

# 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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## OUR PATH TOWARDS PASCHA: DECLARING VICTORY OVER FEAR, PANIC AND VIRUSES

*A spirit-filled homily given by Metropolitan Athanasios of Lemesou, Cyprus, to his flock, on March 16, 2020. His words and position stand in direct and unfortunate contrast to the actions and position of most of Orthodoxy's hierarchs, who have unconditionally surrendered the faithful to a Holy Great Lent absent of divine services, and, for many, Holy Communion.*

We have been informed that be-

cause of the urgent measures that were announced by the State, and that have been taken to protect human life, our Church, not wanting to seem disobedient to these orders, has postponed the faith based homilies and the other gatherings which were scheduled in each parish

of our Metropolis. Therefore, the spiritual homily that used to take place after the Vespers services has been cancelled.

I just wanted to share with you a few words, since God blessed us to meet. Of course, we will do as much as it is possible from the human side of things. We thank the officials and the scientists, the politicians and those in governing power, who teach us and direct us to how we should face this difficult situation. We are not denying the reality of the difficult times. But for sure, as people of the Church, we have also our own way to analyze and to be critical in thinking and to evaluate the events that come through our life.



So, in this instance as well, in this difficult moment, we will deal with everything with all possible human means, scientific means and other. But for sure, and above all, we will deal with this situation with our faith: to Christ, our Panaghia, and the Saints of the Church.

The Church in difficult times has always taught us and directed us to pray. This crisis will be dealt—and can only be dealt—with prayer. We need much prayer, very much prayer. We need people who have such great strong prayer, such that can turn the

events of the world around. Because in truth, only prayer can turn around the development of events. Everything else is human. Of course, it is good to have the human approach and it is beneficial. But prayer can, in reality and in short time, turn around every-

thing and can end this difficulty. However, this difficulty has a beneficial side to it. It teaches us many things. It shows us our weakness, the temporary nature of human things. It teaches that everything around us is ephemeral. Therefore, we must understand that our first need and our first longing should be the Kingdom of God. Just as the Lord says in the Holy Gospel, *Seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you.* We will be given everything from Our Lord, the Lord of Glory; we just need to seek the Kingdom of God.

This is our true necessity and need, this is what we truly need. Of course, all other things are necessary too, but

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

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

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God knows our needs and provides. The Church is calling us to struggle and pray, to struggle to gain more prayer—prayer that streams from repentance and humility. We must repent for our personal sins, for the sins of our brethren and for the sins of the whole world. We need to offer God strong prayer, gushing out of our humble and repentant heart; so that God can have mercy on us and overturn the difficult events.

If we pray, everything will be overturned. If we do not pray, then the events will take the human course of things; and we do not know how things will be and how things will develop.

Our Churches will remain open. The Worship of God will never stop. The priests and we [i.e., the hierarch himself] will be in the position that God placed us. And as shepherds of the Church, we offer our prayers and the services for the Worship of God and for Holy Communion and Thanksgiving. We offer these for the whole world, for the whole Adam. Whoever wants to attend may approach. Whoever feels difficulty and weak or anything else, they can act as their conscience directs them. We cannot judge any man. We are called to pray for the whole world, the whole Adam, for all the human race.

Maybe someone can question themselves and say, “We that come to the Church, we will not ever get ill?” We will get ill and one day we will die. Who told us that we would remain immortal in this world? We needed the coronavirus to remind us that one day we will die? We needed the coronavirus to tell us that we can fall ill? What did the forty martyrs say? “Our actions are in *philotimo* (good honor).”

Since one day we will die, let us die honorably and being pleasing to God. Let us also remember our Saint Neophytos who said, *what other thing exists above all but the fear of God and the remembrance of death?*—to remind us of our exodus from this world and our presence in front of God.

What does the Church offer us? The strength to NOT fear; the victory against the fear of death.

We will all go through biological death, without exceptions. However, the spiritual death is a death that a faithful person who believes in God will not undergo. *He who believes in Me will have life eternal*, says our Lord. He who believes in Me will never taste death, meaning spiritual death, because the biological death we all go through. And this is death that we fear—the spiritual death—the eternal separation from God. We do not want this separation, it terrifies us, because this is



eternal separation, eternal death—the eternal separation from our Lord Christ. The biological death is human nature and will arrive one day. Even if we are saints, even if we are sinners, we will all go through the gate of the biological death.

We walk towards Pascha, the Resurrection of Christ, Who was victorious over death and Who destroyed the fear of death, and then we shall hear the night of the Resurrection: *No one fears death, because we are freed from death by our Savior.* No one should fear death because our Savior released us from the fear of biological death, and we move on to live the Resurrection. Death is conquered. There is no death. There is only life eternal. Christ is alive, the Kingdom of God is real, and will be to the ages.

With this type of faith, we will walk through this difficult time that we currently face—without fears, without panic, without human reasoning. We will walk crying out the Love of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that our life here has an end. We know that this life is just passing through, a journey through, from the temporary to the eternal—to the eternal Kingdom of God.

In these times of crisis, our faith is tested, our way of life matters, our thoughts are evaluated, and the quality of our relationship with our Father, our God, is measured: our life, our strength, our time in works of repentance, our time in prayer and in worship offered to God. The Church will remain in prayer, giving glory and worship to the Living God, without any human selfish act. With the wisdom of the Church, we will be given hope that God is above all things. I am not saying that we ignore the human side of things. Not at all. But we need to be victorious over fear, victorious over death which destroys love—the true Love, Who is Christ, the One Who destroys fears. He who loves God fears nothing. Nothing darkens his life, not even the most difficult moment. For God's love is victorious over the fear and gives us the taste of eternal life.

In our Metropolis, in our Metropolis' Church and in other Churches and on every Thursday, before or after the *Apo-deipnon* [Compline] (depending on what is best for the schedule), we will conduct the Sacrament of Holy Unction for the healing of body and soul. The Church will offer us a medicine of eternal life that will heal our body and soul. Together with the chemical and biological, human-made medications, the Church offers us the Holy Sacrament of Holy Unction, to give us strength of body and soul, so we can have peace, and deal with whatever we encounter in front of us. Life and death are both in front of us, and with faith in God and with the presence of Christ in our heart, we will take advantage of our time here on earth, and we will use this life towards the benefit of our soul and also see death as eternal life.

Death is conquered. Christ conquered death. As the fathers of the Church teach us. Let us have hope in Christ.

Let us call upon the Holy Theotokos, our Mother, and our Holy Saints, and let us walk our path in faith and peace. We should give comfort to our brethren. Just think of how much despair and fear exists; how much lack of courage and feeling unsafe exists in the hearts of men that do not have the Light of God in their lives. Our life is like a tragedy without the presence of God. It is a life of tragedy if we are without our Holy Church. Without Christ man cannot live. Without the Light of God, darkness is unbearable. This is why we are all called, all of us who believe in Christ and call upon his All Holy Name, to become instruments of God who bring messages of hope and joy, peace, calmness and stillness, courage in the hearts of our brethren calling upon the presence and the Love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen!



Let us not consider this a sign that God has abandoned us and has despised us, when we are subject to trials [sorrows]. But let it be a sign to us that the Lord cares for us. Because, by allowing trials to come, He is cleansing our sins.

**St. John Chrysostom**

These current catastrophes are so terrible for us, because they have come upon us because we are not firm in the Faith, and because we are not enduring them for the sake of Christ... And what is even worse, and leaves us powerless in our efforts to counteract our misfortunes, is that we do not strengthen ourselves with the power of Christ. We put our hope, not in God, but in human powers and means.

**St. John of San Francisco**

The Christian must stand upon the various sorrows and temptations like an anvil, which—even though it is hammered upon constantly—does not move from its place, nor does it get ruined, but stays firm, [as firm as it was in the beginning].

**St. Ephraim the Syrian**

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or, what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [Mt 16:26] In other words, in the visible world there is no value equivalent to the value of the human soul, or a value at which the soul can be praised and purchased. It is worth more than all worlds combined.

**St. Justin Popovic**

Praise God from your cross, because the cross is the only true instructor, guardian and throne of theology. Outside the cross, there can be no living knowledge of God. Do not search for Christian perfection in human virtues. There you will not find it, because it is hidden in the Cross of Christ.

**St. Ignatii Brianchaninov**

## PROPHECIES CONCERNING OUR LORD'S CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

*Based on Scriptural passages, from an Orthodox pamphlet.*

The prophecies below were written well over seven hundred years prior to the age of Christianity. Remarkably, however, the prophets described the events as if they were recording history from the base of the Cross. The circumstances surrounding the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ were not only foretold, but they are also documented, historical facts. The fulfillment of these Jewish Scriptural prophecies alone serve as unequivocal testimony that the God-man Jesus Christ was the awaited Messiah, Who suffered for man, in order to save him and grant him eternal life.

That He would be betrayed by His disciple: *He who ate of my bread, hath magnified the lifting of heels against me.* (Pss 40:10).

That the gentiles and the archpriests would plot against Him: *Why have the heathen raged, and the peoples meditated empty things? The kings of the earth were aroused, and the rulers were assembled together against the Lord and against His Christ.* (Pss 2:1-2).

That unjust witnesses would bear false testimony against Him: *Unjust witnesses rose up against me; things I knew not they asked me. They repaid me with evil things instead of good.* (Pss 34:13).

That He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver: *So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.* (Zech 11:12).

That the silver would be used to purchase the field of the potter: *And the Lord said unto me, "Cast it unto the potter"—a goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.* (Zech 11:13).

That He would be bound with fetters: *Woe to their soul, for they have devised an evil counsel against themselves, saying against themselves: Let us bind the just one.* (Isa 3:10).

That He would remain silent before Pilate: *But as for me, like a deaf man I heard them not, and was as a speechless man that openeth not his mouth. And I became as a man that heareth not, and that hath in his mouth no reproofs.* (Pss 37:14-15). *He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.* (Isa 53:7).

That He would be whipped, slapped, spat upon, and ridiculed: *I gave my back to scourges, and my cheeks to blows, and*

*I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting.* (Isa. 50:6). *For I am ready for scourges, and my sorrow is continually before me.* (Pss 37:17).

That His disciples would abandon Him: *And I waited for one that would grieve with me, but there was no one; and for them that would comfort me, but I found none* (Pss 68:25). *I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.* (Zech 13:7).

That the soldiers would make fun of Him: *And they prated against me, they that sit in the gates; and they made a song about me, they that drink wine.* (Pss 68:15).

That He would be crowned with a wreath of thorns: *Go forth, ye daughters of Zion, and behold... the crown wherewith his mother crowned him.* (Sol 3:11).

That He would carry the Cross on His shoulders: *For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder.* (Isa 9:6).

That He would suffer for us: *He was a man in suffering, and acquainted with the bearing of sickness, for his face is*

*turned from us: he was dishonored and not esteemed. He bears our sins and is pained for us: yet we accounted him to be in trouble, and in suffering, and in affliction. But he was wounded on account of our sins, and was bruised because of our iniquities... and by his bruises we were healed.* (Isa 53:3-12).

That He would die for the sins of the world: *Because of the iniquities of My people, He was led to death.* (Isa. 53:8). *And he bore the sins of many, and was delivered because of their iniquities.* (Isa. 53:12).

That He would be crucified on the Cross: *They plotted an evil device against me, saying, 'Come, let us put wood in his bread, and destroy him root and branch from the land of the living, so his name might not be remembered any longer'* (Jer. 11:18).

That He Who is crucified is the Life; but the Jews will not believe: *And thy life shall be hanging before thine eyes; and thou shalt be afraid by day and by night, and thou shalt not believe in thy life.* (Deut 28:66).

That He would be crucified in the middle of the earth: *But God is our king before the ages, He hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth.* (Pss 73:13).

That He would be crucified along with the thieves: *And he was numbered among the transgressors.* (Isa 53:12).

That His hands and feet would be nailed: *"They have pierced my hands and my feet. They have numbered all my bones.* (Pss 21:16). *And I will say to him, What are these wounds between thine hands? Those with which I was wounded in my beloved house.* (Zech. 13:6).



That He would be mocked while on the Cross: *All that look upon me have laughed me to scorn; they have spoken with their lips and have wagged their heads [saying]: He hoped in the Lord; let Him deliver him, let Him save him, for He desireth him.* (Pss 21:6-8).

That they would pierce His side: *And they shall look upon Me, Whom they have pierced.* (Zech 12:10).

That water would gush forth from His holy side: *And in that day living water shall come forth out of Jerusalem.* (Zech 14:8).

That none of His bones would be broken: *They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones.* (Num 9:12).

That He would be given vinegar mixed with gall to drink: *And they gave me gall for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* (Pss 68:26).

That His clothes would be distributed and His garments parted: *They have parted my garments amongst themselves, and for my vesture have they cast lots.* (Pss 21:18).

That there would be darkness on the earth during His Crucifixion: *And it shall come to pass in that day that there shall be no light, and there shall be for one day cold and frost, and that day shall be known to the Lord, and it shall not be day nor night: but towards evening it shall be light.* (Zech 14:6-7). *And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that the sun shall go down at noon, and the light shall be darkened on the earth by day.* (Amos 8:9). *The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their light. And the Lord shall cry out of Zion, and shall utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heaven and the earth shall be shaken.* (Joel 3:15-16).

That He would descend to Hades to liberate the souls in bondage: *And the gates of death open to thee for fear; and did the porters of hell quake when they saw thee.* (Job 38:17). *Mightily leading forth them that were shackled, and likewise them that embitter Him, them that dwell in tombs.* (Pss 67:7). *Hades from below was embittered to meet you.* (Isa 14:9).

That His body would not suffer corruption: *For Thou wilt not abandon my soul in Hades, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.* (Pss 1:10).

That He would resurrect: *Because of the distress of the beggars and the groaning of the poor, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will establish them in salvation, I will be manifest therein.* (Pss 11:6). *Arise, O God, judge the earth, for Thou shalt have an inheritance among all the nations.* (Ps. 81:8). "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered" (Pss 67:1). *Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest.* (Pss 131:8). *He Who brought up from the earth the shepherd of His sheep.* (Isa 63:11). *Prepare yourself, rise early in the morning...* "On account of this, wait for Me," says the Lord, "until the day of My rising up as a testimony. For My judgment shall be for the gathering of the nations." (Zeph 3:7-8).

That He would resurrect in three days: *Let us go, and return to the Lord our God; for he has torn and will heal us; he will*

*smite and bind us up. After two days he will heal us: in the third day we shall arise and live.* (Hos 6:1-3).

That many dead people would be resurrected: *The dead shall rise up; and those in the tombs shall arise.* (Isa 26:19). *Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your tombs to lead you, My people, up from their graves.* (Ezek 37:12-14).

That the myrrh-bearing women would visit His tomb: *Come hither, ye women that come from a sight; for it is a people of no understanding.* (Isa 27:11).



One of the saints said: There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was ill, lying down; and when I had embraced him, I sat with him and told him, "Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons." But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, "Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you." And I said to him, "Yes, I am very young, but I have the temptations of mighty men." And he said again, "Then it is God's will to make you wise." And I said, "How can I become wise? For every day I taste death." And in reply he said, "God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace."

#### St. Abba Isaac the Syrian

My blessed children, the holy Fathers teach us that a man's heart is entangled with the prickly roots of various passions that are lodged very deep within it. When a person, through enlightenment of God, attempts to uproot (in essence, to transfigure) a passion, he grips and removes the rootlets with forceps. However, as he attempts to uproot each passion, he simultaneously lacerates the heart. When the heart is cut open, it bleeds and hurts. If a person decides not to bear the pain, he gives up at that point, he abandons the struggle, and thus remains passionate and sinful. If, however, he patiently endures the pain, he removes the root of the passion and is set free

#### Blessed Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona

The Western Church, from the tenth century downwards, has privily brought into herself through the papacy various and strange and heretical doctrines and innovations, and so she has been torn away and removed far from the true and orthodox Church of Christ. How necessary, then, it is for you to come back and return to the ancient and unadulterated doctrines of the Church in order to attain the salvation in Christ after which you press.

#### Ecumenical Patriarch Anthimos

[Synodal reply to the Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, 1895]

## REPENTANCE AND SALVATION!

### A PASTORAL CIRCULAR FOR THE LENTEN TRIODION

*By Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythira and Antikythera (Greece).*

*Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos:  
for I have befouled my soul with shameful sins  
and have wasted all my life in slothfulness.*

*By thine intercessions deliver me from all uncleanness.*

[From the hymn “*Open Unto Me the Doors of Repentance*”]

† † †

**M**y dear brothers and concelebrants! My brothers in Christ and beloved children of the Lord!

As we know, the Lenten Triodion lasts seventy days. It begins with the Week of the Publican and the Pharisee and ends on Holy Saturday. The Lenten Triodion includes the first three weeks of preparation for Great Lent, before Cheesefare Sunday. It also includes the sacred time of the holy and Great Forty Days, which begins with Clean Week and continues until the Friday before Lazarus Saturday. The Lenten Triodion also covers Great and Holy Week, which can be called the “Holy of Holies” of the Lenten Triodion: from Holy Monday through Holy Saturday.

At the beginning of the Lenten Triodion, we sing with contrite heart: *The doors of repentance do Thou open unto me, O Giver of life, Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos.* Repentance and salvation are the two highest and most sacred spiritual goals to which the aspirations of Orthodox believers should be directed. It is possible to attain them by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, through life in the Holy Spirit and in *podvigs*—both spiritual and bodily, which are a means of returning to our common purpose: to the observance of the Divine commandments and the fulfillment of the will of God.

Repentance!

*Let no one who lives in sin fall into despair,* advises St. John Chrysostom. But none of the virtuous should give themselves over to carelessness. Let the virtuous not be sure of himself, for such will remain behind the repentant harlot. But let the sinner not despair, because it is possible that he will overtake the first (by sincere repentance)... When we turn away from sin and are filled with ardent love for God, He forgets the former. God is not like people. He does not punish for our previous actions (of which we sincerely repented). And if we have repented, He does not ask why we squandered so much time. He loves us and does not reject us when we return to Him. It is enough only to return in the proper manner (through sincere repentance).

*When houses fall into disrepair, we always renovate them,* St. John Chrysostom says in another place. We ought to do the same with ourselves. Have you sinned today? That is, has

your soul fallen into decay (have you become the old man)? Despair not, do not commit another fall, but restore your spiritual home. How? By repentance, tears, confession, and good deeds. And never stop doing it.

Repentance and salvation!

*Salvation,* St. John Chrysostom underlines, *is achieved not by our labors, not by our podvigs, but by love;* but not only by God’s love, and not only by our virtues. For if salvation were attained only by His love, then we would all be saved. And were it achieved simply by our virtue, then the coming of the Lord and all the acts of the Divine economy would be superfluous. However, (our salvation) is accomplished not only by Divine love, and not only by our virtue, but by the joint action of one and the other.

My brothers,

*Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos,* we chant during the time of the sacred and soul-saving Lenten Triodion. Repentance and salvation! Repentance is the true path of a God-loving Christian life in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Repentance is the blessed path to our Lord and God and the most God-pleasing way of life. True repentance throughout our entire life guides us along the safe path and unswervingly leads to salvation in Jesus Christ, for there is none other name under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12).

Life in repentance and its orientation towards salvation in Christ shields us spiritually and protects us from slavery and the yoke of the devil, and wards us from evil spirits, from sin, and from every evil.

By means of a gradual removal of non-fasting foods and the entrance into the spiritual fast, with prayer and long Church services, with constant reminders of repentance and the need for spiritual sobriety, the Lenten Triodion helps the faithful in spiritual warfare and assists in spiritual work. On the other hand, the “worldly triodion” (with a lowercase letter), that is, wasting these special days wandering along the roads and back alleys of sin, and even among carnival disguises and festivals, disorients a man and alienates him from the spirit of devout prayer, spiritual struggle, and blessed turning to the Lord in this holy time.

