; let no one be proud.

Now is the day of joy; let us not revenge. Now is the day of Good Will; let us not be mean. In this Day of Peace; let us not be conquered by anger.

Today the Bountiful impoverished Himself for our sake; so, rich one, invite the poor to your table. Today we receive a Gift for which we did not ask; let us give alms to those who implore and beg us. This present Day cast open the heavenly doors to our prayers; let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Today the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of our humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the Seal of Divinity.

[St. Isaac the Syrian]

DEVOTION TO PRAYER

By Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra, from "The Church at Prayer: The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart," *Holy Convent of the Annunciation, Ormylia, Greece (2005)*, pp. 54-63.

If we wish to devote ourselves to the Jesus Prayer, we must also recognize that we have a problem. We are imprisoned within the confines of our worries and concerns. We are always in a hurry. We get tired. We become disillusioned. We live with stress, we are troubled by disturbing thoughts, by our passions, by inner storms. In order to sleep, we need to be on the point of exhaustion; and in order to be happy, we have to listen to music, or find some other amusement. This is no life at all! It tires us out, and doesn't allow us to pray as much and in the way that we want.

This is why the Fathers assure us that the words of God *refresh and strengthen the soul, as wine strengthens the body* (Ephraim the Syrian, cited in Paul the Monk, Evergetinos, vol. 2). Know that the word of God is to be found both in Scripture and in the Holy Fathers. We must diligently study both; and among the latter, the ascetic Fathers particularly. We must likewise always be attentive to our work, not squandering our strength needlessly, but expending it responsibly on the duties which are before us. In this way our life will become a daily spiritual exercise, and, coupled with spiritual study, will smooth the ground of the soul, rendering it capable of rising upwards.

In order to pray, you need to cultivate one important quality. Just as we look after the health of our body, so too should we attend to the health of the soul. It is necessary that we should be joyful. When we become accustomed to pray, the joy of Christ is granted to us, along with much else besides. If you're sad when you're praying, if you're depressed, then something inside you isn't right. You should look to it, give it your attention, because a person's character plays an important role in prayer.

Listen to what fine things were said about St. Savvas of Vato-paidi, who underwent the greatest sufferings: *He was most joyful in conversation, and in appearance exceedingly gentle and charming.* (Philotheos Kokkinos, "Life of St. Savvas the Younger"). In his dealings with others, he always had a bright smile, the sweetest face, and the whole of him was filled with grace. How much more so in his dealings with God, when, during prayer, he became like a bright sun!

Another ascetic Father, St. Neilos, tells us *that prayer is a matter of joy and thanksgiving.* Do you want to know if your prayer is true? Take note of this: does exultation spring from your heart, does it move you to thanksgiving? For *when you are at prayer, and it produces a joy beyond all else, then you have truly found prayer.* (Philokalia, "On Prayer 15").

Prayer, then, because it is communion with God, brings joy. Of course, we need to struggle against sin, and against our passions. But this should not discourage us, since we have surrendered our life to Jesus Christ. However, struggle is necessary if our

life is to be blessed. If we wish to succeed at prayer, we should not harbor any bitterness against anyone, we should not get mixed up in another person's life, create stress for them, or hurt anyone's feelings or upset them. Neither should we be upset by anyone else. All our social interactions should be natural and simple. We should feel that all people are one and the same, considering ourselves to be *one self with all*, without, of course, denying our beliefs or departing from our proper conduct. Then prayer is easy. It is enough for us to let God work in us, just as the farmer sows the seed and waits for the gentle rain.

We will therefore continue to struggle. We will call to mind the Name of Jesus, some with the lips, others with the mind, still others with the mind in the heart, and others as divine grace grants them when it visits them, when their spirit flashes like lightning, and, crying out, they encounter God. If we do all these things, God will drop the dew of Hermon into our soul and will make us joyful and true.

It is worth devoting much time, indeed as much time as we can, to putting into practice the patristic saying: *compel yourself to pray much* (Abba Isaiah, "Discourse 4.1), leaving everything else to the Lord. And if we can say only one prayer, even this has value. Moreover, St. Isaac the Syrian says, *consider every prayer which you utter in the night to be of greater worth than, all the activity of the day.* ("Ascetical Homily 64"). And thus our one, small prayer is even more precious when it is offered during the night.

Leave everything to God. Get on with your work and let your mind be on prayer! And choose a good guide, who can lead you by the hand to Christ. We must, however, stress that with respect to the spiritual life, all things are done for us by the grace of God, and thus we should be at peace.

The Fathers tell us that the invocation of the Name of Jesus, the practice of the prayer of the heart, is like a flask of myrrh. You open it, you pour some out, and the place is filled with fragrance. When you cry out: *Lord Jesus Christ*, the fragrance of the Holy Spirit is given off, and you receive a *pledge of the divine Spirit.* This is because the *Holy Spirit, suffering together with us, descends, and is moved to the desire for spiritual prayer.* (Philokalia, "On Prayer 63"). Moreover, the Spirit prays instead of us, if we are able forget about ourselves. Then he takes on our failings, our impurities, and the whole poverty of our existence. When we pray, we become temples of God, and priestly ministers of a great mystery. In the beautiful words of one Church Father, *"take a censer and offer incense, because Christ is here in your heart, from which the words "Lord Jesus Christ" rise like the sun.* Elsewhere he says that *when we hear the sound of the censer, let us remember that we are a temple, and let us feel in our minds that we are offering incense to Christ, who is within us, and thus let us venerate the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.* (St. Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Life of Moses").

Just think: within us is the kingdom of God, his dwelling place, where we "confine that which has no body within a

body”, so that the “worship of heavenly things” takes place within our hearts”. We acquire God, and God is inseparably bound up with all the saints, for they, like us, have all been nourished on the same milk, having been fed at the breast of the Holy Spirit. Thus the saints are our brothers and friends. They wait for us, love us, and secure our blessedness, as the Prophet Isaiah says: “Blessed is he who has relatives and friends in Jerusalem” (Isa 31.9). We acquire as our friends and relatives all the saints of Christ, who live above, in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Do you remember the words of Christ? *There are some standing here, who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come with power.* (Mk 9:1). This is applicable to us, too. We live, that is, we experience “in power,” the kingdom of God, when we say the Prayer of Jesus. And when we do, the Spirit makes us worthy to know God. And the saints attain to Christ, about whom some think that no one sees, and no one knows. And yet!... through prayer we understand that which is beyond understanding, namely, the *incomprehensible and transcendently radiant content of our God* (St. Dionysios the Areopagite, “On the Divine Names”), because the grace of the Spirit wells up from every fount, initiating us into the unspeakable beauty of God.

And if we don’t reach as far as that, the Prayer of the Heart will nevertheless bring us abundant blessings, consolation, pleasure, forgiveness, and salvation, to each as it is best for him. This is what God gives.

And if we have not enjoyed such fruits, it does not mean that others have not tasted of them. The saints many times beheld the glimmerings of the Godhead, for God revealed self to them as light! God is hidden. No one sees him. This is why he is said to be within a *thick cloud*, or *shrouded in darkness*. (Exod 19.9). God is light, but to us he is invisible. Even so, to the extent that God has revealed himself, many saints have seen God, who filled them with his own, holy light.

This is clear from the Life of St. Savvas (“Life of St. Savvas”), whom we mentioned a moment ago. He was filled with divine longing. And while he sat in silence, his heart seeking God, suddenly God appeared to him, and said *I am here!* Look at me, it is I! How grand and godlike! And how did God appear to him? In what manner? In what form? How? As *light flowing from heaven in abundance*. Light, we are told, enveloped everything. It entered into him, first dominating his mind, afterwards his senses, and then covered all the members of his body.

After that, the saint was so radiant, so fragrant, that people flocked in the thousands to see him, to imbibe the fragrance,

to partake of it, and they painted his image on planks—on *planks and boards*, it says—while he was still alive. They treated him and honored him as a saint, because they saw the sanctity portrayed on his face.

And the *Life* goes on: *Take care, because these are the mysteries of the Lord. The Godhead appears in all its beauty, in all its glory, in all its unspeakable delight, and its light transforms the man upon whom it is poured forth.* Such a man can see God, and all those things beyond the heavens which eye has not seen.

After this, the saint, *wounded by the sweet arrow of the Lord*, speaks to the light: *Where do you dwell, and upon whom do you look? Show me your glory, so that I may know you (Ex 33.13). I want to see you as you are.* And then he heard a voice: *But you have been completely divinized by partaking in due measure of the Godhead. There is no need for me to tell you where I dwell—I who am God—for you yourself have become god, receiving my light from me.*

How many times, my dear friends, have the saints seen this light, even if we have never seen it ourselves? But it is enough that you say the Prayer, and abide with Christ. These are the fruits of the Prayer of the Holy Mountain.

Finally, let us see how prayer is lived and experienced on the Holy Mountain.

There is an ascetic on the Holy Mountain—I won’t give you his name; he is still living—who is given to saying: “Ach! Twenty-four hours a day aren’t enough for me to pray!” Do you sense what sort of prayer this man practices? Do you realize how far above the earth he is? Can you imagine what sweetness he feels as

he turns his eyes and his heart increasingly toward God?

Yes, they pray on the Holy Mountain, in the monasteries and outside the monasteries. Great figures have emerged in recent years, such as Daniel Katounakiotes (+1929); Kallinikos the Hesychast (+1930), and so many others. One of our own monks, blessed Old Arsenios, who fell asleep a few years ago, didn’t even want to sleep, but rigged himself up by a rope, and leaned on a piece of wood, in order to pray without ceasing.

Many monks have done this. When he prayed and made prostrations, he would hang his head on the floor. He said: “I’m a sinner and God won’t hear my prayer, but at least let him hear the hanging of my head. My sin is so great that prayer doesn’t dare come out of my mouth!” And yet he had such grace! He prayed constantly. You should have seen his face. And if you could have seen how he fell asleep, you would have said, “truly, the death of a righteous man is blessed.”



More recently there was another ascetic. He often needed hours to celebrate the liturgy, because he was visited by the saints, who celebrated with him. Sometimes he took so long that he sent his disciples away, so that he could be alone, and they wouldn't be startled. And when his ecstasy ended, he would open the door and say, "let's resume the Liturgy..."

Another monk was praying at night, during the office, when a remarkable thing happened. His mind left his body and flew out over the sea, it went to the mountains and the valleys, looked at the trees, the flowers, the fish of the sea, and saw and heard that everything in creation glorifies God. From that day forward he was unable to stand at all, and from his darting eyes, tears never ceased to flow. He saw, and said, that creation, even though it lacks a soul, pours out tearful praises to God, "whereas I, who have a soul, am lost in sin."

Hesychasts and ascetics, in unbroken succession, have never been absent from the Holy Mountain, down to the present day and hour. Let us call to mind St. Silouan (+1938), whose entire life was a constantly flourishing prayer. More recently, Elder Joseph Spelaiotes (the Hesychast, +1959) devoted his life to prayer, which he absorbed deeply. He made it his strength, and experienced it as the sweetness of Paradise. He is survived by many spiritual children and grandchildren.

From the Holy Mountain, the Prayer of Jesus has been communicated to the world. It was from here that St. Paisius Velitchkovski (+1794) gave the Prayer to the Slavs. Father Sophronios, also an Athonite, has done the same thing in Europe.

Athos also influenced St. Athanasios of Meteora, as well as St. Dionysios of Olympus, and they inspired many others, who cannot be numbered. Symeon Monochiton, Iakovos the Elder, St. Theonas, the Kollyvades ... the Prayer has hastened into the entire world. And so there are Holy Mountains in Russia! And in Serbia there are Holy Mountains! Wherever you go. In Europe there are now monasteries populated by Athonites, and they do nothing else but disseminate the Jesus Prayer, as much as they are able.

What would our life be like, dear friends, without the Prayer of Jesus? And what would the world be without it? A heart which does not have this prayer seems to me to be like a plastic bag—now you put something into it, but it will soon tear and you'll throw it away. That which gives meaning to our life, to our existence, is prayer, because it is prayer which gives us God. They say that life will come to an end when men cease to pray. But is it possible for them ever to stop praying? No. Because there will always be those who love the Lord. And as long as such souls exist, the world will not be lost. Unceasing prayer is the hidden life of the world. And thus the world will not perish, but will be renewed, and just as it now *groans in travail* because of the corruption of nature (cf. Rom 8.22), so too, when *the new earth and the new heaven* appear (2 Pet 3:13), it will rejoice in the eternal joy and glory of the human race, made radiant in the outpouring of divine light.

Let us pray. Let us mystically keep our censers burning, because, as we said, when we keep the Name of Jesus on our lips or in our heart, we become tabernacles of God, we become Godhearers.

Solomon says somewhere that God chose for his dwelling place the sun, the created light—but God, who is uncreated light—left it! It was not possible even for a vast and dazzling star to be the dwelling place of the great God. And so God left the sun, and made the "dark cloud" his dwelling place, clothing himself in darkness and invisibility. Now, if we cannot look at the sun, how would we look at Christ, full of light, the sun of life, who transcends all creation? And so he hides himself in invisibility, so that we can be free, and believe, and choose God. When Solomon set about building his temple, he gathered together materials of gold, silver, emeralds, and whatever else was most precious, expending more wealth than any one since in order to make a house for God. When he was finished, however, he said that he had prepared another house for God "*to dwell in anew*" (1 Kgs 8:53). That new house is the Church.

My dear friends, we too have a house for the Lord to dwell in: our heart. Do you remember what the Lord said when he ascended into heaven? *I will be with you always*. (Mt 28:20). And this is why, during the last living act of the Liturgy, the elevation of the sacred Chalice, the priest says: *Forever, now and always, and unto the ages of ages*. What does that mean? It is as if Christ is saying: I am going away. I am entering into My dark cloud, I am returning to My invisibility, and you will lose sight of Me. But remember that I am always before you, I am always within you. I will remain here unseen, unobserved, in the innermost parts of the sanctuary, to be consumed by the priest, so that you can consume Me as well, whenever you want.

And so, my dear brothers, make ready your spiritual censers, and procure fragrances for your souls, because God has chosen neither the sun, nor the temple of Solomon, which he permitted to be destroyed. Why? Because He wanted His house to be, through prayer, the heart of each of us.



The Christian, approaching God with a prayer to Him, or to His most pure Mother, or to the angels and saints, in order to insure the success of his prayer, ought to try to resemble as far as possible the Lord Himself, or His most-pure Mother, or the angels and saints. In this lies the secret of drawing near to God, and of His speedily hearing our prayers.

St. John of Kronstadt

ARE SINS COMMITTED AFTER BAPTISM FORGIVEN?

By St. John Damascene, from "The Precious Pearl: The Lives of Saints Barlaam and Ioasaph," *Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, MA (1997), pp. 137-143.*

Ioasaph said to the elder, "Well then, as the strictness of these doctrines demands such chaste conversation, if after baptism I chance to fail in one or two of these commandments, shall I therefore utterly miss the goal and shall all my hope be in vain?"

Barlaam answered, "Deem not so. God, the Word, made man for the salvation of our race, aware of the exceeding frailty and misery of our nature, has not even here suffered our sickness to be without remedy. But, like a skillful leech, he has mixed for our unsteady and sin-loving heart the potion of repentance, prescribing this for the remission of sins. For after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, and have been sanctified

by water and the Spirit, and cleansed without effort from all sin and all defilement, if we should chance to fall into any transgression, there is, it is true, no second regeneration made within us by the spirit through baptism in the water of the font, and wholly recreating us (that gift is given once for all): but by means of painful repentance, hot tears, toils and sweats, there is a purifying and pardoning

of our offenses through the tender mercy of our God. For the fount of tears is also called baptism, according to the grace of the Master; but it needs labor and time; and many has it saved after many a fall; because there is no sin too great for the clemency of God, if we are quick to repent and purge the shame of our offenses, and death does not overtake us and we do not depart from this life still defiled; **for in the grave there is no confession nor repentance.**

But as long as we are among the living, while the foundation of our Orthodox Faith continues un-shattered, even if somewhat of the outer roof-work or inner building be disabled, it is allowed to renew by repentance the part rotted by sins. It is impossible to count the multitude of the mercies of God, or measure the greatness of his compassion: whereas sins and offenses of whatever kind are subject to measure and may be numbered. So **our offenses, being subject to measure and number, cannot overcome the**

immeasurable compassion and innumerable mercies of God.

