

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]

VOL. 17, ISSUE 03-04

MARCH-APRIL 2019

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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Publisher: St. POIMEN Greek Orthodox Brotherhood

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GOD FORBID THAT WE BOAST IN ANYTHING BUT THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Homily on the Sunday before the Elevation of the Holy Cross by Protopresbyter Peter Heers, September 24, 2017, from “Orthodox Ethos,” www.orthodoxethos.com.

The Sunday before the Elevation of the Cross, brothers and sisters, and the Church presents before us the Holy Cross in preparation—and then with the Sunday after the feast, in thanksgiving—for the great feast.

We, with Paul, throughout all the generations, boast of the Cross, and only in the Cross. The Cross is our boast as Christians! And, as we heard in the Epistle, Paul, the great Apostle, spent most of his time preaching the Gospel face to face with the Judaizers—those Jews who, as he says, sought to make a good showing, a good impression, in the flesh of the converts. And that means they sought to have a good word, a good image with the unbelievers, those Jews who had not converted.

These were Christians, Jewish Christians, who remained tied down, bound to the law, and the perception of the law. They taught the Christians in Galatia to keep the law, including circumcision, and they meant the ceremonial law, which had been fulfilled in Christ, and replaced by the freedom of grace, and in this, as St. Paul says elsewhere, they taught another gospel. They taught another gospel! Nothing less than another gospel, because they refused to see the fulfillment, and they remained with the type, with the shadow, with the purely human, which does not redeem, which does not make people new creations in Christ.

This is who he speaks of in the Epistle that we heard. Let’s hear this excerpt again. He says, *As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised; only that they may not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the Law, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh.* And listen to this, this is the key, *But God forbid that I should boast, except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* (Gal 6:12-14)

The question is why did the Jewish Christians teach this? Why did they seek to remain with the old Law... to be trapped in the mentality that we are still in the type, in the shadow, waiting for fulfillment. They sought to appear well in the eyes of those unrepentant Jews who claimed that the Jewish converts had abandoned the traditions of the fathers. That is, they sought to compromise with the spirit of the world and the unbelief of the Jews, with the enemies of the Cross! To compromise, in order to avoid reproof, because they did not believe. Underneath all of this worldliness, this resistance, was ultimately lack of faith in the sacrifice of our Lord. Apparently, they had not yet tasted of regeneration and they wanted to avoid persecution. They wanted to avoid the Cross!

The history of the Church is full of such people, up to our day, and in our day perhaps we have many - many of such false, traitorous Christians. Saint John Chrysostomos says that they prefer to offend and even reject Christ in order to be pleasing to men; rather we offend God in order to please men! They are men pleasers, co-workers with the enemies of the Cross. The life of the Cross requires sacrifice. Christ requires

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Orthodox Heritage is published bi-monthly by the “Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen,” a laity brotherhood. All correspondence should be addressed to the Brotherhood at the Phoenix address or the e-mail address above.

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

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of us sacrifice, because sacrifice is love. When we do not sacrifice, we do not love; when we do not love we cannot be united to the God Who is love.

The Cross is our *path*, our opening to the life of love with the Master and the Eternal life that we all seek. If we put aside the Cross, we put aside the path to God; we put aside love. Only those who lift up the Cross of Christ are led into the freedom of grace. If we deny the Cross we deny the sacrifice, we deny the crucifixion of our intellect. Then we remain enslaved, as they were, to a shadow, but a shadow of the greatness of the Gospel that is being offered to us.

And inevitably they serve two masters: the world and Christ. They become two-faced, double-minded people. We have many of those today in the Church. Two-faced, double-minded: one thing among the faithful, another thing in the world, one thing among the monastics, another thing amongst the world’s leaders. One thing here and one thing there. They are two-faced, double-minded inevitably because they deny the power of the Cross in their lives. They seek ease and comfort; **this is the greatest heresy of our day: a Christianity without the Cross; a Christianity without sacrifice; a Christianity without asceticism. Christianity without love!**

We talk of love today, we hear about love all the time, and most of the time it has nothing to do with the love of God, but rather the love of *self*! And we remain trapped in self-satisfaction: we are good, we believe, and we live according to all of the law, fulfilling it; we are just in the eyes of God, so we believe. We are satisfied with ourselves, with our community, with our identity, but, alas, the love of Christ, the love of His Cross is far from us. These people who remain in the shadow, who remain in self-love, in self-satisfaction, they

are living traps within the Church, they distort the Christian worldview, the *phronema*, and the Christian ethos.

Whether they fall toward the right or to the left, it matters little, they are still of the world. This is one aspect, one area, where many do not see and fall. There are those who are of this mindset **on the right**, and in the temptation on the right. The zealots for the form, the zealots for the packaging, for the law, for the secondary, the tertiary or even the contrary. There are zealots for many things, thinking that in this they are saving or being saved and yet they are of the world, and yet to sacrifice and love. They are not able to prioritize the things, to put them in the right order. They don’t see the source of all the goodness and the blessings.

First Christ; first the Cross—and then everything else, including our worldly identity. And only in Christ, and only in the Cross, does the rest have meaning, depth and regeneration. Only in Christ, and in His Cross! And so, when we lose the hierarchy of things, we lose everything. We think we are saving the form, the history, the identity, the Nation, but in fact we are losing all of that, because we have lost Christ! Only He can save the nation, only He can save the people, only He can save the Church, only He can save us. And when we deny the sacrifice of the Cross, we deny His *salvific grace*, the freedom that comes with grace... We are putting the cart before the horse, and we go nowhere in the end.

And **on the left**, many fall also because they seek to serve two masters, the world and the Lord. So you have the worldly, the modernists, the innovators, that deny the crucifixion of their mind, and of their body, and of their life in this world. They mock asceticism, they mock abstinence, they have zeal for the externals, they do not have zeal for exacti-

tude of the faith, of confession of the faith, and those who do, they call fundamentalists. They speak of updating, but what they mean is changing, perverting, distorting, compromising with the world, because they cannot say with Paul that, *God forbid that I should boast, in anything except the Cross of Christ.*

Can we say that? Or, do we boast in ourselves, in our achievements, in our supposed gifts? This is on the personal level: many of us can spot that—the arrogance, the vanity, the pride in ourselves; not all of us, but some of us, many of us, can do that. Can we spot the other kind? That we have pride in an identity, which is worldly and earthly, and we think that this saves... that we belong to the club of the saved. *God forbid that I should boast in anything except the Cross of Christ, by whom the world, (both on the right and the left), has been crucified to me and I to the world.* And then he says: for in Christ Jesus, *neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything,* and we can add as we heard the other Epistle read today, *neither Greek nor Jew, neither Russian nor American neither slave nor free, neither man nor woman (Gal 3:28-29); neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*

Are we being regenerated? Have we overcome the passions? Have we become free from the passions, the delusions of this age, the identity of the world? **The identity of the world!** Many of us think that there is salvation in our worldly identity. Brothers and sisters, **in heaven there is not one Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, American Orthodox soul. There is only an Orthodox Christian soul who lived out his life in America, or in Russia, or in Greece.** There are no identities of *this world* in the next world. Let us not confuse this temporary, quick passing life, and our identity in it, with regeneration, with the Cross of Christ, with sacrifice and love! They are two different things. We can have one, Christ and the Cross and all the rest is regenerated. This is the glory of the history of the Church! That the Cross came, Christ came, and regenerated and renewed and saved and brought up to heaven and made holy human endeavors in the arts, in literature and music. But *first Christ* and His Cross, and then this regeneration and then this new creation, as Paul says.

And he gives us this *rule of faith*. He gives us this rule of faith and he says, as many as walk according to this rule of regeneration, of crucifixion of the mind, of crucifixion of this worldly identity, peace and mercy be upon him, and

upon the Israel of God! He says this to the *phyletists*^(*) of his age, to those who are trapped in the identity of this world, the Jews, who had a monopoly on Christ for thousands of years! Who could claim that their culture, their identity, should be the identity of everyone on the face of the earth, except the Jews, from which came our Savior?!...They could claim it? No they could not.

For, it was for a time, it was but a shadow leading to the light! So he says to his fellow Jews, peace and mercy be upon you, if you walk according to this rule; if [however] you remain in this world (whether you be on the right or the left it matters little), if you remain a foreigner to the Cross and the sacrifice, **you are lost!**

He bears, he says—and here he finishes—the marks of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we also, imitating Paul, be made worthy to bear the marks of our Lord Jesus Christ, the crucifixion of our intellect, the crucifixion of our worldly identity!

In the ancient Church when they were persecuted, they said what? I am a Christian from Jerusalem and not from Athens?... No. They said: ***I am a Christian, period. I am a Christian, period... I bear the marks of our Lord Jesus Christ, crucify me and give me life!*** they said to their persecutors. This is

what we need in these end days, we need such Christians... may we be made worthy, may we be made worthy...

† † †

(*) *Phyletism* or *ethnophyletism* (from Greek ἔθνος *ethnos* “nation” and φυλετισμός *phyletismos* “tribalism”) is the principle of nationalities applied and (erroneously) taking precedence in the ecclesiastical domain.

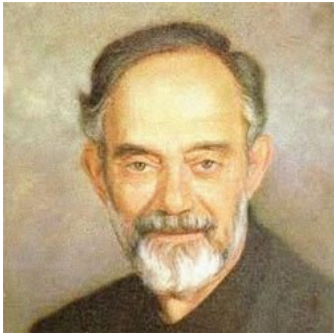


The passions will not stop appearing in us and attacking us, until the grave! Let us prepare ourselves for a lifelong battle against them—firmly convinced that, because of the frailty of our nature, we cannot always achieve victory, and we will sometimes be defeated. Nevertheless, by supporting and strengthening repentance—and its consequent humility—in us, these defeats themselves can serve to help our spiritual progress.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

SATAN AND THE FALL

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "The Ancestral Sin," pp. 75-84. (Footnotes omitted for length).



In the devil there is no truth. He is the very source itself of every form of lie. *For the devil has sinned from the beginning* (1 Jn 3:8), and leads mankind astray into sin. Satan is not simply a negative concept of evil but, quite the contrary, a real power. He has free will, *devices* (2 Cor 2:11), and *wiles*.

(Eph 6:11). He is a personal force capable of perceiving, even before the Resurrection, that Christ is the Son of God.

Under his command he has whole legions of demons and invisible powers, and among them some are more evil than others. The devil and his army of demons have the same teachings. Thus, there exists *demonic wisdom* (Jas 3:15), *the wisdom of the rulers of this age*. (1 Cor 2:8). The demons know that there is one God, and from their assaults against Christ they perceived His divinity. They know who Christ's true followers are. But Christians also know the *devices* of the devil. The demons instigated the Crucifixion of Christ. They do not know the wisdom of God, however, or they would not have crucified Him.

Satan, like God, has faithful sons and followers. The views that Satan is an instrument of the divine wrath (which is typical of post-Augustine Western theology) or that the present power and energy of the devil is only an illusion stand squarely in opposition to biblical and patristic testimonies. According to the thought of the first Christians, Satan continues to be a powerful enemy of God. Like a kind of parasite, the devil subjugated creation to death and corruption. *He was the man slayer from the beginning*. (Jn 8:44). Thus, through the instrumentality of man's fear of death, the devil became the holder of that power, and through that fear drew the world into sin. In other words, *Sin reigned in death* (Rom 5:21) because *the sting of death is sin*. (1 Cor 15:56). *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear because fear hath torment. He that feareth has not been made perfect in love*. (1 Jn 4:18).

Because of the sins that spring forth from the fear of death, *the whole world lieth in wickedness*. (1 Jn 5:19). Through falsehood and fear, Satan, in various degrees, motivates sin. In a certain way, he is the god and ruler of this age or world. But this does not justify the devil's claim that to him has been given all authority over the kingdoms of the earth. God has never ceased to care for the world. Through laws, prophets, and chosen leaders, He guides and chastens men. If it were possible, the demons would have pulled down everything, even the heavens along with the rest of creation. But in no

way are they able to do it. Certainly the God and Father and Creator of all things has not abandoned mankind but has given a Law and sent holy prophets to teach and proclaim to the human race the return to sobriety and the knowledge that God is One.

Despite the victory of the Lord and of the baptized over Satan, the evil spirit is able to move the *heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*. (Acts 5:3). Moreover, the *god of this age blinds unbelievers' minds lest the light of the Gospel of Christ rise on them*. (2 Cor 4:4). For the restraint which human laws could not effect, the Divine Logos would have effected had not the demons, taking as their ally the wicked lust in every man which draws him to all manner of vice, scattered many false and profane accusations, none of which attach to us. With great sincerity, Justin, a former Platonist, writes: *Therefore, we forewarn you to guard yourselves lest the demons we speak against delude you and turn you away from reading and understanding all that we have said. But I fear*, writes St. Paul, *lest in any way, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts should be corrupted from the simplicity that is toward Christ*. (2 Cor 11:3). The devil persistently and in every unlawful manner tries to subjugate men. To accomplish this, he has effective, powerful, and cunning ways of deception. And if indeed the wrath of God had such agents, it would be hopeless for the human race because the only way to be saved would be absolute predestination.

Athenagoras and Justin write that God *committed the care of men and of all things under heaven to angels whom He placed over them. But the angels violated this appointment and were captivated by women and begat children who are called demons*. The souls of the giants are the demons that wander around the earth. And furthermore, they subjugated the human race to themselves... and sowed every manner of evil. Therefore, having believed the deceiving demon, men dared to disobey God and departed from Paradise. The devil was the cause of his own apostasy and that of others. Man disobeyed God, having been deceived by the angel who, because of God's many gifts to man, was jealous and cast a spell on him, thus ruining himself and convincing man to sin through disobedience of the commandments of God... Thus, by his falsehood, the devil was the cause of man's exile from paradise.

The dominant thought of the Fathers is the biblical view that Satan is the primary cause of transgression, sin, and death. Of course there are certain variations in statements, but this in no way alters the essence of the biblical teaching regarding the devil's contribution to the fall of the human race. Thus, Justin and Athenagoras can speak about the intercourse of angels with women on earth, indicating in this way that the demons acted to perpetuate the fall among men after Adam (as if to say that mankind did not fall automatically with the first-made humans), and about the serpent leading Adam astray, and about the deceiving of Eve. The Apostle

Paul speaks about the fall of Adam and at the same time writes, *The serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness* (2 Cor 11:3), and *Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression.* (1 Tim 2:14).

Bodily death, as the Scriptures tell us, did not take hold immediately after the transgression of Adam and Eve. Indeed, after the disobedience they lived for many years. First, *through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin* (Rom 5:12) came spiritual death (the loss of grace) and, after a period of time, bodily death. Theophilus writes regarding the first-made men after the transgression: *Then Satan saw that not only were Adam and his wife living but were even bearing children, and he was unable to kill them by his malice. Seeing, therefore, that Abel was pleasing to God, he acted upon his brother Cain and caused him to kill his brother Abel. And thus, the beginning of death was made in this world, and it continues up to the present in every generation of men.*

Satan would very much have wished to kill all of mankind in one sweep, but he is not able to do this because God gives life to all things. The devil brings death only indirectly, through sin and the resulting separation of man from God, which brings death. So he who was made in the image of God became mortal since the mightier Spirit parted from him. And all those who, by their own choice, stand off from God are visited by separation from Him... and separation from God is death. *The wages of sin is death.* (Rom 6:23). Therefore, this is how the passage that says the demons *gave the laws of death over to men* ought to be understood. St. Irenaeus' declarations that *Satan is the cause of death* must be interpreted in the same way. The devil is the primary cause of sin, which distances man from God and results in death. Man is both the victim of the evil one's deception and the accomplice in sin.

Writing on the expulsion of men from paradise, Justin refers strangely to yet another cause, polytheism, in addition to disobedience: *When they came out of paradise, they remembered the names of gods, being no longer taught of God that there are no other gods... Thus, having been cast out of paradise and thinking it was for the transgression alone that they were expelled, and not knowing it was also because they believed there were other gods, they passed down the names of gods to the people who came after them. This first false imagining about gods has its origin in the father of lies. God, then, knowing that the false doctrine*

of polytheism is like a disease that plagues the souls of men, and wishing to remove it and overturn it, appeared first to Moses and said, 'I am Who is'. Similarly, Tatian writes, *By means of prohibitions, God became the blocker of wickedness and the praiser of those who persist in virtues. And men attached themselves to one who, because of his being first born [of the angels], was more skillful than the rest. And men and angels declared him to be God, who was a rebel against the law of God.* The soul that is separated from the Holy Spirit is unable to behold things that are perfect and, while seeking after God, it fashions for itself many gods, following the sophistries of the demons. So the wicked energies of Satan and the demons were not limited to the deceiving of Eve alone. On the contrary, they extend throughout the course of world history under a variety of forms. The demons have never ceased to work their deceptions in men.

It would be a great mistake to think that the first Christians regarded the devil merely as a whisperer of bad suggestions in men's ears. Satanic energy is not something that is apparent only in the wicked thoughts of men. In addition to influencing men's thoughts and will, the devil acts in nature, and he acts ontologically. The spiritual and natural dimensions of the energies of Satan are not divided. On the contrary, they are inseparably coefficient.

The fall was not limited to the human race but extended to reasonless animals and reasonless nature. The animals are named wild beasts [θηρία] because they are hunted [θηρεῖσθαι], not as if they were made evil or venomous from the first, for nothing was made evil by God, but all things were good, indeed very good; human sin, however, brought evil upon them. For when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him.

For creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but because of Him Who subjected it, in hope that creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that all of creation coexisted peacefully until now. So Satan is the primary cause of corruption and temporarily has the power of death. For this reason, the devil is called *the god of this age* (2 Cor 4:4) and the *ruler of matter*. The demonic movements and actions proceeding from the adverse spirit produce these disorderly sallies and, moreover, move men as individuals and as nations, some in one way and some in another. Others who are of no mean reputation, therefore,



have thought that this universe is constituted without any definite order, driven hither and thither by irrational chance. According to Paul, the devil is also the *ruler of the power of the air*. (Eph 2:2).

Despite the fact that marvelous order and harmony prevail in the cosmos, clearly demonstrating that all things are governed by God, nevertheless, there exists in it a kind of parasite that is manifested by death and consequently by disharmony in the societal relations of men and nations. The evils that are produced by death are not from God. *For God created not death*. (Wis 1:13). As a result, this world which is in subjection to death and corruption cannot be considered natural, if by natural we mean the world as God intended it to be. In other words, the world is abnormal, but this is not because of its own nature but because a parasitic force exists in it at present. *For it is not by God that things are moved against nature... But God is perfectly good and is eternally doing good*. The parasitic force in the world shall be completely destroyed at the Second Coming. *The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*. (1 Cor 15:26). *And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more*. (Rev 21:4).

According to the later testimonies of Judaism and the earliest ones of Christianity, the devil and his demons are not only the cause of death, they are also agents of illnesses. Replying to the head of the synagogue, the Lord said, *Thou hypocrite, this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?* (Lk 13:15-17). *He is the Lord of all...and He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil*. (Acts 13:36, 38). The casting out of operative demons from sufferers is equal to a cure of bodily and spiritual ills. There are indeed diseases and disturbances of the matter that we are made of. But when such things happen, the demons take note and approach a man whenever weakness lays hold of him. And there are times when, in a wanton tempest, they themselves disturb the working of the body. But being smitten by the power of a word from God, they depart in terror, and the sick man is healed.

In these books of the prophets, then, we found that it was foretold that Jesus would come and mature... and heal every illness and every infirmity: *He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet may be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'*. (Mt 8:16-17). The casting out of demons through the Holy Spirit is proof that *the kingdom of God has come upon you* (Lk 11:20), and the curing of the ill is proof that Jesus is the awaited Christ.