To the issues that deserve fervent prayer “on the field of virtues,” we add the following: a complete cessation of the fires (large and ongoing) on the continent of Australia, the cessation of the strong seismic vibrations in our neighboring country to the east, the elimination of the looming threat of war, the removal of the threats of an earthquake in the country bordering us to the north—Albania—and the speedy restoration of what has been destroyed in both countries. [And to this we should add the world devastation from Covid-19, uncovered after the authorship on this article, *Ed.*].

And most importantly: for the reconciliation and restoration of the Divinely-inspired unity and communion of

all the Local Orthodox Churches that make up the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. None of the autocephalous Local Churches, with the exception of three, accept the great canonical violation of recognizing a certain entity made up of schismatic, excommunicated, defrocked, and unordained persons as a canonical “autocephalous Church,” while completely ignoring and disdaining His Beatitude Onuphry, the canonical primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, with a whole host of canonical bishops under him and millions of faithful enduring persecution. And while the canonical Ukrainian Church endures persecution, harassment, and violence, celebrations are being held in honor of the first anniversary of the provision of “autocephaly!”

And just like the eleven autocephalous Churches, we humbly believe that this gaping wound, which is devastating for the holy Body of the One and only Orthodox, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, will not be healed if this most serious of canonical problems will not be resolved on the pan-Orthodox level, by convening a pan-Orthodox council. The passage of more and more time, the exerting of pressure, as well as pompous Divine services and joint prayers with representatives of other confessions and other religions only deepens the wounds instead of healing them. We fear that the proposed visit of the head of the Vatican in the footsteps of the apostle Paul—to those places where the great “apostle to the Gentiles” traveled—will bring no good fruits. This can happen only under one condition: if first of all, the theology and ecclesiology of the great “apostle to the Gentiles” Paul is fully recognized, with great humility and fitting modesty, and heretical teachings are renounced, accompanied by sincere and salvific repentance out of love for God.

With heartfelt wishes for a blessed, peaceful, and fruitful time of the Lenten Triodion, good repentance, and the salvation of your souls, I remain, with paternal prayers and love in Christ,

† Metropolitan Seraphim of Kythira and Antikythera



For us, the ungodly, the Master was given up. Who would not marvel? Who would not give glory? When the slaves had sinned, the Master was given up. The sons of perdition and the children of darkness went out into the darkness to arrest the Sun, Who had the power to consume them in an instant. But the Master—knowing their impudence and the force of their anger—with gentleness, by His own Authority, gave Himself up into the hands of the ungodly.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

## ON OUR FALL FROM PARADISE

By Fr. John S. Romanides.

The Fathers teach that with the Fall, the human nous became darkened. The Fathers are not concerned with Adam per se, but with his nous and with the sickness that followed from its darkening. The Fathers speak about a nous void of understanding. Throughout Patristic literature, the whole issue of the Fall centers on this darkening of the human nous.

But how do we know that man fell? Just from the historical description of the Fall in Holy Scripture? And what does “the Fall” really mean? What does “Paradise” mean? What was Paradise? There are two Patristic traditions on this subject, which are summarized by St. John of Damascus, who gives us both Patristic opinions without taking a position himself on this issue.

One tradition says that Adam’s nous in Paradise was illumined. The other tradition says that the condition of his nous was such that he could behold God continuously and that this is what Paradise meant for Adam—to see the glory of God. Both the Alexandrian tradition and Cappadocian tradition (of St. Basil the Great) maintain that before the Fall, Adam beheld God with his nous, while the Antiochian tradition (of St. John Chrysostom) maintains that his nous was simply illumined.

St. John of Damascus takes no position as to whether Adam’s nous was merely illumined before the Fall, or whether it was in a state where it could continuously behold God, that is, in a state of continuous *theosis*. Why does this Father of the Church not take a position? Because what interests him is to provide two explanations for the original state of the nous and how it became darkened. But how do we know that Adam’s nous became darkened? Very simply, because we know that we ourselves now have a darkened nous. And this darkened nous needs healing. The cure has two phases: illumination and *theosis*. ***Theosis is the complete cure.***

But what does it mean to say that the nous has become darkened? It means that the noetic activity in the human heart is not functioning properly. Noetic energy begins to function properly only when man passes through purification and reaches illumination. After the Fall, the nous is in a darkened state. Why? Because it is full of thoughts (logismoi) and has been darkened by these thoughts. And when does the nous become darkened by thoughts? The nous is darkened when the thoughts of our reasoning mind [dianoia] descend into the heart and become thoughts of the nous, that is, when the location of our thoughts becomes confused between the rational mind and the nous. Thoughts are present in our nous that should not be there, because they belong to our reasoning faculty, the dianoia. The nous must be utterly empty of thoughts in order for it to remain pure and thus receptive, so that the Holy Spirit can come and dwell and remain in it.

## THY CROSS WE WORSHIP, O MASTER

*By Constantine Zalalas, Rochester, NY, March 2018.*

The precious and life-giving Cross is the holiest symbol of our Faith. All the Holy mysteries are completed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the seal of the Holy Cross. All the Hieratical prayers—of Holy Baptism, Holy Chrism, Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, etc.—begin and end with the sign of the Cross. The Holy Temples, the Holy vessels and the liturgical vestments, and all liturgical actions are sanctified by the sign of the Holy Cross. Moreover, the Cross is the most faithful companion of every Orthodox Christian. From the moment we enter this world until we exit it in our final resting place—our tomb—we are accompanied by the blessing of the Cross. We bless ourselves with the sign of the Cross daily; we keep crosses at our homes, at our places of work and in our automobiles because we believe in the beautiful hymn of our Church.

The Cross is the guardian of the Universe; the Cross is the beauty of the Church; the Cross is the power of kings; the Cross is the staff of the Church; the Cross is the glory of angels; the Cross is the wounding of demons.

The symbol of the Cross is so indispensable that in its absence a church would be anything but a church of the Crucified Christ. The grace and power of the Cross is not due to the shape of the Cross per se but because it is the Cross of Christ. The Red Cross, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the green cross of pharmacies or doctors—all these crosses are insignia of human institutions and, as such, totally irrelevant to the Cross of Christ. The Cross of Christ, on the other hand, is the organ by which He saved the world, the altar on which He offered Himself as the perfect offering, the pure offering of the prophecy of Malachi (1:6). All the *kenosis*, poverty, humiliation, pain, affliction and death He willingly accepted for us merge on the Cross. He suffered the greatest humiliation and pain upon the Cross; He became a curse to free us from the curse of the Law and the bondage of sin. All Christ's work and all His philanthropy gravitate toward the Cross. By being bound on the Cross,

Christ loosed the tragedy of human bondage caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve; and by being obedient unto death, the death of the Cross, He re-orientated our human freedom towards our Maker, the Triune God. Upon the Cross He conquered our death, by making our death His own death and by His Resurrection He has granted to us life and incorruption. Through the Cross He reconciled us to God the Father and granted us remission of sins. On the Cross He demonstrated to us in the most convincing way that He loves us with infinite, unconditional love—a love that did not diminish an iota even during His most horrific pain and suffering. Through the Cross He brought together all of us from different and once-scattered nationalities, and further united us as members of one Body, renewing us with the water and blood that spilled out of His side, which water and blood are the two central mysteries of the Church.



He broke down the high walls that divided us, re-creating by His blood the new man of grace. On the Cross He cleansed and sanctified the sky, the air, and the earth. He was crucified under the sky, hanging in midair; and His most precious blood was dripping into the earth. On the Cross He offered an ecumenical sacrifice for the entire earth and a common cleansing for the entire human nature. That is

why He suffered outside the city and away from the Temple of Solomon, according to the theology of the Golden Mouth John. On the Cross Christ revealed to us that this transient world is not the final reality but the path towards that reality, provided that we take up the struggle to crucify our egotism. On the Cross He manifested Himself as the only Life-giver, Redeemer and Savior of the entire world. He decisively destroyed the works, power, deceit and authority of the devil over people. That is why the devil goes into a panic and trembles, being unable to behold or approach the power of the Cross of Christ.

There is a poignant story about a very holy man, John Vostrinos, who had the authority to expel unclean spirits; it is said that when they brought to him several young women who were victimized by evil spirits, he questioned the evil spirits inside of them: What do you fear the most from the things that we do in Church? And the evil spirits answered, We are mainly afraid of three things: (1) That which you



hang around your neck... (That is how much they fear the Cross: they could not even say its name...but they described it periphrastically or in a roundabout way.) (2) That bath that you are given at the church (Holy Baptism), and (3) That which you eat at your liturgies (Holy Communion).

These are the three greatest weapons against the demons; and that is why they are so viciously fought and totally distorted by sectarian and heretical Christians. The death of the Lord on the Cross is life-giving and redeeming because it was totally voluntary and willing. Christ journeyed to the Cross not as a condemned defendant but as a King, offering His life giving blood as transfusion like the Pelican who broke his chest open to revive his poisoned children. That is why He said, I have a baptism to be baptized with—a baptism of death—and how am I constrained till it be accomplished. This is why the Eastern Orthodox write on the Cross *The King of Glory* and not simply *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. They depict the Lord on the Cross as Master: with His hands spread horizontally, in total control and not hanging miserably and helplessly conquered by despair and pain, as seen in the crosses of the West.

The death of the Lord is salvific and redeeming because it was real death and not docetic (i.e., not for appearance's sake); for the One Who sacrificed Himself was sinless and unable to sin. His human nature was always united with the divine nature and forever at the state of *theosis* from the very moment of conception, hypostatically united on the One Person of God the Logos. According to the decision of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod Christ had two natural wills in full accord with one another, with the human will always and deliberately following and obeying the divine will. Thus the Lord in His human nature and will could never desire anything different than His Father and the Holy Spirit; He was never tempted, and could not be tempted, for He was the only true human, who pleased God one hundred percent.

The devil's three temptations in the desert were weaker than spider webs, and the ancient serpent walked away empty-handed.

Those outside of the Church and inside of the Church, who think otherwise and ascribe a fallen human nature to Christ, try to interpret Christ with their own fallen mindset. The person of Christ cannot be interpreted by a fallen man, but the fallen man needs to be interpreted by the God-man. When we attempt to theologize about the God-man with our ill rationalism we fall prey to the scandal of the Cross—much like the unbelieving Jews and the Athenian philosophers. We empty the mystery of the Cross of Christ, according to St. Paul.

The theological pen of St. Gregory Palamas adds the following: This is the wisdom and power of God; to conquer through weakness, to elevate through humility, to make wealthy through poverty. It is not surprising that the

Lord did not wish to maintain the glory of Transfiguration which would certainly make him avoid the Cross... who would dare approach Him... His enemies would vanish like smoke... the Jews could not even look at Moses' face when he returned from the top of Mount Sinai. Likewise Pilate and Herod, Annas and Caiphas would not be able to glance at a transfigured Christ... yet He chose not to violate their free will.

Christ did not want to convince us and force us to believe by His glory and power, but to draw us to Him by His loving humility.

On His descent from Mount Tabor the conversation was not centered on His glory but He was rather preparing His disciples for the Cross. His work was to convey to us that without the life of the Cross and voluntary discomfort, we will not share in the glory of the Resurrection or Transfiguration. As the Captain of our Faith, having brought many sons to glory (through discomfort, *askesis* and suffering [like Joseph, Moses, the prophets, the seven Maccabees, and the three youths in the fire]), He, also being their captain of salvation, needed to finish His life through suffering (Heb 2:10, which is terribly mis-translated by our English Bibles): *For it was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of our salvation perfect through suffering...*

So everything was made for Christ, and everything visible and invisible was made by Christ. Christ was perfect man and perfect God from the moment of conception, so there was absolutely nothing imperfect in the human nature of Christ that needed to be perfected through suffering. In His sacrificial spirit and love He chose to be the first martyr: Not to be made perfect through suffering, but to complete his earthly life through suffering. By stretching out His hands on the Cross He would heal the sinful action of Adam, who stretched out his hands to taste the forbidden fruit.

That is why Christ severely rebuked Peter, who was suggesting to Him to avoid the Cross. He called him Satan, only a few hours after He had praised him for his God inspired confession. *Get behind Me, Satan; you are a scandal to Me, because you are not thinking in Godly terms, but you think by the logic of men.* On His way to His voluntary Passion He was saying, *Now the Son of Man is glorified.* And in other verses of the gospel, the Cross is presented as the Glory of Christ. As St. John the Chrysostom writes, the Cross before Christ was the means of shame and condemnation, but now it is the cause of honor and glory. This is also overt from the words of the Lord: *Father, glorify Me with the glory I had before the world received its existence from You...* He was referring to the Cross... **the Cross is the glory of Christ.** After His rebuke of Peter, Christ instructed the rest of His disciples to embrace the gospel of the Cross: *Anyone who wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross*

*and follow Me.* To the sons of Zebedee and their mother, who were seeking to be first, the Lord said, *You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink? Or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?*

So the Cross is not just a symbol or a metaphor, but the way of life for those who would like to be called Christians. As it would be inconceivable to consider Christ without the Cross, likewise it is inconceivable to be considered a Christian without sharing in the sufferings and the Cross of Christ. *Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot become My disciple.*

What does this mean for us? How can we carry our cross in a society that idolizes pleasure and comfort? We can accomplish this in three ways.

First, by undertaking the daily struggle to crucify our passions according to St. Paul: *Those of Christ have crucified their passions and their earthly desires.* (Gal 5:24). I share in the crucifixion of Christ when I struggle to uproot or transform my sinful passions: my egocentrism, my selfishness, my egotism, my self-love. Excessive self-love leads to the lack of faith and faithlessness altogether. It fosters indifference for our fellow man—and worse yet, to the use and abuse of our fellow man for our personal gratification and/or financial gain. Love of pleasure, love of possessions, love of glory and attention: all these sprout from the passion of ill self-love. The self-lover cannot be a lover of God or a lover of man. He can pretend to be a man of faith and philanthropic, but deep down he is only in love with himself. If we do not crucify our sick self-love, we cannot follow Christ and we cannot become his disciples.

*We must die to the world,* as St. Paul repeatedly teaches. *We must die to the world before Christ can live in us... I no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). St. Gregory Palamas calls this the first mystery of the Cross: to distance all influences of the world around me which cause me to sin. The second mystery of the Cross is to guard the mind/nous from all sinful images and remembrance of past sins, and to fight all *logismoi*, by *nepsis* and unceasing noetic prayer. By the daily struggle of *nepsis* and prayer a man begins to transform his sinful passions and tendencies; and he discovers the inner treasure, the kingdom of God within him. As he progresses, he begins to feel a spiritual warmth inside his heart, which chases away sinful thoughts and passions and which brings a deep peace and consolation to the soul and body.

According to St. Gregory, the uncreated energy of the Holy Cross was present and active in the Old Testament. The sign of the Cross was used by Moses to open the Red Sea. The sign of the Cross was used by the elderly Jacob to bless his grandchildren Manasseh and Ephraim. The resurrections worked by Elijah and Elisha prefigured the Crucifixion of

Christ. The bronze serpent hung on a vertical and horizontal wood prefigured the Crucifixion. There are at least twenty instances in the Old Testament where the uncreated energy of the Cross of Christ manifests itself. The entire procession of the Israelites in the wilderness moved in the sign of the Cross: three tribes in the front, three tribes a short distance back; three tribes to the right, and three tribes to the left.

If the power of the Cross was active in the life of all the righteous in the Old Testament, it is also certain that it was active in the life of the Most Holy Theotokos, who did nothing whatsoever to displease God. She never polluted herself, not even with a single thought, and at the tender age of three did what Abraham did in his old age. She left the home of her parents and entered the Holy of Holies where, by elevating her mind above every earthly thought, she united her nous with God and thereby maintained a constant vision of God. The power of the Cross in the righteous of the Old Testament was aiding them in their struggle against sin; whereas the energy of the Cross in the life of the spotless Virgin was an enhancement to elevate her to greater spiritual heights: from glory to glory and from *theoria* to *theoria*.

From the moment she was born she was creating an abode for the One Who could save man. She was struggling to create within her a beautiful dwelling, a dwelling that could house God. More on this we find in the homily of St. Gregory Palamas on Her Entrance to the Temple, and I quote: *At the moment the virgin entered the Holy of Holies she looked around and she rejoiced greatly for finding such a great and appropriate refuge.* Through the physical beauty of the Holy of Holies she was capable of elevating her mind to the invisible beauty of God so her mind was no longer thinking of any earthly joy or desire. This way she surpassed the needs of nature and the desires of the senses. She refused to look at anything beautiful in the earthly sense and to taste those foods that gratify the senses. Accordingly, she became the first human to become free from the tyranny of the devil, and rendered his schemes powerless; and for this victory at a very young age she received as a reward the luxury of being fed by an angel.

Thus, the first method of being crucified together with Christ is to renounce the sinful passions of our fallen Adamic nature. The second method is to forbear the involuntary afflictions of this earthly life courageously and thankfully, according to the Pauline adage: *Give thanks to God for everything...for the sweet things and the bitter things...* Painful and incurable diseases, the death of loved ones, injustice, disrespect, slander, persecutions that we will often undergo as Christians—all of these will grant us the opportunity to share in the sufferings, crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. If we become indignant under these trials we will suffer loss. If we accept these misfor-

tunes stoically—with the “what-can-we-do” attitude—we will not benefit much. If we accept these difficulties as a visitation from God for the purpose of our perfection, then we will benefit greatly.

The voluntary acceptance of pain as our cross—as the gift of God’s love for our spiritual development and perfection—elevates us to the ranks of the Holy martyrs. The Christian who courageously suffers on the bed of pain and in the process glorifies God for making him a participant in His Son’s suffering will be considered a confessor of the Faith and a contemporary martyr. According to St. Paul, if we endure by imitating Him in His suffering, we also will reign with Him.

The third method of being crucified with Christ is to embrace voluntary struggles, poverty and discomforts for the love of God. The Lord spoke about a narrow and sorrowful gate which suggests discomfort and pain. The kingdom of God suffers violence, and those who desire it must exercise a merciless combat against their sinful passions. Without this combat the old man of sin does not give up. Without prayer, fasting, abstinence, prostrations and general *askesis*, the passions of the fallen nature cannot be bridled. *You must give blood to receive the Spirit* was a common slogan among the Desert Fathers.

The strict fast of Great Lent is not an easy matter for a number, if not most, of our Christians. Without this blessed toil of fasting (for those of good health), we will not be crucified together with Christ and we will not live the joy of the Resurrection. We experience the Resurrection when we live the gospel of the Cross. Everything in our Church has the air of the Resurrection because we crucify our fallen nature year round. We don’t give up chocolate for a few weeks. We fast the majority of the time—well over 200 days per year. Our Church is the Church of the Cross and the Resurrection. We the Orthodox celebrate Holy Friday with the air of the Resurrection, while the western non-Orthodox celebrate their Pascha with the air of crucifixion: they display a cross with a purple cloth on it—nevertheless, a cross. In the Orthodox icons there is no Cross, but the joy of Adam being pulled out of the bonds of Hades.

This joy, the joy as a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is hidden in the voluntary sufferings and discomfort that we undertake for the love of Christ. The pain and discomfort of asceticism and repentance is the way to blessedness. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

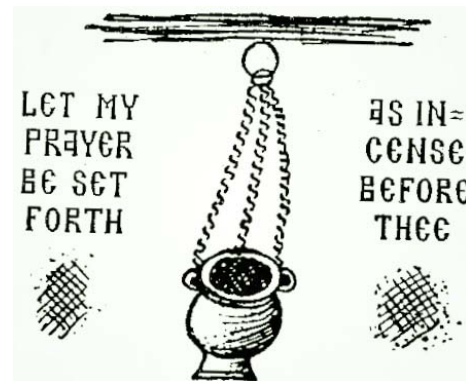
Voluntary discomfort and relative pain for the love of Christ will lead to spiritual freedom and blessedness. Most of us Orthodox, however, prefer the way of the anti-Christian world, a world that demonizes discomfort, pain and suffering. Painkillers are prescribed for every age and find their way into every cupboard, whether we really need them or not.

