

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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CONSCIENCE AND OBEDIENCE

Source: "Counsels from the Holy Mountain," selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim, St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, AZ (1999), pp. 130-136.

When a person remains completely obedient to his conscience and implements whatever it tells him, he is not reproved by it anymore—not that its voice has weakened, but rather because of his good obedience, his conscience has nothing to reprove. The Apostle John says that when a man's conscience does not condemn him, he has confidence toward God. (cf. 1 Jn 3:21).

It is impossible for a person to proceed without ever stumbling somewhere, because from all sides the devil, the world, and the flesh are continuously inserting obstacles into his life, and he stumbles in proportion to his carelessness. Therefore, when he falls, he should arise at once and seek forgiveness. When one repents in proportion to the gravity of his fall, his conscience, which used to bother him, stops reproving him.

We must guard our conscience on three points—with respect to God, with respect to our neighbor, and with respect to things. One guards his conscience with respect to God when he avoids the various sins. He guards his conscience with respect to his neighbor when he does not grieve him, judge him, slander him, scandalize him, or push him towards evil deeds. He guards his conscience with respect to things when he does not cause destruction or damage to material things through carelessness, negligence, or unscrupulousness.

St. Theodore the Studite tells us many things about this "unscrupulousness."

When you see something burning or being damaged and you do not pick it up and protect it, this is unscrupulousness. When your clothes get torn and you neglect them, and then they get completely ruined, this is unscrupulousness. When you are able to work but instead of working you wander around here and there, this is also unscrupulousness. When you leave your food out and it goes bad and you throw it away, this is unscrupulousness because you should have taken care to eat it before it went bad. Therefore, unscrupulousness is when one errs in any way with respect to material things, and also when one offends God in any way.

The greatest wealth is obtained when one strives to preserve his conscience unburdened. But in the event that he senses that something has wounded him, he should correct it immediately, and thus he will return to his prior state.

How many times has our conscience reproved us! The more a person listens to his conscience, and the more he attends to it, the more precisely it guides him. And the more discreetly it guides and reproves him, the more he ascends in purity.

There is also the so-called "evil conscience," which often comes with the pretense and shape and form of the good conscience, yet in essence it is the evil, perverted conscience, the conscience which is opposed to God. The evil conscience is that voice which teaches things deceitful, perverted, and contrary. The good conscience has humility and obedience as its starting point, source, and foundation. The evil conscience has pride and disobedience as its source.

When one does not obey the Elder, when one resists, when one is deceitful,

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when one does not listen, then one has what is called self-reliance; such self-reliance is the evil conscience.

Humble-mindedness gives birth to the good conscience. Since the two consciences are entangled, one often asks himself, “Is this the evil conscience or the good one? Should I believe this thought or that one?” So to learn—or rather to be taught—what is the good conscience, one needs to have humility; but above all, he needs to place himself under the guidance of another, his superior, his leader, his spiritual father, and to obey whatever he says. Then little by little he will begin to perceive which thoughts are evil and which are good, what is the hue of the good conscience and what is the hue of the evil conscience. Thus, on the one hand, through the teaching and guidance of his spiritual father he avoids falling, and on the other hand, in time he is taught what the hue and appearance of the two consciences are and becomes a perfect man.

It is those who are without obedience who have suffered harm. For man is pressed by both consciences; the one works to save him and the other to destroy him, and many times he does not know which one to listen to. He who is under obedience avoids this danger and little by little becomes experienced and skilled in discerning the evil conscience from the good conscience.

Abba Poimen had two thoughts, and he went to tell them to his spiritual father, who lived very far away—he set out in the morning and arrived in the evening. He forgot one thought, however, and told him only the other one. When he returned to his cell, as soon as he put the key in the door, he remembered the second thought. So without even opening the door, he went back again to tell him his other thought. When his spiritual father saw his labor and his

exactitude, he exclaimed, “Poimen, Poimen, shepherd of angels! Your virtue will make your name known in all the world.” (The term “*poimen*” in Greek means shepherd).

For one to become experienced enough to distinguish the voice of the good conscience from the voice of the evil conscience, he must pass through obedience. If he does not pass through obedience, he is deficient. He may have gifts; he may be a good soul; he may do various good works—but you will see that he always hobbles in discernment and humility. The virtue that submission to an Elder gives is, first and foremost, discernment, which comes through humble-mindedness. That is to say, obedience forges a man’s character and gives him, above all, discernment and humility.

Ask your Father, says the Scripture, *and he will tell you.*” (Deut 32:7). We see **this in the patristic path the saints walked.** We read in the Lives of the Desert Fathers that a certain Zacharias saw a vision, but his spiritual father was not in a position to elucidate whether it was from God or from the demons. So he rebuked his disciple, telling him not to pay attention to visions. The disciple went to a discerning Elder who told him, “The vision is from God, but go and submit yourself to your spiritual father,” thus showing that being obedient is more important than seeing visions.

How much the Fathers have left us for our instruction! The best road, the most correct, the safest, the most free from responsibility, is the road of submission to an Elder. “He who practices obedience,” says Abba Palamon, “has fulfilled all the commandments of Christ.”

“The disciple has chosen the best road,” says Abba Moses. “Run, children, to wherever obedience is. There lie joy, peace, brotherly love, unity, vigilance, consolation, crowns, and wages.” But when we want to put forth our own will

as disciples, then the road becomes difficult, rough, and dangerous. When one practices obedience, he finds himself in love, in forcefulness, in brotherly affection, in crowns, in sanctification, in salvation.

Self-will is a great barrier, a great obstacle—it is a wall between the soul and God. Just as when a wall is in front of us and blocks the sun, the place is damp and unhealthful and does not bear fruit because the sun does not shine there, the same thing happens with the wall of self-will. When it stands in front of the soul, the soul is darkened and remains without fruit. The Sun of Righteousness is Christ; when the soul is not obstructed, the rays of Christ come and illuminate it, and man bears fruit and is sanctified.

Only the one who has tasted the fruit of obedience can speak about it. Obedience is the most grace-filled road. Above all, one who is obedient casts out the evil demon of selfishness and pride—which causes all evils—and brings humility and freedom from care.

We read in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* about two brothers who decided to become monks and left the world. One became a disciple in a coenobitic monastery; the other became a hermit. After two or three years the hermit said, “Let me go and see my brother who is in the monastery, living in the midst of cares and worries. Who knows how the poor thing is doing in the midst of so much bustle.” He was confident that through his *asceticism* he had reached a high spiritual level. He went to the monastery, and with the excuse that he supposedly needed his brother, he said to the abbot, “I would like to see my brother a little.” His brother came, and the abbot, who was a holy man, blessed them to go off by themselves and talk.

When they had gone some distance from the monastery, they saw on the path a dead man who was almost naked. The hermit said, “Don’t we have any clothes to cover the man with?” The monk from the monastery, in his simplicity said, “Wouldn’t it be better to pray for him to be resurrected?” “Let’s pray,” said the hermit. They both prayed, and the dead man arose. The monk from the monastery did not attach much importance to the miracle; he believed it came about through the prayers of his Elder. The hermit, however, said within himself that the miracle occurred because of his own virtues—because of his *asceticism* and fasting, his nightly vigils and the hardship he endured, his sleeping on the ground and all his other achievements.

When they returned, before they had a chance to speak, the abbot said to the hermit, “Brother, do not think that it was because of your prayers that God raised the dead man—no! God did it because of the obedience of your brother!” When the hermit saw that the abbot immediately read his thoughts, that he had the gift of clairvoyance and was a holy man, he believed that in reality he himself was deluded, and that his brother, who he thought was anxious and worried about many things within the monastery, was actually above him.

Think with what confidence the disciple said, “Let’s pray for him to be resurrected!” Here you see simplicity, guilelessness, faith. The hermit considered it impossible, but the monk from the monastery considered it natural; he trusted in the prayers of his Elder. What a struggle he must have undergone to reach such humility! How his egotism and pride must have been smashed in the monastery! What



**Elder Ephraim of Arizona (R) with
Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (+1998)**

person coming from the world does not have egotism and pride? How many disciples were sanctified and gave forth myrrh after death!

On the Holy Mountain, in the region of St. Anne’s Skete, there was a monk who hauled sacks of wheat up from the harbor with much labor and sweat. At one point he began to say in his thoughts, “I wonder if we will have a reward for all the sweat and labor we endure in order to obey our Elders?” As he reflected on these things, he sat down to rest a little. A light sleep came

upon him, and as he was half asleep, he saw the Panaghia before him. “Do not be dismayed, my child” she said to him. “This sweat which you shed to haul your provisions for the sake of obedience is counted as the blood of a martyr before my Son.” Then he came to himself, and his thoughts and distress left him. The fathers inscribed that event on the stone wall there, and whoever passes by there reads it.

Near the main church of St. Anne’s Skete, there is a little house called “The Patriarch’s.” A Patriarch by the name of Cyril lived there in *asceticism*; he had abandoned the patriarchal throne and came to live as a simple monk. The fathers hauled their things on their backs, but they said to the Patriarch, “You are old, your All-holiness, and not accustomed to our way of life. We will get you a little donkey to load your provisions on.” So they got him a little donkey, and he went up and down the mountainside with it.

One day, as the Patriarch climbed up with the animal and the other fathers had their provisions on their backs, they sat down to rest a little. And as the Patriarch was half awake, he suddenly saw the Panaghia together with the Angels. The Panaghia was holding a vessel and was giving a drink to the fathers who were carrying their things on their backs; the Angels were holding handkerchiefs and wiping away their sweat.

He saw with surprise that they even wiped the sweat from the donkey, and he begged them, "Wipe me also, please." Then the Panaghia said to him, "Father, you have not sweated; we will wipe the donkey because it has." Then he woke up and came to himself. He said to the fathers, "Take away the donkey, because I am missing out on many blessings. The Panaghia and the angels wiped the donkey and not me!" From then on, he also carried his things on his back.

How very many such things have happened in the lives of the Fathers! If only we were there to see them! Now such things are rarely encountered; they have all been lost.

So let us be attentive to our conscience. Let us acquire a good conscience through obedience, contrition, confession, and humble-mindedness. Let us avoid self-will, which begets self-reliance and the evil conscience. Amen.



GOD NEVER LEAVES

From "The Evergetinos."

A brother was beset by the demon of lust. It so happened that the brother once passed by a village in Egypt and saw a beautiful woman, who was the daughter of a pagan priest. On seeing her, he was wildly aroused and, under the influence of his passions, went to the father of the girl and said: "Give me your daughter as my wife."

"I cannot give her to you," the pagan priest answered, "without asking my god. Wait a bit."

Indeed, the pagan priest went to his god's oracle (through which, as we know, the Devil speaks) and asked: "A monk came to my home and wants my daughter as his wife. Shall I give her to him?"

The demon hidden in the oracle answered him: "Ask him if he will deny his God, his baptism, and the vows he made as a monk."

When the pagan priest returned, he said to the monk: "Will you deny your God, your baptism, and your monastic vocation?" Indeed, the monk accepted his terms. But immediately he saw something bright come from his mouth and, like a dove, go up into the heavens.

Right away, the pagan priest ran to the demon and said: "Behold, the monk did all that you asked." Then the demon said to him: "Do not give you daughter to him as a wife, for his God has not departed from him, but is still helping him."

So once again, the pagan priest went to the monk and told him: "I cannot give my daughter to you as a wife, since your God continues to remain near you and help you."

On hearing this response, the monk was deeply moved and said within himself: "Even though God in His singular goodness has bestowed upon me so many good things, I—wretch that I am—have denied Him, His Holy baptism, and monastic vows. But despite my denial, God has not departed from me, though I have so greatly betrayed him, and continues to help me. After that, do I not have duty to run to Him, grounded in the surety of His boundless goodness?"

Having now recovered from the dizziness of passion, the brother left immediately for the desert and went to his Elder, to whom he confessed his denial, as well as all of his thoughts.

With kindness the Elder told him: "Brother, remain with me in my cave and fast for two days at a time for three weeks: that is you can fast strenuously for two days and on the third relax the fast. And I will ask God to forgive you."

The Elder did indeed grieve for the brother and entreated God with earnestness: "My God," he would say, "Give me the soul of this monk and receive his repentance."

God, as merciful as he is, heard the sincere and fervent prayer of the Elder, especially since it came forth from genuine love. When the first week of the cloistered monk's penance had been fulfilled, the Elder visited him and told him: Have you perhaps beheld something?"

"Yes," the monk answered, "I saw a dove depart for the heavens in front of my head."

The Elder said to the repentant monk, "Take care for yourself and ask God with the whole of your soul, without cessation, to forgive you." With these recommendations, the Elder once again departed.

As soon as the second week had passed, the Elder came again to the cave where the monk was cloistered: "How is it going, Brother? Perhaps you have seen something again?" he asked with fatherly concern and care.

"Yes, Elder, I saw a dove next to my head."

The Elder, having advised him anew to pray with earnestness and to stay in a state of vigilance in his soul, took leave. When at last the third week had elapsed, the Elder went to the cloistered monk and said to him: "Have you seen anything more?"

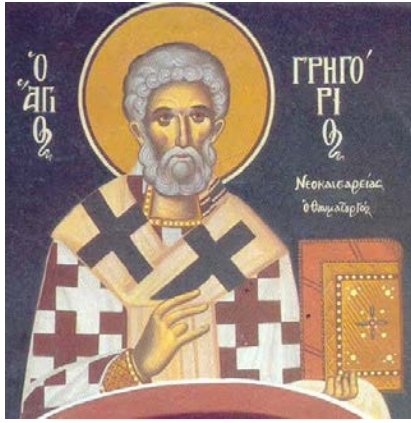
With joy, the monk answered: "I saw the dove come and perch on my head. So, when I stretched out my hand with joy to grab him, he flew into my mouth."

When the Elder heard this answer, he thanked God and said to the repentant monk: "Do you see, my brother? God has accepted your repentance. Therefore, be careful with yourself from now on."

Crying, the emotion-filled brother answered the Elder: "From now on and ever after, Father, I will remain near you, and shall not leave you until I die." And indeed the monk remained with the Elder and never left.

ON THE ANNUNCIATION TO THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY

By St. Gregory of Neocaesarea, known as *Thaumaturgus* (Ὁ Θαυματουργός—*O Thaumaturgus, The Miracle-Worker*) (+275).



Today the choir of angels sings strains of praise joyfully, and the light of the advent of Christ shines brightly upon the faithful. Today is the glad springtime to us, and Christ the Sun of righteousness has beamed with clear light around us, and has illumined the

minds of the faithful. Today Adam is made anew, and moves in the choir of angels, having winged his way to heaven. Today the whole circle of the earth is filled with joy, since the sojourn of the Holy Spirit has been realized to men. Today the grace of God and the hope of the unseen shine through all wonders transcending imagination, and make the mystery that was kept hidden from eternity plainly discernible to us. Today are woven the chaplets of never-fading virtue. Today, God, willing to crown the sacred heads of those whose pleasure is to hearken to Him, and who delight in His festivals, invites the lovers of unswerving faith as His called and His heirs; and the heavenly kingdom is urgent to summon those who mind celestial things to join the divine service of the incorporeal choirs. Today is fulfilled the word of David, *Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad.*

The fields shall be joyful, and all the trees of the wood before the Lord, because He comes. David thus made mention of the trees; and the Lord's Forerunner also spoke of them as trees that should bring forth fruits meet for repentance, or rather for the coming of the Lord. However, our Lord Jesus Christ promises perpetual gladness to all those who believe in Him. For He says, *I will see you, and you shall rejoice; and your joy no man takes from you.*

Today is the illustrious and ineffable mystery of Christians, who have willingly set their hope like a seal upon Christ, plainly declared to us. Today Gabriel, who stands by God, came to the Pure Virgin, bearing to her the glad annunciation, *Hail, thou that art highly favored! And she cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel immediately proceeded to say, The Lord is with you: fear not, Mary; for you have found favor with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob*

forever: and of His kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? Shall I remain a virgin, she asks? Do I not then lose the honor of virginity?

And while she was yet in perplexity as to these things, the angel placed shortly before her the summary of his whole message, and said to the Pure Virgin, *The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.* For what it is, that also shall it be called by all means; for *with God nothing shall be impossible.*

Meekly, then, did divine grace make election of the pure Mary alone out of all generations. For she proved herself prudent truly in all things; neither has any woman been born like her in all generations. She was not like the primeval virgin Eve, who, keeping holiday alone in paradise, with thoughtless mind, unguardedly hearkened to the word of the serpent, the author of all evil, and thus became depraved in the thoughts of her mind; and through her that deceiver, discharging his poison and refusing death with it, brought it into the whole world; and in virtue of this has arisen all the trouble of the saints.

In the holy Virgin alone is the fall of that (first mother) repaired. Yet this holy one was not competent to receive the gift until she had first learned who it was that sent it, and what the gift was, and who it was that conveyed it. While the holy one pondered these things in perplexity with herself, she says to the angel, *Whence have you brought to us the blessing in such wise? Out of what treasure-stores is the pearl of the word dispatched to us? Whence has the gift acquired its purpose toward us? From heaven you have come, yet you walk upon earth! You exhibit the form of man, and (yet) you are glorious with dazzling light. These things the holy one considered with herself, and the archangel solved the difficulty expressed in such reasoning by saying to her: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you.* Therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. And *fear not, Mary;* for I am not come to overpower you with fear, but to repel the subject of fear. *Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God.* Question not grace by the standard of nature. For grace does not endure to pass under the laws of nature. You know, O Mary, things kept hidden from the patriarchs and prophets. You have learned, O virgin, things which were kept concealed till now from the angels. You have heard, O purest one, things of which even the choir of inspired men was never deemed worthy. Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Daniel, and all the prophets, prophesied of Him; but the manner they knew not. Yet you alone, O purest virgin, are now made the recipient of things of which all these were kept in ignorance, and you learn the origin of them.*

Where the Holy Spirit is, there are all things readily ordered. Where divine grace is present, all things are found possible with God. The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. Therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of you *shall be called the Son of God*. And if He is the Son of God, then is He also God, of one form with the Father, and co-eternal; in Him the Father possesses all manifestation; He is His image in the person, and through His reflection the (Father's) glory shines forth. And as from the ever-flowing fountain the streams proceed, so also from this ever-flowing and ever-living fountain does the light of the world proceed, the perennial and the true, namely Christ our God.

It is this that the prophets have preached: The streams of the river make glad the city of God. And not one city only, but all cities; for even as it makes glad one city, so does it also the whole world. Appropriately, therefore, did the angel say to Mary the holy virgin first of all, *Hail, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you*; inasmuch as with her was laid up the full treasure of grace. For of all generations she alone has risen as a virgin pure in body and in spirit; and she alone bears Him who bears all things on His word. Nor is it only the beauty of this holy one in body that calls forth our admiration, but also the innate virtue of her soul. Wherefore also the angels addressed her first with the salutation, *Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with you*, and no spouse of earth; He Himself is with you who is the Lord of sanctification, the Father of purity, the Author of incorruption, and the Bestower of liberty, the Curator of salvation, and the Steward and Provider of the true peace, who out of the virgin earth made man, and out of man's side formed Eve in addition. Even this Lord is with you, and on the other hand also is of you.

Come, therefore, beloved brethren, and let us take up the angelic strain, and to the utmost of our ability return the due share of praise, saying, *Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with you!* For it is yours truly to rejoice, seeing that the grace of God, as he knows, has chosen to dwell with you—the Lord of glory dwelling with the handmaiden; He that is fairer than the children of men with the fair virgin; He who sanctifies all things with the undefiled. *God is with you*, and with you also is the perfect man in whom dwells the whole fullness of the Godhead. *Hail, thou that art highly favored*, the fountain of the light that lightens all who believe

upon Him! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the rising of the rational Sun, and the undefiled flower of Life! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the mead of sweet savor! Hail, thou that art highly favored, the ever-blooming vine, which makes glad the souls of those who honor you!

Hail, thou that art highly favored!—the soil that, all untilled, bears bounteous fruit. You have brought forth, in accordance with the law of nature indeed, as it goes with us, and by the set time of practice; and yet in a way beyond nature, or rather above nature, by reason that God the Word from above took His abode in you, and formed the new Adam in your holy womb, and inasmuch as the Holy Ghost gave the power of conception to the holy virgin; and the reality of His body was assumed from her body. And just as the pearl comes of the two natures, namely lightning and water, the occult signs of the sea; so also our Lord Jesus Christ proceeds, without fusion and without mutation, from the pure, and chaste, and undefiled, and holy Virgin Mary; perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, in all things equal to the Father, and in all things consubstantial with us, apart from sin.



