

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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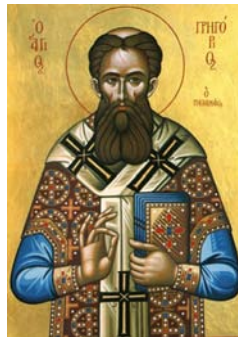
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SERMON ON THE TRANSFIGURATION

By Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, Greece.



For an explanation of the present Feast and understanding of its truth, it is necessary for us to turn to the very start of today's reading from the Gospel: *Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John his brother, and led them up onto a high mountain by themselves.* (Mt 17:1).

First of all, we might start by asking when the Evangelist Matthew began his six-day count? What kind of day was it? What does the preceding statement indicate, where the Savior, in teaching His disciples, said to them: *For the Son of Man shall come with his angels in the glory of His Father*, and further: *Again I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death, until they have seen the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.* (Mt 16:27-28)? That is to say, it is the Light of His own forthcoming Transfiguration which He terms the Glory of His Father and of His Kingdom.

The Evangelist Luke points this out and reveals this more clearly saying: *Now it came to pass about eight days after these words, that He took Peter and John and James, and went up the mountain to pray. And as He prayed, His countenance was altered, and His raiment became a radiant white.* (Lk 9:28-29). But how can the two be reconciled, when one of them speaks definitively about the interval of time

as being *eight days* between the sayings and the manifestation, whereas the other (says) *after six days*?

There were eight on the mountain, but only six were visible. Three, Peter, James and John, had come up with Jesus, and they saw Moses and Elias standing there and conversing with Him, so altogether there were six of them. However, the Father and the Holy Spirit were invisibly with the Lord: the Father, with His Voice testifying that this was His Beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit shining forth with Him in the radiant cloud. Thus, the six are actually eight, and there is no contradiction regarding the eight. Similarly, there is no contradiction with the Evangelists when one says *after six days*, and the other says *eight days after these words*.

These two variations formulate an apparent mystery, and may even create a doubt or rather contradiction as to the number and who exactly was present upon the Mount. It stands to reason, and everyone rationally studying in accordance with Scripture knows that the Evangelists are in agreement one with another. Luke spoke of eight days without contradicting Matthew, who declared *after six days*. There is not another day added on to represent the day on which these sayings were uttered, nor is the day on which the Lord was transfigured added on (which a rational person might reasonably imagine to be added to the days of Matthew).

The Evangelist Luke does not say *after eight days* (like the Evangelist Matthew says *after six days*), but rather *it came to pass eight days after these words*. But where the Evangelists seem to contradict one another, they actually point out to us something great and mysterious. In actual fact, why did the one say *after six days*, but the other, in ignoring

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the seventh day, have in mind the eighth day? It is because the great vision of the Light of the Transfiguration of the Lord is the mystery of the Eighth Day, i.e., of the future age, coming to be revealed after the passing away of the world created in six days.

About the power of the Divine Spirit, through Whom the Kingdom of God is to be revealed, the Lord predicted: *There are some standing here who shall not taste death, until they have seen the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.* (Mt 16:28). Everywhere and in every way the King will be present, and everywhere will be His Kingdom, since the advent of His Kingdom does not signify the passing over from one place to another, but rather the revelation of its power of the Divine Spirit. That is why it is said *come in power*. And this power is not manifest to simple ordinary people, but to those standing with the Lord, that is to say, those who have affirmed their faith in Him like Peter, James and John, and especially those who are free of our natural abasement. Therefore, and precisely because of this, God manifests Himself upon the Mount, on the one hand coming down from His heights, and on the other, raising us up from the depths of abasement, since the Transcendent One takes on mortal nature. Certainly, such a manifest appearance by far transcends the utmost limits of the mind's grasp, as effectualized by the power of the Divine Spirit.

Thus, the Light of the Transfiguration of the Lord is not something that comes to be and then vanishes, nor is it subject to the sensory faculties, although it was contemplated by corporeal eyes for a short while upon an inconsequential mountaintop. But the initiates of the Mystery, (the disciples) of the Lord at this time passed beyond mere flesh into spirit through a transformation of their senses, effectualized within

them by the Spirit, and in such a way that they beheld what, and to what extent, the Divine Spirit had wrought blessedness in them to behold the Ineffable Light.

Those not grasping this point have conjectured that the chosen from among the Apostles beheld the Light of the Transfiguration of the Lord by a sensual and creaturely faculty, and through this they attempt to reduce to a creaturely level (i.e., as something "created") not only this Light, the Kingdom and the Glory of God, but also the Power of the Divine Spirit, through Whom it is meet for Divine Mysteries to be revealed. In all likelihood, such persons have not heeded the words of the Apostle Paul: *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him. But to us God has revealed them through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.* (1 Cor 2:9-10).

So, with the onset of the Eighth Day, the Lord, taking Peter, James and John, went up on the Mount to pray. He always prayed alone, withdrawing from everyone, even from the Apostles themselves, as for example when with five loaves and two fish He fed the five thousand men, besides women and children (Mt 14:19-23). Or, taking with Him those who excelled others, as at the approach of His Saving Passion, when He said to the other disciples: *Sit here while I go over there and pray.* (Mt 26:36). Then He took with Him Peter, James and John. But in our instance right here and now, having taken only these same three, the Lord led them up onto a high mountain by themselves and was transfigured before them, that is to say, before their very eyes.

What does it mean to say: He was transfigured? asks the Golden-Mouthed Theologian (Chrysostomos). He answers this by saying: *It revealed something of His Divinity to them,*

as much and insofar as they were able to apprehend it, and it showed the indwelling of God within Him. The Evangelist Luke says: *And as He prayed, His countenance was altered* (Lk 9:29); and from the Evangelist Matthew we read: *And His face shone as the sun.* (Mt 17:2). But the Evangelist said this, not in the context that this Light be thought of as subsistent for the senses (let us put aside the blindness of mind of those who can conceive of nothing higher than what is known through the senses). Rather, it is to show that Christ God, for those living and contemplating by the Spirit, is the same as the sun is for those living in the flesh and contemplating by the senses. Therefore, some other Light for the knowing the Divinity is not necessary for those who are enriched by Divine gifts.

That same Inscrutable Light shone and was mysteriously manifest to the Apostles and the foremost of the Prophets at that moment, when [the Lord] was praying. This shows that what brought forth this blessed sight was prayer, and that the radiance occurred and was manifest by uniting the mind with God, and that it is granted to all who, with constant exercise in efforts of virtue and prayer, strive with their mind towards God. True beauty, essentially, can be contemplated only with a purified mind. To gaze upon its luminance assumes a sort of participation in it, as though some bright ray etches itself upon the face.

Even the face of Moses was illumined by his association with God. Do you not know that Moses was transfigured when he went up the mountain, and there beheld the Glory of God? But he (Moses) did not effect this, but rather he underwent a transfiguration. However, our Lord Jesus Christ possessed that Light Himself. In this regard, actually, He did not need prayer for His flesh to radiate with the Divine Light; it was but to show from whence that Light descends upon the saints of God, and how to contemplate it. For it is written that even the saints *will shine forth like the sun* (Mt 13:43), which is to say, entirely permeated by Divine Light as they gaze upon Christ, divinely and inexpressibly shining forth His Radiance, issuing from His Divine Nature. On Mount Tabor it was manifest

also in His Flesh, by reason of the Hypostatic Union (i.e., the union of the two perfect natures, divine and human, within the divine Person [Hypostasis] of Christ, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity). The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon defined this Hypostatic union of Christ's two natures, divine and human, as *without mingling, without change, without division, without separation.*

We believe that at the Transfiguration He manifested not some other sort of light, but only that which was concealed beneath His fleshly exterior. This Light was the Light of the Divine Nature, and as such, it was Uncreated and Divine. So also, in the teachings of the Fathers, Jesus Christ was transfigured on the Mount, not taking upon Himself something new nor being changed into something new, nor something which formerly He did not possess. Rather, it was to show His disciples that which He already was, opening their eyes and bringing them from blindness to sight. For do you not see that eyes that can perceive natural things would be blind to this Light?

Thus, this Light is not a light of the senses, and those contemplating it do not simply see with sensual eyes, but rather they are changed by the power of the Divine Spirit. They were transformed, and only in this way did they see the transformation taking place amidst the very assumption of our perishability, with the deification through union with the Word of God in place of this.

So also she who miraculously conceived and gave birth recognized that the One born of her is God Incarnate. So it was also for Symeon, who only received this Infant into his arms, and the aged Anna, coming out [from the Jerusalem Temple] for the Meeting, since the Divine Power illumined, as through a glass windowpane, giving light for those having pure eyes of the heart.

And why did the Lord, before the beginning of the Transfiguration, choose the foremost of the Apostles and lead them up onto the Mount with Him? Certainly, it was to show them something great and mysterious. What is particularly great or mysterious in showing a sensory light, which not only the foremost, but all the other Apostles



already abundantly possessed? Why would they need a transforming of their eyes by the power of the Holy Spirit for a contemplation of this Light, if it were merely sensory and created? How could the Glory and the Kingdom of the Father and the Holy Spirit project forth in some sort of sensory light? Indeed, in what sort of Glory and Kingdom would Christ the Lord come at the end of the ages, when there would not be necessary anything in the air, nor in expanse, nor anything similar, but when, in the words of the Apostle, *God will be all in all* (1 Cor 15: 28)? That is to say, will He alter everything for all? If so, then it follows that light is included.

Hence it is clear that the Light of Tabor was a Divine Light. And the Evangelist John, inspired by Divine Revelation, says clearly that the future eternal and enduring city *has no need of the sun or moon to shine upon it. For the Glory of God lights it up, and the Lamb will be its lamp.* (Rev 21:23). Is it not clear that he points out here that this [Lamb] is Jesus, Who is divinely transfigured now upon Tabor, and the flesh of Whom shines is the lamp manifesting the Glory of divinity for those ascending the mountain with Him?

John the Theologian also says about the inhabitants of this city: *They will not need light from lamps, nor the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shed light upon them, and night shall be no more.* (Rev 22:5). But how, we might ask, is there this other light, in which *there is no change, nor shadow of alteration* (Jas 1:17)? What light is there that is constant and unsetting, unless it be the Light of God? Moreover, could Moses and Elias (and particularly the former, who clearly was present only in spirit, and not in flesh [Elias having ascended bodily to Heaven on the fiery chariot]) be shining with any sort of sensory light, and be seen and known? Especially since it was written of them: *They appeared in glory, and spoke of his death, which he was about to fulfill at Jerusalem.* (Lk 9:30-31). And how otherwise could the Apostles recognize those whom they had never seen before, unless through the mysterious power of the Divine Light, opening their mental eyes?

But let us not tire our attention with the furthestmost interpretations of the words of the Gospel. We shall believe thus, as those same ones have taught us, who themselves were enlightened by the Lord Himself, insofar as they alone know this well: The Mysteries of God, in the words of a prophet, are known to God alone and His perpetual proximity. Let us, considering the Mystery of the Transfiguration of the Lord in accord with their teaching, strive to be illumined by this Light ourselves and encourage in ourselves love and striving towards the Unfading Glory and Beauty, purifying our spiritual eyes of worldly thoughts and refraining from perishable and quickly passing delights and beauty which darken the garb of the soul and lead to the fire of Gehenna and everlasting darkness. Let us be freed from these by the

illumination and knowledge of the incorporeal and ever-existing Light of our Savior transfigured on Tabor, in His Glory, and of His Father from all eternity, and His Life-Creating Spirit, Whom are One Radiance, One Godhead, and Glory, and Kingdom, and Power now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.



Parents must teach their children from their earliest days. They must teach them the fear of God, must cut their bad impulses and faults, and they must not fawn upon them or satisfy their bad desires or appetites. The small child is like the soft candle that you shape as you like, and which accepts whatever seal you put upon it.

Whatever letters you write on a clean sheet of paper will remain imprinted. In the same way, whatever the small child learns when he is small will remain imprinted until old age.

When the tree is small, if the wind blows, it bends. If we put a pole next to it, then it becomes straight. If we don't put up a pole, and it becomes bent, it will always remain bent. If, when it is grown up and well rooted, we want to straighten it, it breaks and is cut down. It is the same with our children. Let us support them in the Faith and in the fear of God when they are small. Let us fence them in and surround them with walls of instruction and good examples, until they get rooted in virtue—when they won't fear any danger.

Everything that the all-wise Holy Apostles and the Godly-wise Fathers of our Holy Orthodox Church handed down to us, many of their successors today want to abolish and so dislodge the Church. However, they will be unable to do this, because the Lord will crush them like vessels of clay. And the few elect will be shaken, and few out of the few will remain unshaken. Let us force ourselves to remain faithful and unshaken in whatever we have received from the divine Apostles, the Holy Fathers, and the teachers of our Church. Do and write as much as you can, but be aware: Today's generation has eyes and sees not, ears and hears not...

The good Confessor's manner, the cheerfulness of his face, the fatherly affection with which he receives the sinner, the sweet language of his teaching, the courage which he gives to the shy, the consolation which he offers to those who have committed many sins and are in despair, citing the example of any who repented and were saved—all these are conducive to sincere repentance and confession of the sinner. It is to such spiritual fathers and physicians of the soul that the sinner ought to entrust the therapy of his soul.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

THE EIGHT MEANS OF TEMPTATION

By Elder Cleopa (+1998).



The Holy Fathers say that, on the path of salvation, one is tempted by the devil from eight sides: From the front, from behind, from the left, from the right, from above, from below, from inside, and from the outside.

1. One is tempted **from behind** when one continuously remembers the sins and evil deeds one has committed in the past, recalling them anew in one's mind, reshuffling them, engaging them, despairing because of them, and contemplating them sensually. Such a remembrance of how we have sinned in the past is a demonic temptation.

2. One is normally tempted **from the front** through fear at the thought of what the future holds: of what will happen to us or to the world; of how much longer we will live; of whether we will have anything to eat; of whether there will be a war or any other kind of serious and frightful event to come; and, in general, by making all kinds of guesses, predictions, prophecies, and everything else that induces fear of the future in us.

3. One is tempted by the devil **from the left** through the call to commit obvious sins and to behave and act in ways that are known to be sinful and evil, but which people do nonetheless. This temptation is a direct call to sin openly and consciously.

4. There are two ways in which the devil tempts **from the right**. The first is when one performs good deeds and actions, but with a bad or malicious intent and purpose. For example, if one does good or acts well out of vainglory, to receive praise, to obtain a position, to acquire fame, or in order to attain some benefit for oneself—it follows that one is doing such good out of vanity, avarice, and greed. The performance of good deeds for bad purposes is sinful and vain. The Holy Fathers liken such a performance of good deeds (such as fasting and almsgiving) to a body without a soul, inasmuch as the purpose for which a deed is accomplished is its soul, while the deed itself is its body. Therefore, the performance of good deeds with an ungodly purpose is essentially a temptation coming from the right, that is, coming under the guise of good. The second demonic temptation from the right comes through various apparitions and visions, when one receives visions of the devil in the form of God or an Angel of God. The Holy Fathers call trusting these specters from the devil, or accepting these demonic phenomena, delusion or deception.

5. Further, the devil tempts one **from below** when one is capable of performing good deeds or holy virtues but is too lazy to do so; or when one knows that one should make greater efforts and labors in ascetic struggles (in virtues and good deeds), and is capable of doing so, but does not do so out of laziness or because one is looking for excuses for one's laziness. One thereby spiritually rejects these virtues by doing much less than one could in fact do.

6. Temptations **from above** also come about in two ways. The first is when one takes upon oneself ascetic struggles that exceed one's strength, thereby recklessly straining oneself. This happens, for instance, when one is sick but imposes a fast on oneself that is beyond one's strength; or generally when one overdoes any ascetic struggle that is beyond one's spiritual and physical capacity. Such obstinacy lacks humility and is unreasonably presumptuous.

Another temptation from above is when one strives to learn the mysteries of Holy Scripture (and of God's mysteries in general), but does not do so according to one's spiritual maturity. That is, when one wants to penetrate the mysteries of God in Holy Scripture (or in the saints, the world, and life in general) in order later to explain and teach these mysteries to other people when one is not spiritually mature enough to do so. The Holy Fathers say that such a person wants to chew through a bone with baby teeth. St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks about this in his work, *The Life of Moses*. He says that it was for this reason that God commanded the Israelites, who were imperfect, to eat only the meat (which is like milk for the teeth) from the Passover lamb—and, moreover, with bitter herbs—and not to break into pieces or to eat the bones, but rather to burn them in fire (cf. Exodus 12: 8, 10:46). This means that we, too, should interpret only those mysteries in Holy Scripture (and in our faith in God generally) that correspond to our spiritual maturity and to eat (absorb) them with bitter herbs, that is, with everything that life brings us (suffering, grief); we should not bite into the mysteries of Holy Scripture, Divine knowledge, and God's Providence, like so many hard bones, with our baby teeth; they are susceptible to fire only, that is, they become clear only in ripe spiritual maturity and in experienced souls that have been tested by grace-filled Divine fire.

7. One is tempted **from within** by that which one has in one's heart and by that which proceeds from the heart. The Lord Jesus Christ clearly stated that it is from within, from one's heart, that sinful and impure thoughts, desires, and lusts proceed (cf. Matthew 15:19) and tempt one. Temptations come not only from the devil, but also humanly, from the evil intentions and skills, lusts, evil desires, and inner love of sin that proceed from an unclean heart.

8. Finally, the eighth door to demonic temptation is opened **from the outside**, through external things and occasions, that is, through everything that enters from outside

through one's senses, which are the soul's windows. These external things are not evil in and of themselves, but by means of them one's feelings can be tempted and induced to evil and sin.

These, then, are the eight means by which everyone is tempted, regardless of whether one is in the world or in seclusion.

Against each of these temptations—from behind, from the front, from the left, from the right, from above, from below, from inside, and from the outside—one must fight by means of **watchfulness** (the precise Slavonic word is *trezvenie*, that is, attentiveness, carefulness, and wakefulness of soul and body; wakefulness and vigilance of spirit; sobriety and discernment; attention to one's thoughts and actions; or, in a word: judgment. On the other hand, by means of constant prayer that invokes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, through **unceasing prayer**. (Or, as it is said in Greek, *Prosochi kai prosefchi*—that is, as the Holy Fathers put it, *by attention and prayer*.)

In other words, the Holy Fathers said that the battle against all temptations and passions consists in the following: guarding all one's mind, soul, and body from temptation—this is our ascetic struggle, from our human point of view; from the Divine side, one must continuously and prayerfully call upon the help of the All-Merciful Lord Jesus Christ—and this is that unceasing and primary prayer of the hesychasts called the Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner!*

† † †

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

[Jn 16:33]



An old man said: For nine years a brother was tempted in thought to the point of despairing of his salvation, and being scrupulous, he condemned himself, saying, "I have lost my soul, and since I am lost, I shall go back to the world." But while he was on the way, a voice came to him on the road, which said, "These nine years during which you have been tempted have been crowns for you; go back to your place, and I will allay these thoughts." Understand that it is not good for someone to despair of himself because of his temptations; rather temptations procure crowns for us if we use them well.

From "The Desert Banquet"

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND HERESY?

Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001), from the book "Patristic Theology"

I believe we can comprehend the basic difference between them, if we take medical science as an example. There, we have doctors who belong to the Medical Association; if a doctor is not a member of the Medical Association, he cannot exercise the medical profession. For a doctor to be legal, he must not only be a graduate of a recognized Medical School, but also a member of the Medical Association. The same prerequisites apply to lawyers. These sciences undergo continuous monitoring, because, if one were to deviate from the proper exercising of his profession, he is tried by the pertinent authority of the professional Association he belongs to, and is expelled from the Body of that profession.