"Therefore we are commanded not to despair for our trespasses but to acknowledge the goodness of God and condemn the sins whereof forgiveness is offered us by reason of the loving-kindness of Christ who for our sins shed his precious blood. In many places of Scripture we are taught the power of repentance, and especially by the precepts and parables of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it says, *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Moreover, he set before us, in a parable, a certain son that had received his father's substance and taken his journey into a far country and there spent all in riotous living. Then, when there arose a famine in that land, he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that land of iniquity^[1], who sent him into his fields to feed swine, thus does he designate the most coarse and loathsome sin. When, after much labor, he had come to the



utmost misery, and might not even fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, at last he came to perceive his shameful plight, and, bemoaning himself, said, *How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called your son: make me as one*

of your hired servants." And he arose and came to his father. But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him tenderly, and restoring him to his former rank, made a feast of joy because his son was found again and killed the fatted calf. Lo, this parable, that Jesus spoke to us, concerns such as turn again from sin and fall at his feet in repentance.

"Again, he represents a certain good shepherd that had a hundred sheep, and when one was lost left the ninety-nine and went forth to seek that which had gone astray until he found it: and he laid it on his shoulders and folded it with those that had not gone astray and called together his friends and neighbors to a banquet because it was found. *Likewise, says the Savior, joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents more than over ninety-nine just persons which need no repentance.*

“And, in sooth, even the chief of the disciples Peter, the Rock of the Faith, in the very season of the Savior’s Passion, failing for a little while in his stewardship, that he might understand the worthlessness and misery of human frailty, fell under the guilt of denial. Then he straightaway remembered the Lord’s words and went out and wept bitterly, and with those hot tears made good his defeat and transferred the victory to his own side. Like a skillful man of war, though fallen, he was not undone nor did he despair, but, springing to his feet, he brought up as a reserve bitter tears from the agony of his soul; and straight away when the enemy saw that sight, like a man whose eyes are scorched with a fierce flame, he leaped off and fled afar, howling horribly. So the chief became chief again, as he had before been chosen teacher of the whole world, being now become its pattern of penitence. And after his holy resurrection Christ made good this three-fold denial with the three-fold question, *Peter, do you love me?* the Apostle answering, *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*

“So from all these and many other examples beyond count we learn the virtue of tears and repentance. Only the manner of it must be noted—it must arise from a heart that abominates sin and weeps, as says the prophet David, *I am weary of my groaning: every night will I wash my bed and water my couch with my tears.* Again the cleansing of sins will be wrought by the blood of Christ^[2], in the greatness of his compassion and the multitude of the mercies of that God who says, *Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them white as snow,* and so forth.

“Thus therefore it is, and thus we believe. But after receiving the knowledge of the truth and winning regeneration and adoption as sons, and tasting of the divine mysteries, we must strive hard to keep our feet for fear we fall. For to fall becomes not the athlete, since many have fallen and been unable to rise. Some, opening a door to sinful lusts, and clinging obstinately to them, have no more had strength to hasten back to repentance; and others, being untimely snatched by death, and having not made speed enough to wash them from the pollution of their sin, have been damned. And for this cause it is hazardous to fall into any kind of sinful affection whatsoever. But if any man fall, he must at once leap up and stand again to fight the good fight: and, as often as there comes a fall, so often must there at once ensue this rising and standing, to the end. *For, Turn you to me and I will turn to you,* says the Lord God. (Zech 1:3).

† † †

[1]: The land to which the prodigal son went is called “The land of Iniquity.” It is a land that has various and countless ways to sin at any moment of time. Remember, dear reader, the vision of our father among the saints, St. Anthony, in which the whole world was filled with traps to catch and

destroy man. And who was saved? The one who was very humble; this was the answer that was given to the Saint. And it is true! Without this virtue the devil triumphs over proud souls.

[2]: The expiatory sacrifice of Christ is the source of remission of sins. *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.* (1 Jn 1:7) This is one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Without the blood of Christ, 20, 30, 50, even a thousand years of strict ascetic living will not erase the least spot of sin. The author of this ascetic work feels this very deeply, that is why he repeatedly speaks about the remission of sin by the blood of the Lord. But emphasis on this truth by the Orthodox preacher does not mean acceptance of the Protestant belief that good works are unnecessary, because besides the above truth Orthodox teaching does not stop emphasizing that other spiritual truth that he who has faith and is honestly repentant is obligated to prove his faith by producing fruit worthy of his repentance in his everyday life in the world. Faith and good works are joined together unbreakably as the root and the fruit of a bountiful tree.



Fasting is a medicine; but a medicine, though it be never so profitable, becomes frequently useless owing to the unskillfulness of him who employs it. For it is necessary to know, moreover, the time when it should be applied, and the requisite quantity of it; and the nature of the country, and the season of the year; and the corresponding diet; as well as various other particulars; any of which, if one overlooks, he will mar all the rest that have been named. Now if, when the body needs healing, such exactness is required on our part, much more ought we, when our care is about the soul, and we seek to heal the distempers of the mind, to look, and to search into every particular with the utmost accuracy.

St. John Chrysostom

Hence, the Shepherds of the Church must not speak only about the Antichrist and his forerunners, but first and foremost they must help Christians to live in such a way that the Grace of Baptism and Chrismation is activated, by the keeping of Christ’s commandments and doctrines, by experiencing these in one’s life in an Orthodox manner, by repentance, and by inner noetic prayer of the heart; for in this way they will be able to distinguish between the energies of Christ and the energies of the Antichrist.

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Navpaktos

THE 14,000 HOLY INNOCENTS AND AMERICA TODAY

By Fr. Demetrios Carrellas, Dec. 29th, 2014.

A woman who destroys the fruit of her womb commits a great sin. She is destroying life itself, for God alone is the Giver of life and He makes possible the conception of a human being in the womb. He gives life and a woman destroys it. Great repentance is necessary, from the depths of her soul. She must change and never commit this sin again. Otherwise, she will be condemned as a murderess. No creature on earth kills its young—only man, the rational being. This is a great sin, and if a woman does not repent from the depth of her soul, she will be condemned as a murderess. Will she pass through the toll-houses? There is no sin that cannot be forgiven but the sin of unrepentance. True and sincere repentance is required for such a sin, and it must never be repeated again.

[St. Thaddeus of Vitovnica]

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My beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, On December 29th, our Holy Orthodox Church commemorates the 14,000 Holy Innocents, and many of their mothers, who were slaughtered by Herod's soldiers in one day. In the United States, because of a disgusting, satanic "law," we "**legally**" slaughter an average of over 3,300 pre-born—and occasionally born—babies every day; but we have been doing this ungodly infanticide for the past 42 years, 11 months and 29 days. Therefore, we have killed over 57 million more babies than Herod. [The 2017 updated number is over 60 million..., *Ed.*].

What has happened to our Nation, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ? How can we continue to ignore the silent screams of God's innocent ones, who are being brutally murdered at an average of one baby every 15 seconds? How can we waste time talking about "global warming" (recently renamed, "climate change"), when so many of our citizens—especially doctors, lawyers, judges, politicians, and not a few "clergy"—are preparing to spend eternity in the lake of fire, prepared for the devil and his demons? Why are we failing to realize that with the murder of every pre-born child, in addition to the demonic 'hit man' (the abortionist) and his/her assistants, there are a number of other souls that are committing spiritual suicide: the baby's parents, the family members and friends who urged the mother to have the abortion, the psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor and/or clergy who supported the decision to have the child offered as a living sacrifice upon the demonic altar of privacy, profit and choice. Do you not see how many souls "die" with every single abortion?

Our Most Sweet Lord Jesus is All-Merciful; and whenever a woman comes to Him with tears of repentance for having allowed herself to abort her child, whenever a doctor repents of his evil actions, whenever a politician comes to himself and

changes from being pro-choice to pro-life, such people can receive forgiveness and healing. For our God's love for each one of us is limitless, unconditional and never-ending. Orthodox Christians are blessed with the Sacrament of Holy Confession, during which God, through His priests, grants His forgiveness of this terrible sin to those who come in repentance.

However, as St. Paul reminds us in his Epistle to the Galatians: *Cease being led astray, God is not mocked; what a man soweth, that also shall he reap.* (Eph 6:7). And those who perform and/or support abortion are mocking God; and a Nation that legalizes this horrific infanticide is mocking God! As a Nation we have "sowed" the blood of 57 million innocent babies. What will we "reap" as a Nation? What will those unrepentant abortionists and supporters of abortion be reaping on that terrible Day?

As a priest of the Holy Orthodox Church, the Bride of Christ, I am compelled to make the following statements to all Orthodox Christians: If you are: an abortionist, one who assists in abortions, counsels women to have abortions; a woman who has had an abortion(s); a father who has either demanded his wife/girl friend to abort their child, or supported her decision to do so; a family member, or friends, who either approved of—or were indifferent to—a family member's/friend's decision to have an abortion; a politician who votes in favor of abortion; a lawyer or judge who has defended the ungodly "right to choose" abortion, then you need to beg God for tears of repentance, change your evil ways and seek God's forgiveness through the Sacrament of Holy Confession. And you should not receive Holy Communion until you repent and undergo a soul-healing penance after your confession. If you simply believe that abortion is a woman's "right," and/or consistently vote for people who support abortion, then I strongly urge you not to receive Holy Communion until you can repent of this immoral philosophy, and seek God's forgiveness through Holy Confession.

I know that you hear all kinds of pleasantly phrased statements in which the child in the womb is regarded as a woman's property, or is dehumanized—treated as a non-entity. They are all lies! They are all born from the "father of lies": the evil one. Here is the one FACT that all Christians need to believe and proclaim: Every abortion kills a human being who is created in the image of God! I was told several years ago that the great and powerful Roman Empire fell 50 years after legalizing abortion. In just 7 more years, the USA will reach the 50 year mark. Will history repeat itself? Will we daily bend the knee of our hearts before Jesus, and beg Him to intervene and deliver us from this demonic slaughter of His babies? Or will we continue to ignore the millions of silent screams that our Lord DOES hear. And how many more of those screams will it take before He replaces His mercy with His righteous judgment?

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Ἡ Χριστουγεννιάτικη Ἀτμόσφαιρα Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ Διηγήματα τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη!

Δ. Πανταζής, ἄρθρο στὸ περιοδικὸ Φιλολογικὰ Περιθώρια.



Τὰ Χριστούγεννα δὲν ἐκφράζουν μόνον τὴ μεγάλη χαρὰ γιὰ τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Εἶναι συγχρόνως καὶ ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα μιᾶς εὐτυχίας, ποὺ στὴν περίπτωση τῶν διηγημάτων τοῦ κορυφαίου συγγραφέα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη ἀποκτᾶ ὅλη τὴ συγκίνηση, ποὺ προκαλεῖ ἡ σηκνογραφία τῆς ἰδιαίτερης πατρίδας του, τῆς Σκιάθου, σὲ συνάρτηση καὶ μὲ τὸ μεγάλο γεγονός τῆς Γέννησης τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

«Στὸ Χριστό, στὸ Κάστρο» ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα φορτίζεται ἀπ' τὴν ἀρχὴ μὲ τὰ λόγια τοῦ παπα-Φραγκοῦλη τὸ βράδυ τῆς 23^{ης} Δεκεμβρίου:

– Τὸ Γιάννη τὸ Νυφιώτη καὶ τὸν Ἀργύρη τῆς Μυλωνοῦς τοὺς ἔκλεισε τὸ χιόνι ἀπάν' στὸ Κάστρο.

Ὅποτε μπλέκεται μίαν ὀλόκληρη περιπέτεια γιὰ τὴ διάσωσή τους, ποὺ συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ ἐπικίνδυνες προσπάθειες, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἀστεϊσμούς ποὺ ἔλαβαν μέρος μεταξὺ τοῦ παπᾶ καὶ τοῦ ψάλτη. Καὶ ποὺ κατάφεραν τελικὰ νὰ φέρουν σὲ καλὸ

τέλος τὸ μόχθο τους, ποὺ κατέληξε νὰ λειτουργήσουν στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τῆς Γέννησης τοῦ Χριστοῦ μέσα σὲ μιὰ ἀτμόσφαιρα ἀγωνίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πίστεως μὲ τὴν ὑποβλητικὴ λειτουργία τῶν Χριστουγέννων.

Ἀνάλογη ἀτμόσφαιρα δημιουργεῖται στὸ «Ἀγνάντεμα», ποὺ ἀρχίζει μὲ μιὰ ἀξιόλογη περιγραφή: «Ἐπάνω στὸ βράχο τῆς ἐρήμου ἀκτῆς, ἀπὸ παλαιούς λησμονημένους χρόνους, εὕρισκετο κτισμένον τὸ ξωκλήσι τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Κατευοδώτρας. Ὅλο τὸ χειμῶνα παπᾶς δὲν ἤρχετο νὰ λειτουργήσει. Ὁ βοριάς μαίνεται καὶ βρυχᾶται ἀνὰ τὸ πέλαγος τὸ ἀπλωμένον μαυρογάλανον καὶ βαθύ, τὸ κύμα λισσᾶ καὶ ἀφρίζει ἐναντίον τοῦ βράχου. Καὶ ὁ βράχος ὑψώνει τὴν πλάτη του γίγας ἀκλόνητος, στοιχειῶ ριζωμένον βαθιὰ στὴν γῆν,

καὶ τὸ ἐρημοκλήσι λευκὸν καὶ γλαρόν, ὡς φωλεὰ θαλασσαιτοῦ, στεφανώνει τὴν κορυφὴν του».

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ καλλίτερα διηγήματα τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη εἶναι ὁ «Ἀμερικάνος». Ξεκινᾶ μὲ τὴν περιγραφή τοῦ μαγαζιοῦ τοῦ Δημήτρη τοῦ Μπέρδε, ὅπου: «Ὁμοιάζε τὴν ἐσπέραν ἐκείνην μὲ βάρκαν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον φουρτουνιασμένη, δευτερόπριμα πλέουσαν, πληττομένην ὑπὸ τῶν κυμάτων τὴν μίαν πλευράν, μὲ τὸ ὕδωρ εἰσπηδὸν ἀπὸ τὴ κουπαστὴ καὶ ραντίζον τοὺς δυστυχεῖς ἐπιβάτας· ὅπου ὁ κυβερνήτης τῆς καὶ ὁ ναύτης τοῦ φαίνονται περιφρόντιδες, δίδοντες καὶ λαμβάνοντες προστάγματα εἰς ἀκατάληπτον γλώσσαν, ὁ μὲν ἰθύνων μετὰ βίας τὸ πηδάλιον, ὁ δὲ λύων καὶ δένων τὰ ἰστία, βοηθὸν διὰ τῆς κώπης ἐκ τοῦ ὑπηνέμου, ἀμφοτέρωι τρέχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν πρύμνην εἰς τὴν πρῶραν, καταπτόντες τοὺς ἀπειροτέρους τῶν ἐπιβατῶν, περιοραιομένους ἀπὸ τὸ ἀφρίζον κύμα, ὄσφραιομένους ἐγγύθεν καὶ γευομένους τὴν ἄλμην. Ἐξημέρωναν Χριστούγεννα καὶ ἕκαστος τῶν πελατῶν ἐπεθύμει νὰ κάμει τὰ ὀψώνιά του».

Στὴ συνέχεια «ὁ καπετὰν Γιάννης διηγεῖτο διὰ μακρῶν τὰ τοῦ τελευταίου ταξιδίου του». Καὶ τοῦ

θέτει ἡ παρέα τὴν ἐρώτηση:

– Ἐπῆρες κανένα ἐπιβάτη ἀπ' τὸ Βόλο;

Τὴν στιγμὴν ἐκείνην ὁ καπετὰν Γιάννης (...) ἀνέκραξεν:

– Ἄ! Νά το!

Ὅλοι ἐστράφησαν πρὸς τὴν θύραν.

Εἶχεν εἰσέλθει ἄνθρωπος ὑψηλός, καλοφορεμένος, ὡς σαράντα πέντε ἐτῶν, ὠραῖος, ἀνοικτοπρόσωπος, ἔξυρισμένος μύστακα καὶ γένειον, πλὴν ὀλίγον

τριχῶν ὑπὸ τὸν πώγωνα καὶ πρὸς τὸν λαϊμόν, μὲ παχειὰν χρυσοῦν καδένα ἐπὶ τοῦ στήθους (...)

Ἐξελθὼν τοῦ καπηλίου ὁ ξένος διηυθύνθη πρὸς τὴν Κολώναν τὴν ἰστάμενην ἀπέναντι τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν (...) Ἐστρεψε τὸ βλέμμα δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ καὶ τέλος τὸ προσήλωσεν ἐπιμόνως εἰς τινὰ μικρὰν οἰκίαν, τὴν ὁποίαν ἐκοίταζε πρὶν, ὅπου μεταξὺ δυὸ οἰκιῶν ἐσηματίζετο κενόν τε, ἐν μέρει θαπτόμενον ἀπὸ λείψανα δύο τοίχων.