Most of the holy fathers, and patriarchs, and prophets desired to see Him, and to be eye-witnesses of Him, but did not attain hereto. And some of them by visions beheld Him in type, and darkly; others, again, were privileged to hear the divine voice through the medium of the cloud, and were favored with sights of holy angels; but to Mary the pure virgin alone did the archangel Gabriel manifest himself luminously, bringing her the glad address, *Hail, thou that art highly favored!* Thus, she received the word, and in the due time of the fulfilment according to the body's course, she brought forth the priceless pearl.

Come, then, you too, dearly beloved, and let us chant the melody which has been taught us by the inspired harp of David, and say, *Arise, O Lord, into Your rest; You, and the ark of Your sanctuary*. For the holy Virgin is in truth an ark, wrought with gold both within and without, that has received the whole treasury of the sanctuary. *Arise, O Lord, into Your rest*. Arise, O Lord, out of the bosom of the Father, in order that You may raise up the fallen race of the first-formed man. Setting these things forth, David in prophecy said to the rod that was to spring from himself, and to sprout into the flower of that beauteous fruit, *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear, and forget your own*

people and your father's house; so shall the King greatly desire your beauty: for He is the Lord your God, and you shall worship Him. Harken, O daughter, to the things which were prophesied before time of you, in order that you may also behold the things themselves with the eyes of understanding. Harken to me while I announce things beforehand to you, and harken to the archangel who declares expressly to you the perfect mysteries.

Come then, dearly beloved, and let us fall back on the memory of what has gone before us; and let us glorify, and celebrate, and laud, and bless that rod that has sprung so marvelously from Jesse. For Luke, in the inspired Gospel narratives, delivers a testimony not to Joseph only, but also to Mary the mother of God, and gives this account with reference to the very family and house of David: *For Joseph went up, says he, from Galilee, unto a city of Judea which is called Bethlehem, to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child, because they were of the house and family of David. And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her son, the first-born of the whole creation, and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

She wrapped in swaddling clothes Him who is covered with light as with a garment. She wrapped in swaddling clothes Him who made every creature. She laid in a manger Him who sits above the cherubim, and is praised by myriads of angels. In the manger set apart for dumb brutes did the Word of God repose, in order that He might impart to men, who are irrational by free choice, the perceptions of true reason. In the board, from which cattle eat, was laid the heavenly Bread, in order that He might provide participation in spiritual sustenance for men who live like the beasts of the earth.

There was no room for Him in the inn. He found no place, who by His word established heaven and earth; for though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor, and chose extreme humiliation on behalf of the salvation of our nature, in His inherent goodness toward us. He, who fulfilled the whole administration of unutterable mysteries of the economy in heaven in the bosom of the Father, and in the cave in the arms of the mother, reposed in the manger. Angelic choirs encircled Him, singing of glory in heaven and of peace upon earth. In heaven, He was seated at the right hand of the Father; and in the manger, He rested, as it were, upon the cherubim. Even there was in truth His cherubic throne; there was His royal seat. Holy of the holy, and alone glorious upon the earth, and holier than the holy, was that wherein Christ our God rested.

To Him be glory, honor, and power, together with the Father undefiled, and the altogether holy and quickening Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of the ages. Amen.

SPIRITUAL GEMS

St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

A devout elder lay on his death bed. His friends gathered around him and mourned him. With that, the elder laughed three times. The monks asked him: "What are you laughing at?" The elder replied: "I laughed the first time, because all of you are afraid of death; the second time, for none of you are prepared for death; the third time, because I am going from labor to rest."

Behold, how a righteous man dies! He is not afraid of death. He is prepared for death. He sees, that through death, he passes from the difficult life to eternal rest.

When the nature of man imagines itself in its original state in Paradise, then death is unnatural, the same way that sin is unnatural. Death emanated from sin. Repented and cleansed from sin, man does not consider death annihilation, but the gate to life eternal.

If, at times, the righteous prayed to God to prolong their earthly life, that was not because of love for this life nor because of the fear of death but solely that they would gain more time for repentance and cleansing from sin in order that they may present themselves before God, more sinless and more pure. Even if they showed fear before death, that was not out of fear of death but the fear of God's judgment. What kind of fear then must the unrepentant sinner have before death?

A man went into the forest to choose a tree from which to make roof-beams. And he saw two trees, one beside the other. One was smooth and tall, but had rotted away inside, and the other was rough on the outside and ugly, but its core was healthy. The man sighed, and said to himself:

"What use is this tree to me if it is rotten inside and useless for beams? The other it is rough and ugly, is at least healthy on the inside and so, if I put a bit more effort into it, I can use it for roof-beams for my house."

And, without thinking any more about it, he chose that tree to make roof-beams.

So will God choose between two men for His house, and will choose not the one who appears outwardly righteous, but the one whose heart is filled with God's healthy righteousness.

Blessed is the man who uses his sufferings, knowing that all suffering in this brief life is loosed on men by God in His love for mankind, for the benefit and assistance of men. In His mercy, God looses suffering on men because of their sins—by His mercy and not His justice. For, if it were by His justice, every sin would inevitably bring death, as the Apostle says: *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* (Jas 1:15). In place of death, God gives healing through suffering. Suffering is God's way of healing the soul of its sinful leprosy and its death.

THE SINNER'S CONDITION

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Path to Salvation, A Concise Outline of Christian Asceticism," translated by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose), published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius, Arizona (2016), pp. 88-92.

For the most part, the Word of God depicts the sinner, who is faced with the necessity of renewal in repentance, as being submerged in deep slumber. The distinguishing characteristic of such people is not always outright depravity, but rather the absence in the strictest sense of inspired, selfless zeal for pleasing God, together with a decided aversion for everything sinful. Devotion is not the main concern of their cares and labors; they are attentive about many other things, but are completely indifferent to their salvation, and do not sense what danger they are in. They neglect the good life and lead a life that is cold in faith, though it be occasionally righteous and outwardly irreproachable.

Particulars for a Person Who Lacks Grace

That is the general characteristic. Here are the particulars for a person who lacks grace: Once he has turned away from God, the person dwells on himself, and makes self the main goal of his life and activity. This is because at this point, after God, there is for him nothing higher than self, especially because, having previously received every abundance from God and having now forgotten Him, he hurries and takes care to fill himself up with something.

The emptiness that has formed inside him because of his falling away from God causes an unquenchable thirst inside him that is vague but constant. The person has become a bottomless abyss. He makes every effort to fill this abyss, but he cannot see or feel it getting full. Thus, he spends his entire life in sweat, toil and great labors; he busies himself with various occupations in which he hopes to find a way to quench his unquenchable thirst. These occupations take up all his attention, all his time and all his activity. They are the highest good, in which he lives with his whole heart.

Thus, it is clear why a person who makes self his exclusive goal is never himself; instead, everything is outside him, in things either created or acquired by vanity. He has fallen away from God, Who is the fullness of everything. He himself is empty; it remains for him to seemingly pour himself out into an endless variety of things and live in them. Thus, the sinner thirsts, fusses, and troubles himself with occupations

and numerous things outside himself and God. This is why a characteristic trait of sinful life is, in its disregard for salvation, *the care and trouble about many things*. (Lk 10:41).

The Care and Trouble about Many Things

The nuances and distinctions of this care and trouble about many things depends on the kinds of emptiness that have formed in the soul. There is the emptiness of the mind that has forgotten the One Who is everything; this gives rise to care and trouble about learnedness, inquisitiveness, questioning and curiosity. There is the emptiness of the will that has been deprived of possession by the One Who is everything; this creates desire for many things, the longing to possess many things, so that everything is in our control, in our hands; this is self-interest. There is the emptiness of the heart that has been deprived of the enjoyment of the One Who is everything; this forms a thirst for the satisfaction of many and various things, or a search for an infinite number of objects in which we hope to find pleasure for our senses, both internal and external. Thus, the sinner is continually

troubled about learnedness, the possession of many things, and the desire for many pleasures. He amuses himself, he possesses, he questions. He goes around in circles his entire life. Curiosity beckons, the heart hopes to taste sweet things, and he is enticed by the will. Anyone can convince himself of this if he ob-



The Last Judgement

serves the movements of his soul over the course of only a single day.

If left alone, the sinner will continue going in circles, because this is our nature when it is enslaved to sin. However, when the sinner is in the company of others, the circles he goes around increase in number a thousand-fold and become more convoluted.

There is an entire world full of people who are continually doing things, questioning, amusing themselves, and scrounging about, whose every way in all of this has led to a system, placed everyone under its laws, and made these laws a necessity for everyone who belongs to this sphere. In this common alliance, they inevitably come into contact, rub up against each other, and in this rubbing succeed in elevating inquisitiveness, self-interest, and self-pleasure to the tenth, hundredth and thousandth degree, thereby placing all happiness, joy and life in this frenzy. This is the world of vanity, in which occupations, ways, rule, connections, language, diversions, amusements, concepts—everything, from the smallest to the greatest thing—are permeated by the spirit

of these three friends of many cares and trouble mentioned above. It is what constitutes the dreary going around in circles by the spirits of worldly people. Being in living communion with this entire world, each sinner is caught up in its thousand-fold net, and is so deeply entangled in it that it is invisible to him.

Such a heavy burden lies on each worldly person and each of his parts, that he does not have the strength to be stirred in the smallest way by anything that is not worldly, because this would seem like raising a thousand-pound weight to him. Thus, no one undertakes such an unmanageable task, and no one thinks to undertake it; instead, everyone lives on, moving in the rut into which they have fallen.

The Seductions of the Prince of This World

Even worse is the prince of this world who is unparalleled in his cunning, spitefulness and experience in seduction. It is through the flesh and materialism with which the soul became mingled at the fall that he has free access to the soul. In his approach, he kindles curiosity, self-interest, and pleasure-loving self-comfort in various ways. Through various enticements, he holds the soul in these things with no escape; through various suggestions he suggests plans for satisfying them and then either aids in fulfilling them, or thwarts them through instruction of other more ambitious plans.

All this is accomplished with one purpose: to prolong and deepen a person's involvement in them. This is what constitutes the change of worldly misfortune and fortune, unblessed by God.

The prince of this world has an entire horde of servile spirits of malice that are subordinate to him. At each instant they scurry along every boundary of the inhabited world to sow various things in different places, deepen entanglement in the net of sin, repair traps that have become weak and broken, and especially to guard against anyone who might take it into his mind to rid himself of his bonds and escape to freedom. In the latter case, they hurriedly gather around the self-willed person. First they come one by one, then by detachments and legions until finally, the entire horde is there. This happens in various ways and forms so as to block all exits and mend the strands and nets, and, using the other analogy, to push back into the abyss any person who has begun to crawl out along its steep slopes.

The Invisible Kingdom of Spirits in Which Each Sinner Is Immersed

This invisible kingdom of spirits has special places. There are the throne rooms, where plans are drawn up, instructions arrive and reports are received with the approval or reproaches of the chiefs. These are the inner sanctums of Satan, as St. John the Theologian expressed it. On earth, in the middle kingdom of people, there are leagues of evil-doers, profligates, and especially nonbelievers and blasphemers,

whose deeds, words and writings pour out sinful gloom everywhere and block out the divine light. The aggregate of worldly ways, pervaded with sinful elements that stupefy and draw one away from God, is the organ through which they express their will and power here.

This is the structure of the sinful sphere! Each sinner is immersed in it, but is kept there largely on account of some particular thing. This thing, perhaps, is in appearance tolerable, even laudable. Satan has a single concern; that is, where a person is completely occupied in his consciousness, attention, and heart, that God not be the sole occupier, but that something outside Him be attached to his mind, will, and heart, so the person has something in place of God and only cares about what he knows and what he enjoys and possesses. Here there are not only carnal and mental passions, but also Specious things such as learnedness, artistry, and worldliness that can serve as the bonds of Satan for keeping blinded sinners in his power and not allowing them to come to their senses.

The Inner Mood and Condition of the Sinner

If one looks at the sinner in his inner mood and condition, it happens sometimes that he is knowledgeable, but is blind with regard to divine things and the matter of his own salvation. Even if he constantly takes care and troubles over things, he is idle and careless in regard to arranging his own salvation; even if he continually experiences anxieties or pleasures of the heart, he is completely insensitive to everything spiritual. In this regard, all forces of being are afflicted by sin; and there is blindness, negligence and insensitivity in the sinner. He does not see his own condition, and therefore does not sense the danger of his situation. He does not sense his danger and therefore does not take the trouble and care to be delivered from it.

The necessity to change and be saved does not even enter his mind. He has complete, unshakable confidence that he is at his proper station in life, wants for nothing and must therefore leave everything the way it is. Therefore, he considers any reminder about another kind of life to be superfluous for himself; he does not listen, and cannot even understand what it is for. He avoids and shuns it...



Orthodoxy is life. If we don't live Orthodoxy, we simply are not Orthodox, no matter what formal beliefs we might hold. It is later than you think! Hasten, therefore, to do the work of God.

Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982)

MAN AND HIS FALL

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Entering the Orthodox Church—the Catechism and Baptism of Adults."

As we analyze the Parable of the Prodigal Son, let us go on to make a man-centered analysis of this parable. It will show us the true value of man and what true life is.

The father in the parable had two sons. Both sons lived at home and enjoyed their father's goods.

God is called Father both in relation to His only-begotten Son and in relation to man. However, there is a vast difference between the two. The Father gave birth to the Son before all ages, whereas He created man within time. Man is also a child of God, but by grace, whereas the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is a Son by nature.

We can use an example to make this more comprehensible. An artist constructs a painting, which is his own spiritual creation, his own work. In a way, you could call it "his child," because it expresses his thoughts and his gifts. At the same time, he begets children. Thus, he makes the painting, but begets the child. The same thing, with appropriate analogy, happens with God the Father in relationship to the Logos and men.

God created the whole world. In the beginning, He created the angels, what is known as the *noetic realm*. He then went on, within the space of five days, to create all the sensible world, nature, birds, fish, animals, plants and so on. Then, on the sixth day He created man, who was both *noetic* and *sensible* [sensory], i.e., he had a soul and body. As the Fathers of the Church say, first He created the Kingdom, the palaces, and then He created the King, man. From his very creation, man was called to be king of the world.

The Holy Scriptures say that man was made by God in His *Image* and *Likeness*. The *Image* refers to the noetic faculty and his free-will, i.e., he has a nous and freedom. Whereas the *Likeness* refers to the fact that he was created to become by grace what God is by nature. That is to say, he was created to become a "god" through grace. Of course, according to the Holy Fathers, the *Image* refers to the triune nature of the soul. Just as God is *Nous*, *Logos* and *Spirit* man also has a nous, logos and spirit. The nous is the center of his personality. The logos or reason is the articulated and spoken word that is formulated with reason. Finally, the spirit, which is man's noetic *eros*, his intense longing, the power he has within him to achieve *theosis*.

This means that the archetype of his creation, we could say the model of man's creation is God, and more especially the *Logos* of God, the Second Person [*Hypostasis*] of the Holy Trinity. Man did not happen alone; he had a model. We can compare man to having a film and printing off many photographs. In this case, the film is Christ, and man is in the image of the *Logos*, a photograph of the *Logos*. This is why

he should be like its original archetype. He must keep his photograph clean; otherwise, it does not correspond to its original creation, and, therefore, loses its value completely.

The term *the image* demonstrates his *ontology*, that is, the reality of his nature. Whereas *the likeness* demonstrates where he should go and what his objective is. This means that man must always bear his noble lineage in mind. He is a prince and noble. He comes from an important and elevated family. He should also know that he ought to strive to live up to this great mission. Man's objectives are not exhausted on himself. That is to say, he should not only consider his food, drink, clothing and recreation, instead he should have high targets. Nor yet is it man's goal to study, work get married, etc. He will do these things to provide for and serve his life here. Ultimately, however, the deeper aim of his life is to become "god" by grace. St. Gregory the Theologian would make an amazing definition of man's purpose. *Man*, he said, *is a living creature sustained here, but transferred elsewhere, and, the completion of the mystery, is deification through its inclination towards God*. That is to say, man lives and is provided for in this earthly existence, but he is journeying to the other life. This journey from biological life to spiritual life is called a *mystery*. Furthermore, the end of the mystery is to become deified, by God's grace.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the two sons are shown living in their Father's house. According to the interpretation of the Holy Fathers, this shows that immediately following his creation, man lived in the house of God, i.e., in Paradise, and he had true communion with God. Paradise was both sensible and noetic. That is to say, it was a special place, but also a personal relationship with God. In the Old Testament, in the book of Genesis in particular, we see that Adam had grace from God immediately following the Creation. This is why both he and Eve lived just like the angels in heaven.

The younger son in the parable sought his own share of his inheritance: "Give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. (Lk 15:12-16)

At this point, the parable is fully compatible with the Fall of man and his detachment from God. We will look at its more central points.

According to St. Gregory Palamas, the younger son sought his corresponding property from his father, which means that sin comes later, whereas virtue is first-born. God created man pure, with the capacity to attain *theosis*. Whereas, sin is

“younger,” a “discovery born later.” It is the result of man’s bad choice. Man used his freedom to choose abandonment of God and his detachment from Him. Man’s sin was that he sought to appropriate God’s work and he attempted to continue his life according to his own will, and not according to the will of God. As can be seen in the Old Testament, man wanted to be obedient to himself and his own reason, and not to the will of God. He made himself and his desires the center of everything, instead of God. This is the essence of the tragedy of *ancestral sin*, and, indeed, of all sin.

In reading the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we observe the stages of the Fall, as well as the tragic figure of the younger son. We can delineate it as follows: appropriation of the property, emigration, squandering of the essentials, deprivation and subjugation. Within this framework, we can see the tragedy of the sin of the forefathers, as well as the tragedy of every other sin that man commits.

When one tries to expend all his life within the bounds of his biological life, interpreting it rationally, this constitutes a departure from God. Man emigrates to a far country. He loses his communion and unity with God. From the moment of his creation, man has a body and soul inseparably joined together. The soul is the life of the body, whereas the life of the soul is the Holy Spirit. Thus, without the Holy Spirit, man is spiritually dead. It is characteristic that, when his son returns, the father in the parable says, *for this my son was dead and is alive again*. (Lk 15:24). This means that departure from God creates this death. Indeed, without God, man is spiritually dead. He may move, work, have a high place in society, yet, without God, everything is dead and life is insipid.

St. John the Damascene, in mentioning the Fall of Adam and Eve, says through sin man lost divine grace, his image was darkened and he [willingly through beguilement] was stripped of divine grace, resulting in the feeling of nakedness in the body, too. The consequences were horrific. Having lost divine grace, death came. First, spiritual death and then bodily death, i.e., sicknesses, mortality and finally, later, the separation of the soul from the body.

The life of a man without the God Who created him is true deprivation. In that case, nothing has meaning in his life. He is completely discontented, because he has lost his archetype, God. He loses true love; he is even deprived of real freedom. This means that he is subjugated to the citizens of that country, far away from his father’s house. These citizens of Hell are, in fact, the devil. He becomes the devil’s minion. This is true deprivation and subjugation of man. He was made to be a prince, to live in the royal palace and he preferred to be naked, in rags, a swineherd. That is to say, he preferred to expend himself solely on his biological strengths and the indulgence of his senses.

It is an absolute truth that, without the Holy Spirit, man is spiritually dead. St. Makarios the Egyptian uses two im-

ages to make this reality comprehensible. The first image is of unsalted meat. In this case, it quickly goes off and gives off a terrible stench. The other image is of a coin that does not have the King’s image upon it. Such a coin would be a counterfeit and would be worthless. The same thing is true of a man who does not have the energy of the All-Holy Spirit within him. He is not a natural man, and he does not have the true life.

St. Gregory of Nyssa would say something quite characteristic: *The person who does not live truly, does not have a true life; the life of sinners is not a life, as such, it is merely labelled as one*. This means that God is man’s life. Besides, Christ Himself said, *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*. (Jn 14:6). Whoever lives apart from God does not have actual life. This is why the life of sinners is simply called life, in name only, but in fact, it is not a life at all. This means that it is tragic. He is locked up within the prison of his senses, of mortality and of corruption. He cannot reach out to the clear skies of freedom. He is tormented by all life’s tragic problems. He can find no escape. He is exiled to a desert island and there is no hope of salvation, unless he returns to God, through his own free will.

Far from God, man is a prodigal. He loses his beauty and his worth. He has no father. He has no house. He does not have love. He has no friends. Everybody takes advantage of him. This is why, sometimes, from within his bitterness and tragedy, he seeks for God. The desire for Baptism can be seen in precisely this perspective. He wants to obtain life, which is God, and he wants to have a personal relationship with God, who is his archetype. The quest for Baptism does not have a social character; it should not be inspired by external, human questions. Rather, it must be placed within this perspective. Someone wants to be baptized so that they can return from death to life, from that far country to his father’s house, from deprivation to abundance, from being an orphan to having a father.



Food is not evil, but gluttony is. Childbearing is not evil, but fornication is. Money is not evil, but avarice is. Glory is not evil, but vainglory is. Indeed, there is no evil in existing things, but only in their misuse.