In reply to the question *Are you the expected One*, the Lord said, *Go and report to John what ye have seen and heard: the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Blessed*

is he who is not offended in Me. (Lk 7:22-23). If one is healed by matter through trusting in it, much more will he be healed by having recourse to the power of God. Even if you be healed by drugs (I grant you this out of leniency), it behooves you to attribute the cure to God.

The accusation that Christ heals and *casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons* (Lk 11:15) does not hold up because *no demon can open the eyes of the blind*. (Jn 10:21). Demons do not cure but by cunning make men their captives. How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand; and if Satan rises up against himself, he cannot stand, but he is finished.

All of this clearly presupposes that the cause of infirmities is not God but the devil. Precisely, for this purpose did the Son of God appear, that He might destroy the works of the devil. *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you*. (Mt 12:28). Totally baseless is the view of Western theologians that Satan is nothing but an instrument of divine wrath. What fellowship is there between righteousness and iniquity? What communion is there of light with darkness? What harmony has Christ with Belial? The destruction of Satan and the demons by God is planned even to the exact hour. *What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God? Art Thou come here to torment us before the time?*(Mt 8:29). *Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out*.(Jn 12:31).

Christ did not come to teach vague ideas about a transcendental world and a sentimental love as imagined by the schools of Abelard, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl. *I came to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled*. (Lk 12:49). Christ is the destruction of the devil, and He is the salvation of the righteous held under the devil's sway from the ages. God appeared in the flesh in order *to abolish him who has the power of death, that is, the devil*. (2 Tim 1:10). Between God and Satan there is no compromise. On the contrary, a great war rages.



A fox pretends to be asleep; the body and the demons pretend to be chaste. The former is on the watch to seize a bird, the latter to catch a soul. So as long as you live, never trust that clay of which you are made and never depend on it until the time you stand before Christ Himself. And never imagine that abstinence will keep you from falling. It was a being who never ate that was nevertheless thrown out of heaven.

St. John Climacus

“BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY” [1 PET 1:16]

By Elder Dionisie of Colciu (+May 11, 2004), from “Familia Ortodoxă,” May 2017 (# 5/100), translated and contributed by an “Orthodox Heritage” reader.

“Pray Unceasingly!”

Sure, the Church has all sorts of prayers for the fulfillment of all of one’s needs. But in each one of us, as persons, in our souls and in our thoughts can be installed a prayer that is small enough, yet very powerful: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* And if at each breath you say, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,* the propensity to sin is chased out from your thoughts and ideas, and Christ dwells in your heart.

The goodness of God helps us as many times as we run to Him and cry out, “Lord, I pray to You, help me!” At that second, the grace of the Holy Spirit comes and helps you. But we should request, as the Holy Fathers tell us, with humble-mindedness. We should consider ourselves to be sinners before God, that we are not worthy of help: “Lord, You Who descended from the Holy Trinity and took on a human body in order to deliver us from evil, I pray to you, help me!” When we do so with humble-mindedness, it is rendered impossible for God to not help you, not under any pretext whatsoever.

But we are indifferent: “Eh, Lord, help me... Eh, if You want, You can help me, but if not, it doesn’t matter.” No! We should consider ourselves to be as we really are, unworthy. You see what the Lord says: *Be holy, for I am holy.* (1 Pet 1:16). But look, we constantly make mistakes, that is why we can never expect that we are worthy for Him to help us. Not so, as we continuously trample upon the will of God, willingly and unwillingly. It is such that, if we request with meekness and with humble-mindedness the help of God, at that second the grace of the Holy Spirit helps us. Oh! May God help us.

You Need to Show Spiritual Manliness

From childhood, our minds turn towards the bad, the unclean, but more so they are led towards the bad by the tempter. Because this is his weapon, in order to ruin our minds. But we need to show spiritual manliness. As much as we can, we should fight, we should not receive unclean thoughts. Do you see? *From my youth many passions have warred against me,* as the *Antiphons* say. Many passions. But

You Yourself help me—we pray to God to help us, and with the help of God we will all be victors. For God helps us, since the Savior tells us thus: *For apart from Me you can do nothing.* (Jn 15:5).

That is why we must always, for whatever we request, we must request it with humility. God accounts the humble-minded person closer to Him, and He prizes humility more than any other virtue or good deed which you may have. If you request from God, whatever you request of Him with humility, it is not possible for God to not listen to you. He listens to you, He fulfills your wish, but you need to request it with humility.

Whatever happens, realize first that it is from God, because that’s how it is, this is the truth. Since God wants it, we

are at this moment here and we are speaking to each other, and we were at the church... but if God does not want it... That is why “*Without Me,*” without God we cannot do anything.

However, we ought to know this thing, because if we know it, from now on, with humble-mindedness whatever we request from God, we will receive. What does the Lord say? Whatever you request, request it, but you must believe, you should be convinced that God will fulfill your wish. But if you say, “Give, O Lord, such-and-such,” and you see that He did not give it to you, you begin to grumble: “Eh, God does not listen to me...” No! Hold on tight and constantly consider yourself unworthy.

Many times, God delays in fulfilling your wish because it is not beneficial for you; there is no other reason for non-fulfillment of your wish other than

that it is not beneficial. Yet at other times God wants to try you more. It is thus with God. You need to show spiritual manliness then. It’s not that the tempter now comes and puts his bell to your ears, with all kinds of his misfortunes, and we should listen to him. No! Go forth with God, only with God and never the tempter.

Be Humble-Minded

He who endures to the end will be saved. (Mt 10:22). You need patience. Humble-mindedness. Well yes, if we would have these three spiritual gifts—obedience, cutting off or personal will and ego, and humble-mindedness—we would count everything as good. Even if you were to be beaten all day long, or to have your heart poisoned by some words, if we had all three of these gifts, which the Holy Fathers counsel, we would consider everything to be



“*I humbled myself, and I saved myself.*”

Elder Dionisie (+2004)

good. However, if we do not have them... we then focus and chase exclusively our own desires. "Well, my will is good! Look at what He did, He made a mistake! He didn't go the right way."

Thus, if you decide to be obedient to whatever they would tell you, to cut off your will, and to never do what you want, then you are covered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, instantly. Yes. And afterwards, you should be humble-minded. Humble-mindedness, that is to say, you should always consider yourself to be inferior to everyone else.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Have Mercy On Me!"

As much as you can, you should always pray. If you cannot read, you should constantly say in your soul and in your mind and in your heart: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* It is a very small prayer, but it has the greatest strength, so that the great saints gave up all their philosophical books and drew near to this prayer which is small, yet mighty in power.

For the one which has this prayer, even if he stops to speak with someone, the prayer works in his mind the entire time. This is a fearful thing, a divine work. He goes, does, mends, without letting the prayer stop... That is why the Holy Books say that in normal times there were men who lived in royal palaces and nevertheless possessed the noetic prayer. Irrespective of the turmoil that was likely there and the countless distractions and temptations, these men attained and maintained their godliness.

And this is exactly how you should speak and live the rest of your lives. Since your obligation is to always *pray unceasingly*, you should continuously maintain the Jesus prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!* You must do so without pondering whether you will eventually acquire the noetic prayer or not. And when the thought comes to you to slander someone, repeat, *Lord Jesus Christ...*; when some defiled thought comes, say *Lord Jesus Christ...* The mouth and mind should always be accustomed to saying, *Lord Jesus Christ...*, and slowly, without realizing it, God shall descend His grace upon you.



When one keeps silent, he is given time and freedom for prayer and concentration; but when he passes his hours carelessly, he does not have time to pray. Furthermore, through his careless speech he accumulates various sins. For this reason the Holy Fathers placed the virtue of silence at the summit of the virtues, for without it no virtue is able to remain in the soul of man.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. Theophan the Recluse, From his letters, translated from Azbykuru by Nun Cornelia (Rees).

Life is short. One hour, another—and then death. Give an account! And we can't say that we forgot to keep a record, for all our deeds are there. They are waiting for us to be read and for our punishment to be meted... that it was all really that way and we have nothing to say about it, no justification. They will be checked with the law and the sentence will be given. Would that it were only for a number of years! But there it's forever. Woe to us! But we don't feel like having compunction! And we don't want to give up our sins... How can this be?! May Thy will be done, *O Lord, Who knowest all things, and save me.*

There have been so many predictions that the end of time is right around the corner. And none of it came true. The Savior said that no one knows the time. So there is no point whatsoever in guessing or being disturbed by other people's guesses. That there will be a Second Coming, this we don't doubt. And neither do we doubt that it will come suddenly unawares, despite all the great signs beforehand. We have only to ceaselessly wait for the Lord, and prepare ourselves for the meeting, without guessing about the time.

Lord, help us to pass this year in the fear of God. Could that be what your dream was about?! Nothing upholds the fear of God so strongly as the remembrance of the Last Judgment. There is no need to give in to the spirit of despondency over this. We should only look carefully around us, and whatever is not pleasing to God should be immediately removed, and if necessary, cleansed away by confession. Then trusting everything to God's mercy, it is only left for us to be of good cheer. The Lord at the Last Judgment will not only be as if judging us, but also as if justifying us all. And He will justify everything if there is at least some small possibility to do so.

If knowing that there is a Gehenna we still live so carelessly, then how would we live if we didn't know about it? Now some will sin and sin, and then think about it.

Don't even think about justifying yourself by your deeds. Justification completely depends upon the Lord's death on the Cross. But there are side issues, which are also like conditions, and although we cannot imagine them perfectly, we can sincerely desire to search for them—to imagine a certain success... feasible, but according to our strength... Here is a task—to decide what a "good defense" before the judgment seat of Christ consists of, about which we pray at the *ectenia*, and to write an answer. Even if we can't decide it in a lifetime, let us at least think about this every day and every hour. Always think of the graveyard!

Remember the old saying, that once we've left the church... So! If there is something wrong with the soul, we won't be able to fix it with funerals.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ORTHODOX CLERGY

By Metropolitan of Florina Augoustinos Kantiotes (+2010), translated by Fr. E.H. and A.H., original article, in Greek, <http://www.augoustinos-kantiotis.gr/?p=35798>. From the book of former Metropolitan of Florina Augoustinos Kantiotes, "The Christian in the End Times," 2nd Edition, 2008, pp. 39-41.



My dear ones,
We must confess a bitter truth.

Those who believe, who struggle to keep their Orthodox faith are few. A great and immense current is steering many Orthodox away from their faith.

I am going to say something that I have never said. You may call it egotistical, but I will give you a measure, whereby to measure the priests, bishops, and all of the clergy and all the theologians. What is this measure? What is the main characteristic of a priest? To gather *prosphora*? To celebrate beautiful services? To deliver grace-filled sermons from the *ambon* and to make a few damsels teary-eyed with his profound thoughts? What is the single characteristic of a priest and a bishop in our difficult age?

The main characteristic of the bishop and the priest is a fighting spirit, boldness. It is what the apostle Paul said that, *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* [2 Tim 3:12] If you see a priest, if you see a theologian, if you see a metropolitan or an archbishop who is not persecuted, but welcomes the love and appreciation of all, then the words of Christ apply, *Woe to you when all people speak well of you* [Lk 6:26]; know very well that he is not on the correct path.

The same thing applies to someone who calls himself Orthodox, but does not want to go against the flow, this avalanche that is coming down to destroy the world. The Orthodox priest goes against the flow. Saint Athanasios the Great was one, who by himself carried on his shoulders, like the mythological Atlas of old, the whole of Orthodoxy. Saint Mark Eugenikos was another one, who carried in his arms the whole of Orthodoxy. Saint Photios the same.

They were few, but they didn't win by their numbers; they won by their faith. Because the value of a faithful priest, the value of a faithful bishop, the value of a faithful archbishop, the value of a layman or a woman, is worth more than the entire world. Therefore, let us not be scared by this betrayal of our faith that is happening left and right.

I recommend one thing to you: Don't tell me: but this priest or that bishop is good, or, this other fellow is a great

theologian, or, that other one is a great speaker, or, that this one opened Plato's academy and when you hear him speak it's absolutely wonderful! ... Check to see if he has a spark of Saint Mark Eugenikos, a spark of Saint Photios, a spark of Patriarch Keroularios, a spark of Elder Papoulakos (who though an illiterate monk stood up, all alone, against the entire world).

I say these things, mindful of my position as a Greek and as a bishop who bears an immense responsibility. We are ready to sacrifice everything. I dare say (perhaps for the last time from this pulpit) to those of you who love Christ, those of you who love the Church: We have on our side our most holy Virgin, we have on our side all those who have struggled and those who continue to struggle for our Orthodox faith.

Those who are with the devil, let them sit down and shut their mouths. Because their cowardice is of the devil, their temptations are of the devil, their arguments are of the devil, through which they seek to cool off a handful of people who suffer torture, torment and persecution for the faith of our Christ.

We have always had as our slogan the oath of the teenagers of Athens, the lads of ancient Greece, who from atop the Acropolis swore, saying, "**Whether alone or with others, I will defend what is sacred and holy.**" I too, an insignificant soldier, declare with boldness: Whether alone or with others I will defend to the last drop of my blood what is sacred and holy in our faith.

And you, instead of a vain applause and instead of praise, both of which mean nothing, raise your prayers, because few are the Orthodox Christians left, and the battle is spreading, and we will soon find ourselves before new events. Lucifer has been campaigning and raging to eradicate the Orthodox faith from the hearts of the people, not only in our small Greece, but also in every corner of the earth. I don't know what will happen.

I don't know what persecutions those of us bishops and the other clergy who surround us, who have ceased to commemorate Athenagoras will suffer. I don't know to which Mount Athos we will take refuge. I know one thing: whatever happens, if the stars happen to fall, if the rivers run dry, if the world is turned upside down, one thing I know—I steadfastly believe that, in the end, Orthodoxy will prevail.

When the moment of the persecution of the Orthodox will come, then we too have our plan, as all the faithful do. And all of you—the 3,000 of you that are here—scatter what I have told you everywhere. Let the one become two, the two four, the four eight ... becoming a great wave of the sea that will cleanse our homeland in such a way that Greece will become a star in heaven, an Orthodox place, a paradise of Orthodoxy. Amen.

HOMILY ON THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE THEOTOKOS

By Saint Theodore the Studite.



Brethren and fathers,

The Annunciation is here and it is the first of the Feasts of the Lord, and we should not simply celebrate as most do, but with understanding and with reverence for the mystery.

What is the mystery? That the Son of God becomes son of man, using the Holy Virgin as the means, dwelling in her and from

her fashioning for Himself a temple and becoming perfect man. Why so? That He might ransom those under the law, as it is written, and that we might *receive sonship* (Gal 4:5), that we may no longer be slaves, but free, no longer subject to the passions, but free of passions, no longer friends of the world, but friends of God, no longer walking according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Those who walk according to the flesh think the things of the flesh; those who walk according to the spirit think the things of the spirit, for the thought of the flesh is death, but the thought of the Spirit, life and peace. And so the thought of the flesh is hostile to God, for it is not subject to the law of God. Indeed it cannot be. Those who are in the flesh *cannot please God*. (Rom 8:5-8).

In brief, this is the power of the mystery, and this is why we should celebrate spiritually and behave spiritually, with holiness and justice, with love, with gentleness, with peace, with forbearance, with *goodness, with the Holy Spirit* (2 Cor 6:6), so that as far as we ourselves are concerned we do not render the dispensation of our Lord Jesus Christ empty and ineffectual. Not only that, but we should both pray and grieve for the world. Why so? Because the Son of God came to save the world, but the world rejected Him. Tribes and languages reject Him, the barbarian nations reject Him, those who have had His Holy name invoked upon them reject Him, some through abandoning the faith, others through their evil lives.

What should He have done and did not do? Being God He became man, He humbled Himself, *becoming obedient unto death, the death of the cross* (Phil 2:8); He gave us His Body

to eat and His Blood to drink; He allowed us to call Him Father. Brother, Head, Teacher, Bridegroom, Fellow-Heir and all the other titles which there is no time to mention now. And still He is rejected, and still, He bears it. For, he says, *I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world* (Jn 12:47).

What then is there to say, brethren? That the genuine disciples are grieved by the rejection of their fellow-disciples, thus showing love both for the teacher and for the disciples. So too, genuine servants suffer in the same way from the desertions of their fellow-servants.

This is why the great Apostle orders that we should offer supplications, prayers, entreaties, thanksgivings on behalf of all mankind, *for kings and for all in high positions* (1 Tim 2:1-2); and elsewhere he says this on the subject, *I speak The Truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have a great grief and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I have prayed that I might be anathema to Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh*. (Rom 9:1-3).

You see the power of love? You see the height of friendship? Moses shows it too when he says to God if You will forgive them their sin, forgive, if not, *wipe me out of the book which You have written*. (Exo 32:32).

So we too, as genuine and not counterfeit disciples, should not only look at what concerns ourselves, but we should grieve and pray for our brothers and for the whole world, so that we all become inheritors of Eternal Life, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom be the glory and the might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

Amen.



When the door of the steam baths is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it; likewise the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the doors of speech, even though everything it says may be good. Thereafter the intellect, though lacking appropriate ideas, pours out a welter of confused thoughts to anyone it meets, as it no longer has the Holy Spirit to keep its understanding free from fantasy. Ideas of value shun verbosity, being foreign to confusion and fantasy. Timely silence, then, is precious, for it is nothing less than the mother of the wisest thoughts.

St. Diadochos of Photiki

GREAT LENT: A TIME FOR MORALITY OR A TIME FOR THE HEART

By Hieromonk Alexios Karakallinos.



There is certainly nothing wrong with people trying to do the right thing and to be moral and up-standing citizens.

The problem is that salvation and transfiguration are not a matter of morality.

The publican and the prodigal were not moral people. They did all the wrong things, but yet they came to themselves, they discovered their hearts, and in so doing found the way, not just to moral goodness, but to holiness, to righteousness, and to feasting in the Father's household.

In the West, many speak about Lent as a period of struggle whose goal is for Christians to become better people. For the ancient fathers, however, it is not just about *the good being preserved in their goodness and the crafty becoming good* (*anaphora* of Saint Basil the Great), although these are things to be prayed for. Rather, it is about discovering the heart, being honest about oneself, being humble before God, and in repentance beginning an incredible journey in which the soul seeks to be clothed in Christ, so that thoughts, desires, the will, all become holy, all become bent on salvation, all become an expression of His forgiveness and His love. No frail human morality can ever hope to contain the overflowing fullness of life with which Christ desires to rejuvenate the faithful.

Unfortunately, an emphasis on morality apart from Christ, apart from repentance, apart from humility can lead to conditions like the Pharisee or the elder son, conditions that are ultimately foreign to the spirit of Lent. This is the problem with morality that Father John Romanides points out with trenchant clarity:

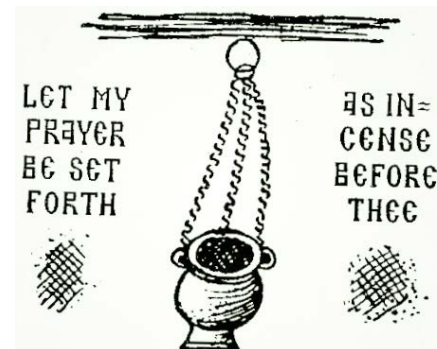
“The biblical tradition as preserved by the Fathers cannot be identified with or reduced to a system of moral precepts or Christian ethics. It is rather a therapeutical asceticism which is not daunted by any degree of malady of the heart or noetic faculty short of its complete hardening. To take the shape of this asceticism without its heart and core and to apply it to a system of moral precepts for personal and social ethics is to produce a **society of puritanical hypocrites who believe they have a special claim on God's love** because of their morality, or predestination, or both. The commandments of Christ cannot be fulfilled by any

simple decision to do so or by any confidence in having been elected.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky takes up this theme in many of his novels and concludes that the humanism derived from a moral code on its own cannot serve as man's ultimate salvation. The world will not be saved by optimistic humanism that believes human progress and morality will eventually save the world. For Dostoevsky and the church fathers, man's deepest problems are not moral, nor even psychological, but ultimately existential and ontological. It's not about following the rules or feeling balanced. It is a matter of choice and it is a matter of human nature being touched by the hand of God Himself. Only by daring to leap towards God in spite of the good and evil that exist in the heart can the believer hope to get beyond the contradiction of the human condition.