Ἐφαίνετο ὅτι ἦτο χάλασμα, ἐρείπιον οἰκίας τινός, οὐ πρὸ πολλοῦ κατεδαφισθείσης. Ὁ ξένος, ἀφοῦ ἐκοίταξε τριγύρω νὰ ἴδῃ μήπως τὸν παρετήρει τις, εἰσήλθε δειλῶς εἰς τὸ χάλασμα ἐκεῖνο, ὅπου εἰς τὴν γωνίαν τῶν δυὸ τοίχων ἐφαίνετο κόγχη τις μαυρισμένη, ὡς νὰ ὑπῆρχεν ἐστία ἐκεῖ τὸ πάλαι.



Εἰσήλθεν ἀσκεπῆς κρατῶν τὸν πῖλον εἰς τὰς χεῖρας, ἐγονάτισε καὶ ἐστήριξε τὸ μέτωπον ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχρῶν λίθων τῆς γωνίας ἐκείνης, καί, ἀφοῦ ἔμεινεν ἐπὶ τρία λεπτά γονυκλινῆς, ἠγέρθη, ἐσπόγγισε τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ ἀπεμακρύνθη βραδέως.

Ἐπανελθὼν πάλιν χαμηλότερον ἐστάθη τὸ μέσον τοῦ δρομίσκου, οὐ μακρὸν τῆς οἰκίας, τὴν ὁποίαν πρὶν ἐφαίνετο ὅτι ἐκοίταξε. Ἐστάθη, καί, ἀφοῦ ἔριξε βλέμμα ὀλόγυρα νὰ ἴδῃ μὴ τις τὸν παρηκολούθει, ἔτεινε τὸ οὖς. Τί ἤκουεν ἄραγε; Ἴσως ἤκουε τὰ διασταυρούμενα καὶ φεύγοντα κατὰ διαφόρους διευθύνσεις, ὡς λάλημα χεμιερινῶν στρουθίων, ἄσματα τῶν παίδων τῆς γειτονιάς, οἵτινες ἐπισκεπτόμενοι τὰς οἰκίας ἔψαλλον τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Ἐδῶ μὲν ἠκούοντο οἱ στίχοι:

Χριστούγεννα, πρωτούγεννα, πρώτη γιορτὴ τοῦ χρόνου, ἐβγάτ', ἀκούστε, μάθετε, τώρα Χριστὸς γεννιέται...

Ἐκεῖ δὲ ἀντήχει:

Κυρά μ', τὴ θυγατέρα σου, κυρά μ', τὴν ἀκριβή σου.

Αἴφνης ὁ ξένος ἠναγκάσθη νὰ παραμερίσῃ, διότι ζεῦγος παιδίων, ὧν τὸ ἓν ἐκράτει φανάριον, ἀρτίως καταβάντα ἀπὸ μίαν κλίμακα, ἤρχοντο πρὸς τὰ ἐδῶ. Ἐστρεψε βήματα τινὰ ὀπίσω, πρὸς τὸ μέρος ὅπουθεν εἶχεν ἔλθει. Τὰ παιδιά ἤλθον πλησίον καὶ οὐδὲ τὸν παρετήρησαν κἄν. Ἀνέβησαν τὴν κλίμακα ἐκείνης ἀκριβῶς τῆς οἰκίας, τὴν ὁποίαν εἶχε κοιτάξει διὰ μακρὰν ὁ ξένος. Τοῦτο ἰδὼν ἔκαμε κίνημα καὶ ἐστράφη ὀπίσω πάλιν μετὰ ζωηροῦ ἐνδιαφέροντος. Ἐστάθη καὶ ἔτεινε τὸ οὖς.

Τὰ παιδιά ἔκρουσαν τὴν θύραν.

— Νὰ ῥθοῦμε νὰ τραγουδήσουμε, θειά;

Μετὰ μίαν στιγμὴν ἠκούσθη ἐνδοθεν βῆμα, ἠνοιχθὴ ἡ θύρα, καὶ γραϊὰ τις μὲ μαύρην μανδύην προκύψασα, εἶπε μὲ θλιβερὰν φωνήν:

— Ὅχι, παιδάκια μ', τί νὰ τραγῶδηστε ἀπὸ μᾶς;

Ἐχομε μεῖς κανένα; Καλὴ χρονίτσα νὰ ἔχετε, κὶ σῦρτε ἄλλοῦ νὰ τραγῶδηστε (...)

Ὅταν οἱ γείτονες τῆς θεῖα Κυρατσῶς τῆς Μιχάλαινας ἐξύπνησαν μετὰ τὰ μεσάνυκτα διὰ νὰ ὑπάγουν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, τῆς ὁποίας οἱ κώδωνες ἐκλάγγαζαν θορυβωδῶς, πόσον ἐξεπλάγησαν ἰδόντες τὴν οἰκίαν τῆς πτωχῆς χήρας, ἐκεῖ ὅπου δὲν ἐδέχοντο τὰ παιδιά νὰ τραγουδήσουν τὰ Χριστούγεννα, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀπέπεμπον μὲ τὰς φράσεις «δὲν ἔχομε κανένα» καὶ «τί θὰ τραγουδήστε ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς» κατάφωτον, μὲ ὅλα τὰ παραθυρόφυλλα ἀνοικτὰ (...)

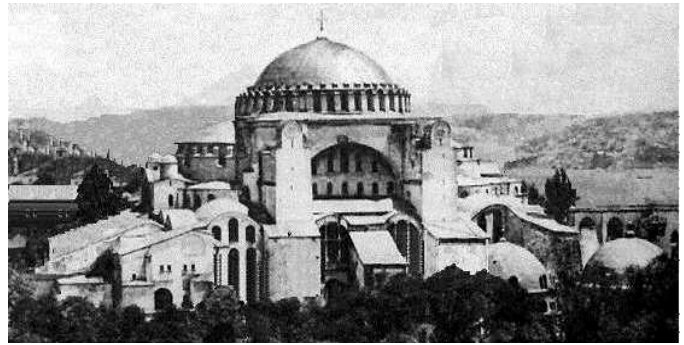
Τί τρέχει; Τί συμβαίνει; Δὲν ἤργησαν νὰ πληροφορηθοῦσιν (...). Ὁ ξενιτευμένος γαμβρός, ἀπὸ εἰκοσαετίας ἀπὼν, ἀπὸ δεκαετίας μὴ ἀφήσας ποὺ ἔχνη (...), εἶχε γυρίσει πολλὰ μέρη εἰς τὸν Νέον Κόσμον, εἶχεν ἐργασθῆ ὡς ὑπεργολάβος εἰς μεταλλεῖα καὶ ὡς

ἐπιστάτης εἰς φυτεῖας καὶ ἐπανήλθε μὲ χιλιάδας τινὰς ταλλήρων εἰς τὸν τόπον τῆς γεννήσεώς του, ὅπου ἐπανεῦρεν ἠλικιωθεῖσαν, ἀλλ' ἀκμαίαν ἀκόμη τὴν πιστὴν του μνηστὴν.

Μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, τὴν Κυριακὴ μετὰ τὴν Χριστοῦ γέννησιν, ἐτελοῦντο ἐν πάσῃ χαρᾷ καὶ σεμνότητι οἱ γάμοι τοῦ Ἰωάννου Εὐσταθίου Μοθωνιοῦ μετὰ τῆς Μελαχροινῆς Κουμπουρτζῆ.

Ἡ θεῖα Κυρατσῶ, μετὰ τόσα ἔτη, ἐφόρεσεν ἐπὶ ὀλίγας στιγμὰς χρωματιστὴν πολίτικην μανδύην, διὰ ν' ἀσπασθῆ τὰ στέφανα. Καὶ τὴν παραμονὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου, τὸ ἐσπέρας ἱσταμένη εἰς τὸν ἐξώστην ἠκούσθη φωνοῦσα πρὸς τοὺς διερχομένους ὁμίλους τῶν παίδων:

— Ἐλάτε, παιδιά, νὰ τραγῶδηστε!...



Γιατί ποῖος μπορεῖ, θαρρώντας σὲ λογικὲς ἀποδείξεις, νὰ πεῖ πῶς γίνεται ἡ σύλληψη τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου; Πῶς γίνεται σχηματισμὸς σάρκας χωρὶς σπορά; Πῶς γίνεται γέννηση χωρὶς φθορὰ παρθενίας; Πῶς εἶναι μητέρα ἐκείνη ποὺ καὶ μετὰ τὸν τοκετὸ ἔμεινε παρθένος; Πῶς ὁ ὑπερτέλειος προόδευε καὶ μεγάλωνε στὸ σῶμα; Πῶς ὁ καθαρὸς βαπτιζόταν; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πεινοῦσε ἔτρεφε τοὺς ἄλλους; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ κοπίαζε χάριζε δύναμη; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔπασχε ἔκανε θεραπείες; Πῶς ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πέθαινε ἔδινε ζωὴ; Καὶ νὰ τὸ πῶ τὸ πρῶτο καὶ τὸ τελευταῖο, πῶς ὁ Θεὸς γίνεται ἄνθρωπος; Μόνο ἡ πίστη χωρεῖ αὐτὰ τὰ μυστήρια, γιατί αὐτὴ κάνει χειροπιαστὰ τὰ πράγματα ποὺ ὑπερβαίνουν τὸ νοῦ καὶ τὴν λογικὴν.

Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς

Ὁ προφήτης Ἡσαΐας εἶπεν «οὐ πρέσβυς, οὐδὲ ἄγγελος, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἔσωσεν αὐτούς», Αὐτὸς, Ποιός; ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Κύριος ἡμῶν, ὅστις εἶχε καὶ δύναμιν ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐλευθερώσῃ καὶ σοφίαν ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ εὕρῃ τὸν τρόπον τῆς ἐλευθερίας μας καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μὴ κάμῃ τυραννικὴν τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῶν θεληματικῶς δεδουλωμένων εἰς τοὺς δαίμονας, καὶ ἀγαθότητα ἄπειρον διὰ νὰ μεταδώσῃ εἰς ὅλους ὁμοῦ τοὺς αἰῶνας τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς θείας του χάριτος καὶ τῆς δόξης καὶ νὰ γίνῃ ὁ αὐτὸς πηγὴ ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ χάριτος εἰς ὅλην τὴν ἀνθρώπινον φύσιν, ὄχι μόνον καθὸ Θεὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ καθὸ ἄνθρωπος.

Ἅγιος Νικόδημος

«Γνώθι Σαυτόν»

Τὸ Μεγάλο Μάθημα τῆς Αυτόγνωσίας

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαὴλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἓνα σχολεῖο. Τὰ μαθήματα πολλά· πάρα πολλά. Κάθε μέρα, κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή, ὁ ἄνθρωπος διδάσκεται. Καὶ διδασκόμενος, διδάσκει. Καὶ διδάσκοντας γίνεται σοφώτερος καὶ ὁ ἴδιος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι. Κατὰ τὸ λόγο τοῦ σοφοῦ παροικιαστῆ: «*Δίδου σοφῶ ἀφορμὴν καὶ σοφώτερος ἔσται*». (Παροιμ 9:9).

Ὁ ἀληθινὰ σοφός, εἶν' ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ γνωρίζει, ἢ τοῦλάχιστο, πασχίζει νὰ γνωρίσει τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ κάθε τρόπο καὶ μὲ κάθε εὐκαιρία. Αὐτὴ ἡ γνῶσις τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας—ἡ αὐτογνωσία—εἶναι τ' ὠραιότερο καὶ μεγαλειωδέστερο κατόρθωμα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς.

Ἀπ' τὰ μαθητικά χρόνια μαθαίνει κανεὶς τὸ πασίγνωστο καὶ θαυμάσιο γνωμικὸ τῶν ἀρχαίων προγόνων μας: «Γνώθι σαυτόν». Τόσο σπουδαῖο, ὥστε χαρακτήρηκε στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα στοὺς Δελφούς. Κάποιοι τὸ ἀποδίδουν στὸ Χεῖλωνα τὸ Λακεδαιμόνιο καὶ ἄλλοι στὸ Θαλῆ τὸ Μιλήσιο.

Τι σημαίνει λοιπόν, τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν»; Μάθε καλὰ τὸν ἑαυτό σου, μάθε ποιὸς εἶσαι. Ἐρεῦνα τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ σου κόσμο, καὶ φωτίζοντάς τον, πρόσεξε ἰδιαίτερα τὶς ἀτέλειες καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες τοῦ χαρακτήρα σου, ὥστε νὰ λάβεις τὰ μέτρα σου γιὰ βελτίωση καὶ προκοπή.

Ὁ πασίγνωστος ἐπίσης, λόγος τοῦ Σωκράτη «ἐν οἴδα, ὅτι οὐδὲν οἶδα», εἶναι ἀπόδειξη ἀληθινῆς σοφίας καὶ αὐτογνωσίας. «Ἡ γνῶσις τῆς ἄγνοιας εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ γνῶσις».

Εἶναι ἐκπληκτικὸ πὼς τὸν ἴδιο περίπου λόγο τοῦ «γνώθι σαυτόν» τὸ βρίσκουμε στὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἰώβ 5:27, ὅπου διαβάζουμε τὸν ἀντίλογο τοῦ Ἐλιφάξ: «Γνώθι σεαυτῶ εἴ τι ἔπραξας», λέγει στὸν Ἰώβ. Σὰ νὰ τοῦ ἔλεγε: «Σκέψου καὶ μάθε· μήπως ἔπραξες κάτι κακό?».

Οἱ μηχανισμοὶ τῆς αὐτογνωσίας λειτουργοῦν συνειρμικὰ καὶ αὐτόματα στὸν κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸ βαθμὸ νοημοσύνης ἢ μάθησης. Καὶ τοῦτο, γιατί ὁ ἄνθρωπος—κάθε ἄνθρωπος—εἶναι ὑπαρξὴ λογικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ. Ἔχει καὶ γνῶσις καὶ ἐπίγνωση καὶ αὐτογνωσία.

Ἀντίθετα, δίχως αὐτεπίγνωση, ἡ ὑποκειμενικότητα δημιουργεῖ παραπονήσεις καὶ παραισθήσεις. Κατὰ τὴν παροιμία: «Ἡ χελώνα τὸ παιδί της ἀγγελόπουλο τὸ κρᾶζει...». Κρίνει «ἄψογα», ὅποιος κατέχει τὸ «γνώθι σαυτόν». Ἀλλιῶτα, προδίδεται καὶ γελοιοποιεῖται!

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι στὴ ζωὴ του ἐρευνητής. Ἐρευνᾷ τοὺς πάντες καὶ τὰ πάντα. Ἀλλοίμονο ὅμως! Ἐκεῖ ποὺ χωλαίνει, εἶναι ἡ ἔρευνα τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ του. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἐξερευνητής τοῦ διαστήματος καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος,

εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἔχει τὶς πιὸ μεγάλες ἀποτυχίες στὸν ἑαυτό του. Ἄλλωστε, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ γνωρίζουμε εἶναι μηδαμινό, μπροστὰ σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ ἀγνοοῦμε.

Οἱ ἀληθινὰ μεγάλοι ξεκινοῦν ἀπὸ μηδενικὴ βάση καὶ φτάνουν στὴν τελειότητα. Αὐτό, ποὺ καταστρέφει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, λέγει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶναι «*τὸ μὴ βούλεσθαι τῆς οἰκείας φύσεως ἐπιγινώσκειν τὰ μέτρα*». Καταστρέφει τὸν ἑαυτό του ὅποιος δὲν ἔχει ἐπίγνωση τῶν δυνατοτήτων του καὶ ἀλαζονεύεται. Ὡστόσο: «*Οὗτος γὰρ μάλιστα ἐστὶν ὁ ἑαυτὸν εἰδώς, ὁ μηδὲν εἶναι ἑαυτὸν νομίζων*». Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ ὀξύμωρα σχήματα στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πνευματικὴ ζωὴ: Αὐτὸς ποὺ γνωρίζει ἄριστα τὸν ἑαυτό του, εἶναι ὅποιος τὸν θεωρεῖ γιὰ τίποτε: Ὁ «*πτωχὸς τῷ πνεύματι*». Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀληθινῆς αὐτογνωσίας.

«*Ἐνδον σκάπτετε*». Ὡραῖο σύνθημα γιὰ ὠραίους ἀνθρώπους. «Ὁργωνε βαθιὰ, νὰ ἔχεις πολὺ σιτάρι», λέει μιὰ ἀγγλικὴ παροιμία. Ὅσο βαθύτερο τὸ σκάψιμο, τόσο καὶ πλουσιότερη ἡ συγκομιδὴ. Ὅσοι σκάβουν βαθιὰ, βρίσκουν «*merus aurum*» (καθαρὸ χρυσάφι). «Ἀρχαῖο ἀνεξερεύνητο ὄρυχεῖο μὲ κοιτάσματα ἄγνωστα, ἡ ψυχὴ σου. Σκάψε βαθιὰ νὰ βρεῖς τὸ χρυσάφι σου».