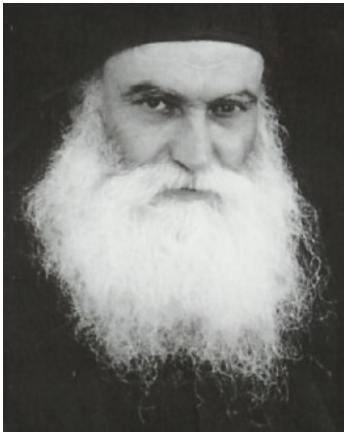
St. Maximus the Confessor

Our world is guided by two principles and sources: God and the devil. All that is better in the world of men has its source in God, and all that is bad has the devil as its principle and source. In the final account, all good comes from God, and all evil from the devil.

St. Justin Popovich

ECUMENISM IS DOMINATED BY UNCLEAN SPIRITS

From the book "Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church - A Synod lacking in Synodicity and Orthodox self-awareness," a publication by "Synaxis of Orthodox Romaics 'Fotis Kontoglou,'" Trikala, March 2016. This book is the transcript of the 3-hour program of the conversation between the manager of the Piraeus Church Radio Station, Mr. Lykourgos Markoudis and professor Demetrios Tseleggides—professor Tseleggides details Elder Ephraim's of Katounakia attestation to him relative to the topic of ecumenism.



In what follows, I will say something that pertains to a personal deposition. I was associated for several decades with Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, of renowned ethos and conscience. Also renowned was the fact that he possessed a "spiritual television." As for me, I had gone to him on many occasions, always with the intention of posing certain very specific

questions, in a specific sequence, and using my own vocabulary. When I would visit him, and without ever stipulating or presenting to him my questions, he would give me the replies that I sought, in the sequence and even using the vocabulary to which I was accustomed. I am mentioning this as a *de facto* personal experience; such experience is not an unprecedented phenomenon—it has been experienced by many others as well.

There was one time when—as a young professor at the School of Theology at the time, about thirty years ago—I had mentioned the following to him. Given that the clime of Ecumenism has also been flourishing in the School of Theology—especially that of Thessaloniki—I had certain nagging problems and questions, because I could see it being represented by otherwise respected professors. Naturally, both my conscience as well as my learning had reacted against it, however, I desired—beyond my scientific status—to also obtain a charismatic reply, which is something that I did for many other issues. Thus, I asked him on the matter in hand—if he could tell me what kind of thing Ecumenism is.

He replied outrightly and without any difficulty:

This question, my child, had also been posed by someone else, sometime before you. I myself have been up here on these rocks for forty years... I have even forgotten my Greek (note that he had completed Middle School) and as such, I haven't preoccupied myself with that issue. But, because I had to reply—seeing that I had been asked about it, and since I had no knowledge

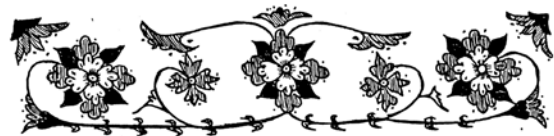
of the matter—I went to my cell and prayed, asking Christ to inform me what Ecumenism is. I received His reply, which was that Ecumenism has a spirit of wickedness and is dominated by unclean spirits.

So I asked him exactly how that was verified. He replied that: *After praying, my cell became filled with an unbearable stench, which caused my soul to feel asphyxiated; I couldn't breathe, spiritually-speaking.*

I asked him if that had been an extraordinary event for him, or if that was the way that Christ responds in analogous cases, and he assured me that... *in all the cases that are involved with sorcery, with unclean spirits, that is the state in which He introduces me. Sometimes there is a spoken response, but in the present case, that was His answer and I have the absolute certainty that Ecumenism does not have the Holy Spirit, but the unclean spirit.*

What I am saying at this moment one might say has the character of intentional impressions. However, I want to inform you that I was overjoyed, because what the Elder had told me in person, I had also seen recorded by his pious monks, who had published a book about his person, his spirituality and his words. Thus, it has been certified in there as well, but it has also been verified through discussions with other, trustworthy theologians, who likewise happened to have heard it personally.

I had not publicly mentioned this until now; however, things have taken such a turn, that I am obliged to bring it up. Of course, it had played a decisive role in my stance towards Ecumenism. As a professor, a scientist, I am naturally obliged in every case to examine the matter with scientific criteria and to substantiate my viewpoint scientifically—and that is what I do in my classes also, step by step; however, I regard this deposition to be significant, because it was delivered in a charismatic manner by a man who knew nothing about the issue. He had never read, never heard of it, and yet, he deposited his direct spiritual experience. I think that things speak for themselves here.



We must pay close attention to everything we do, and struggle to uproot the ferocious beast of egotism that eats away at us. Our ego! When it erupts within us, we become enraged, we criticize, we make demands, we curse, we ridicule and humiliate others. It is a beast! This is what impels us to criticize. This is what inflates us with the idea that we have accomplished great things, that we are good, that we possess virtues and thousands of other things. The origin of all good things is humility. Conversely, the origin of all evils is egotism.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή, Πορεία προς τὸ Πάσχα

Τοῦ Πατρὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου Σμέμαν, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή», ἐκδόσεις Ἀκρίτας, Ἀθήνα 1999.

Όταν κάποιος ξεκινάει γιὰ ἓνα ταξίδι θὰ πρέπει νὰ ξέρεи ποῦ πηγαίνει. Αὐτὸ συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὴ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή. Πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, ἡ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή εἶναι ἓνα πνευματικὸ ταξίδι ποῦ προορισμὸς του εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα, ἢ «Ἐορτὴ Ἐορτῶν». Εἶναι ἡ προετοιμασία γιὰ τὴν «πλήρωση τοῦ Πάσχα, ποῦ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικὴ Ἀποκάλυψη». Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀρχίσουμε μὲ τὴν προσπάθεια νὰ καταλάβουμε αὐτὴ τὴ σχέση ποῦ ὑπάρχει ἀνάμεσα στὴ Σαρακοστή καὶ τὸ Πάσχα, γιὰτὶ αὐτὴ ἀποκαλύπτει κάτι πολὺ οὐσιαστικὸ καὶ πολὺ σημαντικὸ γιὰ τὴ Χριστιανικὴ πίστι καὶ ζωὴ μας.

Ἄραγε εἶναι ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἐξηγήσουμε ὅτι τὸ Πάσχα εἶναι κάτι πολὺ περισσότερο ἀπὸ μία ἀπλὴ γιορτὴ, πολὺ πέρα ἀπὸ μία ἐτήσια ἀνάμνηση ἑνὸς γεγονότος ποῦ πέρασε; Ὁ καθένας ποῦ, ἔστω καὶ μία μόνο φορὰ, ἔζησε αὐτὴ τὴ νύχτα «τὴ σωτήριο, τὴ φωταυγὴ καὶ λαμπροφῶρο», ποῦ γεύτηκε ἐκείνη τὴ μοναδικὴ χαρὰ, τὸ ξέρει αὐτό. Ἀλλὰ τί εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ χαρὰ; Γιὰτὶ ψέλνουμε στὴν Ἀναστάσιμη Λειτουργία: «Νῦν πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτὸς, οὐρανός τε καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ καταχθόνια»; Μὲ ποιά ἔννοια ἐορτάζομεν—καθὼς ἰσχυριζόμαστε ὅτι τὸ κάνουμε— «θανάτου τὴν νέκρωσιν, Ἄδου τὴν καθαίρεσιν ἄλλης βιοτῆς τῆς... αἰωνίου ἀπαρχῆν...»;

Σὲ ὅλες αὐτὲς τίς ἐρωτήσεις ἡ ἀπάντηση εἶναι: Ἡ νέα ζωὴ ἡ ὁποία πρὶν ἀπὸ δυὸ χιλιάδες περίπου χρόνια ἀνέτειλεν ἐκ τοῦ τάφου, προσφέρθηκε σὲ μᾶς, σὲ ὅλους ἐκείνους ποῦ πιστεύουν στὸ Χριστό. Μᾶς δόθηκε τὴν ἡμέρα ποῦ βαφτιστήκαμε, τὴν ἡμέρα δηλαδὴ ποῦ ὅπως λέει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «Συνετάφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον, ἵνα ὡσπερ ἠγέρθη Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν διὰ τῆς δόξης τοῦ πατρὸς, οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν». (Ρωμ. 6:4).

Ἔτσι τὸ Πάσχα πανηγυρίζουμε τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν γεγονὸς ποῦ ἔγινε καὶ ἀκόμη γίνεται σὲ μᾶς. Γιὰτὶ ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ μᾶς ἔλαβε τὸ δῶρο αὐτῆς τῆς νέας ζωῆς καὶ τὴ δύναμη νὰ τὴν ἀποδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ζήσει διὰ μέσου της. Εἶναι ἓνα δῶρο ποῦ ριζικὰ ἀλλάζει τὴ διάθεσή μας ἀπέναντι σὲ κάθε κατάσταση αὐτοῦ τοῦ

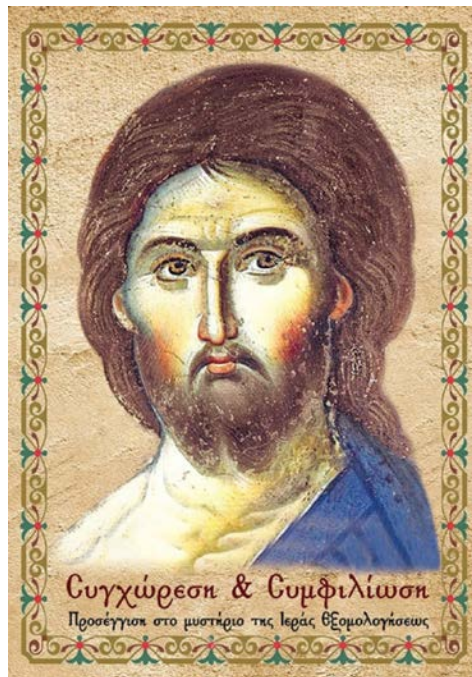
κόσμου, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπέναντι στὸ θάνατο. Μᾶς δίνει τὴ δύναμη νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώνουμε θριαμβευτικὰ τὸ «νικῆθηκε ὁ θάνατος».

Φυσικὰ ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα ὁ θάνατος, εἶναι σίγουρος, τὸν ἀντιμετωπίζουμε, καὶ κάποια μέρα θὰ ἔρθει καὶ γιὰ μᾶς. Ἀλλὰ ὅλη ἡ πίστι μας εἶναι ὅτι μὲ τὸ δικὸ Του θάνατο ὁ Χριστὸς ἄλλαξε τὴ φύση ἀκριβῶς τοῦ θανάτου. Τὸν ἔκανε πέρασμα-διάβαση στὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, μεταμορφώνοντας τὴ δραματικότερη τραγωδία σὲ αἰώνιο θρίαμβο, σὲ νίκη. Μὲ τὸ «θανάτω θάνατον πατήσας», μᾶς ἔκανε μέτοχους τῆς Ἀνάστασής Του. Ἀκριβῶς γι αὐτὸ στὸ τέλος τοῦ ὄρθρου τῆς Ἀνάστασης—στὸν Κατηχητικὸ Λόγο τοῦ Ἰωάννου Χρυσοστόμου—λέμε θριαμβευτικὰ: «**Ἀνέστη Χριστός, καὶ ζωὴ πολιτεύεται. Ἀνέστη Χριστός, καὶ νεκρὸς οὐδεὶς ἐν τῷ μνήματι**».

Τέτοια εἶναι ἡ πίστι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ποῦ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται καὶ φανερώνεται μὲ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀναριθμητῶν ἁγίων της. Ἀλλὰ μήπως δὲ ζοῦμε καθημερινὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ πίστι σπάνια γίνεται καὶ δική μας ἐμπειρία; Μήπως δὲ χάνουμε πολὺ συχνὰ καὶ δὲν προδίνουμε αὐτὴ τὴ νέα ζωὴ ποῦ λάβαμε σὰν δῶρο, καὶ στὴν πραγματικότητα ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν ἀναστήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ σὰν νὰ μὴν ἔχει νόημα γιὰ μᾶς αὐτὸ τὸ μοναδικὸ γεγονὸς; Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀδυναμίας μας, τῆς ἀνικανότητάς μας νὰ ζοῦμε σταθερὰ μὲ πίστι ἐλπίδα καὶ ἀγάπη, στὸ ἐπίπεδο ἐκεῖνο ποῦ μᾶς ἀνέβασε ὁ Χριστὸς ὅταν εἶπε: «Ζητεῖτε πρῶτον τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην Αὐτοῦ».

Ἄπλούστατα ἐμεῖς ξεχνᾶμε ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰτὶ εἴμαστε τόσο ἀπασχολημένοι, τόσο βυθισμένοι στὶς καθημερινὲς ἔγνοιες μας καὶ ἀκριβῶς ἐπειδὴ ξεχνᾶμε, ἀποτυχαίνουμε. Μέσα σὲ αὐτὴ τὴ λησμοσύνη, τὴν ἀποτυχία καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἡ ζωὴ μας γίνεται ξανὰ παλαιὰ, εὐτελής, σκοτεινὴ καὶ τελικὰ χωρὶς σημασία, γίνεται ἓνα χωρὶς νόημα ταξίδι γιὰ ἓνα χωρὶς νόημα τέρμα. Καταφέρνουμε νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ θάνατο καὶ τελικὰ, ἐντελῶς αἰφνιδιαστικά, μέσα στὶς «ἀπολαύσεις τῆς ζωῆς» μᾶς ἔρχεται τρομακτικὸς, ἀναπόφευκτος, παράλογος.

Μπορεῖ κατὰ καιροὺς νὰ παραδεχόμαστε τίς ποικίλες ἁμαρτίες μας καὶ νὰ τίς ἐξομολογούμε, ὅμως ἐξακολουθοῦμε νὰ μὴν ἀναφέρουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας σ' ἐκείνη τὴ νέα ζωὴ ποῦ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκάλυψε καὶ



μᾶς ἔδωσε. Πραγματικά **ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴν ἦρθε ποτὲ Ἐκείνος**. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μόνη πραγματικὴ ἁμαρτία, ἡ ἁμαρτία ὅλων τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, ἡ ἀπύθμενη θλίψη καὶ τραγωδία ὅλων τῶν κατ' ὄνομα Χριστιανῶν.

Ἄν τὸ ἀναγνωρίζουμε αὐτό, τότε μπορούμε νὰ καταλάβουμε τι εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα καὶ γιατί χρειάζεται καὶ προϋποθέτει τὴ Μεγάλῃ Σαρακοστή. Γιατὶ τότε μπορούμε νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι ἡ Λειτουργικὴ παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ὅλος ὁ κύκλος τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν τῆς ὑπάρχουν, πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς βοηθήσουν νὰ ξαναβροῦμε τὸ ὄραμα καὶ τὴν γεύση αὐτῆς τῆς νέας ζωῆς, ποὺ τόσο εὐκόλα χάνουμε καὶ προδίνουμε, καὶ ὕστερα νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ μετανοήσουμε καὶ νὰ ξαναγυρίσουμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

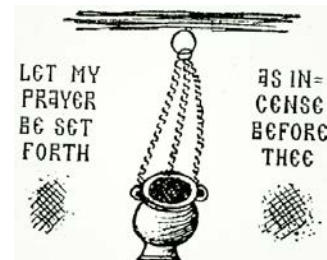
Πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀγαπᾶμε καὶ νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦμε κάτι ποὺ δὲν τὸ ξέρουμε; Πῶς μπορούμε ἂν βάλουμε πάνω ἀπὸ καθετὶ ἄλλο στὴ ζωὴ μας κάτι ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν ἔχουμε δεῖ καὶ δὲν ἔχουμε χαρεῖ; Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, πῶς μπορούμε, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε μιὰ Βασιλεία γιὰ τὴν ὁποία δὲν ἔχουμε ἰδέα; Ἡ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἦταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶναι ἀκόμα καὶ τώρα ἡ εἴσοδος καὶ ἡ ἐπικοινωνία μας μὲ τὴ νέα ζωὴ τῆς Βασιλείας. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ Λειτουργικὴ τῆς ζωῆς ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς ἀποκαλύπτει ἐκεῖνα «*ποὺ ὀφθαλμοὺς οὐκ οἶδε καὶ οὐκ ἤκουσε καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη, ἃ ἠτοίμασεν ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν*». (Κορ. 2:9). Καὶ στὸ κέντρο αὐτῆς τῆς Λειτουργικῆς ζωῆς, σὰν καρδιά τῆς καὶ μεσουράνημά τῆς—σὰν ἥλιος ποὺ οἱ ἀκτίνες του διαπερνοῦν καθετὶ—εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα. Τὸ Πάσχα εἶναι ἡ πόρτα, ἀνοιχτὴ κάθε χρόνο, ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ στὴν ὑπέρολαμπρη Βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ἡ πρόγευση τῆς αἰώνιας χαρᾶς ποὺ μᾶς περιμένει, εἶναι ἡ δόξα τῆς νίκης ἡ ὁποία ἀπὸ τώρα, ἂν καὶ ἀόρατη, πλημμυρίζει ὅλη τὴν κτίση: **Νικῆθηκε ὁ θάνατος**.

Ὀλόκληρη ἡ λατρεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ὀργανωμένη γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ Πάσχα, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Λειτουργικὸς χρόνος, δηλαδὴ ἡ διαδοχὴ τῶν ἐποχῶν καὶ τῶν ἐορτῶν, γίνεται ἓνα ταξίδι, ἓνα προσκύνημα στὸ Πάσχα, ποὺ εἶναι τὸ Τέλος καὶ ποὺ ταυτόχρονα εἶναι ἡ Ἀρχή. Εἶναι τὸ τέλος ὅλων αὐτῶν ποὺ ἀποτελοῦν τὰ παλαιὰ, καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς νέας ζωῆς, μιὰ συνεχῆς διάβαση ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο τοῦτο στὴν Βασιλεία ποὺ ἔχει ἀποκαλυφτεῖ ἐν Χριστῷ.

Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἡ παλαιὰ ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῆς μικρότητας, δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ ξεπεραστεῖ καὶ ν' ἀλλάξει. Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο περιμένει καὶ ζητάει ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ κάνει μιὰ προσπάθεια ἡ ὁποία, στὴν κατάστασι ποὺ βρίσκεται τώρα ὁ ἄνθρωπος, εἶναι οὐσιαστικὰ ἀπραγματοποίητη. Ἄντιμετωπίζουμε μιὰ πρόκλησι. Τὸ ὄραμα, ὁ στόχος, ὁ τρόπος τῆς νέας ζωῆς εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς μιὰ πρόκλησι ποὺ βρίσκεται τόσο πολὺ πάνω ἀπὸ τὶς δυνατότητές μας!

Γι' αὐτὸ, ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι, ὅταν ἄκουσαν τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Κυρίου Τὸν ρώτησαν ἀπελπισμένα: *Τίς ἄρα δύναται σωθῆναι;* (Ματθ. 19:26). Ἀληθῶς, δὲν εἶναι καθόλου εὐκόλο νὰ ἀπαρνηθεῖς ἓνα ἀσήμαντο ἰδανικὸ ζῶης καμωμένο μὲ τὶς καθημερινὲς φροντίδες, μὲ τὴν ἀναζήτησι τῶν ὑλικῶν ἀγαθῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀσφάλεια καὶ τὴν ἀπόλαυσι καὶ νὰ δεχτεῖς ἓνα ἄλλο ἰδανικὸ ζῶης τὸ ὁποῖο βέβαια δὲν στερεῖται καθόλου τελειότητας στὸ σκοπὸ του: *Γίνεσθε τέλειοι ὡς ὁ Πατὴρ ἡμῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς τέλειος ἐστίν.*

Αὐτὸ ὁ κόσμος μὲ ὅλα του τὰ μέσα, μᾶς λέει: νὰ εἶσαι χαρούμενος, μὴν ἀνησυχεῖς, ἀκολούθα τὸν «εὐρὸν» δρόμο. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο λέει: Διάλεξε τὸ στενὸ δρόμο, ἀγωνίσου καὶ ὑπόφερε, γιὰτὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ δρόμος γιὰ τὴ μόνη ἀληθινὴ εὐτυχία. Καὶ ἂν ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν βοηθαίει πῶς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ κάνουμε αὐτὴ τὴ φοβερὴ ἐκλογὴ; Πῶς μπορούμε νὰ μετανοήσουμε καὶ νὰ ξαναγυρίσουμε στὴν ὑπέροχη ὑπόσχεσι ποὺ μᾶς δίνεται κάθε χρόνο τὸ Πάσχα; Ἀκριβῶς αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ στιγμὴ ποὺ ἐμφανίζεται ἡ Μεγάλῃ Σαρακοστή. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ «*χείρα βοηθείας*» ποὺ ἀπλώνει σὲ μᾶς ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Εἶναι τὸ σχολεῖο τῆς μετάνοιας ποὺ θὰ μᾶς δώσει δύναμη νὰ δεχτοῦμε τὸ Πάσχα ὄχι σὰν μιὰ ἀπλὴ εὐκαιρία νὰ φᾶμε, νὰ πιοῦμε, ν' ἀναπαυτοῦμε, ἀλλά, βασιικά, σὰν τὸ τέλος τῶν «*παλαιῶν*» ποὺ εἶναι μέσα μας καὶ σὰν εἴσοδό μας στὸ νέο.