In order to avoid descending into nihilism, Dostoevsky offers his readers another path: the acceptance of suffering and affliction in the context of a relationship with God. It is only in this context that man is able to recognize a path out of his fallen condition. It is only this Love that is able to transform suffering into salvific joy.

This is the goal of Great Lent, a journey through the acceptance of ascetical toil and struggle culminating in the joyous feast of Pascha where we celebrate the Risen Lord as *One Who trampled down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestoweth Life*. The journey of Great Lent is not about “doing this” or “avoiding that,” but about cleansing our hearts in repentance by reaching out to touch the Lord Jesus. Then, we will do what is truly good, forgiving and loving, then we will avoid what is truly bad, pride, judging, and hatred, not because of a moral precept, but because we will feel Christ's mercy in our heart, so that with Saint Paul, each one of us might say, **yet not I, but Christ that liveth in me**. Amen.

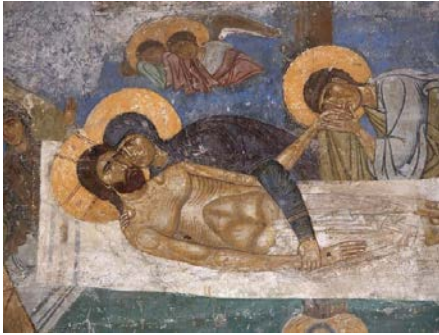


There are three things which bring salvation to man: faith, works, and contemplation. For firstly, one believes from hearing; secondly, one does the commandments; and thirdly, one is granted union with God and enjoys with contemplative faith what he formerly believed with faith from hearing.

St. Maximos of Corinth

PASSION WEEK: “IT IS THE ONLY TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN WE FORGET OURSELVES”

Source: Pravmir.com, *Orthodox Christianity and the World* (<http://www.pravmir.com/sermon-for-great-friday/>).



Passion Week. It is the only time of the year when we forget ourselves, our duties, and our requests. In the Church's hymnody of the Passion services from Thursday to Saturday you will

not find any mention of us sinners, of our downtrodden souls, of our petitions. The contemplation of Christ engrosses everything. Our attention is focused upon Him alone. Therefore, for the attentive Christian, the experience of these days is a school of life in Christ and of life with Christ, which is the only true and normal condition for a Christian.

Two sorrowful and horrific actions—the path to Golgotha and the procession to the burial cave—are the objects of our contemplation these days. It is characteristic of the Divine services that they make us participants of those distant and frightful events. In the garden of Gethsemane, our eyes are blinded by torches, a youth wrapped in a cloth hid among trees, and Peter was warming himself by the fire when he was surprised by a cock crow. We peered into Pilate's window, were surprised by the many-voiced roar of the crowd, the women of Jerusalem were wailing over the beaten Sufferer, the thief was forgiven because of the final love entrusted to the Holy One... And two old men and grief-stricken women found the final shelter for the Homeless One.

How vividly one sees the faces of Christ's contemporaries, but He Himself is somehow mystically hidden, remaining inaccessible to this contemplation. But did not St. Isaiah foretell this: *As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men. So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.* (Isa 52:14-15). Did you notice that, in the description of the suffering of the Innocent One, the Prophet does not speak a word of sympathy for Him? Why is this so? Because all our feelings are engrossed only by the awesome amazement of God's works, which are beyond our comprehension and reveal the love of Christ, *which passeth understanding* (Eph 3:19). But human love we see too well, and it too is worthy of wonder, for it is a love without hope.

We look at the Cross and the Grave from Pascha; we know too well the joy of the Resurrection, we live by it. And the solemn order of the Divine services of Passion Week, grand and mournful, but penetrated with the expectation of Pascha, its hidden joy, tinges even the Burial Shroud [*Epi-taphios*], the last covering of the Sufferer. For us the Burial Shroud is the banner of the Resurrection and the triumph over death and slavery, the banner of freedom and unity with God. But Nicodemus and the Elder of Arimathea, the sorrowful women, and the Mother of God were weeping tears over the bloody cloth, the modest covering of the Dead One. They saw in the Burial Shroud the clothes of the ancient patriarch Joseph which had been wept over by Jacob: *For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.* (Gen 37:35).

Can we imagine the grief and despair of love bereft of all hope? Christ was the most beautiful and sacred being in the lives of these people, but they know that death is irreversible; they know that nobody can overcome it and they have nothing to expect and to be afraid of: Nicodemus no longer conceals his faith in Christ. Joseph risks losing everything he has, and gives even his tomb to the Righteous One. They have nothing to hope for and to expect, their love is stronger than fear. Even if Christ, the purest and most sacred being they have ever seen in their lives, is dead, then I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.

Today God's overwhelming love toward man is revealed to us. But man's love for God is no less striking and admirable, and the memorial of this love is the Holy Burial Shroud in which the body of the Lover of Mankind was wrapped, wrapped with the loving hands of weak and infirm people, but faithful in love even to hell.



Before any fall into sin the demons bring upon a man the following passions: dark forgetfulness; fierce anger, that is, inhuman and beast-like malice; and ignorance, like darkness which has no trace of light. These three passions precede every sin. For a man does not perform a single sin before he has become disposed towards every sin, towards every evil, either by forgetfulness or by anger or by ignorance. From these proceed insensitivity of soul, that is, the mind, which is the eye of the soul, remains dark and is then captivated by all the passions. The first to be born is a weakness of faith; weakness of faith gives birth to self-love, the beginning and end, the root and origin of every evil.

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

Τι Είναι ἡ Νοερὰ καὶ Καρδιακὴ Προσευχή;

Πηγή: Ἀγιορειτικὴ Μαρτυρία, τεύχος 2, σελ. 72-74.



Ἡ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο φανερώνει κοινωνία μετὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἄρα εἶναι σὰν προσευχή. Ὁ ἀγώνας γιὰ τὴν συνεχή ἐπίκληση τοῦ ἁγίου Ὄνόματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τὴν εὐχή «*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλόν*», ἀνανεώνει συνεχῶς στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὴν μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν κοινωνία μετὰ τὸν Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔγραφε στοὺς Θεσσαλονικεῖς: «*Ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε*».

Μετὰ τὴν μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν προσευχή ὁ ἄνθρωπος φανερώνει τὴν ἀληθινὴ εὐγένεια τῆς φύσεώς του, ποὺ εἶναι μεθόριο μεταξὺ ὄρατοῦ καὶ ἀοράτου κόσμου καὶ «*ζῶον θεοῦμενον*». Ξεπερνᾷ τὴν φυσικὴ ἀναγκαιότητα, ἐκτείνει τὴν ὑπαρξὴ του μέχρι τὸν Θεό, αἰσθάνεται ἐλεύθερος ἀπὸ ὅ,τι τὸν κρατᾷ αἰχμάλωτο στὴν γῆ.

Γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ὅμως ἡ προσευχή ἀληθινή, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι προσευχή τοῦ ὅλου ἀνθρώπου καὶ ὄχι μόνον τῶν χειλέων ἢ μόνον τοῦ νοῦ ἢ μόνον τῆς καρδιάς.

Τελεία προσευχή εἶναι ἡ νοερὰ καὶ συγχρόνως καρδιακή. Ὁ νοῦς προσεύχεται μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά, ποὺ εἶναι τὸ κέντρο τῆς ὑπάρξεως. Δηλαδή ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ τὸ βάθος του καὶ τὸ κέντρο του προσεύχεται ἐκπληρώνοντας τὴν πρόσκληση τοῦ Θεοῦ: «*Ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδιάς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς ἑαυτόν*». Ὁλόκληρος ὁ ἄνθρωπος προσφέρεται στὸν Θεό.

Γι' αὐτὴ τὴν προσευχή χρησιμοποιεῖται ἡ μονολόγιστη εὐχή «*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλόν*», ποὺ μετὰ τὴν σύντομη ἐπίκλησή της βοηθεῖ στὴν συγκέντρωση τοῦ νοῦ καὶ στὸ βύθισμα τοῦ νοῦ στὴν καρδιά.

Οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες, οἱ λεγόμενοι νηπτικοί, ἀπὸ τὴν πείρα τοὺς ἔγραψαν γιὰ τὸν τρόπο καὶ τὴν μέθοδο αὐτῆς τῆς προσευχῆς. Ὑπάρχει μία συλλογὴ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων, ποὺ λέγεται Φιλοκαλία. Καὶ ἡ λέξις φιλοκαλία εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὴ. Μετὰ τὴν νοερὰ καὶ καρδιακὴ προσευχή ὁ πιστὸς ἐνώνεται μετὰ τὸν Θεό, θεᾶται τὸν Θεό, ποὺ εἶναι ὅ,τι ὁμορφότερο ὑπάρχει στὸν κόσμο, τὸ ὑπέρτατο κάλλος.

Ἐπειδὴ ὑπάρχει ὁ κίνδυνος νὰ γίνῃ κάποια σύγχυση μεταξὺ τῆς καρδιακῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῶν διαφόρων τρόπων διαλογισμοῦ καὶ προσευχῆς, ὅπως ἀσκεῖται

στὶς ἀνατολικὲς θρησκείες, νομίζω ὅτι πρέπει νὰ διευκρινίσω μερικὰ ζητήματα:

1. Ὅχι μόνον ἡ μονολόγιστη εὐχή, τὸ «*Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλόν*», ἀλλὰ καὶ κάθε προσευχή τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως ἡ θεμελιώδης θεοπαράδοτος κυριακὴ προσευχή, τὸ «*Πάτερ ἡμῶν*», πρέπει νὰ εἶναι νοερὰ καὶ καρδιακή, δηλαδή νὰ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ βαθύτερο εἶναι μας.

2. Ἡ ἀπόκτηση τοῦ χαρίσματος τῆς ἀδιαλείπτου νοερᾶς καὶ καρδιακῆς προσευχῆς δὲν εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους κυρίως ζήτημα μεθόδου καὶ τεχνικῆς, ἀλλὰ **ζήτημα συντετριμμένης καρδιάς, δηλαδή καρδιάς ποὺ μετανοεῖ, πονάει γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῆς καὶ ταπεινώνεται**. Χωρὶς αὐτὴ τὴν καρδιά καμιά μέθοδος καὶ τεχνικὴ τῆς προσευχῆς, ὅπως ἡ χρησιμοποίησις τῆς εἰσπνοῆς καὶ ἐκπνοῆς, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ φέρῃ τὴν ἀληθινὴ προσευχή.

3. Ἡ καρδιακὴ καὶ νοερὰ προσευχή προϋποθέτει τὴν συμμετοχή μας στὴν ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, στὰ Μυστήριά της, τὴν τήρησις τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ὑπακοή σὲ πνευματικὸ πατέρα. Δὲν εἶναι δηλαδή μία ἀτομικιστικὴ – ιδιωτικὴ προσέγγισις τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία ὁ ταπεινὸς Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανὸς λαμβάνει τὴν Χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ Χάρις ἐνεργεῖ μέσα του, μετὰ τὴν ἰδικὴ του βέβαια συνεργασία καὶ θέλησις, τὴν ὄντως ἀληθινὴ προσευχή.

Τελειώνοντας στὸ θέμα τῆς προσευχῆς θὰ ἤθελα νὰ πῶ ὅτι ὁ σημερινὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔχει κατ' ἐξοχίαν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχή γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ ἀπορροφᾶται ἀπὸ τὸν σύγχρονο βαθύτατα ὑλιστικὸ τρόπο ζωῆς ξεχνώντας τὴν θεοείδειά του, δηλαδή τὴν θεϊκὴ καταγωγὴ καὶ τὸν θεϊκὸ προορισμὸ του. Ἀκόμη, γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ κρατᾷ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ του ἐνότητα, ἰσορροπία καὶ εἰρήνη μέσα στὴν φοβερὴ διασπαστικὴ ἀνισορροπία καὶ ἐξωστρέφεια τοῦ συγχρόνου κόσμου. Γιὰ νὰ μπορεῖ, ἔχοντας συνεχή τὴν αἴσθησις τῆς παρουσίας καὶ προνοίας τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴν ζωὴ του, νὰ μὴν «ἀγχώνεται», ἀπελπιζέται καὶ βιώνει τὸν κόσμον ὡς κενὸ καὶ «μὴ-νόημα».

Μετὰ τὴν συνεχή ἐπίκληση τοῦ γλυκυτάτου καὶ ἁγίου Ὄνόματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ αἰσθάνεται τὸν Χριστὸ στὴν καρδιά του, θὰ ἀποφεύγει τὴν ἁμαρτία, θὰ καλλιεργεῖ αἰσθήματα ἀγάπης γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Θὰ εἰρηνεύει ὁ ἴδιος καὶ θὰ εἰρηνεύει καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ περιβάλλοντός του.

Ἄς μοῦ ἐπιτρέψετε μία ἀδελφικὴ συμβουλὴ ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴ παράδοσις τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους: **Ὅσο περισσότερες φορὲς τὴν ἡμέρα μετὰ πόθο λέμε τὴν εὐχή «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ...», τόσο πιὸ κοντὰ στὸν Θεὸ θὰ εἴμαστε καὶ τόσο περισσότερη Χάρι καὶ δύναμις θὰ λαμβάνουμε γιὰ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζουμε τὶς διάφορες δυσκολίες καὶ πειρασμοὺς τῆς ζωῆς.**

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση Εἶναι ἢ πιὸ Πνευματικὴ Ἐπανάσταση ποὺ Ἔγινε στὸ Κόσμο. Εἶναι Ἁγιασμένη!

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ Ἐπανάσταση γίνεται τὶς περισσότερες φορὲς ἀπὸ κάποιες ὑλικὲς αἰτίες, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ σκλαβιά, ἡ στέρηση, ἡ κακοπέραση, τὰ βασανιστήρια, ἡ περιφρόνηση. Ἡ λευτεριά εἶναι ἡ θεότητα ποὺ λατρεύει ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, καὶ γι' αὐτὴ χύνει τὸ αἷμα του. Μὰ τὴ λευτεριά, πολλὲς φορὲς, σὰν τὴν ἀποχτήσῃ ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, δὲν τὴ μεταχειρίζεται γιὰ πνευματικούς σκοπούς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ χαρεῖ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ μονάχα. Κοντὰ στὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ ἔρχεται καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ, μὰ τὶς περισσότερες φορὲς γιὰ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ θεωροῦνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι κάποιες ἀπολαύσεις ποὺ εἶναι κι αὐτὲς ὑλικές, κι ἄς φαίνονται σὰν πνευματικές.

Ἕνας ἐπαναστάτης τῆς γαλλικῆς ἐπανάστασης, νὰ ποῦμε, θεωροῦσε γιὰ πνευματικὰ κάποια πράγματα ποὺ, στ' ἀλήθεια, δὲν ἦταν πνευματικά. Αὐτὸς ἤθελε ν' ἀποχτήσῃ τὴ λευτεριά, γιὰ νὰ κάνει αὐτὰ ποὺ νόμιζε πὼς εἶναι σωστὰ καὶ δίκαια γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο μοναχά, δηλαδή γιὰ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ τους, μὴ πιστεύοντας πὼς ὑπάρχει τίποτ' ἄλλο γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐπιδιώξῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω πὼς, γιὰ τὶς περισσότερες ἐπαναστάσεις, οἱ αἰτίες ποὺ τὶς κάνανε νὰ ξεσπάσουνε σταθῆκανε ὑλικές, καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία ποὺ ἐπιδιώξανε ἦταν προορισμένη νὰ ἱκανοποιήσῃ μονάχα τὶς ὑλικὲς ἀνάγκες.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ὅμως Ἐπανάσταση εἶχε μὲν γιὰ αἰτία καὶ τὶς ὑλικὲς στερήσεις καὶ τὴ κακοπάθησιν τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ὅπως ἡ κάθε ἐπανάσταση, ἀλλὰ, ἀπάνω ἀπ' αὐτὲς τὶς αἰτίες, εἶχε καὶ κάποιες ποὺ εἶναι καθαρὰ πνευματικές. Καὶ πνευματικὸ, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, ἀληθινὰ πνευματικὸ, εἶναι ὅ,τι ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ μέρος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, μὲ τὴ ψυχὴ του, δηλαδή μὲ τὴ θρησκεία.

Ἡ σκλαβιά ποὺ ἔσπρωξε τοὺς Ἕλληνες νὰ ξεσηκωθοῦνε καταπάνω στὸ Τοῦρκο δὲν ἦταν μοναχά ἡ στέρηση καὶ ἡ κακοπάθησιν τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ἀλλὰ,

ἀπάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, τὸ ὅτι ὁ τύραννος ἤθελε νὰ χαλάσῃ τὴ πίστη τους, μποδίζοντάς τους ἀπὸ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ χρῆματά τους, ἀλλαξοπιστιζοντάς τους καὶ σφάζοντας ἢ κρεμάζοντάς τους, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἀρنيόντανε τὴ πίστη τους γιὰ νὰ γίνουνε μωχαμετάνοι. Γιὰ τοῦτο πίστη καὶ πατρίδα εἶχανε γίνῃ ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, καὶ ἡ λευτεριά ποὺ ποθοῦσανε δὲν ἦταν μονάχα ἡ λευτεριά ποὺ ποθοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ ἐπαναστάτες, ἀλλὰ ἡ λευτεριά νὰ φυλάξουνε τὴν ἁγιασμένη πίστη τους, ποὺ μ' αὐτὴν ἐλπίζανε νὰ σώσουνε τὴ ψυχὴ τους. Γιατί, γι' αὐτούς, κοντὰ στὸ κορμί, ποὺ ἔχει τόσες ἀνάγκες καὶ ποὺ μὲ τόσα βάσανα γίνεται ἡ συντήρησή του, ὑπῆρχε καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς πὼς ἀξίζει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ὅσο περισσότερο ἀξίζει τὸ ροῦχο ἀπ' αὐτό.

Ἐκεῖνες οἱ ἄπλες ψυχές, ποὺ ζοῦσανε στὰ βουνὰ καὶ στὰ ρημοτόπια, ἦτανε διδαγμένες ἀπὸ τοὺς πατεράδες τους στὴ πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ γνωρίζανε, μ' ὅλο ποὺ ἦτανε ἀγράμματα, κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια του, ὅπως εἶναι τοῦτα: «Τὶ θὰ ὠφελήσῃ ἄραγε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἂν κερδίσῃ τὸν κόσμον ὅλο, καὶ ζημιωθῇ τὴ ψυχὴ του;» Ἡ: «Τὶ θὰ δώσῃ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ πληρωμὴ τῆς ψυχῆς του;» Καί: «Ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι πιὸ πολύτιμη ἀπὸ τὴ τροφή, ὅπως τὸ κορμὶ ἀπὸ τὸ φόρεμα!» κ.ἄ.