«Ad Intra», πρὸς τὰ μέσα. Στὰ ἐνδότερα. Μονάχα σὰν περάσεις τὸ τοῦνελ τῆς ἐνδοσκοπήσης, θ' ἀντικρύσεις τὸ ξέφωτο μιᾶς καινούργιας ἐλπίδας. Ὁ μέσα κόσμος εἶναι τόσο ἀπέραντος, ὅσο καὶ ὁ ἔξω κόσμος. «*Βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιὰ παρὰ πάντα, καὶ ἄνθρωπός ἐστι καὶ τὶς γινώσεται αὐτόν;*» (Ἰερεμ 17:9). Ἡ καρδιὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι βαθιὰ καὶ ἀνεξερεύνητη, περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλο πρᾶγμα στὸν κόσμο. «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, αὐτὸς ὁ ἄγνωστος», ὅπως τὸν ἀποκάλεσε κάποιος ξένος.

Ἡ αὐτογνωσία εἶναι πορεία πρὸς τὴν τελειότητα. Εἶναι μέσον Ὁρθόδοξης ὑπαρξιακῆς κάθαρσης καὶ φωτισμοῦ, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει καμιὰ σχέση μὲ τὴν αὐτογνωσία—αὐτοσυγκέντρωση βουδδιστικοῦ ἢ ἄλλου ἀνατολικοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ τύπου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ προσοχὴ ἀπὸ λαθεμένες ψευδογνωστικὲς τεχνικὲς. **Μᾶς ἀρκεῖ ν' ἀποκτήσουμε «Νοῦν Χριστοῦ». Ὑπέροχος ὀραματισμός!**



Ἄν νόμιμα ἀσκήσετε νηστεύοντας, μὴ τὸ παίρνετε ἐπάνω σας. Ἄν δὲ γιὰ αὐτὸ κομπάζετε, καλύτερα ἂς τρώτε κρέας. Γιατί εἶναι προτιμότερο νὰ τρώγῃ κανεὶς κρέας παρὰ νὰ τὸ παίρνῃ ἐπάνω του καὶ νὰ ἔχῃ μεγάλη ἰδέα γιὰ τὸ ἑαυτό του.

Ἀββᾶς Ἰσίδωρος ὁ Πρεσβύτερος

Έτοιμοι για Θάνατο!

Μακαριστοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀγίουστίνου, Μητροπόλιτη Φλωρίνης (+2010).

«Εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι.»

[Μάρκ 8:34]

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἀγαπητοί μου, δὲν στρατολογεῖ ὁπαδοὺς διὰ τῆς βίας. Μολονότι περισσότερο ἀπὸ κάθε ἄλλον αὐτὸς θὰ εἶχε τὸδικαίωμα καὶ τὴν ἀξίωσι νὰ ἀπαιτήσῃ, ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, τοὺς ὁποίους δημιούργησε καὶ ἔφερε στὴν ὑπαρξί, νὰ ὑποταχθοῦν στὸ θέλημα καὶ τὸ κέλευσμά του καὶ νὰ προσέλθουν νὰ καταταχθοῦν στὸ στράτευμά του, ἐν τούτοις ἀφήνει τὸν καθένα ἐλεύθερο νὰ κἀνὴ μόνος του τὴν ἐπιλογή, νὰ πάρῃ τὴν ἀπόφασιν ποὺ κρίνει σωστὴ καὶ νὰ πῆ ἂν θέλῃ νὰ γίνῃ ἀκόλουθος καὶ ὑπήκοός του.

«Ὅστις θέλει», λέει, «ὀπίσω μου ἐλθεῖν» (Μάρκ 8:34). Τὸ εἶπε τότε στοὺς μαθητὰς του, τὸ εἶπε σὲ ὅλο τὸν ὄχλον ποὺ τὸν περιστοιχίζε τὴ στιγμὴ ἐκείνη, τὸ λέει καὶ σ' ἐμᾶς σήμερα. Εἴμαστε λοιπὸν ἐλεύθεροι νὰ ποῦμε ποιά ἀπὸ τὶς δύο σημαῖες διαλέγουμε—γιατὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει τρίτη ἔχουμε μπροστά μας ἢ τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ τὴ σημαία τοῦ σατανᾶ καὶ τοῦ δαμονικοῦ κόσμου. Ἄλλ' ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἡ θεία χάρις θὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ νὰ πάρουμε τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἐκλέξουμε τὸ δικό του δρόμο, στὸ ἐξῆς ὀφείλουμε σὲ ὅλη μας τὴ ζωὴ νὰ ἐφαρμόζουμε τὸ δικό του πρόγραμμα, τὸ πρόγραμμα ποὺ αὐτὸς ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς συνέταξε καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο ἰσχύει γιὰ ὅλα τὰ παιδιὰ του, γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἀκολουθούς του. Καὶ τὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ τί προβλέπει; Τὸ εἶπε ὁ ἴδιος «Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀκολουθείτω μοι».

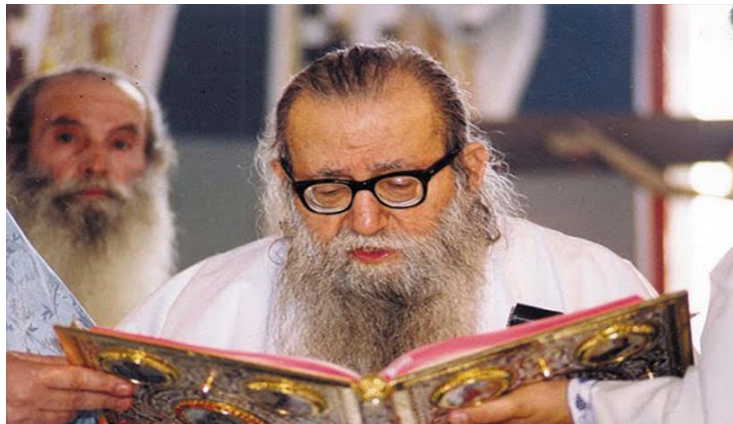
Ἀπαιτεῖ λοιπὸν τρία πράγματα. Πρῶτον, νὰ μισήσουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία, τῆς ὁποίας τὸ φαρμακερὸ κεντρὶ καὶ ἡ πικρὴ ρίζα βρίσκονται μέσα στὴν καρδιά μας (αὐτὸ σημαίνει τὸ «ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτόν»). Δεύτερον, νὰ εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι γιὰ θάνατο (αὕτῃ τὴν ἔννοια ἔχει τὸ «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ»). Καὶ τρίτον, νὰ βαδίζουμε μὲ εὐλαβικὴ ὑπακοὴ ἐπάνω στὰ ἴχνη τῆς δικῆς του ἀγίας ζωῆς (αὐτὸ σημαίνει τὸ «ἀκολουθείτω μοι»).

Σὲ ἓνα σύντομο κήρυγμα δὲν προλαβαίνουμε ν' ἀναπτύξουμε καὶ τὰ τρία αὐτὰ σημαντικὰ μέρη τοῦ

προγράμματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀφήνοντας λοιπὸν τὸ πρῶτο καὶ τὸ τρίτο μέρος, καὶ μέσα στὸν χρόνον ποὺ διαθέτουμε, θὰ στρέψουμε τὴν προσοχή μας στὸ δεύτερο. Ἡ δευτέρα ἀπαίτησι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ», βρίσκειται, ὅπως βλέπουμε, ἀνάμεσα στὶς δύο ἄλλες ἀπαιτήσεις του, τὴν πρώτη καὶ τὴν τρίτη, καὶ τρόπον τινὰ τὶς ὑποβαστάζει καὶ τὶς ἐνισχύει. Αὕτην θὰ προσπαθήσουμε ν' ἀναπτύξουμε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σύντομο κήρυγμά μας ἐπὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

«Ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ»... Ὁ ἀκόλουθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀγαπητοί μου, πρέπει νὰ σηκώσῃ τὸν σταυρό του. Ὁ τίμιος σταυρός, ἐπάνω στὸν ὁποῖο θυσιάστηκε χάριν τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ κόσμου ὁ «ἀρχηγὸς τῆς πίστεώς» μας (Ἑβρ 12:2), εἶναι τὸ σύμβολο τῆς ὑπερτάτης θυσίας. Συμβολίζει καὶ ἐκφράζει τὴν μεγαλύτερη καὶ μοναδικὴ θυσία, τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας.

Ὅσοι λοιπὸν τιμοῦν καὶ ἀσπάζονται αὕτη τὴν ἄμωμη καὶ ἀκήρατη θυσία, αὐτοὶ ἐλκύονται καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι ἀπὸ τὴ



χάρι τῆς, συγκινοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς. Ἐξοικειώνονται μὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ σταυροῦ, αἰσθάνονται ἀλληλέγγυοι μ' αὐτό, ξεπερνοῦν τὸν φόβο τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φιλοτιμοῦνται, ὅπως ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, νὰ «ἀνταναπληρῶν τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν

θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ» (Κολ 1:24), ν' ἀναπληρῶνουν στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τους ὅσα θὰ πάθαινε ὁ Χριστὸς ἂν ἦταν ἀκόμη ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ σωματικῶς.

Ὁ πόθος καὶ ἡ λαχτάρα τους τοὺς ἐμπνέει νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦν «τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι», νὰ πεθάνουν γιὰ νὰ βρεθοῦν μιὰ ὥρα γρηγορώτερα κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό (Φιλ 1:23). Φτάνουν ἀτρόμητοι στὸ σημεῖο νὰ κινδυνεύουν καὶ ν' «ἀποθνήσκουν καθ' ἡμέραν», νὰ πεθαίνουν καθημερινῶς (Α΄ Κορ 15:31).

Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια λοιπὸν κ' ἐμεῖς, ἐφ' ὅσον μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ καταταχθήκαμε στὸ στράτευμα τοῦ Κυρίου, πρέπει νὰ εἴμαστε ἔτοιμοι γιὰ τὰ πάντα· ἔτοιμοι νὰ θυσιάσουμε ὄχι μόνον ἀναπαύσεις καὶ τιμὲς καὶ δόξες καὶ πλοῦτη, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὕτη τὴ ζωὴ μας ἀκόμη· ἔτοιμοι γιὰ πόλεμο, ἔτοιμοι γιὰ θάνατο. Ἄς λέμε κ' ἐμεῖς μαζί μὲ τὸν ψαλμωδὸ καὶ τὸν ἀπόστολο: Γιὰ σένα, Κύριε, πεθαίνουμε κάθε μέρα, μᾶς ἔχουν σὰν τὰ πρόβατα ποὺ πᾶνε γιὰ σφαγὴ· «ἐλογίσθημεν ὡς πρόβατα σφαγῆς». (Ψαλμ 43:23, Ῥωμ 8:36).

Τὸ στράτευμα τοῦ Κυρίου δὲν ἔχει προορισμὸ νὰ ἀδρανή, νὰ διασκεδάξῃ καὶ νὰ κοιμᾶται. Πρόκειται νὰ περάσῃ μέσα ἀπὸ χώρες ἐχθρικές, ἀνάμεσα ἀπὸ «λύκους». (Ματθ 10:16. Λουκ 10:3). Θὰ ὑποχρεωθῇ νὰ δίνη μάχες, νὰ γκρεμίσῃ τὰ ὀχυρώματα τοῦ σατανᾶ, νὰ συγκρούεται μὲ τοὺς ἀντιχριστοὺς, νὰ προχωρῇ πάντα μπρός.

Πῶς ὅμως θὰ γίνουν ὅλα αὐτά, ἂν οἱ στρατιῶτες τοῦ Κυρίου εἶνε δειλοί; Ὁ δειλὸς στρατιώτης ὄχι μόνο ὁ ἴδιος κινδυνεύει νὰ συλληφθῇ ἀπὸ τὸν ἐχθρὸ, ἀλλὰ γίνεται καὶ πρόσκομμα καὶ ἐμπόδιο στοὺς συμπολεμιστὰς του· διότι καὶ ἕνας μόνο νὰ δειλιάξῃ, προκαλεῖ τὸν πανικὸ καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ δειλὸς Χριστιανὸς, αὐτὸς ποὺ τρέμει μπροστὰ στὶς θυσίες καὶ ὁ ἴδιος θὰ κινδυνεύσῃ τὸν ἔσχατο κίνδυνο, νὰ χάσῃ δηλαδὴ τὴν ψυχὴ του καὶ νὰ γίνῃ αἰχμάλωτος τοῦ σατανᾶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρόσκομμα στὴν ὁδὸ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ ἄλλων ἀδελφῶν του θὰ γίνῃ, διότι ἡ δειλή του στάσι σὲ ζητήματα πίστεως καὶ ἠθικῆς θὰ ἐπηρεάσῃ καὶ θ' ἀπογοητεύσῃ πολλοὺς.

Γι' αὐτὸ χρειάζεται νὰ πάρῃ ἡρωικὴ ἀπόφασι καὶ νὰ πῇ: Θὰ πεθάνω στὸ πεδίο τῆς μάχης τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν θ' ἀρνηθῶ τὴν πίστι μου, δὲν θὰ παραβῶ τὸ καθῆκον μου, δὲν θὰ καταπατήσω τὴν ἠθικὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ἔστω καὶ ἂν οἱ ἀντίπαλοί μου (ὁ κόσμος, ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὁ σατανᾶς) μοῦ δείχνουν ἕνα σταυρό, ἐπάνω στὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει κ' ἐγὼ ν' ἀφήσω, ὅπως ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος, τὴν τελευταία μου ἀναπνοή.

Αὐτὴ τὴν ἀπόφασι πρέπει νὰ πάρῃ κάθε Χριστιανὸς, ἂν θέλῃ νὰ εὐαρεστήσῃ στὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῆς στρατιάς, τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. Ἐὰν ἕνας ἐπίγειος βασιλιάς τιμᾷ τοὺς γενναίους στρατιῶτες του μὲ παράσημα, καὶ ὁ Κύριος θὰ τιμῆσῃ τοὺς ἀνδρείους Χριστιανοὺς «μετὰ δόξης αἰωνίου» (Β' Τιμ 2:10), γιατί ἀναδείχθηκαν «πιστοὶ ἄχρι θανάτου» καὶ ἀξίζουσιν νὰ τοὺς δώσῃ «τὸν στέφανον τῆς (αἰωνίου) ζωῆς». (Ἄποκ 2:10). Ἄκουσαν καὶ ἐκτέλεσαν τὴν προσταγὴ τοῦ Κυρίου «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ» καὶ «γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς».

Ὅποιος φθάνει μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ἀπόφασι αὐτῇ, αὐτὸς ἔχει ξεπεράσει κάθε ἄλλο ἐμπόδιο. Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πῆρε τὴν ἀπόφασι, χάριν τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἠθικῆς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, νὰ θυσιάσῃ—ἂν παραστῇ ἀνάγκη—καὶ αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ του, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς θὰ ἔχῃ πάντοτε εἰρήνη στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ θὰ βαδίζῃ ἀτάραχος τὴν ὁδὸ τοῦ Κυρίου. Καὶ πῶς ὄχι; Ἀφοῦ ἀποφάσισε νὰ θυσιάσῃ τὴ ζωὴ του, τὸ πολυτιμότερο ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπίγεια ἀγαθὰ, τί ἔχει πλεόν νὰ φοβηθῇ; Αὐτὸς ποὺ μπορεῖ καὶ περιφρονεῖ τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἐχθρὸ τῆς ζωῆς, τὸν θάνατο, πῶς δὲν θὰ περιφρονήσῃ εὐκόλα καὶ τοὺς μικρότερους ἐχθροὺς τῆς ζωῆς του, τὶς θλίψεις καὶ τὶς ποικίλες στενοχώριες;

Ὅποιος ἔχει τὴ δύναμι νὰ θυσιάξῃ τὸ μεγαλύτερο κεφάλαιο πῶς δὲν θὰ θυσιάσῃ σὲ δεδομένη στιγμή μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα ποσά; Ὁ στρατιώτης ποὺ πέφτει μὲ θάρρος στὴ φωτιὰ τοῦ θανάτου κ' εἶναι ἔτοιμος γιὰ τὴν τιμὴ τῆς πατρίδος καὶ τὸ αἷμα του νὰ χύσῃ, πῶς δὲν θὰ ὑποφέρῃ εὐκολώτερα κάθε ἄλλη κακουχία τοῦ πολέμου;

Νά λοιπόν, ἀγαπητοί μου, γιατί κάνω σήμερα αὐτὸ τὸ τολμηρὸ κήρυγμα. Ἡ ἀπόφασι νὰ πεθάνουμε γιὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ μᾶς κἀνῃ βράχους ἀκλόνητους σὲ κάθε πειρασμό. Μένοντας σταθεροὶ στὶς Χριστιανικὲς μας ἀρχὲς καὶ πεποιθήσεις, θ' ἀντικρούζουμε ἄφοβα κάθε ἄλλο κίνδυνο. Ἔτοιμοι γιὰ τὸ θάνατο, ἔτοιμοι γιὰ σφαγὴ, θὰ εἴμαστε συγχρόνως ἔτοιμοι καὶ γιὰ κάθε ἄλλη μικρότερη θυσία ποὺ θὰ ζητήσῃ ἀπὸ μᾶς ὁ Χριστός. Ἄν εἴμαστε κοντὰ στὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, θὰ διατελοῦμε δὲ διαρκῆ ἐπιστράτευσι. Πεθαίνοντας κάθε μέρα καὶ στιγμή γιὰ τὸν γλυκύτατο Κύριό μας καὶ συνοδεύοντάς τον στὸ δρόμο τοῦ σταυροῦ του, θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν ἐλπίδα νὰ γίνουμε μέτοχοι καὶ τῆς αἰωνίου δόξης καὶ χαρᾶς.