The same however occurs in the Church. The respective procedure within the Body of the Church—that is, the excision of a member—is called "excommunication;" if it relates to a member of an ecclesiastic rank, then it is called "unfrocking/deposition." It is how heretics are excommunicated from the Body of the church.

Just as within the medical realm a "quack" (fake doctor) cannot possibly be permitted to heal, thus also in the Church it is not possible for a heretic to heal the souls of people; because, being a heretic, he does not know how—nor is he able—to heal. Therefore, in the same manner that a union between a "quack" Association and the Medical Association is never possible, it is likewise never possible for a union to take place between the Orthodox and heretics. An actual doctor is not one who merely reads many medical books, but rather, the one who has graduated from the Medical School of a University, and also has apprenticed over a significant period of time near an experienced professor of proven ability to heal the sick.



Meekness is an unchanging state of mind, which both in honor and dishonor remains the same. Meekness consists in praying sincerely and undisturbedly in the face of afflictions from one's neighbor. Meekness is a cliff rising from the sea of irritability, against which all the waves that strive against it break, but which itself is never broken.

St. John Climacus

THE MYSTERY OF MAN'S HEART

By Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex.



Question 1: Forgive this very naive question: Where is the heart? Not “What is the heart?” but “Where is the heart?”

Answer 1: The heart is within our chest. When we speak of the heart, we speak of our spiritual heart which coincides with the fleshly one; but when man receives illumination and sanctification, then his whole being

becomes a heart. The heart is synonymous with the soul, with the spirit; it is a spiritual place where man finds his unity, where his mind is enthroned when it has been healed of the passions. Not only his mind, but his whole body too is concentrated there.

St. Gregory Palamas says that *the heart is the very body of our body*, a place where man's whole being becomes like a knot. When mind and heart unite, man possesses his nature and there is no dispersion and division in him any more. That is the sanctified state of the man who is healed. On the contrary, in our natural and fallen state, we are divided; we think one thing with our mind, we feel another with our senses, we desire yet another with our heart. However, when mind and heart are united by the grace of God, then man has only one thought—the thought of God; he has only one desire—the desire for God; and only one sensation—the noetic sensation of God. That is why repentance and tears are so much appreciated; they help us to find that healing, that state of integrity, because no human being can weep having two thoughts; we weep because of one thought that hurts us. If we are hurt by the thought that we are separated from God, that *salvation is far from the sinner* and all those things that inspire this pain in our heart, then, of course, we can cry; but if we have two thoughts, we cannot cry.

The saints do not have many thoughts; they may have only one thought, but through that thought, they see the whole of cosmic being, heaven and earth. That thought becomes a pair of binoculars through which they see and discern everything. Tears are much appreciated in the spiritual life because, sooner or later, they make the heart surface. If we have tears because we desire God and we want to be reconciled with Him, surely the heart will be found and the mind will descend into it and God will reign there with grace.

Question 2: If a person arrives at that state of having acquired a humble heart, is it possible then to fall back to the old state, and if so, is it harder to get back or is it easier?

Answer 2: We go up and down all the time, but we never stop seeking and “fishing” for those humble thoughts that unite the mind with the heart. For example, all the thoughts of the Holy Scriptures can help us, because they come from the humble Spirit of God. Therefore, any thought expressed in the Holy Scriptures can become a *burning coal* that will touch the heart as it touched the lips of Isaiah. That is why we should always study the word of God and have it dwelling richly in our heart, as St. Paul says: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* (Col 3:16).

It is easy for grace to ignite one of these thoughts at the time of prayer, and then we have one verse from the Scriptures to pray with for a long time. And the Holy Spirit prays with us because this particular word is given by Him. This single thought that brings tears and repentance may come from the Holy Scriptures, quickened by grace; it may come directly from God Himself, through prayer; it may come from the hymnology of the Church, from a word of an elder or a brother; it can come from anywhere. God is constantly seeking our heart, and He can provoke it with whatever is at hand. We only have to be ready to “snatch” it.

Prayer of self-condemnation is especially helpful. The prayers before Holy Communion are full of these thoughts of self-condemnation before the thrice-Holy God. I think that if we read them carefully we would always receive great help; one day one sentence from those prayers will stay with us and work repentance, another day another one, and so on. Prayer of self-condemnation helps a lot because it follows the path of Christ, which goes downward. He is the One Who first went down, and He then *ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* (Eph 4:8). For this reason Fr. Sophrony says that those who are led by the Holy Spirit never cease to blame themselves before God and this leads them downwards.

But we must be careful, because not everybody can bear this. Those who are healthy psychologically can do so and find great strength and consolation, but for those who are less strong, there is another way which involves giving thanks to God continuously and balancing the prayer by ending it with the words *although I am unworthy, O Lord.* St. Maximus the Confessor says that true humility is to bear in mind that we have our being “on loan” from God. We find humility if we thank God continuously for everything, if we thank Him for every single breath He gives us. In one of the prayers before the Sacrament of Baptism, we say that God has spread out the air for us to breathe, and we find a similar idea in one of the prayers of the kneeling service at Pentecost. Consequently, if we thank God for everything and for every single breath of air that He gives us, we will maintain a humble spirit.

Question 3: In our journey to the heart, as we come to know God more, there is spiritual growth. Part of our journey is also learning and studying, and I was wondering if you could comment on the balance between the knowledge and growth of the mind versus the knowledge and growth of the heart. How do we know whether they are growing together or whether they are growing apart? And as we learn, we realize that we will never truly learn anything anyway, and it seems that the heart goes one way and the mind realizes that it will never know it at all.

Answer 3: I think it is true that intellectual work is not very favorable for the activity of the heart, but it is necessary and we have to go through it, at least for a number of years. It is necessary for the life of the Church, especially if we are to serve people. The only thing that can protect us is if we do it in obedience to the Church—to a bishop or a spiritual father. That will protect us and keep us for a time.

I remember when I was studying theology, I was trying to keep the prayer. It was not possible. One week I kept the prayer, but the following week I could not keep up with my work. When I tried to catch up with the work, I lost the prayer. I did not have any stability in those years. Sorry to speak of my personal experience, but looking back, I can say that it was very profitable because I was told to do it and I did it, and the prayers of the one who asked me to do it protected me.

Once I said to one of my elders at the monastery, “Nowadays, the work of a spiritual father is so difficult and dangerous; you have to be incorruptible to do it.” And he replied, “No, that is wrong. You do not have to be incorruptible; you have to have a point of reference.” And he was right: a point of reference in the person of an elder in the Church keeps the spirit of humility, that is to say, it protects us from danger. We do not have to be incorruptible, but we have to have a trustworthy point of reference. Nobody is incorruptible.

Question 4: In our modern culture that is so materialistic, scientific and focused on biology and the natural sciences, how can we even become aware that the heart is something more than just a muscle? How can we become aware of ourselves as being something more than just a brain or a circulatory system?

Answer 4: We must learn the language of God. I wanted to talk to you about this later, but I will say a few words now.

Since all of us have sinned, we all have a common language, the language of pain. When we come to God, we will inevitably have to suffer in order to be purified. If we speak to God with that pain, if we pour out our heart to God with that pain, then God will listen to us, and the heart will be activated.

I have an example from the First Book of Samuel. The Prophetess Hannah was childless, but she had a servant who had many children. This servant despised her; she was very proud and arrogant, because she was so vainglorious about her family. Hannah did not take any revenge, although she was the mistress, but she went to the temple and she poured out her heart to God in pain. Of course God heard her and answered her prayer, and the following year she came back to

the temple with her newborn son, Samuel.

When we suffer tribulation, pain or illness in our life, we must remember to pour out our heart out to God rather than seek human consolation, by going from one person to another and talking about it. This might give us some psychological consolation, but we lose all the tension of life, that energy of

pain which is so precious when we direct it towards God. This is one way.

The other way, as I have said before, is to find someone who can teach us how to speak to God. In the temple, little Samuel was sixteen or seventeen when he heard a voice calling him and he ran to Eli, the priest of the temple, and the priest said to him, *Go back to sleep, nobody called you.* The same thing happened a second time. Again he ran to Eli, saying to him, *Did you call me?* and the priest sent him back to sleep once more. When the same thing happened a third time, Eli, who had been initiated into the life of the Spirit, understood that this was a prophetic calling from God, and he advised him, *Go, and if you are called again say “Here am I, speak for Thy servant heareth.”* (cf. 1 Sam. 3:1-20). Indeed, the voice called again and Samuel received the prophetic anointing.

Similarly we learn to speak to God with our heart through obedience to our elders and, in fact, the ministry of a priest is to teach his people this language of God in the same way



as Eli taught Samuel. We all have a common language of pain, of suffering; one way or another we all go through it in this life, because God loves us.

Question 5: In the monastic life it is easy to see who might be your elders, but how can we identify these persons in our life in the world? From what sources can we find our elders outside of that life?

Answer 5: This has always been an important question in the life of the Church, and I remember St. Symeon the New Theologian saying that one must seek for an elder with tears. Pray to God that He gives you one and, if you do not find one, then speak to God directly, pouring out your heart to Him with tears, and the Lord Himself will be your Teacher.

What I say now is a bit risky and dangerous, but it is easy to suppose that there are no such elders any more. I believe that if we are humble, it is easier to find one. If we are humble, we can make anybody a prophet, because if we approach with a humble heart and trust, then God will speak to us. I remember Fr. Sophrony saying to us, "Make your spiritual father a prophet!" That is to say, approach with faith and trust, and God will inspire him to give you a word.

As I have said earlier, true repentance proves that God is just, righteous and blessed in all His ways, and that we are liars. It often happens that we, the spiritual fathers, do not know what we are saying. People come and ask a word of us. Sometimes the word comes naturally without our realizing it; at other times, nothing comes. It does not depend only on us; it depends also on the faith of the person who asks.

A little girl, twelve years old, came to me and said, "Sometimes I have proud thoughts; tell me what to do." And I said to that little girl, "Give thanks to God for all the things He has done for you. Give thanks to Him for every breath of air He gives you." And that little girl grabbed my word and ran away happily. Forgive me for talking about myself, but it is the only way to speak concretely about these things. There is a dangerous side to it, because we can spoil the *ethos* of our life and of the Church, but I am now speaking among my fellows, among priests, and I feel I can be more specific and open. We must do everything in such a way as not to usurp the spiritual space of the other, of our fellows. And if we are to succeed in this, we have to be careful not to lose our humility.



If you want to be spiritually tranquil, never part from someone while feeling agitated, but try in every way to forgive everyone in your soul and to make peace as much as possible. In so doing, you will part from others with a calm spirit, and you will enjoy serenity of the soul.

Venerable Moses of Optina

"THEY HAVE COMMITTED EVERY SIN OF THE FLESH, BUT I LOVE THEM"

Source: From the book "Hieromonk Elder Porphyrios: An Anthology of Advice."



The Elder told me one day:

"Boys and girls come to me sometimes. Those poor children, and what haven't they done. They have committed every sin of the flesh, but I love them."

The Elder did not justify the actions of the youth, which he characterized as carnal sins, but at the same time he loved them as precious souls "for whom Christ died". By his love he attracted them like a magnet and gradually they were healed of their worship of the flesh.

This patristic attitude of the Elder was misunderstood by conservative puritans, who mourned, and some irresponsible progressives, who rejoiced, for the same reason: that supposedly the Elder "tolerated" carnal sins. They did not understand that sin cannot be combated against with an intolerant condemnation of the sinner, nor through guilty legalism of the fall. The Elder effectively fought sin by loving the sinner and helping them become aware of their responsibility for their fall, and the possibility in Christ of them being freed from it and guilt through repentance and forgiveness and the life in Christ. He wanted to guide them to a new life, and not trouble their soul with the past.

The saint often advised his spiritual children that love, unity and cooperation of parents and good understanding between them and their children gives a sense of security and confidence to their children. Otherwise, the children become unsafe and insecure. Often the insecure children can lead to the "safety" of a gang and/or obtain a violent behavior (as a reaction to a dysfunctional family).

The behavior of the children is related to the situations they experienced in their family. The negative attitude of parents creates wounds in the hearts of the children and leaves scars of injury in their souls that keep during their whole life. These psychological scars are affecting their behavior and their relationship with others, during the rest of their lives.

In other words, the experiences the children carry from their childhood affect their lives and their behavior in relation to others (family, sexual relationship, friends). Children, Saint Porphyrios said, become older, educated, but do not really change. This is obvious even from the most minor events of their life.

ON THE NAME OF THE ANTICHRIST THE NAME OF THE MENACE, THE SON OF PERDITION, THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS!

Source: "Revelation, the Seven Trumpets & the Antichrist," vol. III, *Orthodox Christian Lessons by Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios* (+2006), translated & adapted by Constantine Zalalas, pp. 316-321, Zoe Press (2015).

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

[Rev 13:18]

† † †



The type of wisdom the Evangelist refers to is divine wisdom and not the product of man's reason or intelligence. Saint John wants to stress that the information he is passing down to generations of Christians can only be understood through divine revelation and divine illumination.

You may wonder whether this wisdom, and more specifically this puzzle of a name, was revealed to some past giants of the Spirit, some important Christians? The answer is no; this name was not revealed.

Perhaps the name of the Antichrist was revealed to Saint John the Evangelist. We base this on the mandate given to Saint John in Revelation, when the angel tells him, *These things you will not write down.* (Rev 10:4). This knowledge was only for Saint John, and he was not permitted to share this knowledge with the Church. This particular detail is also found in Daniel when the prophet was also prophesying about the Antichrist (Dan 12:4).

These instances show that there are some specific revelations which do not pertain to the Church as a whole, but are relevant only to the person of the prophet who writes these prophecies. This is especially true in that Saint John could have easily asked the Lord, "Lord, please tell me, who is this menace of the Church, this destroyer of the entire world? Tell me, who is he?" The Lord may have responded, "I will tell you his name. This is his name, but you will not write his name in the book. You will only write down the number of his name."

This makes it almost impossible to ascertain the name, because a number of names correspond to that number. Perhaps the name of this menace, the son of perdition, the man of lawlessness, was also known to Saint Paul. Perhaps

it was revealed to him. Alternatively, the name of the Antichrist may have been made known to the twelve apostles, and they withheld it from the Church, so Christians would generally lack knowledge about the name of the Antichrist.

Certainly one can wonder, why then is Saint John the Evangelist creating this provocation by stating, *This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number . . . ?* This provocation is not designed to frustrate the reader, but mainly to draw his attention in order to provoke a healthy curiosity. The reader needs to be observant and to develop the inner sense that the Antichrist is coming. Moreover, a great many features of the physiognomy of the Antichrist will be made available, as Scripture is not lacking in these. The only thing lacking is the name.

So, what Saint John is indicating is that the vigilant Christian will not have any difficulty ascertaining the name if he becomes knowledgeable about all his other features, so that when the Antichrist does come, he will be able to point him out immediately. Saint John purposefully provokes the reader's watchfulness—not his curiosity. It is well-known that man easily succumbs to his curiosity, as attested to by the many attempts made throughout history to decode this enigmatic number 666. Needless to say, all those attempts were in vain because the number corresponds to many different names. In these previous decoding efforts, the Greek alphabet was used, as well as the Latin and the Hebrew alphabets. If you want my humble and lowly opinion, which is the opinion mainly accepted by the Church, the decoding of the number will require the use of the Greek alphabet. The reason is that Revelation was originally written in the Greek language. The letters of the Greek alphabet were used to create the numerical systems of those times in that each letter of the alphabet was used to correspond to a number.

Needless to say, previous hasty attempts to decode the name of the Antichrist did not stop short of misspelling names for the sake of making things fit. An example of one of the names used was *Latinos*, as those doing the decoding wanted to show that the Roman emperor was the Antichrist. In the process however, they misspelled the word *Latinos*. They added an extra letter [Lateinos the letter *epsilon* next to *iota*, so that they could change the number of this word from 661 to 666. The letter *epsilon* provided those much-needed five points, *epsilon* being the fifth letter of the Greek alphabet.

The same holds true with the name *amoumai*, which was suggested by Saint Hippolytus, of Rome. He conjectured that it does not have to be a name but the idea of the denial of Jesus Christ." He misspelled the word by placing an *epsilon* at the end instead of the diphthong *alpha iota*. He did this to accommodate the needed number. Since the *alpha*

iota diphthong provided ten numbers, which were too many (676), misspelling the word and using *epsilon* made things work out. These excessive interpretations do not deserve serious consideration.

So then, how are we to deal with this enigmatic number? Certainly not like the Pentecostals gathering here in our city of Larisa, who have been claiming that the name of the Antichrist would be William II. It is beyond me how they imagine such a name—William II! Since such conjecture has been going on for eons, and it is all in vain and to be avoided, let's look at the golden rule of our Church. This is found in the fifth book of Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, (chapter thirty) and repeated by Saint Andrew of Caesarea in his interpretation of Revelation.

Saint Irenaeus writes, *It is safer and less dangerous to await the fulfillment of the prophecy than to attempt to conjecture and decode the possible names, especially since many names correspond to the afore-said number.* Thus, it is much safer to await the fulfillment of these events than to have anyone obsessively search to pinpoint the name of the Antichrist. Saint Andrew of Caesarea writes (this is axiomatic): *Regarding the exact number and the other details written about him, (meaning the Antichrist) time and experience will reveal to those who remain vigilant (neptic).*

It is true indeed that time reveals the prophecies. However, it is through spiritual experience and *nepsis* of the heart that one ascertains that the fulfillment of prophecy is at hand. What is *nepsis* of the heart? A *neptic*, in the literal sense, is one who exercises sobriety in all things; his mind is clear. It is well-known that the different passions cause a type of drunkenness; they darken the *nous* and the heart. Thus, if we are free from this drunkenness of the passions and we maintain a state of *nepsis*—a clarity in our heart, then we can see every single thing clearly in order to interpret the events of history. On this, Saint Ignatius exhorts Saint Polycarp in his epistle; *Study the times pro-*

fusely in full expectation of the One to come. The Second Coming of Christ, as we will see further in the lessons to come, is chronologically connected with the appearance of the Antichrist, since Christ will come immediately after the appearance of the Antichrist. So, when Saint Ignatius exhorts that we study the times profusely, it means to keep a close watch on the unfolding of events so that you can see clearly. All of this presupposes a *neptic* heart, a heart cleansed from passions, evils and weaknesses—to be a believer, a person of faith. Thus, Saint Andrew epigrammatically states: *The time and experience will reveal to those who are neptic.*

This will be especially critical when the two prophets, Elijah and Enoch identify the Antichrist. The non-believers will be highly disappointed and indignant because the Antichrist will be their idol, their ideal world leader who will ultimately put the two prophets to death, whereas the faithful will have no question about his identity. The witness of the two prophets will further confirm the experience of the faithful who will be adequately informed from the multiple references in Scripture and the Church Fathers regarding the identity of the Antichrist.

Saint Andrew continues, *If the name of the Antichrist needed to be known (in advance), the one who saw it would have revealed it to us.* This is why I told you that Saint John probably knew the name: *However, the Grace of God did not want to have the name of this destroyer included in holy Scripture. As many names are found with this number, it would be the practice of logic to discover it* (PG 105, 339C). In other words, it would be an exercise in curiosity to attempt to find how many names fit this number. This being the case, we should not be curious; rather, we should wait until the fullness of time comes.

Now, many of us may wonder: Since the name is not revealed and the number should not be decoded, then what is the purpose of having it in the Scripture? Is Saint John the Evangelist simply toying with us? Of course not.