Γιὰ τοῦτο, κατὰ τὰ χρόνια τῆς σκλαβιάς, χιλιάδες παλληκάρια σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε καὶ παλουκωθήκανε γιὰ τὴ πίστη τους, ἀψηφόντας τὴ νεότητά τους, καὶ μὴ δίνοντας σημασία στὸ κορμὶ τους καὶ σὲ τούτη τὴ πρόσκαιρη ζωὴ. Στράτευμα ὀλάκερο εἶναι οἱ

ἄγιοι νεομάρτυρες, ποὺ δὲ θανατωθήκανε γιὰ τὰ ὑλικὰ ἀγαθὰ τούτης τῆς ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴ πολύτιμη ψυχὴ τους, ποὺ γνωρίζανε πὼς δὲ θὰ πεθάνει μαζί μὲ τὸ κορμὶ, ἀλλὰ θὰ ζήσει αἰώνια. Ἀκούγανε καὶ πιστεύανε ἀτράνταχτα τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ εἶπε: «Μὴ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον ποὺ σκοτώνει τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τίποτα παραπάνω. Ἀλλὰ νὰ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ θανατώσῃ καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴ ψυχὴ».

Ἡ ἐλευθερία, ποὺ γι' αὐτὴ θυσιάζονταν, δὲν ἦταν κάποια ἀκαθόριστη θεότητα, ἀλλὰ ἦταν ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς, ποὺ γι' αὐτὸν εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «Ὅπου τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ἡ



ἐλευθερία». *Κι ἄλλοῦ λέγει: «Σταθεῖτε στερεὰ στήν ἐλευθερία πὸν σᾶς χάρισε ὁ Χριστός, σταθεῖτε καὶ μὴν πέσετε πάλι στὸ ζυγὸ τῆς δουλείας. Γιατὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία σᾶς κάλεσε. Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μὴν τὴν παίρνετε μονάχα σὰν ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὴ σάρκα σας».*

Γιὰ τοῦτο εἶναι ἀγιασμένη ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση, κι ἀγιασμένοι οἱ πολεμιστὲς τῆς, ὅπως ἦταν ἀγιασμένοι ὅσοι πολεμήσανε μαζί μὲ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Παλαιολόγο, πρὶν ἀπὸ τρακόσα ἐξηνηταχτὸ χρόνια, κατὰ τὸ πάρισμο τῆς Πόλης, καταπάνω στὸν ἴδιο ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες τους.

Στὴν ἐπανάσταση τοῦ Εἴκοσι-ἕνα, ὅπως καὶ στήν πολιορκία τῆς Πόλης, μαζί μὲ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς πολεμοῦσανε πλῆθος ραφοφορεμένοι, καλόγεροι, παπάδες καὶ δεσποτάδες, καὶ τραβούσανε μπροστὰ μὲ τὸ σταυρὸ στὸ χέρι, κι ἀπὸ πίσω τους χίμιζε κλαίγοντας ὁ λαός, κ' ἔψελνε:

Γιὰ τῆς πατρίδος τὴν ἐλευθερία, γιὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστη τὴν ἀγία, γι' αὐτὰ τὰ δύο πολεμῶ, μ' αὐτὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιθυμῶ, κι ἂν δὲν τὰ ἀποκτήσω, τί μ' ὠφελεῖ νὰ ζήσω;

Στὴ Πόλη κρεμάστηκε ὁ πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος, ἀνοίγοντας πρῶτος τὸ μαρτυρολόγιο τῆς Ἐπανάστασης. Ὁ Θανάσης Διάκος πολέμησε σὰν νέος Λεωνίδας, καὶ σουβλίστηκε γιὰ τὴ πίστη του. Ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανός, ὁ Ἡσαΐας Σαλώνων, ὁ Ρωγῶν Ἰωσήφ, ὁ Παπαφλέσσας, ὁ Θύμιος Βλαχάβας, κι ἄλλοι πολλοί, πολεμήσανε γιὰ τὴν ἀγιασμένη πατρίδα τους.

Στὴ Τριπολιτσὰ κλειστήκανε στὴ φυλακὴ κατὰ τὴν Ἐπανάσταση οἱ δεσποτάδες τοῦ Μοριά, κ' οἱ περισσότεροι πεθάνανε μὲ ἀβάσταχτα μαρτύρια. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στὴ Πόλη, φυλακωθήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε πολλοὶ δεσποτάδες.

Παρακάτω βάζω λίγα λόγια ἀπὸ τὸ ἡμερολόγιο τοῦ ἀντιναύαρχου Γεωργίου Σαχτούρη:

«Παρασκευή, 25 Δεκεμβρίου. Ἐορτὴ τῶν Γενεθλίων τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀραγμένοι εἰς Ντάρδιζα μὲ ἡσυχον ἀέρα τῆς τραμουντάνας, πλὴν μὲ χιόνια. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἡμέρα, διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνον τῆς ἐορτῆς, τὸ πρωί, ὑψώνοντας τὴν σημαίαν μας, ἐρρίχθη καὶ μία κανονιά, καθὼς καὶ ὅλα τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ἐδῶ ἀραγμένα τὸ αὐτὸ ἔπραξαν.

Κυριακὴ, 15 Αὐγούστου. Ἐορτὴ τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἐξημερώθημεν ἀραγμένοι. Ὑψώσαμεν τὰς σημαίας καὶ ἐρρίξαμεν καὶ ἀπὸ μίαν κανονίαν διὰ τὸ χαρμόσυνον τῆς ἡμέρας».

Ὁ ναύαρχος Κουντουριώτης ἔκανε τὴ προσευχὴ του, σὰν τοὺς παλιούς, νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει ἡ Παναγία στὴ ναυμαχία τῆς «Ἑλλης», κι ὅπου ἄλλοῦ τὸν καλοῦσε

τὸ χρέος του. τὸ ἴδιο κάνανε καὶ κάνουνε ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες στὸ πόλεμο.

Κατὰ τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, πρῶτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς θρησκείας πληρώσανε μὲ τὴ ζωὴ τοὺς τὸ καινούργιο χαράτσι στὸν ὄχτρο τῆς πίστες μας. Ὁ μητροπολίτης τῆς Σμύρνης Χρυσόστομος κρεμάστηκε, ὁ δεσπότης τῶν Κυδωνιῶν Γρηγόριος θάφτηκε ζωντανός, ὁ Μοσχονησιῶν Ἀμβρόσιος θανατώθηκε ἄσπλαχνα, κι ὅλοι οἱ παπάδες κ' οἱ καλόγεροι περάσανε ἀπὸ τὸ σπαθί.

Οἱ Γερμανοὶ κ' οἱ Ἴταλοὶ θανατώσανε κι αὐτοὶ τοὺς ρασοφορεμένους τῶν χωριῶν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀπομείνουν παραπίσω ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους θεομάχους.

Ναί! Πίστη καὶ Πατρίδα εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς ἓνα πράγμα. Κι ὅπως πολεμᾷ τὸ ἓνα, πολεμᾷ καὶ τ' ἄλλο, κι ἂς μὴν ξεγελιέται.

Ἡ μάννα μας ἡ πνευματικὴ εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας, πὸν ποτίστηκε μὲ πολὺ κι ἀγιασμένο αἷμα. Κανένας λαὸς δὲν ἔχυσε καὶ δὲν χύνει ὡς τὰ σήμερα τὸ αἷμα του γιὰ τὴ πίστη, ὅσο ὁ δικός μας. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη εἶναι ὁ θησαυρὸς ὁ κρυμμένος κι ὁ πολύτιμος μαργαρίτης πὸν λέγει ὁ Χριστός.



Εἶναι ψέμα ὅτι ἀνήκουμε στὴ Δύση. Ἀλλὰ μήτε στὴν Ἀνατολή, μήτε στὸν Βορρᾶ, μήτε καὶ στὸν Νότο ἀνήκουμε. Ἐμεῖς, ὡς Ἕλληνες, ἀνήκουμε ἐδῶ. Πάνω δηλαδὴ ὡς τὸ Βόσπορο καὶ μέσα ὡς ἐκεῖ τὴν Τραπεζοῦντα καὶ κάτω στὴν ὁμορφὴν Κύπρον καὶ πάλι πάνω στὸ γαλάζιο Αἰγαῖο καὶ στροφὴ ἀριστερὰ γιὰ τὴν Ἀθήνα καὶ παραπέρα ὡς τὴ Βόρειο Ἑπειρο καὶ πάλι πίσω στὴ Θράκη καὶ στὸν Ἑβρο καὶ ξεκούραση πιά στὸ Αἶβαλί, στὴ Σμύρνη, στὴν Ἰμβρο καὶ στὴν Τένεδο.

Κυρ-Φώτης Κόντογλου

Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι σωτήρας, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι ὁδοστρωτήρας. Δὲν ἰσοπεδώνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, δὲν ἰσοπεδώνει τὴν ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ ἐλευθερία εἶναι καὶ πτῆση πρὸς τὰ πάνω καὶ πτώση πρὸς τὰ κάτω.

Ἄρχιμ. Δανιὴλ Ἀερᾶκης
Ἱερός Ναὸς Εὐαγγελίστριας, Πειραιᾶς

Ἐν Ἀρεταῖς Ἐκλάμποντες καὶ Πίστει Ὁρθῆ [Ὁρθρος τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Τρίτης]

Γράφει ὁ Φώτης Μιχαήλ, ἱατρός.

*«Τὸν Νυμφίον ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπήσωμεν, τὰς λαμπάδας
ἐαυτῶν εὐτρεπίσωμεν, ἐν ἀρεταῖς ἐκλάμποντες
καὶ πίστει ὀρθῆ, ἵνα ὡς αἱ φρόνιμοι, τοῦ Κυρίου
παρθένοι, ἔτοιμοι εἰσέλθωμεν, σὺν αὐτῷ εἰς τοὺς
γάμους.»*

† † †



Τὸ ἀναλόγιο εἶναι τὸ μέγα διδασκαλεῖο τῆς Πίστεώς μας. Οἱ ὕμνογράφοι—ὅσων τὰ ἔργα δοκιμάστηκαν στὸν χρόνο καὶ καταξιώθηκαν στὴν ἐκκλησιολογικὴ καὶ δογματικὴ συνείδηση τοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου πληρώματος—ἦσαν ἄνθρωποι θεοφώτιστοι, ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἀπαίδευτοι καὶ ἐντελῶς ἀρχαριοὶ στὴν ζωὴ τὴν πνευματικὴν, βρισκόμεθα μεγάλη παρηγοριὰ καὶ

ἀνάπαυση στὰ νοήματα τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μας ὕμνολογίας. Ὅποια ἀπορία καὶ νὰ ἔχει κανεὶς πάνω σὲ θέματα βίου καὶ Πίστεως, εἶναι βέβαιον, ὅτι θὰ βρεῖ ἀπαντήσεις ἀσφαλεῖς καὶ ὑπεύθυνες μέσα στὴν θεολογία τῶν λατρευτικῶν μας ὕμνων.

Στὸ ἀναλόγιο συναντῶνται διαχρονικῶς οἱ δάσκαλοι τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς μουσικῆς, μὲ τοὺς ἐραστὲς τῆς ὀκτωήχου κάθε ἐποχῆς. Συναντῶνται καὶ οἱ φωτισμένοι ὕμνογράφοι ὅλων τῶν ἐποχῶν, δάσκαλοι ἁγιοπνευματικοί, μὲ κάθε ψυχὴ ζῶσα καλῆς ἀνησυχίας, σὲ μιὰ συνάντηση μετάγγισης Θείας Σοφίας· σὲ μιὰ συνάντηση θεοδίδακτης γνωμοδότησης προϋποθέσεων σωτηρίας.

Στὸ ἀναλόγιο παρίστανται, σὲ κάθε ψαλμωδία, Πατέρες καὶ ὕμνογράφοι μαζί. Ὁ λόγος τῶν Ἁγίων μας Πατέρων, ὁ ἐρμηνευτικὸς τῶν Γραφῶν, γίνεται ἀκόμα πιὸ προσιτὸς στοὺς πιστοὺς, μὲ τὴν γραφίδα τῶν ἱερῶν μας ὕμνογράφων.

Παράδειγμα, ὁ ποιητὴς τοῦ ὄρθρου τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Τρίτης: Σὲ ἓναν ἀπὸ τοὺς ὕμνους του δὲν κάνει τίποτε ἄλλο, ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ προσφέρει λακωνικῶς, εἰδικὰ γιὰ τὶς ἡμέρες μας τὶς πονηρές, μοναδικῆς ἀξίας διδασκαλία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου.

Ἔλεγε ὁ Χρυσορρήμων Ἰωάννης: «Οὐδὲν ὄφελος βίου καθαροῦ, δογμάτων διεφθαρμένων». Σὲ τίποτε

δὲν ὠφελεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἡ ἐνᾶρετη ζωὴ, ἐὰν τὰ δόγματά του εἶναι διεφθαρμένα. Ἐάν, δηλαδή, ἡ πίστη του εἶναι νοθευμένη.

Καὶ ὁ ὕμνογράφος τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Τρίτης γνωμοδοτεῖ μελωδικῶς: «Τὸν Νυμφίον ἀδελφοὶ ἀγαπήσωμεν, τὰς λαμπάδας ἐαυτῶν εὐτρεπίσωμεν, ἐν ἀρεταῖς ἐκλάμποντες καὶ πίστει ὀρθῆ, ἵνα ὡς αἱ φρόνιμοι, τοῦ Κυρίου παρθένοι, ἔτοιμοι εἰσέλθωμεν, σὺν αὐτῷ εἰς τοὺς γάμους.».

Ἐμπρός, ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε τὸν Νυμφίον Χριστὸ καὶ νὰ συγυρίσουμε τὶς λαμπάδες μας. Πῶς, ὅμως, νὰ δείξουμε τὴν ἀγάπη μας στὸν Νυμφίον Χριστό; καὶ τὶς λαμπάδες μας, τὶς ψυχές μας, πῶς νὰ τὶς τακτοποιήσουμε; «Ἐν ἀρεταῖς ἐκλάμποντες καὶ πίστει ὀρθῆ!». Λαμποκοπῶντας ἀπὸ ἀρετὲς καὶ πίστη ἀνόθευτη!



Ἦρχισαν οἱ ἄγριοι πόλεμοι, ὅπου δὲν μὲ ἄφηναν ἡσυχίαν ἡμέρα καὶ νύχτα. Ἄγριοι πόλεμοι! Μῆτε ὥραν νὰ ἡσυχάσω. Ἐπίσης καὶ ἐγὼ μὲ μανίαν εἰς αὐτούς. Ἐξ ὥρας καθήμενος εἰς προσευχὴν τὸν νοῦν δὲν ἐσυγχώρουν νὰ βγῆ ἀπὸ τὴν καρδίαν. Ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα μου ὁ ἰδρώτας ἔτρεχε βρῦσις. Ξύλον ἀλύπητα. Πόνος καὶ δάκρυα. Νηστεία ἄκρα καὶ ὀλονύκτιος ἀγρυπνία· καὶ ἐπιτέλους κατέπεσα. Ὅλα ἔτη ὀκτῶ κάθε νύχτα μαρτύριον. Ἐφευγαν οἱ δαίμονες καὶ ἐφώναζαν. Μᾶς ἔκαψε! Μᾶς ἔκαψε! Ὅπου ἔτυχε μίαν νύχτα... καὶ τοὺς ἤκουσε καὶ ὁ πλησίον μου ἀδελφός ξενιζόμενος, ποῖοι ἦσαν αὐτοὶ ποῦ ἐφώναζαν.

Καὶ ὅμως τὴν τελευταίαν ἡμέραν, ποῦ θὰ τοὺς δῶκεν ὁ Χριστός, ἐγὼ πλέον διελογιζόμενος ἀπεγνωσμένος ὅτι, ἀφοῦ τὸ σῶμα μου ἐπεσε τελείως νεκρὸν καὶ τὰ πάθη μου ἐνεργοῦν ὡς ἐν τελείᾳ ὑγείᾳ, οἱ δαίμονες εἶναι οἱ νικηταί. Αὐτοὶ μὲ ἔκαψαν ἀσφαλῶς καὶ ἐνίκησαν καὶ ὄχι ἐγώ. Ἐπιτέλους, καθὼς ἐκαθήμην νεκρός, πληγωμένος, ἀπεγνωσμένος, αἰσθάνομαι ὅτι ἠνοιχθῆ ἡ θύρα καὶ ἦλθε κάποιος, πλὴν δὲν ἐστράφη νὰ ἰδῶ, ἀλλὰ ἔλεγα τὴν εὐχὴν. Καὶ αἴφνης αἰσθάνομαι ὅτι κάτω μου κάποιος μὲ ἐρεθίζει πρὸς ἡδονήν. Καὶ στρέφομαι καὶ βλέπω τὸν δαίμονα, ὅπως εἶναι κασιδῆς· πληγωμένη ἡ κεφαλὴ του, νὰ βρωμάει! Καὶ ὠρμησα θηριωδῶς νὰ τὸν πιάσω. Καί, ὅπως τὸν ἔπιασα, εἶχε τρίχες τοῦ χοίρου, καὶ ἔγινεν ἄφαντος. Εἰς δὲ τὴν ἀφήν μου μὲ ἄφησε τὴν αἴσθησιν τῶν τριχῶν του καὶ τὴν βρώμα στὴν ὄσφρησιν. Καὶ ἐπιτέλους ἀπ' αὐτὴν τὴν στιγμὴν ἐρράγη ὁ πόλεμος καὶ ἔπαυσαν ὅλα. Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰρήνη εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν. καὶ ἀπαλλαγὴ τελεία τῶν ἀκαθάρτων παθῶν τῆς σαρκός...

Γέρων Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἡσυχαστής (+1959)

Ἐκφραση Μοναχικῆς Ἐμπειρίας, ἐπιστ. 37. σελ. 223

Τι Σημαίνει ἡ Φράση, «Αἰωνία ἡ Μνήμη»;

Ἀγίου Νικόλαου Βελμίροβιτς (Ἐπισκόπου Ἀχρίδος).

Σὲ ταλαιπωρεῖ τὸ ὅτι δὲν ξέρεις τὴ σημασία αὐτῶν τῶν λέξεων, ποὺ ἀκουγες πολλές φορές καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ἔλεγες ἐπάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς. Καὶ καλὰ κάνεις ποὺ ρωτᾷς. Ὅσο καλύτερα γνωρίζεις ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴν ἀρχαία καὶ καλὴ Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας, τόσο καὶ περισσότερο τὴν ἀγαπᾷ.

«Αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη» σημαίνει: Αἰώνια νὰ ὑπάρχει ἡ μνήμη γιὰ σένα. Ἄκουσα μιὰ φορὰ πὼς κάποιος στὸν ἐπικήδειο λόγο ἐπάνω ἀπὸ τὸν νεκρὸ φώναξε: «Αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη στὴ ... γῆ!» Παραξελεύθηκα σὲ μιὰ τόσο λανθασμένη ἐρμηνεία τῆς πίστεως μας. Μὰ μπορεῖ καὶ νὰ εἶναι αἰώνιο στὴ γῆ, ὅπου ὅλα περνοῦν βιαστικὰ σὰν προσκεκλημένοι σὲ γάμο;

Ὅντως, δὲν εὐχόμεστε στὸν νεκρὸ ἐντελῶς μηδαμινὸ πλοῦτο, ὅταν τοῦ εὐχόμεστε νὰ τὸν μνημονεύουν σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο, ὁ ὁποῖος καὶ ὁ ἴδιος πλησιάζει στὸ τέλος του; Ἀλλὰ ἂς ποῦμε πὼς τὸ ὄνομα κάποιου μνημονεύεται στὴ γῆ ἕως τὸ τέλος τοῦ χρόνου—τὶ κερδίζει αὐτὸς ἀπ' αὐτό, ἐὰν ἡ μνήμη του στὰ οὐράνια ἔχει ξεχαστεῖ;

Τὸ σωστὸ εἶναι νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦμε τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ νεκροῦ νὰ μνημονεύεται αἰώνια στὴν αἰωνιότητα, στὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ καὶ στὸ Βασίλειο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τοῦτο καὶ εἶναι τὸ νόημα τῶν λέξεων «αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη».