Christianity is about joy, they tell us. God does not want us to suffer. God wants us to feel good and be happy. But joy cannot be bought with money. True Christian joy comes after the pain and suffering for the sake of the gospel. Today we want to follow Christ empty-handed, without our cross; the idea of the Cross makes us tremble because we are enslaved to a life of comforts. Comfort is the worst enemy of Christianity, according to the Fathers. All the contemporary evils are the illegitimate children of the comfortable and Cross-despising lifestyle of the West.

The world today is facing the plagues prophesied in the Book of the Revelation, which are not the work of God but the consequences of a world that chose an anti-Christian journey, a journey that despises the Cross.

The answer is repentance. Without repentance this world will self-destruct, no doubt. It is only a matter of time. As Christians of these most perilous times, we must increase our vigilance and struggle to avoid being pulled into these strong torrents. Our life preserver is the love of the Cross of Christ: the love of discomfort, or *philoponia*. It is a matter of choice for all of us to follow either the life of the Cross or the wide path that leads to destruction. As wise spiritual investors, let us never forget the undying words of the immortal Saint Paul. I reckon that the sufferings of this age are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Amen

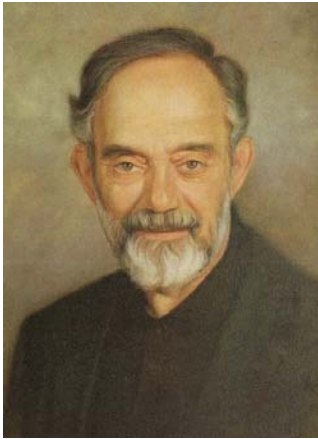


Through greed we underwent the first stripping, overcome by the bitter tasting of the fruit, and we became exiles from God. But let us turn back to repentance and, fasting from the food that gives us pleasure, let us cleanse our senses on which the enemy makes war. Let us strengthen our hearts with the hope of grace, and not with foods which brought no benefit to those who trusted in them. Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery, who disperses the darkness of ignorance by the Light of His Resurrection.

*Aposticha*, Vespers on the evening of the Sunday of the Last Judgement

## BEFORE THE AGES

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



The phrase *before the ages* is highly significant, because the ages and time are not the same. The Fathers make a distinction between the ages and time, even though they did not know modern physics. In physics, time as understood in the past no longer exists. In the past, time was measured by the movement of the earth relative to the sun and the moon. But now, our

understanding of time has changed drastically.

But what matters to us is that the Fathers clearly distinguish between the ages and time. So the Fathers say that when God created the world, He first created the ages, then the angels, and afterwards both this world and time. In other words, the Fathers knew that time was a dimension of a particular aspect of the created universe, because the ages were the first creation to be created and not time. Time was created later on by God.

The main difference between the ages and time is that in time one event is followed in turn by another, while in the ages events do not necessarily follow one another. Instead, events and reality coexist in such a way that what happens is not necessarily entangled in the process of succession. But since man exists within time, his experience is limited to subsequent states. Existence without this process of succession is not within man's experience, but there is one exception. He can acquire this experience in the experience of *theosis*, because during *theosis* time is no longer in effect.

Only someone who has reached *theosis* has experienced a way of being that transcends existence, that transcends time, that transcends the ages, that transcends space, that transcends reason, and so forth. Someone in a state of *theosis* experiences the uncreated, but still does not know epistemologically what this uncreated reality is, because the uncreated epistemologically remains a mystery to the person in a state of *theosis*. In other words, even when God reveals Himself to someone who has reached *theosis*, God remains a Mystery. Even if someone perceives God with his nous, reason, senses and body, God nevertheless remains a Mystery, since He remains outside the boundaries and means of human knowledge.

And this is the case because human knowledge is based on similarity and difference, but there is no similarity between the created and the uncreated realms. For example,

if on the one hand we see an elephant, but do not know anything about elephants, the elephant before us does not resemble anything else. It is simply different from other animals. If we later see two elephants, we will say, "Hey, these two look alike." But if we examine them more carefully and discover that one elephant is male while the other one is female, then we will be able to see that they differ from one another in certain parts of the body. Yet in spite of these differences, they possess such an overall similarity that we can return to talking about elephants and place them in the same category with other elephants.

When someone experiences *theosis*, on the other hand, he can recognize a difference, but he cannot find a similarity with anything. Nevertheless, there is a difference. He sees something that he has never seen before in this life, but there is no similarity between what has been revealed to him and what he already knows. Why is this the case? Because the glory of God is different from everything created that he has observed within the created realm. It is different, but it is also utterly unlike anything known within creation. Why is it not similar to anything? It is not similar to anything, because it does not have color, it cannot be measured, it is not light, it is not darkness, it is not big, it is not small, it does not have a shape, it does not have a form.

This is the reason why the Fathers speak about the glory of God being like something without shape or form. Of course, to say that it is without form is to offer a rebuttal to the Platonists, since the Platonists believed in the existence of a world of forms. But when the Fathers say that the glory of God is without form, this means that it has nothing to do with Plato's conceptual world. Whenever the Fathers describe the glory of God as being without shape or form and whenever they refer to this absence of shape and form, they are making a direct assault on the opinions of Plato and Aristotle and on philosophy in general. This means that Patristic theology completely avoids those categories that belong to philosophical ways of thinking.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with someone studying philosophy as long as he rejects philosophy's teachings on the existence and nature of God. After all, philosophy trains the human mind. This is what all the hesychastic Fathers say, including St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, the Church Father whose ability to reason like a philosopher is unsurpassed. And if you read St. Dionysios the Areopagite, you will see that he even follows this same line of thought. So we can conclude that there is nothing wrong with someone spending his time with philosophy in order to train his rational faculty, in Greek *dianoia*, but it is sheer stupidity to accept the teachings of philosophy when it comes to theological subjects.

## Στῶμεν Καλῶς!

### Δὲν ἀποδεχόμαστε ὅτι ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος μετάδοσης ἀσθένειας μέσω τῆς Ἐκκλησίας!

Τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτη Ἐδέσσης κ. Γωήλ.

**Μ**ὲ ἀφορμὴ ὅσα ἔγιναν τὶς τελευταῖες μέρες μὲ τὴν παύση τῶν ἱεροπραξιῶν, ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ πρωτοφανοῦς ἰοῦ, ταπεινὰ θὰ θέλαμε νὰ διατυπώσουμε τὴν θέση τῆς Ἁγίας μας Ἐκκλησίας ὡς πρὸς τὸ ἐὰν μεταδίδονται οἱ ἀσθένειες μέσω τῶν Ἁγίων Μυστηρίων, ἢ μέσω τῶν ἀγιαστικῶν μέσων τῆς, τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν Ἁγίων εἰκόνων, τὸν ἀσπασμὸ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν παραμονή μας μέσα στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς.

**1. Ὡς πρὸς τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας:** Ὑπάρχει κοινὴ παραδοχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅτι τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μεταδώσει ἀσθένειες. Αὐτὸ πιστεύει ἡ Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἀποδεικνύει καὶ ἡ πράξις. Ἱερεῖς ποὺ ἐπὶ δεκαετίες ὑπηρετήσαν σὲ νοσοκομεῖα μὲ λοιμώδη νοσήματα, πολὺ μεταδοτικὰ καὶ ἀνίατα γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τους, οὐδέποτε νόσησαν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἦταν μέγα λάθος ἡ πράξις ἐνὸς ἱερέως τῆς Μητροπόλεως μας νὰ κοινωνήσῃ τοὺς πιστοὺς μὲ κοχλιάρια (κουταλάκια) τῆς μιᾶς χρήσεως.

**2. Ὁ ἀσπασμὸς τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων καὶ ἡ παραμονὴ στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς:** Ἡ συζήτηση γι' αὐτὰ ἔχει ἓναν ἐξίσου ἰσχυρὸ συμβολισμὸ στὸν χρόνον ποὺ γίνεται. Τὴν Β' Κυριακὴ τῶν Νηστειῶν ποὺ ἐορτάσαμε τὸν ἅγιον Γρηγόριον τὸν Παλαμᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος διετράνωσε καὶ διεκήρυξε μὲ λόγια καὶ ἔργα τὴν δυνατότητα τῆς μετοχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὶς ἄκτιστες θεῖες ἐνέργειες, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ μᾶς μὲ τὴν ἀποχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὸν Κυριακάτικο ἐκκλησιασμὸ σπεύσαμε νὰ διακηρύξουμε τὴν αἴρεση τοῦ Βαρλαάμ ποὺ ἀρνοῦνταν τὴν μετοχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὶς ἄκτιστες θεῖες ἐνέργειες.

Ὁ ἱερέας εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, ἀσθενής, πεπτωκός, ἀγωνιζόμενος γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση τοῦ ἔσω ἀνθρώπου. Ὁ ἱερέας «ἐνδεδυμένος τὴν τῆς ἱερωσύνης χάριν» μετέχει καὶ μεταδίδει τὶς ἄκτιστες Θεῖες ἐνέργειες

διὰ τῆς ἱερωσύνης καὶ ὄχι διὰ τοῦ προσωπικοῦ τοῦ ἀγιασμοῦ. Ὅταν ὑπάρχει καὶ αὐτός, φυσικά, ἔχει διπλὴ τὴν χάρη. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀσπαζόμαστε τὰ χέρια τῶν ἱερέων, μετέχουμε τῶν ἀκτίστων ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ λαμβάνουμε τὴν Θεῖα Χάρη ἐν τῷ μέτρῳ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς εὐλαβείας μας.

Ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Ὅσιος Παῖσιος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀσπαζόταν μὲ πολὺ πόθο τὰ χέρια τοῦ ἱεροουργήσαντος ἱερέως μετὰ τὴν Θεῖα Λειτουργία, «ὁ ἱερέας δὲν ἔχει δικὰ του χέρια». Ἄν πιστεύουμε ὅτι μπορεῖ ὁ ἱερέας νὰ μεταδώσει ἀσθένειες ἀρνούμαστε τὴν χάρη τῆς ἱερωσύνης, ἀρνούμαστε τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅταν ἀμφιβάλλουμε ἢ ἀρνούμαστε μὲ τὶς πράξεις μας τὶς ἄκτιστες Θεῖες ἐνέργειες, κατασκευάζουμε ἓναν ἄλλο Θεὸ καὶ ἀρνούμαστε τὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεὸ.

**3. Τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς:** Ὁ ναὸς εἶναι Σῶμα τοῦ ζῶντος Θεοῦ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φέρει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου σώματος. Καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι μόνον συμβολικόν. Μέσα στὴν Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία οἱ τύποι καὶ τὰ σύμβολα περιέχουν τὴν οὐσία, τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς τηροῦμε. Καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι πὼς ὁ ἱερὸς ναὸς ὡς Σῶμα Χριστοῦ δὲν δύναται νὰ εἶναι χῶρος μετάδοσης ἀσθενειῶν. Ἄν ἀμφιβάλλουμε γι' αὐτό, ἀμφιβάλλουμε γιὰ τὸ ἐὰν ὑπάρχει ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ. Ἐξομοιώνουμε τὸν Ναὸ μὲ μία αἴθουσα συναθροίσεων.

Ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ συζήτηση καταλήγει σ' ἓναν ἔντονον προβληματισμὸ καὶ σὲ μίαν λυπηρὴ διαπίστωση. Ὁ προβληματισμὸς εἶναι: πιστεύουμε ὄντως στὸν Θεό; Καὶ ἂν ναί, σὲ ποιὸν Θεό; Σὲ ἓναν βαρλααμιτικὸ Θεὸ ποὺ κατασκευάζει ἡ λογικὴ μας; Σὲ ἓναν Θεὸ στὸν ὁποῖο ἀναγνωρίζουμε τόση χάρη, ὅση χωρᾶ τὸ φτωχὸ μυαλό μας;

Ἡ πικρὴ διαπίστωση εἶναι ὅτι χωρὶς νὰ τὸ καταλαβαίνουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ θέλουμε, βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Πάσχουμε ἀπὸ αἰρετικὸ φρόνημα, ἐνῶ διακηρύσσουμε τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μας. Βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ κινδυνεύουμε νὰ μὴν συγχωρεθοῦμε οὔτε ἐδῶ οὔτε αἰῶνια ἀμφισβητώντας τὴν χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Ὅταν φοβόμαστε νὰ προσκυνήσουμε τὶς ἱερεῖς εἰκόνες, νὰ ἀσπασθοῦμε τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερέως, νὰ βρεθοῦμε μέσα στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ, ἀρνούμαστε στὴν



πράξη την σωστική και αγιαστική Χάρη του Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Θεωρούμε ὅτι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μεταδώσει κάτι «κοινὸν ἢ ἀκάθαρτον» καὶ αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ μεγίστη βλασφημία.

Ἄς ὁμολογήσουμε καὶ μὲ τὶς πράξεις μας, ὅπως ὁμολογήσαμε μὲ τὰ χεῖλιά μας, ὅτι πιστεύουμε στὴν ἔνοικοῦσα, στὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες, στοὺς ἱερεῖς, στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς, Θεία Χάρη. Ἡ μετοχή μας σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν Χάρη εἶναι ἐξάρτηση τῆς δικῆς μας πίστεως. Ὅσο πιστεύουμε, τόση Χάρη λαμβάνουμε. Ἡ ὑπαρξή της ὁμως δὲν ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὴν δική μας πίστη. Ὁ Θεός, «ὁ Ὦν καὶ ὁ Ἦν καὶ ὁ Ἐρχόμενος» δὲν καταργεῖται, ἐὰν ἐμεῖς δὲν Τὸν πιστεύουμε.

Κατὰ τὰ ἀνωτέρω, τὴν παύση τῶν ἱεροπραξιῶν μὲ νόμο τῆς Πολιτείας, τὴν δεχόμεστε ὡς Θεία παιδαγωγία, διότι «ἡμάρτομεν, ἠνομήσαμεν, ἠδικήσαμεν, οὐδὲ συντηρήσαμεν, οὐδὲ ἐποιήσαμεν καθὼς ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν» ὁ Κύριος. Δὲν ἀποδεχόμεστε ὁμως τὴν αἰτιολόγηση τῆς Πολιτείας, ὅτι ὑπάρχει κίνδυνος μετάδοσης τῆς ἀσθένειας μέσῳ τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἱερουργουμένων μυστηρίων.

Ἦδη Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν καὶ πάσης Ἑλλάδος κ. Ιερώνυμος καὶ ἡ Ἱερὰ Σύνοδος ἔστειλαν ἐπιστολὴ στὴν Ὑπουργὸ Παιδείας καὶ Θρησκευμάτων καὶ τὸν Γενικὸ Γραμματέα Θρησκευμάτων ἀναφορικὰ μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα καὶ βάζουν τὰ πράγματα στὴν θέση τους. Ἐν ὀλίγοις, εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ μολυνθοῦμε ἢ νὰ κολλήσουμε ὁποιαδήποτε ἀσθένεια ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη, τὶς Ἁγίες εἰκόνες, τὸν ἀσπασμὸ τῶν χειρῶν τῶν ἱερέων καὶ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς.

Ἄν πιστεύουμε ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ στὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἔνοικοῦσα θεία Χάρη, θὰ ἔχουμε καὶ πλοῦσια τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ μας. Ἐὰν τὴν ἀρνούμαστε ἢ ἀμφιβάλουμε, πάσχουμε τὴν αἴρεση τοῦ Βαβυλῶν καὶ τῶν εἰκονομάχων. Ἀρνούμαστε τὸν Θεὸ καὶ βλασφημοῦμε κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Διὰ τοῦτο...

**Στῶμεν καλῶς!**

Πιστεύσωμεν ἀπλῶς καὶ ὀρθῶς, καὶ ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Πατρός, καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἔσται πάντοτε μετὰ πάντων ἡμῶν. Ἀμήν.

**Ο** ὀνειδισμοὶ ἀποπλύνουν τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη. Σὲ αὐτὸ ἂς σὲ πείση καὶ ἡ σχετικὴ φράση, ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῖ ὁ λαός. Μερικοὶ κοσμικοὶ δηλαδὴ ὅταν ἐξυβρίσουν κάποιον κατὰ πρόσωπον, λέγουν μὲ καύχηση: «Τὸν τάδε τὸν ἔλουσα» (ἐννοεῖ μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶπε). Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀληθινόν.

**Ἄγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης**

## «Θανάτου Ἐορτάζομεν Νέκρωσιν...»

Πρ. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός (+2019), Κυριακάτικη Ἐλευθεροτυπία, 17 Ἀπριλίου 2001.

**Μ**ὲ τὰ ἀπαισιότερα συναισθήματα ἀντιμετωπίζεται **Μ**σνήθως ὁ θάνατος. Ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο τόσο καυχόμεστε, δὲν μᾶς ἔχει ἐξοικειώσει μὲ τὴν μεγαλύτερη καὶ τραγικότερη πραγματικότητα στὴ ζωὴ μας, τὸν θάνατο. Οὔτε μᾶς ἔχει συμφιλιώσει μαζί του. Γι' αὐτὸ λείπει στὴ σημερινὴ κοινωνία μία ρεαλιστικὴ φιλοσοφία τοῦ θανάτου. Βέβαια, σ' αὐτὸ συντρέχουν διάφοροι λόγοι. Ὁ ὀλιγόπιστος φοβάται τὸν θάνατο, διότι βλέπει τὴν ἀνετομιότητά του νὰ τὸν ὑποδεχθεῖ. Ὁ ἄπιστος ἢ ἄθεος, ποὺ στηρίζει ὅλες τὶς ἐλπίδες του στὸν κόσμο αὐτό, βλέπει τὸν θάνατο σὰν καταστροφὴ. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀποφεύγει νὰ μιλεῖ γιὰ τὸν θάνατο ἢ χλευάζει τὸν θάνατο, ἀλλὰ στὸ βάθος τὸν φοβάται. Ὅπως τὸν φοβοῦνται οἱ οἰκονομικὰ εὐρωστοί, διότι θὰ τοὺς κάμει νὰ χάσουν ὅσα ἔχουν, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ προλετάριοι τοῦ κόσμου μας, μολονότι διατείνονται, ὅτι βλέπουν τὸν θάνατο σὰν σωτηρία. Διότι γι' αὐτούς, κυρίως, ἰσχύει ὁ λόγος τοῦ Δ. Σολωμοῦ: «Γλυκεῖα ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ὁ θάνατος μαυρίλα».

**Γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανό, ὁμως, καὶ μάλιστα τὸν Πατερικό, δηλαδὴ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο, τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ θανάτου ἔχει λυθεῖ.** Ἡ Σφίγγα τοῦ θανάτου διέκοψε τὴ σιωπὴ της. Τὸ αἴνιγμα, ποὺ τόσο ἀπασχόλησε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο πνεῦμα καὶ μόνον ἡ σωκρατικὴ-πλατωνικὴ μεγαλοφυΐα μπόρεσε νὰ ψαύσει στὸν «Φαίδρο», ἔχει πιά ἐξιχνιαστῆ καὶ ἀπομυθευθεῖ. Μένει, βέβαια, καὶ γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ ὁ θάνατος «μυστήριο». «Ὦντως φοβερῶτατον τὸ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήριο»—ψάλλουμε στὴ νεκρώσιμη ἀκολουθία.

Τὸ μυστήριο ὁμως δὲν ἔγκειται στὴν ὑπαρξή του, ἀλλὰ στὶς συνέπειές του: «*Πῶς ἡ ψυχὴ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος βιαίως χωρίζεται...*»! Ἡ συμμετοχὴ τοῦ πιστοῦ στὸ Πάθος καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ βοηθᾶ στὴν κατανόηση τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου.