Icon of the Last Judgment

As a prophet, Saint John writes with all seriousness and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this inscription will be made manifest during the fullness of time when the prophecy will be fulfilled.

When Christ told the disciples about things that would materialize in a few days, He would say, *I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you truly believe.* (Jn 14:29). For example, on Great Thursday evening, Christ said to the disciples, *Tonight the sheep will be scattered because the shepherd will be struck. Peter, tonight you will deny me three times. And the rest of you will also deny me* (Mt 26:31-35). *I will resurrect in three days.* (Mk 9:31). *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.* (Jn 16:20-22). Truly, the Lord had good reason to say, *I have told you these things so that when they come to pass, you will believe* (Jn 14:29).

Prophecy is the greater proof of truth and authenticity—prophecy, not miracles. Many false miracles will be worked by the Antichrist. The devil can work miracles, unfortunately, as many people experience in spiritism and the magic arts. Prophecy, however, is the unshakable criterion of truth. The devil has no knowledge of the future. Thus, he cannot prophesy; he can make an intelligent guess at times.

God sends a spirit of delusion upon the people who believe in the devil as punishment, such that they believe the guesswork of the devil which can be seen in the interpretation of people's dreams, in promises of fortune-tellers, in mediums, in coffee cup readers, and in spiritists. God often allows these to come true so that those who trust in the works of the devil believe the lie. This punishment of God is at times disciplinary or condemnatory, and more often condemnatory, I am afraid. The spirit of delusion is a final punishment given by God. God abandons these workers of wickedness once and for all, as Saint Paul states, *Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness* (2 Thess 2:11-12). The Old Testament is also very clear about the spirit of delusion.

Consequently, prophecy is a privilege that can only belong to God. It was used here (in Revelation) so that the people of any given generation, whether it be our generation or some future generation, can say; indeed, the prophecy is true! We need to prepare ourselves accordingly.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

[Mt 11:15]

THE BLESSINGS OF ALMS

Source: "The Lives of the Fathers of the Eastern Desert," by Bishop Leontius of Neapolis ("Life of John the Almsgiver").



One day, the all-wise John (the Almsgiver, Patriarch of Alexandria, 610-619) heard of a generous giver and so he sent for him privately and said jokingly:

—How is it that you became so generous? Was it natural to you, or did you put constraint upon yourself?

Some to whom he put this same question stood shamefacedly before him and would not answer, whilst others would tell him their story. One man whom the Saint questioned answered as follows:

—As a fact, master, I neither give anything nor do any good; but the little I do give and do from that which comes to me through Christ and your prayers I came to do in this way. Formerly I was very hardhearted and unsympathetic and one day I lost money and was reduced to poverty. Then my reason began to say to me: "Truly, if you had been charitable, God would not have forsaken you." And thereupon I decided to give five coppers [*pholleis*] a day to the poor. But when I started giving them, Satan immediately checked me by saying: "Those coppers would really have been enough to buy a bath-ticket or vegetables for your family." Then I felt at once as if I were taking the money out of my children's mouth and so I gave nothing.

—But I noticed I was being mastered by this vice, so I said to my slave: "I want you to steal five coppers daily without my noticing it, and give them in charity." For I am a money-changer master.

The money-changer continued:

—My slave, worthy fellow, began by stealing ten coppers, and occasionally even a shilling [*keratin*]. When he noticed that we were being blessed, he began to steal gold crowns, [*trimisia*] as well, and give them away as well. One day I was expressing my astonishment at God's blessings to us, I said to him: "Those five coppers, boy, have greatly benefited us. So now I want you to give ten." At that the slave said to me with a smile: "Yes, be thankful for my thefts, since but for them we should not even have bread to eat today. However if there can be a just thief, I am he!" And then he told me that he had given shillings and even crowns. So it was through his faith, master, that I grew accustomed to giving with all my heart.

The holy Patriarch was much edified by this story and said:

—Truly I have read many stories in the lives of the fathers, but I have never heard anything like this!

Ένας Θάνατος που Προκαλεί Χαράν

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. Μελετίου Ἀπ. Βαδραχάνη, «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», ἀριθ. φύλ. 1891, 12 Αὐγούστου 2011.

Παράξενο νὰ πανηγυρίζεις ἓνα θάνατο καὶ νὰ προσκαλεῖς σὲ πανηγύρι, ἀντὶ γιὰ πένθος, ὀλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη. Παράξενο νὰ χαίρῃσαι, νὰ σκιριτᾶς, νὰ χορεύεις ἐόρτια καὶ ν' ἀγαλλιᾶσαι στὴ θεὰ αὐτοῦ τοῦ θανάτου. Κι ὅμως στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας αὐτὸ εἶναι ὁ κανὼν καὶ ἡ γενικὴ συνήθεια, ὅταν ἐορτάζουμε τὸ θάνατο τῶν ἁγίων μας, καὶ μάλιστα τὸ θάνατο τῆς Παναγίας μας.

Ἔτσι ὅταν ἔχουμε τὴ μνήμη τοῦ εἰρηνικοῦ ἢ μαρτυρικοῦ θανάτου κάποιου ἁγίου, ὁ ναὸς τοῦ τιμωμένου ἁγίου στολιζέται, ὅσο πιὸ μεγαλόπρῃα τὸ ἐπιτρέπει ἡ οἰκονομικὴ κατάστασή του. Στολιζέται, ὅπως στολιζόταν οἱ ἀρχαῖες πρωτεύουσες τῶν μεγάλων αὐτοκρατοριῶν, ὅταν περιέμεναν νὰ γυρίσει ὁ αὐτοκράτορας καὶ νὰ κάνει τὸν θρίαμβό του, δηλαδὴ τὴν μεγαλοπρεπῆ καὶ πανηγυρικὴ εἴσοδό του στὴν πρωτεύουσα. Καλλίφωνοι ψάλτες προσκαλοῦνται, πλῆθος ἱερέων προστρέχει, ὁ ἐπίσκοπος ἢ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι ὅπου αὐτὸ εἶναι δυνατὸ, οἱ ἀρχές, ὁ λαός...

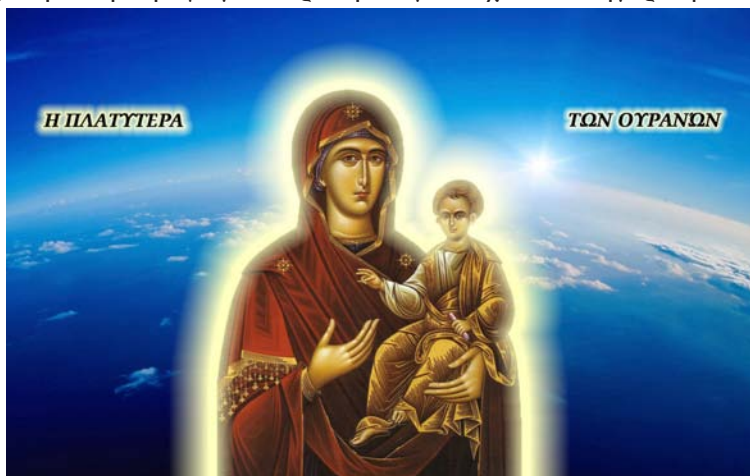
Εἶναι ὅλοι χαρούμενοι, ὅλοι φαιδροί, ὅλοι μὲ τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν ἔπαρση ὅτι στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ νικῆθηκε ὁ θάνατος

καὶ συνεπῶς ὁ θάνατος τῶν ἁγίων, ἀπὸ ὀριστικὴ καὶ ἐξαθλιωτικὴ ἐκμηδένιση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποῦ ἦταν, τώρα μεταβάλλεται σὲ μιὰ γέννηση στὴν αἰώνια καὶ χαρούμενη καὶ εὐτυχισμένη ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ. Σὲ μιὰ καταξίωση ἄνευ προηγουμένου. Σὲ μιὰ δόξα ἀφθορῆ, ἀμάραντη καὶ ἄληκτη.

«Ὁ θάνατός σου Κύριε, ἀθανασίας γέγονε πρόξενος εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἐν μνήματι κατετέθης, οὐκ ἂν ὁ παράδεισος ἠνέγκτο» ψάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας στὴ νεκρῶσιμη ἀκολουθία. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ὁ θάνατος τῶν ἁγίων συντελεῖ στὴν ἐδραίωση καὶ ἰσχυροποίηση τῆς στρατευομένης Ἐκκλησίας καὶ στὴν προκοπὴ καὶ πνευματικὴ πρόοδο τῶν πιστῶν. Οἱ ἅγιοι δὲν χάνονται οὔτε χωρίζονται ἀπὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς, ἀλλὰ ἀέναα καὶ ἀδιάκοπα μεσιτεύουν γι' αὐτοὺς στὸν Κύριο. Εἶναι πρόδρομοὶ τους καὶ προάγγελοι τους στὸν Παράδεισο μ' ὅτι αὐτὸ συνεπάγεται. Ἀναμένουν νὰ τελειωθοῦμε κι ἐμεῖς καὶ ὅλοι μαζί νὰ συμμετάσχουμε στὸ τραπέζι τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, πρὶν τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ θάνατος ἦταν φοβερὸς ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ δικαίους τοῦ ἀναστήματος τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, τοῦ Ἰσαάκ, τοῦ Ἰλῆα. Τὸν φοβόταν καὶ ἔκαναν ὅτι μπορούσαν γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἀποφύγουν. Μετὰ τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅμως, ὁ θάνατος—λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Χρυσόστομος—κατάντησε σὰν ἓνα λιοντάρι, ποῦ τοῦ βγάλανε τὰ δόντια καὶ τοῦ κόψανε τὰ νύχια. Βρυχᾶται καὶ ὀρμᾶ νὰ μᾶς κατασπαράξει, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς κάνει κακό. Προκαλεῖ τὸ γέλιο καὶ τὴν περιφρόνησή μας. Δὲν τὸ φοβοῦνται οὔτε οἱ γυναῖκες οὔτε τὰ παιδιά. Ἀντίθετα, τὸν ἀντιμετωπίζουν θριαμβευτικὰ καὶ μὲ περιφρόνηση.

Ἔγνος εἶναι γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὁ θάνατος. Ἔνας ἕγνος ἀπὸ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ ξυπνήσουμε ξεκούραστοι καὶ ἀνανεωμένοι, μὲ καινούργια καὶ ἀθάνατα σώματα. Ἄφθορα καὶ ἀγέραστα, ἄτρωτα ἀπὸ τὴ φθορὰ καὶ τὴν ἀσθένεια. Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπὸν καὶ οἱ μνήμες τοῦ θανάτου τῶν ἁγίων ἔχουν πανηγυρικὴ καὶ ὄχι πένθιμη μορφή.



Εἰδικὰ ὁ θάνατος τῆς Παναγίας προκαλεῖ ἀνείπωτη καὶ ἀνέκφραστη χαρὰ στοὺς πιστοὺς, διότι δὲν μοιάζει μὲ τὸν θάνατο τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ἀκόμη καὶ τῶν ἁγίων. Γιατὶ αὐτὴ ἦταν καθαρὴ ἀπὸ κάθε ἁμαρτία. Θεώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος κι ἀπὸ τὴν κυοφορία καὶ τὴ

γέννηση τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου. Ἔγινε δοχεῖο τοῦ ἀστέκτου (ἀβάσταχτου) πυρὸς καὶ χωρίο τοῦ ἀχωρήτου Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ θάνατος δὲν εἶχε δύναμη ἐπάνω της. Πέθανε μὲν γιὰ νὰ πληρώσει τὸ κοινὸ μέτρο τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως, μετέστη ὅμως πρὸς τὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Θεὸ της. Καὶ μένει ζῶσα καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατό της, γιὰ νὰ χαίρεται γιὰ τὴν δόξα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ γιὰ νὰ προσεύχεται ἀδιάκοπα γιὰ ὅλο τὸ λαὸ της, ὅλον τὸν κόσμο.

«Ἐν τῇ Γεννήσει τὴν παρθενίαν ἐφύλαξας, ἐν τῇ Κοιμήσει τὸν κόσμον οὐ κατέλιπες Θεοτόκε. Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν, μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ταῖς πρεσβείαις ταῖς σαῖς λυτρομένη, ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.» Ὁ θάνατος τῆς Θεοτόκου—ἐκείνης ποῦ γέννησε τὴν Ζωὴ καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση—λαμβάνεται ἐπιπλέον ὡς ὁ τύπος τῆς ἀναστάσεως ὅλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ δίδεται ὡς τὸ παράδειγμα

Γιὰ τὴν νίκη κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου, ποῦ ἐπιτέλεσε ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἔτσι τὴν προσφωνεῖ ὁ ὕμνωδός: «Χαῖρε ἀναστάσεως τύπον ἐκλάμπουσα!». Τὸ

ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν φαίνεται ἄμεσα, ἀλλὰ οὐσιαστικά ὁ θάνατος καταργήθηκε πράγματι. Δὲν ὀνομάζεται κἄν θάνατος, ἀλλὰ κοίμησις, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτὸ τὸ καθιέρωσε ἀνάμεσα στὸν εὐσεβῆ λαὸ τὸ γεγονός τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου. Τὸ σῶμα τῆς Παναγίας μας κοιμήθηκε στὴν ἀγκαλιὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς πρεσβεύει γιὰ ὅλους μας μπροστὰ στὸν θρόνο Του. Ἡ μετάστασή τῆς ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν ζωὴ στὴν ἄλλη, τὴν ἀληθινή, δὲν εἶναι πρόξενος πένθους ἀλλὰ αἰτία χαρᾶς καὶ πανηγύρεως. Πανηγυρίζει ὁ λαὸς μας στὴν γιορτὴ τῆς καὶ ζῆ μιὰ μικρὴ Λαμπρὴ, χορεύει καὶ ἀγάλλεται ὅπως στὴν γιορτὴ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Διότι στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Παναγίας βλέπει ὁ κάθε πιστὸς τὸν ἑαυτό του ὡς μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ στὴν Κοίμησή τῆς βλέπει τὸν δικό του θάνατο ὡς μιὰ κοίμησις ἕναν ὕπνο μέσα στὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀπὸ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ σηκωθεῖ σὰν θὰ σημάνει ἡ σάλπιγγα τῆς ἀναστάσεως καὶ θὰ εἶναι αἰώνια μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀποψη ἡ γιορτὴ τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι μιὰ ὁμολογία πίστεως τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅτι «προσδοκεῖ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν», ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕνα κήρυγμα καὶ μιὰ διδαχὴ παρηγοριᾶς καὶ ἐλπίδας στοὺς χαροκαμένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ πενθοῦν γιὰ τὸν θάνατο τῶν ἀγαπητῶν τους, καὶ στοὺς ἀπεγνωσμένους, ποὺ δὲν ἐλπίζουν σὲ κανένα παρὸν οὔτε μέλλον. Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου μᾶς βεβαιώνει ὅτι ὁ θάνατος εἶναι μιὰ ἀνάπαυλα πρὶν τὴν ἀνάστασις καὶ ἕνα προοίμιο τῆς αἰώνιας δόξας, γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο βέβαια ποὺ πεθαίνει ἐν Χριστῷ. Καὶ γιορτάζοντας «τῆς Παναγίας», βιώνουμε μὲ ἕνα τρόπο ποὺ πολὺ μᾶς ἐγγίζει, τὴν ἀνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐφαρμοσμένη στὴν ζωὴ καὶ στὸν θάνατο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποὺ πολὺ Τὸν ἀγάπησε καὶ βαθεῖα Τὸν κατάλαβε καὶ ἀσύλληπτα ταπεινὰ Τὸν ὑπρέτησε: τῆς **Ἵπεραγίας Ἐνδόξου Λεσποίνης μας Θεοτόκου καὶ Ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας.**



Εκεῖνος, ποὺ πιστεύει πραγματικὰ στὸν Κύριον φοβάται τὴν Κόλασιν, καὶ αὐτὸς ποὺ φοβάται τὴν Κόλασιν ἐγκρατεύεται καὶ δὲν πέφτει σὲ πάθη. Αὐτὸς πάλι, ποὺ ἐγκρατεύεται ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη ὑπομένει τὶς θλίψεις. Ὑπομένοντας τὶς θλίψεις στηρίζει τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ στὸν Θεόν. Ἡ ἐλπίδα πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀποσπᾷ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ κάθε ἐναγώνια μέρμινα καὶ φιλόκοσμη προσπάθεια. Ἐφ' ὅσον λοιπὸν ἀπαλλαγῆ ὁ νοῦς ἀπὸ τὴν μέρμινα καὶ τὴν φροντίδα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, τότε πλέον θὰ ἀποκτήσῃ τὴν ἀγάπην πρὸς τὸν Θεόν.

Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς

Γαστριμαργία: Εὐχάριστο Πάθος;

Τοῦ κ. Γεωργίου Θ. Μηλίτη, διδασκάλου.

Απὸ τὰ πανάρχαια χρόνια οἱ ἄνθρωποι πίστευαν ὅτι ρίζα καὶ αἰτία πολλῶν ἀσθενειῶν ποὺ τυραννοῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἶναι ἡ πολυφαγία ἢ ἡ γαστριμαργία, ὅπως ἄλλοιῶς λέγεται.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας θεωρεῖ τὴν γαστριμαργία αἰτία πολλῶν κακῶν καὶ μητέρα πολλῶν ἄλλων ἁμαρτημάτων, διότι αὐτὴ ἔβγαλε τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο.

Ἡ γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἕνα ἐλάττωμα, ἕνα πάθος, ποὺ μᾶς παρακινεῖ νὰ τρῶμε καὶ νὰ πίνουμε περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο χρειάζεται τὸ σῶμα μας γιὰ νὰ συντηρηθεῖ. Οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες, καὶ μάλιστα ὁ ἱερός Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, λένε ὅτι πρόκειται γιὰ βαρεῖα ἁμαρτία, ὅπως ἀποδεικνύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους: *«Αὐτὴ ἐξόρισε τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, αὐτὴ προκάλεσε τὸν μεγάλο κατακλυσμὸ, αὐτὴ ἔκανε τοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες εἰδωλολάτρες, αὐτὴ ἔριξε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σὲ πολλὰ ἄλλα κακά».*

Ἡ γαστριμαργία καταβάλλει σχεδὸν ὅλους μας, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι εὐχάριστο πάθος. Εἶναι ἀμφίβολο καὶ ἐπίφοβο ἂν πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου ἐγκαταλείπει τὸν ἄνθρωπο· εἰδικὰ σήμερα, ἐποχὴ ἀφθονίας καὶ καλοζωίας, ἔχει δημιουργηθεῖ τὸ πλέον κατάλληλο κλίμα, αὐτὸ τὴ βοηθεῖ νὰ γιγαντώνεται καὶ νὰ διαφεντεύει σ' ὅλη σχεδὸν τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα.

Τι Λέμε Γαστριμαργία;

Ἡ γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἕνα ἐλάττωμα, ἕνα πάθος, ποὺ κυριεύει πολλοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἡ λέξις γαστριμαργία εἶναι σύνθετη καὶ παράγεται ἀπὸ τὸ οὐσιαστικὸ **γαστήρ** (κοιλία) καὶ τὸ ρῆμα **μαργαίνω** (κατέχομαι ὑπὸ μανίας, καὶ μάργος λέγεται ὁ μανιώδης)· ἔτσι, ὅταν καταλαμβάνει κάποιον ἡ μανία νὰ γεμίσει τὴν γαστέρα (κοιλία) του, αὐτὸ λέγεται γαστριμαργία. Ἄρα γαστριμαργία εἶναι τὸ πάθος ποὺ μᾶς παρακινεῖ νὰ τρῶμε καὶ νὰ πίνουμε περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο χρειάζεται τὸ σῶμα μας γιὰ νὰ συντηρηθεῖ.