Μιὰ φορὰ καυχῆθηκαν οἱ μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν Δάσκαλό τους λέγοντας: «Κύριε, καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια ὑποτάσσεται ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί σου». (Λουκ 10:17). Καὶ ὁ Κύριος τοὺς ἀπάντησε νὰ μὴν χαίρονται γι' αὐτὸ ἀλλά: «Χαίρετε δὲ ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματα ὑμῶν ἐγράφη ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς» (Λουκ 10:20), δηλαδή νὰ χαίρονται ἐπειδὴ τὰ ὀνόματά τους εἶναι γνωστὰ καὶ τὰ θυμούνται καὶ τὰ μνημονεύουν στὸ Οὐράνιο Βασίλειο τοῦ φωτὸς καὶ τῆς ζωῆς.

Στὴν Ἁγία Γραφὴ συχνὰ λέγεται πὼς τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν δικαίων θὰ εἶναι γραμμένα στὸ βιβλίον τῶν ζωντανῶν, ἐνῶ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν θὰ σβηστοῦν καὶ θὰ ξεχαστοῦν. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία περὶ τοῦ πλουσίου καὶ τοῦ Λαζάρου βλέπουμε ὅτι ὁ Κύριος λέει τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Λαζάρου μὲ τὸ ὀλοκάθαρό Του στόμα, ἀλλὰ ἀποσιωπᾷ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἄδικου πλουσίου.

Ὁ Λάζαρος, σημαίνει, ὅτι μπῆκε στὸ Βασίλειο τῶν Οὐρανῶν, καὶ ἔλαβε τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ καὶ τὴν αἰώνια μνήμη, ἐνῶ ὁ ἁμαρτωλὸς πλοῦσιος ἔχασε καὶ τὸ βασίλειο καὶ τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα.

Στὴ θεϊκὴ ἐπιστῆμη καμιά φορὰ τὸ ὄνομα ταυτίζεται μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη γράφεται: «Καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγένετο σεισμὸς μέγας, ... καὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῷ σεισμῷ ὀνόματα ἀνθρώπων χιλιάδες ἑπτὰ». (Ἀποκ 11:13). Ὑπὸ τὸν σεισμὸ τῆς γῆς πρέπει νὰ καταλάβουμε μεγάλους πειρασμούς, στοὺς ὁποίους οἱ ἑπτὰ χιλιάδες ἀνθρώπων ὑπέκυψαν, ἀποστάτησαν ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἔχασαν τὶς ψυχές τους. Τοῦτο σημαίνει ὅτι δὲν καταστράφηκαν μόνο τὰ σώματά τους—αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐλάχιστης σημασίας—ἀλλὰ οἱ ψυχές καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα. Τὰ ὀνόματά τους στὴν αἰωνιότητα

ἐκημενίστηκαν καὶ σβήστηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τῶν ζωντανῶν.

Ὅποιος ἐπιθυμεῖ μιὰ ἀθάνατη μνήμη στὴν αἰωνιότητα, ἐπιθυμεῖ εὐαγγελικὸ πρᾶγμα. Ἐὰν κάποιος ἐπιθυμεῖ ἀθάνατο ὄνομα στὴ γῆ, θέλει ματαιόδοξο πρᾶγμα. Νὰ ξέρεις ὅτι πολλοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀθόρυβα καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τοὺς προσέξουν πέρασαν αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ, ἀπέκτησαν ἀθάνατο ὄνομα σ' ἐκεῖνο τὸν κόσμο. Νὰ σκέπτεσαι περὶ αὐτοῦ,

ἀδελφὲ Μελέτιε, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ σοῦ ἀποκαλύψει ἀκόμα πολλὰ. Καὶ ὅταν ἀκούσεις γιὰ τὸ δικό μου θάνατο, πᾶς στὴν προσευχὴ σου: «Αἰωνία του ἡ μνήμη»!

Εἰρήνη καὶ ὑγεία ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο.



Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι τὸ ὄξυγόνο τῆς ψυχῆς, εἶναι ἄναγκη τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ θεωρεῖται ἀγχαρεία. Ἡ προσευχὴ γιὰ ν' ἀκουστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ πρέπει νὰ γίνεται μὲ ταπείνωση, μὲ συναίσθηση βαθιὰ τῆς ἁμαρτωλότητάς μας, καὶ νὰ εἶναι καρδιακὴ. Ἐὰν δὲν εἶναι καρδιακὴ, δὲν ὠφελεῖ. Ὁ Θεὸς ἀκούει πάντοτε τὴν προσευχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποὺ εἶναι πνευματικὰ ἀνεβασμένος.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης

«Ὁ Ἐπιτάφιος»

Τοῦ πατρὸς Κωνσταντίνου Στρατηγόπουλου· αὐτοτελὲς ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Τὸ Σταυροδρόμι τῆς Καρδιάς μου» τοῦ πατρὸς Κωνσταντίνου Στρατηγόπουλου, σελ. 41-48, ἐκδόσεις «Φιλοκαλία», Μάιος 2002.

Τὸ Πάσχα ἐκείνη τὴ χρονιά ἦρθε ἀργά. Τὰ χελιδόνια εἶχαν ἤδη ἀρχίσει νὰ κτίζουν τὶς φωλιές τους. Τὰ χελιδόνια ἦταν πάντοτε ἓνα μέτρο χρονικὸ ἂν ἔφταναν πρὶν τὸ Πάσχα, τότε εἶχαμε καλοκαιριάτικο Πάσχα, ἂν ὄχι, τὸ Πάσχα ἦταν χειμωνιάτικο. Κανεὶς βέβαια δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίζει γιατί τὰ χελιδόνια ἔρχονται κάποια στιγμή. Εἶναι, ὅμως, σίγουρο ὅτι ὁ Πλάστης καὶ Δημιουργὸς τοὺς ἔδωσε μιὰ σοφία ποὺ εἶναι ἀρκετὴ γιὰ νὰ καταξιώσει τὶς κινήσεις τους.

Ὁ Μάριος ὁ Σεβντᾶς δὲν ἐνδιαφερόταν βέβαια τόσο γιὰ τὰ χελιδόνια· ἄλλου ἦταν στραμμένα τὰ ἐνδιαφέροντά του. Ὅπως δὴποτε, ὅμως, χάριξε φέτος γιὰ τὸ Πάσχα ποὺ γιορταζόταν μαγιάτικα. Ὁ Μάριος δὲν ἦταν κάποια ἐκτακτὴ προσωπικότητα ποὺ θὰ ἔκανε κάποιον νὰ ἀσχοληθεῖ μαζί του. Ἀλλὰ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ καταλάβει εἶχε κάνει ὅλο τὸ Νιχώρι νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μαζί του.

Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χωριὸ τοῦ ἄνω Βοσπόρου, ὁ Μάριος κατεῖχε μιὰ θέση δικῆ του. Μιὰ θέση μοναδική. Ἦταν ὁ γελωτοποιὸς τοῦ χωριοῦ. Χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλει. Χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ἐπιδιώκει. Ὅλοι γελοῦσαν μαζί του καὶ μόνο ποὺ τὸν ἔβλεπαν. τὸν εἶχαν λίγο γιὰ χαζό, λίγο γιὰ κουτὸ καὶ λίγο γιὰ τεμπελάκο, ἀφοῦ δὲν ἔκανε μιὰ συγκεκριμένη ἐργασία. Ἄλλοτε καθάριζε ἓναν κῆπο, ἄλλοτε ἔκανε τὰ ψώνια κάποιας κυρᾶς. Δουλειὲς ὅλες τοῦ ποδαριοῦ. Φτωχοζοῦσε δὲν τὸν ἔνοιαζε ὅμως. Ὅλοι γελοῦσαν μαζί του. Ὅλοι τὸν πείραζαν. Ἐκεῖνος ποτὲ δὲν θιγόταν. Πάντα εἶχε καὶ μιὰ ἀπάντηση εὐτράπελη, χαριτωμένη.

- Μάριε, θὰ πᾶς σήμερα γιὰ ψώνια;

- Ὁ Μάριος δὲν πάει ἀπλῶς γιὰ ψώνια, εἶναι ψώνιο, ἀπαντοῦσε ἐκεῖνος. Τὸν ρωτοῦσαν:

- Μάριε, πόσα χρόνια πῆγες σχολεῖο;

- Πηγαίνω κάθε μέρα ἀφοῦ σχολάζω ἀπὸ κάθε δουλειά, ἔλεγε ἐκεῖνος. Ἄλλοτε τοῦ ὑπέβαλαν τὸ δύσκολο ἐρώτημα:

- Ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ πιὸ σπουδαῖος στὸ χωριό;

- Ὅποιος κάνει τὰ πιὸ σπουδαῖα πράγματα χωρὶς νὰ τὸν βλέπει κανεὶς, ἀπαντοῦσε ἐκεῖνος.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια πὼς αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔλεγε δὲν ἦταν πάντα ἀστεία. Ἀλλὰ τὸ χωριὸ εἶχε συνηθίσει νὰ γελάει. Μόνο ὁ παπα-Ἀντώνης, ἐφημέριος τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου, τὸν ἄκουε μὲ προσοχή. Μερικὲς φορές, μάλιστα, ἔλεγε ὁ εὐλογημένος αὐτὸς ἱερέας:

- Αὐτὸς δὲν εἶναι ἠλίθιος. Λέει ἀλήθειες. Ὁ Θεός, βέβαια, γνωρίζει πιὸ καλά.

Πράγματι, μόνο ὁ Θεὸς πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζε τὴν ἀρετὴ τοῦ Μάριου. Μιὰ ἀρετὴ ποὺ φωλιάζει μέσα στὴν καρδιά μερικῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ κανεὶς δὲν τὴν ἀναγνωρίζει. Μιὰ ἀρετὴ ποὺ ἔχει ἀπαίτηση νὰ πεῖ στὸν ἄλλο ἀλήθειες, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν θίξει. Προτιμᾶς τότε νὰ σὲ θεωρήσει ὁ ἄλλος τρελό, παρὰ νὰ τὸν τρελάνεις.

Ἐκείνη, λοιπόν, τὴ χρονιά, ὁ Μάριος εἶχε χαρὰ μεγάλη γιὰ τὸ καθυστερημένο Πάσχα. Τὸ ἔλεγε, ἐξᾶλλου, παντοῦ.

- Γιατὶ Μάριε χαιρεσαι γιὰ τὸ καθυστερημένο Πάσχα;

- Μὰ ἐπειδὴ κεντάω. Πρέπει νὰ τελειώσω τὸ κέντημα.

Κι ὅλα τὰ παιδιά γύρω ἔσκαγαν στὸ γέλιο.

- Τι σχέση ἔχει τὸ κέντημα μὲ τὸ Πάσχα; ρώτησε ὁ Μανώλης ὁ μανάβης, ποὺ ἦταν γνωστός γιὰ τὸ ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὸ του φρόνημα.

- Ὅση σχέση ἔχεις καὶ σὺ μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, τοῦ

ἔλεγε ὁ Μάριος, καμιά καὶ μεγάλη.

Τὴ σχέση, βέβαια, ποὺ εἶχε τὸ κέντημα μὲ τὸ Πάσχα τὴν γνώριζε πολὺ καλά ὁ Μάριος. Πρὶν τρεῖς χρόνια, στὴν περιφορὰ τοῦ ἐπιταφίου, μερικὰ ἀπρόσεκτα παιδιά εἶχαν κάψει, παίζοντας, μιὰ μεγάλη ἄκρη τοῦ ἐπιταφίου. Εἶχε στενοχωρηθεῖ πολὺ κι ὁ παπα-Ἀντώνης. Πὼς θ' ἀγόραζε καινούργιο ἐπιτάφιο; Τὰ ἔσοδα τοῦ ναοῦ ἦταν μετρημένα. Μόλις καὶ κάλυπταν τὶς βασικὲς ἀνάγκες. Στὸ τέλος τὸ ξεπέρασε. Δὲν πειράζει, μιὰ φορὰ τὸ χρόνο ἦταν. Θὰ κάλυπτε μὲ λουλούδια τὸ καμμένο μέρος. Κανεὶς δὲν θὰ τὸ βλεπε. Ὁ Μάριος, ὅμως, τὸ τόνισε:

- Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι τρύπιος ὁ ἐπιτάφιος. Ἀρκετὰ ὅσα ἔκαναν οἱ ἔβραῖοι στὸ Χριστό.

Ἐπρεπε κάτι νὰ γίνε. Χρήματα δὲν εἶχε. Ἀλλὰ εἶχε χέρια. Κάποτε δούλευε στὸ Πέρα, πλάι σ' ἓναν τεχνίτη κεντημάτων. Θὰ προσπαθοῦσε. Γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ θὰ τὸ ἔκανε. Δὲν μπορούμε κι ἐμεῖς νὰ μαρτυροῦμε γιὰ τὸ



Χριστό; Θά εἶχε κόπο αὐτὴ ἱστορία. Ὑπολόγιζε τρία χρόνια. Ἐπρεπε νὰ γίνει τέλειος. Ἐπιτάφιος θὰ ἦταν. Μεράκι χρειάζοταν. Ἀγάπη καὶ Σεβντὰς μὲ μεράκι.

Γιὰ Ἐκείνον ὅμως θὰ τὸ ἔκανε. Τρία χρόνια. Δὲν πειράζει. Ἐκείνος εἶχε κατέβει τρεῖς μέρες στὸν Ἄδη. Τὶ εἶναι τρία χρόνια δουλειᾶς γιὰ τὸ Χριστό; Σ' ὅλη τὴ ζωὴ μας ἔπρεπε νὰ δουλεύουμε γι' Αὐτόν. Τρία χρόνια λίγα ἦταν.

- Βρὲ Μάριε, πῶς πάει τὸ κέντημα; Τὸν ρωτοῦσαν στὸ χωριό, χωρὶς καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ γνωρίζουν γιὰ ποῖο κέντημα ἦταν ὁ λόγος.

- Θὰ καταλάβεις πῶς πάει ἂν κεντήσεις στὴν καρδιά, στὸ νοῦ καὶ στὸ σῶμα σου τὸ Χριστό, ἀπαντοῦσε ὁ Μάριος.

- Πῶς θὰ Τὸν κεντήσω;

- Τὶ εἶμαι ἐγώ; Ἐκκλησία; Τὶ μὲ ρωτᾷς; Νὰ πᾶς σὲ κανένα πνευματικὸ νὰ δεῖς καὶ τὸ κεντητὸ τὸ πετραχίλι του καὶ θὰ καταλάβεις τὶ ἐννοῶ, ἀπαντοῦσε ὁ Μάριος.

Ὅλο τὸ χωριὸ γελοῦσε μὲ τὸ μυστήριό αὐτὸ κέντημα. Τὶ τρέλα ἦταν πάλι κι αὐτὴ; Τὰ παιδιά στὸ δρόμο τοῦ χωριοῦ τὸ γλεντοῦσαν μὲ τὸ κέντημα. Τὴν ἔπαθε, βέβαια, μέσα σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἔξαψη τῆς φαντασίας, κι ἡ κυρὰ Κούλα ἢ Πρίφταινα. Κεντοῦσε μιὰ μέρα, στὴν πόρτα τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ σπιτιοῦ της, κάτω τσεβρέδες. Μόλις τὰ παιδιά τὴν εἶδαν, ἄρχισαν νὰ φωνάζουν.

- Τὸ κέντημα, τὸ κέντημα. Ἐχει ἀπὸ τὴν τρέλα τοῦ Μάριου.

Εἶχε γίνει πολὺ ἀναξιοπρεπὲς τὸ νὰ κεντᾷς. Ὅλοι, μόλις ἔβλεπαν ἓνα κέντημα, ἔφερναν στὸ νοῦ τους τὸ Μάριο. Καὶ τότε, ἀμέσως, σὲ κατέτασαν στὴ συνομοταξία τῶν τρελῶν. Καὶ τρελὸς δὲν θὰ ἔθελε κανεὶς νὰ εἶναι.

Τρία χρόνια ὁ Μάριος δεινοπάθησε ἀπὸ τὶς κοροϊδίες. Τρία χρόνια δούλεψε σκληρά. Ἀσκήθηκε. Ξεπέρασε τὸν ἑαυτό του. Ἄς γελοῦσαν ὅλοι μαζί του· δὲν τὸν πείραζε. Αὐτὸς δούλευε μυστικὴ ἐργασία γιὰ τὸ Χριστό. γιὰ τὸν τάφο Του. Τὶ πιὸ μεγάλο μποροῦσε νὰ κάνει; Ὅταν μιὰ μέρα θὰ πέθαινε, θὰ ἔβλεπε μπροστὰ του, μέσα στὸν τάφο του, τὸ Χριστό. Τὶ θὰ Τοῦ ἔλεγε; Πῶς θὰ Τὸν ἔβλεπε; Ἐπρεπε νὰ προετοιμαστῆ γιὰ τὸν τάφο Του. Ἐπρεπε νὰ τὸν κεντήσῃ ἀπὸ τώρα στὴ ζωὴ του. Τὴν ἡμέρα ὅλοι γελοῦσαν μ' αὐτόν, καὶ τὸ βράδυ ἐκείνος, πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπιτάφιο, ἔκλαιγε γιὰ ὅλους. γιὰ ὅλα. Κάθε βελονιὰ καὶ δάκρυ. Κάθε βελονιὰ καὶ ἓνας τάφος. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἐπιτάφιος ἦταν πραγματικὸς ἐπιτάφιος. Δουλεμένος μὲ δάκρυα, γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες του.

- Πῶς πάει τὸ κέντημα, Μάριε; Ρωτοῦσαν οἱ φίλοι του.

- Βρεγμένο εἶναι, ἀπαντοῦσε ἐκείνος, καὶ τὰ γέλια τράνταζαν τὸ γύρω χωριό.

Τρία χρόνια κεντοῦσε ὁ Μάριος. Κι ἔγινε σάν τις μυροφόρες, τὴ Μαρία τὴ Μαγδαληνή, τὴ Μαρία τοῦ

Κλωπᾶ, τὴν ἄλλη Μαρία. Καὶ ἔκεινος Μάριος λεγόταν. Μύρα δὲν εἶχε νὰ γίνει μυροφόρος. Τὸ κέντημα, ὅμως, φέτος θὰ τὸ τελείωνε. Εὐτυχῶς καὶ τὸ Πάσχα ἦταν καλοκαιρινό. Εὐτυχῶς καὶ τὰ χελιδόνια ἦρθαν πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ Πάσχα.