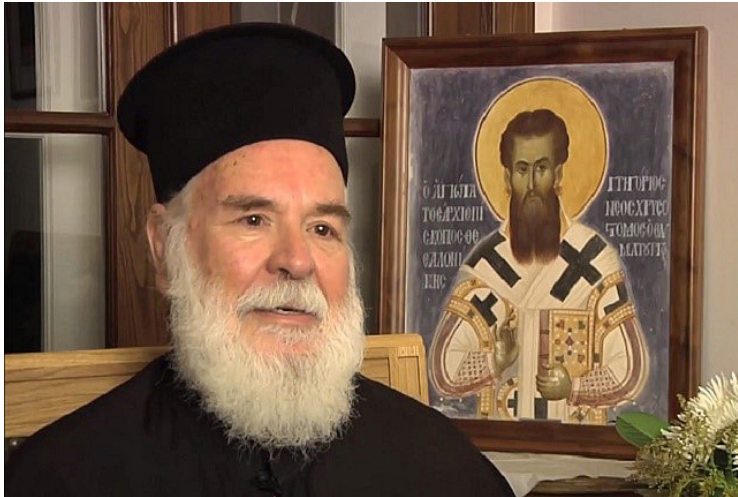
Ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ δημιούργησε τὰ πάντα «*ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων*» (ἀπὸ τὸ μηδὲν) καὶ μᾶς ἔφερε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνυπαρξία στὴν ὑπαρξή. Ὁ θάνατος, ἐξάλλου, εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν θέληση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δὲν εἶναι φυσικὴ κατάσταση, ἀλλὰ συνδέεται μὲ τὸ τραγικὸ γεγονός τῆς ἁμαρτίας, τῆς ἀστοχίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ μένει στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Θεοῦ. «*Ὁ Θεὸς θάνατον οὐκ ἐποίησεν*», «*φθόνῳ διαβόλου εἰσῆλθεν θάνατος εἰς τὸν κόσμον*». Ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέτρεψε τὸν θάνατό μας, «*ἵνα μὴ τὸ κακὸν ἀθάνατον γένηται*».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θεολογικὴ ἐρμηνεία τοῦ θανάτου ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους μας, τοὺς ἀληθινοὺς θεολόγους. Ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὡς πτωτικὸ γεγονός, ἀδρανοποίησε καὶ νέκρωσε, τελικὰ, τὴν ζωὴ μας, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἐνοίκηση

του Θεού στην καρδιά μας, τὸ κέντρο τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας. Αὐτὸς ὁ «χωρισμὸς» ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκτιστη χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ πνευματικὸς θάνατος, ποὺ προκάλεσε καὶ τὸν σωματικὸ-βιολογικὸ θάνατό μας. Στὸν πνευματικὸ θάνατο πρέπει νὰ ζητηθεῖ ἡ αἰτία καὶ τοῦ σωματικοῦ θανάτου. Θρήνος, λοιπόν, κατὰ τὴν κήδευση κάποιου ἀγαπητοῦ μας προσώπου («*Θρηνώ καὶ ὀδύρομαι, ὅταν ἐννοήσω τὸν θάνατον...*», ψάλλουμε) δὲν συνδέεται μὲ τὸν πρόσκαιρο χωρισμὸ μας, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν αἰτία ποὺ προκάλεσε τὸν θάνατό μας, τὴν ἁμαρτία.

Ὁ σωματικὸς θάνατος εἶναι διάσπαση τῆς ἁρμονικῆς σχέσης καὶ συλλειτουργίας ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, ὡς τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ ἀνθρώπινη σάρκα νεκρώνεται, φθείρεται καί, ἐπιστρέφοντας στὸ χῶμα, διαλύεται. Ἡ ψυχὴ ὅμως δὲν φθείρεται, οὔτε διαλύεται, διότι ὁ Θεὸς τὴν δημιούργησε πνευματικῆ. Περιμένει τὸ «*κέλευσμα*» (παράγγελμα) τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ (Α΄ Θεσς. 4:16), γιὰ νὰ ξαναενωθεῖ μὲ τὸ ἀναστημένο σῶμα καὶ νὰ ζήσει αἰώνια μαζί Του, σὲ μίαν ἄλλη ζωὴ, ποὺ θὰ εἶναι ὅμως αἰώνια συνέχεια τῆς γήινης ὑπαρξῆς μας. Ὁ «*νόμος τῆς ἀφθαρσίας*» ἰσχύει ἀπόλυτα στὸ δημιουργικὸ ἔργο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τίποτε δὲν χάνεται ἀπὸ αὐτό. Γι' αὐτὸ κάθε στιγμῆς τῆς παρούσας ζωῆς ἔχει γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ σωτηριολογικὴ σημασία, διότι ἀπὸ τὸν τρόπο ποὺ τὴ ζοῦμε κρίνεται ἡ σωτηρία μας, ἡ κατάστασή μας στὴ μετὰ θάνατον ὑπαρξή μας (βλ. Β΄ Κορ. 6:7).

**Ὁ Χριστὸς, μὲ ὅλο τὸ σωτήριο ἔργο Του, ἐπιφέρει τὴν πλήρη ἄρση ὅλων τῶν συνεπειῶν τῆς πτώσης.** Συντρίβει τὴν ἁμαρτία πρῶτα στὴ δική Του ἀναμάρτητη φύση, ποὺ δὲν νικιέται ἀπὸ τὴ θανατηφόρο δύναμη τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ Του, στὸν ὁποῖο θανάτωσε τὴν δική μας ἁμαρτία, τὴν ἁμαρτία ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου (Ἰω. 1:29). Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἐνεργεῖ τιμωρητικά, ὅπως ἀπαιτοῦσε ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νόμος, ἀλλὰ ὡς Σωτήρας καὶ Ἀπελευθερωτῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπὸ τὴ δουλεία τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ὅπως ἐπιβάλλει ὁ δικὸς Του νόμος. Δὲν τιμωρεῖ, συνεπῶς, τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, ὅπως συνέβη μὲ τὸν κατακλυσμὸ στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη (Γεν. κεφ. 8), ἀλλὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ὅπως ὁ καλὸς γιατρὸς δὲν ζητεῖ τὸν θάνατο τοῦ ἀσθενοῦς, ἀλλὰ τῆς νόσου. Γι' αὐτὸ στὴ Θεία Λειτουργία ὀνομάζεται ὁ Χριστὸς «*ίατρος τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων ἡμῶν*».



Ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ κορυφωση τῆς νίκης Του πάνω στὴν ἁμαρτία μας καὶ γι' αὐτὸ νοσηματοδοτεῖ ὅλη τὴν ὑπαρξή μας. Ἐνῶ ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου βαδίζει πρὸς ἓνα τέλος, ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὸ φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ἀποδεικνύεται χωρὶς τέλος. Διότι στὸ ὄριο ἱστορίας καὶ μεταϊστορίας βρίσκεται ὁ Νικητῆς τοῦ Θανάτου, ὁ Χριστὸς, ὁ Ὅποιος «*θανάτῳ ἐπάτησε τὸν Θάνατον*» καὶ μεῖς «*Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν*», τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Θανάτου.

Ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ νίκη πάνω στὸν Θάνατο. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὴν σχέση μας μὲ τὸν Χριστό, ὁ θάνατος γίνεται φοβερὸς καὶ ἀδυσώπητος. Μὲ τὸν ἀναστάντα Χριστὸ ὁ Θάνατος ἀπομυθοποιεῖται. Καταλύεται ἡ παντοδυναμία του (Ἐβρ. 2:14). Ὁ Χριστὸς κατήργησε τὸ φόβητρο τοῦ θανάτου, ὥστε Χριστιανικὰ ὁ θάνατος νὰ νοεῖται ὡς ἡ ἀληθινὴ γέννηση καὶ ἀναμονὴ τῆς κοινῆς ἀνάστασης. Κατανοεῖται, ἔτσι, τὸ παράδοξο: **Ἐνῶ ὁ «κόσμος» γιορτάζει γενέθλια, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πανηγυρίζουμε τὴν «μνήμην», τὴν κοίμησιν, τῶν Ἁγίων μας.** Διότι ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ τὸν αὐθεντικὰ Χριστιανὸ εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ γέννησή μας («*γενέθλιος ἡμέρα*») στὴν ἀληθινὴ ζωὴ.

**Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς, ὅμως, ζεῖ τις περιέργες γιὰ τὸν χωρὶς Θεὸ πραγματικότητας, μετέχοντας στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος.** Δὲν ἀρκεῖ γι' αὐτὸ τὸ τυπικὸ βάπτισμα. Χρειάζεται μετοχὴ στὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ζωὴ καὶ ὑπαρξή. Στὰ ὅρια αὐτῆς τῆς ζωῆς ὁ πιστὸς πεθαίνει κάθε στιγμῆς τῆς ζωῆς του, νεκρώνεται, μὲ τὴν ἄσκηση καὶ τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, γιὰ νὰ ζήσει μέσα στὴ Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ «*αἰώνιος ζωὴ*». Γι' αὐτὸ μας διδάσκουν οἱ μοναχοὶ μας, οἱ αὐθεντικοὶ πιστοί: «*Ἐὰν πεθάνεις, πρὶν πεθάνεις, δὲν θὰ πεθάνεις, ὅταν πεθάνεις!*»

Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ «*ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, κὰν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται*» (Ἰω. 11:25) σημαίνει, ὅτι ἡ μέσῳ τοῦ βαπτίσματος καὶ τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς ἐνωσή μας μαζί Του, μᾶς συνδέει καὶ πάλι μὲ τὴν γεννήτρια τῆς ζωῆς, τὴν πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ εἶναι Αὐτὸς. Μᾶς ἐπαναφέρει στὴν κοινωνία καὶ σχέση μὲ τὸν Θεό, ποὺ ζωοποιεῖ τὸν θάνατό μας καὶ μεταμορφώνει σὲ Ζωὴ δική Του τὸν καθημερινὸ θάνατό μας. Χωρὶς νὰ εἶναι, συνεπῶς, κανεὶς ζωντανὸ μέλος τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ζήσει ἀληθινὰ, νὰ μετέχει

της ζωής του Χριστού. Ὁ ἀπλῶς βαπτισμένος ἔχει τις δυνατότητες καὶ προϋποθέσεις μετοχής σ' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι μετέχει σ' αὐτήν, ἂν δὲν μετέχει στὴν ἄσκηση καὶ τὴν ἐμπειρία τῶν ἁγίων μυστηρίων. «*Ὁὐχ ὅτι ἀπαξ γεγενήμεθα τοῦ σώματος*», λέγει ὁ Ἱ. Χρυσόστομος. Δὲν τελειώνουν, δηλαδή, ὅλα ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν σωτηρία, μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα. Μὲ αὐτὸ ἀρχίζουν. Τὸ βάπτισμα εἶναι τὸ ἀνοιγμα τῆς πύλης, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ διαβεῖ τὴν πύλη κανεὶς καὶ νὰ ζήσει ἐν Χριστῷ.

Οἱ Ἅγιοί μας, μὲ τὰ ἀκέραια καὶ ἄφθαρτα λείψανά τους (π.χ. Ἅγιος Σπυρίδων ἢ ὁ Ἅγιος Γεράσιμος) βεβαιώνουν τὴν υπέρβαση τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τῶν συνεπειῶν του (φθορᾶς) ἤδη μέσα στὴ ζωὴ μας αὐτὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ δίνουν μαρτυρία τῆς αἰωνιότητος μέσα στὴν ἱστορία. Βλέποντας τοὺς Ἅγίους μας ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς (καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν ἐμπειρία ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἑπτανήσιοι ἀπὸ μικρὰ παιδιὰ), οἰκοδομεῖ τὴν δική του φιλοσοφία γιὰ τὸν θάνατο. Ἡ νίκη τοῦ Χριστοῦ δίνει τὴν δύναμη, ὥστε νὰ μὴ βλέπει ὁ πιστὸς τὸν θάνατο, ὅπως «*οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα*» (Α΄ Θεσσ. 4:14), ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ νικᾷ κάθε μορφὴ θανάτου (ἀποτυχίες, ἀρρώστιες, παθήματα). Διότι δὲν δίνει ἀπόλυτο χαρακτήρα στὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ. Δὲν ἦταν οὔτε μαζοχιστὴς, οὔτε πεισιθάνατος ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὅταν ἔλεγε: «*τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχω εἰς τὸ ἀναλύσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι*» («θέλω νὰ πεθάνω καὶ νὰ εἶμαι μὲ τὸν Χριστό»). Φιλ. 10:23).

Ὁ θάνατος εἶναι γιὰ τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο πιστὸ «μετάβαση» στὴν ὄντως ζωὴ. Ἕνας ὕπνος, ποὺ περιμένει τὸ ξύπνημα στὴν ἀτελεύτητη αἰωνιότητα. Βέβαια, ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τοῦ τὴν φύση ἀθάνατος. Ἡ ἀθανασία εἶναι χάρισμα τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὡς πλάσμα Του. Ἀθάνατος εἶναι μόνον ὁ ἄκτιστος (ἀδημιούργητος) Θεὸς (Α΄ Τιμ. 6:15). Ἀθανασία, ἐξάλλου, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀπλὴ ἐπιβίωση ἀλλὰ ἡ μετοχὴ στὸν «Παράδεισο», στὴ χάρις ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει καὶ ἡ εὐχή μας «*αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη*». Νὰ μετέχει, δηλαδή, ὁ πιστὸς αἰώνια στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴ βασιλεία του.

**Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, μὲ ὅλη τὴν δομὴ της, προσφέρει στὸν πιστὸ τὴ δυνατότητα συνεχοῦς μετοχής στὸν θάνατο καὶ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ.** Τὰ μυστήρια λ.χ. εἶναι συνεχῆς πραγμάτωση αὐτὴ τῆς δυνατότητας. Μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα πεθαίνει κανεὶς μὲ τὸν Χριστό (Ρωμ. 6:3). Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ πρῶτα βαπτιστήρια, οἱ ὁμαδικές «κολυμβήθρες» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, εἶχαν συνήθως τὸ σχῆμα σταυροῦ. Τὸ βαπτιστήριον (ἢ κολυμβήθρα) εἶναι ὁ τάφος τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἡ «μήτρα» τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναγεννήσεως. Γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι τελοῦμε τὸ βάπτισμα μὲ τριπλὴ κατάδυση καὶ ἀνάδυση καὶ ὄχι μὲ ῥαντισμὸ ἢ ἐπίχυση. Ζοῦμε αἰσθητὰ καὶ ὁρατὰ τὸν θάνατο καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασή μας.

Ἡ Μετάνοια ἢ Ἐξομολόγηση εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ θάνατος (τῆς ἁμαρτίας μας) καὶ ἀνάστασή μας στὴ νέα ζωὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ σώματος. Γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι τόσο ἀναγκαῖο αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον, ὅπως καὶ ἡ ὀλοκλήρωσή του, ἡ Θεία Εὐχαριστία, ἡ μετοχὴ στὴ νίκη καὶ τὴ δόξα τοῦ ἀναστημένου Χριστοῦ, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς, ὅπου μὲ τὴν Ἀνάληψή του ἀνέβασε τὴν ἀναγεννημένη φύση μας.

Ἄν καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα μυστήρια (Εὐχέλαιο, Γάμος, Ἱερωσύνη π.χ.), προσφέρουν ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἴδια δυνατότητα. Ὁ γάμος λ.χ. εἶναι ἐνσωμάτωση τῆς νέας ζωῆς τοῦ ζευγους στὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὥστε καὶ στὴν εἰδικὴ αὐτὴ ὄψη τῆς ζωῆς τους νὰ ζοῦν τὸ ἴδιο μυστήριον τοῦ θανάτου τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τῆς συνεχοῦς ἀναστάσεώς τους σὲ μία ζωὴ, στὴν ὁποία Κύριος εἶναι μόνον ὁ Χριστός. Γι' αὐτὸ—ἂν θέλουμε νὰ δοῦμε τὰ πράγματα στὴν ἀληθινὴ τους ὄψη—ὁ πολιτικὸς γάμος εἶναι μὲν «πολιτικῶς» νόμιμος, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξισωθεῖ μὲ τὸ μυστήριον, διότι πραγματοποιεῖ μὲν ἓνα «νομικὸν συνάλλαγμα», ἀλλὰ δὲν μᾶς εἰσάγει στὴ ζωὴ τῆς Θείας Χάρης.

Συχνά, ὅταν μᾶς ὑποβάλλεται τὸ ἐρώτημα, τί ἔχει νὰ προσφέρει ἡ Ἐκκλησία στὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς κάθε κοινωνικῆς δυσλειτουργίας, ἡ ἀπάντησή μου εἶναι μία: ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὡς σῶμα Χριστοῦ, δὲν μοιράζει ἀσπιρίνες στοὺς πονοκεφάλους τοῦ κόσμου. Εἰσάγει σὲ μία ζωὴ, ποὺ δίνει τὴν δυνατότητα στὸν πιστὸ ἄνθρωπο νὰ νικᾷ συνεχῶς τὸν κάθε θάνατό του καὶ νὰ ὁμολογεῖ ὅπως στὸν Ἀπ. Παῦλο: «*Ὡς ἀποθνήσκοντες καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶμεν*», «*φαινόμαστε σὰν νὰ πεθαίνουμε, καὶ ὅμως ζοῦμε*». (Β΄ Κορ. 6:9).



Ὅταν ἔρθει μέσα μας ὁ Χριστός, τότε ζοῦμε μόνον τὸ καλὸ, τὴν ἀγάπη γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον. Τὸ κακό, ἡ ἁμαρτία, τὸ μίσος ἐξαφανίζονται μόνον τους, δὲν μποροῦν, δὲν ἔχουν θέση, νὰ μείνουν.

Νὰ μὴν ἐνδιαφέρεσαι ἂν σὲ ἀγαποῦν, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἐσὺ ἀγαπᾷς τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μόνον ἔτσι γεμίζει ἡ ψυχὴ.

Στὴν ψυχὴ, ποὺ ὅλος ὁ χῶρος της εἶναι κατελιημμένος ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μπεῖ καὶ νὰ κατοικήσει ὁ διάβολος, ὅσο κι ἂν προσπαθήσει, διότι δὲν χωράει, δὲν ὑπάρχει κενὴ θέση γι' αὐτόν.

Ὁ σκοπὸς μας δὲν εἶναι νὰ καταδικάζουμε τὸ κακό, ἀλλὰ νὰ τὸ διορθώνουμε. Μὲ τὴν καταδικὴ ὁ ἄνθρωπος μπορεῖ νὰ χαθεῖ, μὲ τὴν κατανόηση καὶ βοήθεια θὰ σωθεῖ.

**Ὁσίου Πορφυρίου Κουσοκαλυβίτου (+1991)**



## Μία Είναι ή Λύσις Διά τὸν Ἴόν...

Τοῦ κ. Παύλου Τρακάδα, θεολόγου.

Δὲν ἤθελον πολὺ οἱ χριστιανομάχοι, διὰ νὰ «ξεσπαθώσουν» κατὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ ὡς «δῶρον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ» ἦλθεν εἰς αὐτοὺς ὅτι τὸν Ἴόν μετέφεραν εἰς τὴν χώραν μας προσκυνητὰ τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων. Ὁ Θεὸς «ὡς ἠθέλησεν οὕτως καὶ ἐποίησεν», ὥστε οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ταγοὶ νὰ ἀναγκασθοῦν νὰ ἀναλάβουν τὰς εὐθύναις των οἱ δὲ ἐκκλησιομάχοι νὰ ἐκμανοῦν ἕως ὅτου συντριβοῦν.