Τὸν ἀκριβῆ ὀρισμὸ τῆς γαστριμαργίας δίνει ὁ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης στὸ βιβλίον του «Κλίμαξ»: *«Γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἡ ὑποκριτικὴ συμπεριφορὰ τῆς κοιλίας, ἢ ὅποια ἐνῶ εἶναι χορτασμένη, φωνάζει πὼς εἶναι ἐνδεὴς (φτωχὴ) καὶ ἐνῶ εἶναι παραφορτωμένη μέχρι διαρρήξεως, ἀνακράζει ὅτι πεινᾷ. Γαστριμαργία εἶναι ἡ δημιουργὸς τῶν καρυκευμάτων, ἢ πηγὴ τῶν τέρψεων τοῦ λάρυγγα. Γαστριμαργία εἶναι μιὰ ἀπάτη τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν. Καθ' ἡ στιγμὴν κάποιος τρώγει τὸ μέτριο σὲ ποσότητα φαγητό του, ἢ γαστριμαργία τὸν κάνει νὰ σκέπτεται πὼς νὰ ἦτο δυνατὸν νὰ καταβροχθίσει διὰ μιᾶς τὰ σύμπαντα».* (Κλίμαξ, ἔκδ. Παρακλήτου 1985).

Ὁ Εὐάγριος καὶ ὁ Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητὴς τὴν ὀνομάζουν «ἐμπαθὴ λογισμό», μ' ἄλλα λόγια «τὸ σῶμα παρεμβαίνει μόνον ὡς ὄργανο πραγμάτωσης τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ψυχῆς». (Συμεών Νέος Θεολόγος).

Γαστρίμαργία, κατ' ἄλλον Πατέρα, εἶναι ἡ κατανάλωση ποσότητας φαγητοῦ μεγαλύτερης ἀπ' ὅση εἶναι ἀπαραίτητη γιὰ τὴν ἐπιβίωσή μας, ἐνῶ λαίμαργία ἢ τάση πρὸς φαγητὰ πού ἔχουν ἀπολαυστικὴ γεύση ἢ ἡ κατανάλωση φαγητοῦ ἀποκλειστικὰ γιὰ εὐχαρίστηση.

Συμπερασματικὰ ἡ γαστρίμαργία, κατὰ τοὺς Πατέρες, εἶναι «ἀναζήτησις τῆς ἡδονῆς τοῦ ἐσθίειν», «ἐπιθυμία τοῦ ἐσθίειν γιὰ τὴν ἡδονή», ἀκόμα ἢ «ἀκράτεια τοῦ στόματος καὶ τῆς κοιλίας».

Θυγατέρες τῆς

Σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς Πατέρας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας ἡ γαστρίμαργία δὲν βλάπτει μόνον τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ γεννᾷ καὶ ἄλλα πάθη καὶ ἀμαρτήματα.

Τὸ πρῶτο πάθος πού τὴν ἀκολουθεῖ εἶναι «ἡ πορνεία καὶ κάθε σαρκική ἀκαθαρσία». Κατὰ τὸ ὄσιο Μᾶρκο τὸ ἀσκητὴ τὴν γαστρίμαργία «ἀκολουθοῦν ἢ λήθη καὶ ἡ ραθυμία». Ἄλλοι Πατέρες τονίζουν ὅτι τὴν ἡδονὴ πού προκαλεῖ τὸ φαγητὸ ἢ τὸ πιετὸ διαδέχεται ἡ ὀδύνη. τὴν εὐχαρίστηση τοῦ λάρυγγα διαδέχεται καταρχὴν ὁ πόνος καὶ τὸ βάρος τοῦ στομάχου, καὶ στὴ συνέχεια ἡ παχυσαρκία καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀναριθμητὰ δεινὰ πού προέρχονται ἀπὸ αὐτὴ.

Κυρίως ὅμως, ἡ γαστρίμαργία προκαλεῖ ζάλη στὸ κεφάλι, βάρος καὶ ἀτονία στὸ σῶμα. Ἔτσι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐγκαταλείπει τὸ πνευματικὸ του ἔργο, ἐπειδὴ ἔρχεται σ' αὐτὸν ἡ ὀκνηρία. Ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ σκότιση τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ ἡ ταραχὴ τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς. Ὁ νοῦς γίνεται ἀδιάκριτος καὶ οἱ πονηροὶ λογισμοὶ βρίσκονται στὸ ἀποκορύφωμά τους ὅταν κανεὶς δὲν ἔχει καθαρὸ νοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀσχοληθεῖ μὲ πνευματικὰ πράγματα.

Οἱ Πατέρες γιὰ τὴ Γαστρίμαργία

Στὰ πατερικὰ κείμενα διαβάζουμε ὅτι τὰ πάθη δὲν ἀνήκουν στὴ φύση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι ἀρρώστιες τῆς ψυχῆς. Ὅταν ὅμως χρονίζονται στὸν ἄνθρωπο, γίνονται δεύτερη φύση του καὶ δὲν ἀπομακρύνονται. Ἀκόμα κι ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετανοεῖ καὶ δέχεται τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, δὲν ἀπαλλάσσεται μὲ μιᾶς ἀπ' αὐτά, ἀλλὰ χρειάζεται νὰ προσπαθήσει καὶ νὰ ἀγωνισθεῖ γιὰ πολὺ καιρὸ ἂν θέλει νὰ τὰ καταπολεμήσει.

Γιὰ τὴ γαστρίμαργία λέγουν ὅτι εἶναι ἀτομικὸ ὀλισθήμα. Γίνεται, ὅμως, θανάσιμο ἀμάρτημα γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ὅταν προξενεῖ βλάβη καὶ σκάνδαλο στὸν πλησίον, ὅταν γνωρίζει ὅτι θὰ πάθει κάποια σοβαρὴ ἀσθένεια καὶ δὲν ἐγκρατεῦται, ὅταν ξοδεύει πάρα πολλὰ χρήματα γιὰ νὰ τρώει πλοῦσια τὴ στιγμὴ πού ὁ πλησίον του στερεῖται τὰ ἀναγκαῖα καὶ δὲν τὸν ἐλεεῖ κι ὅταν δὲν τηρεῖ τὶς καθιερωμένες ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας νηστείες (ἐφόσον δὲν ἐμποδίζεται ἀπὸ κάποια ἀρρώστια).

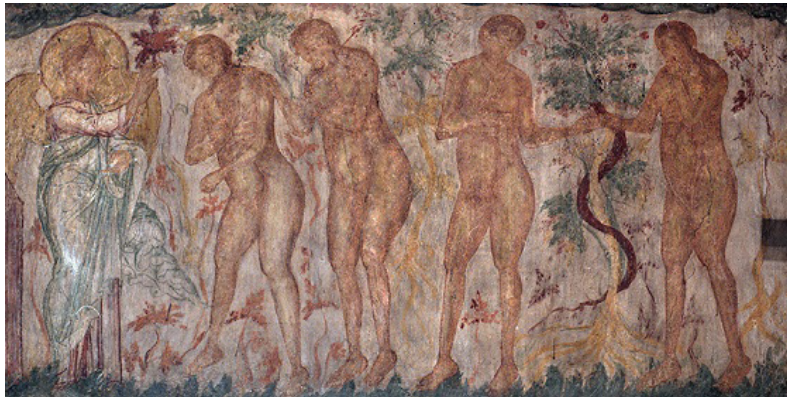
Πῶς Θεραπεύεται

Ὅπως γιὰ ὅλες τὶς ἀσθένειες τοῦ σώματος ὑπάρχουν φάρμακα πού τὶς καταπολεμοῦν καὶ τὶς θεραπεύουν ἔτσι καὶ γιὰ τὶς ἀσθένειες τῆς ψυχῆς, τὰ πάθη, ὑπάρχουν τὰ κατάλληλα φάρμακα πού ὄχι μόνον τὶς θεραπεύουν ἀλλὰ ἀπελευθερώνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὸν τυραννικὸ ζυγὸ τους.

Ἰσχυρὸ ὄπλο γιὰ τὴν καταπολέμησι τῆς γαστρίμαργίας εἶναι ἡ νηστεία. Αὐτὴ δόθηκε σὰν ἐντολὴ στὸν Παράδεισο· διαβάζουμε στὴ Γένεσι: «Καὶ ἐνετείλατο Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Ἀδάμ λέγων ἀπὸ παντός ξύλου τοῦ ἐν τῷ Παραδείσῳ βρώσει φαγῆ, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ γινώσκειν καλὸν καὶ πονηρὸν, οὐ φάγεσθε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἢ δ' ἂν ἡμέρα φάγητε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ, θανάτῳ ἀποθανεῖσθε». (Γέν. 2:16).

Ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία προκειμένου νὰ βοηθήσει τοὺς πιστοὺς ὄχι μόνον νὰ ἀπαλαχθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ πάθος τῆς γαστρίμαργίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ ἀνεβοῦν πνευματικὰ θέσπισε περιόδους νηστείας. Ἔτσι οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι νηστεύουμε κάθε Τετάρτη καὶ Παρασκευὴ· σαράντα ἡμέρες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων (ἀπὸ 15 Νοεμβρίου μέχρι καὶ 24 Δεκεμβρίου)· τὴν Ἁγία καὶ Μεγάλῃ Τεσσαρακοστῇ (ἀπὸ τὴν Καθαρὰ Δευτέρα μέχρι καὶ τὸ Μεγάλο Σάββατο, εἶναι πολὺ αὐστηρὴ νηστεία)· τὴ νηστεία τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων (ἀρχίζει τὴ Δευτέρα μετὰ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Ἁγίων Πάντων καὶ τελειώνει στὶς 28 Ἰουνίου)· τέλος ἔχουμε καὶ τὴ νηστεία πρὸς τιμὴν τῆς Παναγίας (ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὴν 1^η Αὐγούστου καὶ τελειώνει τὴν παραμονὴ τῆς ἑορτῆς τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου).

Οἱ Πατέρες λέγουν ὅτι οἱ πιστοὶ πρέπει νὰ δεῖνουν προσοχὴ διότι ἡ νηστεία χρειάζεται διάκριση, δὲν πρέπει νὰ νηστεύουμε πάνω ἀπὸ τὶς δυνάμεις μας, ὅταν ἡ ὑγεία μας δὲν τὸ ἐπιτρέπει· δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνοῦμε, ὅμως, ὅτι οἱ ἔρουνες πού ἔκαναν οἱ εἰδικοὶ ἔδειξαν



ὅτι ὅταν κάνουμε νηστεία σύμφωνα με τὶς ὑποδείξεις τῶν Πατέρων, ὄχι μόνον δὲν κινδυνεύει ἡ ὑγεία μας ἀλλὰ ἀπεναντίας ὁ ὀργανισμὸς ἀποτοξινώνεται καὶ δὲν προσβάλεται εὐκόλα ἀπὸ διάφορες ἀσθένειες. Χριστιανικὴ νηστεία καὶ ὑγιεινὴ διατροφή εἶναι γιὰ τὴν Ἱατρικὴ σχεδὸν ταυτόσημες ἔννοιες.

Μαζὶ μετὰ τὴν νηστεία, οἱ Πατέρες, σὰν ἀντίδοτό τῆς συνιστοῦν καὶ τὴ μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου, καθὼς καὶ τῆς Μέλλουσας Κρίσεως: «Ὅταν λάβεις θέση σὲ πλούσιο τραπέζι—συμβουλεύει ὁ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος—φέρε ἐμπρὸς σου τὴ μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τῆς κρίσεως ἴσως ἔτσι νὰ συγκρατήσεις λίγο τὸ πάθος. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἂν ἀκόμη δὲν ἐγκρατευθεῖς, τουλάχιστον θὰ ταπεινωθεῖς καὶ θὰ ἀναστενάξεις, συγκρίνοντας τὴν πολυφαγία σου μετὰ τὸ πάθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ». (Κλίμαξ σελ. 191).

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς διαφεύγει ὅτι στὴ γαστρεντερία συνήθως πέφτουμε ὅταν τρώμε συχνότερα ἀπ' ὅσο πρέπει ἢ νωρίτερα ἀπὸ τὴν κατάλληλη ὥρα, ὅταν τρώμε καὶ πίνουμε περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο μᾶς χρειάζεται, ὅταν ἐπιζητοῦμε πλούσια, ἀκριβὰ καὶ ἐξεζητημένα φαγητά, ὅταν τρώμε μετὰ βουλμῖα καὶ ὅταν σπαταλᾶμε μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ πολύτιμου χρόνου τῆς ζωῆς μας σὲ γαστρονομικὰ ἀσχολίες καὶ φροντίδες. Ὁ χρυσὸς κανόνας εἶναι: «*Νὰ δίνουμε στὸ σῶμα ὅσα ἡ ἀνάγκη θέλει καὶ ὄχι ὅσα ἡ ἡδονὴ ἀπαιτεῖ*».

Οἱ Πατέρες γιὰ τὴν Τροφή

Ἴσως κάποιος νὰ πεῖ ὅτι οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας εἶναι ἐναντίον τῆς τροφῆς· αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι σωστό, διότι κανένας ἐκ τῶν Πατέρων δὲν πέθανε ἀπὸ ἀσιτία διότι ἔτρωγαν τὸ ἀναγκαῖο φαγητὸ πὺν χρειαζόντουσαν γιὰ νὰ διατηρηθοῦν στὴ ζωὴ. Ἀκόμη οἱ Πατέρες δὲν θεωροῦν ὅτι ἡ τροφή εἶναι ἀκάθαρτη καὶ κακὴ ὥστε νὰ κάνει τὴν γαστρεντερία πάθος. Αὐτὸ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ Γραφή: «*Οὐ τὸ εἰσερχόμενον εἰς τὸ στόμα κοινοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον*». (Ματθ. 15:11). Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος γράφει στὸ μαθητὴ του Τιμόθεο: «*Πᾶν κτίσμα Θεοῦ καλόν, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον*». (Α΄ Τιμ. 4:4). Ἄρα, τὸ πάθος τῆς γαστρεντερίας δὲν εἶναι ἐπακόλουθο τῆς τροφῆς πὺν παίρνουμε, ἀλλὰ στὸ σκοπὸ καὶ στὸ στόχο πὺν βάζουμε ὅταν καθόμαστε νὰ φᾶμε.

Ὁ ἅγιος Δωρόθεος Γάζης ἔλεγε: «*Ἄλλο πρᾶγμα εἶναι τὸ νὰ φάγει κάποιος διὰ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσει τὴν φυσικὴν ἀνάγκην λήψεως τροφῆς καὶ ἄλλο νὰ φάγει διὰ νὰ δοκιμάσει τὴν ἐκ τοῦ φαγητοῦ ἡδονήν. Ὁ σκοπὸς διὰ τὸν ὅποιον τρώγει τις εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὅποιος δημιουργεῖ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. Τὸ νὰ τρώγει δὲ κανεὶς ὅσον ἐπιβάλλουν αἱ σῶματι καὶ τοῦ ἀνάγκαι σημαίνει ὅτι οὗτος ὀρίζει εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν τοῦ πόσον πρέπει νὰ φάγει καθ' ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν*».

Τέλος

Πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζουμε, ὅτι τὸ φοβερὸ πάθος τῆς γαστρεντερίας εἶναι ἀνελέητο καὶ ὁ ἀγῶνας γιὰ τὴν καταπολέμησή του δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλος. Εἶναι σκληρὸς καὶ κουραστικὸς. Συνεχῆς καὶ ἰσόβιος. Πρέπει νὰ παλέψουμε μ' ἓναν πολὺ δυνατὸ ἐχθρὸ, πὺν μᾶς βλάπτει σωματικά, ἀλλὰ κυρίως ψυχικά. Ἄς πάρουμε τὴν ἀπόφαση καὶ ἂς τὴν τηρήσουμε «*μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυφαγία καὶ τὴν πολυποσία*». Ἄς ἔχουμε πάντα στὸ μυαλὸ μας αὐτὰ πὺν ἔλεγε ὁ Μέγας Ἀντώνιος: «*Ἐγκράτεια εὐδαιμονία ἐστὶ καὶ ἐλπίς ἀγαθὴ ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων*» καὶ νὰ μὴ ξεχνοῦμε ὅτι «*ἡ νηστεία, τὸ ἀντίδοτό τῆς γαστρεντερίας, εἶναι βία φύσεως καὶ περιτομὴ τῶν ἡδονῶν τοῦ λάρυγγα, ἐκτομὴ τῆς σαρκικῆς πυρώσεως, ἐκκοπὴ τῶν πονηρῶν λογισμῶν, ἀπελευθέρωση ἀπὸ λογισμοὺς ὀνειρῶν, καθαρὸτητα προσευχῆς, φωτισμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς, διαφύλαξις τοῦ νοῦ, διάλυσις τῆς πυρώσεως, θύρα τῆς κατανύξεως, ἐλαφρότης τοῦ ὕπνου, ὑγεία τοῦ σώματος, πρόξενος τῆς ἀπαθείας, ἄφεση τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων, θύρα καὶ ἀπόλαυσις τοῦ Παραδείσου*». (Κλίμαξ, σελ. 191).



Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑΣ

Ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐλευθερίας εἶναι ἓνας καὶ βρῖσκεται μόνον μέσα στὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, μᾶς λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Μάρκος ὁ Ἀσκητὴς στὸ ἔργον του «*Περὶ πνευματικοῦ Νόμου*» (ἐκδόσεις Παναγόπουλος), ὅπου γράφει μεταξὺ ἄλλων:

«*Ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐλευθερίας (δηλ. τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου) διδάσκει ὄλη τὴν ἀλήθεια. Καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν διαβάζουν, μόνον γιὰ νὰ λάβουν μία γνώση του. Λίγοι ὁμως τὸν ἐννοοῦν, ἀνάλογα μετὰ τὴν ἐκτέλεση τῶν ἐντολῶν*».

Καὶ λίγο πῦν κάτω ἐξηγεῖ ὁ Ἅγιος: «*Ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐλευθερίας (δηλ. τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου) μετὰ τὴν ἀληθινὴν γνώση διαβάζεται, μετὰ τὴν ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν γίνεται ἀντιληπτὸς, ἢ πληρωσὴ του ὁμως γίνεται μετὰ τὸς οἰκτιρμοὺς τοῦ Χριστοῦ*».

Καὶ καταλήγει: «*Ὅσοι δὲν λογαριάζουν ὅτι εἶναι ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ τηροῦν ὄλες τὶς ἐντολές τοῦ Χριστοῦ, αὐτοὶ διαβάζουν σωματικά τὸν νόμον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ δὲν ἐννοοῦν μήτε ἐκεῖνα, πὺν λένε, μήτε ἐκεῖνα γιὰ τὰ ὅποια δίνουν διαβεβαιώσεις (Α΄ Τιμ. 1:7). Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ νομίζουν ὅτι τάχα ἐκπληρώνουν τὸν νόμον μετὰ τὰ ἔργα τους*».

Ἔμεῖς πῶς διαβάζουμε τὸν λόγον τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου;

Ἐπὶ Ἀρχαγγέλων

Ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ Ἀρχάγγελοι καὶ Ποιὰ εἶναι τὰ Ὄνόματά τους;

Ἀγίου Νικολάου Βελμύροβιτς, «Ὁ Πρόλογος τῆς Ἀχρίδος»,
Ἐκδόσεις Ἄθως.

Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή δίνει σαφῆ καὶ ἀκράδαντα μαρτυρία ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι ἀκαταπαύστως ἐπικοινωνοῦν μὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμο. Ἡ Ἱερὰ Παράδοση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μᾶς διδάσκει τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀρχηγῶν τῶν ἀγγελικῶν δυνάμεων: Μιχαήλ, Γαβριήλ, Ραφαήλ, Οὐριήλ, Σαλαθιήλ, Ἰεγουδιήλ καὶ Βαραχιήλ (ἐνίοτε συμπληρῶνεται καὶ ἓνας ὄγδοος, ὁ Ἰερεμιήλ). Ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ Ἀρχάγγελοι καὶ τί σημαίνουν τὰ ὀνόματά τους;

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Μιχαήλ**» στὴν Ἑβραϊκὴ γλῶσσα σημαίνει «ποιὸς εἶναι ὁμοιος μὲ τὸν Θεό;» (τίς ὡς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν;). Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ ἀπεικονίστηκε ἤδη ἀπὸ τοὺς πρώτους Χριστιανοὺς ὡς στρατηγός, ὁ ὁποῖος κρατᾷ στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι τοῦ δόρυ, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο ἐπιτίθεται στὸν Ἐωσφόρο, τὸν Σατανᾶ, καὶ στὸ ἀριστερὸ τοῦ χέρι κρατᾷ ἓνα πράσινο κλαδὶ φοίνικα. Στὴν κορυφὴ τοῦ δόρατος ὑπάρχει μία λινὴ κορδέλα μὲ κόκκινο σταυρό. Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ θεωρεῖται ὡς ὁ φρουρὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου πίστεως, ὁ ὁποῖος μάχεται κατὰ τῶν αἰρέσεων.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Γαβριήλ**» σημαίνει «Ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ», ἢ «ἰσχυρὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ». Εἶναι ὁ ἀγγελιαφόρος τῶν μυστηρίων τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἰδιαίτερος δὲ τῆς Ἐνσαρκώσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄλων τῶν σχετικῶν μὲ αὐτὴν μυστηρίων. Ἀπεικονίζεται συνήθως κρατώντας στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι τοῦ φανάρι μὲ φωτισμένη λαμπάδα καὶ στὸ ἀριστερὸ τοῦ χέρι ἓναν καθρέφτη ἀπὸ πράσινο ἴασπη. Ὁ καθρέφτης σηματοδοτεῖ τὴ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς ἓνα κρυμμένο μυστήριον.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Ραφαήλ**» σημαίνει «Θεῖα θεραπεία» ἢ «Θεὸς ὁ θεραπευτῆς». (Τωβίτ 3:17, 12:15). Ὁ Ραφαήλ ἀπεικονίζεται νὰ ὀδηγεῖ μὲ τὸ δεξιὸ χέρι τοῦ τὸν Τωβίτ (ὁ ὁποῖος κρατᾷ ἓνα ψάρι ἀλιευμένο στὸν Τίγρη ποταμὸ) καὶ μὲ τὸ ἀριστερὸ μία ἀλαβάστρινη ἰατρικὴ θήκη.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Οὐριήλ**» σημαίνει «Πῦρ τοῦ Θεοῦ», ἢ «Φῶς τοῦ Θεοῦ». (Γ' Ἑσδρας 3:1 καὶ 5:20). Ἀπεικονίζεται νὰ κρατᾷ ἓνα σπαθὶ κατὰ τῶν Περσῶν στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι τοῦ καὶ μία πύρινη φλόγα στὸ ἀριστερὸ.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Σαλαθιήλ**» σημαίνει «πρεσβευτῆς πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ». (Γ' Ἑσδρας 5:16). Ἀπεικονίζεται μὲ χαμηλωμένο τὸ πρόσωπο καὶ τὰ μάτια του, κρατώντας τὰ χέρια του στὸ στήθος σὲ στάση προσευχῆς.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Ἰεγουδιήλ**» σημαίνει «αὐτὸς ποὺ δοξάζει τὸν Θεό». Ἀπεικονίζεται μὲ χρυσοῦ στεφάνι στὸ δεξιὸ τοῦ χέρι καὶ τριπλὸ μαστίγιον στὸ ἀριστερὸ.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Βαραχιήλ**» σημαίνει «εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ». Ἀπεικονίζεται νὰ κρατᾷ στὸ χέρι τοῦ λευκὸ τριαντάφυλλο κοντὰ στὸ στήθος του.

Ἀρχάγγελος «**Ἰερεμιήλ**» σημαίνει «ἐξύμνηση τοῦ Θεοῦ». Τιμᾶται ὡς ἐμπνευστῆς ὑψηλῶν σκέψεων, ποὺ ἀνυψώνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ. (Γ' Ἑσδρας 4:36).

Οὐράνιοι Ἀρχιστράτηγοι, ἐσεῖς ποὺ ἄνωθεν ἐπιβλέπετε μὲ μεγάλη στοργή, σκεπάστε μας μὲ τίς φτεροῦγες σας, προστατέψτε μας μὲ τὴ δύναμή σας.

Εἴσαστε ὀπλισμένοι μὲ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, στεφανω-

μένοι μὲ τὴ δόξα Του, κρατᾶτε πύρινες ρομφαῖες γιὰ νὰ θεριζέτε τοὺς δαίμονες.

Ἀστραπιαῖος, ὡς ἀκτίνες φωτὸς διασχίζετε τὰ σύννεφα, ὅλα τὰ σύννεφα τοῦ ἁέρα, ὅπου δίνετε μάχες, παλεύοντας ὑπὲρ

τοῦ Ὑψίστου Θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

Ἀκούραστοι, ἄγρυπνοι φρουροί, χαριέστατοι, ἀκαταπαύστως ὑπερίπτασθε πάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ὅλη τὴν κτίση, πάνω ἀπὸ ἀναρίθμητους κόσμους.

Ὅλες οἱ κραταιὲς στρατιᾶς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ—οἱ ἐνάρετες λεγεῶνες μὲ τὰ ἀγαθοποιὰ τάγματα τῶν ἀγγέλων—δικές σας εἶναι, ἀδελφοί μας, κατὰ τὸν κοινὸ μας Πλάστη.

Θεῖοι ἀρχιστράτηγοι τῶν οὐρανίων Δυνάμεων, ὀδηγήστε μας ἐκεῖ ὅπου πρέπει νὰ ἀρθοῦμε, στὸν θρόνον τοῦ Ὑψίστου Θεοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος τὰ πάντα δημιούργησε ἐκ τοῦ μηδενός.

† † †

Ἀπολυτίκιον (Κατέβασμα) — Ἦχος δ΄
Τῶν οὐρανίων στρατιῶν Ἀρχιστράτηγοι,
δυσωποῦμεν ὑμᾶς ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀνάξιοι, ἵνα ταῖς ὑμῶν
δεήσεσι, τειχίσῃτε ἡμᾶς, σκέπη τῶν πτερῶν,
τῆς αὐλοῦ ὑμῶν δόξης, φρουροῦντες ἡμᾶς
προσπίπτοντας, ἐκτενῶς καὶ βοῶντας Ἐκ τῶν
κινδύνων λυτρώσασθε ἡμᾶς, ὡς Ταξίαρχαι τῶν
ἄνω Δυνάμεων.



Ένας Άγιος Δεσπότης: Μητροπολίτης Σιατίστης Αντώνιος (+2005)

Πηγή: «Βήμα Ὁρθοδοξίας», <https://www.vimaorthodoxias.gr/>.

Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐκδότη

Στις 17 Δεκεμβρίου τοῦ 2005, «ὁ πιδὸ ταπεινὸς δεσπότης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας», ὅπως τὸν ἀποκάλεσαν πολλοί, ἄφησε τὴν τελευταία πνοή του στὸ «Μποδοσάκειο» νοσοκομεῖο Πτολεμαΐδας, σὲ ἡλικία 85 ἐτῶν, μετὰ ἀπὸ τρίμηνη μάχη μὲ τὸν καρκίνο. Ὁ θάνατός του προκάλεσε μεγάλη ὀδύνη στὸν λαὸ τῆς Σιατίστης καὶ τῆς εὐρύτερης περιοχῆς τῆς ἱεραῆς Μητροπόλεως. Ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης Ἀντώνιος παραμένει ἓνα καὶ (δυστυχῶς) μοναδικὸ στὶς μέρες μας παράδειγμα ἀγιοσύνης, ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ ποιμαντικῆς ἡγεσίας τύπου ποὺ σπανίζει καὶ ἴσως οὔτε κὰν ὑπάρχει στὸν κύκλο τῆς σημερινῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης Ἱεραρχίας. Τὴν εὐχή του νὰ ἔχουμε.

† † †

Ἄπλως καὶ πάμπωχος ἦταν ὁ Δεσπότης Ἀντώνιος. Δὲν εἶχε Μερσεντὲς μὲ ὀδηγό, ἀλλὰ ἀνέβαινε καὶ στὶς καρότσες τῶν ἀγροτικῶν γιὰ τὶς μετακινήσεις του. Ὅταν τὰ ἔργα μιλοῦν ἀπὸ μόνον τους τότε τὰ σχόλια περιπεύουν...

Αἰτία γι' αὐτὸ τὸ ἄρθρο; Ἐνα γράμμα:

Στέλιο, ἀγαπητὲ φίλε καὶ ἀδελφέ, καλημέρα,

Ἄργησα νὰ σοῦ γράψω.

Ἀπουσίαζα. Σοῦ ὀφείλω τὰ βιογραφικὰ ποὺ τὰ φωτοτύπησα ἀπὸ τὸν τόμο ποὺ ἐκδόθηκε γιὰ τὰ τριάντα χρόνια τῆς ἐπισκοπικῆς του διακονίας.

Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ θὰ ἠθελα νὰ σὲ βεβαιώσω εἶναι ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἦταν Ἅγιος. Ζοῦσε ἅγια. Εἴκοσι χρόνια ποὺ τὸν ἔζησα ἀπὸ κοντὰ τὸ ἔβλεπα, τὸ ἔνοιωθα. Ἀκτινοβολοῦσε φῶς, γέλιο, καὶ πάντα ἠρεμος. Ἄπλως σ' ὄλα του. Φτωχὸς μέχρι τρέλας. Λιτὸς ἀπερίγραπτα. Ντρέπομαι ὅταν ἀναλογίζομαι τὸ πόσες φορὲς λειτούργησα μαζί του καὶ ἐγὼ φοροῦσα στολὲς πλούσιες καὶ αὐτὸς ἦταν πλάι μας φτωχότατος.

Θὰ σοῦ πῶ κάτι γιὰ νὰ θαυμάσεις πάνω σ' αὐτό. Ἀγόρασα μία βαλίτσα, κάποτε, γιὰ τὶς στολὲς μου ὅταν μετακινούμουν. Δερμάτινη. Ἦλθε λοιπὸν στὴν Ἐκκλησία, ὡς τοποτηρητῆς. Εἶχε μία βαλίτσα ξύλινη—ἐσωτερικὰ ἐπενδυμένη μὲ ταπετσαρία χάρτινη, σὰν καὶ αὐτὲς ποὺ ἔχουν κάτι λαϊκὰ μπαούλα. Ντράπηκα. Παπᾶς

ἐγώ. Δεσπότης αὐτός. Τοῦ λέω, «Γέροντα δὲν πάει ἄλλο. Θὰ πάρετε τὴ βαλίτσα τὴ δική μου». Ἐπαναστάτησε. «Ὅχι» μοῦ λέει, «ἐσὺ εἶσαι οἰκογενειάρχης, ἔχεις παιδιὰ καὶ ἄλλα τέτοια». Τελικὰ τὴν πήρε.

Ἦστερα ἀπὸ μέρες μοῦ τηλεφώνησε. «Ἐλα νὰ πάμε νὰ λειτουργήσουμε σὲ κάποια κωμόπολη». Πάω, καὶ τί νὰ δῶ. Ἡ ξύλινη βαλίτσα. «Πάλι τὰ ἴδια» τοῦ λέω. «Παιδάκι μου», μοῦ λέει, «ἔπιασε τόπο, τὴν ἔδωσα σὲ μία φτωχὰ γυναίκα».

Πήγαμε, κάποτε μὲ τοὺς δικούς μου στὴ Σιατίστη νὰ τὸν ἐπισκεφθοῦμε. Καὶ τί νὰ δοῦμε: Σφουγγάριζε τὶς σκάλες τῆς Μητροπόλεως. «Αὐτὰ τὰ λεφτὰ ποὺ θὰ ἴδιναι σὲ μία γυναίκα, τὰ βάζω στὸ φιλόπτωχο—καὶ ὕστερα μὴ ξεχνᾶτε πὼς ἂν ἤμουν στὸ μοναστήρι, θὰ ἔκανα κάποιον διακόνημα».

Μοῦ διηγήθηκε κάποιος:

Ἦταν ὁ πρῶτος καιρὸς ποὺ εἶχε ἔλθει στὴ Μητρόπολη. Δὲν ἦταν ἀκόμα γνωστός. Πῆγε μία Κυριακὴ σὲ χωριό, στὸ Βόιο. Τέλειωσε ἡ Λειτουργία.

Βγήκε ἔξω καὶ περιέμενε κανένας νὰ τὸν μαζέψει γιὰ τὸν πάει στὴ Σιατίστη. Αὐτοκίνητο δὲν εἶχε μέχρι ποὺ πέθανε. Στάθηκε ἓνας μὲ τὸ αὐτοκίνητό του, αὐτὸς ποὺ μοῦ τὰ διηγείται, καὶ τοῦ λέει. «Παπούλη ποῦ πάς»; Λέει αὐτὸς Σιατίστη. «Καὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ πάω, ἀλλὰ ἔχω δίπλα μου τὴ γυναίκα μου. Πρέπει νὰ στριμωχθοῦμε». Τοῦ λέει ὁ Δεσπότης. «Στὴν

καρότσα μὲ παίρνεις;» Λέει «Ναί».

Ἀνέβηκε στὴν καρότσα ὁ Δεσπότης. Φτάσαμε στὴ Σιατίστη. Θέαμα. Ἔτρεξαν ἄνθρωποι. Στάθηκαν μπροστὰ στὸν ἐπίσκοπο. Τὸν βοήθησαν νὰ κατέβει. Χειροφιλήματα. Ρωτάει ὁ ἄνθρωπος. «Ποιὸς εἶναι;» «Ὁ Δεσπότης», τοῦ λένε. Ἀρχίζει νὰ κλαίει. «Ἐβαλα», μοῦ λέει, «τὸν Δεσπότη στὴν καρότσα καὶ ἄφησα τὴ γυναίκα μου στὸ κάθισμα».

Καὶ τέτοια περιστατικά, Στέλιο, πολλά. Αὐτὸς ὁ Ἅγιος ἄφησε περιουσία στὴ Μητρόπολη: Τὰ μοναστήρια του. Ἀτέλειωτες ὥρες ἐξομολόγηση. Ἡ μισὴ Κοζάνη πήγαινε σ' αὐτόν. Ἀγρυπνίες. Κόσμος ἀπὸ Καστοριά, Γρεβενά, Κοζάνη, Πτολεμαΐδα. Δυὸ φορὲς ἔκανε τοποτηρητῆς ἀπὸ 2-3 μῆνες καὶ τὰ γύρισε ὄλα τα χωριὰ τῆς περιοχῆς, ἑκατὸν πενήντα (150) τὸν ἀριθμὸ, ἀπὸ δύο φορὲς!

Στὴν κηδεῖα του, ὅταν ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος εἶπε ὅτι σήμερον κηδεύουμε ἓναν ἅγιο, ὁ κόσμος ὅλος φώναξε



μὲ μία φωνὴ τρεῖς φορές «Ἄγιος». Ἀκόμα σηκώνεται ἡ τριχὰ μου. Αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες κυκλοφόρησε ἕνα βιβλίο «Ἐνας Φιλομόναχος Ἐπίσκοπος». Μόλις τὸ πάρω θὰ στὸ στεῖλω. Χαιρέτα ὅλους. Εὐχου – Εὐχομαι.

Πάπα-Γιώργης Μπετσάκος

Κοζάνη, 12 Μαρτίου, 2006

† † †

Ο Μακαριστὸς Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης κ. Ἀντώνιος Κόμπος γεννήθηκε τὸ 1920 στὸ Ἄργος Ἀργολίδος. Ἦταν ἀπόφοιτος τῆς Μαρασλείου Παιδαγωγικῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν καὶ τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν. Κάτοχος μεγάλης θεολογικῆς παιδείας, συμπλήρωσε τὶς σπουδές του στὰ Πανεπιστήμια Ὁξφόρδης καὶ Παρισίων.

Διετέλεσε καθηγητὴς καὶ Διευθυντὴς Ἱερατικῶν Σχολῶν. Κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1971-74 ὑπηρετήσε ὡς ἱεροκέρυκα εἰς τὴν Ἱερὰν Μητρόπολιν Αἰτωλίας καὶ Ἀκαρνανίας. Διάκονος ἐχειροτονήθη εἰς τὰς 3.12.67, πρεσβύτερος δὲ εἰς τὰς 4.12.67. Τὴν 23^{ην} Μαΐου 1974 ἐξελέγη Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης.

Ἐξέδωσε ἀξιόλογα ἐπιστημονικὰ ἔργα. Δημοσίευσε βιβλιοκρισίας καὶ ἄρθρα ἐποικοδομητικὰ εἰς διάφορα περιοδικά. Ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κυρίῳ τῇ 17/12/2005.

Μία μαρτυρία...

Ἦταν ἕνας σεμνὸς ἡλικιωμένος κληρικὸς, ψηλός, ἀδύνατος, ἀσκητικὸς, ποὺ ταξίδευε μὲ τὸ καραβάκι στὴ γραμμὴ «Δάφνη-Ἁγία Ἄννα». Στὴ διαδρομὴ ἦταν λιγομίλητος, συμμαζεμένος. Τὸ καραβάκι πέρασε τὰ μοναστήρια καὶ ἔφτασε τὸν ἄρσανά τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Ἁγίου Παύλου, ὅπου ὁ ταξιδιώτης κληρικὸς ἔκανε, ὅπως καὶ σὲ κάθε μοναστήρι, τὸ σταυρὸ του.

Πέρασαν ἀπὸ τὸ μουράγιο τῆς Ν. Σκῆτης καὶ σὲ λίγο ἀντίκρισαν τὴν Ἁγία Ἄννα καὶ ἔκανε πάλι μὲ εὐλάβεια τὸ σταυρὸ του. Ἐδῶ ἦταν ὁ προορισμὸς τοῦ εὐλαβοῦς κληρικοῦ. Σηκώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴ θέση του μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους, καὶ μόλις τὸ καραβάκι ἔπιασε στὸ μουράγιο, οἱ περισσότεροι κατέβηκαν ἐκεῖ. Κατέβηκε καὶ αὐτός.