Ἡ φιλαργυρία εἶναι αἰτία ὅλων τῶν κακῶν τῆς ἁισχροκερδεῖας, τῆς τσιγγουνιάς, τῆς ἀστοργίας, τῆς ἀπιστίας, τῆς μισανθρωπίας, τῆς ἀρπαγῆς, τῆς ἀδικίας, τῆς πλεονεξίας, τοῦ τόκου, τοῦ δόλου, τοῦ ψεύδους, τῆς ἐπιτορκίας καὶ ὅλων τῶν ὁμοίων μὲ αὐτά. Ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλαργυρίας γίνονται ἱεροσυλίες, λωποδυσίες καὶ κάθε εἶδος κλοπῆς· ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς φιλαργυρίας δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνο στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὴν ξηρὰ καὶ στὰ πελάγη ἄρπαγες καὶ ληστὲς καὶ πειρατὲς, ἀλλὰ καὶ μέσα στὴν πόλιν ἄδικα σταθμὰ καὶ ζύγια καὶ διπλὰ μέτρα καὶ περίεργη κοπὴ καὶ παραχάραξι νομισμάτων, ὑπέρβασι ὁρίων, κακοὶ ἀνταγωνισμοὶ γειτόνων. Αὐτὴ καὶ ἔθνη ἐναντίον ἐθνῶν ὀδήγησε, καὶ φιλίες δυνατὲς διέλυσε, καὶ μερικὲς φορὲς διέσπασε καὶ συγγένειες, καὶ τὴν πατρίδα κανεὶς πρόδωσε καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ ὅλα ὁ καθένας προδίδει τὴν ψυχὴ του.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς

Ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Φραγκολατίνους

Γράφει ὁ πατὴρ Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός, ὁμότιμος καθηγητὴς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Ἀθηνῶν.

Εκείνον τὸν Ἀπρίλιο, τοῦ 1204... Ἄν ἡ 29^η Μαΐου εἶναι ἡμέρα πένθους γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό, διότι φέρνει στὴ μνήμη μας τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀθωμανοὺς τὸ 1453, ἄλλο τόσο ἀποφρὰς εἶναι γιὰ τὸ Γένος μας καὶ ἡ 13^η Ἀπριλίου, διότι κατ' αὐτὴν ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλις τὸ 1204 στοὺς Φράγκους. Τὸ δεῦτερο γεγονός δὲν ὑστερεῖ καθόλου σὲ σημασία καὶ συνέπειες ἔναντι τοῦ πρώτου. Αὐτὴ εἶναι σήμερα ἡ κοινὴ διαπίστωση τῆς ιστορικῆς ἔρευνας. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1204 ἡ Πόλις, καὶ σύνολη ἡ Αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης, δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ ξαναβρεῖ τὴν πρώτη της δύναμη. Τὸ Φραγκικὸ χτύπημα ἐναντίον της ἦταν τόσο δυνατό, ποὺ ἔκτοτε ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολις ἦταν «μία πόλις καταδικασμένη νὰ χαθεῖ» (Ἑλ. Ἀρβελέρ). Ἀξίζει, συνεπῶς, μία θεώρηση τοῦ γεγονότος αὐτοῦ ἔστω καὶ στὰ περιορισμένα ὄρια ἐνὸς ἄρθρου.

[1] Στὶς 12/13 Ἀπριλίου 1204, καὶ ἔπειτα ἀπὸ μία πεισματικὴ καὶ μακρόχρονη πολιορκία, κατελάμβαναν οἱ Φραγκολατῖνοι Σταυροφόροι τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ Αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Ῥωμανίας / Βυζαντίου ἔσβηνε κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ θανάσιμο πλήγμα τῆς Φραγκικῆς Δύσεως. Τὸ γεγονός αὐτὸ ἦταν σημαντικώτατο σὲ δύο κατευθύνσεις: α) ἐσωτερικά, διότι σφράγισε καθοριστικὰ τὴν περαιτέρω πορεία τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας, καὶ β) ἐξωτερικά, διότι καθόρισε ἐπίσης τελεσίδικα τὶς σχέσεις μετὰ τὴν Δύση, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀνερχόμενη δύναμη τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν. Ἡ τραγικὴ ιστορικὴ ἐπιλογή τοῦ Ῥωμαίου, ποὺ ἐκφράζεται μετὰ τὸν γνωστὸ ἐκεῖνο λόγο «κρεῖττον (...) φακιδόλιον (...) Τοῦρκων ἢ (παρὰ) καλύπτρα Λατινική», ὑποστασιώνεται στὰ 1204, ὅταν πλέον ἀποκαλύπτονται ἀδιάστατα οἱ διαθέσεις τῆς Φραγκιάς ἔναντι τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς Ἀνατολῆς.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1095 ἀρχίζουσιν οἱ Σταυροφορίες, ἐκστρατείες δηλαδὴ τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ κόσμου τῆς Εὐρώπης, μετὰ σκοπὸν, κατὰ τὶς ἐπιφανειακὰς διακηρύξεις, τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση καὶ ὑπεράσπιση τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων. Στὶς ἐπιχειρήσεις αὐτὲς, ποὺ κράτησαν ὡς τὸν 15^ο αἰῶνα, πρωτοστατοῦσαν οἱ ἐκάστοτε Πάπες, διότι ἦσαν «ἔεροὶ πόλεμοι» κατὰ τῶν ἀπίστων. Βέβαια ἡ ἔρευνα ἔχει ἐπισημάνει στὶς ἐκστρατείες αὐτὲς καὶ ταπεινὰ ἐλατήρια, λ.χ. τυχοδιωκτισμὸς, δίψα πλουτισμοῦ, κ.ἄ.

Εἶναι ὅμως σήμερα πέρα ἀπὸ κάθε ἀμφιβολία ὅτι οἱ Σταυροφορίες κύριον σκοπὸν εἶχαν τὴν Φραγκικὴ κυριαρχία στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Ἀνατολή καί, τελικὰ, τὴν διάλυση τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Αὐτοκρατορίας τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης, ποὺ ἦταν τὸ ἐμπόδιο στὸν ἐπεκτατισμὸ καὶ

τὰ μονοκρατορικὰ σχέδια τῆς μετακαρλομάγειας Φραγκοσύνης. Τὸ 1204, ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους, ἡ διάλυση τῆς «Βυζαντινῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας» καὶ ἡ ἐπακολουθήσασα Φραγκοκρατία ἐπιβεβαιώνουν τὴν ἐκτίμησιν αὐτή.

[2] Τὰ γεγονότα τοῦ 1204 συνδέονται μετὰ τὴν Δ' Σταυροφορία. Ἡ σχετικὴ βούλησις γι' αὐτὴν ἐκφράσθηκε τὸ 1199 μετὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ πάπα Ἰννοκεντίου Γ' (1198-1216), «πνευματικοῦ πατέρα» τῶν δύο βασικῶν ἐπεκτατικῶν μέσων τῆς Φραγκοπαπικῆς ἐξουσίας, τῆς «Ἱερᾶς Ἐξετάσεως» (Inquisitio) καὶ τῆς Οὐνίας (ὡς ιδέας). Συνεργάτης αὐτόκλητος παρουσιάσθηκε ὁ δόγης (δούκας) τῆς Βενετίας Δάνδολος μετὰ τὸ στόλον του. Σπουδαῖο ιστορικὸ πρόβλημα εἶναι ἡ ἐκτροπὴ τῆς Δ' Σταυροφορίας ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους Τόπους πρὸς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἦταν σκοπὸς ἀνομολόγητος ἢ τραγικὴ σύμπτωση; Ἡ πλειονότητα τῶν ιστορικῶν, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν ἀδέσμευτων, δέχεται τὸ πρῶτον.

Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ καλὰ ὀργανωμένο σχέδιον, ποὺ ἀποσκοποῦσε στὸ νὰ δοθεῖ ἰσχυρὸ χτύπημα στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Αὐτοκρατορία, ποὺ περνοῦσε περίοδο κάμψεως λόγῳ τῆς ἐντάσεως τοῦ τουρκικοῦ κινδύνου. Κατὰ τὰ δυτικὰ χρονικά, μάλιστα, κάποιοι Λατῖνοι ἄρχοντες ἀρνήθησαν νὰ συμμετάσχουν, ὅταν ἔμαθαν τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ σκοποῦ τῆς Σταυροφορίας. Οἱ περισσότεροι ὅμως συμβιβάσθηκαν ἀπὸ οἰκονομικὴ ἀνάγκη.

Ἐμειναν κυρίως οἱ «μνημένοι» στὴ συνωμοσία κατὰ τῆς Νέας Ῥώμης κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν «πνευματικὴν» ἡγεσία τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τὴν στρατιωτικὴν τοῦ Δόγη, ποὺ μετέβαλε τὴν Βενετία σὲ θαλασσοκράτειρα δύναμη μετὰ τὴν ἐκμηδένισιν τοῦ «Βυζαντίου». Ὁ βενετικὸς στόλος μετέφερε στὴν Προποντιδα ἄγριες μάζες Φλαμανδῶν, Φράγκων, Γερμανῶν—τὰ χειρότερα στρώματα τῆς δυτικῆς κοινωνίας, κακοποιούς, ἐγκληματίες, καιροσκόπους. Ἡ ἀμοιβὴ τοῦ Δόγη: Ἡμισὴ λεία ἀπὸ τῆς λεηλασίας τῆς πλουσιότερης πρωτεύουσας τοῦ τότε κόσμου.

[3] Βέβαια, τὰ Φραγκοπαπικὰ σχέδια διευκολύνθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴν ἀρρυθμίαν τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἀπὸ τὸν 11^ο αἰῶνα ἄρχισε προοδευτικὰ ἡ παρακμὴ της. Τὸ 1071 στὸ Ματζικέρτ ὁ «Βυζαντινὸς» στρατὸς δέχθηκε μεγάλη ἥττα ἀπὸ τοὺς Σελτζούκους Τοῦρκους, μετὰ συνέπεια τὴν ἀπώλεια μεγάλου τμήματος τῆς Μ. Ἀσίας.

Παράλληλα (1071) χάθηκε τὸ τελευταῖον ἔρεισμα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως στὴν Ἰταλία, ἡ Βάρις (Bari), πέφτοντας στὰ χεῖρα τῶν Νορμανδοφράγκων. Οἱ ἀνορθωτικὲς προσπάθειες τῶν Κομνηνῶν δὲν εἶχαν σημαντικὰ ἀποτελέσματα καὶ τὸ κράτος ὑποχωρεῖ σταδιακὰ στὴν οἰκονομικὴ ἰσχύ τῶν ἰταλικῶν πόλεων. Ἡ Αὐτοκρατορία παραχωρεῖ σημαντικὰ προνόμια

στή Βενετία, Πίζα και Γένοβα με ἀντάλλαγμα στρατιωτική βοήθεια. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ὅμως ἦταν νὰ δημιουργηθοῦν ἀκμαῖες δυτικὲς παροικίες στὴν Ἀνατολή, μεταβάλλοντας τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας σὲ δικό τους ἐμπορικὸ χῶρο. Οἱ Ἰταλοφράγκοι ἐδραιώθηκαν στὴν Ἀνατολή καὶ ἐνίσχυσαν τὴν βουλμία τῆς εὐρύτερης Φραγκικῆς οἰκογένειας.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ κοινωνικὸ κλίμα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἦταν τὴν ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ ἀρκετὰ ἀντίξοο. Ἡ Πόλη ἔχει πιά ἀπομονωθεῖ καὶ ἀναπτύσσονται φυγόκεντρος τάσεις λόγω τῆς δυσαρέσκειας τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Διοίκηση καὶ πολίτες συναγωνίζονται μεταξύ τους σὲ διαφθορά. Οἱ φορολογίες εἶναι δυσβάστακτες καὶ βαρύνουν τοὺς πολίτες τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Ἡ κεντρικὴ ἐξουσία ἀμφισβητεῖται καὶ σημειώνονται ἐπαναστατικὰ κινήματα.

Ἡ φήμη γιὰ τὴν μυθώδη πολυτέλεια τῆς Πόλης καὶ τῶν κατοίκων της εἶχε διαδοθεῖ καὶ στὴ Δύση μὲ εὐλογες συνέπειες. Τὰ ἀμύθητα πλούτη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἔτρεφαν τὴν φαντασία τῶν πολλῶν καὶ διευκόλυναν τὰ ἐπεκτατικὰ σχέδια τῶν λίγων, τῆς Φραγκικῆς ἡγεσίας. Βέβαια, οἱ ἀθῶοι καὶ ἀνύποπτοι ἐπαρχιωτὲς τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας εἶδαν στὴν ἀρχὴ ὡς θεία τιμωρία τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους, ὁ δὲ ὄχλος της ἔλαβε μέρος στὴ λεηλασία. Ἀργότερα ὅμως θὰ συνειδητοποιηθοῦν οἱ σκοποὶ τῶν Φράγκων καὶ θὰ ἐκτιμηθοῦν σωστὰ τὰ γεγονότα.

[4] Ἡ ὀργάνωση τῆς Σταυροφορίας ἄρχισε τὸ 1201. Σημαντικοὶ Φράγκοι φεουδάρχες δήλωσαν συμμετοχὴ: Ὁ κόμης τῆς Φλάνδρας Βαλδουίνος, ὁ κόμης τῆς Καμπανίας Τιμπῶ, ὁ ἱστορικὸς Γοδεφρείδος Βιλλεαρδουίνος καὶ ὁ μαρκήσιος Βονιφάτιος Μομφερατικός. Ἡ συγκέντρωση τοῦ στρατοῦ ἔγινε τὸν Ἰούνιο τοῦ 1202 στὴ Βενετία. Τὸ Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1202 καταλήφθηκε γιὰ λογαριασμὸ τῶν Βενετῶν ἡ δαλματικὴ πόλη Ζάρα, ποὺ εἶχε ἀποστατήσει καὶ ὑπαχθεῖ στὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς Οὐγγαρίας.

Οἱ δυναστικὲς ἔριδες στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη («Ἄγγελοι») διευκόλυναν—ὡς συνήθως—τὰ δυτικὰ σχέδια. Οἱ Σταυροφόροι στὶς 24.5.1203 ξεκίνησαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ζάρα καὶ μέσῳ Κερκύρας κατευθύνθηκαν γιὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ θέα τῆς πόλεως τοὺς ἄφησε κατάπληκτους. «Δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ φανταστοῦν πῶς ὑπῆρχε στὸν κόσμο τόσο ἰσχυρὴ πόλη», σημειώνει ὁ Γ. Βιλλεαρδουίνος στὴν ἱστορία του. Στὶς 6 Ἰουλίου

ἄρχισε ἡ πρώτη πολιορκία, μὲ λεηλασίες στὰ προάστια καὶ τὶς ἀκτὲς τῆς Προποντίδας.

Προσπάθεια τῶν πολιορκουμένων, τὴν νύκτα τῆς Πρωτοχρονιάς τοῦ 1204, νὰ πυρπολήσουν τὸν ἐχθρικὸ στόλο, ἀπέτυχε. Ἐπεκράτησε τότε ἀναρχία. Στὶς 25 Ἰανουαρίου ὁ λαὸς ἀνεκήρυξε Αὐτοκράτορα τὸν Νικόλαο Καναβό, ἐνῶ ὁ Αὐτοκράτορας Ἀλέξιος Δ΄ συνελήφθη καὶ ἐκτελέστηκε (8.2.1204). Νέος Αὐτοκράτορας ἐκλέχθηκε ὁ Ἀλέξιος Ε΄ ὁ Μούρτζουφλος. Μάταια προσπάθησε νὰ ὀργανώσει τὴν ἄμυνα καὶ νὰ περιορίσει τὶς λεηλασίες. Οἱ Σταυροφόροι ἤδη τὸ Μάρτιο τοῦ 1204 εἶχαν ὑπογράψει συνθήκη γιὰ τὴν τύχη τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας μετὰ τὴν πτώση τῆς πρωτεύουσας.

Βασικὲς ἀποφάσεις: Θὰ ἐκλεγόταν Λατίνος Αὐτοκράτορας καὶ Λατίνος Πατριάρχης. Ἔτσι φάνηκαν καὶ οἱ ἀληθινοὶ σκοποὶ τῆς ἐκστρατείας. Ἐπίσης καθορίστηκε ὁ τρόπος διανομῆς τῆς λείας καὶ τῶν ἐδαφῶν τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἡ μεγάλη ἐπίθεση κατὰ τοῦ θαλασσοῦ τείχους ἔγινε στὶς 9 Ἀπριλίου. Ἡ τελικὴ ὅμως ἐπίθεση ἔλαβε χώρα στὶς 12 καὶ ξημερώνοντας 13 ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη. Ἡ ἡγεσία εἶχε ἤδη διαλυθεῖ. Αὐτοκράτωρ καὶ εὐγενεῖς ἐγκατέλειψαν τὴν πόλη καὶ μόνο οἱ κληρικοὶ ἔμειναν, γιὰ νὰ προὔπαντήσουν τοὺς Σταυροφόρους καὶ νὰ τοὺς δηλώσουν τὴν ὑποταγὴ τῆς Βασιλεύουσας. Ὁ λαὸς πίστευε στὰ Χριστιανικὰ αἰσθήματα τῶν νικητῶν, ἀλλὰ διαψεύσθηκε οἰκτρά.

[5] Ἡ συμπεριφορὰ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἀπεκάλυψε στοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς τὴν Φραγκικὴ Δύση, ἑκατὸν πενήντα χρόνια μετὰ τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ σχίσμα. Ἔγιναν ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους ἀκατονόμαστες πράξεις ἀγριότητος καὶ θηριωδίας. Φόνευαν ἀδιάκριτα γέροντες, γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιά. Λεηλατοῦν καὶ διαρπάζουν τὸν πλοῦτο τῆς «βασίλισσας τῶν πόλεων τοῦ κόσμου». Στὴ διανομὴ τῶν λαφύρων μετέσχε, κατὰ συμφωνία καὶ ὁ Πάπας.

Τὸ χειρότερο: πυρπόλησαν τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς Πόλης καὶ ἐξανδραπόδισαν ἓνα τμήμα τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ της. Σ' αὐτὰ πρέπει νὰ προστεθοῦν οἱ μαδικοὶ βιασμοὶ τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τὰ πάμπολα ἄλλα κακουργήματα. Μόνο τὴν πρώτη μέρα φονεύθηκαν 7.000 κάτοικοι τῆς Πόλης. Ἰδιαιτέρως δὲ στόχος τῆς θηριωδίας ἦταν ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος κληρικός. Ἐπίσκοποι καὶ ἄλλοι κληρικοὶ ὑπέστησαν φοβερὰ βασανιστήρια καὶ κατασφάζονταν μὲ πρωτοφανῆ μανία. Ὁ Πατριάρχης



μόλις μπόρεσε ξυπόλητος και γυμνός να περάσει στην απέναντι ακτή.

Η Κωνσταντινούπολη απογυμνώθηκε από τους θησαυρούς της. Έσυλήθηκαν οι ναοί και αυτή η Αγία Σοφία, μάλιστα μέσα σε σκηνές φρίκης. Στη λεηλασία πρωτοστατούσε ο Λατινικός κληρός. Κανείς δεν φανταζόταν ότι η Πόλη θα έκρυβε τόσο ανεκτίμητους θησαυρούς. Έπι πολλά χρόνια τα δυτικά πλοία μετέφεραν θησαυρούς στη Δ. Ευρώπη, όπου και σήμερα κοσμούν εκκλησίες, μουσεία και ιδιωτικές συλλογές, π.χ. Άγιος Μάρκος, Βενετία. Ένα μέρος των θησαυρών (κυρίως χειρόγραφα) καταστράφηκε. Μέγα μέρος από τους «Βυζαντινούς» θησαυρούς του Αγίου Μάρκου εκποιήθηκε το 1795 από την Βενετική Δημοκρατία για πολεμικές ανάγκες.