Πράγματι δὲν ἀπέμειναν παρὰ ἐλάχιστοι ἐκ τῶν δημοσιογράφων ποὺ κάτι ἐψιθύρισαν ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἔναντι τῶν ὀρδῶν τῶν βαλλόντων κατὰ τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας ὡς μολυσματικοῦ μέσου! Ἡ προπαγάνδα ἀντέστρεψε τοὺς ὅρους καὶ κίνδυνος πλέον εἶναι ὄχι ὁ ἴσος, ἀλλὰ ὁ Χριστός! Δὲν ἔλειψαν οἱ ποταποὶ χαρακτηρισμοὶ περὶ «ἀνοησιῶν», «δοξασιῶν», «σκοταδισμού» καὶ πλῆθος ἄλλων ποὺ πάντοτε ἐπιστρατεύονται ἀπὸ τοὺς «καλλιεργημένους», ποὺ δῆθεν αὐτοὶ θεωροῦν τὴν συμπόνια πρὸς τοὺς συνανθρώπους των ἀποκλειστικῶν των προνόμιον. Ἐπεστράτευσαν μάλιστα κάθε «αὐθεντίαν», ποὺ καθυποβάλλει τὸν λαόν, ἀποτεινόμενοι ἕως καὶ εἰς Καθηγητὴν τοῦ MIT, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀδιστάκτως εἶπε κατὰ λέξιν «μὴ λάβετε τὴν Θεϊαν Κοινωνία!» Βλέπετε ρίπτουν τὸν «λίθον τοῦ ἀναθέματος» κατὰ τῆς «μεταφυσικῆς αὐθεντίας», τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀλλὰ μετέρχονται τὸν ἴδιον «μηχανισμόν», διὰ νὰ τὴν ἀντικαταστήσουν μὲ τὴν «ἐπιστημονικὴν» τάχα ἄποψιν, ἀθεϊστικὴν εἰς τὴν οὐσίαν τῆς.

### Τελικῶς τὸ σῶμα μας δὲν μᾶς ἀνήκει!

Νὰ φριξὴ κανεὶς; Καλύτερα νὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνη κανεὶς τὰ Θεϊκὰ λόγια ὁσάκις ἡ Ἐκκλησία «σταυρώνεται» ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ βλέπουν τοὺς «ἰδεολογικοὺς» των ἀντιπάλους εἰς τὸ ἰκρίωμα: «**Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσιν**». Εἶναι τόσον ἀφελεῖς; Εἶναι δυνατὸν ἓνας ἴσος νὰ κλονίσῃ τὴν πίστιν; Προφανῶς οἱ ἴδιοι εἶναι ποὺ τρέμουν, διότι ὅταν ἐγγίξῃ ὁ θάνατος, εἰς μορφὴν ἰοῦ, τότε ὁ μόνος τρόπος διὰ νὰ καθησυχάσουν τὸν ἑαυτὸν τους ὅτι ἡ ἀπιστία τους εἶναι ἡ μόνη βεβαιότητα ποὺ τοὺς ἀπέμεινεν, ἡ μόνη λύσις εἶναι νὰ ἀποδείξουν ὅτι κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν λαμβάνει τὴν πίστιν του σοβαρὰ καὶ μόνον αὐτοὶ εἶναι... συνεπεῖς μὲ τὴν ἀπιστίαν τους! Δὲν πρόκειται διὰ δοκιμασίαν τῆς πίστεώς μας ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀπιστίας τῶν πολλῶν, τῶν ὁποίων «ψύχεται ἡ ἀγάπη».

Ἀντιλαμβάνονται ὅμως ὅτι ἤδη ἔχουν ἠττηθῆ, διότι ἡ πίστις τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ὀδηγεῖ αὐτὸν ἕως τὸ «ἀπαρνησάτω ἑαυτὸν». Αὐτὸ σημαίνει νὰ εἶμαι Χριστιανός; Ἄν ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία μετέδιδεν ἀσθενείας (πρᾶγμα βεβαίως ψευδές), τότε καὶ ἐγὼ ποὺ κοινωνῶ

συνειδητὰ θέλω νὰ συμπάσχω μὲ τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, ἄς ἀρρωστήσω καὶ ἐγώ, ἄς συσταυρωθῶ! Ὅλοι αὐτοὶ κόπτονται διὰ τὸν ἀλτρουισμόν, κόπτονται, ἀλλὰ ὅταν τοὺς ὑποδεικνύῃς τὴν μεγαλυτέραν πρᾶξιν ἀλληλεγγύης, τὴν Θεϊαν Μετάληψιν, τὴν ἀπορρίπτουν, προτιμοῦν τὴν ἀτομικὴν τους ἐξασφάλισιν, νὰ προφυλάξουν τὸν ἑαυτὸν τους. Ὅμως ὁ κορωνοϊὸς ἦλθε, διὰ νὰ πλήξῃ τὸ θεμέλιον τῆς αὐτοδιασφαλίσεως: ἔγινεν ὁ διαπρύσιος κήρυξ ὅτι τελικὰ τὸ σῶμα μας δὲν μᾶς ἀνήκει! Εἰς τὸ ἰδικὸν τους δόγμα, ποὺ μὲ ἀλαζονείαν τὸ προηγούμενον διάστημα ἐπέβαλαν μὲ θρησκευτικὴν προσήλωσιν, ἀπήντησεν ἡ ἐκχώρησις τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ ἔλθῃ αὐτὸς ὁ ξενιστής, ποὺ κατοικεῖ εἰς τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς νὰ ἐρωτήσῃ κανένα διὰ δικαίωμα παραμονῆς.

Τοιουτοτρόπως εἰς τὴν ἔκτρωσιν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἀποτέφρωσιν ἦλθε νὰ προστεθῆ καὶ ἓνας νέος μεταφυσικὸς μηδενισμὸς καὶ μία ἀκόμη ἀπαξίωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου: ἡ ἀπαίτησις νὰ τεθοῦν ἐκποδῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς οἱ ἠλικιωμένοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ μόνη τους παρηγοριά.

### Πρέπει νὰ κλείσουν οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοί;

«Νὰ κλείσουν οἱ Ἐκκλησίες, νὰ κλείσουν οἱ Ἐκκλησίες», εἶναι μόνιμη ἐπωδὸς εἰς τὰ χεῖλη των. Ἀδυνατοῦν νὰ ἐννοήσουν ὅτι τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς τοὺς ἔκτισε καὶ τοὺς ἀνοίγει ὁ εὐλαβῆς κόσμος, ὄχι ἡ Διοικοῦσα Ἐκκλησία ἢ ἡ Πολιτεία. Οἰοσδήποτε νόμος δὲν δύναται νὰ ὑπερνικήσῃ τὴν θέλησιν τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι γεγονός διὰ χιλιάδας νόμους ποὺ ἐθεσπίσθησαν, ἀλλὰ κατηργήθησαν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολίτας. Οὔτε ἡ ἰδία ἡ Διοίκησις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν θὰ κατορθώσῃ νὰ ἐπιβάλλῃ τοιαύτην ἀπόφασιν. Μήπως καὶ ὁ Πρωθυπουργὸς ποὺ τὸ ζητεῖ, θὰ κοινωνήσῃ τὴν Κυριακὴν; Χωρὶς Θεϊαν Κοινωνίαν τότε θὰ μείνωμεν ἀπροστάτευτοι, εἶναι ὡσὰν νὰ κλείνουν τὰ νοσοκομεῖα τῆς χώρας.

Δὲν ἐδόξασε κανεὶς τὸν Θεὸν νὰ εἶπῃ: Ἐπιτέλους μίαν Σαρακοστήν κλεισμένοι εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν μας καὶ ὄχι εἰς τὰ καπηλεῖα. Ἐσταμάτησαν καὶ τὰ λαμπρὰ συλλεῖτουργα τῶν Ἐπισκόπων ποὺ ἐγίνοντο διὰ ἀσημάντους ἀφορμάς. Κατάνυξις! Ἐνας ἴσος ἔφερεν εἰς ἑαυτὴν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς κοσμικοὺς. Ἐπαυσαν τὰ δαμονικὰ καρναβάλια ποὺ ὠδήγουν εἰς τὰ νοσοκομεῖα διὰ πλύσεις στομάχου ἢ διὰ ἀμβλώσεις. Αἱ μητέρες ἔλαβαν ἄδειαν καὶ καὶ τοὺς ἐδόθη ἡ εὐκαιρία νὰ ἀσχοληθοῦν μὲ τὰ παιδιὰ τους εἰς τὸ σπῆτι, ἂν καὶ κάποιαι εἶναι ἀμήχαναι διὰ τὸ τί νὰ τὰ κάνουν!

Δὲν εἴμεθα τόσο «ἀνάληγοι», διὰ νὰ μὴ ἀντιλαμβανώμεθα ὅτι ἐδημιουργήθησαν προβλήματα καὶ ὑπῆρξαν καὶ ἀνθρώπιναι ἀπώλειαι. Ἴσως ὅμως ἦτο καιρὸς νὰ ἀναθεωρήσωμεν τὴν ζωὴν μας. Χρειαζόμεθα δρακόντεια μέτρα ποὺ ἀποπνέουν

φόβον, διὰ νὰ συνέλθωμεν; Λόγος μετανοίας ἠκούσθη; Λόγος ἐλπίδος; Ἡ μόνον ὑγειονομικαὶ συστάσεις ἐντὸς τῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν;

Πάντως τίποτε ἀπὸ αὐτὰ δὲν θὰ ἀφυπνίσῃ τὸν κόσμον ἂν οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοὶ μείνουν κλειστοί. Μᾶς εἶναι ἄχρηστος ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἂν δὲν λειτουργῇ καὶ θὰ εἶναι ἐσφαλμένη μία παρομοία ἀπόφασις. Πόσον θὰ μείνουν κλειστοὶ οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοί; Εἶναι δυνατὸν ἡ ΔΙΣ νὰ ἀποφασίσῃ δι' ὅλην τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν; Ἐρωτήματα ποὺ ὀδηγοῦν μόνον εἰς αὐτοπαγίδευσιν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

**Μία κοινωνία ποὺ θέτει εἰς τὸ περιθώριον τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους (ιερεῖς) καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους (ἡλικιωμένους) δὲν θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ὀνομάζεται κοινωνία, ἀλλὰ ζούγκλα!** Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ κοινωνικὴ τους εὐαισθησία; «Ἀπομονώστε τοὺς γέρους, γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσουν»; Οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς προτιμοῦν νὰ πεθάνουν, παρὰ νὰ ἐγκαταλειφθοῦν μόνοι! Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ πραγματικὸς ρατσισμός! Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ «ἀγρία» λογικὴ, ποὺ εὐρέθῃ νὰ γίνεται μὲ εὐσχημον τρόπον σύνθημα καὶ νεωτεριστῶν οἰκουμενιστῶν θεολόγων.

#### Λύσεις Ἀπιστίας...

Κατάπληξιν προεκάλεσαν αἱ ἀπόψεις τοῦ Καθηγητοῦ τῆς Δογματικῆς κ. Χρ. Σταμούλη, τοῦ θεολόγου κ. Π. Ἀνδριοπούλου καὶ τοῦ ἐλεῶ Θεοῦ δημοσιογράφου κ. Σωτ. Τζούμα, οἱ ὁποῖοι

πρότειναν οὔτε ὀλίγον οὔτε πολὺ νὰ κοινωνοῦν χώρα οἱ ἀσθενεῖς, μὲ ἄλλα σκευὴ καὶ μὲ Θεία Κοινωνία, ποὺ θὰ τὴν ἔρριπταν ἔπειτα εἰς τὰ ἀπορρίμματα!

Ἡ πρότασίς τους δὲν ἦτο παρὰ μία διαστρεβλωσις τῶν σχολίων τοῦ Ἁγ. Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου. Ὁ δὲ κ. Ἀνδριόπουλος ἐπεκαλέσθη ἕως καὶ τὴν ἀποξήρασιν τοῦ «Ἄμνοῦ», διὰ νὰ καταδείξῃ ὅτι αὐτὸς φέρει μικρόβια! Τί ἐπερίμενε; Νὰ εἶναι ἄφθαρτος ὁ Ἅγιος Ἄρτος, ὥστε νὰ μὴ δυνάμεθα νὰ τὸν μεταλάβωμεν, καθὼς δὲν θὰ διελύετο ἀπὸ τὰ πεπτικά ὑγρά; Ἐλησμόνησε τώρα ὅτι χρόνια τὴν Μεγάλῃ Πέμπτῃ κοινωνοῦν ἑκατομμύρια κόσμοι, μετεδόθη κάποιος λοιμὸς;

Πολλὰ πράγματι αἱ εὐφάνταστοι ἰδέαι καὶ ἀπὸ Ἱεράρχας. Εἶδομεν περισσότερας ἀνακοινώσεις καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκείνας διὰ τὰς ἐκτρώσεις ἢ τὰ σύμφωνα συμβιώσεως... Ἄλλος εἶπε νὰ τελοῦμε τὴν Θεϊαν Λειτουργίαν τοῦ Ἁγ. Ἰακώβου, ἐπειδὴ δίδονται ξεχωριστὰ τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα ἢ νὰ διανεμῶνται ἀτομικαὶ λαβίδες ἢ «κουταλάκια». Τότε διατί νὰ μὴ

τὸ πράττωμεν πάντοτε διὰ τὴν ἀποφυγὴν παντοίας νόσου ἀλλὰ καὶ βδελυγμίας;

Ἄλλος πρότεινε ὑπαιθροῦς Θεϊας Λειτουργίας. Διατί ἀπορρίπτει ὅμως τότε τὰς Λιτανείας, ποὺ αὐτὰς ἐφήρμοζον ἐν καιρῷ λοιμῶν οἱ βυζαντινοί; Ἄλλος συνεβούλευσε νὰ ψεκάζωμεν μὲ μέγαν ἁγιασμόν, λησμονῶν ὅτι ὀφείλομεν πρῶτα νὰ πράξωμεν ὅ,τιδήποτε εἶναι ἀνθρωπίνως δυνατόν καὶ ἔπειτα μὲ φειδῶ νὰ μεταχειρισθῶμεν κάθε μέσον ἁγιασμοῦ. Ἄλλος πάλιν προέτρεψε τοὺς κληρικοὺς νὰ διαμοιράσουν τὸ ποίμνιον εἰς παρεκκλήσια καὶ ἐξωκλήσια, ἄλλος ἐπέτρεψε νὰ τελοῦν δύο (διατί ὄχι καὶ τρεῖς;) Θεϊας Λειτουργίας οἱ ἱερεῖς, ὥστε ὁ κόσμος νὰ προσέρχεται μὲ «βάρδιες», ἐνῶ εἰς τὸν ἀντίποδα ἐκινήθη ὁ Μητροπολίτης ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔπαυσε τελείως τὰς ἀκολουθίας! Τελικῶς νὰ πολλαπλασιάσωμεν ἢ νὰ μειώσωμεν τὰς ἀκολουθίας, Σεβασμιώτατοι;

#### Ἡ τηλεόρασις ἀντικαθιστὰ τὴν εὐχαριστίαν;



Ἡ πλέον πονηρὰ πρότασις ἦτο ἡ παραμονὴ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν καὶ ἡ «παρακολούθησις» τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν ἀπὸ τὴν τηλεόρασις, τὸ ραδιόφωνον καὶ τὸ διαδίκτυον! Ὅποιος μάλιστα ἐπιθυμεῖ Θεϊαν Κοινωνίαν θὰ ἔχῃ τὴν δυνατότητα... delivery! Πλήρης ἰδιωτικοποίησις τῆς

πίστεως μὲ τὴν εὐλογίαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας! Πῶς λοιπὸν νὰ μὴ ἀναμεταδώσουν πολιτικοὶ καὶ δημοσιογράφοι ὅτι ἡ πίστις εἶναι «ἀτομικὴ ὑπόθεσις» καὶ ὁ καθένας δύναται κατὰ μόναν νὰ τελέσῃ τὰ «θρησκευτικὰ του καθήκοντα»; Καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνάθροισις, τί εἶναι; Ὁμαδικὴ ἱκανοποίησις ἀτομικῶν ἀναγκῶν; Ἡ μήπως μᾶς ἀρκεῖ νὰ λειτουργῇ μόνος ὁ παπᾶς μὲ ἓνα ψάλτην, διότι εἰπώθη καὶ αὐτό.

«Τοσοῦτον χρόνον» εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἀκόμη κανεὶς δὲν ἔμαθε «τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα»; Μέσα εἰς ὅλην αὐτὴν τὴν κατάπτωσιν καὶ τραγικότητα ἔχει ἐνδιαφέρον ὅτι ἐν μιᾷ νυκτὶ κατέρρευσεν ὅλον τὸ οἰκοδόμημα τῆς λεγομένης εὐχαριστιακῆς ἐκκλησιολογίας. Ὅλοι ἐκεῖνοι (μαζὶ καὶ ἡ ΔΙΣ ποὺ εἰς τὸ ἀνακοινωθὲν ἔγραφε διὰ «ἄθλημα ἐλευθερίας») ἀπληρνήθησαν τὰς πομπώδεις θεωρίας των περὶ τῆς λατρευτικῆς συνάξεως ποὺ δοξολογεῖ τὸν Θεὸν κ.λπ., τὴν διέλυσαν καὶ τοὺς ἀπέμεινε μόνον τὸ «φάρμακον ἀθανασίας», ἡ θεραπευτικὴ διάστασις, ὄχι ὅμως ἀπαραιτήτως δι' ὅλους. Ἐφάνη καὶ ἡ ἀπιστία τινῶν.

Ὁ Σεβ. Ἀμερικῆς (ποῦ εἶπε νὰ κοινωνήσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀλλοδόξους) ὅπως καὶ ὁ Σεβ. Ἀλεξανδρουπόλεως ἄφησαν ἀνοικτὰ διάφορα ἐνδεχόμενα ἀκόμη καὶ διὰ τὴν Θεῖαν Κοινωνίαν.

Ἄραγε πιστεύομεν πραγματικὰ ἢ ἐπιχειροῦμεν νὰ καθησυχάσωμεν τὰς συνειδήσεις μας; Τελικὰ ὁ ἰὸς δὲν εἶναι τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως, ὅπως κάποιοι εἶπαν εἰς τὰ ραδιοφωνα ποῦ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι κατέχουν οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὰ ποῦ γνωρίζει μόνον ὁ «Πατὴρ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ», ἀλλὰ σίγουρα εἶναι ἀποκαλυπτικός.

Βεβαίως ἡ Θεῖα Κοινωνία δὲν μεταδίδει νοσήματα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλιν ὅσοι τὸ ἐπικαλοῦνται τὸ λέγουν ἀπλῶς, διὰ νὰ καθυποτάξουν τὸν ἐνδόμυχον φόβον ὅτι ἴσως κολλήσουν; Δι' αὐτὸ τὸ ψελλίζουν καὶ δὲν τὸ διατρανώνουν δημόσια; Ἡ μήπως πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἐπικαλούμεθα, διότι ὄντως πιστεύομεν ὅτι ἡ νίκη κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου εἶναι πρωτίστως νίκη κατὰ ὅσων ὀδηγοῦν εἰς τὸν αἰώνιον θάνατον; Διατί ὁμιλοῦμεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον μὲ τὴν ἀρνητικὴν πλευρὰν τῆς Θεῖας Κοινωνίας π.χ. «δὲν κολλάει», «δὲν μεταδίδει», «δέν», «δέν», «δέν»... Δὲν ἔχουν ἀποτέλεσμα, διότι τελικῶς ὅσα θετικὰ καὶ νὰ εἴπωμεν, ἐὰν δὲν τὰ ἀποδειξώμεν εἰς τὴν πράξιν μὲ τὴν αὐτοθυσίαν μας, δὲν πείθουν κανένα, διότι δὲν ἔχουν οὔτε νόημα δι' ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἰδίους.