Γύρισε ὅμως τὸ κεφάλι του πρὸς τὰ πίσω καὶ εἶδε ἕναν νεαρὸ ἱερομόναχο νὰ ἀγωνίζεται νὰ βγάλει ἀπὸ τὸ καραβάκι ἕνα σωρὸ πράγματα ποὺ εἶχε. Δὲν χάνει εὐκαιρία καὶ τὸν ρωτᾷ. «Νὰ σὲ βοηθήσω, πάτερ;»

«Να εἶναι εὐλογημένο γέροντα», ἀπαντᾷ ὁ νεαρὸς ἱερομόναχος, κι ἀμέσως ὁ ἡλικιωμένος κληρικὸς παρὰ τὴν ἡλικία του, μὲ νεανικὸ φρόνημα, βοήθησε σβέλτα στὴ μεταφορὰ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀπὸ τὸ καραβάκι στὸ μουράγιο. Τελείωσαν, καὶ ὁ μοναχὸς εὐχαρίστησε τὸν ἄγνωστο κληρικὸ καὶ ἐκείνος ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκρη τοῦ μουράγιου γιὰ νὰ πάρει στὴ συνέχεια τὸν ἀνήφορο. Τότε τὸν γνώρισαν μερικοὶ καὶ ἔτρεξαν κοντά του. Ἐβαλαν μετάνοια κατὰ τὸ συνηθισμένο... «Εὐλόγησον, Δέσποτα!», «Ὁ Κύριος». «Εὐλογεῖτε, Σεβασμιότατε!», «Ὁ Κύριος».

Ὁ μοναχὸς τὰ ἔχασε! Τόση ὥρα λοιπὸν τὸν βοηθοῦσε ἕνας Δεσπότης νὰ βγάλει τὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ τὸ καΐκι; Ποιὸς νὰ ἦταν ἄραγε αὐτὸς ὁ ταπεινὸς παπᾶς, ὅπως ἐμοίαιζε; Ἔτρεξε, ἔβαλε μετάνοια, πῆρε εὐχή, ζήτησε συγχώρεση ποὺ δέχθηκε νὰ γίνε βοηθὸς του ἕνας Δεσπότης, κι ἐκεῖνος δὲν ἀντέδρασε καθόλου, θεωρώντας το γιὰ κάτι φυσικὸ καὶ ἀνθρώπινο τὸ νὰ προσφέρεις βοήθεια στὸν διπλανό σου...

Ποιὸς Δεσπότης ὅμως ἦταν; Ἦταν ὁ μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος Κόμπος. Μὴ μοῦ πεῖτε τώρα, ὅτι ἔχουμε πολλοὺς σὰν κι' αὐτόν...

Μία ἀκόμη μαρτυρία:

Γεῖα σᾶς φίλοι μου!

Νὰ σᾶς πῶ καὶ ἐγὼ λίγα περιστατικὰ γιὰ τὸν μακαριστὸ Ἀντώνιο!

Ὁ ἐπίσκοπος κ. Ἀντώνιος σπάνια χρησιμοποιοῦσε αὐτοκίνητο, καὶ συνήθως πῆγαινε μὲ λεωφορεῖο σὲ ὅλες τὶς Συνόδους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα πολλοὶ Ἱεράρχες τὸν ... πείραζαν καὶ τὸν ... φώναζαν «Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ΚΤΕΑ».

Μία φορὰ πανηγύριζε ἕνα χωριὸ κοντὰ στὴ Σιάτιστα καὶ θὰ προεξείχε ὁ Μητροπολίτης. Ὁδηγὸ τότε δὲν εἶχε. Ὅποτε κάνει ὠτο-στόπ καὶ στὸ δρόμο σταματᾷ ἕνα τρακτέρ ποὺ κουβαλοῦσε ἄχυρα μὲ καρότσα. Ὁ ὀδηγὸς ἔτσι φτωχὸ καὶ χωρὶς κάτι νὰ δείχνει πὼς εἶναι Μητροπολίτης, τὸν πέρασε γιὰ ἀπλὸ μοναχὸ καὶ τοῦ εἶπε, πὼς μόνο πίσω στὰ ἄχυρα ἔχει θέση. Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Ἀντώνιος δέχτηκε μὲ χαρά!

Ὅταν ἔμπαιναν στὸ χωριὸ μὲ τὸν Δεσπότη πάνω στὰ ἄχυρα, κάποιοι χωρικοὶ τὸν ἀντιλήφθηκαν καὶ ἄρχιζαν νὰ φωνάζουν. «Ὁ Δεσπότης ἦρθε!... Ὁ Δεσπότης ἦρθε!...». Οἱ καμπάνες ἄρχισαν νὰ χτυπᾶνε δυνατὰ καὶ ὁ ὀδηγὸς τοῦ τρακτέρ τὰ ἔχασε, ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο κατάλαβε τί γινόταν...

Ἐνα ἀκόμη γεγονὸς ἦταν, πὼς εἶχε ἕνα κῆπο ποὺ ὅλο σκάλιζε φορώντας κάτι παλιὰ ρᾶσα. Ἔτσι, ὅταν μία παρέα ἀπὸ γνωστοὺς καὶ φίλους του πῆγαν νὰ τὸν δοῦν, δὲν τὸν κατάλαβαν νομίζοντας πὼς εἶναι ὁ κηπουρὸς... «Ποῦ εἶναι ὁ Δεσπότης;», τὸν ρωτᾶνε. «Τί τὸν θέλετε;», τοὺς λέει. «Νὰ πάρουμε τὴν εὐχή του», τὸν λένε. «Να πάω νὰ τὸν φωνάξω», τοὺς λέει. Πῆγε, ἔβαλε ἕνα ἄλλο καθαρὸ ρᾶσο, καὶ γύρισε κοντὰ τους...

Τέλος ἀπὸ προσωπικὴ ἐμπειρία μπορῶ νὰ πῶ, πὼς εἶχε τὴν ἀθωότητα καὶ ἀγνότητα μικροῦ παιδιοῦ, καὶ πολὺ μεγάλη ἀγάπη γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, ποὺ τὴν καταλάβαινες ἀπὸ τὴν συμπεριφορὰ του.

Οἱ Τελευταῖες Στιγμές του

Ο γνωστὸς διορατικὸς γέροντας Γαβριὴλ ποὺ βρίσκεται λίγο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὶς Καρυές, διαβεβαίωσε ὅτι ὅταν κοιμήθηκε ὁ Μακαριστὸς Ἀντώνιος ἔγινε τέτοιο «γλέντι» στὸν Παράδεισο ποὺ εἶχε νὰ γίνε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς κοίμησης τοῦ Ἁγίου Νεκταρίου!

Ἄς δοῦμε τώρα τὴν περιγραφή πὸν ἔδωσε ἕνας πιστὸς Χριστιανός, σχετικὰ μὲ τὶς τελευταῖες ὥρες τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Ἀντωνίου:

Βρέθηκα, λέει, μὲ τὸ μοναχό, στὰ χέρια τοῦ ὁποίου κοιμήθηκε ὁ μακαριστὸς Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος. Τὸν παρακάλεσα νὰ μοῦ περιγράψει τὶς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς τῆς κοιμήσεώς του, καὶ μοῦ εἶπε:

Ὁ Μακαριστὸς κατὰ τὶς τελευταῖες ἡμέρες ἦταν σὲ ἄσχημη κατάσταση καὶ εἶχε δυσκολία ἀκόμη καὶ στὸ νὰ μιλήσει. Τὸν εἶχαμε πάει στὴν Ἀθήνα ὅπου ἐκεῖ ἔκανε ἐγχείρηση ἀφαίρεσης τοῦ στομάχου λόγω τοῦ καρκίνου πὸν εἶχε. Τὴν ἐπόμενη ἡμέρα, μετὰ τὴν ἐγχείρηση μὸλις μπήκαμε στὸ δωμάτιο τὸν εἶδαμε νὰ κλαίει ἔντονα κοιτάζοντας τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο σὲ μία εἰκόνα μέσα στὸ δωμάτιο τοῦ νοσοκομείου.

«Τί ἔπαθες Δέσποτα;» τὸν ρωτήσαμε. Μὲ δυσκολία ψέλλισε, «θὰ σὰς πῶ... θὰ σὰς πῶ...», ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ πλέον δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ μιλήσει. Προφανῶς κάτι εἶδε πὸν τὸν συγκλόνησε...

Μετὰ, τὸν φέραμε στὸ γυναικεῖο μοναστήρι στὸ Μικροκάστρο ἀλλὰ δὲν ἠθελε νὰ τὸν περιποιῶνται οἱ μοναχὲς καὶ ἔτσι καθόμασταν δίπλα τοῦ ἐναλλάξ διάφοροι μοναχοί. Εἶχα μία ἀδιόρατη διαίσθηση ὅτι θὰ κοιμηθεῖ στὰ χέρια μου. Δὲν ξέρω γιατί.

Ἡ ὑγεία του ἐπιδεινώθηκε καὶ τὸν πήγαμε στὸ νοσοκομεῖο Μποδοσάκειο στὴν Πτολεμαῖδα. Κάποια μέρα δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἄλλος μοναχὸς νὰ πάει στὸν Μακαριστὸ καὶ ὁ Γέροντας εἶπε σ' ἐμένα νὰ πάω μίας κι ἔτυχε νὰ εἶμαι δίπλα τοῦ ἐκείνη τὴν στιγμὴ.

Πῆγα στὸ νοσοκομεῖο. Ὁ Μακαριστὸς ἦταν στὴν ἐντατικὴ ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἦταν κι ἄλλοι ἀσθενεῖς μέσα, δὲν ἠθελε νὰ εἶμαι ἐκεῖ καὶ παρέμενα στὸν διάδρομο. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὥρα ἢ προῖσταμένη μὲ φώναξε καὶ μοῦ εἶπε ὅτι ὁ Δέσποτας τελείωσε. Μὲ θλίψη μπῆκα μέσα κι ἀσυναίσθητὰ του ἔπιασα τὸ χέρι του καὶ προσευχόμενα γιὰ περίπου εἴκοσι λεπτά. Σὲ κάποια στιγμὴ πετάχτηκα πάνω συνειδητοποιώντας ὅτι ἔπρεπε νὰ εἰδοποιήσω τὴν Μητρόπολη καὶ τὸ Μοναστήρι γιὰ τὴν κοιμήσή του. Τότε ἔρχεται κατὰ πάνω μου ἔντρομη ἢ προῖσταμένη, μία σκληρὴ γυναίκα, καὶ μοῦ λέει:

– Πάτερ τί κάνατε ὅση ὥρα τοῦ κρατούσατε τὸ χέρι;

– Τί συμβαίνει; τὴν ρώτησα.

– Πάτερ αὐτὸ πὸν ἔγινε εἶναι ἐκπληκτικό! Ἐνῶ ὅταν σὰς φώναξα ὅλες οἱ ἐνδείξεις ἀπὸ τὰ μηχανήματα βεβαίωναν ὅτι ὁ Δέσποτας εἶχε πεθάνει· ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμὴ πὸν τοῦ πιάσατε τὸ χέρι ἄρχισαν πάλι νὰ δείχνουν ἐνδείξεις ἀνθρώπου ἐν ζωῇ! Δὲν τὸ πιστεύω! Εἶμαι συγκλονισμένη. Μόλις τοῦ ἀφήσατε τὸ χέρι, οἱ ἐνδείξεις στὸ μηχανήματα ξαναμηδενίστηκαν...

Στὸν τάφο του περνοῦν πολλοί, προσκυνοῦν καὶ ζητοῦν πνευματικὴ βοήθεια, γιατί εἶναι πεπεισμένοι

ὅτι ἔχει παρηγοσία στὸν Θεό. Προσκύνησαν δύο σὲ περίοδο χειμῶνος καὶ αἰσθάνθηκαν παρατεταμένη εὐωδία, χωρὶς νὰ κάψουν θυμίαμα καὶ χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχουν λουλούδια.

Τὸν εἶδε γνωστὸς του σὲ ὄνειρο μετὰ τὴν κοιμήσή του καὶ ὁ Σεβασμιώτατος τοῦ εἶπε: «Κοντὰ σας εἶμαι. Σὰς βοηθῶ. Νά, βλέπεις αὐτὴν τὴν κυρία; Ἔχει πρόβλημα καὶ πρέπει νὰ τὴν βοηθήσω», καὶ τοῦ ἔδειξε μία μεσήλικη γυναίκα.

Ἄλλος, τὴν τεσσαρακοστὴ ἡμέρα ἀπὸ τὴν κοιμήσή του, τὸν εἶδε σὲ ὄνειρο καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Μὴν ἀνησυχεῖς. Ὅλα θὰ πᾶνε καλά. Παρακαλῶ τὴν Παναγία νὰ σοῦ χαρίσει μία ἄριστη σύζυγο», πράγμα πὸν συνέβη μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο καιρὸ.

Παρουσιάστηκε σὲ πνευματικοπαίδι του σὲ ὄνειρο καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἐτοιμάσου, θὰ ἔρθω νὰ σὲ πάρω». Δὲν κατάλαβε τὴν σημασία καὶ ἐνῶ ἦταν ὑγιής, χωρὶς κάποιο πρόβλημα, ἐκοιμήθη σὲ λίγους μῆνες.

Ὁ ἀπλὸς καὶ ταπεινὸς Ἱεράρχης, ὅπως ἀθόρυβα ἔζησε καὶ ἀγωνίστηκε ἔτσι ἀθόρυβα ἔφυγε ἀπ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ, ἀφήνοντας πίσω του ἕνα πλούσιο πνευματικὸ ἔργο, τὴν φωτεινὴ ζωὴ του καὶ τὴν διδακτικὴ του ταπείνωση. Τὴν εὐχή του νὰ ἔχουμε.



Ὅταν Ἀρχίσει τὸ Κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία...

Ἀπὸ πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ παπα-Γιάννη Καλαΐδη.

Ὁ παπα-Γιάννης ἦταν πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Ἀντωνίου Μητροπολίτου Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης, τὸν ὁποῖο τιμοῦν οἱ περισσότεροι ὡς σύγχρονο Ἅγιο. Ὁ πατήρ, μᾶς ἀπεκάλυψε ὅτι ὁ μακαριστὸς πέραν ὅλων τῶν χαρισμάτων πὸν εἶχε, ἔγινε δέκτης μεγάλων ἀποκαλύψεων ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.

«Τὸν καιρὸ δὲ πὸν ἦταν στὸ νοσοκομεῖο στὰ τελευταῖα του, μετὰ τὴν τελευταία ἐγχείρηση πὸν ἔκανε, μὸλις τὸν φέρανε στὸ δωμάτιο κοιτοῦσε ἀπέναντι τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου Χριστοῦ καὶ ἔκλαιγε σὰν μικρὸ παιδί λέγοντας μὲ τὴν γνωστὴ ταπεινότητά του «**πῶς μὲ ἀξίωσες Χριστέ μου, ἐμένα καὶ μοῦ ἀπεκάλυψες αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα!**», προφανῶς κάτι σοβαρὸ εἶχε δεῖ πιὸ μπροστά... Ὅταν τὸν ρωτήσαμε «τί εἶδες Δέσποτα;» μὲ δυσκολία μᾶς ἀπάντησε, γιατί εἶχε πρόβλημα μὲ τὴν φωνή του, «ὅταν ἀρχίσει τὸ κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία νὰ ἀρχίσετε νὰ προσεύχεστε!» καὶ τὸ ἐπανελάβε πολλὲς φορὲς «ἐκεῖ, ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία ὅταν ξεκινήσει...» ἐννοώντας ὅτι μετὰ θὰ πιάσει ἡ πόρρα καὶ ἐμᾶς... Τὸν ξαναρωτήσαμε «τί ἄλλο εἶδες Δέσποτα;» καὶ μᾶς εἶπε «θὰ σὰς πῶ μετὰ...» ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἐκοιμήθη...»

Αὐτὸ ἦταν προφανῶς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου...

ON THE DORMITION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

By Saint John of Kronstadt.

Magnify, O my soul, the honourable Translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven.

[Refrain for the 9th Ode of the Canon]

† † †

Let us be happy, beloved brothers and sisters, that we belong to the Holy Orthodox Church, worthily and rightly glorifying the Most Holy Sovereign Theotokos on this eminent day out of all the days of the year with special solemnity. There exists on earth many societies and entire governments that do not consider the need nor the obligation to call upon and glorify the Queen of heaven and earth, the Mother of Our Divine Lord Jesus Christ, and other saints and angels; to submissively serve Her lovingly, as the true Mother of God. Sadly in Russia nowadays we have heretics (among us) who actively dishonor the Mother of God, the saints, their icons, their relics and their festivals. O, if only they also unanimously with us glorified the worthy Queen of heaven and earth!

Today the Holy Church solemnly glorifies the honorable Dormition or translation of the Mother of God from earth to heaven. A wonderful translation—she died without serious illness, peacefully. Her soul is taken up in the divine hands of Her Son and carried up into the heavenly abode, accompanied by the sweet singing of angels. And then, her most pure body is transferred by the apostles to Gethsemane where it is honorably buried, and on the third day it is resurrected and taken up to heaven. You see this on the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos. On it is represented the life-bearing body of the Theotokos laying on a bier, surrounded by the apostles and hierarchs, and in the center of the icon the Lord holding in His hands the most pure soul of the Theotokos. The translation of the Mother of God is a paradigm of the translation in general of the souls of Christians to the other world.

We say that our dead have “fallen asleep” or “passed away.” What does this mean? This means that for the true Christian there is no death. Death was conquered by Christ on the Cross. But there is a translation, i.e. a rearrangement of his

condition, i.e., his soul is in another place, in another age, in another world beyond the grave, eternal, without end, that is what is meant by “falling asleep.” It is as if it were a temporary dream after which, by the voice of the Lord and the fearful yet wonderful trumpet of the Archangel, *and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:29). This is what the Christian means by translation. We should be ready for this translation, for the day of the general resurrection and judgment, for this indescribable world event, recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

This preparation for the meeting of the heavenly King before the dread judgment seat, after death, is essentially the person’s preparation throughout the whole of his life. This preparation means a change in all his thoughts, and the moral change of all his being, so that the whole man would



be pure and white as snow, washing clean everything that defiles the body and spirit, so that he is adorned with every virtue: repentance, meekness, humility, gentleness, simplicity, chastity, mercifulness, abstention, spiritual contemplation, and burning love for God and neighbor.

Our preparation for meeting the heavenly King, and for the inheritance of eternal life in heaven, should consist of these things. The heavenly King desires souls adorned with immutable virtue, souls prepared so that the Very Lord Himself could abide in them. Do not marvel that the Very Lord wants to live in us. In fact the human soul is more spacious than the heavens and the earth, for it exists in the image of God. And if one removes sins from the soul, the Lord of all will settle in it and will fill it with Himself. *We will come to him and make our dwelling with him* (Jn 14:23), says the Lord about the souls who love Him.

And so, ye participants in the Christian feasts, and especially the present feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, ye who are brightly adorned with every virtue and translated to the heavenly kingdom, to Her Son and God, proclaim to each and every one about preparing their souls to be the dwelling place of the Lord, about continual repentance, and about the incorruptible adornment of Christian virtue. Let your death also be unashamed and peaceful, serving as the pledge of a good answer at the dread judgment seat of Christ.

Amen.

THE BEATITUDES OF ST. PAISIOS

Source: "Epistles," by Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Holy Monastery "Evangelist John the Theologian," Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece (2002).

"Precious Cross," December 2, 1972

Sister Abbess Philothei,
Your blessing!

Today, a kind of craziness took hold of me and I took the pencil, as does the madman who writes his outbursts on the wall with charcoal, and I sat down to write my own thoughts on paper like one crazed, and, again, like a lunatic, to send them to you in writing. I am doing this latter craziness out of much love for my sisters, that they might be edified, even if only a little.

The reason for the initial craziness was five letters, one after the other, from various parts of Greece on a variety of subjects. While the events described were great blessings of God, those who wrote to me had fallen into despair because they dealt with them in a worldly way.

After replying accordingly to their letters, I took the pencil like a madman, as I have said, and wrote this letter. I believe that even a fifty-cent piece from your journeying brother will be something toward a flint for each one of the sisters so as to light a little candle in her cell and offer her doxology to our Good God.