[6] Βαθύτερα ίχνη από την ίδια την καταστροφή «της πόλης των Πόλεων» χαράχθηκαν μέσα στις ψυχές των Όρθοδόξων. Για τους Ρωμηούς ήταν πια απόλυτα βεβαιωμένο ότι η Δ΄ Σταυροφορία είχε απ' αρχής στόχο την άλωση της Πόλης και την διάλυση της Ρωμαϊκής Αυτοκρατορίας. Και είναι γεγονός ότι οι δυτικές πηγές βλέπουν την καταστροφή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ως τιμωρία των «αίρετικών» (Γραικών), που ήταν «άσεβεις και χειρότεροι από τους Έβραίους».

Την άλωση της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως την βλέπουν ως «νίκη της Χριστιανοσύνης». Το χάσμα, συνεπώς, μεταξύ Άνατολης και Δύσεως, που είχε ανοίξει με το σχίσμα (1054), γίνεται τώρα άγεφύρωτο. Οι «Βυζαντινοί» είχαν την ευκαιρία, άλλωστε, να ζήσουν το μίσος των Φράγκων έναντίον τους. Κατά τον ιστορικό Νικήτα Χωνιάτη, αυτόπτη μάρτυρα της άλωσης, η άρπακτικότητα και βαρβαρότητα των Σταυροφόρων δεν συγκρίνεται με την ηπιότητα των μουσουλμάνων, οι οποίοι μόλις κατέλαβαν τα Ίεροσόλυμα άρκέσθηκαν άπλως στην έπιβολή μικρού φόρου, άποφεύγοντας κάθε βιαιότητα.

Οι «Βυζαντινοί» συνειδητοποίησαν ότι μετά το 1204 οι Λατίνοι - Φράγκοι ήταν ο ουσιαστικός έχθρός τους, γιατί μόνο απ' αυτούς κινδύνευε η Όρθόδοξη πίστη και η παράδοση του Γένους. Έτσι, διαμορφώθηκε η στάση των άνθενωτικών, που προσέκριναν την πρόσκαιρη συνεργασία με τους Όθωμανούς από την «φιλία» των Φράγκων, έπιλέγοντας μεταξύ δύο κακών. Μία στάση που θα έκφρασθεϊ θεολογικά και από τον άγιο Κοσμά τον Αιτωλό κατά τον 18ο αιώνα.

Η άλωση του 1204 όμως είχε και ευεργετικές συνέπειες σε μία άλλη διάσταση. Ο μέσος Ρωμηός θα συνειδητοποιήσει την σημασία της διαλύσεως της Αυτοκρατορίας. Όσο μάλιστα θα παρατείνεται η Φραγκοκρατία, η αντίπαθεια έναντίον των Λατίνων θα μεταστοιχειωθεί σε όμοψυχία. Λόγω δέ της διασπάσεως της ένότητας των έπιμέρους έθνοτήτων

της Αυτοκρατορίας μετά το 1204, θα αρχίσει ο τονισμός της έθνικότητας, με εμφάνιση της έθνικης συνειδήσεως. Ό τραυματισμός δέ του έθνικου γοήτρου θα γεννήσει την Μεγάλη Ίδέα, ως πόθο έπανακτήσεως της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως και άνασυστάσεως της Αυτοκρατορίας.

Η πορεία των πραγμάτων οδήγησε την χώρα μας να καταλήξει, από τη σχέση «προστασίας» σε συμμαχίες με τις μεγάλες δυτικές δυνάμεις και σήμερα σε «νομαρχία» της Ένωμένης Ευρώπης. Το Ευρωπαϊκό «Διευθυντήριο» έχει την δυνατότητα να συνεχίζει την άλωση του Γένους/Έθνους μας με άλλους τρόπους. Πόσο το συνειδητοποιούν αυτό οι Πολιτικοί μας στις συναλλαγές τους με την Δυτική Ήγεσία; Τουλάχιστον, για να μετριάζεται η άκρατη αισιοδοξία μας και να μη πορευόμαστε με άυταπάτες...



Προορισμός μας ύψιστος είναι η θέωσός μας, το να γίνουμε όμοιοι με τον Θεό. Αυτή την άπεριγραπτο τιμή μās κάνει η αγάπη του. Άφοϋ ο Θεός μās έδωσε, τρόπον τινά, τον Έαυτό του, δεν είναι έπόμενο να δίνουμε και έμεις τον έαυτό μας στους άδελφούς μας; Ό,τι έχουμε, δεν πρέπει να το προσφέρουμε στον πλησίον μας; Άπό αυτή την άναλογία έξαρτάται η σωτηρία μας, η θέωσή μας. Άν ο Θεός μās άξιώνη να γίνουμε κοινωνοί της θείας του φύσεως, με την μετάληψη του Σώματος και του Αϊματος του Υίου Του, έτσι και έμεις πρέπει να άφήνουμε στους άδελφούς μας το δικαίωμα να κοινωνούν σε ό,τι έχουμε. Να έπισκεπτώμαστε τον άρρωστο. Να παρηγορούμε τον θλιμμένο. Να καταρτίζουμε τον άγνοούντα. Να ξεχνάμε τις άδικίες που μās έκαμαν οι άλλοι, γιατί όλοι άνήκουμε στον Χριστό, είμαστε του Χριστού. Και ο Χριστός θα άνταμείψη για κάθε τέτοια θυσία τον καθένα.

Άγιος Ίωάννης της Κρονστάνδης
Έκείνος, που περιεργάζεται και άσχολείται με τις άμαρτίες των άλλων και κατακρίνει τον άδελφόν του, διότι τον ύποψιάζεται, δεν έχει αρχίσει ακόμη το έργον της μετανοίας, αλλά ούτε έρευνά για να έλέγξη τις δικές του άμαρτίες, που είναι βαρύτερες από την πιο μεγάλη ποσότητα μολύβδου, ούτε άντελήφθη από ποια αίτία γίνεται ο άνθρωπος βαρυνκάρδιος, αγαπώντας την ματαιότητα και ζητώντας το ψέμα...

Άγιος Μάξιμος ο Όμολογητής

«Καρδιά Πάσχα, Νοὺς Λάμπα, Μάπα Δάκρυα»

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου Ἱεροθέου, ὁμιλία κατὰ τὸν πρῶτο Κατανυκτικὸ Ἑσπερινό.



Θὰ ἤθελα νὰ σᾶς πῶ μία διήγηση ἀπὸ ἓναν σύγχρονο ἀγιορείτη μοναχό, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔζησε σὲ ἓνα Φιλοθεΐτικο Κελλί τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος γεννήθηκε

στὴν Ρωσία, στὴν Πολτάβα, τὸ 1882, καὶ κοιμήθηκε τὸ 1965 στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, στὴν ιδιόρρυθμη τότε Ἱερά Μονὴ Φιλοθέου.

Λεγόταν Αὐγουστίνος μοναχός, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο γράφει ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος στὸ βιβλίο ποὺ συνέγραψε γιὰ τοὺς Γέροντες ποὺ συνάντησε στὰ Μοναστήρια καὶ στίς Σκήτες τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Ὁ Γέροντας αὐτός, ὁ π. Αὐγουστίνος, ζοῦσε μέσα στὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸ ποὺ σᾶς εἶπα προηγουμένως, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἀναφέρω...

Τὸ διακόνημά του ἦταν νὰ συγκεντρῶν ὅλα τὰ γέρικα ζῶα τῆς περιοχῆς, τὰ ὁποῖα οἱ ἄλλοι μοναχοὶ εἶχαν—δὲν ὑπῆρχαν αὐτοκίνητα τότε στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος, τουλάχιστον τότε, καὶ ὅλες οἱ ἐργασίες γίνονταν μὲ τὰ μουλάρια—ὅταν αὐτὰ γερνοῦσαν καὶ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ προσφέρουν καμμία ἐργασία, τὰ ἄφηναν στό... δάσος νὰ τελειώσουν μόνα τους καὶ πολλές φορές κατασπαράσσονταν ἀπὸ τὰ θηρία καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς λύκους, κλπ.

Ἐκεῖνος, λοιπόν, λυπόταν αὐτὰ τὰ ζῶα, τὰ συγκέντρωνε καὶ τὰ γηροκομοῦσε... Ἦταν γηροκόμος καὶ νοσοκόμος τους. Τὸ ἔκανε ἀπὸ ἀγάπη καὶ εὐγνωμοσύνη, γιὰ τὴν τόσα χρόνια ἐξυπηρετοῦσαν τοὺς μοναχοὺς στὰ ἔργα τους. Καὶ ὅταν ἀργότερα οἱ δυνάμεις του δὲν τοῦ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ ἀνταποκριθῆ στὸ ἔργο αὐτὸ καὶ χρειάστηκε ὁ γερο-Αὐγουστίνος νὰ πάη στὸ γηροκομεῖο τῆς Μονῆς, ζήτησε νὰ ἀναλάβῃ κάποιος ἀπὸ τοὺς μοναχοὺς τὸ διακόνημα αὐτό.

Ἐπίσης, αὐτός ἔδειχνε πολὺ μεγάλη ἀγάπη σὲ κάθε προσκυνητή. Εἶχε πολὺ μεγάλη εὐαισθησία ἐσωτερικὴ καὶ κάθε ἓναν ποὺ συναντοῦσε τοῦ ἔκανε ἐδαφιαία, στρωτὴ μετάνοια. Καὶ ὅταν τοῦ ἔλεγαν: «Γιατί, Γέροντα, βάζεις ἐδαφιαία μετάνοια στοὺς λαϊκούς;» ἐκεῖνος ἀπαντοῦσε: «Γιατί ἔχουν τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος». Δηλαδή, ἔβλεπε σὲ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξο Χριστιανὸ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τὸν τιμοῦσε...

Φυσικά, δὲν ἀρκεῖ νὰ ἔχη κανεὶς τὴν Χάρη τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος, θὰ πρέπει αὐτὴ ἡ Χάρη νὰ εἶναι ἐνεργῆς, ζωντανή. Ἐκεῖνος, ὅμως, ἔβλεπε αὐτὴ τὴν δυνατότητα τὴν ὁποία ἔχει ὁ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός νὰ γίνῃ ἅγιος, καὶ ὅσο ἀμαρτωλός καὶ ἄν εἶναι, μπορεῖ νὰ σωθῆ...

Κοινωνοῦσε τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων μὲ πολλὴ ἀγάπη καὶ ζήλο. Μάλιστα μία φορὰ αἰσθάνθηκε τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία ὡς σάρκα καὶ αἷμα, τόσο πολὺ, ποὺ τὴν μασοῦσε γιὰ πολλὴ ὥρα. Καὶ ἐνῶ τὴν μασοῦσε, συγχρόνως αἰσθανόταν μεγάλη ἀγαλλίαση στὴν καρδιά του καὶ ἔκλαιγε ἀπὸ μεγάλη χαρὰ.

Ἀκόμη, τὸ βράδυ διάβαζε τὸν κανόνα του καὶ τὰ βιβλία χωρὶς νὰ χρησιμοποιῆ φῶς, γιὰ τὴν φώτιζε τὸ κελλί του τὸ Φῶς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ κελλί του τὰ μεσάνυχτα μετατρέποταν σὲ μέρα...

Ἐπίσης, εἶχε ἐπισκέψεις ἁγίων. Πολλές φορές εἶδε Ἁγίους, Ἀγγέλους καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν Παναγία. Καὶ ὅταν μάλιστα ἦταν στὸ Γηροκομεῖο, ἔβλεπε τοὺς Ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς Ἁγίους καὶ σκουντοῦσε τοὺς ἄλλους Γέροντες μοναχοὺς νὰ σηκωθοῦν. Ἔλεγε: «Ἡ Παναγία», «ὁ Ἄγγελος». Ὁ γηροκόμος τὸν θεωροῦσε πλανεμένο. «Σηκωθεῖτε, ἦλθε ὁ τάδε Ἅγιος», καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι δὲν ἔβλεπαν τίποτα καὶ τὸν θεωροῦσαν ὅτι εἶναι σαλός.

Ὁ ἅγιος Παΐσιος ποὺ ἦταν ἓνα διάστημα στὴν Μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Φιλοθέου γράφει γιὰ τὸν γερο-Αὐγουστίνου: «Ἡ μορφὴ τοῦ Γέροντα ἦταν φωτεινὴ, γιὰ τὸν εἶχε ἐπισκιάσει ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ μόνο νὰ τὸν ἔβλεπες, ξεχνοῦσες κάθε στενοχώρια γιὰ τὴν σκορποῦσε χαρὰ μὲ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ του καλοσύνη. Ἡ ἐξωτερικὴ του φορεσιά, τὸ ζωστικὸ του τὸ καταμπαλωμένο, ἦταν χειρότερο ἀπὸ τὸ ροῦχο ποὺ κρεμαίει ὁ κηπουρός ὡς σκιάχτρο γιὰ τὴν κουροῦνες. Ἐάν τύχαινε νὰ τοῦ δώση κανεὶς κανένα καλὸ πράγμα, τὸ ἔδινε καὶ αὐτός σὲ ἄλλον...

Ἔτσι χαρούμενος μὲ τὴν πολλὴ καλοσύνη του, δοξολογώντας τὸν Θεὸ καὶ προσευχόμενος ἀδιαλείπτως, πέρασε ἢ μᾶλλον ἔζησε παραδεισένια ζωὴ στὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας. Μέσα του εἶχε τὸν Χριστό, ἡ καρδιά του ἦταν Παράδεισος, καὶ ἀξιώθηκε νὰ δῆ καὶ ἀπὸ δῶ Ἀγγέλους καὶ Ἁγίους, ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν Παναγία, καὶ στὴν συνέχεια νὰ ἀγάλλεται αἰώνια.

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ θὰ ἔφευγε ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Γερο-Αὐγουστίνου τὸ πρόσωπο του ἄστραψε τρεῖς φορές! Οἰκονόμησε δὲ ὁ Θεός νὰ βρισκεται ἐκεῖ δίπλα του καὶ ὁ Γηροκόμος, ὁ ὁποῖος θαύμασε καὶ βεβαιώθηκε γιὰ τὴν θεῖες ἐπισκέψεις ποὺ εἶχε ὁ Γέροντας».

Αὐτὰ εἶναι λόγια τοῦ Ἁγίου Παΐσιου καὶ φυσικὰ τὰ ἀποδεχόμαστε πλήρως, ὅχι γιὰ τὴν πληροφορήθηκε ἀπὸ κάποιον ἄλλον, ἀλλὰ τὰ εἶδε ὁ ἴδιος καὶ τὰ περιγράφει, εἶναι αὐτόπτης καὶ αὐτήκοος μάρτυς τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ εὐλογημένου αὐτοῦ μοναχοῦ.

Τὸ ἀπόσταγμα ὅλων αὐτῶν ποὺ ἔζησε ὁ Γέροντας αὐτός, ὁ π. Αὐγουστίνος ὁ Φιλοθεΐτης, ἦταν μία φράση τὴν ὁποία ἔλεγε. Ξέρετε, ὅταν πάη κανεὶς στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος καὶ βλέπῃ μοναχοὺς, ρωτᾷ: «Γέροντα, πές μου κάτι». Καὶ οἱ Γέροντες λένε ἀνάλογα μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ ζοῦν, καὶ ὅχι αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔχουν διαβάσει. Ἐκεῖνος ζοῦσε

πολλά, αλλά όλα αυτά, όλη η ζωή του ήταν κλεισμένη σε μία φράση. Τι έλεγε; Ήταν Ρώσος στην καταγωγή, μιλούσε σπαστά Έλληνικά και έλεγε:

«Καρδιά Πάσχα, νούς λάμπα, μάτια δάκρυα».

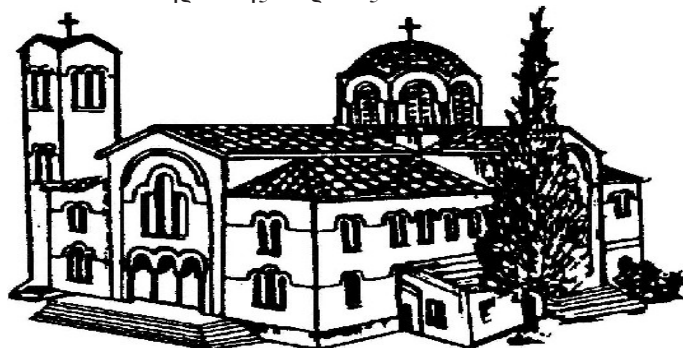
Είναι καταπληκτικό! Όταν τὸ διάβασα για πρώτη φορά—δὲν ἔτυχε νὰ τὸν γνωρίσω, γιατί τὸ 1966 πῆγα για πρώτη φορά στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος—ἐνθουσιάστηκα, γιατί αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀπόσταγμα μιᾶς ζωῆς. Τι δίδασκε καὶ τι ἔλεγε: **Στὴν καρδιά σας νὰ ζητε τὸ Πάσχα, στὸν νοῦ σας νὰ ἔχετε τὸ φῶς-λάμπα, στὰ μάτια σας δάκρυα.**

Ἄν αὐτὸ τὸ ἀναστρέψουμε καὶ πούμε «στὰ μάτια δάκρυα-μετάνοια, στὸν νοῦ φῶς-λάμπα, καὶ στὴν καρδιά Πάσχα», τότε καταλαβαίνουμε πῶς προχωρεῖ κανεὶς στὴν πνευματικὴ του ζωή...

Εἶναι αὐτὸ ποὺ οὐσιαστικὰ λένε οἱ Πατέρες: **κάθαροις, φωτισμός, θέωσις.**

Τὸ νὰ ζῆ κανεὶς μέσα στὴν καρδιά του τὸ Πάσχα, δηλαδή τὴν ἀγαλλίαση, τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν χαρὰ—ὄχι τὴν συναισθηματικὴ χαρὰ, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ τὴν χαρὰ ποὺ εἶναι καρπὸς τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος—τόν Χριστό, αὐτὸ δὲν ἔρχεται εὐκόλα. Προηγεῖται τὸ φῶς μέσα στὸν νοῦ, δηλαδή ὁ νοῦς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὸν σκοτασμό, τὴν σύγχυση, τοὺς πολλοὺς λογισμοὺς, καὶ προσεύχεται καθαρὰ στὸν Θεό, καὶ φυσικὰ ὑπάρχουν τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

Ποιὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ζήσει τὸ Πάσχα στὴν καρδιά του; Ποιὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ἔχη φωτισμένο νοῦ καὶ νὰ μὴν ἔχη σύγχυση; Naί, αὐτὸ ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας... Γιατί πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία ποὺ ἔχουμε στοὺς Ναοὺς καὶ τὶς ἀκολουθίες, ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ ἀκολουθία, ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ λειτουργία μέσα στὴν καρδιά, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀδιάλειπτη προσευχή, ἡ καρδιακή, ἡ ἀγρυπνία ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ μέσα στὴν καρδιά, στὸ θυσιαστήριο τῆς καρδιάς.



Ἄν δὲν κυριευθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἔρωτα τῶν οὐρανίων ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν πόθον τῆς ἄνω Ἱερουσαλὴμ (ποὺ εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), ἀλλὰ μένουμε προσκολλημένοι στὴν ἐπίγεια ζωή, κυλιόμενοι μέσα στὸν βοῦρκο τῶν πολλαπλῶν κοσμικῶν φροντίδων, δὲν θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὴν Οὐράνια Πατρίδα!

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος

Ἡ 25^η Μαρτίου καὶ τὸ Πραγματικὸ Νόημά της

Γράφει ὁ Μητροπολίτης Προικονήσου Ἰωσήφ, «Ὀσμὴ Ζωῆς», ἐκδ. Ἀθῶς, σ. 290-296.