Συνεχῶς πολλοὶ καὶ ἀνάμεσά τους Μητροπολίται προσκομίζουν ὡς ἀποδείξεις ἱστορικὰ παραδείγματα ἀπὸ περιστατικὰ ὅπου ἱερεῖς ἐκοινώνουν πιστοὺς μὲ λοιμώδεις νόσους, χωρὶς οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ ἀσθενοῦν. Καιρὸς νὰ τὸ κάνουν πρᾶξιν καὶ ὄχι νὰ δίδουν εἰς διακόνους ἢ ἄλλους ἱερεῖς νὰ καταλύουν τὸ ἱερὸν δισκοπότηρον. Δὲν ἠκούσαμεν οὔτε ἓνα Μητροπολίτην νὰ λέγῃ «ἐγὼ τακτικὰ πάω καὶ μεταλαμβάνω τοὺς ἀρρώστους!» Ὑπάρχουν μάλιστα καὶ Ἱεράρχαι ποῦ ἀποφεύγουν συστηματικὰ νὰ εὔρεθοῦν εἰς νοσοκομεῖα. Πῶς ὅμως νὰ κρατήσουν τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν εἰς τὸ ὕψος τῆς, ὅταν οἱ ἴδιοι ἀντὶ νὰ προσφέρουν τὰς χεῖρας τους εἰς τὸν κόσμον διὰ χειροφίλημα προτείνουν τὸ ἐγκόλπιον; Ἐτεροὶ δὲ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ἔχουν εὐαισθησίαν καὶ τοὺς ἔχει ἀπαγορεύσει ὁ ἰατρὸς νὰ δίδουν τὸ χέρι τους. Ἄλλοι κυκλοφοροῦν συνεχῶς μὲ ἀπολυμαντικὸν ποῦ ἔχουν εἰς κάποιον θύλακα ἢ εἰς τὸ αὐτοκίνητον.

#### **Αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ γίνη!**

Ἡ πίστις κερδίζει καὶ τοὺς πλέον ἀντιθέους, ὅταν ἀπαστρέφῃ εἰς τὴν ταπεινώσιν τῶν κληρικῶν νὰ εὔρεθοῦν πλησίον τῶν πασχόντων καὶ ὄχι ὅταν συμβιβάζεται μὲ τὸν συρμόν, διὰ νὰ εἶναι πολιτικὰ ὀρθή. Ἐπομένως, **μία λύσις ὑπάρχει διὰ νὰ πιστεύσῃ ὁ κόσμος: νὰ μεταβῇ ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος καὶ οἱ Μητροπολίται εἰς τὰ νοσοκομεῖα καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουν ἀρρώστους.** Ἡ λύσις δὲν εἶναι νὰ ἀποφύγωμεν αὐτὴν ἢ τὴν ἄλλην ἀσθένειαν. Αὐταὶ οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως

θα ὑπάρχουν. Εἶναι βέβαιον ὅτι εἰς τὸ μέλλον θα ὑπάρξουν ἀκόμη ἰσχυρότεροι ἰοί. Τί θα πράξωμεν τότε; Θα κλείσωμεν μονίμως τοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς; Θα θέσωμεν εἰς τὸ περιθώριον τὰς εὐπαθεῖς ομάδας; Ἡ μήπως ἀντ' αὐτῶν νὰ διακηρύξωμεν ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει θάνατος, διότι ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ Κυρίου τὸν συνέτριψε; Πῶς θα τὸ ἐπιτύχωμεν αὐτό, ἂν στερήσωμεν τὸν κόσμον ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπὶ γῆς Παράδεισον; Ἄν κλείσωμεν τὰς θύρας αὐτοῦ παραμονὰς τοῦ Πάσχα;



## **Μεγάλη Πέμπτη καὶ Θεῖα Κοινωνία**

*Ἀπὸ τὸ Περιοδικὸ «Ὁ Ὅσιος Γρηγόριος» τῆς Μονῆς Γρηγορίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους, ἀριθμ. 34.*

Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἡ Μεγάλη Πέμπτη εἶναι ἡ ἡμέρα κατὰ τὴν ὁποία παραδοσιακὰ ὅλος ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος κόσμος προσέρχεται νὰ μεταλάβει τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων, ὀφείλεται στὸ γεγονός ὅτι σήμερα ἔγινε ἡ παράδοση τοῦ φρικτοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς Εὐχαριστίας κατὰ τὸν Μυστικὸ Δεῖπνο. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Χριστός, ἐν ὄψει τοῦ Πάσχα τοῦ ἐβραϊκοῦ, σὲ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ προηγούμενα (ὄχι στὸ τελευταῖο τελικὸ συμπόσιο τοῦ ἐβραϊκοῦ Πάσχα ποῦ ἔθυσαν τὸν ἀμνὸν τὸν ἐνιαύσιο) ἔφαγε μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του· καὶ ἀφοῦ πῆρε ψωμὶ στὰ χέρια Του, εὐχαρίστησε, τὸ εὐλόγησε, καὶ τοὺς τὸδωσε λέγοντάς τους: «*Λάβετε, φάγετε, τοῦτο ἔστι τὸ σῶμα μου*». Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σῶμα μου, ποῦ σᾶς δίνω αὐτὴν τὴν στιγμήν, τὸ ὁποῖο «*κλάται*», «*τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον*» (τὸ ρῆμα εἶναι κλάω-κλώ, ἀπὸ κεῖ ποῦ βγαίνει καὶ ἡ λέξις τῶν μαθηματικῶν: τὰ κλάσματα, ὅπως καὶ ἡ ἀρτοκλασία: ἡ κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου, κόβουμε τοὺς ἄρτους καὶ τοὺς μοιράζουμε), γιὰ πολλοὺς, γιὰ ὄσους θέλουν νὰ σωθοῦν. Κατόπιν πῆρε ἓνα ποτήρι κρασί, τὸ εὐλόγησε, εὐχαρίστησε τὸν Οὐράνιο Πατέρα καὶ τὸ πρόσφερε στοὺς μαθητὲς Του λέγοντας: «*Πίετε ἐξ αὐτοῦ πάντες, τοῦτο ἔστι τὸ αἷμα μου, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυνόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*».

Νά! τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θεῖας Εὐχαριστίας!

Πολλὲς φορὲς καὶ κατ' ἐπανάληψιν ἀναφέρθηκε στὴ Γραφή ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι «ὁ Ἄρτος τῆς Ζωῆς», «ὁ ἐκ τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ καταβάς». Καὶ πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ ἔρρευσε τὸ ἅγιον αἷμα Του, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔγινε τὸ «*καινὸν πόμα*», τὸ καινούριον ποτό, στὸ ὁποῖο θα μᾶς καλέσει ὁ θεσπέσιος ἱερὸς Δαμασκηνὸς τὴ νύκτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως: «*Δεῦτε πόμα πίνωμεν καινόν, οὐκ ἐκ*

πέτρας ἀγόνου τερατουργούμενον», (ὄχι μὲ τὸ θαῦμα ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Μωϋσῆς στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια, σ' ἓνα ἄγρονο βράχο, κι ἔδωσε νερὸ σὺνήθες, φυσικὸ νερὸ νὰ πιοῦνε, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἄλλου εἴδους πόμα αὐτό, εἶναι τὸ ποτὸ τῆς Ζωῆς, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔρρευσε ἀπὸ τὴν ἄχραντο πλευρὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς πληγὲς στὰ χέρια καὶ στὰ πόδια τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

Ἀπὸ τότε ἡ Εὐχαριστία συνιστᾷ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε τὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, κάνουμε τὴν Λειτουργία. Καὶ ὅπως μαζεύτηκε τὸ σιτάρι σπυρι-σπυρὶ ἀπὸ κάθε γωνιὰ τοῦ χωραφιοῦ καὶ ἀλέστηκε κι ἔγινε τὸ ψωμί, ἔτσι μαζευόμαστε καὶ μεῖς ἕνας-ἕνας ἀπὸ κάθε γωνιὰ, γύρω ἀπὸ τὸν προεστῶτα τῆς Εὐχαριστίας, καὶ ἀντιγράφοντας τὴν πρακτικὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ τὴν ἐντολὴ Του: «*Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*» (αὐτὸ νὰ κάνετε γιὰ νὰ μὲ θυμάστε), «*καὶ ὅσες φορὲς θὰ τρώτε αὐτὸν τὸν ἄρτο καὶ θὰ πίνετε αὐτὸ τὸ κρασί, θὰ καταγγέλλετε καὶ θὰ μαρτυρεῖτε τὴν Ἀνάστασή μου, τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς Θεότητάς μου*», κι ἐμεῖς συναζόμεστε καὶ κάνουμε τὴ Λειτουργία, καὶ ἔτσι συνιστοῦμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ εἴμαστε ὅλοι καλεσμένοι νὰ μετάσχουμε αὐτῆς τῆς ἀθανάτου τραπέζης, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ προϋποθέσεις. Ὅχι ἀπαράσκευοι, ὄχι ἀκάθαρτοι, ὄχι ἀμετανόητοι ὅπως ὁ Ἰούδας.

Λέει ἓνα πικρὸ λόγο, ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς ἀληθινό, ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Ἀνάμεσά σας, λέει, ὑπάρχουν ἓνα σωρὸ ἄρρωστοι καὶ πεθαίνει πολλὸς κόσμος. Καὶ αὐτό, γιατί κοινονεῖτε ἀναξίως*», «*ἐσθίετε καὶ πίνετε ἀναξίως*». Εἶναι πῦρ καταναλίσκον ἢ Θεία Κοινωνία. Καὶ ἢ θὰ καταναλώσει τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας, ἢ θὰ καταναλώσει καὶ θὰ ἀφανίσει ἐμᾶς τοὺς ἴδιους. Χρειαζόμαστε λοιπὸν προϋποθέσεις, καὶ ὄχι νὰ τὴν περνᾷ κανεὶς ὅτι εἶναι ὁ πρωινὸς καφὲς ποὺ πρέπει νὰ πᾶμε νὰ τὸν πιοῦμε, ἐπειδὴ ἔτσι συνηθίζουμε καὶ ἔτσι λέει τὸ πρωτόκολλο τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ἢ τὸ ἔθιμο τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ οὕτω καθ' ἑξῆς. Λέει ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος: «*Τὸν ἄξιο δὲν τὸν κάνει ἡ ἡμέρα, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι ἄξιος, ὅποιαδήποτε ἡμέρα ἔχει ἑορτῆ, ἔχει Πάσχα, ἔχει Χριστούγεννα*». Ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἔτοιμος καὶ κοινωνεῖ ἄξίως.

Ὅσον ἄφορα τὴν προσευχὴ, τί νὰ πῶ ἐγὼ σὲ σᾶς, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἴσθε οἱ βιοῦντες τὸ μέγα μυστήριον τῆς προσευχῆς; Εἴσθε οἱ καλλιεργητὲς τῆς νοερᾶς καὶ μονολογίστου προσευχῆς. Εἴσθε ἐσεῖς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀγωνίζεσθε νὰ τηρεῖτε τὸ «*ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε*» τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου.

Μόνον γιὰ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας τοὺς προσκνητὲς νὰ πῶ, ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἔδωσε ὑπόδειγμα προσευχῆς, καὶ μάλιστα μὲ αὐτὴ τὴν προσευχὴ τὴν ἐναγώνιο κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπινὴ Του φύση.

Ἡ ἀγωνία ἦταν στὴν ἀνθρωπινὴ φύση Του, γιὰ νὰ μὴν περάσει κανενὸς ἢ ιδέα, ὅπως ἀργότερα στοὺς μονοφυσίτες, ὅτι ἦταν «*κατὰ δόκησιν ἄνθρωπος*» καὶ ὄχι τέλειος ἄνθρωπος. Γι' αὐτὸ φάνηκε ἡ ἀγωνία κι ἔσταξε ὁ ἰδρωτὰς ὡς θρόμβοι αἵματος ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπό Του. Ἦταν ἡ ἀνθρωπινὴ φύση, ἡ ὁποία βεβαίως τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς ἐκεῖνη τῆ στιγμῆ, καὶ ὄχι βεβαίως ἡ Θεία φύση, ἡ ὁποία οὐδέποτε εἶχε καμία ἀγωνία, διότι εἶναι ἀπαθὴς ὁ Θεός, καὶ οὐδέποτε εἶχε καμία ἐπιφύλαξη στὸ νὰ πιεῖ τὸ ποτήριον τὸ ὁποῖο ἔδωσε ὁ Πατέρας, τὸ νὰ δεχθεῖ δηλαδὴ τὸ Σταυρό, τὸ Πάθος, τὸ Θάνατο γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ἀδελφῶν Του, τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου.



Ἀλλὰ μᾶς ἔδωσε ὑπόδειγμα προσευχῆς. Νὰ θυμίσω μόνον ἓνα λόγο τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου, ἂν δὲν κάνω λάθος: «*μνημονευτέον Θεοῦ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀναπνευστέον*» (Εἶναι μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη νὰ προσεύχεσαι καὶ νὰ ἐπικαλεῖσαι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἀναπνέεις). Πόση ὥρα μπορεῖ νὰ μείνει κανεὶς χωρὶς νὰ ἀναπνέει; Νὰ κλείσει τὴ μύτη του, νὰ μὴν παίρνει μέσα ὀξυγόνο; Κάποια λεπτὰ ἀντέχει τὸ σῶμα ἀπὸ τὴν λεγομένη ἄδηλη ἀναπνοή, τὸ ὀξυγόνο ποὺ εἰσπράττει μέσα ἀπὸ τοὺς πόρους τοῦ σώματος.

Ἀλλὰ πόσο; Μετὰ πεθαίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Πόσο θ' ἀντέξει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἢ ψυχὴ, χωρὶς τὴν προσευχὴ; Ἔχουμε μεγαλύτερη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ παρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ὀξυγόνο. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ ὁποῖος ἀποκόπηκε ἀπὸ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ σταμάτησε νὰ μνημονεύει τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι νεκρός! Αὐτὸς εἶναι γιὰ μνημόσυνο μὲ πλερέζες καὶ γιὰ κλάματα καὶ θρήνους ἄνευ παραμυθίας. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι αὐτὴ ἢ ὁποία δείχνει ὅτι ἡ καρδιὰ ἀπὸ μέσα κτυπᾷ. Ὅτι ὑπάρχει ζωὴ, ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ζωντανός.

Δὲν θέλω νὰ σᾶς κουράσω περισσότερο. Μᾶς τὰ εἶπε τόσο ὡραία ἡ ἀκολουθία. Θὰ μᾶς τὰ πει περισσότερο ἢ μεγάλη ἀκολουθία τῆς ἀγρυπνίας τὸ βράδυ, τῶν Ἀχράντων Παθῶν, στὴν ὁποία ἂς ἔχουμε τεταμένη τὴν προσοχή μας καὶ ἂς ἀφήσουμε ἀνοιχτὰ τὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ δουλέψει ἡ Χάρις Του μέσα μας αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ Ἀχράντου Πάθους τὴ σωτηρία μας, ὅπως Ἐκεῖνος ξέρει καὶ κατὰ τὸ ποσοστὸ στὸ ὅποιο ἔχουμε ἔτοιμασθεῖ καὶ εἴμαστε δεκτικοὶ ὅλοι μας.

Σᾶς εὐχαριστῶ γιὰ τὴν ὑπομονή σας.

## CHRIST IS RISEN!

By Elder Cleopa of Romania.

Today we celebrate the feast of feasts and the holiday of holidays. Today there is spiritual joy throughout the entire Christian world. Today our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has illumined everything through His Resurrection. Let heaven and earth rejoice together, and the earth be glad, because the light of the Resurrection of the Lord has filled with light heaven, and earth, and hell, and all the ones enslaved in the bonds of death. In the hope of the Resurrection, our Savior brought them into eternal joy when He descended into Hades. Today Jesus Christ, our Life, through His Resurrection established a new foundation of humanity and crowned all the holy miracles He worked while on earth.

Today is the day of the Resurrection of the Lord, the victory of reconciliation, the undermining of war, the crushing of death, and the defeating of the devil. It is meet and right for us today to repeat the words of the prophet Isaiah: *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* (cf. Hosea 13:14, 1 Cor 15:55).

On this day our Master Jesus Christ smashed the gates of brass and the name of death itself; He made it to no longer be called death, but sleep. Before Christ's coming and before the economy of the Cross, the name of death was frightening. And after Christ our God led Himself as a sacrifice to the Cross for us and resurrected from the dead, He transformed death into sleep, as a lover of men.

Do you see how bright the victory of the Resurrection of Christ is? We have been given countless blessings through the Resurrection of our Lord. The deceit of the devils perished through the Resurrection. Through the Resurrection we counter death. Through the Resurrection we overlook the present life. Through the Resurrection we strive for the heavenly reward. Through the Resurrection, while clothed in our bodies we draw nearer to the bodiless ones if we so desire.

Today the splendid victories took place. Today Christ our God conquered death and He undermined the tyrannical demon, and He offered us the path towards our salvation through His Resurrection. So let us all rejoice and exalt, for

our Savior conquered death and hell and worked everything for our salvation.

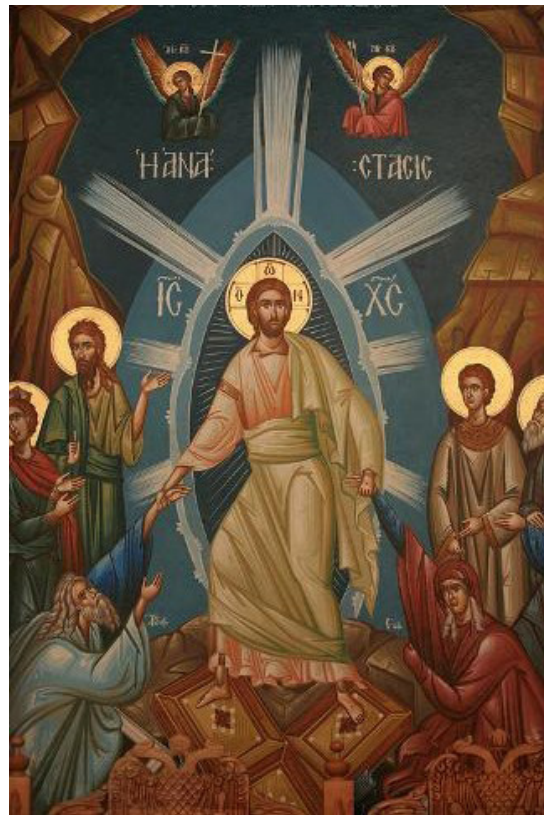
Listen to what our godly father St. John Chrysostom says: *Let us not be careless and ungrateful towards the blessings that we receive through the Resurrection of our Lord. Neither should we say, "Look, Great Lent is over, now we no longer need to worry about anything." For now more than before, we have to be very careful with our souls so that by strengthening the body we do not render the soul more helpless. That is, by caring for the servant (body), not to become careless towards the master (soul). For our spiritual labor is for the rest of our life. He also says, We are freed from the burden of fasting, but we did not also renounce the fruit of the fast. The efforts of laboring are over, but do not let go of the ambition for doing good deeds. The fasting period is over, but let the reverence remain. The bodily fast passed, but not the spiritual, which is better than the other, and the former was done for the latter.*

Through spiritual fasting we understand the working of good deeds, that all of us who were baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity and who believe in Christ, Who resurrected from the dead, are all obligated to do. Before all good deeds that help the salvation of our souls the most, Christian love comes first. Without love, without forgiveness, and without almsgiving there is no salvation, there is no Pascha, there is no joy in the soul, and there is no resurrection from the death of our sins, as well as no peace in our hearts.

*The day of Resurrection, let us be illumined with the feast, and let us embrace one another. Let us say, brethren, even to those that hate us, let us forgive all things in the Resurrection, and so let us cry, Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.*

We should scrutinize all of our thoughts, all of our feelings, and all of our behaviors very well, and then approach the Holy Chalice with a broken and humble heart, with our hearts filled with faith and love for the Cup of Holy Communion, in order to receive Christ our God, Who is always present and ready to come and dwell among us, as it says so clearly in His Holy Gospel: *Whoever eats My Body and drinks My Blood abides in Me and I in him.* (Jn 6:56).

Are we determined to do this? It is for our benefit, for the benefit of our earthly and heavenly life. For it is only if we



are united with our Lord Jesus Christ that we will be able to understand better and deeper the true meaning of our life on earth. We will surely embark victoriously on the path of the eternal, holy, and heavenly life.