Ἦρθε ἡ Μεγάλὴ Ἑβδομάδα. Ὅλα ἦταν φωτεινά. Ἡ ἀνοιξη στὸ ἀποκορύφωμά της. Κι ὁ Μάριος ἔτοιμος. Ἐτοιμος γιὰ νὰ καταθέσῃ τὸν ἐπιτάφιο ἐκεῖ πού ἔπρεπε. Τρία χρόνια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ του εἶχε γίνει τάφος· γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ δούλευε. Ὁ κόσμος πιὸ πολὺ τὸν κοροΐδευε. Ὁ τρελός, ὁ ἠλίθιος, ὁ κουτός. Ναί, αὐτὸς ἦταν. Ἀλλὰ δὲν μποροῦσε ἓνα χωριὸ νὰ ἔχει ἓναν καμμένο ἐπιτάφιο· γιὰ τὸ χωριὸ δούλευε. γιὰ νὰ ἔχουν τὸ Χριστό.

Τὴ Μεγάλὴ Παρασκευὴ τὸ πρωὶ ὁ Μάριος πῆρε τὸν ἐπιτάφιο στὴν πλάτη του. Καὶ βγήκε στὸ δρόμο. Ἄρχισε νὰ γυρνᾷ γύρω γύρω στὶς πλατεῖες καὶ στοὺς δρόμους ψάλλοντας τὸ «ἡ ζωὴ ἐν τάφῳ». Τὸ χωριὸ σηκώθηκε στὸ πόδι. Τὶ τρέλα ἦταν πάλι κι αὐτὴ;

- Μάριε, τὸ βράδυ θὰ βγῆ ὁ ἐπιτάφιος, τὶ κάνεις ἐκεῖ;

- Ἀνοιγώ δρόμο στὸ Χριστό. γιὰ νὰ μὴν σᾶς ἔρθει ξαφνικὰ τὸ βράδυ καὶ δὲν τὸν προλάβετε. Γιὰ νὰ ἐτοιμάζεστε ἀπὸ τώρα. Τάφος θὰ περάσει ἀπὸ δῶ τὸ βράδυ. Πρέπει νὰ προετοιμαστῆτε γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἀντέξετε.

Ἡ «ζωὴ ἐν τάφῳ», καὶ πάλι καὶ ξανά. Μέχρι ποῦ ἔφτασε στὴν ἐκκλησία. Μπήκε στὸ ἱερὸ τὴν ὥρα πού ἀνεγιγνώσκοντο οἱ μεγάλες Ὁρες. Στάθηκε μπροστὰ στὸν παπα-Ἀντώνη.

- Πάρε αὐτὸ ἀπὸ ἓναν τρελὸ καὶ χαζό. Ἐνας τάφος ὅπως πρέπει γιὰ τὸ Χριστό. Ὅσο τὸν ἔφτιαχνα τόσο πιὸ πολὺ ξεκουραζόμουν. Μὴν πεῖς σὲ κανένα πῶς ἐγὼ τὸν ἔφτιαξα. Στὸν τάφο του ὁ καθένας εἶναι μόνος μπροστὰ στὸ Χριστό. Οὔτε οἱ ἔπαινοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, μὰ οὔτε καὶ ἡ κοροϊδία τους ἔχουν σημασία. Σημασία ἔχει νὰ κεντήσῃς κάτω γιὰ τὸ Χριστὸ στὴ ζωὴ. Συγχώρα με τὸν τρελό, χρονιάρρα μέρα καὶ σὲ διδάσκω. Ἐγὼ ὁ ἀγράμματος. Ἐγὼ ὁ ἠλίθιος, ὁ χαμένος. Κάνε μιὰ προσευχὴ γιὰ μένα.

Ἐκεῖνο τὸ βράδυ ἡ περιφορὰ τοῦ ἐπιταφίου ἔγινε μὲ λαμπρότητα. Ὁ καινούργιος ἐπιτάφιος φάνταζε μὲ μεγαλοπρέπεια. Ὁ πατήρ Ἀντώνιος κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς περιφορᾶς, ἔνωσε πολλὰς φορὰς εὐωδία ἀνέκφραστη νὰ τὸν περιτυλίγει. Ὁ ἐπιτάφιος εἶχε πάνω του λουλούδια. Μὰ ποτὲ λουλούδια δὲν μύρισαν τόσο ὠραῖα, τόσο οὐράνια. Στὸ τέλος τῆς πομπῆς κι ὁ Μάριος, ὁ μυροφόρος, ὁ Σεβντὰς.

- Μάριε, τὶ κεντᾷς;

- Οὔ, τώρα πιά τελείωσε, τὸ πῆρε τὸ κέντημα ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν τάφο Του. Μὴν τὰ ρωτᾷς. Κάνε καμὶα προσευχὴ καὶ γιὰ μένα τὸν τρελό. **Κάνε μιὰ προσευχὴ γιὰ νὰ ἔχουμε καλὴ ζωὴ «ἐν τάφῳ».**

Ὁ Θεὸς Ἐγκαταλείπει τὸν Ἄνθρωπο;... Εἶναι Δυνατὸ Αὐτό;

Ἀγίου Σιλουανοῦ τοῦ Ἀθωνίτη.

Ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς εἶναι τέτοιας λογῆς: Στὴν ἀρχὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος προσελκύεται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ μὲ τὴ δωρεὰ τῆς χάριτος, κι ὅταν ἔχει πιά προσελκυσθεῖ, τότε ἀρχίζει μακρὰ περίοδος δοκιμασίας. Δοκιμάζεται ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη του στὸ Θεό, καὶ δοκιμάζεται «σκληρά».

Στὴν ἀρχὴ οἱ αἰτήσεις πρὸς τὸ Θεό, μικρὲς καὶ μεγάλες, ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ παρακλήσεις ποὺ μόλις ἐκφράζονται, ἐκπληρώνονται συνήθως μὲ γρήγορο καὶ θαυμαστὸ τρόπο ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό.

Ὅταν ὁμως ἔλθει ἡ περίοδος τῆς δοκιμασίας, τότε ὅλα ἀλλάζουν καὶ σὰν νὰ κλείνεται ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ νὰ γίνεται κουφὸς σ' ὅλες τὶς δεήσεις.

Γιὰ τὸ θερμὸ Χριστιανὸ ὅλα στὴ ζωὴ του γίνονται δύσκολα. Ἡ συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέναντί του χειροτερεύει, παύουν νὰ τὸν ἐκτιμοῦν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀνέχονται σ' ἄλλους, σ' αὐτὸν δὲν τὸ συγχωροῦν, ἡ ἐργασία του πληρώνεται, σχεδὸν πάντοτε, κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ νόμιμο, τὸ σῶμα του εὐκόλα προσβάλλεται ἀπὸ ἀσθένειες. Ἡ φύση, οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὅλα στρέφονται ἐναντίον του.

Παρὸτι τὰ φυσικὰ του χαρίσματα δὲν εἶναι κατώτερα ἀπὸ τὰ χαρίσματα τῶν ἄλλων, δὲν βρῖσκει εὐνοϊκὲς συνθήκες νὰ τὰ χρησιμοποίησι. Ἐπὶ πλέον ὑπομένει πολλὰς ἐπιθέσεις ἀπὸ τὶς δαμονικὲς δυνάμεις καὶ τὸ ἀποκορύφωμα εἶναι ἡ ἀνυπόφορη θλίψη ἀπὸ τὴ θεία ἐγκατάλειψη. Τότε κορυφώνεται τὸ πάθος του, γιὰτὶ πλήττεται ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος σ' ὅλα τὰ ἐπίπεδα τῆς ὑπάρξεώς του.

Ὁ Θεὸς ἐγκαταλείπει τὸν ἄνθρωπο;... Εἶναι δυνατὸ αὐτό;

Κι ἐν τούτοις στὴ θέση τοῦ βιώματος τῆς ἐγγύτητος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔρχεται στὴν ψυχὴ τὸ αἶσθημα πὼς Ἐκεῖνος εἶναι ἀπείρως, ἀπροσίτως μακριά, πέρα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀστρικοὺς κόσμους κι ὅλες οἱ ἐπικλήσεις πρὸς Αὐτὸν χάνονται ἀβοήθητες στὸ ἀχανὲς τοῦ κοσμικοῦ διαστήματος. Ἡ ψυχὴ ἐντείνει ἐσωτερικὰ τὴν κραυγὴ τῆς πρὸς Αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ δὲν βλέπει ἀκόμα οὔτε βοήθεια ΟΥΤΕ προσοχὴ. Ὅλα τότε γίνονται φορτικά.

Ὅλα κατορθώνονται μὲ δυσανάλογα μεγάλο κόπο. Ἡ ζωὴ γεμίζει ἀπὸ μόχθους κι ἀναδεύει μέσα στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸ αἶσθημα πὼς βαραίνει πάνω του ἡ κατάρα καὶ ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅταν ὁμως περάσουν αὐτὲς οἱ δοκιμασίες, τότε θὰ δεῖ πὼς ἡ θαυμαστὴ πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν φύλαγε προσεκτικὰ σ' ὅλες τὶς πτυχὲς τῆς ζωῆς του.

Χιλιόχρονη πείρα, ποὺ παραδίνεται ἀπὸ γενιὰ σὲ γενιὰ, λέει πὼς, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς δεῖ τὴν πίστη τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀγωνιστῆ γι' Αὐτόν, ὅπως εἶδε τὴν πίστη τοῦ Ἰώβ, τότε τὸν ὀδηγεῖ σὲ ἀβύσσους καὶ ὕψη ποὺ εἶναι ἀπρόσιτα σ' ἄλλους.

Ὅσο πληρέστερη καὶ ἰσχυρότερη εἶναι ἡ πίστη καὶ ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸ θεό, τόσο μεγαλύτερο θὰ εἶναι καὶ τὸ μέτρο τῆς δοκιμασίας καὶ ἡ πληρότητα τῆς πείρας, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ φτάσει σὲ μεγάλο βαθμό. Καὶ τότε γίνεται ὀλοφάνερο πὼς ἔφτασε στὰ ὄρια, ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ξεπεράσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος.



Τὸ κακὸ ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὶς κακὲς σκέψεις. Ὅταν πικραίνεσαι καὶ ἀγανακτεῖς, ἔστω μόνο μὲ τὴ σκέψη, χαλᾶς ὅλη τὴν πνευματικὴ σου ἀτμόσφαιρα. Ἐμποδίζεις τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα νὰ ἐνεργήσῃ, καὶ ἔτσι ἐπιτρέπεις στὸ διάβολο νὰ μεγαλώσῃ τὸ κακὸ. Ἐσὺ πάντοτε νὰ προσεύχεσαι, νὰ ἀγαπᾶς καὶ νὰ συγχωρεῖς, διώχνοντας ἀπὸ μέσα σου κάθε κακὸ λογισμό.

Ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι ταραγμένη, θολώνει τὸ λογικὸ καὶ δὲ βλέπει καθαρά. Μόνο, ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι ἤρεμη, φωτίζει τὸ λογικὸ, γιὰ νὰ βλέπει καθαρὰ τὴν αἰτία κάθε πράγματος.

Ὅι ἀσθένειες μᾶς βγάζουν σὲ καλὸ, ὅταν τὶς ὑπομένουμε ἀγόγγυστα, παρακαλώντας τὸ Θεὸ νὰ μᾶς συγχωρήσῃ τὶς ἁμαρτίες καὶ δοξάζοντας τὸ ὄνομά Του.

Ὅταν προσεύχεσαι, νὰ ξεχνᾶς τὴν σωματικὴ σου ἀρρώστια, νὰ τὴν ἀποδέχεσαι σὰν κανόνα, σὰν ἐπιτίμιο, γιὰ τὴν ἄφεση τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σου. Γιὰ τὰ παραπέρα μὴν ἀνησυχεῖς, ἄφησέ τα στὸ Θεὸ κι ὁ Θεὸς ξέρει τὴ δουλειά Του.

Ὅσιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης



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

JUSTICE DELAYED IS JUSTICE DENIED: OUR ORTHODOX BROTHER ON DEATH ROW.

JUDICIAL WARFARE. FRANK ATWOOD AND THE VICKI LYNN HOSKINSON STORY

By the friends and supporters of Anthony (Frank) Atwood, see <https://justiceforfrankatwood.com/>.

The sudden disappearance and subsequent murder of 8 year old Vicki Lynn Hoskinson in 1984 stimulated intense hysteria in Tucson, Arizona, and Frank J. Atwood, a drug addled parolee from out of state, spotted near the scene of the crime, was a prosecutor's dream. Presumed guilty before the trial even began and persecuted in the media, the 1987 trial and sentencing were mere formalities in sending Frank to prison.

Once on death row Anthony began helping his attorney to prepare his Arizona Supreme Court appeal. As bad as the trial court proceedings went, the appellate litigation also concluded in disaster. The hoped-for objective review was an exercise in madness; the court even managed to convict Anthony on a charge never brought before the state court.

Next came the post-conviction relief (PCR) proceedings where evidence not previously discovered and presented

could be raised in the trial court. Things looked hopeful but went terribly wrong. Anthony's PCR attorney learned that government experts had deceived his trial attorney and things only went downhill from there.

Years rolled by when, in 2003, an engineering expert, David Hill, began to study the FBI and Pima County Sheriff's office photography. What he learned was staggering. The sole alleged link between Anthony and the victim was a smear of pink bicycle paint on Frank's car bumper (police theorizing that the car hit the bike). Mr. Hill uncovered proof that evidence of this occurrence was fabricated by authorities and that no other corroborating evidence existed.

Ultimately, the case went to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, but the same sordid judicial absurdity also visited these proceedings; the appeal denial came in rapid time and Frank was once again denied justice.

Anthony is currently pursuing an "ineffective assistance of counsel" claim against his attorneys for not submitting the U.S. Supreme Court petition on time, losing his final chance for appeal, and other legal missteps.

Details of the case reside at www.thefrankatwoodstory.gr and your visit is highly recommended. You can also sign up for our newsletter with updates on Frank's case at: www.justiceforfrankatwood.com. Please read on to find out how Eastern Orthodoxy changed Frank's life.

Introduction to Rebirth in Orthodoxy

Frank Jarvis Atwood (now baptized, "Anthony" in the Orthodox Church) was born on January 29, 1956 in Los Angeles to an Army General and a socialite from Austria. By all accounts, he enjoyed an advantageous childhood. He was raised in the Episcopal Church (serving as an acolyte and singing in the choir), learned morality, and excelled in football and baseball leagues. God surely blessed him but, while attending military school in 1970 and preparing to attend West Point, Anthony drifted toward drugs and was suspended. Ashamed and expelled, shortly thereafter he was kidnapped and sexually assaulted.

Ensuant PTSD went untreated and a struggling-to-cope teen engaged in criminal and radical countercultural conduct. Of course, years of incarceration resulted.

Having departed Episcopalianism, Anthony involved

himself in eastern belief systems, tarot, and astrology; but God never left him. Whether dealing with minor brushes with the law, Christian teachers, and more and more serious criminal court experiences, the grace of God remained.

Anthony ultimately abandoned Christ fully, operating a multi-state drug ring and committing countless robberies. While Frank was certainly on the wrong side of the law, he was wrongfully arrested in 1984, convicted and received a sentence of death in 1987—for a murder he did not commit. The classic case of "wrong place, wrong time."

God's Providence

It took years for Anthony to accept such an unfair course of events as a blessing from God. He initially sought to normalize his situation by enrolling in college courses while working at redeveloping a loving relationship with his parents. (Following God's example of unconditional love, they remained loyal to their son.) As God's Providence stirred within, Anthony determined to rededicate his life in obedience to Christ in January of 1998.

His involvement in Western, Protestant Christianity fanned the flames of desire for God, but over the next decade, Anthony remained spiritually unfulfilled. He continued his schoolwork—earning two Associates degrees, a Pre-Law English Bachelors (at Ohio University), and a Masters in Literature (from Cal State at Dominquez Hills).



One day Anthony glanced at a magazine and noticed an ad for a book on “mystical” Christianity. Protestantism’s intellectual/scholastic emphasis left Anthony hungry for something “within,” so he ordered and read the book. He later contacted the author for more information and was able to contact one of the book’s protagonists, an Athonite monk serving in Cyprus as a Bishop. A blossoming relationship unfolded and Anthony learned that God’s allowance of such secular justice (i.e., wrongful capital murder conviction) was a sign of God’s Providence.

Bishop Athanasios soon invited Anthony to come home to the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and Frank was on the road to converting to Eastern Orthodoxy.

In addition to sending books on lives of the saints which presented an accurate depiction of authentic Greek Orthodox life, the Bishop also sent a number of works by other theologians—e.g., Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (of Nafpaktos, Greece), Father John Romanides and Archimandrite Sophrony. These books stimulated much discourse and introspection.

While his Episcopalian upbringing provided a bit of familiarity with Greek Orthodoxy (the Symbol of Faith/the Nicene Creed, praying to the saints, etc.), Anthony still had to “unlearn” many of Western Protestantism’s falsehoods.

The books lovingly sent by the Bishop infused within him a wealth of invaluable instruction, but his curiosity compelled him to pose many questions and in return, Anthony received his first true teachings in Orthodoxy.

Frank learned lessons on what the One, Holy and Apostolic Church, established by the Lord Jesus Christ in the first century, has always believed... the distinction between studying the true word of God and how it differs from the West’s practice of believers simply developing their own ideas on scriptural meanings.

Eventually it became clear that Anthony was ready for local spiritual guidance and so he reached out to the Abbot of St. Anthony’s Monastery in Florence, Arizona; he would soon receive his teachings personally from Geronda Paisios who visited him at the prison.

Life in Orthodoxy

The 1988 interaction with Bishop Athanasios led Anthony to read about the lives of the saints and other Greek Orthodox material. Geronda Paisios began visiting every other week and baptized “Anthony” in 2000.

God’s Providence assisted Anthony in his struggle toward purification under the guidance of his monastic, spiritual father and as years passed Anthony penned several books (see, www.churchfathertheology.com). Most recently an autobiography of he and his wife was published by a Cypriot Monastery. It is called “And the Two Shall Become One” and is available at Amazon.com: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1985391058/>.

Anthony also continued his studies, earning a theology degree from St. Stephen’s Seminary and is currently pursuing a doctorate in theology. The changes everyone has observed in Anthony is clear evidence of the glory of God’s Providence.

While obedience under the Abbot underlined the difference from the Western philosophy where one decides on one’s own scriptural interpretations, it also highlighted heretical Protestant concepts like:

1. Baptism as merely a public declaration of belief (as opposed to an actual death, burial, and resurrection with the Lord) or
2. Divine Liturgy being simply a symbolic remembrance of Christ’s work on the Cross (thus, not the literal partaking of the Lord’s Body and Blood), or
3. The belief in “eternal security” which teaches the acceptance of Jesus provides an everlasting salvation that cannot be lost (not the ongoing process of salvation).

At times, such drastic differences were disconcerting, however, to work out his own salvation via obedience to the Abbot became second nature to Anthony. This provided a sense of purpose and direction, and revealed God’s Providence in allowing the radical worldly injustice in the courts... Truly, “Anthony was Home!”

Anthony continues to gratefully accept God’s Providence, and if God’s will is for him to perish by lethal injection he will obediently embrace that as well. Given judicial abuses, flaws by lawyers and other perceived injustices, Anthony’s spiritual father instructed him to continue his spiritual struggle.

Because Anthony has run out of legal options, we are helping him take this struggle to the media. We are reaching out to five important people for assistance who have a history of dealing with cases like Anthony’s and seek the corresponding support of Orthodox brethren worldwide:

- (a) Rick Halperin: news@smu.edu (SMU law professor)
- (b) Lupita Murillo: lmurillo@kvoa.com (KVOA Tucson journalist)
- (c) Jeffrey Toobin: (New Yorker Magazine writer) <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyToobinAuthor>
- (d) Maria Menounos (Greek Orthodox television personality) <http://mariamemounos.com/contact-me/>
- (e) Alan Dershowitz (Attorney, Harvard law professor) dersh@law.harvard.edu

Please familiarize yourself with the case facts at the above websites and then contact these individuals to encourage their involvement (Please copy john@justiceforfrankatwood.com with all correspondence. He can also be reached directly at (917) 740-5417).