I feel great joy when every sister, with her particular cross carries out the equivalent struggle with *philotimo*.

It is a small thing to give to Christ a heart equal in size and as luminous as the sun out of gratitude for His great gifts, and especially for the particular honor He showed us monks by conscripting us with personal summons to His Angelic Order.

A great honor also belongs to the parents who were thus made worthy of becoming related to God. Unfortunately, however, most parents do not realize this and, instead of being grateful to God, are infuriated, etc., for they see everything in a worldly way, like those people I mentioned earlier, who became the reason for me to take the pencil and write everything that follows:

1. Blessed are those who loved Christ more than all the worldly things and live far from the world and near God, with heavenly joys upon the earth.

2. Blessed are those who managed to live in obscurity and acquired great virtues but did not acquire even a small name for themselves.

3. Blessed are those who managed to act as a fool and, in this way, protected their spiritual wealth.

4. Blessed are those who do not preach the Gospel with words, but live it and preach it with their silence, with the Grace of God, which betrays them.

5. Blessed are those who rejoice when unjustly accused, rather than when they are justly praised for their virtuous life. Here are the signs of holiness, not in the dry exertion of bodily asceticism and the great number of struggles, which, when not carried out with humility and the aim to put off the old man, create only illusions.

6. Blessed are those who prefer to be wronged rather than to wrong others and accept serenely and silently injustices. In this way, they reveal in practice that they believe in *one*

God, the Father Almighty and expect to be vindicated by Him and not by human beings who repay in this life with vanity.

7. Blessed are those who have been born crippled or became so due to their own carelessness, yet do not grumble but glorify God. They will hold the best place in Paradise along with the Confessors and Martyrs, who gave their hands and feet for the love of Christ and now constantly kiss with devoutness the

hands and feet of Christ in Paradise.

8. Blessed are those who were born ugly and are despised here on earth, because they are entitled to the most beautiful place in Paradise, provided they glorify God and do not grumble.

9. Blessed are those widows who wear black in this life, even unwillingly, but live a white spiritual life and glorify God without complaining rather than the miserable ones who wear assorted clothes and live a spotted life.

10. Blessed and thrice blessed are the orphans who have been deprived of their parents' great affection, for they managed to have God as their Father already from this life. At the same time, they have the affection they were deprived of from their parents in God's savings bank *with interest*.

11. Blessed are those parents who avoid the use of the word "don't" with their children, instead restraining them from



The tomb of St. Paisios next to the church of St. Arsenios the Cappadocian, at the Monastery of St. John the Theologian, situated in the village Souroti, approximately 20 km from Thessaloniki, Greece.

evil through their holy life—a life which children imitate, joyfully following Christ with spiritual bravery.

12. Blessed are those children who have been born *from their mother's womb* (Mt 19:12) holy, but even more blessed are those who were born with all the inherited passions of the world, struggled with sweat and uprooted them and inherited the Kingdom of God in the sweat of their face (cf. Gen 3:19).

13. Blessed are those children who lived from infancy in a spiritual environment and, thus, tirelessly advanced in the spiritual life. Thrice blessed, however, are the mistreated ones who were not helped at all (on the contrary, they were pushed towards evil). But, as soon as they heard of Christ, their eyes glistened, and with a one hundred and eighty degree turn they suddenly made their soul to shine as well. They departed from the attraction of earth and moved into the spiritual sphere.

14. Fortunate, worldly people say, are the astronauts who are able to spin in the air, orbit the moon or even walk on the moon. Blessed, however, are the immaterial *Paradisians*, who ascend often to God and travel about Paradise, their place of permanent abode, with the quickest of means and without much fuel, besides one crust of bread.

15. Blessed are those who glorify God for the moon that glimmers that they might walk at night. More blessed, however, are those who have come to understand that neither the light of the moon is of the moon, nor the spiritual light of their soul of themselves, but both are of God. Whether they can shine like a mirror, a pane of glass or the lid of a tin can, if the rays of the sun do not fall on them it is impossible for them to shine.

16. Fortunate, worldly people tell us, are those who live in crystal palaces and have all kinds of conveniences. Blessed, however, are those who've managed to simplify their life and become liberated from the web of this world's development of numerous conveniences (i.e., many inconveniences), and were released from the frightening stress of our present age.

17. Fortunate, worldly people say, are those who can enjoy the goods of the world. Blessed, however, are those who give away everything for Christ and are deprived even of every human consolation for Christ. Thus it is that they manage to be found night and day near Christ and His divine consolation, which many times is so much that they say to God: *My God, Thy love cannot be endured, for it is great and cannot be fit within my small heart.*

18. Fortunate, worldly people say, are those who have the greatest jobs and the largest mansions, since they possess all possibilities and live comfortably. Blessed, however, according to the divine Paul, are those who have but a nest to perch in, a little food and some coverings. (cf. 1 Tim 6:8). For, in this way, they've managed to become estranged from the vain world, using the earth as a footstool, as children

of God, and their mind is constantly found close to God, their Good Father.

19. Fortunate are those who become generals and government ministers in their head by way of heavy drinking (even if just for a few hours), with the worldly rejoicing over it. Blessed, however, are those who have put off the old man and have become incorporeal, managing to be earthly angels with the Holy Spirit. They have found Paradise's divine faucet and drink from it and are continually inebriated from the heavenly wine.

20. Blessed are those who were born crazy and will be judged as crazy, and, in this way, will enter Paradise without a passport. Blessed and thrice blessed, however, are the very wise who feign foolishness for the love of Christ and mock all the vanity of the world. This foolishness for Christ's sake is worth more than all the knowledge and wisdom of the wise of this world.

I beg all the Sisters to pray for God to give me, or rather take from me my little mind, and, in this way, secure Paradise for me by considering me a fool. Or, make me crazy with His love so I go out myself, outside of the earth and its pull, for, otherwise my life as a monk has no meaning. I became externally white as a monk. As I go I become internally black by being a negligent monk, but I justify myself as one unhealthy, when I happen to be so; other times, I excuse myself again for being ill, even though I am well, and so I deserve to be thoroughly thrashed. Pray for me.

May Christ and the Panaghia be with you!

With love of Christ,
Your brother,
Monk Paisios



When someone takes the first step to reconciliation, he immediately feels joy, peace and relief. Why? Prior to this, hatred, enmity, separation and alienation laid like a heaven burden on his shoulders. There was also pressure from the devil who wanted his way. God, on the other hand, is love and humility. All of us are filled by our egotism and seek to erect our own will. We believe that we are correct, that we are good and that others are at fault.

What does it indicate when we criticize others and consider ourselves flawless? This is why the Lord commands: *Judge not that you not be judged.* And He adds: *For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged.* (Mt 7:1-2). To criticize others is an extremely serious sin, although we indulge in it like bread and butter, and as a 'sin which so easily besets us' (Heb 12:1). A besetting sin is one that takes place at every opportunity and all the time.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

By His Eminence Metropolitan Augoustinos Kantiotis (+2010), Bishop of Florina, Greece, from "On the Divine Liturgy—Orthodox Homilies," Vol. Two, translated by Asterios Gerostergios, pp. 164-171, *Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 115 Gilbert Road, Belmont, MA (1986).*

I AWAIT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD!



If mankind had never sinned, dear readers, we would have never known death; we would have remained immortal—immortal not only in soul, but also in body. But sin occurred, and along with the other consequences, it brought this calamity called death, which is the separation of soul and body. This is the punishment we received after committing sin. *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* (Gen 3:19). The body, made up of different natural elements, moves and acts by means of the immortal soul. The soul now loses its precious companion with death, which dies and dissolves into the elements from which it was made. The flesh decays and only bones remain, and even these, over a long period of time, wear away and become ashes, reminding us of the Church hymn: *I called to mind the Prophet who cried, "I am but earth and ash."*

All bodies rot away and dissolve. However, there are some exceptions to this natural law of decay: the holy *relics* of men and women who were sanctified. These bodies remain incorrupt and are proof of the power of Christ, who works miracles through the relics of Saints.

Now the Church, in the eleventh article of the Symbol of the Faith, proclaims that the dead will be resurrected. Will they be resurrected? No! Shout unbelievers. But what are their arguments?

The bodies of human beings, they say, dissolve into the great crucible of the earth, and only their ashes exist. What about bodies burned in terrible fires, bodies of people drowned in the great seas and eaten by fish, bodies of people devoured by lions and other wild beasts—how is it possible to resurrect these bodies?

In Christ's time, there were people who believed in God, but did not believe that bodies would be resurrected. These people were the Sadducees. When St. Paul went to Athens, stood on the Areopagus and preached that a day will come

when the dead will rise and be judged, the philosophers listening to him began to laugh and mocked him. Today there are still many who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They say:

—When someone dies, forget him, he's gone for good!

In spite of this, the Church continues to say that the dead will be resurrected. Where do we find the truth about the resurrection? Primarily, in God's word. Even the wisest people can be mistaken, but the word of God is truth; and since the word of God declares that the dead will rise, we believe it and proclaim it.

Where in God's word, the Holy Scriptures, is the resurrection of the dead mentioned? Let's bring up only some of these passages:

First, the famous 36th chapter of the prophecy of Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw an awesome vision. He was brought to a field where, many years before, a battle had taken place and many people were killed. Their bodies were eaten by wild birds and their fleshless bones covered the plain. The spectacle was horrible. While the prophet looked at the scattered bones in this macabre scene, he heard a voice say to him:

—Son of man, is there any hope for these bones to live?

—O Lord, Thou knowest, he answered.

—Prophecy to these bones, the voice of God commanded.

The prophet obeyed the order and prophesied to the bones. Immediately, the bones began to creak and come together, joining one to another, making whole skeletons. The skeletons filled with flesh and were finally covered with skin. But they were still dead bodies; there was no life in them—an endless array of dead bodies.

—Prophecy again, commanded the voice of God.

The prophet spoke again and wind came from the four corners of the earth and the dead bodies stood up on their feet and walked as if in a military parade. This vision is proof, an assurance of God, that the dead shall be resurrected. They will be resurrected by the trumpet of the archangel, which will sound by God's command—the trumpet call of resurrection for all the dead.

Another quotation related to the resurrection of the dead is found in the Second Book of Maccabees. There we have the story of seven brothers, and their heroic mother. In spite of all the threats made them by a tyrant, they did not deny their true faith, but with the courage their faith gave them, they faced their martyrdom. Although the tyrant tortured them; cutting off their hands and feet, these admirable martyrs answered the tyrant:

—Hands and feet are not ours. God gave them to us, and we believe that God, for whom we are sacrificed, will give them back to us in the resurrection!

Christ Himself assured us in the most positive way that the dead will be resurrected. We hear Christ's words in the Funeral Service when the Gospel is read, saying, *Verily, ver-*

ily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear it shall live. (Jn 5:25).

In addition, Christ proclaimed the resurrection of the dead through miracles. He raised dead people three times: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus, who was dead four days. Finally, the greatest proof of the resurrection of the dead is Christ's own resurrection.

By Christ's resurrection death was completely defeated; and believers of every century proclaim with the Apostle Paul: *O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where thy victory?* (I Cor 15:55).

Yes, dear friends, the dead will be resurrected, and we ourselves will be resurrected, because, after a while we too will be dead.

But the question is raised: "How will bodies be resurrected from the dead?" To this question St. Paul gives an answer.

He gives examples, and one example is the seed of plants. What is the importance of a seed? It is sown in the earth, buried like a dead person. It rots like a dead body, and out of this rotten seed comes a sweet-smelling flower, which, with its new appearance proclaims that God makes new bodies from dead ones, bright bodies which will differ from the old ones as much as a huge oak tree differs from a tiny acorn.

O God, Thou dost great and marvelous wonders in heaven and earth!

Let everyone of us, with steadfast faith, proclaim: *I await the resurrection of the dead.*

† † †

AND LIFE IN THE AGES TO COME...

In the previous article of the Symbol of the Faith we proclaim that another life exists beyond the grave, which is eternal. Let's speak about it now.

Everybody dies. Death is the punishment given us because of sin. Death, however, as we discussed it in our previous homily, is not annihilation of our human existence. The shovel of the grave digger does not mean that there, in the grave, is the end of us. Death marks a turning point in human life, just as birth does. This phase of our life is not the last one; it is the beginning of a new life under different conditions.

Our Church teaches that we are composed of two things—body and soul. The body decays after death and

dissolves into the elements from which it is made. *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* (Gen 3:19). One day, however, our bodies will be resurrected, spiritual and incorruptible.

The soul, though, does not consist of material elements, as does the body. It is immaterial, and being immaterial it is immortal. The soul does not die, it lives on earth together with the body and uses the body as a servant. With death, this union is interrupted and the soul alone, free from the weights and responsibilities of the flesh, continues living, but under other conditions.

The souls of the departed await the terrible Day of Judgement, and those who on earth lived according to the will of God have a foretaste of heaven, experiencing joy and gladness; but those who did not live as God wanted, who remained unrepentant until the end of their lives, experience sorrow and distress. They feel beforehand a measure

of eternal damnation, and, like a defendant on trial, having committed many *crimes* and not at peace, but in agony over the outcome of the trial, so also are the sinful and unrepentant souls who are waiting for the Day of Judgement. This state, which will last from

the day of their death to the Day of Universal Judgement, is called the *Intermediate State* of souls.

The Intermediate State will come to an end. The Day of Universal Judgement will come and then, as the Lord assures us, people will be separated: some *shall go away into everlasting punishment*, and others *into eternal life.* (Mt 25:46).

Eternal life, eternal damnation! People today hear these words and do not pay attention, because they do not believe in God, or, if they believe, think that it is impossible for God, who is Love, to punish people this way.

There is no Hell, they say, there is no eternal life. We shall not bring in here philosophical arguments to convince people that there is a Hell and a Paradise. Since Christ in a most positive way assured us that Hell and Paradise exist, we believe Christ, Who never lies. Christ is the Truth and Life—if we do not believe Christ, whom shall we believe? Christ is the truthful witness, and His witness is worth more than that of people. Only Christ knows our past, present and future. Outside of Christ, we do not know what life is and what death is.

Eternal life! Eternal life differs greatly from our present life, because our present life is transient, that is, it lasts only a



little time, while life beyond the grave has no end. The 80 or 90 years we **might** live here on earth, compared to eternal life, are only a drop of water in the ocean.

A certain author, in order to give an idea of what eternity is like, used this example. Imagine, he says, that all the sand from every river, lake and sea were all in one place. Then imagine a bird coming to take one grain of sand in its beak. After a thousand years, another comes and takes a second grain of sand, and this continues every thousand years. How many millions, trillions of years must pass before the birds take the last grain? No matter if it seems impossible! The mathematicians say the time will come when a bird will take the last grain from this pile of sand and there will be an end; but in the eternity about which Christ speaks, there will be no end.

The life we speak of is not only eternal, it is also unchangeable. That is, the decisions the supreme tribunal of God pronounces for unbelievers and unrepenting sinners cannot be changed.

Some may ask: "What is Hell." Is it snakes and scorpions? Fire and brimstone? Darkness without light? It is something worse than these, something worse than anyone could imagine. Hell, for one thing, is a sinner's conscience, which now, in the heart of the impious, the criminal, the murderer, is dormant. In the other world, however, it will awaken, and one will see all the crimes he has committed. One will see the whole tragic situation, and he will hear the terrible, endless "I accuse" addressed to the guilty.

"What is Paradise?" It is a new life so beautiful the human mind cannot imagine. There, none of the sufferings exist which bother us here. There is no sickness or death, derision or slander, cries or mourning. New bodies, glorious and incorruptible will be resurrected, differing from the old, earthly bodies as a flower differs from a bare seed, as an oak differs from an acorn. We will have new, spiritual bodies, like the body of Christ after his resurrection. There will be a new union with the soul, which, united with the spiritual body, will enjoy the blessings which human eye cannot see, nor human ear hear, nor human heart imagine.

Paradise! An illustrious old preacher used to say, we will enjoy you (Paradise), but here we cannot understand you!

Eternal Damnation, Eternal Life! There is life in the Age to come, and the kind of life we will live then depends on the kind of life we live now.

O Christ! Enlighten us to believe and not lose everything, and then lament in vain.

My beloved, let us close our ears to the faithless, and let us believe what our Church tells us: *I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.* Let us be ready, wherever we are, for death, that we might go to the other world, where are the saints and the angels, and where is Christ, the King of the Ages. Amen.

ON MORTAL SINS, REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Source: "The Evergetinos, A Complete Text," vol. I of the First Book, translated and edited by Bishop Chrysostomos, with Hieromonk Auxentios, John Petropoulos, Gregory Telepneff, and Hieromonk Ambrosios, pp. 45-53, Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, Etna, CA (1988).

A mortal sin is that sin for which a person does not repent. No one is so good and so merciful as God. Yet a man who remains obstinately in sin and will not repent—not even God forgives him. We are deeply sorry when we sin, nevertheless, we gladly embrace every excuse and occasion for sins.

[Abba Mark]

† † †



Through the works of the Devil, a brother who lived in a small monastic house regularly fell to immorality; nonetheless, he forced himself not to

put aside his monastic habit. After finishing his services and his rule of prayer, he would entreat God with groans: "My Lord, whether I wish it or not, save me, for I, mud that I am, crave for the stench of sin; but Thou, as God All-Powerful, are able to prevent me from sinning. For, if Thou hast mercy on the righteous, this is nothing of note; and, if Thou, by the same token, savest the pure, this is nothing admirable; these, by virtue of the measure of their struggle and virtue, are worthy to enjoy thy goodness. Master, let thy mercies do their miracle, and show to me Thy endless love of man; for the poor man has entrusted unto Thee, that is, he who has been deprived of all the virtues."

These and similar things the brother said each day, with eyes filled with tears; whether he had happened to sin or not.

Anyway, one night, according to his habit, he fell into the loathsome sin of immorality; but immediately at midnight he got up to fulfill his rule of prayer. The Devil, who had led the brother into sin, would literally go mad at the hope that the sinful brother held out for his salvation and his effrontery, as the Devil saw it, to place himself before God by his prayers. So it was that this time he decided to appear visibly before the brother, telling him: "You wretch! How do you not become red with shame in standing before God? How do you dare to bring the name of God to your lips? Are you so brazen that you dare even chant?"

To these words of the Devil the brother answered:

"This cell is a forge: you give a hit with the hammer and receive one; thus I will continue to fight against you until death and wherever I am on the last day of my life. So take heed: grounding my courage in the limitless goodness of God, I tell

you on my oath and assure you that, on the name of Him Who came to call sinners to repentance and to save them, I will not cease to pray to God in defiance of you, until you cease to war against me. And we shall see who will win: you or God.”

Hearing these decisive words, the Devil said to the brother: “All right, from now I will not war against you, so that I am not responsible for your gaining the victor’s crown for your patience.” From that moment, the Enemy departed from the brother’s presence.

And the brother, who had been so assaulted up to that time, came to contrition and thereafter sat and wept unceasingly for his sins.

Often he thought to himself: “You do good in weeping.” But he would respond to this thought: “Away with such good; for whether He saves a man’s soul or not, it is not God’s desire that any man, having spotted his soul in all kinds of disgraceful deeds, should then merely sit and lament for this waste (but that he should actively repent).”

† † †

A brother once lived in the skete together with Abba Paphnoutios. This brother battled with thoughts of immorality and would often say, under the influence of passion: “Not even with ten women would I be able to satisfy my desire.” But the Elder would entreat him and say: “Do not think this way; this

is a test and it will pass.” However, the brother did not heed this valuable advice, but eventually went into Egypt and took a woman, in keeping with his desire.