Ἀδελφοί μου! Ἄς παρακαλέσουμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μᾶς φωτίσῃ, γιὰ νὰ λάβουμε τὴν ἡρωικὴ ἀπόφασι καὶ νὰ ἐκτελέσουμε κ' ἐμεῖς τὴν ἐντολή του «ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ». Ἀμήν.



Μόνο ὁποῖος ζεῖ μὲ τὴν πίστη καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ πίστη τοῦ διαποτίζει ὅλη τὴν ψυχὴ, ὅλο τὸν νοῦ, ὅλη τὴν διάνοια καὶ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά, ὥστε νὰ ζεῖ ὅλος μὲ Αὐτὸν καὶ σὲ Αὐτόν, μόνο αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίζῃ ποῖος εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ τί εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Μόνο μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ γνωρίζουν ὅτι τὸ «κεφαλαιῶδες» εἶναι ἡ Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ «Μόνη Ἀλήθεια». Μόνο στὸν Ἰησοῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἀλήθεια γιὰ τὸν Θεό, γιὰ τὸν κόσμο καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιὰ τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ γιὰ τὰ ἀόρατα ὄντα. Καὶ «γνωρίζεται» μόνο ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ζεῖ σὲ Αὐτόν· καὶ ζεῖ σὲ Αὐτόν ὁποῖος ζεῖ στὸ Σῶμα του, τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἔτσι, μόνο στὴν Ἐκκλησία μπορεῖ νὰ «γνωσθεῖ», νὰ «μαθευτεῖ» ἡ ἀλήθεια «περὶ τοῦ παντός». Γιατί ἡ Παναλήθεια=Ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Χριστός.

Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς

Νεοταξικές Μαγαρισιές (στά σχολικά βιβλία) για τη Γιορτή τῶν Χριστουγέννων

Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Κιλκίς

Θὰ βγοῦν πράγματα ἀπὸ τὰ σχολεῖα ποὺ ὁ νοῦς σας δὲν φαντάζεται...

[Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός]

† † †

Ἦλεγε ὁ γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης, ὁ ὁσιακῆς μνήμης ἀθλητῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ: «Σοῦ φτιάχνω μία ἐξαιρετικὴ, πεντανόστιμη ὁμελέτα, ἀλλὰ ρίχνω καὶ μία κουτσουλιὰ μέσα. Τὴν τρῶς; Δὲν τὴν τρῶς, ἔχει μαγαριστεῖ ὀλόκληρη».

Ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία, διὰ στόματος τῶν Ἁγιορειτῶν Πατέρων, ὅταν ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ Μιχαὴλ Η΄ ὁ Παλαιολόγος, ἐπιζητοῦσε ἔνωση καὶ ὑποταγὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στὴν παναίρεση τοῦ Παπισμοῦ, «κανοναρχεῖ»: «Ὁ τῆς ὑγιῶς πίστεως καὶ τὸ βραχὺ ἀνατρέπων τὸ πᾶν λυμαίνεται». Μία «μικρὴ» ὑποχώρηση, μία ἐλάχιστη κηλίδα, ἀνατρέπει ὅλη τὴν πίστη. Γιατί τὰ γράφω αὐτά; Χριστούγεννα ἔρχονται σὲ λίγες μέρες. Στὰ σχολεῖα ἐτοιμαζόμαστε. Ἡ γιορτὴ, τὰ κάλαντα, τὰ ποιήματα. Προσμένουμε, δάσκαλοι καὶ μαθητές, τὴν συγκινητικώτατη γιορτούλα μας. Ὑπάρχει, ὅμως, ἡ παραφωνία, καὶ ὁ σπίλος, ἡ «κουτσουλιὰ»: Τὰ βιβλία τῆς «γλώσσας», αὐτὰ τὰ περιοδικὰ ποικίλης καὶ ἀνόητης ὕλης, ποὺ μᾶς φόρτωσαν οἱ νεογραικύλοι.

Πέρυσι ἔγραψα γιὰ τὶς πομπές καὶ τὶς παραλυσίες τῶν βιβλίων τῆς Ε΄ Δημοτικοῦ. Τὴν κακόψυχη μάγισσα «Φρικαντέλα» ποὺ μισοῦσε τὰ κάλαντα καὶ ἀποκαλεῖ «σκουπιδόπαιδα» τὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ πῆγαν νὰ τῆς τὰ ψάλλουν, γιὰ τὶς συνταγὲς μαγειρικῆς, ποὺ προτείνει τὸ ἄθλιο βιβλίο, ἀντὶ γιὰ τὴν γιορτὴ καὶ γενικὰ ὅλες τὶς νεοταξικὲς μαγαρισιές, ποὺ ἓνα μόνο πράγμα θέλουν νὰ κρύψουν ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνάκια: ὅτι τὰ Χριστούγεννα γιορτάζουμε τὴν γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, «σήμερον» καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων.

Φέτος ἤθελα νὰ γράψω γιὰ τὰ Χριστούγεννα, ἀναφερόμενος, κυρίως, σ' αὐτὰ τὰ χαζοχαρούμενα ἰδεολογήματα περὶ... γιορτῆς τῆς εἰρήνης ἢ τῆς οἰκογένειας. Καὶ ὡς γνωστόν, τὰ Χριστούγεννα καθιερώθηκαν σὰν γιορτὴ τῆς οἰκογένειας, μετὰ τὴν διάλυσή της στὴν παραζαλισμένη Δύση, ἐνῶ σὰν γιορτὴ τῆς εἰρήνης οὔτε ὡς κακόγουστο ἀστεῖο δὲν

στέκει. Δὲν ἔχουν τὸ Θεό τους οἱ μακελλάρηδες τῆς οἰκουμένης...

Τὶς ἡμέρες αὐτὲς μου φέρνει μία δασκάλα, συνάδελφος, τὸ βιβλίο γλώσσας τῆς Δ΄ Δημοτικοῦ. Διαβάζω τὴν 8^η ἐνότητα. Τίτλος: «Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται».

Πρῶτο κεῖμενο: «Ἡ Νύχτα τῆς Γεννήσεως», ποίημα τοῦ Δροσίνη. Ἀπὸ κάτω ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς γέννησης, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι «λεπτομέρεια ἐπιτραχηλίου, δώρου τοῦ Γρηγορίου Βελλᾶ ἐκ Μελενίκου, στὴν Ἱερὰ Μεγίστη Μονὴ Βατοπεδίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους, 2 Μαρτίου 1813». Ἐξαιρετικὰ ὅλα.

Δεύτερο κεῖμενο: «Χριστουγεννιάτικα Κάλαντα Κύπρου». Κι ἐδῶ ἄριστη ἢ ἐπιλογή.

Στὴν ἐπόμενη σελίδα (50) τὸ «ἐπίπεδο πέφτει». Παραπομπὴ στὴν ἐφημερίδα «ΤΟ ΒΗΜΑ», ἓνα κεῖμενο γιὰ τὶς Χριστουγεννιάτικες κάρτες καὶ τὴν ἱστορία τους στὴ Δύση. Τέλος πάντων, μπῆκαν στὴ ζωὴ μας. Παρατρύνονται οἱ μαθητὲς νὰ φτιάξουν τὶς Δυτικοῦ τύπου Χριστουγεννιάτικες κάρτες.

Στὸ ἐπόμενο κεῖμενο, «πέφτει ἡ κουτσουλιὰ», τὰ λύματα ποὺ λυμαίνονται τὴν «ὑγιὰ πίστη». Τίτλος τοῦ κειμένου: «Ἡ Μπουγάδα τοῦ Ἀϊ-Βασίλη». Προσοχὴ στὰ κουτοπόνηρα ἢ πονηρὰ μηνύματα τοῦ ἀθλιουργήματος. Διαβάζω: «Σήμερα ὁ Ἀϊ-Βασίλης ξυπνᾷ ἀπ' τὰ χαράματα. Ἐξὶ μόνο μέρες μένουν ὡς τὴν παραμονὴ τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς κι ἓνα σωρὸ δουλειὲς τὸν περιμένουν». Μεταξὺ τῶν ἐργασιῶν ποὺ «τὸν περιμένουν» καὶ ἡ μπουγάδα.

Παρατήρηση πρώτη: Ἐξὶ μέρες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν παραμονὴ τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς εἶναι τὰ Χριστούγεννα. Τότε θὰ κάνει τὶς δουλειές του καὶ θὰ βάλει μπουγάδα; Βάζει μπουγάδα.

Διαβάζω ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο γλώσσας Δ΄ Δημοτικοῦ, τεῦχος β', σελίδα 52: «Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο βγαίνει στὴν αὐλὴ, ν' ἀπλώσει τὴν μπουγάδα του. Πρῶτα κρεμάει τὶς κάλτσες του, ὕστερα τὴ φανέλα του, τὸ μακρὺ του σῶβρακο, τὸ σκούφο του, τὸ πουκάμισο καὶ τελευταῖα τὸ σακάκι καὶ τὸ παντελόνι του». Ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς: «Κρεμάει ὁ Ἀϊ-Βασίλης τὸ μακρὺ του σῶβρακο». (Τί γράφουμε! Ὁ ἅγιος νὰ μᾶς συγχωρέσει).

Οἱ ἀφόρητες αὐτὲς σαχλότητες προφανῶς γράφονται γιὰ τὸ περίεργο αὐτὸ ξωτικό, τὸ εὐτραφὲς καὶ γαστρίμαργο, ποὺ διαφημίζει τὸ ἀμερικάνικο...



ψυκτικό. Τὸ κείμενο ὁμως ἀναφέρεται σὲ παιδιὰ βαπτισμένα, «τέκνα» τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς ὁποίας σέμνωμα καὶ καύχημα εἶναι ὁ οὐρανοφάντωρ ἅγιος Βασίλειος καὶ ὄχι σὲ παιδάκια τῆς ἄθειας Δυσης ποὺ περιμένουν τὴν δωρογεμὴ κάλτσα τοῦ «ἐξέρυθρου οἰνόφλυγος Σαντακλάους».

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀναφέρονται μὲ τέτοιες δυσφημιστικὲς καὶ ὕβριστικὲς φράσεις τὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία, γιὰ τὸν ἀσκητικώτατο καὶ φιλανθρωπότατο ἅγιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας; Τὸν ἅγιο, ποῦ ὅπως μαρτυρεῖ ὁ ἐπιστήθιος φίλος του, Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, λόγω τῆς κοσμοσυρροῆς τῶν εὐεργετηθέντων, κατὰ τὸ «ξόδι» του, ποδοπατήθηκαν ἄνθρωποι; Τίποτε δὲν σέβονται πιά οἱ κηφῆνες τῆς κακοθείας καὶ τῆς ἀκολασίας; Πῶς τὰ παιδιὰ θὰ μάθουν νὰ σέβονται ὅσια καὶ ἱερά, ὅταν χλευάζονται μὲ τέτοιες χυδαῖες εὐτραπελίες οἱ ἅγιοι τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας;

Ὁ γέροντας τῆς Καισαρείας, αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ποῦ γίνεται σήμερα στὸ σχολεῖο, συμβουλεύει νὰ ἀποφεύγουμε: Τὴν προβολὴ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἡλικία, τὴν «εὐπλαστον», βλαβερῶν διηγήσεων καὶ νοσηρῶν προτύπων. Γράφει ὁ ταπεινὸς Ἱεράρχης: «*Εὐπλαστον οὖν ἔτι οὖσαν καὶ ἀπαλὴν τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ὡς κηρὸς εὐεικτον, ταῖς τῶν ἐπιβαλλομένων μορφαῖς ραδίως ἐκτυπομένη, πρὸς πάσαν ἀγαθῶν ἄσκησιν εὐθὺς καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐνάγεσθαι χρῆ...*». («Ὅροι κατὰ Πλάτος», ΕΠΕ 8:258). Δηλαδή, «ἡ ψυχὴ πρέπει νὰ ὀδηγεῖται στὴν ἄσκηση κάθε ἀγαθοῦ ἔργου ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα βήματα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅποτε εἶναι ἀκόμη εὐπλαστὴ καὶ ἀπαλὴ σὰν τὸ κερί καὶ εὐκόλα διαμορφώνεται σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς μορφές καὶ τὰ σχήματα, ποῦ παρουσιάζονται σ' αὐτὴ ἀπὸ τοὺς πνευματικὸς ὀδηγούς της».

Καὶ τώρα αὐτὸν τὸν ἅγιο, ποῦ ἀνάλωσε τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ παιδαγωγώντας τὴν νεότητα, τὸν βάζουμε ἡμεῖς τὰ ἀπολειψάδια τοῦ Γένους, νὰ πλένει Χριστουγεννιάτικα τὸ σῶβρακό του.

Δὲν γέννησε αὐτὸς ὁ τόπος Παπαδιαμάντη, Κόντογλου, Καρκαβίτσα, Παπαντωνίου, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔγραψαν ἀριστουργήματα γιὰ τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεῖαν γέννησιν ἢ γιὰ τὸν Ἄη-Βασίλη (ὅπως τὸ θεσπέσιο κείμενο τοῦ Κόντογλου «ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος» τὸ ὁποῖο ἐκπαραθυρώθηκε ἀπὸ τὰ βιβλία). Ὅχι. Αὐτοὶ ἔχουν τὸ «κουσοῦρι» νὰ εἶναι Ὁρθόδοξοι Ἕλληνες, ιδιότητα ἐπικίνδυνη, σκοταδιστικὴ...

Κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα «ὑπουργεῖο Παιδείας καὶ διὰ βίου μάθησης». (Αὐτὸ τὸ πομπῶδες εὐφυολόγημα «διὰ βίου»—κέλυφος ἔρημο ἐννοίας—ἢ δευτέρη λέξη του, περιέχει «ἰῶτα ἐν» περιττό. Ἄν τιτολοφοῦνταν «διὰ βού(ν)» μάθησις θὰ ἦταν σαφεστέρα ἢ διατύπωσις...).

Λασπόνερα καὶ ἀσέβειες στὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία, ποῦ θολώνουν τὸν νοῦ. Στὸ τέλος τῆς ἐνότητος,

γιὰ νὰ ἐπανέλθουμε στὸ βιβλίον τῆς Δ' Δημοτικοῦ, παρατίθεται—τί ἄλλο—συνταγὴ γιὰ τὴν παρασκευὴ Βασιλόπιτας. Ἡ ὅποια παιδευτικὴ ἀξία τῶν δύο πρώτων καλῶν κειμένων ἐξουδετερώνεται ἀπὸ τὰ νεοεποχίτικα ποῦ ἔπονται.

Καὶ ὅταν θολώνει ὁ νοῦς καὶ μᾶς βρίσκει τὸ κακό, παροτρύνει ὁ Ἑλύτης, νὰ μνημονεύουμε Διονύσιο Σολωμὸ καὶ Ἀλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη. Γράφει ὁ ἅγιος τῶν γραμμάτων μας: «Νὰ παύσει ἡ συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησις τῆς θρησκείας ἐκ μέρους πολιτικῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἐπιστημόνων, λογίων, δημοσιογράφων καὶ ἄλλων. Ἡ λεγομένη ἀνωτέρα τάξις νὰ συμμορφωθεῖ μὲ τὰ ἔθια τῆς χώρας... Νὰ γίνῃ προστάτις τῶν πατριῶν, καὶ ὄχι διώκτρια. Νὰ ἀσπασθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἐγκολπωθεῖ τὰς ἐθνικὰς παραδόσεις. Νὰ μὴν περιφρονεῖ ἀναφανεῖ ὅ,τι παλαιόν, ὅ,τι ἐγχώριον, ὅ,τι Ἑλληνικόν. Νὰ καταπολεμηθεῖ ὁ ξενισμὸς, ὁ πιθηκισμὸς, ὁ φραγκισμὸς. Νὰ μὴν νοθεύονται τὰ θρησκευτικὰ καὶ τὰ οἰκογενειακὰ ἔθια... Νὰ μὴν χάσκωμεν πρὸς τὰ ξένα...».