This would be immensely appreciated.

In the meantime, during this Holy Great Lent and the forthcoming festive days of Holy Pascha, please keep Anthony in your prayers. He will be praying for you.

THEOLOGICAL LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, from "Hesychia and Theology," edited from length.

In the life of St. Mary of Egypt, the greatness of her personality is evident, as is the power of God's grace, which brought her to new birth through the wretched state she was in. Let us undertake a brief analysis of ten theological points that can be identified in the life of St. Mary of Egypt.

1. The Gift of Baptism

St. Mary of Egypt was baptized at an early age, and after Baptism she sunk into a dissolute life. She herself confessed to Abba Zosimas: "I am a sinful woman, but I have been walled about by Holy Baptism." She sinned as a baptized Christian, and made the members of Christ into members of fornication. This gift of Baptism, however, made it possible for her, through the baptism of repentance, to return to Christ, and for her members to become members of the Body of Christ.

The Baptism that we receive as infants is called the washing of regeneration, because through it we are born again into a new life. By Baptism we are restored to the state that Adam was in before he sinned. It is a gift of the Church to enable us to cast off the garments of skin, our corruption and mortality, and to be lifted up spiritually. St. Athanasius calls Baptism, *a planting for eternal life*. St. Basil regards it as *a chariot to heaven, the cause of our acquiring the kingdom, the gift of adoption*.

Baptism is actually the spiritual vaccination that we receive as infants so that, when we grow up, we can of our own free will vanquish sin, the devil and death. This does not mean that we are deprived of the great privilege of freedom, a gift that God gave us at our creation. Since we do not forfeit our freedom, we can choose to sin even after Baptism, and still have the potential to deny God. According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Baptism does not take away our free will or freedom of choice, but gives us the freedom no longer to be tyrannised by the devil unless we choose to be*.

It is good that we receive Baptism at an early age because, without depriving us of our freedom, it gives us the possibility, if we so choose, truly to become members of the Body of Christ.

2. The Grace of Repentance

St. Mary of Egypt's repentance came about through God's grace and the blessing of the Holy Mother of God, and was expressed with great intensity. She denied the world absolutely, renounced all the wishes of the carnal 'old man,' and transformed all the powers of her body and soul. By so doing she not only activated the grace of Baptism, but also lived the blessed state of deification.

St. Mary of Egypt lived in an extreme form something that many of the ascetic fathers of the desert experienced. They

would hear a word, either directly from the presence of God as revelation, or from the Elders, and then they would go deep into the desert in order to live this word for the rest of their lives. Every word of revelation has great energy and many years of ascetic effort are required to make it a living reality by God's grace. This happened in the case of St. Mary of Egypt. For forty-seven years she struggled to put into practice the word of revelation that she heard in the Church in Jerusalem, and to assimilate the experience of grace that she was granted through the veneration of the Precious Cross and the voice of the Holy Mother of God. This too came about by the energy of that word.

We can also discern various expressions of self-accusation in her speech. She feels ashamed of her deeds; she regards herself as a snake because of her former life; she calls herself dissolute, "a sinful woman" and "a woman bare of all virtue."

Man has free-will, and God Who gave it to him does not take it away. Nor does He deprive him of the gift of Holy Baptism. Man therefore has the potential, on account of passions, death and corruption, but also as a result of attacks of temptation, to commit sin. The grace of Holy Baptism does not then abandon him completely, but remains in the innermost recesses of his heart, hidden by passions and sins.

Repentance comes about by man's cooperation with the grace of God. It activates the grace of Holy Baptism, which is present in the depths of the heart and is hidden by passions. This is why the service of monastic tonsure, which is an expression of repentance, is called *a second Baptism*. Repentance is man's return from the unnatural state of the loss of communion with God, to the natural or supernatural state of progressing from the divine image to the divine likeness.

St. John of the Ladder has some amazing words to show the great value of repentance: *Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so*. He explains these daring words by saying that Baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, whereas repentance, the second baptism, washes away sins committed after baptism.

Repentance is a gift of the Holy Spirit and can be activated in man because the grace of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation is within him. St. Nicholas Kavalas writes that we receive the grace of Chrismation together with Baptism, but we perceive its effect later, when we want to live a godly life and repent of the deeds that we have done. He writes that for some people the gift of Holy Chrismation manifests itself later through repentance and a change in their way of life: *Some have subsequently repented and bewailed the sins which they have committed and live according to right reason, and so have given proof of the grace that has been infused into their souls*.

It follows that St. Mary of Egypt's repentance and tears were the action of Holy Chrismation, as was her victory over corruption and mortality.

3. The Experience of the Mystery of the Cross

St. Mary of Egypt's miraculous change of direction came about when she went into the Church in Jerusalem *in which the life-giving wood of the Cross was being displayed*. When she had been prevented three or four times from entering the Church, she finally realized that the reason why she was prevented *from seeing the life-giving wood was the filth of her deeds*. She felt profound repentance and prayed to the Holy Mother of God to count her worthy to venerate the Precious Wood of the Cross, and promised that, if this were granted, she would then change her life. She would never again do anything to insult her flesh, and would leave the world and everything in it. Among other things, she prayed, *Allow me to see the wood on which the God you bore in the flesh was crucified, Who gave His own blood as a ransom for me*. Then she besought the Holy Mother of God, *Command, O Sovereign Lady, that the door to the sacred veneration of the Cross may be opened also to me, and I offer you to God your Son as a trustworthy guarantor, that I shall never again insult my flesh through shameful intercourse, but as soon as I have seen the wood of the Cross of your Son, I shall at once renounce the world and everything in it, and will immediately go wherever you, as the guarantor of my salvation, shall advise and lead me*.

After that she entered the Church without hindrance and reached the sanctuary. She was granted *the life-giving sight of the Cross, beheld the mysteries of God* and realized how ready God was to accept her repentance. Then she threw herself down and venerated that holy ground. She made a promise before the Holy Mother of God that she would fulfil the terms of her pledge. Afterwards, as we have seen, she went into the desert at the bidding of the Holy Mother of God, to wage the ascetic struggle for the purification of her passions and for her sanctification.

We see from this that St. Mary of Egypt venerated the Precious Cross in a state of spiritual inspiration, and through its power she lived the mystery of the Cross in her personal life, by struggling against thoughts and carnal desires. This was linked with the *theoria* of uncreated Light. There is a very close connection between the Cross and the Resurrection. In patristic theology this is called *living the mystery of the Cross*.

4. Sharing in God's Deifying Energy

St. Mary of Egypt's experience of the mystery of Christ's Cross and Resurrection was closely connected with her participation in the deifying energy of God. We see this vividly in her whole life: in her unceasing prayer, in the vision she beheld of uncreated Light and in her experience of continuous communion with God. Thus she attained to the goal of her existence, which was not to lead a moral life based on humanistic principles, but to be deified.

In the teaching of the Fathers of the Church we discover the theological truth that God's uncreated energy *is indivisibly divided into divisions and inseparably separated into separate parts*, and takes various names according to the results it produces.

The saints and angels share in the deifying energy of God. The energy of God that helps man along his path to deification is also known by other names, such as purifying energy, which purifies his heart from passions; illuminating energy, which illuminates his nous; and deifying energy, which deifies man, through the vision of the uncreated Light.

According to the teaching of the Church, man was created by God *in His image and after His likeness*. The divine image refers to man's nous and free will, whereas the divine likeness refers to his communion with God, his deification. **Deification is the vision of uncreated Light, which constitutes man's communion with God**. It follows that man has within him the necessary powers for this journey to deification and for fulfilling the purpose of his creation.

Because man fell into sin and put on the garments of skin (corruption and mortality), a new method was needed to attain this goal. This came about through Christ's incarnation, when He voluntarily assumed a body subject to death and suffering, in order to vanquish death and make it possible for man too to be victorious over it, through the power of Christ.

According to the teaching of our Church, Christ became man in order to deify human nature. Since then, by means of the deified human nature that came about in the hypostasis of the Word, anyone who partakes of the divine and human Body of Christ through the Sacraments and Christian asceticism can be deified. According to St. Maximos the Confessor, man's deification is very closely linked with Christ's incarnation. He writes characteristically: *He makes man god by grace to the same degree as God Himself became man by nature according to the divine Economy*.

However sinful a man may be, whatever state he may be in, however low he may have fallen, he can partake of the deifying energy of God, provided he co-operates with the energy of divine grace. Men participate in deification to many different degrees. Those who have been purified from the passions share in deification *through their exalted and noetic concentration upon the divine*. Others *perfected in virtue by purification through their divine intelligence and through sacred intercourse with God, participate according to their proficiency and the degree of their purification in the same deification as their brethren, and they commune with them in the God of unity*.

5. The Suspension of Bodily Energies

In the life of St. Mary of Egypt we clearly see the effects of her deification. These include the suspension of her bodily energies, as demonstrated by the fact that she did not take nourishment; the transformation of her body so that she could endure changes in her environment; the ability to cover long distances in a short space of time; the elevation of her body above the ground while praying; and walking on water, as we saw in the summary of her biography in the first part of the chapter.

Body and soul are linked. When the soul is subjected to the body, it becomes carnal, but when the body is under the

influence of a soul that has the gift of the Holy Spirit, the body is remade accordingly and is hallowed.

In patristic teaching it is clear that the body is reformed in the course of deification. During theoria all the bodily energies are suspended, including the instinct for self-preservation, the digestive process, and all the functions of the fallen body. We see this in the lives of the Prophets and Apostles, as described in the books of the Old and New Testaments.

According to St. Makarios of Egypt, as the body of Christ was glorified when He climbed Mount Tabor, “so also the bodies of the saints are glorified and shine like lightning”. According to St. Symeon the New Theologian, when, through many labours and ascetic efforts, a man rises above the needs of the body, “he carries it round with him as a light weight. It is like a spiritual body, and is neither tired nor hungry nor thirsty”, and he reaches the point of divine vision. According to St. Nikitas Stithatos, when someone repents and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, serenity, peace and silence enter his body. Then his body “becomes full of a new power, a new vigour, a new spiritual strength”. In the Gerontikon we come across many such examples, such as the occasion when someone encountered Abba Silouanos “and saw his face and body radiant like an angel’s, and fell to the ground”.

In the course of man’s regeneration the body is illuminated by the soul. Just as the removal of God’s grace from the soul also affects the body, so the soul’s participation in uncreated grace is transmitted to the body too, because soul and body are closely interrelated. Someone who has been reborn acquires an experience of man’s state before the Fall, and also of eschatological life, the life of the saints in the Kingdom of God.

6. The Action of Holy Communion

As we see from the life written by St. Sophronios of Jerusalem, St. Mary of Egypt partook of the Body and Blood of Christ after venerating the Precious Cross, and then devoted herself to a life of total repentance in the desert. Finally she was counted worthy, after forty-seven years of repentance, to partake again of the Body and Blood of Christ, and to depart that same day to God. Asceticism is inseparable from Holy Communion, from eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ.

It is significant that St. Mary of Egypt reached the place where Abba Zosimas was waiting for her by walking on the water of the River Jordan, and left after Holy Communion in the same manner. Immediately after Holy Communion, however, she covered in one hour a distance that should have taken twenty days, and died in the place where she experienced her resurrection and ascension.

The ascetics ascribe great importance to Holy Communion, because according to Christ’s words, no one can live without *eating His Body and drinking His Blood*. (Jn 6:53). Abba Pomen says that, just as a deer living in the desert eats many snakes, is burnt by their poison, and so desires springs of water, so it is for monks: *In the desert, they are burned by the*

poison of the demons and they long for Saturday and Sunday to come so that they can go to the springs of water, that is, to the Body and Blood of the Lord, to be purified from the poison of the evil one.

Holy Communion, however, does not act on man unconditionally. Certain conditions must be met if the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ is to act in a purifying, illuminating and deifying way, and not punitively. Christ acts according to a person’s state. Sometimes He purifies him, sometimes He illuminates, and at other times He deifies. **There are, however, circumstances in which He burns him up.**

The gift of the Holy Spirit is also received by other means, such as through prayer, repentance, obedience and doing God’s will. According to St. Dionysios the Areopagite, *Our greatest likeness to and union with God is the goal of our hierarchy. But divine scripture teaches us that we will only attain this through the most loving observance of the august commandments and by the doing of sacred acts.*

In the case of St. Mary of Egypt, the action of Holy Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, with the blessing, protection and assistance of the Holy Mother of God, remained within St. Mary for forty-seven years. Through her heroic asceticism and prayer this energy stayed constantly within her and brought about the deification of her soul and her body. It kept her in a state of intense spiritual inspiration. Her penitence, together with the action of the Holy Communion changed her *nous*, gave her great inspiration and energy, and imbued her with intense longing for God. This energy governed her entire being for forty-seven whole years. We see this from the fact that towards the end of her life she went to take Holy Communion walking on the water of the River Jordan. **She was already in a state of deification.**

In her case the words of St. John of the Ladder apply absolutely, when he says that he saw impure souls prone to carnal desires, who, having made their experience of sinful love a reason for repentance, *transferred the same love to the Lord; and, overcoming all fear, they drove themselves unsparingly towards the love of God*. Divine love transformed her existence, and again the words of St. John of the Ladder hold true: *Blessed is he who has obtained such love and longing for God as an enraptured lover has for his beloved*. He who truly loves *ever keeps before his mind’s eye the face of his beloved, and there embraces it tenderly*. Such a man can find no rest from his yearning even in sleep. In this state, the whole man is commingled in some way *with the love of God*.

When St. Mary of Egypt reached the end of her life, she was possessed by the desire that had been kindled by her profound experience after God’s revelation and Holy Communion. She was full of the energy and love of God, and when she partook again, a second time, of the Body of Christ, she was led into the uncreated Temple, the Kingdom of God, of which she had a foretaste in this life.

7. The Gift of a Blessed End

St. Mary of Egypt's entire way of life was the fruit of her communion with Christ, the true Life, and so it was a triumph over death. Her departure from this world was also worthy of her life. Completely out of sight, alone with Christ the Bridegroom, she surrendered her soul to Him for love of Whom she had followed such a hard path. The more someone loves, the more he endures and undergoes sacrifices and labours. All these things are the distinctive characteristics of love and intense longing for God.

Abba Zosimas obeyed the Saint's request that he visit her the following year in the place where he met her the first time, at the dried-up stream. When the Elder reached there, he saw *the Saint lying dead, with her hands placed as was fitting, and lying in such a way as to look towards the East*. While the Abba was wondering whether St. Mary would want her body to be buried, he found near her head a message inscribed by her in the earth. In it she asked Abba Zosimas to bury her body and told him that she had reached the end of her life the night before the saving Passion of Christ, after partaking of the divine and Mystical Supper. Then the Abba, *running to the feet of the Blessed One, washed them with his tears, not daring to touch any other part*.

These are all signs of a holy end. The Saint passed away after partaking of the Most Pure Mysteries in a state of deification. She had foreknowledge of her death, gave verbal and written instructions, arranged the position of her body so as to be facing east, crossed her hands, and remained in this state for a whole year, in an incorrupt form, because Abba Zosimas could recognise her and embrace her feet with tears.

At her burial, apart from Abba Zosimas, there was a lion, which stood next to her body and licked her feet. St. Sophronios writes that Abba Zosimas *saw a large lion standing by the body of the Saint, licking her feet*. At the command of Abba Zosimas, the lion dug a hole in the ground so that St. Mary could be buried. Then the Abba covered her body with earth, weeping and praying, *with the lion standing by*.

It was a burial full of contrition and silence. God's grace was in the dead body of St. Mary, the saintly monk Zosimas was in a state of deepest contrition, the lion watched silently and helped significantly with the burial, and the whole creation revered this event. The grace of God was transmitted through the *nous* of the Saint to her body, and from there it extended to irrational creation as well.

8. The Blessed Figure of Abba Zosimas

In the life of St. Mary of Egypt, Abba Zosimas plays an important role. He is described by the hymnographer as *the greatest of Fathers*. Of course the central figure is St. Mary, who by God's grace healed the whole of her previous life through her great love for God, and transformed her being. But the one who discovered her, to whom she revealed her life, who gave her Holy Communion, and who buried her, is also worthy of honour. **Saints are recognized by saints.**

On reading this life we are moved by the personality of Abba Zosimas. We can discern many qualities and spiritual gifts in him, such as his zeal and longing, his humility, sensitivity and tenderness. Only a saint can recognise a saint, and St. Mary revealed herself and her life only to this holy man.

St. Sophronios writes that Abba Zosimas had waged the monastic struggle from early childhood. *His way of life and his words were a credit to him*, and he had devoted himself to every kind of asceticism. He was *a spiritual Elder*, and many people used to ask him about spiritual matters. He lived a life of praxis but also of theoria, *continuously singing psalms and studying the sacred Scriptures*, and had often been found worthy of *divine visions*.

God revealed St. Mary of Egypt to him because he was being troubled by proud thoughts. First God prompted him to go to the monastery beside the Jordan, where he found monks living the hesychastic life in every respect. *He saw Elders radiant in praxis and theoria*, especially during Great Lent. Later God revealed St. Mary to him, and he was humbled to see how exalted her spiritual state was.

When the Abba saw St. Mary in the distance, without realizing exactly what he was seeing, *he was, as it were, inspired by delight and overjoyed at the incredible sight, and he started running in the direction towards which the person he saw was hastening*. Zosimas was running, she was avoiding the encounter, and *they were both running to the same place*. The Abba besought her with tears and cries to stop so that he could see exactly who it was.

At this first meeting *awe and ecstasy of mind took hold of Zosimas*. He knelt down and *asked for a blessing as was customary, but she too prostrated herself*. When he saw St. Mary praying lifted up above the ground, anguish seized him *and he said 'Lord have mercy' over and over again to himself as he lay on the ground*. Later *he flung himself down and tearfully grasped her feet*. As he listened to the account of how she repented, Zosimas *rushed to make a prostration*, but St. Mary would not let him. When St. Mary left, the Abba *knelt down and venerated the place where her feet had stood, and glorifying and thanking God*, he returned to the monastery.

The Abba spent the whole year until that next meeting in *hesychia*, enraptured by what he had seen, and *he entreated God within himself to show him that dear face again*. He was impatient at having to wait so long. Obviously Abba Zosimas was in an ecstatic state as he awaited his next meeting with the Saint.

After a year, when he went out to meet St. Mary and she was late in arriving, Abba Zosimas *did not take his eyes off the desert as he waited to see what he so desired to see*. As time passed the Elder *began to weep, then to sigh, and raising his eyes to heaven he entreated God not to deprive him of this meeting on account of his sins*. When he saw her walking on the water he was *terrified*. As the account tells us, *he was seized by astonishment at the extraordinary sight*.

When he had given her Holy Communion and she was preparing to depart, Abba Zosimas said to her with simplicity: *Would that it were possible to follow you and always see your venerable face.* She asked him to bless her, and the Abba *touched the Saint's feet and asked her to pray for the Church, the empire and for himself. Then, sighing and lamenting, he let her depart.*

He looked forward all the following year to seeing the Saint again, and hastened to reach *that extraordinary sight.* When he arrived at the appointed place and did not meet her, *he began to weep once more* and besought God to show him *Your [i.e. God's] inviolate treasure, the angel incarnate.* Having found her dead, he cried for a long time, then *he recited the psalms appropriate to the time and the occasion, and said the funeral prayers.* In the presence of the lion, as we have seen already, *the Elder again washed the Saint's feet with his tears, and earnestly entreating her now more than ever to pray for everyone, he covered her body with earth.*

All this clearly reveals the spiritual state of Abba Zosimas, because nobody can recognise a saint unless he too has God's grace. We also see his sensitivity and tenderness of spirit. Through this revelation God cured his proud thoughts and he was humbled before the superiority of St. Mary, the former harlot.