After a numbers of years, the Elder went up to Egypt from the skete and encountered the fallen brother, who was carrying a basket of shells. But such was his wretchedness that the Elder did not recognize him immediately.

The fallen brother approached the Elder and said to him: “Elder; I am the one who was your disciple at the skete.”

On recognizing the brother and seeing to what wretchedness he had fallen, the Elder broke into tears and with grief said:

My child, why did you leave the honor with which you were adorned and come here to fall to such wretchedness and dishonor? Anyway, did you take the ten women, as you said, in order to satisfy your passions?”

The brother sighed deeply and with his eyes wet with tears answered:

“Father, I took only one woman to satisfy my physical weakness; and I toil laboriously just to keep her in bread.

The Elder said to him tenderly:

“Return with me, my child.”

“Abba, is there a chance to repent?” The brother asked in agony.

“Of course there is,” the Elder answered the brother encouragingly.

With these words of hope, the fallen brother abandoned everything and followed the Elder into the desert. As soon as they came to the skete, on account of the experience gained from his sinful deeds, he evolved into a spiritually combative and good monk.

† † †

A brother posed the following question to an Elder: “Father, if someone happens to fall to some temptation, such as immorality, through the work of the Devil, what happens to those who become scandalized at seeing this fall to temptation?”

The Elder, rather than directly answer, related the following: There once lived a renowned Deacon in a coenobitic monastery in Egypt. During this time, a man from the city, who was banished by the ruler for his political convictions, fled to this monastery with his whole family, so as to be safe from his persecutors.

With the influence of the Devil, the Deacon fell into sin with one of the women

among those who had come with the man from the city. When the sin became public, everyone was shocked with the disgrace.

The Deacon went away to an Elder much loved by him and confessed the incident to him. At the back of his cell the Elder had a crypt, a fact known to the Deacon also. Repenting for his sin, therefore, the Deacon asked the Elder to let him go into the crypt and to be literally entombed there, without anyone, except only for the Elder, knowing this fact. Indeed, the Elder consented and gave the place to the brother.

The Deacon then moved into this dark place and repented sincerely before God, grieving unceasingly and taking nothing else as food, save only a little water and a little bread, which the Elder from time to time provided for him.

During the period of time in which the Deacon was subjecting himself to the harsh practice of repentance, the water level of the (Nile) river had not risen at the appointed flood period, so that the whole area (of Egypt) was in danger of



drying up completely. To ward off the danger of drought, therefore, everyone offered up supplications and continually entreated God with Faith to hold off disaster. Then the following was revealed to one of the holy men: "Unless you go to ask such-and-such a Deacon, who is hidden in the cell of a certain monk, to pray to God, the level of the river's waters will not rise."

This holy man, having received this information, revealed it to everyone. And those who heard this message marveled and all together went to the cell of the monk, called forth the Deacon from his dark crypt, and imposed on him to pray to God, so as to save the place from drought. And no sooner had the Deacon prayed, than immediately the level of the river's waters rose.

This miracle was an indication that God had accepted the Deacon's repentance, and thus all who had earlier been scandalized were now more greatly benefited by his repentance and glorified God.

† † †

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

"Give me your daughter as my wife."

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

Indeed, the pagan priest went to his god's oracle (through which, as we know, the Devil speaks) and asked:

"A monk came to my home and wants my daughter as his wife. Shall I give her to him?"

The demon hidden in the oracle answered him:

"Ask him if he will deny his God, his Baptism, and the vows which he made as a monk."

When the pagan priest returned, he said to the monk:

"Will you deny your God, your Baptism, and your monastic vocation?"

Indeed, the monk accepted his terms. But immediately he saw something bright come from his mouth and, like a dove, go up to the heavens.

Right away the pagan priest ran to the demon and said:

"Behold, the monk did all that you asked." Then the demon said to him:

"Do not give your daughter to him as a wife, for his God has not departed from him, but is still helping him." So once again the pagan priest went to the monk and told him:

"I cannot give you my daughter as a wife, since your God continues to remain near you and help you."

On hearing this response, the monk was deeply moved and said within himself:

"Even though God in His singular goodness has bestowed upon me so many good things, I, wretch that I am, have

denied Him, His holy Baptism, and monastic vows. But despite my denial, God has not departed from me, though I have so greatly betrayed Him, and continues to help me. After that, do I not have a duty to run to Him, grounded in the surety of His boundless goodness?"

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

With kindness, the Elder told him:

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

The Elder did indeed grieve for the brother and entreated God with earnestness:

"My God," he would say, "give me the soul of this monk and receive his repentance:"

God, merciful as He is, heard the sincere and fervent prayer of the Elder, especially since it came forth from genuine love.

When the first week of the cloistered monk's penance had been fulfilled, the Elder visited him and told him:

"Have you perhaps beheld something?"

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

The Elder said to the repentant monk:

Take care of yourself and ask God with the whole of your soul, without cessation, to forgive you."

With these recommendations the Elder once again departed.

As soon as the second week had passed, the Elder came again to the cave where the monk was cloistered:

"So, how is it going, Brother? Perhaps you have again seen something?" He asked with fatherly concern and care.

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

The Elder, having advised him anew to pray with earnestness and to stay in a state of vigilance in his soul, took leave.

When, at last, the third week had elapsed, the Elder went to the cloistered monk and said to him:

"Have you seen anything more?"

With joy, the monk answered:

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

When the Elder heard this answer, he thanked God and said to the repentant monk:

"Do you see, my brother? God has accepted your repentance. Therefore; be careful with yourself from now on."

Crying, the emotion-filled brother answered the Elder:

"From now and ever after, Father, I will remain near you, and I shall not leave until I die."

And, indeed, the monk remained with the loving Elder and never left.

THE LAW OF CHANGES IN OUR PRACTICAL LIFE

By the Holy Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi (+2009), from "Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles, Experiences, Teachings," translated by Elizabeth Theokritoff, Holy Monastery of Vatopaidi (1999).



Every rational nature undergoes countless alterations, and changes come upon every man at every hour, throughout his earthly life. When in the course of various changes we were alarmed by unforeseen transformations, the holy Elder would explain to us the mysteries of these operations from the experience of the Fathers, with detailed descriptions. He

would often draw our attention to the subject of alterations and changes, and tell us:

In changes you should be courageous in both of the main phases. Firstly, you must remain unmoved amidst the pressures and transformations which they produce in you; and secondly, you must discern the causes which have given rise to them. The main causes of changes, according to the great Markarios, are the following four (and there are also the various complications from passions and satanic interventions which stimulate and reshape them):

(a) natural changes, resulting from climatic conditions, which cause a change in a person's mood;

(b) a diet which is not appropriate to our constitution transforms our disposition;

(c) a pang (a brief piercing spasm of pain, *Ed.*) of conscience resulting from some omission or excess in our duties in general, caused principally by an unregulated life, in which case the spiritual law permits an earth tremor in order to wake us up;

(d) the devil himself, who, in his envy for anyone who is making progress, makes war against him as far as God allows.

This is the nature of changes, whereas their properties are beneficial if rightly used.

Changes and trials form an almost indistinguishable union in which either one may provoke the other, and the two of them lead those who are prudent to profit and advancement. Whether the trial produces the change or the change the trial, we reach the same conclusion: that we must face them philosophically and with patient endurance. Abba Mark says, *Afflictions that come to us are the result of our own sins.*

But if we accept them patiently through prayer, we shall again find blessings.

Included in the mystery of changes are also events that come from the "right" hand side, especially in those who are struggling in the proper way. When someone carries out a commandment or performs some other good deed in full conscience, he must certainly expect the seal to be set on his action. Many have kept up the labor of doing the commandment without a murmur, and yet, through inexperience, have been unable to bear the trial when the seal is set on their noble toil, and thus have suffered harm.

Here the Elder, who was insistent about these details, would often say to us:

As night follows day, so successes are followed by trials that test us.

Patient endurance of the testing which follows a good work proves the person's willing and conscious intention, showing that he carried out this action not accidentally, but by choice and purely for the sake of God's commandment. This is one aspect; the second is that it increases mindfulness of God within him, and in a certain way he receives a good addition to his spiritual workshop. On the other hand, the person who loses heart in the trial that follows his action has lost the boldness of firm faith which he had, and through failure has produced forgetfulness in his mind.

Where there is love and self-control and, according to the ever-memorable Elder, repentance and prayer, every difficulty and perplexity evaporates.

Particularly in the beginning, when the penitent embarks on his spiritual struggle, he is quite paralyzed by changes. This is because he does not expect or realize that changes shift as a natural rule, particularly when he is careful and does not of himself give them any occasion. The Elder was always telling us, "You should take advantage of good changes and cry out to God, like David, that He may remember you when you yourselves will forget." The outcome of changes is forgetfulness of God, complete lassitude (a sense of weariness, fatigue *Ed.*) of one's members and a loss of appetite for anything good. It was with this in mind that the prophet said, *So even to old age and grey hairs and when my strength deserts me, O God, do not forsake me.* (Pss 71:18).

The Elder also explained, "Don't be misled into thinking that these dry, graceless states can be overcome by effusiveness and meeting people and joking; they are overcome only by patient endurance, prayer and hope. For younger people it helps to call to mind the things to come, death and eternal life, and—to some extent—to consider in detail God's economy for the salvation of the world."

When we asked him if and how far he had been troubled by these changes, he told us, "If I describe to you the struggle I have had here, you will not be able to bear hearing it. But God's goodness and our Lady the Mother of God, who

always protected me, gave me a kind of perseverance and toughness and I did not give way. Here it is tears that help us and save us most of all. Everything depends on the divine goodness.”

On other occasions he would tell us, “Fear, too, provokes changes, but beginners can be seriously harmed by their neighbor’s seeming prejudice against them or ill-disposition towards them. When there is someone present who you know speaks ill of you and slanders you, it is almost impossible for this not to produce a change, however much you try not to be affected. But after forgiveness and prayer for that person, you regain your equilibrium after the trauma of grief.”

One of the most consoling features of our life at the beginning was the Elder’s explanation and description of the repeated changes which occur inevitably, so it seems, in our everyday life. To beginners’ zeal—or rather *beginners’ piety*, as St John Climacus calls it—the transformation that occurs in one’s character seems strange, and it makes people who are inexperienced and unknowing feel uneasy. They do not see why such an alteration has for no reason changed the disposition of their inner world, and even of their bodily members. They search for faults in their own conduct and have difficulty finding anything,

because according to the measure of their strength they have left nothing undone. So why the alteration? Why do they experience dryness, lack of will, the quenching of their fervor, an unnatural exhaustion in their limbs and the withering of their prayer? And yet these things happen!

The fall of our forefathers has left us a legacy of parasitic phenomena which came in after the Fall: the rupture of our personality, marks of corruption, the constituent elements of death and death itself. Included among these manifestations of corruption and flux are to be found the *changes and alterations*, as the fathers call them. It is the results of these changes that give rise to the irregularities referred to above. These now innate states in which the self is altered have become our most inseparable companions and betrayers, and can cause a tremendous amount of harm if we are not alert to their opposition.

These states too, according to the judgement of the Fathers, may be either natural or *acquired* from outside; and those

which are acquired belong to two categories, one much worse than the other. The natural states are those which are always present in man’s character whether he wants them or not, even if he guards against them with all his might; as we have said, these are a hereditary affliction since the Fall. *Acquired* changes depend on causes and occasions. One class, the more innocent, arise from the natural influences of sickness, diet, climate and evil demons; the other class comprises those for which we are personally culpable. When man stirs up his conscience against him, for the many reasons that this can happen, his disposition then undergoes change and is altered regardless of his will.

In the first case, that of the natural changes which are so frequent, there is no other means of dealing with them apart from faith. Since, in the words of St Paul, we walk *by faith and not by sight*, we do not look for evidence of a miracle, nor do we pay attention to emotions, and we are indif-

ferent to what happens. We pay no attention to what we feel in the heat of the day or the cold of the night; our sole concern is to bear, willingly and without complaint, the weight of our cross, the law of the commandment and the imposition of our duty, according to the saying *they go forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing*. (Pss 126:6).

It is right that consolation should accompany

the laborers of the commandments who are *weary and heavy laden*. (cf Mt 11:28). But in this vale of tears where we serve out our exile, the spurious growths of changes interrupt the regular sequence, in the same way as different weather conditions occur in the atmosphere. Here, however, there is a different mystery. The all-saving providence of God has enlisted the natural occurrence of changes as a saving means of education, for the formation and perfecting of His children. When God calls a soul to knowledge of Himself and obedience to Him, He bestows His grace upon it as a free gift, in the form of fervor and faith and dedication and other joyful manifestations of His own gift. **Once the “agreements are signed” and official service in His army and obedience begin, the Giver then withdraws His grace by stages and leaves the soldier alone in order to test his faith: will he stay fighting and working, or will he turn back?** It is precisely during these progressive intermissions in grace that the changes appear, which means that their



Elder Joseph the Hesychast and His Synodia

place in our lives has now taken on a purpose. Glory to the love for mankind of our good Master, who has grafted the parasitic outgrowths of corruption and death into the training and formation of His children!

In the second case, however, where the prevailing changes are not the natural ones, and where grace does not withdraw of its own accord in order to test us, but it is our own actions that are responsible for its withdrawal—here care is needed to correct the fault before any more damage is done. In this case, the error is to be found in these main areas: it results either from negligence, when we have been remiss in our duties, or from self-conceit which has opened the way to pride. Then it requires humiliation and labor, and fasting, and vigil, and extensive prayer with deepest humility, according to the words of the Psalm, *consider my humiliation and my trouble and forgive all my sins* (Pss 25:18), and again, *when I was humbled, the Lord saved me* (Pss 115:6).

The presence of grace in the soul, which is the crowning of our whole purpose, requires of man Christ-like behavior and quite literally nobility, in as much as we are *those who belong to Christ* (Gal. 5:24), in St Paul's words. Any deviation from this position is considered a betrayal of the *good confession* (cf. 1 Tim 6:12), and as a result grace withdraws. On this account we must take care to keep it within us and, if it departs for any reason, we must call it back by sincere repentance.

I recall how on one occasion I did something wrong, I think through inexperience. Once I had confessed my fault to the Elder—not that he had been unaware of it before—and after sincere repentance on my part, he said to me: “I want you to perform an additional labor in order to satisfy grace which you have grieved by your inattentiveness.” And he sent me on a long journey from our huts at Little St. Anne as far as Karyes, coming back by the north side through the Lavra and Kavsokalyvia. Ostensibly it was on some errand, but in reality it was a penance to produce pain through ascetic labor, which is the practical condition of repentance.

In this way these spiritual elders knew how to reconcile human differences with divine justice, because they believed in the words of the Psalm, *Before I was humbled I went astray; therefore have I kept Thy word* (Pss. 119:67) and *If I had not been humbled, then Thou hadst humbled me, that I might learn Thy commandments* (cf. Pss 119:71). After this saving lesson through which I regained my place in the providence of our Christ's love for mankind, I sang songs of triumph: *Let those who fear Thee turn to me, and those that know Thy testimonies* (Pss 119:79) and *It is good for me that Thou didst humble me, that I might learn Thy commandments.* (Pss 119:71).

Every occasion provided by the events of our lives was a pretext for the elders to expound the all-saving providence of God, a page in the universal governance of all things through the most infinite fatherly care of our God and

Father, our helmsman. As we have said elsewhere, what the blessed Elder was trying to do was to *habituate* us to the correct stance—the movement and dependence of all things upon the unsleeping eye of the divine wisdom and justice of Him *through whom all things were made, and without Him was nothing made that was made.* (Jn 1:3). He would tell us, “If you make this your consciousness, you will arrive without effort at a state in your lives where movement is stilled, bringing about lasting peace—because in this way you do not blame or condemn anyone for anything, not even Satan himself. Learn to regard self-accusation as the most basic means to progress, and learn to look directly to the starting-point of the fault, since, as Abba Mark says, *everything involuntary has its cause in what is voluntary, and man has no greater enemy than himself.*”



Nothing in the entire universe happens without either the will of God or His consent. Everything we see that is good and harmonious is the result of the will of God. As for anything that is in chaos, God knows why it is like that; and why He has permitted it. He sets the limits. What we must know is that He is present everywhere.

How unthankful we are, and how much we have cleaved to the corrupt things of this world! We are too engrossed in things of this world, and thus become spiritually impoverished; because one cannot sit on two chairs. One cannot drink both from the Cup of the Saviour and from the cup of the adversary. We must decide whom we will serve: God, or the things of this world. One cannot serve God and mammon at the same time.

What is a life? Nothing! It is difficult to comprehend how short life is. A young person does not understand this. It has occurred to me many times that we are miserable wretches indeed—we who live on the earth. We cannot live as long as 4 billion seconds, which is 120 years. ... What is one hundred years? Nothing! A moment... Our life is eternity.

We must begin with ourselves, and not try to change others. The Holy Fathers say that we must correct ourselves, to work on our salvation, and many around us will be saved. We must strive always to be kind, good, and quiet—at peace, so that people will always feel peace and quietness in our presence. We know that we can either attract people with our thoughts, or drive them away. We need to change, so that our faith might be strengthened.

Blessed Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

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THE ROBE OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

The Orthodox Church celebrates the Deposition of the Holy Robe of the Theotokos on July 2nd. Here is some information about the feast and a picture of the Holy Robe today (or possibly a portion of or one of numerous robes of the Theotokos), and how it came to rest in Georgia.



During the reign of Leo the Great (457-474) two patricians and brethren on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land lodged with an old widow, a Christian of Jewish descent. Seeing the many miracles wrought at a small shrine in her house, they pressed her until she revealed to them that she had raiment of the most holy Theotokos kept in a small coffer.

Our Lady had had two virgins in her lifetime who attended upon her; before her holy Dormition, she gave each of them one of her divine garments as a blessing. This old widow was of the family of one of those two virgins, and it had come through the generations into her hands. With the permission of God, that this holy relic might be had for the profit of many, the two men took the garment by stealth and brought it to Blachernae near Constantinople, and building a church in honor of the Apostles Peter and Mark, they secretly enshrined the garment therein.

But here again, because of the multitude of miracles that were worked, it became known to the Emperor Leo, and a magnificent church was built, as some say, by that same Leo, but according to

others, by his predecessors Marcian and Pulcheria, and enlarged by Leo when the holy raiment was found. The Emperor Justin the Younger completed the church, which the Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes raised up immediately again after it had burned in 1070. It burned again in 1434, and from that time it remained a small house of prayer together with the renowned holy spring.

After the seventh century, the name Blachernae was given to other churches and monasteries by their pious founders out of reverence for this famous church in Constantinople. In this church John Catacuzene was crowned in 1345; also, the Council against Acindynus, the follower of Barlaam, was convoked here.

There are several different explanations as to how the Robe came to Georgia. According to one account, it was brought from Jerusalem at the beginning of the 12th century. According to another, it was brought to Georgia in the 8th century, during the period of iconoclasm in Byzantium. According to the chronicle Life of Kartli, the wonder-working Robe of the Most Holy Theotokos had been preserved in the church at Khobi for many centuries.

In 1640 the Russian envoys Fedot Elchin and Pavel Zakharev visited western Georgia and reported having seen the Precious Robe. It was also described in the accounts of various travelers through western Georgia including the patriarch of Alexandria (in the 17th century); and several monks of Mt. Athos.

Every year on July 2nd, the Most Precious Robe is carried from the Zugdidi Museum to the Cathedral of the Blachernae Icon of the Theotokos. Pilgrims from many countries have traveled to Zugdidi to venerate the Robe of the Most Holy Mother of God.