Ποῦ νὰ ἐβλέπε ὁ γέροντας τοῦ Γένους τὰ σημερινὰ μασκαριλίκια τῆς Παιδείας μας. Δὲν θὰ ἔγραφε γιὰ «συστηματικὴ περιφρόνησιν τῆς θρησκείας», ἀλλὰ γιὰ διωγμὸ καὶ διαπόμπευση τῆς πίστεως.



Κάποτε ἓνας ἅγιος Γέροντας παρακαλοῦσε νυχτα καὶ μέρα τὸν Θεὸ, γονατιστός, νὰ τοῦ φανερώσῃ πῶς ἐνεργοῦν ἐναντίον τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ δαίμονες.

Ὁ Κύριος τοῦ ἔδειξε σημεῖο ὅτι δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ζητεῖ τέτοιο πρᾶγμα. Ὁ Γέροντας ὁμως παρακαλοῦσε τὸν Κύριο μὲ ἐπιμονὴ καὶ ἔλεγε:

«Κύριέ μου, κάνε μου αὐτὴ τὴν χάρη καὶ ὡς Παντοδύναμος ποῦ εἶσαι φύλαξέ με, ὥστε νὰ μὴ μοῦ δημιουργήσουν κανένα κίνδυνο».

Πράγματι ὁ Θεὸς δέχθηκε τὴν προσευχὴ του, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ νὰ ὠφεληθῇ περισσότερο καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν ἔκανε νὰ δῆ τοὺς δαίμονες μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ μάτια.

Τί εἶδε τότε: Εἶδε νὰ εἶναι τόσο μεγάλο τὸ μῖσος τῶν δαιμόνων, νὰ περιτριγυρίζουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο, νὰ τρίζουν ἀπὸ φθόνον τὰ δόντια τους ἐναντίον του, ἀλλὰ Ἄγγελος Κυρίου νὰ τοὺς ἐπιπλήτῃ καὶ νὰ προφυλάσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο.

Ἀπὸ τὸν «Εὐεργετινὸ» (τόμ. Γ')

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἱερώνυμος στὴ Σπήλαια τῆς Βηθλεέμ...

Περιοδικό «Ο ΣΩΤΗΡ», Τεύχ. 2057.



Ἦταν ἡ νύχτα τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Ἐνας ἅγιος καὶ σοφὸς ἀσκητὴς προσεύχεται ἀπὸ ὥρα γονατιστὸς μέσα στὸ μικρὸ, ἅγιο Σπήλαιο, στὴ Βηθλεέμ. Στὸ ἴδιο σπήλαιο ποὺ

πρὶν ἀπὸ περίπου 400 χρόνια εἶχε φιλοξενήσει τὸν νεογέννητο Χριστό μας. Ὁ ἀσκητὴς δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος ἀπὸ τὸν μεγάλο Πατέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, τὸν ἅγιο Ἱερώνυμο (+420), ποὺ κατέγραψε καὶ τὰ ὅσα συνέβησαν ἐκεῖ.

Ἐκεῖνη τὴ νύχτα ὁ Ὅσιος εἶχε ἀφήσει τὸ ἀσκητήριό του, ποὺ ἦταν κοντὰ στὸ ἅγιο Σπήλαιο, καὶ εἶχε ἀποφασίσει νὰ τὴν περάσει ξάγρυπνος καὶ προσευχόμενος μπροστὰ στὴν ἁγία Φάτνη.

Ἡ καρδιά του ἦταν γεμάτη εὐγνωμοσύνη γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη δωρεὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ: νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Ἰδιος στὴ γῆ, νὰ γίνει ἄνθρωπος, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς γλυτώσει ἀπὸ τὴ δουλεία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀπὸ τὴν τυραννία τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τὰ νύχια τοῦ θανάτου!

Ἀπόλυτη σιωπὴ ἐπικρατοῦσε μέσα στὴ νύχτα στὸν ἱερὸ χῶρο... Ἐαφνικὰ ἀκούστηκε νὰ προφέρει τὸ ὄνομά του μὴ γλυκιὰ φωνή:

-Ἱερώνυμε!

Ἐαφνιάστηκε ὁ Ὅσιος... Κοίταξε παραξενεμένος γύρω του... Τίποτε... Δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανεὶς.

-Ἱερώνυμε! Ξανακούστηκε ἡ φωνή...

Ναὶ! Ἐρχόταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁγία Φάτνη... καὶ ἔκανε τὴν καρδιά του νὰ τρέμει συγκλονισμένη.

-Ἱερώνυμε, τί δῶρο θὰ Μοῦ κάνεις ἀπόψε στὴ γιορτὴ Μου;

Ἦταν πράγματι ἡ γλυκιὰ φωνὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἐέσπασε σὲ λυγμοὺς ὁ ἅγιος:

-ὦ Κύριε, τὸ ξέρεις ὅτι γιὰ Σένα τὰ ἄφησα ὅλα: τὸ παλάτι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, τὰ μεγαλεῖα τῆς Ρώμης, τὶς ἀνέσεις. Ἡ καρδιά μου, ἡ σκέψη μου, ὅλα σὲ Σένα εἶναι στραμμένα! Τί ἄλλο μπορῶ νὰ Σοῦ προσφέρω; Δὲν ἔχω τίποτε!

-Καὶ ὅμως, Ἱερώνυμε, ἔχεις κάτι ἀκόμα ποὺ μπορεῖς καὶ πρέπει νὰ μοῦ τὸ προσφέρεις... Αὐτὸ θὰ Μὲ εὐχαριστήσῃ πιὸ πολὺ ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα, καὶ αὐτὸ θέλω...

Ἔπεσε σὲ συλλογὴ ὁ Ὅσιος... Πέρασαν λίγα λεπτὰ καὶ μετὰ τόλμησε νὰ ψελλίσει:

-Κύριε, δὲν βρίσκω κάτι... Πές μου, τί θὰ μποροῦσα ἀκόμη νὰ Σοῦ προσφέρω καὶ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὸ σκεφτώ;

Μεσολάβησε μικρὸ διάστημα σιγῆς καὶ ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ξανακούστηκε:

-Ἱερώνυμε, τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου θέλω. Δῶσε μου τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου!

-Τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου; Τί νὰ τὶς κάνεις, Κύριε, τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου;

-Θέλω τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου γιὰ νὰ σοῦ τὶς συγχωρήσω, ἀφοῦ γι' αὐτὸ ἦρθα στὸν κόσμο, ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἐπικράτησε βαθιὰ σιωπὴ.

Συγκλονισμένος ὁ ἅγιος Ἱερώνυμος ἄφησε τὰ δάκρυά του, δάκρυα εὐγνωμοσύνης, νὰ πλημμυρίζουν τὸν ἱερὸ χῶρο ὅλη τὴ νύχτα.

Ἄφησε καὶ σὲ μᾶς τὴν ἔμπρακτη παραγγελία νὰ μὴ λησιμονοῦμε κάθε Χριστοῦγεννα τὸ ὠραιότερο δῶρο πρὸς τὸν Σωτήρα μας, τὴ μετάνοιά μας γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος ἑορτασμὸς τῆς μεγάλης ἑορτῆς...

Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε.

Χριστὸς ἐξ Οὐρανῶν ἀπαντήσατε.

Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς ὑψώθητε.

Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ, καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί· ὅτι δεδόξασται.



Πρέπει κατὰ τὸν ἀγῶνα νὰ ἐπικαλοῦνται οἱ ἀγωνιστὲς καὶ τὴν θεῖα βοήθεια, λέγοντες, πάλιν, μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς Παῖδες πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ: «Κύριε, βαδίζουμε ὀπίσω Σου τώρα μὲ ὅλη μας τὴν καρδιά, καὶ Σε φοβούμεθα καὶ ζητοῦμε τὸ πρόσωπό Σου· μὴ μᾶς ἐντροπιάσῃς, ἀλλὰ δέξου μας μὲ ἐπιείκεια καὶ σῶσε μας, κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῆς εὐσπλαχνίας σου καὶ τῶν θαυμάτων σου· δόξασε τὸ ὄνομά Σου, Κύριε, καὶ ἂς ἐντραποῦν ὅσοι κακομεταχειρίζονται τοὺς δούλους Σου· εἴθε νὰ καταισχυνοῦν μαζὶ μὲ κάθε δυναστεία τους καὶ νὰ συντριβῇ ἡ δύναμή τους. Ἄς μάθουν ὅτι σὺ εἶσαι Κύριος, ὁ μόνος ἀληθινὸς Θεὸς καὶ δοξασμένος σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη».

Καὶ ἐὰν ὁ τύραννος γίνῃ ἔξω φρενῶν καὶ πυρακτώσῃ ἐπτά φορὲς ἰσχυρότερα τὸ καμίνι τῶν ἡδονῶν, ἂς ἔχουν θάρρος ὅσοι ἐστήριξαν τὶς ἐλπίδες τους στὸν Κύριο. Διότι τὸ καμίνι θὰ μεταβληθῇ ἐντὸς ὀλίγου σὲ δροσιά, καὶ ὁ τύραννος, τὸν ὁποῖον παλαιότερα εἶχαν φοβηθῇ, αὐτὸς ἀπ' ἐδῶ καὶ ἐμπρὸς καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν σκιά τους θὰ τρομάξῃ, ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς βοήθειας ποὺ τοὺς ἐδόθη ἀπὸ ὑψηλά.

Ἅγιος Ἐφραίμ ὁ Σύρος

THE INVIOLEABILITY OF FREE WILL

By St. Nektarios of Pentapolis, from "ΠΕΡΙ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑΣ ΨΥΧΗΣ," Athos Editions, pp. 25-32.

If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

[Mt 16:24]



Human free will is sacred. This saying demonstrates the profundity of our moral freedom. The Savior invites people to follow Him and then leaves us free to decide this most important question for ourselves: to follow Him or turn against the way of God. He came for our salvation but does not encroach on our free will. He invites us to take an active part in our

salvation, but does not violate our free will in the slightest. If people were not free and self-determining beings, we would never have deserved such great respect, we would never have been accorded such great honor, that is to work with Christ the Savior for our own salvation; nor, of course, would it have been left to our personal inclination, but rather we would have been led to salvation as passive and inert creatures and would have simply accepted the effect of divine grace, which would have worked exclusively for our redemption. Truly, this is how respected and inviolate God desires our moral freedom to be; how imperious He wants our free will to be!

A study of the history of the redemption of humankind reveals the Son of God, Who became a person in order to save all of us, treading the path to His voluntary passion, bearing the sin of the world, healing our wounds, fulfilling the great mystery of divine dispensation, reconciling us with God and yet in no way infringing our free will. There you are! The gate of Paradise, which had been shut, was opened; the fiery sword which guarded the entrance was removed and the voice of the Lord invited excluded humanity to enter thereby into a place of peace and quiet. However, we were left free to enter or not, as we choose.

This freedom, that is to act by choice and to follow His laws, not influenced even by God Himself, demonstrates the absolute nature of our free will, which derives from our moral freedom, our great value, and the high position we occupy in the creation. What great honor is rendered to us by the fact that our free will is inviolate. At the same time, with what clarity are we taught our responsibilities: that we should respect our free will; have fervent zeal; and not allow,

under any circumstances, our free will to be enslaved and our moral freedom to become dependent on humiliating passions and desires.

Our moral freedom obliges us to make provision for our salvation, because otherwise we shall be lost. The formal recognition of our moral freedom by the Savior Himself teaches us that our salvation will be achieved solely by the absolute action of God's grace, but also by our own consent and simultaneous action.

Concerning this necessity, let us see what the wise Fathers of the Church have to say. St. Chrysostom says: *Even though grace is grace, it saves only those who desire to be.* St. Gregory the Theologian stresses that: *Our consent is necessary; but we shall be saved by God.* St. Clement the Alexandrian adds: *God inspires the souls that desire; but if their readiness abandons them, then the very grace which has been given them by God will be denied them.* In addition, St. Justin concludes: *God did, indeed, make people without their consent, but is unable to save them against their will.* Thus, we are expressly and clearly taught that there are two factors in our salvation: (a) the free desire of the human will and (b) the grace of God.

The prime agent in the work of our salvation is indeed the grace of God, because Christ the Savior came as Light to those who were in the dark and shed the light of His Grace on those *dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death.* He sought the lost sheep, called back those who had strayed, spoke secretly to people's hearts and showed us the way to salvation. It is the grace of God which perfects and saves, yet our own will should not be accounted of any less importance. We should regard it as the outstanding gem in the crown of our salvation, since it is the main lever that shifts our outlook that has been rendered inert by sin.

Our will is what urges our footsteps to follow the Savior, this is what strengthens our hearts to show self-denial, this is what bears the cross on the shoulder. Because, although grace invites us, dispels the gloom and illumines the dark places, it is possible nevertheless, due to the carelessness and slothfulness, the contamination and spiritual idleness of the carnal view of life, for our free will to feign deafness, to close its eyes, to remain in darkness and to proceed in exactly the opposite direction: the direction towards perdition. In other words, our free will can act in total contradiction to what it actually wants. Therefore, it is necessary for us truly to want our salvation, to seek it.

We have to want to hear, in order to hearken to the voice of Him Who is calling us. We need to want to see in order to open our eyes to the brilliant, abundant light. We have to want to move, to follow the Savior, to refuse to be the people we once were, with our passions and desires, in order to take the cross upon our shoulders. We must follow the *strait and circumscribed road* so that we may pass through the narrow gate of Paradise.

Our own will has to come first, because this is required by the terms with which the Savior calls those who are of a mind to follow Him. Without this disposition, it would be impossible to fulfill the terms offered, and thus salvation itself would be beyond us. On the one hand, grace is granted, but our will and concurrence are necessary if we are to receive it. Even more so, what is required is self-denial, self-sacrifice, a stable outlook which will not allow for any deviation from the path of constantly following the voice of the Savior, Who calls and is the voice of grace and of truth. If the grace of God which comes to us saved people by itself, the call would be entirely superfluous, as would be the terms and conditions. Though the grace of God is infinite, it does not save by itself, because it does not want to violate our free will.

Were it not that our consent is a vital factor in our salvation, God, in His infinite love for humankind, would, of course, save everyone, but without their consent. Yet, with very precise terms, He did indeed call us who are enslaved to our sentiments and who tend towards sin. He offered salvation, but demanded that we conform, because this was required by a great and important provision: the stipulation that we be reborn and renewed in Jesus Christ our Savior. Because in our former state, we could not enter the Kingdom of God, since we would be corrupted by sin. Therefore, we had to cast off this person, with its desires and passions and put on a new person, who had been reborn, in the awareness that they were made by God in *His image*.

Nevertheless, in order to cast off the old person, we first have to want to do so. So our cooperation in the task of our perfection is exceptionally important. Our Saviour has told us that in His Father's house, *there are many rooms*. The people who dwell therein are those who have lived their lives on earth in an appropriate manner. Our life-style here, therefore, defines our position in Paradise. St. Gregory Nazianzos has this to say on the matter: *Just as there are various, separate ways of living, so there are "many rooms with God", which are allocated depending on each person's worth. One of us might have one virtue, another have them all. Given this, let each of us, from now on, cease from wandering off wherever the mood takes us and instead follow Him Who guides us well and directs us along the narrow path, in order to bring us to the broad highway of blessedness.*

So we have to work for our salvation, otherwise we run the ultimate risk of perdition, since there is nothing in common between light and darkness, any more than there is between good and evil. Sin, which has corrupted us, is darkness and the great evil, because it conflicts with the will of God. Since we have the privilege of moral freedom, any misconduct on our part is counted as a sin that sets us apart from God. The greater the good of moral freedom, the greater also are the responsibilities this entails. People who are morally free should become holy. This is why, in the Old and New Testa-

ments God gives commands telling us: *Become holy, as I am holy*. (Lev 20:7, 26 and I Pet, 1:16).

How can people who are loathsome, people who are worthy of aversion have any sort of communion with God? Moreover, the Savior gives us a similar commandment when He says: *You, too, should be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect* (Mt 5:28), because His children should be like the Father Who has called them. God, then, wants us to be holy and perfect, because only those who are holy and perfect are really the children of our Father in heaven and they alone have the right to invoke His gifts, taking courage precisely from the love of a child for its Father.