Ἡ 25^η Μαρτίου μᾶς φέρνει καὶ πάλι μπροστὰ στὴ μεγαλύτερη καὶ ἱερώτερη ἐπέτειο τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης. Ἐκεῖνη τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ τοῦ Γένους ἐνάντια

στὸν κατακτητὴ καὶ τύραννο, ποὺ για περισσότερους ἀπὸ τέσσερις αἰῶνες τὸ σταύρωνε καὶ τὸ εὐτέλιζε στὸν Γολγοθᾶ τῆς δουλείας. Τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς παλιγγενεσίας ποῦ, Θεοῦ εὐδοκήσαντος, ἀκολούθησε. Βρισκόμαστε πάλι μπροστὰ σὲ μνήμες ἱερῆς γεγονότων σπουδαίων καὶ μεγάλων, ποὺ σημάδεψαν ὄχι μόνο τὴν Ἑλληνική, μὰ καὶ τὴν πανανθρώπινη ἱστορία. τὸ Μεσολόγγι, γιὰ παράδειγμα, τὸ Κούγκι, τὸ Ζάλογγο, ἡ Ἀραπίτσα, τὸ Μανιάκι, ἡ Ἀλαμάνια καὶ τόσα ἄλλα, ποὺ «ἐπιλείψει με διηγούμενον ὁ χρόνος» (Ἐβρ. 11: 32), σημάδεψαν τὴν πανανθρώπινη ἱστορία ἀνεξίτηλα! Καὶ πίσω ἀπ' αὐτὰ βρίσκονται ἄνθρωποι μεγάλοι, ἐλεύθεροι μέσα στὴν ἐξωτερικὴ σκλαβιά, γενναῖοι καὶ δυνατοί. Καί, γιὰ νὰ θυμηθῶ τὸν ποιητὴ, «Γιὰ τοὺς μεγάλους, γιὰ τοὺς ἐλεύθερους, γιὰ τοὺς γενναίους, τοὺς δυνατοὺς, ἀρμόζουν τὰ λόγια τὰ μεγάλα, τὰ ἐλεύθερα, τὰ γενναῖα, τὰ δυνατά». Λυπᾶμαι ποὺ ὁ λόγος μου εἶναι φτωχὸς καὶ δὲ θὰ μπορέσει νὰ σταθεῖ ἀντάξιος τους. Ἄς με συγχωρήσουν οἱ ἱερεῖς τοὺς σκιές...

Πολλὰ γράφτηκαν μέσα στὶς δεκαετίες ποὺ κύλισαν ἀπὸ τότε, σχετικὰ με τὸ νόημα τοῦ ξεσηκωμοῦ ἐκείνου καὶ τῆς θυσίας τῶν προγόνων μας. Ἐγὼ θὰ προτιμοῦσα ν' ἀκουστῆ ἡ ἤρεμη φωνὴ τοῦ ποιητῆ, ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν ἱστορία με τὴν εὐαισθησία ποὺ χαϊδεύει ἓνα λουλουδι, με τὴ λαχτάρα ποὺ ἀκούει τὰ πρῶινὰ τὸν ὄρθρο τῶν πουλιῶν καὶ με τὴν εὐλάβεια ποὺ ἀκούει τὸ κλάμα ἑνὸς παιδιοῦ. Λέει, λοιπόν, ὁ μεγάλος μας Σεφέρης:

**Γιὰ μᾶς ἦταν ἄλλο πρᾶγμα ὁ πόλεμος
γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
καθισμένη στὰ γόνατα τῆς Ὑπερμάχου Στρατηγοῦ,
ποὺ εἶχε στὰ μάτια ψηφιδωτὸ
τὸν καμὸ τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης.**

«Γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ», λοιπόν, καὶ «γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου», ἦταν ὁ ξεσηκωμὸς τοῦ '21! Γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ χλευαζόταν καθημερινὰ ἀπ' τὸν ἀλλόθρησκο κατακτητὴ καὶ βιαζόταν ἀδιάντροπα ἀπὸ τὶς ἀσταμάτητες προσπάθειες

τοῦ σατανικοῦ ἐξισλαμισμού. Καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ τὸν εἶπαν «ραγιά» καὶ τὸν ξάπλωσαν στὸ προκρούστιο κρεβάτι τοῦ γούστου τοῦ τελευταίου ἀνθρωποειδοῦς ποὺ ἄκουε στὴν προσφώνηση «ἀγάς»! Γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ κυνηγήθηκε ἐπίμονα, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα τὸ μέγα ἱερὸ νέφος τῶν Νεομαρτύρων ἀπὸ τὴ μία μεριά, καὶ τὸ φαινόμενο τοῦ «Κρυπτοχριστιανισμού», μὲ ἔξαρση στὸν Πόντο, τὴν Κρήτη καὶ τὴν Κύπρο (λινομπάμπακοι). Ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς πολλοὺς—δυστυχῶς—ἐξισλαμισμοὺς, ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη! Καὶ γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ μὲ τὸ «παιδομάζωμα», τὸν τρομερὸ κι ἀπάνθρωπο «ντεβσιρμέ» (ἔτσι τὸ ἔλεγαν), ἀπέθαινε χίλιες φορὲς πρὶν ἔρθει ἡ ὥρα τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ κορμιοῦ!... Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ ἔλειωνε σὰν τὸ κερὶ κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ὑποχρεωνόταν νὰ κάμει «τεμενά», γιατί ἤξερε νὰ κάμπει τὰ γόνατά της μόνο ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ κι ὄχι ἀνθρώπων!... Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ κυνηγημένη ἔπαιρνε τὰ βουνὰ καὶ ζούσε σὰν τ' ἀγρίμια, μὲ τὴ ρετσινιά τοῦ «κλέφτη» τοῦ «χαΐνη». Μία ρετσινιά, ποὺ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων τὴν ἔκαμε τίτλο τιμῆς! Γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ διψασμένη γιὰ παιδεία καὶ μάθηση, ἦταν ἀναγκασμένη νὰ τρέχει νύχτα σὲ Κρυφὰ Σχολεῖα γιὰ μία χούφτα κολυβογράμματα! γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ποὺ κυνηγημένη σὰν στρουθί, ἔπαιρνε τῶν ὀμματιῶν της, ζητώντας μία λεύτερη ἀνάσα σ' Εὐρώπες καὶ Ρωσίες, σὲ κόσμους καὶ πολιτισμοὺς ξένους κι ἀλλόκοτους, μὲ τὸ σαράκι τῆς ξενιτειᾶς νὰ τὴ χτικιάζει!...

Γι' αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ἔγινε ὁ ξεσηκωμὸς τοῦ '21! Καὶ τὸν εὐλόγησε ἀπὸ πάνω ὁ Θεός, ποὺ «εἶχε βάλει τὴν ὑπογραφή Του νὰ λευτερωθεῖ τὸ Γένος». Καὶ τὸν προστάτεψε ἡ Μάννα τοῦ λαοῦ μας, ἡ Ὑπέρομαχος Στρατηγός, «ποὺ εἶχε στὰ μάτια Τῆς ψηφιδωτὸ τὸν καημὸ τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης». Καὶ πέτυχε! Μὲ ὀδυνηρότατες θυσίες! Μὲ αἶμα ἄφθοно καὶ δάκρυα περισσότερα! Μὲ σκοντάμματα κι ἀνασηκώματα! Παρὰ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὴν ἀγριάδα ποὺ τὰ τετρακόσια χρόνια τοῦ «χειροπιαστοῦ σκοταδιοῦ» τῆς «πικρῆς σκλαβιάς» εἶχαν σωρέψει στοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τὸν τόπο μας! Παρὰ τίς τρικλοποδιὲς τῶν μεγάλων! Παρὰ τίς προδοσίαις τῶν χαμερπῶν! Παρὰ τίς παρασπονδίαις καὶ τίς ἐγκαταλείψεις ἀφίλων φίλων! Παρὰ τίς κάθε λογῆς κακομοιριὲς κι ἀντιξοότητες!...

Καὶ σήμερα, «στοῦ κύκλου τὰ γυρίσματα», εἶναι χρέος νὰ μνημονεύσουμε τοὺς αἵτιους. Τοὺς ἀφανεῖς καὶ τοὺς ἐπιφανεῖς. Τοὺς ἄγνωστους καὶ τοὺς γνωστούς κατ' ὄνομα. Τὶς μαννάδες καὶ τίς γιαγιάδες ποὺ λίκνισαν τὰ παιδιὰ τους καὶ τὰ γαλούχησαν μὲ τ' ὄνειρο τῆς λευτεριάς. Τοὺς ἀπροσκύνητους πατεράδες καὶ παπποῦδες, τὰ λεβεντοπαλλήκαρα τῆς Κλεφτουριάς. Κολοκοτρωναίους, Καραϊσκάκηδες, Μακρυγιάννηδες

καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους. Τοὺς θαλασσόλυκους Κανάρηδες, καὶ Μπουμπουλίνες. Τοὺς Φαναριώτες ἄρχοντες, Ὑψηλάντηδες, Μαυροκορδάτους καὶ λοιπούς. Τοὺς Δημογέροντες καὶ τὸν ἀπλὸ λαὸ τῶν πόλεων, τῶν χωριῶν καὶ τῶν μαρτυρικῶν νησιῶν μας. Τοὺς Φιλικούς ποὺ ὀρκίζονταν στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο νὰ σώσουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Τοὺς πλούσιους ποὺ ἔδωσαν τὰ πάντα γιὰ τὸν ἱερὸ ἀγώνα. Τοὺς φτωχοὺς ποὺ ἔθεσαν στὴ διάθεση τοῦ Γένους τὸν πλοῦτο τῆς γενναίας τους ψυχῆς. Τοὺς ταπεινοὺς καλόγερους καὶ παπάδες, ποὺ στὸ μοναστήρι τους, τὴν ἐκκλησιά τους, τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο τους, κράτησαν ζωντανὴ ὄχι μόνο τὴν Πίστη καὶ τὴ γλώσσα τοῦ λαοῦ μας, μὰ καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ Γένους. Τοὺς θεοφώτιστους Διδάχους, ποὺ μὲ κορυφαῖο ἕναν Κοσμᾶ Αἰτωλό, κράτησαν ἄσβηστο τὸ φῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς ἔνθεης παιδείας μέσα στὸ ἔρεβος τῆς τουρκικῆς σκλαβιάς. Τοὺς μαρτυρικούς Ἱεράρχες καὶ Πατριάρχες, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὸν πολύμουσο Ἅγιο Κύριλλο Λούκαρι ὡς τὸν Ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Ε' καὶ τὸν Κύριλλο τὸν ΣΤ', μὲ τὸ παράδειγμά τους, τὴ διδαχὴ τους καὶ τὸ αἶμα τοῦ μαρτυρίου τους ἐφώτισαν τὸ Γένος, ἐπότισαν κι ἐκαλλιέργησαν τὸ δένδρο τῆς ἐλευθερίας του κι ἐπλήρωσαν τὸ βαρὺ τίμημά της.

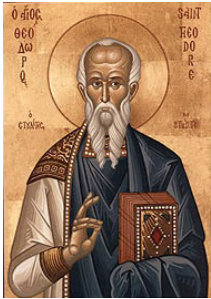
Δὲν ἔγινε τὸ '21 ἀπλῶς γιὰ νὰ περάσουν μερικὰ ὀνόματα στὴν ἀθανασία! Ἐγινε γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε ἐμεῖς, κι αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ ῥθουν μετὰ ἀπὸ μᾶς, τὸ μίτο τοῦ νήματος ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ τὰ ἔθνη καὶ τοὺς λαοὺς στὴν ἀλήθεια! Κι αὐτὸς ὁ μίτος εἶναι τὸ Χριστιανικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς θυσίας γιὰ χάρη τῶν μεγάλων ἰδανικῶν! Τὸ Χριστιανικὸ αἶσθημα τῆς ἀδελφικῆς ἀλληλεγγύης! Τὸ Χριστιανικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπὸ τὴ σκλαβιά κυρίως τῶν παθῶν, τῶν ἐσωτερικῶν αὐτῶν ἐπικίνδυνων ἐχθρῶν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου! Τὸ πατριωτικὸ αἶσθημα τῆς εὐθύνης γιὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν γύρω μας. Τὸ αἶσθημα τῆς ἀξιοπρέπειας καὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης. Τῆς εὐθύνης «γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου»! Τὴν ψυχὴ τὴ δική μας, τῶν παιδιῶν μας, τῶν συμπαροίκων μας, κι ὅσων ἀκόμη μοιράζονται μαζί μας τὸν Ἑλλαδικὸ ἥλιο...

Αὐτὴ θὰ εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη καταξίωση ἐνὸς Μεσολογγίου, ἐνὸς Σουλίου κι ἐνός—ἀργότερα—Ἄρκαδιου! Ἡ δικαίωση τῶν ἀγῶνων καὶ τῶν ὀραματισμῶν ἐνὸς Στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη! Ὁ καλύτερος φόρος τιμῆς σ' ὅσους ἔβαλαν τοὺς ὤμους τους νὰ σηκώσουν, σὰν ἄλλοι Ἄτλαντες, τὸ βάρος τῆς εὐθύνης γιὰ τὸ Ἔθνος. Εὐθύνης ἀπέναντι στὸν Θεό, στὸν κόσμο καὶ στὴν Ἱστορία, ὅταν ὁ Ὑψηλάντης διάβηκε τὸν Προῦθο καὶ λίγο ἀργότερα ἡ Ἁγία Λαύρα ἔδωσε τὸ σύνθημα, κι ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς ἐσήμανε τὴν καμπάνα τοῦ χρέους!

Ἄς εἶναι ἀγέραστη κι ἀθάνατη ἡ ἅγια μνήμη τοῦ '21! Κι ἄς γίνεῖ ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη τοῦ σήμερα ἀντάξιά της!

LENTEN HUMILITY AND PATIENT ENDURANCE

By St. Theodore the Studite, given on the Wednesday of Holy Week, from Catechesis 72: "On the Saving Passion and Teaching on Humility and Patient Endurance." These Catecheses were given when St. Theodore and his monks were in exile from Constantinople during the reign of Michael II (820-829).



Brethren and Fathers, the present day is holy and to be venerated, for from this day the Lord begins to take on himself the sufferings of the Cross, for our sake, in accordance with David's words: *Why did the nations rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth rose up and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against his*

Christ. [Pss 2:1-2]. They assembled together to plot an evil plan against the Master.

The deceitful Judas denies him utterly and betrays the teacher with a deceitful kiss. The Lord of all things is led away prisoner, stands before the judgement seat, is interrogated and answers; and when He answers—O fearful report!—He is struck by a slave and bears it with long-suffering, saying: *If I have spoken evil, give testimony to the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?* [Jn 18:23]. Then He is scoffed at, mocked, jeered at, ridiculed, spat at, buffeted, scourged. He ascends the Cross, and when He has ascended He prays for His murderers: *Father, forgive them their sin, for they do not know what they do.* [Lk 23:33]. Then He is given gall with vinegar, He is pierced by a lance, the Immortal is put to death...

These in brief are the Master's sufferings, and one who hears them with understanding is not angry, or embittered, or enraged, or puffed up, or arrogant towards his brother; is not envious, or filled with vainglory. Rather he is humbled, crushed, considers himself to be earth and ashes, desires communion in Christ's sufferings, is eager to be conformed to His death, so that he may have a part in the glory of His resurrection.

Nevertheless, you too take courage, because you have shared and are sharing in the Master's sufferings. For you see where you are. Is it not for the sake of His word and His testimony that you are in exile and persecution? Have you not previously experienced prison? Have you not shed your blood under tortures? Have not some of our brothers died a martyr's death? Such then is our boast in the Lord, such our gift. However, the end beatitude is not assured because of the ease of reversal and the impossibility of knowing what the morrow will bring to birth; thus, stand your ground unflinching and unmoving in the Lord *striving side by side with one spirit and one soul for the faith of the Gospel, in no way intimidated by your opponents* [Phil 1:27-6], *not giving*

offence in anything, but in everything recommending ourselves as God's ministers [2 Cor 6:3-4], by obedience, humility, meekness, long-suffering, great endurance. *For you need endurance in order to do God's will and obtain the promise. For in a little while He who is coming will come and not delay.* [Heb 10:36-37]. And, if He will come and not delay, why do we hate being in afflictions and do not rather choose to die each day for the Master? For it is written: *If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are unfaithful, He remains faithful; He cannot disown Himself.* [1 Tim 2:11-13].

How great joy the saints will have when they see the Lord "coming from heaven with the angels of His power. [2 Thess. 1:7], inviting them with inexpressible joy, crowning them and becoming their companion for ever and ever? What anguish will they have who have disobeyed the Gospel and transgressed His commandments? *They will suffer the penalty, as it is written, of eternal destruction, cut off from His presence and from the glory of His strength, when He comes to be glorified in His saints and marvelled at among all who have believed.* [2 Thess 1:9-10].

And so, brethren, as we contemplate and think on these things, again and again *let us purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* [2 Cor 7:1], zealous for what is better, striving for what is more perfect, *hating what is evil, holding fast to what is good, loving one another with brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honor, not lagging in zeal, being ardent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer* [Rom. 12:9-12], that by such sincerity we may worthily celebrate the imminent Pascha, and be counted worthy to enjoy the eternal blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.



Today is the joyful forefeast of the time of abstinence, the bright threshold of the Fast. Therefore, brethren, together let us run the race with confident hope and with great eagerness.

First Canon of Cheesefare Monday, Ode 1

Let us venerate the Cross of the Lord, offering our tender affection as the cypress, the sweet fragrance of our faith as the cedar, and our sincere love as the pine; and let us glorify our Deliverer who was nailed upon it.

Wed Matins of the 4th Week of Lent, Ode 7

A WONDROUS VISION

From the book, "Soul Beneficial Visions and Narrations on the Other Life," "Orthodox Kypseli" publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

A married man, who had children, servants and plenty of wealth, was immensely merciful and hospitable. One evening, after dinner, he fell asleep; in the morning, he was found lying on the ground, cold and unconscious as if dead. His relatives carried him to his bed giving him first aid and warming him in their effort to bring him back to consciousness. After several days of loving care by his relatives, he recovered and was asked by them to tell all what happened to him and where he was while he was as if dead for so many days. He would not respond, refusing to satisfy their request; instead, he would cry inconsolably and such tears of repentance and contrition continued unceasingly. Moreover, until his death (some years later) he told nobody. When he was approaching his end, he called his eldest son and decided to tell him (and all of his relatives that were present) of that experience. His words were clear and succinct and in front of everybody.

"My dear son, I give you this last commandment and order you to keep it strictly as much as you can. Be charitable to the poor and have a lot of affinity towards the strangers and travelers. Look after them in your home and with great love serve them willingly and give to them generously, as much as they need, just as you saw me do until now. Because hospitality is most welcome amongst all virtues by God, and receives great reward in the heavenly Kingdom. And to motivate you and all my relatives towards such a God-pleasing act of kindness and sympathy towards the strangers and the poor, on this day and during my last few hours, I shall relate this amazing vision I had, when you found me as dead down on the floor of our house, a few years ago.

"Know that from my early years I had great reverence for the Most Holy Theotokos and every day I would read her eulogies and blessings. For this longing and love that I had with all my soul and heart, the Despot (Christ) blessed me through her intercessions to receive many gifts and graces, especially for the sympathy I had for the poor and strangers, as you know, receiving everyone with love and giving generously, whatever and whenever was needed.

"That night I had the following vision: I heard a voice calling my name saying:

—Rise from the bed and follow me.

"When I got up, the one that had called me grabbed me firmly by the hand, and brought me to a valley. He then disappeared and I, left alone and not knowing what to do, suddenly heard behind me loud and obnoxious voices and disturbances. Turning back, I saw a huge crowd of demons who were rapidly coming towards me, to grab me, just as if they were savage beasts. As soon as I saw them, I started

running as fast as I could, with incredible fear, until I arrived at a house; after entering this house, I closed the door firmly shut. However, they broke the door and came in to grab me.

"So that you all understand better, listen to this. It had been three years prior to that experience that I received a stranger in our home, on the evening of the feast of All Saints, to host him just as was our custom. Arriving at the house, I met another stranger that had been received by your mother, according to my commandment to her, to receive and offer hospitality to everybody as if he were an angel of the Lord; shortly thereafter, your brother brought another one as well. I must tell you that your mother and I tasted great happiness for having been blessed to receive and offer hospitality in my home to these three strangers, similar to the "form" of the Most Holy Trinity. I offered them the richest and best hospitality, as much as I could, according to my custom. "So, going back to my vision, the demons had come in. And I, panicked and terrified, started to cry to the Lord to have mercy through the intercessions of His Most Holy Mother. It is then that I saw three extremely pleasant looking men tell me:

—Fear not for we have come to help you.

"Having expelled the demons they asked me if I knew them. I replied:

—No, my lords, I do not know you.

"They then replied:

—We are the three strangers you offered hospitality with rich and Abrahamic heart and we were sent by our Lord to help you, and reward you for all the love you showed us and thereby you are saved from the demonic hands.

"Having said that, they disappeared.

"I thanked God and fearing to go outside in case they disturb me again, I remained in the house for a while. After what appeared to be a long while, I crossed myself and went outside, hoping in the Lord. Having walked a little, I saw the demons running behind me again, screaming and saying:

—Let us run now to catch him in case he escapes.

"I once again became terrified and running faster, I cried to the Theotokos:

—Most Holy Theotokos help me.