Today is the Passover of our Lord. Today Christ, our Life, conquered death, hell, and the devil. Today the gates of Paradise and of the Kingdom of Heaven have opened to us. Today the angels rejoice together and worship God.

Therefore, let us put away all evil, all sadness, and all sin from our homes and from our hearts, and let us welcome the Resurrected Christ with joy. Let us worship the Cross upon which Christ was crucified. Let us kiss the Tomb from whence our Lord resurrected. Let us follow our Savior with faith and hope, together with the Mother of God, with the Apostles, with all the Saints, with the Holy Fathers, and all our ancestors. Let us spiritually kiss each other, brother and brother; let us reconcile; let us love one another, for today we acquired forgiveness and salvation through the Resurrection. Let no one be sad; let no one lose faith and hope due to the troubles of life, for the Resurrected Christ is with us. We carry Him inside ourselves, and He will always dwell with us, if we remain in His love and if we keep His commandments.

With this life-giving faith that gives us power and victory, let us chant together the Hymn of the Resurrection: *Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life.* Amen.



The Lamb of God communicates with us on the holy and light-bearing night of Resurrection. We pray for this when we are just beginning to prepare for Lent, and afterwards many times during the course of the Great Fast: that the Lord would vouchsafe us to partake of the Holy Mysteries on the night of Holy Pascha. At that time the grace of God acts in a special way upon men's hearts. We partake of the Christ Resurrected, we become partakers of His Resurrection. Of course, we must prepare ahead of time, and, having already communed during Great Lent, receive again the Holy Mysteries. Before Paschal Liturgy there is no time for a proper confession; this must be done earlier. And then, on that light-bearing night, having received general absolution, to draw near to the Divine Lamb, the pledge of our resurrection. No one should leave the church prematurely, rushing away to eat the meat of animals instead of receiving the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

**St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco**

## THE PRAYER OF THE CHERUBIC HYMN

*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. 48-51, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 115 Gilbert Road, Belmont, MA (1986).*

When the Cherubic Hymn, dearly beloved, is chanted, the priest stands before the Holy Table and reads the following prayer:

*None is worthy, among them that are enslaved by carnal desires and pleasures, to approach or come near or minister before Thee, the King of Glory; for Thy Service is great and fearful even to the Heavenly Powers. Yet since, through Thine ineffable and immeasurable compassion, Thou hast without change or differentiation become man and taken the title of our High Priest, as Lord of All, Thou hast committed to us the celebration of this rite and of the Bloodless Sacrifice. For Thou, O Lord our God, alone dost govern all things in heaven and in earth, Thou Who sittest upon the throne of the Cherubim and art Lord of the Seraphim and King of Israel, Who only art Holy and retest among Thy Saints. To Thee I persistently call, for Thou alone art righteous and ready to hear. Look upon me Thy sinful and unprofitable servant and purify my soul and heart from an evil conscience; enable me by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, girt with the grace of the Priesthood to stand at this Thy Holy Table and to consecrate Thy Holy and Spotless Body and Thy Precious Blood. For to Thee I come near, bowing down my neck, and Thee I beseech. Turn not away Thy Face from me, neither reject me from among Thy children, but consider me worthy so that these Gifts may be brought near to Thee by me, Thy sinful and unworthy servant. For Thou art the Offerer and the Offered, the Acceptor and the Distributed, Christ our God, and to Thee we ascribe glory, with Thine Eternal Father and Thy most holy, righteous and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and from "all Ages to all Ages" Amen.*

This prayer of the Cherubic Hymn is one of the most inspired and moving prayers of the Divine Liturgy. Pious celebrants of the Most High at the time when they read it become filled with so much emotion, that they shed tears and their sobbings will not let them finish this superb prayer. How great is Christ, and how small and wretched is man! The greatness of Christ and the wretchedness of man, who dares to approach the holy altar and offer the Holy Mystery—this prayer emphasizes these two things.

Christ! O Christ, Thou art the Master of all. Thou dost govern, Thou dost command all that is heavenly, all that is earthly. Thou art Lord of the angels and archangels, of the Cherubim and the Seraphim. Thou alone art holy. Thou dost find gladness and Thou dost rest there where holiness

is. Thou didst come from the heights of heaven here to earth. Thou didst come out of love for wretched man. A love which in the language of man cannot be expressed, and there is no measure to measure. Thy love is an endless ocean.

The priest, O Christ, what am I who ministers? I am thine unprofitable and worthless servant, who, even if I had kept all thy commandments, even so I am not worthy to gaze upon the height of Thy Majesty. It is a great and frightening thing for someone to serve Thee. With what hands can I touch Thee the Undeified? With what tongue can I hymn and celebrate the sacred ceremony? I am afraid, Thou might reject me. Full of fear and reverence, Christ, I bend down, I worship Thee and beseech Thee...

The priest must feel always his unworthiness, especially during the time when he is celebrating and offering the Highest Mystery. He himself should not be in his place, nor any other man, regardless of how perfect he is, but one of the angels and archangels of the heavenly world. And this could be done. Namely, every time when a Liturgy is about to be celebrated, an angel could come down from heaven, come here to earth, and celebrate the Holy Mystery. Nothing is impossible to God. Has not God sent angels many times here to earth to execute His commandments and serve the people? It would be possible for the angels and archangels to be entrusted with such a task.



What an astonishing phenomenon it would be, if upon entering the church we were to see an angel celebrating at the Holy Sanctuary! But this task, which angels and archangels would tremble to perform, has been entrusted to priests. Christ gave them the power to conduct the holy mysteries. St. John Chrysostom says that if we hypothesize that this spiritual power to remit sins and in general to perform the mysteries were given to the angels, because the angels have no conception of sin and of the temptations which people experience, they would be unable fully to understand and feel the human tragedy; likewise the people would come into contact with angels with great difficulty and reservations. But the priest, himself a sinful man who every day confronts temptations and fights the mighty fight against sin, sees on top of all that the weakness of people. He hears with great sympathy, as a fellow-sufferer, the sins of his fellow man, and is ready to give absolution to those who believe and sincerely repent.

Therefore let us thank Christ, because among the other benevolent acts towards mankind, he gave to men, to the priests, the spiritual power to forgive sins and to celebrate the mysteries in general.

The priest as a man may not be rich and powerful, wise and learned, one who impresses worldly people; he may be humble and disdained. However, from the moment when he receives and wears, as the prayer says, "the grace of ordination," he receives authority which is higher than any other. For even the most powerful and rich and learned person, as a sinner, needs to have his sins forgiven. And only the priest can give this absolution in the name of Jesus Christ. Having this kind of spiritual authority, he is above kings. He is superior to the angels and archangels, because God did not give to any of them this authority to forgive sins.

These things indeed, which we write here about the priests, are spiritual matters, and only he who believes understands and feels them. And when he sees a priest, he honors him

as he should, because the priest has spiritual power, as a representative of Christ on earth. St. Cosmas the Aitolian used to say: "If you, my child, meet on your path both a priest and an Angel, first you must greet the priest and then the Angel, because the priest who performs and celebrates is superior to the Angels and Archangels."

Today, unfortunately, in an age of anarchy, un-

belief and corruption, the priests of the Most High are not honored, and the majority of them are not even aware of the highness of their office.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten us, so that indeed the priests might feel Whose soldiers they are, and the people might not despise and disparage them, but might honor them like the angels of the Lord, the Creator of all. Amen.



If you cannot be merciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner. If you are not a peacemaker, at least do not be a troublemaker. If you cannot be assiduous, at least in your thought be unlike a sluggard. If you are not victorious, do not exalt yourself over the vanquished. If you cannot close the mouth of a man who disparages his companions, at least refrain from joining him in this.

St. Isaac of Syria

## PASCHA IS COMING: A STORY

By Elena Gaaze, translated by Dmitry Lapa, from "Orthodox Christianity," *orthochristian.com*.

Fields, forests and poor villages were slowly gliding by the train windows. The passengers were lulled by the rumble of wheels. The sun was warming the face of a young woman pleasantly. She made herself comfortable on the upper berth and took comfort knowing that Pascha was coming and it would be followed by the summer with all its wonders...

The passengers on the lower berths hadn't had time to get acquainted with each other yet, but they were already discussing the destiny of Russia. Pale and overwrought due to the spring lack of vitamins, they looked on the dark side of things. They were talking about a loss of moral values that had once been passed on from grandparents to their grandchildren.

"Oh, come off it! Turn on the TV, and you will see everything!" a history teacher who was sitting on the left by the window waved her hand and turned away from her conversation partners angrily.

An oppressive atmosphere began to reign in the compartment, and even their teeth began to ache. Everybody stared out of the window. And, as if to make things worse, heaps of last year's trash were exposed from under the snow, while the train went through squalid, neglected villages... Thus a few minutes passed in silence.

Suddenly a strong, pure girlish voice rang out from an upper berth:

"With all that, I disagree with you! I don't agree, and that's that!"

The very young woman who had attracted little attention since the beginning of the journey sat down on her berth, and now everybody was looking at her attentively and with amazement. She jumped down from her berth carefully, took her lacy knitted headscarf from under her pillow, wrapped it around her shoulders cozily, and settled down next to the history teacher.

And the tiny space of the compartment was imperceptibly transformed at once. As if the cheerless prospect of a journey with disagreeable people unexpectedly turned into the promise of an interesting and warm conversation with an old friend. The girl who was a little embarrassed looked around at her fellow travelers and introduced herself cheerfully:

"I'm Asya! Let's get to know each other!"

Igor Viktorovich looked at his fellow traveler sympathetically—he took a liking to her at once. The teacher would cast a glance at her every now and then jealously and in an unfriendly manner. The young woman was fresh and lovely, but that was not the point. The point was that there was something in her that made her nobler than all the most beautiful and wise people in the world if they didn't have it. The teacher couldn't figure out what it was, and so she was annoyed.

The fourth traveler in the compartment was a plump, modest woman with an apologetic smile on her face. Her participation in the conversation amounted to nothing more than smiling this smile and nodding her head in agreement. It looked as if she were afraid of being asked for her opinion and agreed with everybody in advance. Gazing at Asya with adoration, she relaxed and was no longer ashamed of her own black flannel dressing gown with its blue Eastern "cucumber" design and of not having had her hair done.

"I have been listening to your conversation," Asya carried

on. "What you have said is right and indeed there are reasons for despondency. But all of you have children (or already grandchildren) and you want to raise all of them," the young lady looked at Igor. "And you will never feel so discouraged that you will give up. And if you have hard moments and even despair, you endure all of this and then start over. Why? Because you love

them despite everything and hope... It is the same with our country, with Russia..."

The girl was silent for a while, as if ignoring that nobody had uttered a single word, and then went on:

"I don't know about you, but I personally can boldly say that the Lord won't abandon us and our children. And these villages..." Asya nodded to the window. "As for the statements that there is nobody to pass the traditions on to the future generations, that is untrue. Or perhaps that's true, but not only people can do that."

It was clear that the young woman was worried: she wanted to say something that was important to her and feared being misunderstood. She was speaking fast and in a confused way because the situation was obviously unfamiliar to her. Asya's companions were staring at her intently, as if fearing to miss a single word.

"Maybe you will find my opinion silly or trivial, but I will share it with you. Let us take our modern bearded Orthodox





men, whom you can see in any church. Every time I see them I cannot stop admiring the way they greet one another with a triple kiss. How beautiful it is! And it is so natural—they have somehow remembered to do this without actually having learned it! And how those who never heard about God from their parents and grandparents make the sign of the cross and pray in churches! How quickly they understand and memorize (to be more precise—remember) everything there!

“As a matter of fact, I grew up in an orphanage as an abandoned child. But it doesn’t matter. What really matters is that nobody talked with us about any Russian traditions, let alone Orthodox traditions. That place was oppressive to me, I felt so miserable, and everybody was so rude... Shame...

“But one day I came across a book at our library (for some reason, no one would borrow it). You surely know this book. It is the novel *The Idiot* by Feodor Dostoevsky. Though I was still a girl, I made out its meaning immediately: Prince Myshkin represents the ideal human being. We all must become like him—then the entire world will be happy. Words

cannot express how much I wanted to tell everybody about him and explain this! But no one would listen to me. They only laughed and said that we have no end of our own idiots. But I wasn’t hurt. The most important thing is that this prince remained with me forever instead of my parents. When I came to believe in God, I understood about whom Dostoevsky had written this novel and for what purpose the Lord had sent me this book at the right time. After the orphanage girls had given me a ‘beating in the dark’ for the umpteenth time, I was about to throw myself into the river...”

“So you changed your mind? Changed your mind after reading *The Idiot*?” the history teacher wondered, trying to make fun of Asya.

“Yes, I did,” Asya replied simply without noticing the teacher’s irony or even looking at her. “Can you explain to me how I managed to grasp this at the early age of thirteen? After all, it was the first thick book I had ever read. Therefore, God can arrange things. He can arrange everything.

“And then another miracle occurred to me. It was two years later, when I was in a boarding school where there were many children from ‘problem’ families, though they were not orphans, and their parents or other relatives would take them home for holidays. So I would stay alone and naturally had attacks of the blues. I remember sitting on my bed in the

bedroom and crying. I was turning over the pages of a book. I don’t remember how I had found it. On its cover was written: *Kustodiev. Life and Works*. The book, though small, was printed on glossy paper, and the reproductions were bright and fine. I was leafing it through automatically, seeing some merchant women, samovars [a samovar is a large decorated container for heating water, traditionally used in Russia for making tea.—*Trans.*], and so on...

“All of these things had nothing to do with my life. I had never been to any museums before then. We were only taken to the circus and the cinema. Thus I was looking through the book, while thinking of something else. And suddenly I saw ‘Maslenitsa’! A pearly winter town down in a valley, with a sledge and bright, well-dressed people in the foreground, embroidered on silk as on a mirror-like surface. I was overcome with joy! Shivers still run down my spine. I even felt the ‘needles’ of little pieces of ice that fly from under the horses’ hooves onto my face. Like a whirlwind, I got carried away to that town, heard the noise of the celebrations, the ringing



of church bells and little sleigh bells. And I heard that particular laughter (then still unfamiliar to me)—airy, open, merry and happy!

“Maslenitsa” by Boris Kustodiev.

“And suddenly all of this appeared so familiar to me. I realized that all of this was mine—I even felt the weight of my light brown braid around my head, saw a reflection of my rosy face

in the samovar, and felt the coldness of the chilly water in the ice hole, as if I were rinsing out my linen... And those swinging movements of strong hands—all of it is familiar to me... The healthy smell of sheets, so stiff, and how they are brought back home from the frost. And I felt the smell of the veranda floor after it has been washed with cold water in hot weather...

“And there were many other sensations that I couldn’t have experienced in real life. And what about the scent of Pascha? It was then that I felt and recognized it—this smell is sweet and meek, and there is peace and quiet in it. I even sensed the beard of a salesman exchanging a triple kiss with me [as the Paschal salutation.—*Trans.*], smelling of rustic tobacco!” Asya broke into laughter with embarrassment.

“I still keep this joy in my soul. Can you answer me where did it fall on me (like a bolt from the blue) from?”

“I believe God gave it to me then as a guarantee so that I would not lose heart. And He can give it to anyone. All we

need to do is ask: 'I am yours, O Lord! Please, never abandon me. I want to rejoice in You and don't need anything else!'"

The teacher was listening to Asya, first smiling condescendingly, and then shrinking back in fear. Igor Viktorovich was looking at Asya fixedly and intently. And Tatiana, a simple chubby woman, was looking at her with understanding. When Asya stopped talking, Tatiana started speaking timidly and worriedly:

"All that you have just said is known to me in some sense. But I would have never been able to explain this in words, like you. Thank you for this. When I was pregnant with my first baby and felt its movement for the first time, this sensation seemed familiar to me. And I always recognized the sensation when milk was coming, these occasional pricks. Yes, exactly," Tatiana went back in her mind to her firstborn, feeling awkward about her own confession. She doubted if it was appropriate for her to talk about these things. But there was a timid, happy smile shining on her face that had already turned rosy.

"How many children do you have?" Igor Viktorovich wondered.

"Five," Tatiana replied simply.

There was an exhalation, either of amazement or admiration, in the compartment.

Asya said:

"How beautiful and happy you are..."

Now Tatiana, who earlier had seemed oppressed and worn out, indeed looked happy, beautiful, strong, calm, and well-built.

"Where are you going alone?" the teacher tried her best to change to an ironic, condescending tone again.

"To a monastery, to my husband," and Tatiana told her the name of the monastery. "He is helping them in construction work. He has a clever pair of hands, so they suggested that we move there all together."

"Are you really going to live in the monastery with all of your children?" the teacher asked in a choked voice.

"Certainly not!" Tatiana answered, laughing. "We will live in a village nearby. I am going to see the house. My sister is staying with the children, while I am away, because it would have been too expensive for us to travel together. But she must manage alone, she is doing it not for the first time. We do have potential buyers seeing our apartment... We have nothing to do in the city. I realized it long ago."

"How are you going to give an education to your children there?" the teacher wondered in a totally unfriendly tone.

"Their souls need to be saved," Tatiana answered simply and turned to the window.

It got quiet in the compartment. Each was immersed in his own thoughts.

Tatiana was trying to stifle her concerns about her children by dreams of the sixth baby (and she suspected she was already

pregnant), fancying a cozy house in which they would all live together in harmony. She imagined how they would go to church, and all the girls would wear white headscarves... They couldn't enjoy such a happy life in the city, where it was inconvenient for them to travel long distances. In the country there would be no "awful" doctors who each time detected new diseases in her, alarmed her with prospects of death, and tried to persuade her to have an abortion, though they themselves had become dead long ago... There, in the open air, she would recover, get her blood levels back to normal, and would stop fainting (which scared her children stiff)...

And Igor Viktorovich suddenly recalled... Ryzhik. This was a little squirrel-like baby rabbit that he loved so dearly when he was a boy about five. It was at his grandmother's in the village—he took it away from the mother rabbit and laid it into a big basket. Then he placed the basket under the bed, fed the bunny on grass and watched it hop around the room. Ryzhik had a strikingly clever muzzle and expressive, big, black eyes. In the compartment, Igor Viktorovich suddenly clearly felt the tenderness of its furry skin on his cheek and its smell of a baby, a winter felt boot, and milk. As he looked at this naïve girl, Asya, he had very similar feelings and was so grateful to her for her fantasies, in which there was something real, something very beautiful and stirring. And Ryzhik came back to his memory again.

One day after he, little Igor, had spent the whole day by the river, he completely forgot his bunny, giving it neither food nor drink. He didn't remember his pet until the nighttime. He jumped out of bed, turned on the light, and took the basket from under the bed... The baby rabbit, though still warm, was dead. Instantly the boy realized that he would never be able to survive this loss and his own guilt. He called his grandmother with his speechless lips, and she heard his silent call and woke up. Then she wrapped Ryzhik into her shawl and went up to the icons. Igor Viktorovich recalled how he had prayed—for the first and last time—while weeping loudly and clasping his hands to his breast. And next he clasped the rabbit that had come back to life to his breast, enjoying the strong pushes of its hind legs with which it scratched his belly all over that night. Later his mother explained that the bunny had not died: it had just been in a dead faint; but as soon as grandmother warmed it the pet came around; but the dead cannot be revived.

At that moment the sense of the miracle (which he had nearly gotten used to and which had made his life so full and wonderful) left the boy. Why did his mother do it? Then Igor Viktorovich remembered his son with his daughter-in-law, and his grandson, whom he had not seen for a year. And he suddenly understood why he found the teacher in the compartment so disagreeable—she reminded him of his own wife. She too could ask her son who had brought his girlfriend home with him for the first time: "Where on earth

did you dig her up?” It is good that she didn’t ask that in the girlfriend’s presence, though she could have done this... The girl was like Asya and even Tatiana—they were “from the same production line”. The future wife “didn’t suit his wife’s tastes.” He, Igor Viktorovich, a very busy factory director, had tried not to get into the heart of the conflict with his son’s family, though he missed them. Now he began to see things in a different light. Glory be to God that he had refused to travel in a sleeper and bought a ticket to an ordinary car and thus met Asya... Glory to God.