9. Overcoming the Division between the Sexes

As we read the life of St. Mary of Egypt, we see the spiritual relationship and communication between three persons: St. Mary, who had formerly been a dissolute woman but attained deification; Abba Zosimas, the saintly hieromonk; and Patriarch Sophronios of Jerusalem, who described St. Mary's life with such love. We also observe the spiritual encounter between Abba Zosimas and St. Mary. Thus we become aware of the spiritual phenomenon whereby gender is transcended through deification [*theosis*].

St. Mary of Egypt actually demonstrated an astonishing manliness in her ascetic life. She practiced asceticism beyond the limits not only of female nature, but of human nature in general, and became like an angel in human form. Carnal lusts were transformed by the intensity of longing for God and wholly dedicated to Him. Because she was living in a state of deification, although her body was naked she was not ashamed. She had attained to the condition of Eve in Paradise before the Fall.

Nevertheless, she was not bold when she met Abba Zosimas. Since the Abba wanted to see her face, she asked him to throw her a rag from his clothing, so that she could cover her natural frailty and thus receive his blessing. Her actual words to him were, *I am a woman and naked, as you see, and the shame of my body is uncovered. But if you really want to give a sinful woman your blessing, throw me the rag you are wearing, that I may use it to conceal my female frailty, and turn towards you to be blessed.*

Abba Zosimas immediately discerned God's grace dwelling within the Saint. Her face was radiant and she was lifted above

the ground while she was praying. He responded swiftly (lest he forfeit her blessing) to the Saint's request that he throw her at least a rag. Having taken off his ancient and torn garment, *he threw it to her, standing with his back towards her.* Once St. Mary had put on the garment and covered *those parts of her body that particularly needed to be covered,* she turned and spoke to him.

By the power of Christ, both of them had transcended the 'divisions' and were living as persons. Their experience reflected in some respects the life of Adam and Eve in Paradise, but, because they were still subject to corruption and mortality, they behaved soberly, modestly, and without boldness.

St. Maximos the Confessor speaks in his works about five divisions: between uncreated and created, between that which is perceived by the nous and that perceived by the senses, between heaven and earth, between Paradise and the inhabited world, and between male and female. Overcoming these divisions was possible for human nature, because it was related to the extremities of each division. It was linked to the earth by the body, to perceptible objects by the senses, to the spiritual world by the soul, and to the uncreated energy of God by the nous.

Man would gradually have made his way upwards, starting by overcoming the division between male and female. This would have come about through the dispassionate relationship between the two sexes. Subsequently, by means of a holy and virtuous life, he would have transcended the division between Paradise and the world. Through living like an angel he would have transcended the division between heaven and earth. By achieving equality with the angels in his manner of knowing he would have overcome the division between the world perceived by the senses and that perceived by the nous, and through love he would have been united with God and have overcome the division between created and uncreated nature.

In the power of Christ and by his own struggle to commune with God in the Person of Jesus Christ, man can now transcend these divisions. We can see this in the relationship between St. Mary of Egypt and Abba Zosimas. Both of them were in communion with Christ to differing degrees. Both were deified, and so had overcome the division between male and female, and they behaved as brother and sister in Christ. However, since they had not yet discarded the garments of skin—bodily corruption and mortality—and were afraid of being too bold, they behaved with mutual respect.

10. The Coexistence of Sacramental and Spiritual Priesthood

There is another interesting point to be stressed in the life of St. Mary of Egypt. Both St. Sophronios, as a holy Bishop, and Abba Zosimas, as a saintly hieromonk, greatly revered St. Mary, who had attained deification by grace and had become *a true sanctuary of divine grace.* The blessed sacramental priesthood respected the spiritual priesthood, and the spiritual

priesthood of St. Mary revered the sacramental priesthood of Abba Zosimas.

The sacramental priesthood is a ministry that serves the faithful who are in the created temple and offer their prayers through created worship, in order that they may one day enter the uncreated Temple and pray in uncreated worship. The spiritual priesthood, however, ministers in the uncreated Temple and prays through noetic and uncreated worship.

Both Abba Zosimas and St. Mary of Egypt were such priests of divine grace, as was also St. Sophronios of Jerusalem, who wrote this life in contrition of spirit. St. Mary had absolute reverence for the priesthood of Abba Zosimas and asked for his prayers, and Abba Zosimas knelt humbly before the Saint, venerated the place where she had been standing and sought her prayers.

The life of St. Mary of Egypt is amazing and full of extraordinary acts wrought by God's grace. The main thing this life shows is the twofold love of that blessed woman, St. Mary. There is her former impure love for men, and her hallowed, spiritual and divine love for God. It is the latter that is more significant. From her youth up she was completely given over to carnal desire, and afterwards she acquired intense love for God and devoted herself wholly to Him. She lived a quiet and hidden life, because great loves are secret and unutterable, since there are no words to express them. Anyone who loves God and is possessed by this *sharp and unbearable longing* for God is entirely given over to Him, because he does not want to share his heart among many loves.

The Church has chosen St. Mary of Egypt as a model of a life of inspired repentance, spiritual struggle and progress towards deification. In her, we see how someone can change from a sinner into a saint through participation in the purifying, illuminating and [glorifying] deifying energy of God. Her commemoration is celebrated on 1st April each year, the day of her glorious repose. However, because of the importance of the life she led, the Church has also appointed that her feast be celebrated on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent, the last Sunday before Holy Week. In this way the Church wishes to demonstrate the measure and degree of our love for God and the manner of repentance.

Anyone who reads this life has a vivid sense of what happens at the end, after the burial of the blessed and hallowed body of St. Mary of Egypt. St. Sophronios writes: *Then both of them departed. The lion went back into the depths of the desert like a lamb. Zosimas returned, blessing and praising Christ our God.*

In accordance with these words, let us too either depart like sheep into the desert of hesychia and dispassion, casting off the ferocity of the passions; or else let us go back like Zosimas to the community of the brethren, blessing and praising God.

With the saintly hymnographer we proclaim:

Thee we have as a pattern of repentance, all-holy Mary; pray to Christ that this gift may be conferred upon us: to praise thee in our hymns with faith and love.

CHRIST IS RISEN

A Paschal Epistle By Metropolitan St. Philaret of New York (+1985).

It is the Day of Resurrection, let us be radiant O ye people; Pascha, the Lord's Pascha: for from death to life, and earth to heaven, Christ God hath brought us, as we chant the hymn of victory.

† † †

Thus sings the Holy Church in the words of Saint John of Damascus during the festal days of Holy Pascha. The great and holy days of Passion Week, days in which the Church commemorated the saving work and sufferings of the incarnate Son of God, which He deigned to take upon Himself in His incarnation—for the sake of us men and of our salvation...

All the services of Passion Week, moving and deeply edifying, are devoted to this holy remembrance. In celebrating these services, the Church as it were, follows step by step Her Lord and Savior and prayerfully, sorrowfully, and gratefully hymns each step, each moment of His redemptive sufferings in corresponding prayers, liturgical ceremonies, and performance of the mysteries.

But Passion Week has ended! Once, in our Homeland, Archbishop Innocent of Kherson, one of the splendid preachers of which there were many in Russia, in his inspired sermon on the day of Great Friday, the day of the sufferings on the Cross and the death of Christ the Savior, exclaimed: *Again Golgotha and the Cross! Again the Tomb and the Winding-sheet.* But behold, we see that the Tomb is empty and the Winding-sheet no longer covers anyone. Christ is Risen—and taking the place of grief and sadness has come that joy that the Risen One Himself predicted to His disciples, *And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.* (Jn 16:22).

This joy is the joy in the Risen Lord. He rose from the grave as the victor over Hades and death—everything is flooded by the blinding light of His glorious Resurrection, and the joy about which He predicted to his disciples has now become the inheritance of all faithful children of His Church. Christ's Church renews this joy of the Resurrection every year in the joyful days of Pascha. And the faithful children of the Church hear her good tidings, rejoice and celebrate. But not in vain do we read in the Holy Gospel the words of the Savior, *Fear not, little flock.* (Lk 12:32).

In our time, a terrible time, a time of such a falling away from all principles of faith and morality that we see now, the number of true believers is truly a little flock compared with that majority of mankind that has in fact lost the true faith and trampled on all the principles of Christian morality.

Seeing what people, who have forgotten completely about Christian purity, modesty, and chastity, permit themselves,

and not only permit themselves, but even maintain that all the vileness and filth with which life is now filled is something legitimate, moral, and deserving of approval. Seeing this, the word of Sacred Scripture that tells how man has joined the dumb beasts and become like unto them comes involuntarily to mind. And not only has he become like them, he has even become worse than them, for beasts do not know those abominations of which the Apostle said *it is shameful even to speak*—but that are now done by the sons and daughters of man who have lost their shame and conscience...

But, *lest my mouth speak of human things*, let us turn to the joyous feast of the Resurrection. In the Gospel reading that we heard at the Divine Liturgy on the night of Pascha are the words, *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not* (Jn 1:5),... the Divine light shone in the darkness and the darkness could not grasp or extinguish it.

In the same way, the light of Christ's Resurrection shines in the world and the darkness of human delusions can not darken or extinguish it.

The Lord Jesus Christ, speaking with the Apostles at the Mystical Supper, told them, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33). He was still only preparing for His *podvig* of redemptive and saving sufferings, but in His divine omniscience He saw this *podvig* as already having been accomplished and as Victor spoke of it to His disciples, to reassure them. And in His infinite mercy and goodness, He makes all those who believe in Him participants in this victory, which is why the Apostle says: *Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor 15:57). And in the sacred book of the Apocalypse, we read God's promise, *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.* (Rev 21:7).

Rejoice then, Christian. And **do not fall into despondency on seeing how evil is spreading in the world.** Of course, it is difficult for the Christian soul to see this spread of evil, filth, falsehood, and malice. Even in his time, our great righteous one, Saint John of Kronstadt, pointed out that one of the most difficult trials for a Christian is the triumph and spreading of evil and falsehood and the impossibility of stopping it. Yes, there are such periods in life. The Savior suggested this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He said to His enemies, who had come to seize Him, *this is your hour, and the power of darkness.* (Lk 22:53). And they took

Him. But their time passed, the power of darkness ended, the light of Christ's Resurrection shone forth, and life conquered death, Good conquered evil, and Truth conquered falsehood.

In the joyous days of Pascha, Russian believers often recall how the great God-pleaser and wonder-worker, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, in the course of the whole year, not just during the Paschal season, met all who came to him with the joyful greeting, *my joy, Christ is Risen!* The great ascetic, in his vast and laborious spiritual experience, recognized all the power and dominion of evil in the world. But he also recognized the triumphant power of the Joyous Resurrection of Christ, before which evil is powerless. And being always filled with the radiant, triumphant joy of Pascha, he shared it with those who came to him with their afflictions and sorrows, transfusing, as it were, this joy into their dejected and grieving souls.



How beautiful our Orthodox Faith is! With what a bright, unfading light it illuminates our lives, filled with sin and vanity! But all its power and light are in the Resurrection of Christ. If Christ the Savior had not risen but had remained in the tomb, life would have turned into a terrible, evil, and unbearable nightmare. But Christ's resurrection did take place, and the Church summons all its faithful children to rejoice and to

celebrate Christ's Resurrection. For in it we *celebrate the slaying of death, the destruction of Hades, and the beginning of a new, eternal life.*

Christ is Risen!

Metropolitan Philaret, Pascha 1982



O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?
Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen, and life reigns!

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in a tomb!

For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the First-fruits of them that slept.

St. John Chrysostom
Paschal Homily

HUMILITY & 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 in 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 denied 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 to drink, 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.

But 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. But since until the end beatitude is not assured because of the ease of reversal and the impossibility of knowing what the morrow will bring to birth, 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*

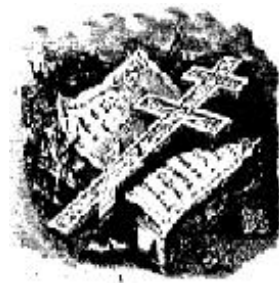
way intimidated by your opponents [Phil 1:27-6], *not giving offence in anything, but in everything recommending ourselves as God's ministers* [2 Cor 6:3-4], by obedience, humility, meekness, long-suffering, great endurance.

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]. But 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 honour, 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 for ever, and to the ages of ages.

Amen.



For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. [Lk 12:34]. In order for one to acquire love for spiritual and heavenly objects, one must reject love for earthly things. In order to fall in love with the promised land, one must reject one's diseased fondness for the land of exile.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

A SHAMEFUL RECOGNITION BY THE GOA ARCHONS

It is with great sadness that we bring to light a shameful event in the life of a very visible Orthodox group in America, the "Archons of the Order of Saint Andrew," via the written words of a conscientious Orthodox priest.

On Tuesday, January 22nd, 2019, the day, 46 years ago, when the SCOTUS legalized abortion, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed the Reproductive Health Act^(*) into law, and then celebrated by lighting the World Trade Center's spire and three bridges in Albany in pink. (Did the Governor choose that day, on purpose, to confirm his apparent hatred of the pre-born baby?)

Governor Cuomo is well known for his outspoken, tenacious and pro-active advocacy in support of the pro-death philosophy (erroneously called, pro-choice, since the "choice" involves killing the pre-born child). Apparently, he would rather not have any pro-life people living in the State. On July 17th, 2014, Governor Cuomo referred to all pro-life citizens as: "extreme conservatives who are right-to-life ... they have no place in the state of New York."

New York currently has an abortion rate double that of the National average. And with this new diabolical regulation in place, that number will definitely increase. For it guarantees that a pre-born child can be killed right up to its day of birth, and several other anti-human life provisions (Please go to this Website for more details: <https://www.liveaction.org/news/new-york-nixes-protections-preborn/?fbclid=IwAR3SYwGc1p2HqAXIWHnaScgN9Z90JgidwFTNWHzOKU8V9IFhPEmCnhsbXBs>). In addition, what impact will this ungodly law have upon the African-American population in New York City, where—at the present time—over three fourths of the babies aborted (78%) are of that race; and more African-Americans are being aborted than are being born?

I must share with you something else regarding Governor Cuomo that causes my heart great sadness. On October 15th, 2017, with much pomp and ceremony, Governor Cuomo was given the Athenagoras Human Right's Award at the annual Archon Banquet, in the presence of several Greek Orthodox Hierarchs and at least one OCA Hierarch.^(**) On January 29th, 2017, **nine months before he received that award**, Governor Cuomo proposed to engrain, within the New York Constitution, a woman's "right" to choose abortion without restrictions (something that is now a reality through the impious document that he signed on January 22nd, 2019), and here is what he said back then: "We have fought very hard for the progress we have made. Great organizations like Planned Parenthood [which performs more abortions than any other abortion provider in the USA] have brought us forward step by step, and we are not going backwards." I pray that someone in

authority will—as a loving father—admonish the Archons for choosing such a person to whom their "human rights" award is given, as well as make the Governor return the award, so that it can be given to someone worthy of it.

Ex-Vice President Joe Biden, who was given that award on October 15th, 2015, should also be asked to return it. While a member of the U.S. Senate, Mr. Biden always voted against the right to life of the child in the womb. And with both his words and actions during his eight years as Vice President, he continued his radical support of the blasphemous "freedom of choice" philosophy. How can these two men, who—without embarrassment or shame, aggressively defend the infanticide of the innocent child in the womb—be given a human rights award, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ?

What has happened to us? Do we not realize that for every child that is aborted, as many as 6-10 souls involved—in some way—with that shedding of innocent blood are in danger of losing their souls, if they do not sincerely repent and confess this terrible sin before they depart this temporal life? When shall we stop ignoring the silent screams of God's innocent ones, whose lives are being snuffed out every 34 seconds? How much longer will we continue to *strain out the gnat, but swallow the camel* (Mt 23:24)? Where are the clergy, steeped in the Patristic *fronema* of our Holy Faith, to lead us away from this politically correct, secular humanistic, hedonistic and non-Orthodox approach to life—to help us to return, with heart-originating tears, to our Most Sweet Lord Jesus, Who is calling each one of us - at this very moment - to *repent, for the Kingdom of the heavens hath drawn near* [Mt 4:17]? Why do we seem to love fulfilling our desires and being held in high regards by people in power (even when they actively support positions that are opposite those of our Church), more than we love to stand up for God's Truth and struggle to be in communion with Christ?

† † †

^(*): The "New York Reproductive Health Act" declares abortion a 'fundamental right' in New York State, prohibiting even basic and widely supported protections, such as parental consent and limits on government funding of abortion. The law allows any "health care practitioner" to perform an abortion, enshrines late-term abortion in New York State law, jeopardizes any agency that does not refer for abortion and seriously threatens conscience protections for hospitals and medical professionals. It is noteworthy that the act also allows medical professionals who are not doctors to perform abortions and has repealed criminal charges for harming unborn children. Prior to the act's passage, abortion was illegal after 24 weeks of pregnancy, with very limited exceptions.

^(**): While the GOA Archons have issued a short statement on their website condemning the act, there has been zero retraction of the award for either Governor Cuomo nor any other pro-death politicians who have received it.

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HOLY GREAT LENT IS UPON US

By St. John of Shanghai.



The doors of repentance are opening, Great Lent is beginning. Every year Great Lent is repeated, and each time it brings us great benefit if we spend it as we should. It is a preparation for the life to come and, more immediately, a preparation for the Bright Resurrection.

Just as a stairway is built into a tall building in order to enable one, by climbing the steps, to easily reach the top, so too, the various days in the year serve as steps for our spiritual ascent.

This is especially true of the days of Great Lent and Holy Pascha.

By means of Great Lent, we cleanse ourselves of the filth of sin, and at Holy Pascha we experience the blessedness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. In climbing a high mountain, one tries to eliminate all unnecessary weight. The less a person carries, the easier it is for him to climb and the higher he is able to climb. So, too, in order to ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin. This weight is lifted from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive each person whom we consider to be at fault before us. Once cleansed and forgiven by God, we then greet the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

And what a priceless gift of God we receive, at the culmination of our lenten struggle. We already hear about this in the

first hymns of the daily lenten *stichera*: *Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery.* (*Aposticha sticheron*, Sunday of the Last Judgment).

Communing of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, unto life eternal—this is the aim of the holy Quadragesima [Forty Days]. Not only on Pascha do we commune, but during Lent also. On Pascha those people should commune who have fasted, confessed and received the Holy Mysteries during Great Lent. Just before Pascha itself there is little opportunity for a proper and thorough confession; the priests are very busy and most of the time occupied with the Passion services. Rather one must prepare ahead of time.

Each time one receives the Mysteries of Christ, one is united with Christ Himself; each time it is a soul-saving act. Why, then, is such significance attached to receiving Holy Communion on the night of Holy Pascha, and why are we all called to do so?

Then, especially, we are given to experience the Kingdom of Christ. Then, especially, we are illumined with the Eternal Light and strengthened for the spiritual ascent.

This is an irreplaceable gift of Christ, an incomparable good. Let no one deprive himself of this joy and, instead of receiving Holy Communion on Pascha night, hasten to eat meat and other foods. Communing of the Holy Mysteries on that night prepares us for the banquet in the eternal Kingdom of God.

Amen.