"Thus running, I reached a flaming river, that was full of snakes, and other fearsome beasts of Hades. Their body was fully immersed in the flames and only their mouth was out, and open, as if they were hungry wishing to eat. The demons who chased me, were shouting to me to fall in the river or they would do it themselves. I then checked the surroundings for a possible different exit, when I saw a narrow bridge with one span and so tall that it looked to me as if it was reaching the sky. Not knowing what to choose between those three options, for example, to fall in the river where I feared the fire and the dragons, to submit to the authority of the demons that was worse,

or to climb on the bridge. I ended up choosing the third. Therefore, I climbed the steps one by one with great fear and danger of falling in the fire. The cunning demons followed me with shouts and threats. When I got to the top of the bridge, the demons reached me and with tears, I cried to the Theotokos:

—Most Holy Theotokos help me.

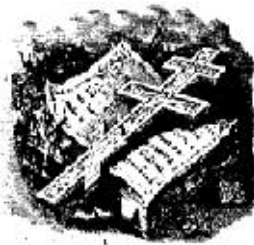
“Then, in front of me appeared the compassionate Mother of mercy and she stretched out her right hand, saying:

—Fear not, my dear servant; because you used to read for me eulogies and prayers and loved the poor, and all of the least brethren of my Son and my Despot, that is why I came to help you in your need.

“Having told me these words, she held me by the hand and oh what a miracle! In a split second, she brought me back to my house and my soul returned to my body; it was then that you all found me, thinking that I was dead.

“For this reason, my son, do not neglect your service to the Mother of the Almighty God the All blessed Theotokos, but every hour to sing hymns to her and glorify her as you should and as I, your father, did. This way you will have her as your helper in all of your earthly and after-life needs. This is my first commandment I give you. The second is, as I already told you earlier, force yourself to love as much as possible the strangers, the poor, the widows, the orphans and give them whatever they need, that is, if you wish to enjoy in the world everything good and to inherit the eternal Kingdom of God.”

The blessed one, having said to all those present, to venerate the God-Mother and to help the poor, he delivered his soul in the hands of God. His son, remembering all his life the fatherly advice, he exercised a life of virtue and after the end of his earthly life, he was found worthy of the heavenly bliss as well.

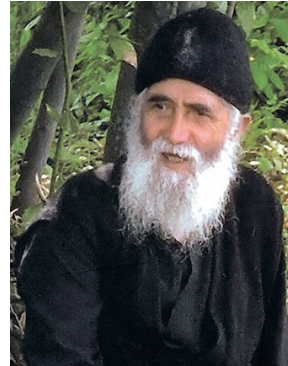


They asked Abba Sisoës, “If a brother sins, surely he must do penance for a year?” He replied, “That is a hard saying.” The visitors said, “For six months?” He replied, “That is too long.” They said, “For forty days?” He said, “That is a great deal, too.” They said to him, “What then? If a brother falls, and the *agape* is about to be offered, should he simply come to the *agape*, too?” The old man said to them, “No, he needs to do penance for a few days. But I trust in God that if such a man does penance with his whole heart, God will receive him, even in three days...”

The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

ON COMMON PRAYERS

By St. Paisios the Athonite, from the Book: “*With Pain and Love for the Contemporary Man*,” published by the Holy Monastery of Evangelist John the Theologian, Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece.



Today, unfortunately, the European so-called courtesy has come in and they try to show themselves as being nice. They wish to show superiority and finally they end up worshipping the two horned devil. “One religion,” they tell you, “should exist” and they level out everything. Some also come to me and tell me “All of us who believe in

Christ should create one religion.”

“Now it is as if you are telling me,” I told them, “about gold and copper, so many carats gold and that much copper, that was separated, to gather them and make them one again. Is it correct to mix them again? Ask a jeweler. Is it proper to mix trash with gold? So much struggle was waged to distill the dogma.”

The Holy Fathers must have known something for prohibiting the relationships with the heretics.

Today they say: “We should pray together not only with heretics but also with the Buddhist and with the fire worshiper and the demon worshiper. The Orthodox must also be present in common prayers and in their conferences. It is a presence.” What presence? They resolve everything with logic and justify the unjustifiable. The European mind believes that spiritual matters can also come into the Common Market. Some of the Orthodox who are shallow and wish to make a promotion, “a mission,” they arrange conferences with the heterodox to cause a sensation, believing this way that they promote Orthodoxy, by becoming, so to speak, “Hungarian goulash” with the false believers. Then the super-zealots take hold of the other end; they also blaspheme against the Mysteries of the New-Calendarists, etc., and in turn deeply scandalize the souls who have piety and Orthodox sensitivity.

On the other hand, the heterodox come to conferences, act like teachers, take whatever good spiritual thing they find from the Orthodox, they process it, they give it their own color and mark and they present it as a prototype. And the strange contemporary world becomes touched by such strange things and is thus spiritually destroyed.

The Lord, though, at the appropriate time, will present the St. Marks, the Eugenikos and the St. Gregorys Palamas who will assemble all our deeply scandalized brothers, to confess the Orthodox faith and strengthen the traditions of the Church and give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

FEAR EVIL LIKE FIRE

By St. John of Kronstadt.

Fear evil like fire. Do not let it touch your heart even if it seems just or righteous. No matter what the circumstances, do not let it come into you. Evil is always evil. Sometimes evil presents itself as an endeavor to God's glory, or as something with good intentions towards your neighbor. Even in these cases, do not trust this feeling. It is a wrong labor and is not filled with wisdom. Instead, work on chasing evil from yourself.

Evil, however innocent it looks, offends God's long-suffering love, which is His foremost glory. Judas betrayed his Lord for thirty silver pieces under the guise of helping the poor. Keep in mind that the enemy continuously seeks your death and attacks more fiercely when you are not alert. His evil is endless. Do not let self-esteem and the love of material goods win you over. When you feel anger against someone, believe with your whole heart that it is a result of the devil's work in your heart. Try to hate the devil and his deeds and it will leave you. Do not admit it as a part of yourself and don't justify it. I know this from experience. The devil hides himself behind our souls and we blindly think we are acting by ourselves. Then we defend the devil's work as something that is a part of us. Sometimes we think that anger is a fair reaction to something bad. However, the idea that a passion could ever be fair is a total and deadly lie. When someone is angry at you, remember that this evil feeling is in him. He is just fooled by the devil and is a suffering instrument in his hand. Pray that the enemy leaves him and that God opens his spiritual eyes, which have been darkened by the evil spirit. Pray to God for all people enslaved by passions because the enemy is acting in their hearts.

Perhaps you hate your neighbor, despise him, and do not want to talk to him peacefully and lovingly because he has been rude, arrogant, or disgusting in his speech or manners. You may despise him for being full of himself or proud or disrespectful. However, you are to blame more than he is. *Physician, heal yourself!* (Lk 4:23). Therefore, teacher, teach yourself. This kind of anger is worse than any other evil. How could evil be chased out by another evil? How can you take a needle from the eye of another person while having a log in your own? Evil defects must be fixed with love, kindness, resignation, and patience. Admit yourself as the worst of all sinners, and believe it. Consider yourself the worst one, chase away any boldness, anger, impatience and fury; you may start helping others. Be indulgent about the defects of others, because if you see their faults all the time, there will be continuous enmity. *The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.* (Psalm 129:3). *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* (Mt 6:14).

We can feel from time to time the most perfect love for God without loving each other. This is a strange thing, and only few care about it. However, love for our neighbor will never come without our own effort. A real Christian does not have any reason to be angry about anybody. Anger is the devil's deed. A Christian should have only love inside and since love does not boast, he should not boast or have any bad thoughts towards others. For example, I must not think about another person that he is evil, proud, etc.; and I must not think that if I forgive his offense he would laugh at me or upset me again. We must not let evil hide in us under any pretense. Evil and anger usually have many different veils. Do not yield to gloomy feelings in your heart but control and eradicate them with the power of faith and the light of the sane mind. These strengths will make you feel secure. *Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.* (Psalm 25:20).

Gloomy feelings usually develop deep in the heart. Someone who has not learned how to control them will be gloomy and pensive most of the time and it will be hard for him to deal with himself and other people. When they come close to you, sustain yourself with inner strength, happiness and innocent jokes: and they will leave you soon. This is from experience.

Lord, give me strength to love everyone like myself and never to get angry or work for the devil. Give me strength to crucify my self-esteem, my pride, my greed, my skepticism and other passions. Let us have a name: a mutual love. Let us not worry about anything. Be the only God of our hearts, and let us desire nothing except You. Let us live always in unifying love and let us hate anything that separates us from each other and from love. So be it! So be it! If God showed Himself to us and lives inside us as we in Him (according to His eternal Word), would He not give us everything? Would He ever trick us or leave us? *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* (Rom 8:32). Now be comforted, my dear, and know nothing but love. *These things I command you, that ye love one another.* (Jn 15:17).



Men are often called intelligent wrongly. Intelligent men are not those who are erudite in the sayings and books of the wise men of old, but those who have an intelligent soul and can discriminate between good and evil. They avoid what is sinful and harms the soul; and with deep gratitude to God they resolutely adhere by dint of practice to what is good and benefits the soul. These men alone should truly be called intelligent.

St. Anthony the Great

AN EXAMPLE FOR LIFE

A chapter from Semya Pravoslanogo Khristianina, Holy Trinity Monastery 1958, reprinted in Pravoslavaaya Zhizn, April 1973.

Great Lent. Spring is approaching. The sun is beginning to give more warmth. The birds are chirping more merrily. There is a smell of spring in the air... The Lenten bell sounds drawn-out and doleful... In church, the black coverings and the subdued chanting inspire a pensive mood.

In the small village church, in a corner near the *kliros* (the section of the church where the chanters assemble for services, *Ed.*), stands an old woman with a boy, her beloved and only grandson. They are there every day. Both of them look devoutly at the icons and earnestly pray. The old woman is very weak and leans upon the boy. He is a tall, well-built eleven-year-old, with a serious face.

The service ends. The old woman slowly wanders home, supported by her grandson. The boy guides her carefully.

They reach their small apartment; the boy unwraps his grandmother's outer garments and seats her carefully in a large easy chair. He spreads a warm shawl on her worn shoulders and lovingly lays his cheek upon her thin, feeble hand. The old woman is blind. Her eyes do not see the serious face of the child. She affectionately feels the head and face of the boy and gently kisses him.

At one time, this old woman was very wealthy. She was the daughter of a rich merchant, and did not know what it meant to be denied anything. Her mother died when she was still young, and her father found as a husband for his daughter a rich, gouty baron. The young girl, pretty and vivacious, became the wife and nursemaid of a capricious, ever-complaining spouse. With angelic patience, she looked after her husband, enduring his whims. She divided her time between looking after her husband and raising her daughter. In ten years' time the baron died. The baroness devoted all her selfless soul to her daughter, who was sickly and feeble. She lived and breathed only for her. When, a year after the daughter's marriage, the girl died, leaving a baby boy, the elderly baroness transferred all her love to the boy. Her son-in-law moved abroad, and the baroness moved with her grandson to a modest apartment. Almost all her estate she distributed to various orphanages and schools.

She raised the boy, taught him, and passed on to him her sensitive soul, her loving heart. In that quiet little corner, surrounded by gentle love, the young Seryozha grew and

developed. He loved his grandmother dearly; she was his quiet little corner of protection.

The years went by. Misfortune fell upon the baroness: she became blind. Her meek eyes no longer cast their gentle, caressing glance upon her grandson. For a long time, young Seryozha could not accept this and often wept. Then he became accustomed and did not leave his grandmother's side. Blind and frail, she did not forget works of love and mercy. Together with Seryozha, leaning on his boyish arm, she continued to be a guardian angel to the poor and unfortunate. Meanwhile, she herself faded day by day.

Every day they went together to their parish church. Returning home, she would sit down in her big chair and rest. The old woman had little strength left, she would not live much longer. They lived in a small, cozy apartment. Seryozha liked their clean, oak-trimmed dining room, his small, light-filled room, its window looking out onto the yard with its thick foliage. Moreover, he liked his grandmother's bedroom, with



a whole case of precious icons. He liked to sit there in the gathering twilight. In the evening, the stove was well stoked. It was warm in the room. The vigil lamps gently flickered before the icons. Shadows crawled along the walls. Outside the wind blew.

The boy's head was filled with serious thoughts beyond his years. In his heart, he promised to follow after his grandmother's example. With his child's

soul, he found in her something holy, something great. He wanted to grow up to be like her—kind and honest.

The blind woman, unmoving, looked somewhere into the distance. Her thoughts were also serious. She was thinking about her Seryozha. Would he remain, as he was, pure and kind? What would life make of him without her, once she was buried? Her heart pained her at the thought of a possible wrong life path by young Seryozha.

From the beginning of Great Lent, the old woman began to grow weaker and to feel poorly. Seryozha was sad.

—Seryozha, let's prepare for Holy Communion next week, said the old woman, sitting one evening with him in her room. Perhaps I will feel better.

Seryozha only pressed closer to his grandmother in silence. His heart ached for her. The next week they began to prepare. Every day they would stand in the corner of her room and pray fervently for one another, for all those who suffered and were oppressed. In the evenings, a lamp was lit in the small bedroom, and Seryozha read to his grandmother from the Bible. He read attentively and earnestly. The light from

the lamp fell upon the grey head of the old woman, upon her kind, gentle old face; it illumined the fine features of the boy, his serious, grave countenance. The old woman's hand rested upon the boy's head. Seryozha liked to read the Bible. His grandmother had taught him to understand the holy and truthful words.

Tears flowed down the boy's cheeks. The blind woman pressed him close to her and soothed him, telling him about God's merciful kindness, His righteousness and long-suffering. The old woman and her grandson prepared diligently to receive the Holy Mysteries. The blind woman became very weak. Seryozha noticed this, he noticed a change come over her face, and his heart was heavy with grief. She was barely able to make it to Confession. After confession, Seryozha went with his grandmother to visit some sick people. It was a clear day; the sun warmed the earth. The old woman smiled.

Meekly and at length, she spoke with the sick folk, who blessed her as she left with her grandson to go home.

That evening they sat for a long time in the little bedroom.

—Remember, Seryozha, my dear, said the grandmother, caressing the boy, remember that all people are not evil in their hearts. Learn to find what is good and holy in the soul of each person. Do not judge or blame others for anything, and no one will condemn you. Think more often of the Savior's Sermon on the Mount. I am old, Seryozha, and I do not know how much longer I will live. You have a father. I wrote to him, and he is returning in a few days. Love your father. Work all your life; do not forget that God gave you life that you might help the poor and suffering. Remember how the Savior suffered, and how during His Passion He thought only about the sinners. You and I had confession today. I sinned a great deal in my life, perhaps I also did much evil. You, however, still have a pure heart. Guard it, Seryozha; guard it from people and from evil! This is a great treasure, it is your wealth. If you grow up to be a good and honest man, my heart will rejoice and give glory. Do not forget God and your neighbor, Seryozha.

The voice of the old lady, although quiet and weak, conveyed such love, such kindness and fervent faith, and it awakened in the soul of the young boy good feelings and thoughts.

—Live with me, Grandma, pleaded the boy. I won't be able to live without you. I shall die. I can't live without your hands, your voice. Remember, Grandma, I shall die.

The boy wept bitterly, pressing against the beloved breast. Tears from the blind eyes fell upon his head.

The next day they received Holy Communion. The old lady was calm and cheerful. She spent the whole day talking with her grandson, explaining passages from the Scripture, caressing him. Before he went to bed, she kissed him warmly, and with her trembling hand, blessed him with the sign of

the Cross. A tear fell upon his brow. For the last time she kissed her beloved boy.

The next morning Seryozha awoke calm and cheerful. The sun peeped brightly through the window. The clean spring air poured through the open casement. Somewhere in the blue sky a lark was singing. Seryozha ran into his grandmother's room and stopped short. She sat in her chair, her head tilted back. In her hands rested a Bible.

Seryozha took her hand. It was cold and heavy. She did not breathe. Her heart no longer beat with infinite love and kindness as it used to. She had died. Seryozha fell unconscious beside the chair.

A few days later, the dear old lady was buried. Seryozha's father spared no expense for the funeral. However, the best reward she received were the tears of all the poor people who followed her coffin. Another grave in the cemetery. They sprinkled earth over Seryozha's grandmother, they wept, they left, and they calmed down. Only one poor child's heart refused to be consoled. Seryozha could not forget his Grandma. How much gentleness, how much kindness, how much self-denying love he had lost. The pain tore at his child's heart. For hours, the boy lay sobbing on the fresh grave, his tears watering the earth.

The sun shines warmly from the clear sky. The lark sings a cheerful song of spring. The honorable heart rests quietly in the damp earth, asleep forever...



It is remarkable that, however much we trouble about our health, however much care we take of ourselves, whatever wholesome and pleasant food and drink we take, however much we walk in the fresh air, still, notwithstanding all this, in the end we sicken and corrupt; whilst the saints, who despise the flesh, and mortify it by continual abstinence and fasting, by lying on the bare earth, by watchfulness, labours, unceasing prayer, make both their souls and bodies immortal. Our well-fed bodies decay and after death emit an offensive odor, whilst theirs remain fragrant and flourishing both in life and after death. It is a remarkable thing: we, by building up our body, destroy it, whilst they, by destroying theirs, build it up—by caring only for the fragrance of their souls before God, they obtain fragrance of the body also.

St. John of Kronstadt

THE HEALING OF THE MAN SICK OF THE PALSYP [MK 2:1-12]

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT AND HOLY LENT

By St. Nikolai Velimirovic, from "Homilies, vol. II," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1996), pp. 145-150.

Today's Gospel speaks of the great efforts and struggles of men of real faith to come into the presence of Christ the Lord. Four men were carrying one of their kinsmen, or friends, who was sick of the palsy—carrying him on his bed, he being so desperately weak and helpless. They tried in vain to push through the great crowd, to come near the Lord, and, failing in this, climbed up onto the roof of the house, tore away the roof and, with a great struggle, let down the bed on which the sick man lay, until it rested at the feet of the wonder-working Healer. This was the measure of their faith in Christ.

And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy: "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." The Lord did not hear their faith expressed in words, but He saw it. His perception penetrated to the most secret depths of the human heart and, beholding these depths, the Lord saw their great faith. With His bodily eyes, He had seen and known their efforts and struggles to bring the sick man into His presence. Their faith, then, was clear to both the Lord's spiritual sight and His bodily eyes.

The unbelief of the Scribes who were present at this event was also clear to the Lord. They reasoned in their hearts: "Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The Lord, perceiving in His spirit the thoughts of their hearts, began gently to reprimand them for this: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" The Lord, in His discernment, reads impure hearts as easily as He does pure ones. As He had immediately seen Nathanael's pure heart, in which there was no guile, so He here immediately and clearly sees the impure hearts of the Scribes, filled with guile. In order to show them that He has power over both the bodies and the souls of men, both to forgive sins and to heal the weakened body, the Lord says to the man sick of the palsy: "I say unto thee: Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thy house." At such a powerful command, the sick man immediately arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying: "We never saw it on this fashion!"

Look how many miraculous powers the Lord demonstrates all at once: He sees into the hearts of men, and discerns faith in some and guile in others. He forgives the soul its sin, making it healthy and clean from the source of its sickness and weakness. He restores health to the weak and palsied body by the power of His words.

Oh how great and fearsome, wondrous and health-giving is the presence of the living Lord!

But we must come and stand in the presence of the living Lord. This is the most important thing on the path of salvation: to come with faith into the Lord's presence, and to feel

this presence. At times, the Lord Himself comes and reveals His gracious presence to us, as He came to Martha and Mary at Bethany, as He suddenly appeared to the Apostle Paul on the road, or to the other apostles on the Sea of Galilee and on the road to Emmaus, in the room with shut doors or to Mary Magdalene in the garden, or to many of the saints in dreams or visions. Sometimes, men were brought by the apostles into the Lord's presence, as Andrew brought Simon Peter and Philip brought Nathanael, and as the apostles' successors and the missionaries have brought thousands and millions of believers to the Lord, and as one believer has brought another. Finally, people themselves sometimes make the greatest efforts to come into the Lord's presence, as was the case with these four men who tore open the roof of the house in order to let the sick man down in front of the Lord.

These are the three ways that men can feel themselves in the Lord's presence. It is for us to exert ourselves and strive to come into the Lord's presence, and for God to allow us into His presence and illumine us by it. We must therefore take these three ways in reverse order, which is to say that we must, with faith and longing, do all we can to come into God's presence; then we must follow the call and directions of the holy, apostolic Church and the Church's Fathers and Teachers; and lastly, only after fulfilling the first two conditions, we must, with prayer and hope, wait upon God to bring us to Himself and, by His presence, to illumine, strengthen, heal and save us.