They alone will inherit the kingdom of heaven. St. Paul wrote about all of this in his epistle to the Corinthians: *Do not you know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: no fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, sodomites, thieves, drunkards, nor those given to cursing, avarice and peculation (embezzlement, Ed.) will inherit the kingdom of God.* (I Cor 6:10). This is why the Savior calls upon us to deny ourselves, to take up the cross on our shoulders and follow Him. *If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.* (Mt 16:24). He recognizes our moral freedom and our free will, and leaves our salvation in their care. So that **people who seek their salvation will have to work to acquire it, otherwise they will be deprived of it.** Otherwise, through their carelessness and lack of concern, they will be preparing themselves for the loss of eternal life and will inherit eternal hell, from which I pray that God will spare us all. Amen.



Notice the way in which Zacchaeus confessed his sin. He did not say: "Lord, I am a sinful man!", or "Avarice is my sickness!" No; but, showing the fruits of repentance, he thus confessed his sin and his sickness: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." Is not this a clear confession that riches are his passion? "And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Is not this a clear confession that his riches were acquired in a sinful manner? He did not, before this, say to the Lord: "I am a sinner, and I repent." He confessed this silently to the Lord in his heart, and the Lord silently received his confession and repentance.

It is of more importance to the Lord that a man acknowledge and confess his sickness and cry for help in his heart than with this tongue, for the tongue is capable of deception, but the heart is not.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich

OUR STRUGGLE WITH PASSIONS

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation," translated by Heiromonk Seraphim (Rose) and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Arizona.

War with the Passions and Lusts



Following the order is a powerful means of destroying passionateness, purifying and correcting ourselves. Observing it consciously and freely, a person destroys passionateness by the very act of alienating it, of not giving it any food, or by placing a yoke upon it of the prescribed rules for the entire breadth of his powers and activities. The stifled pas-

sions then quiet down, like a candle under a glass. Just the same, we must not limit ourselves to this activity alone. Rules are given in order to heal our corrupted powers which are permeated with passionateness. The same power that lies in evil must now work for good. Therefore it is impossible not to meet with evil at the beginning of good works, during the first movement of our powers. If it is impossible to be both good and evil, and if we are expected to be only good without any evil taint, then we must cast out evil from every work, so that we can begin to do only good. So in uninterrupted connection with a direct and appropriate occupation of the powers, there must always be an indirect activity aimed at casting out evil and passionateness that rise up, otherwise known as war with the passions and lusts.

Establishing ourselves in and growing accustomed to the prescribed ascetic labors is achieved only through struggle and warfare, by victory over temptations. Who has ever become a faster without struggling against his stomach, or acquired sincere child-like faith without conquering self-opinion and proud-mindedness? And this does not apply to one thing only, but to the whole array of related activities, from inner effluences to the final departure from the world. Everywhere is struggle; therefore the prescribed rule, being the renewer of the powers and nature, is also the field of constant spiritual warfare. Conquer the unnatural in your powers, and they will become natural; ward off and cut off evil, and you will see the good. Asceticism is ceaseless triumph.

Freely Choosing and Loving Good Is a Powerful Weapon

The possibility and basis for all inner victories is first the victory over ourselves—in the breaking of our will and dedicating ourselves to God, with inimical denial of every-

thing sinful. At this time is born the dislike for passionate-ness, hatred, and aversion, which is itself a spiritual fighting strength and alone comprises the entire army. Where this is not present, the battle is already in the hands of the enemy; but where it is present, we often win without a struggle. From this we can see that a departure point for appropriate activity is our inner [man]; it is the departure point of warfare, only from another side. When consciousness and free will switch to the side of good and come to love it, they vanquish through hatred all evil and passionateness, especially their own. In this consists the change, or the break.

Therefore the powers that war with passions are also the intellect or spirit—the seat of consciousness and freedom—the spirit being upheld and strengthened by grace. Through it, healing power reaches the powers through ascetic labors; through it, the vanquishing Spirit passes through the passions to battle. And vice versa: When passions attack, they directly storm the mind or spirit, that is, the seat of consciousness and freedom. These reside in our inner sanctuary, at which the enemy shoots his arrows, by way of the passions, from soul-related qualities and fleshliness as if from an ambush. And as long as the consciousness and freedom are whole, that is, as long as they are on the side of good, then no matter how fierce the attack, the victory is ours.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that all the power for victory comes from us—it only shows what comes out of us. The point of fortification for battle is our renewed spirit, and the triumphant, vanquishing power over the passions is grace. It builds one thing in us and destroys another, but again through the spirit, or consciousness and free will. The struggler relinquishes himself to God crying out, complaining about his enemies and hating them, and God in him and through him casts them out and vanquishes them. *Be of good cheer*, said the Lord, *for I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33). *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*, (Phil 4:13) confesses the Apostle, precisely because without Him we can do nothing. Whoever wants to triumph by himself will undoubtedly fall into the same passion that he fights, or at least into some secondary passion. Having given himself to God, he literally goes from nothing to victory. Again, this does not negate our own opposition, but only shows that even with all our opposition, success or victory can never be our own; and if it comes, it is always from God. Therefore oppose and struggle against the passions as much as you can, but do not fail to lay all your sorrows on the living God, Who says: *I am with you in an evil day—do not be afraid.*

Reviewing Our Enemies to Know the Suitable Methods on Uprooting Passions

How should a man now act, or in general what methods are suitable for uprooting passions? In order to determine this, we must review all of our enemies, as well as what

forms they take and how they act. This itself will determine the nature of our struggle with them. Success in battle depends greatly on our vision of its formation.

There is no such thing as peaceful progress in goodness, because our passions are still alive and they are greatly fortified by this present vain, visible world, and by the dark forces that rule it. These are the sources of the movements that war against goodness in us.

Man is totally passionate until he converts. At conversion the spirit, being filled with zeal, is pure. But the soul and the body remain passionate. When the cleansing and healing has begun, the soul and body resist and fight for their lives against the spirit that persecutes them. These attacks usually come through soul-related and bodily powers; they strike at the spirit, for through it are these powers estranged. But sometimes there are movements aimed directly at the spirit. These are the fiery arrows that the enemy shoots from his physical-emotional/psychological ambush at the prisoner escaping from his tyranny. Regardless of the fact that there is a part of us which is healed and whole, the attacks of sin and passions are obvious and felt throughout our existence.

(1) In the body: The source of passions is pleasing of the flesh, or comforting the flesh, with which the whirlwind of our bodily life and sensual delight are directly linked. Wherever they are present there is sexual lust, gluttony, love of pleasure, sloth, comfort, adulterous feelings, loquacity, absent-mindedness, restlessness, willfulness in everything, unseemly laughter, idle talk, sleepiness, day-dreaming, craving the pleasant and all manner of pleasing the flesh in lust.

(2) In soul: **a) In the mental part**—opinion, exclusive belief in one's own intellect, criticism, attacking the mind of God, doubts, puffing up and arrogance, curiosity, mental plundering, straying thoughts. **b) In the desirous part**—self-will, unsubmitiveness, love of authority, cruelty, opportunism, self-reliance, covetousness, ungratefulness, possessiveness, extortion. **c) In the sensual part**—passions that shatter peace and tranquility of heart, or various kinds of pleasantness and unpleasantness: wrath, envy, hatred, anger, revenge, judgment, contempt, vainglory, ambition, pride, boredom, sadness, sorrow, depression, joy, cheerfulness, fears, hopes, expectations.

The Source of Passions of Soul and Body Is Self-Love

The source of all these passions of soul and body is self-love or egotism which, although conquered or refused at first, attacks often, and, clothed in one passion or another, wages war against the spirit. This residual egotism together with the whole army of passions comprises the now-decaying fleshly man and is that very other *law in my members* (Rom 7:23), of which the Apostle speaks, and from which something always attacks that is contrary to the spirit's desires.

The Holy Fathers, in order not to distract the attention of the spiritual warrior-Christian, strove to trace all the passions to their beginnings, in order to discern what the warrior should attack. With this goal, they place three things close to the effluence of egotism: pleasure, covetousness and pride; after these are five more passions issuing from them. Limiting it to this, the Holy Fathers describe the attacks of these passions and show how to war with them. Whoever has cut off pleasure by self-directed wrath, covetousness with unacquisitiveness, and pride with humility has conquered egotism, for it is easier to vanquish it by destroying its children than by attacking it itself.



If you wish, search out a mediator and a physician and a good counselor and let them show you: how as a good counselor they will apply their counsel on the ways of repentance; how as a physician, they will give you the appropriate medicine for every wound; how they will be a mediator through prayer; and how he has communication with God and will stand before Him face to face on your behalf to gain the mercy of the Divine.

Therefore, if you find a flatterer or a slave of the belly do not strive to make him your counselor and ally lest he come around to your will and teach you not those things that are pleasing to God but those that you will accept, and thus you remain again the enemy of God and unreconciled with Him.

Accept neither an inexperienced physician who will plunge you into despair with his great abruptness and improper incisions and cauteries, nor one who, in his excessive sympathy, will leave you ill while you think you are cured and, worst of all, what you do not expect, will surrender you to eternal hell. For this hell is brought about when, in this life, the soul's illness is not cured [never attains illumination] but continues [unillumined in darkness] until it dies with us. *For not all who are of Israel are Israelites* (Rom 9:6), but those with the name who also know the power of the name and are minds [a nous] that see [theoria] God. Likewise not all who are called Christians are really Christians. *Not everyone, who saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, Christ says, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father Which is in heaven, and He says, just as "many will say to Me on that day...in Thy name we cast out demons...and then I will profess to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.* (Mt 7:21-23).

St. Symeon the New Theologian

ON LIES

By Abba Dorotheos, from "Practical Teaching on the Christian Life," translated by Constantine Scouteris, Athens (2004).



Brethren, I want to remind you of a few things about falsehood. I see that you are not careful about holding your tongue and through that, we are easily led astray. You see, my brothers, as I always tell you, a habit can tend towards good or towards evil. We therefore need great vigilance so that we are not cheated by lies. No-one who lies becomes united with God. The lie is alien to God. It is written that, *Falsehood is from the evil one*, and also that *He is a liar and the father of lies*. (In 8:44).

You see he calls the devil the **father of lies**, while God is the truth. He himself said, *I am the way, the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6).

See what we are separating

ourselves from and what we attach ourselves to through lies, clearly the devil. Therefore, if we really want to be saved, we are obliged to love the truth, with all our strength and concern, guarding ourselves from all falsehood, so that we are not separated from truth and from life.

There are three different kinds of lies. Lying in thinking, lying verbally and lying through one's own way of life. The person who lies in his thinking is open to suspicions. When he sees someone talking with his brother, he is suspicious and says, "They are talking about me!" If they happen to stop talking, he is still suspicious, suspecting that they stopped because of him. If someone says one word to him, he suspects that he said it to bother him. Simply he is suspicious of his neighbor in everything, saying, "He did that because of me. He said that or did that because of me." This is the person who lies in his understanding. Nothing he says is true, but all is based on suspicion. From this comes curiosity, slander, eavesdropping, quarrelling and condemnation.

It sometimes happens that he suspects something and it turns out to be true. On account of this, he maintains that he wants to correct himself, so he is always curious thinking

that, "If someone speaks against me, I will see what is the mistake he is accusing me of, and thus I can correct myself". First of all, this principle is from the devil, since he started with lies. That is to say, he suspected what he did not know. How is it possible for an evil tree to produce good fruits? If this person really wanted to correct himself, when a brother says to him, "Don't do that!" or "Why did you do that?" he should not be distressed, but make a bow and thank him. Then he will be corrected. If God sees that this is his intention, He will never leave him in error, but will always send him a person who can correct him. However, to say that, "I shall believe my suspicions in order to 'correct myself' and I shall eavesdrops and be curious about everything," this is a justification from the devil to destroy him.

When I was present in the coenobium, I was tempted to find out about the inner disposition of someone through his gestures. Just such a thing happened to me. I was once standing still when a woman passed in front of me carrying a pitcher. I do not know how I was carried away and stared into her eyes. Immediately, my thoughts told me that she was a prostitute. As I had told myself that, I was greatly troubled and I referred the whole matter to the elder, Abba John, in this way, "Master, if without wanting to, I see someone's gesture and my thoughts tell me his inner disposition, what should I do?" The elder answered me thus, "What! Surely, it happens that a person may have a natural defect and through inner struggle manage to overcome it! It is impossible to learn the state of a person's soul from that. Therefore never trust your suspicions for even a straight rule can be made crooked by a crooked one. Suspicions are not true and harm us." From that time on, even if my mind told me that the sun was the sun or that darkness was darkness, I would not believe it. Nothing is graver than suspicions. They are so harmful that if we keep them for a long time, they begin to convince us that we clearly see things that do not exist and have never happened.

I will tell you a wonderful thing that I witnessed when I was in the coenobium. There we had a brother much troubled by this passion. He was so easily persuaded by his own suspicions that he was certain that all of his suspicions were just as his thoughts dictated to him, and it could not possibly be otherwise. As time passed the evil progressed and the devil had misled him so much that he once went into the garden to spy. He always eavesdropped and pried. He thought he saw one of the brothers stealing figs and eating them. It was Friday and not yet the second hour. Having persuaded himself that what he saw was a reality, he left in silence and watched again during the Eucharist gathering, to see what the same brother would do about Holy Communion. When he saw the brother washing his hands to enter and take Communion, he ran and said to the Abba,

“Look, at that brother who is going to take Communion with the other brothers. Order that It not be given to him. I saw him stealing figs from the garden this morning and eating them.”

Meanwhile, this brother entered into the holy offering with great compunction. He was one of the devout. When the Abba saw him, he called him, before he reached the priest who was distributing Holy Communion. He took him aside and said to him, “Tell me my brother what you have done today?” The brother was surprised and said, “Where, master?” The Abba said, “In the garden when you went there this morning, what did you do there?” The surprised brother said again to him, “Father, I was in neither the garden, nor indeed the monastery, this morning, for I have only just come back from the road. Immediately after the dismissal of the vigil the steward (the monk in charge of the financial affairs of the monastery) sent me on an errand far away.”

The errand that he referred to was many miles away and he arrived just in time for the Eucharist. The Abba called the steward and asked him “Where did you send this brother?” He confirmed what the brother had already said, namely that he sent him to that particular town. He made a bow to the Abba saying, “Forgive me, father for not sending him to you to get your blessing. It was after the vigil and you were resting.”

When the Abba heard all this, he gave them both his blessing and allowed them to take Communion. Then he called the other brother who had the suspicions and reprimanded him, banning him from Holy Communion. Not only that but he gathered all the brothers after the service and told them what happened, in tears. He marked out that brother, in front of everyone. He had three reasons for doing so: Firstly, to shame the devil and make an example of the sower of suspicion. Secondly, to allow the brother’s sin to be forgiven through this dishonor and to obtain God’s help for his advancement. Thirdly, to ensure that the brothers never trusted their own suspicions. He gave much advice about this to us and to the brother concerned saying that, “There is nothing more harmful than suspicion,” and he proved that by this incident.

The fathers said many similar things to protect us from the harm that suspicion does to us. Therefore, brethren, let us try not to trust our suspicions, with all our strength. For there is nothing that distances a person from taking care of his own sins, or from always being curious about what does not concern him, more than this. No good comes of it, rather manifold troubles and affliction come of it. They leave a person no time to acquire fear of God. Therefore, if suspicions are sown in us through our own evil, let us immediately transform them into good thoughts. Thus, we will not harm ourselves. Suspicions are evil and they

never allow the soul to find peace. This is falsehood of the understanding.

As for the liar in words, this is the person who, let us say, is too lazy to get up for the vigil, yet does not say, “Forgive me because I was too lazy to get up.” Instead, he says, “I had a fever. I was faint and I couldn’t get up. I didn’t have the strength.” He says ten lying words to avoid making a bow and humbling himself. If someone blames him for something, he sighs and tries to change his words in such a way, so as to refute the person who blames. Likewise, if he happens to quarrel with his brother, he does not stop justifying himself. Instead he maintains... “But you have,” or “But you did that,” or “I didn’t say that, he did.” He says all that, so that he should not have to humble himself. Also, if he happens to want something, he does not come to the point and say, “I like this, I want it” but he persists and says in a round-about way, “I suffer this and I need this” or “they told me to do that” and many other lies so as to fulfill his will.

Every sin arises from the desire for pleasure, avarice or ambition. Lying has its roots in three vices. Either from not blaming and humiliating oneself, or for some pleasure or for gain. He does not cease from turning this way and says anything to achieve his purpose. This person is never trusted, for even if he says a true word no one believes him. Even when he speaks the truth, the others are in doubt.

Sometimes there is a great need. In that case, if one does not hide this, it causes great trouble and sorrow. When a person finds himself in such circumstances and there is no alternative, he can, as I said, alter his words so as not to become more sorrowful, troubled and endangered. As Abba Alonios said to Abba Agathon, “Suppose two men killed someone in front of you and one of them escapes to your cell. The magistrate is looking for him and asks you saying, ‘Did a murder take place in front of you?’ If you do not accommodate things you will deliver that man to death.”