How great our efforts to open the way to God's presence must be is most clearly shown in the example of these four men, who did not hold back from climbing onto the roof, deterred by no shame or fear, in order to let their sick friend down from above into the presence of the living Lord. This example of zeal is similar to—if not greater than—that of the widow who importunately begged the unjust judge to deliver her from her adversary (Lk 18:1-5). This means the fulfilling of the Lord's command *to cry day and night to God, until He hear them*. This is a proof of the truth of God's other command: *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you*. (Mt 7:7). This is, lastly, the explanation of Christ's strange words: *The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. (Mt 11:12).

The Lord, then, demands of His faithful followers that they do all they can, that they exert all their strength, work while they have light, pray without ceasing, beg, seek, knock, fast and perform innumerable works of mercy, and all this so that the Kingdom of heaven—the great, fearsome and life-giving presence of God—may be opened to them. *Watch ye, therefore, and pray always*, says the Lord, *that ye may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man*. (Lk 21:36). Be watchful and vigilant over your heart, that it cleave not to the earth; be watchful over your thoughts, that they do not lead you away from God; be vigilant over your works, to double your talent and not let it diminish and disappear altogether; be vigilant

over your days, that death come not upon you unawares and seize upon you unrepentant in your sins.

This is our Orthodox faith: active, prayerful and watchful, permeated through and through with tears and with striving. No other faith demands such striving on the part of its faithful to be worthy to stand before the Son of God. It proposes these efforts to the whole world, but our Lord and Saviour Himself demanded them of the faithful, and the Church constantly repeats them from age to age, from generation to generation, holding up to the faithful the ever-greater number of spiritual warriors who fulfilled the law of Christ and were vouchsafed glory and inexpressible power both in heaven and on earth.

But on the other hand, we must not deceive ourselves, thinking that all man's efforts and strivings bring salvation of themselves. We must not imagine that a man will, by his efforts and striving alone, be able to come into the presence of the living God. If God does not will it, no mortal can ever come to stand before His face. For the Lord Himself, who ordained all this effort and striving, says in another place: *When ye shall have done all these things, which are commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.* (Lk 17:10). And in another place: *No man can come to Me except the Father... draw him.* (Jn 6:44). And again: *Without Me, ye can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5). And again, in another place: *By grace ye are saved.* (Eph 2:5).

What can we say after all this? Shall we say that all our striving for salvation is in vain? Shall we let our hands fall and wait for the Lord Himself to place us, by His power, in His presence? Does not the Prophet Isaiah himself say: *All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.* (Isa 64:6)? Should we, then, leave aside all effort and striving? But would we not, then, become as that servant who dug, and hid his lord's talent in the ground, and at whom his lord, because of this, shouted: *Thou wicked and slothful servant!* (Mt 25:26). We must be sober, and exert ourselves to fulfil the Lord's clear commandments. We must exert ourselves to the full, but it is in God's power to bless our efforts and bring us into His presence. The Apostle Paul gave a wonderful explanation of this, when he said: *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*" (1 Cor 3:6-7). All, then, depends on God—on His power, wisdom and mercy. It is, though, for us to plant and to water, and we dare not abandon our duty without being in danger of eternal perdition.

It is a farmer's duty to plant and water, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the seed will make shoots, grow and bring forth fruit. It is a scientist's duty to examine and seek, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not knowledge will be revealed to him.

It is a parent's duty to bring up and educate his child in the fear of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy how long this child will live. It is a priest's duty to teach, inform, reprimand and guide the faithful, but it depends on

God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the priest's efforts will bring forth fruit. It is the duty of all of us to strive and endeavor to be made worthy to stand in the presence of the Son of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not we will be allowed near to the Lord.

But we must not strive without hope in God's mercy. May all our endeavors be illumined by the hope that the Lord is near us, and that He will receive us into the presence of the light of His countenance. There is no deeper and more inexhaustible fountain than the fountain of God's mercy. When the Prodigal Son repented after his terrible fall to the level of the swine, his merciful father went to meet him, embraced him and forgave him. God is tireless in going to meet His repentant children. He extends His hand to all who turn to face Him. *I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people* (Isa 65:2), the Lord said of the Jews. So, when the Lord holds out His hand to the rebellious, how would He not to the obedient? The obedient Prophet David says: *I have set God always before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fail.* (Pss 15/16:9). To those, then, who are striving for their salvation, the Lord does not deny His presence.

Let us therefore not consider our endeavors to be in vain, as do the godless and those in despair, but let us, while striving and making the greatest possible efforts, hope in the mercy of the Lord God. Let us especially redouble our efforts during the Great Fast, as the Holy Church recommends.

May our path in this be lighted by the example of those four who climbed up onto the roof and tore it open, and let down the fifth, their friend sick of the palsy, before the Lord. If one fifth of our soul is paralyzed or sick, let us hasten with the healthy four fifths before the Lord, and He will give health to the part within us that is sick. If one of our senses has been scandalized by this world, and been made ill from the shock, let us hasten with the other four senses before the Lord, that He may have pity on our sick sense and heal it. When one part of the body is sick, the doctor recommends two sorts of nursing: care, and the feeding-up of the rest of the body, so that the healthy part may become even stronger and more healthy, and can thus resist the sickness in the part that is ill. So it is with our souls. If we have doubt in our minds, let us strive in heart and soul to strengthen our faith and, with the Lord's help, to heal and strengthen our sick mind. If we have sinned through forgetting prayer, let us hasten, with works of mercy, to restore our lost prayerfulness—and the other way round.

And the Lord will see our faith, and our efforts and striving, and will take pity on us. And He, in His endless mercy, will let us come into His presence, into that immortal and life-giving presence by which the countless angelic hosts and the armies of the saints are given life, receive their strength and are imbued with joy. To our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ 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.

THE PRAYER OF GETHSEMANE

By Elder Sophrony Sakharov (+2001), from "His Life is Mine," Chapter 13: The Prayer at Gethsemane, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, pp. 91-95.

Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is the noblest of all prayers by its virtue and power to atone for the sins of the world. Offered to the Eternal God the Father in a spirit of divine love, it continues to shine, a light that cannot be extinguished, forever drawing to itself souls that have preserved their likeness to God.

Christ included the whole human race in this prayer, from Adam to the last man to be born of woman. We lack existential knowledge of such love and so its permanent significance is hidden from us. Victorious in eternity, Christ's love on the earthly plane spells extreme suffering. No one has ever known such suffering as Christ endured. He descended into hell, into the most painful hell of all, the hell of love. This is a sphere of existence which can only be apprehended through spiritual love—how far we can penetrate the mystery depends on the measure of love that it has been granted to us to know from on High. It is vital to have experienced, if only once, the heavenly fire which Christ brought with Him; to know with our entire being what it is to be even a little like Christ.

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Lk 22:44). Let those who are ignorant of such love, and who have no desire to know, refrain from expressing opinions about Christ. Let no one venture in his folly to disparage the appearance among us of Christ the Immortal King, lest at the end bitter shame compel him to cry *to the mountains and rocks, fall on me, and hide me from the face of him that sitteth on the throne.* (Rev 6:16).

Though the emphasis does not lie on the physical suffering of Christ crucified on the cross, the bodily pain makes the agony total in every respect. We know by experience that the soul can be more dreadfully wounded than the body. And if this is so with the soul in her earthly dimension, what must it be for the soul as spirit aspiring to eternity?

To know, if only *through a glass, darkly* (1 Cor 13:12) the way that Christ Himself travelled; to transform our physical nature into prayer at least palely reflecting His Gethsemane prayer during the most tragic night in the history of the world, we must accept tribulation. Adversity opens the heart to all the suffering in the world. The last stage of this great science of universal love comes when we arrive at the threshold of another life—when we are *dying*. Many, especially in our day, are more or less unconscious during their last hours, and die without prayer. But it would be well if the Christian could cross over in a state of prayer, realizing that he has arrived at the final judgment. Often we die little by little, and thanks to this gradual experience of death we become more and more

able to assume the tragedy of human history and to apprehend the mystery of Gethsemane and, maybe, even of Golgotha.

In the person of the first Adam all mankind suffered a fearful catastrophe, an alienation which is the root of all alienations. The body was wounded, the skeleton smashed, the countenance—the image of God—distorted. Succeeding generations have added many another injury and broken bone to the wounds of the first created man. The whole human corpus is sick. Isaiah described it well: *From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.* (Isa 1:6). The slightest touch is torment. When people are physically ill they realize that others want to help and they put themselves gratefully in the doctor's hands; but when it comes to spiritual suffering they are resentful and ascribe their pain to outside interference. Thus with Christ: He, the One True Physician, in His concern with the sores of our sin caused the most acute pain to all mankind.

There is nothing more dreadful than Christ—Truth. The whole world fears Him. Is it not a fact that if we did indeed accept Christ's absolute Truth, with our inborn longing for truth we could not refuse to follow Him? But a peculiar animal instinct of the flesh quickly tells us that to follow Him involves a readiness to be crucified for love of Him. Where and how shall we find the strength for such heroism? Christ's suffering is impossible to portray. In any case, no one would understand. Just as children do not realize the sacrifices their parents and teachers make to bring them up and pass on to them the hard-earned experience of a lifetime, so generally men did not understand Christ—and even the rare exception only partly understood. Thus the Word of Christ which calls for a radical altering of our whole life came as a cruel wound.

When Christ beheld our distress He suffered more than any of us. And he bore this cross all the years of His service in the world. Golgotha was only the last act, the culminating point, as it were, uniting the whole: the mental distress of an infamous death, the wild vindictive laughter of those to whom He had caused offence the physical pain of being crucified, the grief of His Spirit because men had spurned the tidings of the Father's love. He was condemned on all sides—by the Roman Empire in its zeal for legality and order; by the Church of the Old Testament founded on the Mosaic Law preserved from Mount Sinai; by the crowd who had received so much good at His hands. The disciples scattered. Christ was left alone, convicted and about to descend to those dwelling in the darkness of hell.

Christ is miracle beyond comprehension. He is the all-perfect revelation of God. He is also the all-perfect manifestation of man.

Every one of us will at some moment be brought to the invisible border between time and eternity. Arriving at this

spiritual boundary-line, we shall have to determine our future in the world that lies before us, and decide either to be with Christ, in His likeness, or to depart from Him. Once the choice—to identify with Christ or to refuse Him—has been made, of our own free will, for all eternity, time will no longer function.

Until this moment of decision, however, while we are still in this life we shall often waver in our self-determining, hesitating whether to fulfil the commandments or give way to our passions. Gradually, as we struggle, the mystery of Christ will be revealed to us if we devote ourselves totally to obeying His precepts. The moment will come when heart and mind are so suffused by the vision of the infinite holiness and humility of the God-Christ that our whole being will rise in a surge of love for God. Overwhelmed by self-loathing for the evil in us, we hunger and thirst to become like God in holy humility, and in this longing lies the seed of holiness. Ever-growing love for Christ naturally leads to experiences that liken us to Him; and an unimaginable panorama will unfold before our eyes. The sorrows of the world will grieve us sorely. And we shall forget our body, and our spirit, in so far as it is able, will live Christ's prayer in Gethsemane.

This is the beginning of the knowledge of Christ for the excellency of which St. Paul counted all other things but loss. To win Christ and attain unto the resurrection of the dead, he was ready to reject all other gain. St. Paul spoke thus, not because he had *already attained* but because he was *pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (cf Phil 3:7-14). So, therefore, if the great apostle Paul had not *already attained*, neither may we make hold to set ourselves on a level with Christ. There must be a certain parallel, however. It is essential for all of us to hear at least a fractional likeness if we would call ourselves Christians. But St. Paul aspired after a more perfect likeness and besought the Corinthians to emulate him (cf I Cor 4:16). Consequently, we must cast fear and faint-heartedness aside and in spirit follow after Christ that we may inherit life eternal in true knowledge of the Heavenly Father and of Christ, Whom He, the Father, sent into the world (cf Jn 17:3).

It can be said with some foundation that almost nowhere is genuine Christianity preached. Christianity so far surpasses the ordinary understanding that the praying heart does not venture to preach the Gospel word. People seek Truth. They love Christ. But, in our day especially, they try to reduce Him to dimensions of their own making, which debases the Gospels to the level of moralistic doctrine. Yet Christ declared, *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.* (Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33).

To attain to knowledge of Truth demands far more effort than it takes to acquire practical and scientific learning. Neither the reading of a vast number of books, nor familiarity with the history of Christianity, nor the study of different theological

systems can bring us to our goal, unless we continuously and to our utmost cling to the commandments of Christ.

When a shadow of a likeness to the Gethsemane prayer is granted him, man then transcends the boundaries of his own individuality and enters into a new form of being—personal being in the likeness of Christ. By participating in the sufferings of His Divine love we, too, in spirit can experience a little of His death and of the power of His resurrection. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death* (in deep prayer for the world and consuming desire for the salvation of all) *we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.* (Rom 6:5). When it is given to us from on High to enter this new sphere of Being, we arrive at *the ends of the world* (I Cor 10:11) and pass into the light of Divine Eternity.

And every man on whom God has bestowed the rare and dread privilege of knowing to a minute degree the agony of Christ's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane will stumble on, slowly and painfully, to a cogent awareness of the resurrection of his own soul and a perception of Christ's undeniable, ineluctable victory. He will know *that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.* (Rom 6:9). And his spirit within him will whisper: My Lord and my God... *Now, O Christ, by the gift of Thy love which passeth all understanding I, too, have crossed from death into life...*

Now—"I am."



THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY

By Archbishop Averky (Taushev) of Syracuse (+1976).

This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith—confirm this universal faith.

† † †

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, you will hear these solemn and significant words in the Rite of Orthodoxy which the holy Church has established to be served on this day. The first week of Holy and Great Lent has ended a week of intensified prayer and ascetical repentance. Now the holy Church, desiring to encourage and console us, has established for us in this first week of Great Lent, on its first Sunday, a spiritual celebration, one most dear and close to our hearts—the triumph of Orthodoxy.

This celebration was first performed in 842 in Constantinople in the presence of the Blessed Empress Theodora by His Holiness Patriarch Methodius, in memory of the overthrow of the last terrible heresy to shake Christ's Church, the heresy

of iconoclasm. However, in this celebration the holy Church marks the triumph of the holy Orthodox faith in general, her victory over all impious heresies, false teachings and schisms.

Our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour founded His Church on earth so that all belonging to her could be saved, could elude the nets of the devil and enter into the Heavenly Kingdom prepared for them. The devil exerted all his strength to overthrow and destroy the Church of Christ and, through this, to hinder the salvation of men. At first, he raised up terrible persecutions against the Church on the part of the Jews and pagans. For almost three centuries, the blood of Christian martyrs flowed without ceasing. Nevertheless, the devil did not succeed in his task. The blood of the martyrs, according to the apt expression of the Christian apologist Tertullian, became the “seeds of Christians.” Christianity triumphed over its persecutors. *The meek lambs of Christ’s flock transformed the wolf-like rage of their persecutors into lamb-like meekness.*

But the devil did not resist after the defeat he suffered at the hands of the martyrs. When the Church of Christ triumphed in the world, he raised up a new, even more dangerous persecution against her: from within the Church, as the holy Apostle Paul had foretold in his conversation with the Ephesian presbyters, men arose *speaking perverse things*. St. Paul called such men *grievous wolves*. (Acts 20:29-30).

These were so-called “heretics” who tried to pervert the true teaching of Christ concerning faith and piety in order to make this teaching ineffective for men. When this happened, the holy Church, in the person of its best servants, took up arms against these heretics in order to defend its true, un-distorted teaching. There began to be convoked first “local” and then “ecumenical” councils. Bishops came together from all the corners of the earth and through the Holy Spirit they gave voice to the pure and un-distorted Truth, following the example of the First Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, (Acts 15:6-29).

They also cut off heretics from the Church and anathematized them. This was in accordance with the clear commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, *If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican*. (Mt 18:17). And in accordance with the commandment of the holy Apostle Paul, that great “Apostle to the Nations” who said, *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed*. (Gal 1:8). And in another place he states: *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema*. (1 Cor 16:22).

Thus our moving, majestic and solemn Rite of Orthodoxy takes its beginning from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and from his great Apostle, called by Him to be the “Apostle to the Nations”, i.e., of the whole pagan world. From the ninth century on the holy Church has established that this rite should be served on the first Sunday of holy Great Lent and that it be called “Sunday of Orthodoxy.”

The rite, brothers and sisters, is particularly important and significant in the evil times we are experiencing, times in which the Orthodox faith is wavering and shaking. This wavering and shaking of the Orthodox faith is due to those very persons who ought to be strengthening and supporting it in the souls of the faithful. Those who should be pillars of holy Orthodoxy—high-ranking hierarchs including the heads of certain Local Churches—are departing from the Truth of holy Orthodoxy. It is terrible to have to say that even the head of the Constantinopolitan Church, which is known as the “Ecumenical” Church, the man considered to be the first hierarch of all Orthodoxy, has set out on this path!

On all of this there undoubtedly lies the print of the Apostasy about which the holy Apostle Paul foretold (2Thess 2-3)—the apostasy of Christians from Christ. We are now face to face with this Apostasy. The major threat to true Christian faith, the Orthodox faith, is the so called “Ecumenical ‘Movement’,” headed by what is known as the “World Council of Churches.” This body denies the doctrine of the unity and infallibility of the True Church of Christ and attempts to create from all the presently existing and distracted faiths, a new “false-church.” This treacherous “church,” from our point of view, will without any doubt be the “church” of Antichrist, that false-church which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head.

From the teaching of the Word of God and the holy Fathers of the Church, we know that the Antichrist will be both the religious and political leader of all humanity: he will stand at the head of the new universal false Church; he will also be the director of one new world government and will attempt to submit all to his absolute power.

The Orthodox faith—this is the “faith of the Apostles,” it is “the faith of the Fathers”—it is that faith which the Apostolic Fathers, the direct disciples of the holy Apostles, and the holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church and their lawful successors, established by the Holy Spirit, interpreted for us in their marvelous and inspired writings.

Brothers and sisters, we must hold this faith steadfastly if we desire eternal salvation! Now we shall perform with you this deeply instructive, moving and highly solemn rite which consists of two parts:

The first part is the prayer of the holy Church for all those who have gone astray or fallen away from the true Orthodox faith. **In the second part**, the holy Church pronounces dread anathema against all false teachers, heretics and schismatics who have grown stubborn in their malice and who do not wish to reunite with the true Church of Christ but instead struggle against her.

Then we shall chant *Eternal Memory* for all departed defenders of holy Orthodoxy and *Many Years* for those defenders of the holy Orthodox faith and Church who are still among the living. Amen!

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THE DIVINE POWER OF THE RISEN AND ASCENDED LORD CHRIST

By St. Justin Popovich.



In the Lives of the Saints it is clearly and obviously demonstrated: There is no spiritual death from which one cannot be resurrected by the Divine power of the risen and ascended Lord Christ; there is no torment, there is no misfortune, there is no misery, there is no suffering which the Lord will not change either gradually or all at once into quiet, compunctionate joy because of faith in Him.

And again there are countless soul-stirring examples of how a sinner becomes a righteous man in the lives of the Saints: how a thief, a fornicator, a drunkard, a sensualist, a murderer, and adulterer becomes a holy man—there are many, many example of this in the Lives of the Saints; how a selfish, egotistical, unbelieving, atheistic, proud, avaricious, lustful, evil, wicked, depraved, angry, spiteful, quarrelsome, malicious, envious, malevolent, boastful, vainglorious, unmerciful, gluttonous man becomes a man of God—there are many, many example of this in the Lives of the Saints

By the same token in the Lives of the Saints there are very many marvelous examples of how a youth becomes a holy

youth, a maiden becomes a holy maiden, an old man becomes a holy old man, how an old woman becomes a holy old woman, how a child becomes a holy child, how parents become holy parents, how a son becomes a holy son, how a daughter becomes a holy daughter, how a family becomes a holy family, how a community becomes a holy community, how a priest becomes a holy priest, how a bishop becomes a holy bishop, how a shepherd becomes a holy shepherd, how a peasant becomes a holy peasant, how an emperor becomes a holy emperor, how a cowherd becomes a holy cowherd, how a worker becomes a holy worker, how a judge becomes a holy judge, how a teacher becomes a holy teacher, how an instructor becomes a holy instructor, how a soldier becomes holy soldier, how an officer becomes a holy officer, how a ruler becomes a holy ruler, how a scribe becomes a holy scribe, how a merchant becomes a holy merchant, how a monk becomes a holy monk, how an architect becomes a holy architect, how a doctor becomes a holy doctor, how a tax collector becomes a holy tax collector, how a pupil becomes a holy pupil, how an artisan becomes holy artisan, how a philosopher becomes a holy philosopher, how a scientist becomes a holy scientist, how a statesman becomes a holy statesman, how a minister becomes a holy minister, how a poor man becomes a holy poor man, how a rich man becomes a holy rich man, how a slave becomes a holy slave, how a master becomes a holy master, how a married couple becomes a holy married couple, how an author becomes a holy author, how an artist becomes a holy artist...