Even in this case where there is great necessity a person must not be without care but he must repent and in tears before God, he must consider this as a time of temptation. He must not use this very often but as one possibility amongst many others. It is like an antidote for poison or like the purgative, which if taken continuously is harmful, but if taken once a year, when it is necessary, is beneficial. One must face the peculiar situation in a similar way so that if it is necessary, as I said, to adapt the truth, to make that one occasion amongst a great many and only when it is necessary. He must do this rarely and with the fear of God, showing to them his intention and the need, and then God will protect him because even this harms the soul.

Thus, we have discussed the liar in thought and the liar in word but we should also talk about the person that lies in his whole life.

The person that lies in his whole life is the one who, while in reality is dissolute, feigns temperance, and being greedy, he speaks about charity and praises sympathy. He is proud but admires humility. Even then, he admires it, without wanting to praise it. He should, with humility, firstly confess his own weakness saying, “Woe is me, wretched one, for I have done nothing good in my life.” After confessing his own weakness, he should then have admired and praised the virtue. He praises it without having the intention of avoiding scandalizing others because in that case he would have thought as follows: “Indeed I am wretched and subject to passions. Why should I scandalize someone else? Why should I harm another soul and bring another burden on myself?” With that thought, even if he had sinned, he would have touched upon good. It is a characteristic of humility to accuse yourself and a characteristic of sympathy to take care of your neighbor.

However, this person does not admire virtue for the reasons I have mentioned, but rather, either to cover his own shame by giving the impression that he himself has this virtue or often to harm and mislead someone. No evil, no heresy, not even the devil himself can mislead someone unless it is transformed into virtue. The Apostle says, *Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.* (2 Cor 11:14). It is not strange then if his servants are transformed into the servants of righteousness. In like manner, the liar, either through fear of shame and humiliation or, as I said, because he wants to mislead and cheat someone talks about the virtues, praising and admiring them as if they were his own and he had experience of them. This is the person whose very life is a lie. This is not a simple person but a two-faced one. He has an internal and external face. His own life is two-faced and worthy of scorn.

Thus, we have said that lies come from the devil. We have also discussed truth and said that God is truth. Let us avoid falsehood, brethren, so as to be delivered from the evil one and let us struggle to obtain the truth so that we may be united with Him, Who said, *I am the truth.* (Jn 14:6). Let God make us worthy of his own truth.

To Him the glory and dominion forever. Amen.



Prayer keeps the world alive and when prayer fails, the world will perish... “Nowadays,” perhaps you will say, “there are no more monks like that to pray for the whole world.” But I tell you that when there are no more men of prayer on earth, the world will come to an end and great disasters will befall. They have already started...

St. Silouan the Athonite

WHY ARE YOU SORROWFUL?

By Elder Ephraim of Arizona.



Why are you sorrowful and glum while walking along the way of God? Those who have forgotten God, who have no hope in the living and eternal fountain of God, should grieve. But we,

who believe in the living God and whose hopes depend upon Him, ought to rejoice that we have such a Father in the heavens, Who loves us more than all fathers and mothers and Who takes infinite care to render us worthy of Him.

But, you say, we fall every moment! Yes, I do not deny it—but we know that our nature is from clay and that it desires the earth and seeks what is base, for *the mind of man is inclined to evil from his youth.* (cf. Gen 8:21). And we see within us a law which seeks to capture our free will, to subjugate it and *render it a slave of sin.* (cf. Rom 7:23).

In all this, however, our good intention triumphs. God has given us spiritual weapons to fight against every satanic attack: the glorious banner of the cross of hope—living hope in Him Who said, *I will never leave you nor forsake you* (cf. Heb 13:5)—hope in our Christ, who was hanged on the Cross, and all who look upon Him and hope in Him will not be put to shame. The all-immaculate Blood which was poured out on the Cross pardoned the sins of mankind and poured forth life. *Blessed is the man who hopes in Him.* (cf. Pss 33:8).

Take courage, my child; this grief of yours will turn into joy. This grief produces great good for you; it surrounds you as with a breastplate of iron, so that the evil darts of attachment to earthly things do not tear your mind away from the concern for heavenly things and for your immortal soul. Grief will succeed joy, and joy, grief, just as night follows day. This is how the Father of lights has established the path of those who are being saved. Just have patience and hope: engrave these in the depths of your heart—with these, all adversities will be faced. Cling to our sweet Jesus; cry out to Him in your afflictions. Entrust to Him the care of grievous things and He will do good to you, as to Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, who out of extreme grief because of her barrenness, fell down before the Lord and poured out her soul as if beside herself. And her petition did not fail. Who ever hoped in God and was put to shame?

Of course, this does not mean blameworthy hope but active hope—that is, hope along with spiritual works according to our strength; otherwise, it is not hope but mockery. Save us from such deceitful hope, O God.

CHILDREN: THEIR JOYS AND THEIR DIFFICULTIES

Source: "Discourses 4, Family Life," published by the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki.



Q.: I've noticed, Elder, that sometimes babies smile at the time of Divine Liturgy.

A.: They don't do that only at the Divine Liturgy. Babies are in constant contact with God, because they've got nothing to worry about. What did Christ say about little children? *Their angels in heaven continually gaze upon the face of my Father who is in heaven.* They're in touch with God and with their guardian angel, who's with them

all the time. They smile in their sleep sometimes, and at other times cry, because they see all sorts of things. Sometimes they see their guardian angels and play with them- the angels stroke them, tease them, shake their fists and they laugh. On other occasions they see some kind of temptation and cry.

Q.: Why does temptation come to babies?

A.: It helps them to feel the need to seek their mothers. If there wasn't this fear, they wouldn't need to seek the comfort of being cuddled by their mothers. God allows everything so that it'll turn out well.

Q.: Do they remember what they see as babies when they grow up?

A.: No, they forget. If a little child remembered the number of times it had seen its guardian angel, it might fall into pride. That's why, when it grows up, it forgets. God's wise in His doings.

Q.: Do they see these things after baptism?

A.: Of course after baptism.

Q.: Elder, is it all right for an unbaptized child to reverence relics?

A.: Why not? And they can be blessed with the holy relics. I saw a child today, it was like a little angel. I asked, "Where are your wings?" It didn't know what to say! At my hermitage, when spring comes and the trees are in blossom, I put sweets on the holm-oaks next to the gate in the fence and I tell the little boys who come: "Go on, boys, cut the sweets from the bushes, because if it rains they'll melt and spoil." A few of the more intelligent ones know that I've put them there and laugh. Others really believe that they've grown there and some others have to think about it. Little children need a bit of sunshine.

Q.: Did you put lots of sweets, Elder?

A.: Well, of course. What could I do? I don't give good sweets to grown-ups; I just give them *loukoumia*. When

people bring me nice sweets, I keep them for the kids at the School [*The Athoniada*]. "See, last night I planted sweets and chocolates and today they've come up! See that? The weather was good, the soil was well-turned because you'd dug it over well and they came up just like that. See what a flower garden I'll make for you. We'll never need to buy sweets and chocolates for kids. Why shouldn't we have our own produce?" (St. Paisios had planted sweets and chocolates in the freshly dug earth and put lilac blossoms on top to make it seem that they were flowering).

Q.: Elder, some pilgrims saw the chocolates you planted in the garden because the paper stood out against the soil. They didn't know what to make of it. "Some kid must have put them there," they said.

A.: Why didn't you tell them that a big kid put them there?

Q.: Elder, why does God give people a guardian angel, when He can protect us Himself?

A.: That's God looking after us especially carefully. The guardian angel is God's providence. And we're indebted to Him for that. The angels particularly protect little children. And you wouldn't believe how! There were two children once, playing in the street. One of them aimed at the other to hit him on the head with a stone. The other one didn't notice. At the last moment, apparently, his angel drew his attention to something else, he leapt up and got out of the way. And then there was this mother who went out into the fields with her baby. She breast-fed it, put it down in its cradle and went off to work. After a bit, she went to check and what did she see? The child was holding a snake and looking at it! When she'd suckled the child, some of the milk had stayed on its lips, the snake had gone to lick it off and the baby had grabbed hold of it. God looks after children.

Q.: Elder, in that case, why do so many children suffer from illnesses?

A.: God knows what's best for each of us and provides as necessary. He doesn't give people anything that's not going to benefit them. He sees that it's better for us to have some sort of defect, a disability instead of protecting us from them.



Live simply and without thinking too much, like a child with his father. Faith without too much thinking works wonders. The logical mind hinders the Grace of God and miracles. Practice patience without judging with the logical mind.

St. Paisios the Athonite

THE NATIVITY AND BAPTISM / THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church, According to the Spoken Teaching of Father John Romanides," vol. 2 (text in quotes is directly from the lectures of Fr. John Romanides).

When we talk about the birth of Christ we are speaking of two births. One is the pre-eternal birth of the Word from the Father, according to the divine nature, and the other is the birth in time from the All-Holy Virgin, according to the human nature. This refers to Christ's two natures: the divine and the human: "The important thing is that this Word, before His birth in the flesh, is like the Father in every respect. He does not come from nothing. The Word has two births. One birth was before all ages and the other birth was in time, which is the birth as a man, the incarnation."

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

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

us (Jn 1:14) is so important. This dwelling is the tabernacle. God "tabernacled" among us. How? He became flesh and dwelt among us."

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

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



1:15), refers to His uncreated divine nature. "This is what the Apostle Paul says: *the image of the invisible God*' Christ, that is. When he says *image* he does not mean something created, because there cannot be a created image of God. It is different if we speak about an image of Christ; in that case we have an image of something created, because

Christ is man and we have an icon of Christ the man, not of Christ's divinity. But when we say that Christ is the image of God, as God is not incarnate, how can God have a created icon? He is the image of the invisible God as an uncreated reality, not as a created reality."

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

"The All-Holy Virgin is in the pre-eternal plan of God, as the *troparia* and the Fathers of the Church say. This is a matter of description. It is not a philosophical question

about whether or not the All-Holy Virgin is necessary for the incarnation. It is a fact that the All-Holy Mother of God is Ever-virgin. We cannot philosophize about something that is a fact and say that the incarnation could have come about even without the All-Holy Virgin, or from a Mother of God who was not a virgin.”

The All-Holy Virgin was the greatest gift of the creation and humanity to Christ. The successive purifications of her forebears, her own struggle and, most of all, the grace of God, made her worthy to become the Mother of the Son and Word of God. She experienced glorification in the Holy of Holies: “We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God.”

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

The Church ruled at the Third Ecumenical Council that the All-Holy Virgin was to be called Theotokos, because she did not give birth to a mere man, but to the Word of God. The teaching about the Theotokos is therefore included in the infallible teaching of the Church.

The Theotokos has an important place in the Church: “In the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church the whole catholic Church is present: Christ with the Theotokos, the Prophets, the Apostles and the saints.”

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

In any case, the human nature that was assumed by the Word and united immutably, inseparably, indivisibly and unconfusedly with the divine nature, was glorified “at the same time as it was assumed” in the womb of the Theotokos. Christ was not gradually perfected, as human beings are. Christ is God according to essence, whereas man is glorified according to participation. Also, according to the

Fathers of the Church, Christ brings about glorification: He is Himself the source of man’s glorification and does not “undergo” glorification. Christ is God and glorifies others, like the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, whereas man is glorified. Christ revealed this glorified human nature to human beings by stages.

“There is no question of Christ having passed through the stages of perfection, purification and illumination in order to reach glorification or *theoria*. There was no progress towards perfection in Christ, since He had glorification or *theoria* or participation in the union of uncreated glory from the very conception of His human nature in the womb of the All-Holy Virgin. He did not possess this by the grace of God, but naturally, seeing that He was God by nature and the actual hypostasis of the Word, Who was the only one of the Holy Trinity to become man by nature, uniting Himself with His own normal human nature, with all its natural properties, including the will and energy that are common to human nature in general. Christ gradually revealed the stages of perfection in Himself (in other words, the glorification of human nature in Himself) to set an example to those who are on the way to perfection. He assumed everything that was common to human nature (except sin) not in external appearance, as the Docetists claimed, in order to delude those observing His human life, but in reality.”

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

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

The saints understand this from their experience. When they reach glorification, the *theoria* of Christ’s glory in His human nature, they realize that Christ is the source of the

uncreated Light, whereas they themselves are participants in the Light.

The fact that Christ was perfect from the beginning was made clear on many occasions, even during His struggle with the devil: “In Christ this state of perfection was natural and not acquired. For that reason His struggle with the devil in the wilderness and His forty-day fast were not an achievement but a manifestation of perfection. At the same time it was a real fight with temptations, not from within but from the devil.”

Christ voluntarily assumed the passible and corruptible aspects of human nature because He really took flesh. However, the so-called “blameless” or natural passions—hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep—did not act in Christ by compulsion. Christ’s divine nature had authority over them. Therefore, Christ was hungry when He wished to be, thirsty when He wished to be, slept or rested when He wished to.

The saints understand this to some extent from their experience. They too, when they reach glorification according to grace, observe a suspension of the natural and blameless passions: hunger, thirst, sleep and so on. In Christ this happened “naturally” because He was true God, and the human nature followed the divine nature: “The incarnate Word not only possesses the state of *theoria* naturally, not by grace, but even as man He Himself is the natural source of glorification and glory. If some of the natural and blameless passions are suspended in those who by grace are in a temporary state of glorification, how much more must those passions have no natural place in Christ, Who is glorified by nature and the source of glorification as man.

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

Paradoxically, the devil is destroyed by means of the very passions by which he attempts to destroy man. The most basic weapon with which Satan tries to destroy human beings is death, but through death Christ and the saints destroy the devil.”

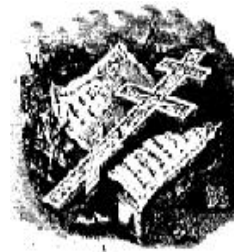
It should be noted at this point that the Triune God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is present everywhere in the world according to energy but not according to essence. The God-man Christ, however, is absent from the world according to His essence as Word, but “the human nature of Christ is everywhere present according to essence,”

by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures. This issue is linked with the teaching about the essence and energy of God, but also about the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ.

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

At Christ’s Baptism in the River Jordan, John the Forerunner was accounted worthy to experience the Triune God: *It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”* (Mk 1:9-11).

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



What, then, O brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God? What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ’s commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, alms-giving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ.”

St. John of Kronstadt

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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 FAITHFUL PEOPLE OF GOD NOT ONLY HAVE THE RIGHT—THEY ARE OBLIGED TO CORRECT ERRING CLERICS

Excerpt from a Prophetic Homily by the Ever-memorable and Blessed Fr. Athanasios Mytilinaios.



There exists the pan-heresy of ecumenism, which has taken hold of Patriarchs and Archbishops by the back of the neck the world over. Patriarchs and Archbishops throughout the world. You know, when someone comes and grabs you by the back of the neck, you are immobilized. If you grab a cat by its neck and you lift it up, he cannot bite you. He is unable to do anything and is immobilized.

Likewise, the devil, [with] this heresy, the pan-heresy of ecumenism [a denial of the Body of Christ's oneness and catholicity], has taken hold of leading clergy, the highest of high, and he now is moving down, toward the people. At this point [*more than 30 years ago, Ed.*], however, he has hold of the leading figures of the Church worldwide—allow me to repeat.

In America, for example, there are already Presbyters who are preaching ecumenism. I have been given a cassette tape in which he [the priest] is preaching ecumenism.

If you do not know someone who will come to you [for example a new priest], what will you do? Should you not make a point to see just who is your parish priest, or your bishop, or Archbishop,

or Patriarch? What will you do? Are you going to be a fool? I mean, if he becomes an ecumenist, will you join him?

There are many other errors or transgressions which could be described in order to illustrate the bad shepherd. The shepherd could even be a heretic—not only in reference to the heresy of ecumenism—pay attention to me here—but with regard to other heresies. Oh, dear, we have quite a few!

So, the people of God not only have the right, they are **required to be vigilant** as to what is being taught by the shepherds and who they are. They have an obligation.

Therefore, politely, kindly, you will see about it, say something, correct possible errors. You remember when Aquila and Priscilla, saw the amazing Apolla, of the race of Alexandrians, he was lacking [in some way] and Priscilla, a woman, took him aside and corrected him, so that his teaching was more accurate. When someone is lacking in some way, he should be politely corrected. A layman may go and tell him, “Father, this is not exactly correct.” When a priest has discernment, respect and humility, he accepts the correction.

When, however, he insists on ideas which are truly heretical, what will the sheep do? Won't that sheep leave?

To give you an example: when I go to confession and the confessor tells me that I can have [relations with] a girlfriend or boyfriend, will I go back to that confessor? I will never return there again.

So, the people of God not only have a right, they have a responsibility to be vigilant in matters of Faith and spiritual life.