The teacher was sitting, trying not to think about anything, and scrutinizing her own hands. She had always been proud of them—they were narrow, with long aristocratic fingers and a perfect manicure. But now they looked like the talons of a bird of prey. It seemed as if all of her five unborn babies were kicking in her lower abdomen. This is what she had already experienced before and ended up in hospital... What if the same thing was happening again? And she was overwhelmed by intense hatred towards these two women—her fellow travelers. “They are to blame for everything! Why are they here?”

And Asya, filled with love for all these people who were nearly strangers to her, looked at a Russian cemetery that was gliding by outside the train windows—it was gaily decorated and “merry” before Pascha. Newly painted fences, with tender paper flowers attached to delicate crosses fluttering in the wind. Although the cemetery was quite far off, and, of course, she couldn’t have seen all of this, Asya who had never been to any cemetery before knew all about these flowers perfectly well.

And it seemed to Asya that the waves of love that she felt so keenly and that were flowing from the shabby village houses to the well-groomed graves and back—from the departed to the living—were washing over her, Tatiana, Igor Viktorovich, and even the history teacher who opposed them...



## THE “NEW MAN” OF THE “THIRD INDETERMINATE GENDER”

By His Eminence Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou.

Until now we knew that there were two genders, the male and the female, or man and woman. There were also some who wavered from this for various reasons, primarily due to the passions. But recently there has arisen another person of the “third gender,” as it has been named by the

courts, after many years of struggle made by such people of an “indeterminate gender” or “third gender.”

Someone named Norrie May-Welby, who was born in Scotland as a man, later went to Australia where he underwent gender reassignment surgery to become a woman, because he believed that he did not feel comfortable as an individual of the female gender, so he decided to discontinue hormone therapy to have an operation to avoid belonging to a “predetermined” gender. Then he began a long struggle to be legally recognized as a person of an “indeterminate” gender.

On Wednesday 2 April 2014 “the Supreme Court of Australia ruled that the State of New South Wales should recognize the existence of this third ‘indeterminate’ gender to which Norrie May-Welby belongs” (Ta Nea, 04/04/2014). Thus was born a person of an “indeterminate gender” (non-specific sex), who is neither a man or a woman.

One is struck by the point to which a person can reach, who is frustrated by all things and wants to taste new experiences and situations. There are many who, claiming human rights for all people, are ready to accept and adopt such a mindset. But if we start accepting human rights without any necessary restrictions, then we will arrive at a social catastrophe.

Existential philosophy, when speaking about freedom, says that the biggest problem with freedom is what we are “given from existence”, that we do not have the right or ability to choose our gender, but it is given to us without the possibility of making a choice. Well, now this personal right has been loosed and is even recognized by the State. But where can society reach with such considerations?

The duality of gender was given to us, and indeed has a biological infrastructure. God created people as man and woman and in this way people developed in society, and thus the human race multiplied. Unfortunately, due to many causes, there exists today in society “genetic corruption” and man himself intervenes in this issue.

In the Church, however, we have the ability to transcend what has been “given from existence” with the life in Christ. Saint Maximos the Confessor, identifying the five divisions (namely uncreated and created, mental and sensible, heaven and earth, paradise and ecumene, man and woman), writes that in the life in Christ we begin to transcend the division of man and woman and proceed to transcend all divisions. The saints of the Church live in an angelic state, as it is written in the *troparion*, *like angels in the world let us celebrate*, but they also become angels in heaven, according to words of Christ, *they will be as angels in heaven*. (Mt 22:30).

When people do not know and cannot become an angel in Christ, then in their mania they voluntarily become a person of an “indeterminate gender,” and even worse, since even animals have a distinction of gender.

## A MIRACLE BY THE ALL-HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

### THE MOTHER OF GOD GAVE EYES TO A YOUNG MAN THAT HAD HIS EYES PLUCKED OUT...

*An account of the ineffable miracle wrought by the holy icon of our all-holy lady the Theotokos of Cassiope for the unjustly-blinded Stephen who wondrously received eyes again. From "Orthodox Life," Vol. 36, No. 3, May-June 1986, published by Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York.*

When Simon Leone Balbi was governor of Corfu, in the year of our salvation 1530, a youth named Stephen was returning from the city to his village, having accomplished his purpose. On the way, he encountered other wayfarers with whom he walked together. At some distance from the city they encountered certain youths who were returning from the mill bringing with them flour. Whereupon Stephen's fellow travellers, because they were vile men and of evil counsel, said "What hinders us from taking this flour and dividing it among ourselves. No one will see us."

But Stephen, being a just man, as soon as he heard these things, endeavored to hinder them as much as he could with many admonishments, saying that this which they were plotting to do was a beastly thing, and that if they did it they would not escape just punishment as thieves and evil-doers. But they, like asps, stopping up their ears (Ps. 57:4), would not listen, rather they even attempted to convince Stephen to become an accomplice to the robbery. He, on his part, would in no wise consent to this. Whereupon, having first beaten the youths, they seized the flour and proceeded to their homes rejoicing. The youths, on their part, when they returned home empty-handed and weeping, related to their relatives what had happened. And they, searching diligently, ascertained who the thieves were and reported the deed to the ruler.

Stephen was also accused together with the thieves, since the victims had seen him in their company, yet they did not know that he had tried to hinder them and that he had not aided them in any way. Those that were guilty of the theft, knowing their guilt, hid in order not to be apprehended and be punished as was meet. But Stephen, since he was innocent, went to the city without any fear. Hence, when he approached, he was recognized and arrested by the soldiers of the ruler and cast into prison. Afterwards, he was led bound before the governor for interrogation. On being questioned, he told the whole truth, that is, that he was walking together with the thieves, but that he took no part in the robbery and that he was unjustly accused. But in vain did he strive to convince the ruler. The words of the just Stephen appeared to the judge as false, for the judge thought him to be a thief and like the others.

Judged guilty unjustly, therefore, by the governor, the innocent Stephen was called upon to choose which punishment he preferred, the privation of his eyes or the cutting off of his

hands. And because the punishment of the privation of his eyes seemed lighter to Stephen, he chose this. Whereupon, leading him weeping and mourning to the customary place of punishment, they gouged out his eyes in the presence of many people. After he was blinded, his mother, weeping and lamenting, brought him to the church of St. Lazarus in order to seek alms.

But most of the people in that place mocked and reproached him as one who had justly suffered punishment, that as a thief he forcefully took what did not belong to him. On the other hand, since they who took compassion on him were few indeed, he thought—according to divine providence, of course—to go with his mother to the church of the Theotokos which was in the village of Cassiope, by the sea, and which was at a distance of eighteen miles from the city of Corfu. In this church there is found the wonderworking icon of the Theotokos, and having an adequate quay outside the church, the boats would all moor there out of reverence for the All-Holy Theotokos. It is at this place that Stephen thought to go and ask for alms from those who came to reverence the holy icon of the Theotokos. His mother also agreed to this.

They went, therefore, to the church of the Mother of God, and after worshipping as was proper, with laments and sighs they recounted to the monk that was there the unjust misfortune which they had suffered and the reason why they betook themselves there. They also asked for a small cell in which to stay. He replied that until the brother who had the keys for the cells returned (for he was absent), they could stay in the church. Stephen's mother, exhausted as she was from the journey, reclined and fell asleep immediately.

But Stephen, unable to sleep because of his pains, fell asleep only a little and very lightly at that. During the night—O thy marvels, most holy Theotokos—he felt hands touching him and pressing against his eyes so much that he awoke crying out loudly and wondering who it was that had touched him so firmly. Beholding a certain Lady resplendent and full of light, who disappeared in a few moments, he thought to himself that it was a dream and not real. But on turning, he saw the icon lamps lit and he marvelled greatly, and was perplexed concerning how and what it was that had taken place. Awakening his mother, he said to her, "Who lit the lamps?" She on her part, thinking that her son was seeing a delusion in his sleep, began to weep and told him to be quiet and go to sleep. "Woe is me," she said, "not only hath he lost his eyes, but now he hath lost his mind also from the shock and pain, and, though being without eyes, he saith that he seeth."

But Stephen would not listen, and insisted that he actually saw the lamps, and even the holy icon of the Mother of God, and that what he was saying was not of his fancy. Then he related to her what had happened to him a little earlier, and that he had called out to her, but that she did not hear him because

she had been sound asleep. His mother, therefore, perceived that this must be a divine manifestation. Whereupon, she arose immediately, and gazing carefully at the face of Stephen, she observed that truly he had eyes, and that whereas formerly he had had dark eyes, he now had blue eyes. Wherefore, from the great joy and awesome fear which overcame her she began to shout loudly and to weep, glorifying God and calling continually upon the name of the most-glorious Mother of God. Both she and her son began to clap their hands and to magnify the all-holy Theotokos.

Hearing the shouts and the clamor, and because it was before the appointed time of arising for the services, the monk who took care of the church became angry and began to reproach them as unruly and evil people, adding that they had been justly punished as such. But Stephen and his mother only continued shouting and relating the marvels of God. The monk, astonished and disbelieving because of the greatness of the miracle, came down into the church. He then beheld him who but a little before had been blind, now having eyes and seeing. Wherefore he departed immediately for the city. Finding the governor Balbi in the court house, he cried out against him, and accused him of being lawless. But those present attempted to expel the monk, saying to him, "It is not lawful to dare with such audacity to confront those which are in authority, and to be haughty and high-minded in such a manner." He, on his part, shouted even more so, saying, "If Stephen had not been unjustly blinded by him, God would not have given him other eyes through the intercession of the Theotokos!"

On hearing this, the governor sent certain notables, who, on their return, reported that the words of the monk were true. Then Balbi, accompanied by notables, went himself to the shrine, by means of the governor's caravel, and all beheld with their own eyes this great miracle and, as was meet, they marvelled greatly.

But the governor Balbi still entertained a doubt, thinking that it was not Stephen himself whom he saw, or that he had not truly been blinded, even as the Jews also had similar doubts concerning the blind man to whom our Lord Jesus Christ gave eyes. The greatness of the miracle did not permit the governor and certain others to accept it immediately. On returning to the city, therefore, Balbi called the executioner and said to him, "Did you take out Stephen's eyes even as I had ordered?" The executioner verified then that indeed he

had blinded him, and that the eyes which had been gouged out were still in the bucket, since it had been only the day before that he had done it. He went, therefore, and brought the eyes. When the governor saw them, he believed that the miracle was genuine, especially since he saw that the eyes were of a hue different from those which Stephen had received anew. It should also be noted that on Stephen's face there were still evident the wounds of the iron implement by which his eyes had been gouged out.

This, of course, happened by divine providence, so that the miracle might be proclaimed and be believed in as indisputable, that is, by the scars and the different color of the eyes.

For if the eyes had been of the same hue, many might have said that they were the same eyes and that they had not been taken out. In this manner, therefore, the miracle was reported throughout all of Corfu and was believed by all. Then Balbi called Stephen and asked his forgiveness for the injustice which he had inflicted upon him out of ignorance. Rewarding him with goodly gifts and attending to him with much kindness, he sent him immediately to his home. Afterwards, the governor was very diligent to renovate the courtyard of the church and to embellish the shrine of the Mother of God at Cassiope.

Many who at that time had doubts about the Orthodox Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ were made steadfast through this extraordinary and ineffable miracle. Beholding what had taken place and had been demonstrated in their own time, they came to

believe in those things which are mentioned in the Divine Scriptures and which are usually believed in by hearing alone. As for those who remained in unbelief and would not honor this ineffable miracle, they were put to shame, for having eyes in order to see, even as the holy Prophet Ezekiel says, they saw not, and having ears to hear, they heard not.

Let us all run, therefore, with faith and piety to the luminous Virgin and Theotokos Mary, and let us beseech her as one who has audience, that she may illumine the eyes of our understanding, lest we walk in the darkness of unbelief and sin, and that she may intercede with God, Who was born of her, to rescue us from every temptation of the evil one and deem us worthy of the celestial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, thanksgiving, honor, and worship, with His Father Who is without beginning, and the All-holy and good and life giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



**The Miraculous Icon of  
Panaghia of Cassiope  
[commemorated on May 8th]**

## ON THE DREADED DAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.



The day of the Last Judgment! That day no one knows—only God the Father knows—but its signs are given in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) of the holy Apostle John the Theologian.

Apocalypse speaks of the events at the end of the world and of the Last Judgment, primarily in images and in a veiled manner. However, the Holy Fathers

have explained these images, and there is an authentic Church tradition that speaks clearly concerning the signs of the approach of the end, and concerning the Last Judgment.

Before the end of life on earth there will be agitation, wars, civil war, hunger, earthquakes... Men will suffer from fear, will die from expectation of calamity. There will be no life, no joy of life but a tormented state of falling away from life. Nevertheless there will be a falling away not only from life but from faith also, and *when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?* (Lk 18:8). Men will become proud, ungrateful, rejecting Divine Law. Together with the falling away from life will be a weakening of moral life. There will be an exhaustion of good and an increase of evil.

Of these times, the holy Apostle John the Theologian speaks in his God-inspired work, the Apocalypse. He says that he *was in the Spirit* when he wrote it; this means that the Holy Spirit Himself was in him, when under the form of various images, the fate of the Church and the world was opened to him, and so this is a Divine Revelation.

The Apocalypse represents the fate of the Church in the image of a woman who hides herself in the wilderness: she does not show herself in public life. In public life, forces that prepare the possibility for the appearance of Antichrist will play the leading role. Antichrist will be a man, and not the devil incarnate. “Anti” signifies “in place of” or “against.” Antichrist is a man who desires to be in place of Christ, to occupy His place and possess what Christ should possess. He desires to possess the attraction of Christ and authority over the whole world. Moreover, Antichrist will receive that authority before his destruction and the destruction of the world.

What is known of this man—Antichrist? His precise ancestry is unknown: his father is completely unknown, and his mother a foul pretended virgin. He will be a Jew of the tribe of Dan. He will be very intelligent and endowed with skill in handling people. He will be fascinating and kind.

The philosopher Vladimir Soloviev worked a long time at presenting the advent and person of Antichrist. He carefully made use of all material on this question, not only Patristic, but also Moslem, and he worked out a brilliant picture.

Before the advent of Antichrist, there was a preparation in the world, the possibility of his appearance. *The mystery of iniquity doth already work.* (2 Thes 2:7). The forces preparing for his appearance fight above all against the lawful Imperial authority. The holy Apostle Paul says that Antichrist cannot be manifested *until what withholdeth is taken away.* (2 Thes. 2:7). St. John Chrysostom explains that the *withholding one* is the lawful pious authority: such an authority fights with evil. For this reason the *mystery*, already at work in the world, fights with this authority; it desires a lawless authority. When the *mystery* decisively achieves that authority, nothing will hinder the appearance of Antichrist any longer.

Fascinating, intelligent, kind, he will be merciful—he will act with mercy and goodness; but not for the sake of mercy and goodness, but for the strengthening of his own authority. When he will have strengthened it to the point where the whole world acknowledges him, then he will reveal his face.

For his capital, he will choose Jerusalem, because it was here that the Savior revealed His Divine teaching and His person. It was here that the entire world was called to the blessedness of goodness and salvation. The world did not acknowledge Christ and crucified Him in Jerusalem; whereas, the whole world will acknowledge the Antichrist’s authority and Jerusalem will become the capital of the world.

Having attained the pinnacle of authority, Antichrist will demand the acknowledgement that he has attained what no earthly power had ever attained or could attain and then demand the worship of himself as a higher being, as a god.

Vladimir Soloviev describes the character of his activity well, as “Supreme Ruler.” He will do what is pleasing to all—on the condition of being recognized as Supreme Authority. He will allow the Church to exist, permit Her Divine services, promise to build magnificent churches... on the condition, that all recognize him as “Supreme Being” and worship him. Antichrist will have a personal hatred for Christ; he will see Him as a rival and look upon Him as a personal enemy. He will live by this hatred and rejoice in men’s apostasy from Christ.

Under Antichrist, there will be an immense falling away from the faith. Many bishops will change in faith and in justification will point to the brilliant situation of the Church.

The search for compromise will be the characteristic disposition of men. Straight-forwardness of confession will disappear. Men will cleverly justify their fall, and gracious evil will support such a general disposition. There will be the habit of apostasy from truth and the sweetness of compromise and sin in men.

Antichrist will allow men everything, as long as they “fall down and worship him”; and the whole world will submit to him. Then there will appear the two righteous men, who will fearlessly preach the faith and accuse Antichrist. According to Church tradition, they are the two Prophets of the Old Testament, Elijah and Enoch, who did not taste of death, but will taste it now for three days, and in three days they must rise. Their death will call forth the great rejoicing of Antichrist and his servants. Their resurrection will plunge them into great confusion and terror. Then, the end of the world will come.

The Apostle Peter said that the first world was made out of water—an image of the primordial chaos, and perished by water—in the Flood. Now the world is reserved unto fire. *The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* (2 Pet 3:10). All the elements will ignite. This present world will perish in a single instant. In an instant all will be changed. Moreover, the Sign of the Son of God, the Sign of the Cross, will appear. The whole world, having willingly submitted to Antichrist, will weep. Everything is finished forever: Antichrist killed, the end of his kingdom of warfare with Christ, the end, and one is held accountable; one must answer to the true God.

“The end of the world” signifies not the annihilation of the world, but its transformation. Everything will be transformed suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye. The dead will rise in new bodies: their own, but renewed, just as the Savior rose in His own body and traces of wounds from the nails and spear were on it, yet it possessed new faculties, and in this sense it was a new body. It is not clear whether this new body will be the same as Adam was made, or whether it will be an entirely new body.

Afterward, the Lord will appear in glory on the clouds. Trumpets will sound, loud, with power! They will sound in the soul and conscience! All will become clear to the human conscience. The Prophet Daniel, speaking of the Last Judgment, relates how *the Ancient of Days, the Judge sits on His throne, and before Him is a fiery stream.* (cf. Dan 7:9-10). Fire is a purifying element; it burns sin. Woe to a man if sin has become a part of his nature: then the fire will burn the man, himself. This fire will be kindled within man: seeing the Cross, some will rejoice, but others will fall into confu-

sion, terror, and despair. Thus, men will be divided instantly. The very state of a man’s soul casts him to one side or the other, to right or to left.

The more consciously and persistently man strives toward God in his life, the greater will be his joy when he hears: *Come unto Me, ye blessed.* Conversely: the same words will call the fire of horror and torture to those who did not desire Him, who fled and fought or blasphemed Him during their lifetime!

The Last Judgment knows of no witnesses or written protocols! Everything is inscribed in the souls of men and these records, these “books,” are opened at the Judgment. Everything becomes clear to all and to oneself. Moreover, some will go to joy, while others—to horror.

When “the books are opened,” it will become clear that the roots of all vices lie

in the human soul. Here is a drunkard or a lecher: when the body has died, some may think that sin is dead too. No! There was an inclination to sin in the soul, and that sin was sweet to the soul; and if the soul has not repented and has not freed itself of the sin, it will come to the Last Judgment with the same desire for sin. It will never satisfy that desire and in that soul there will be the suffering of hatred. It will accuse everyone and everything in its tortured condition; it will hate everyone and everything. *There will be gnashing of teeth* of powerless malice and the unquenchable fire of hatred.

*A fiery gehenna*—such is the inner fire. *There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.* Such is the state of hell.



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## THE LETTER OF THE LAW CAN BE QUITE DEADLY

*By St. Paisios the Athonite.*

Once asked someone: “What type of warrior do you consider yourself to be? Christ’s warrior or temptation’s warrior? Are you aware that the evil of temptation also has its own warriors?”

A Christian must not be fanatic; he must have love for and be sensitive towards all people. Those who inconsiderately toss out comments, even if they are true, can cause harm.

I met a theologian who was extremely pious, but had the habit of speaking to the (secular) people around him in a very blunt manner; his method penetrated the listener so deeply that it shook them severely. He told me once: “During a gathering, I said such and such a thing to a lady.” But the way that he said it, he crushed her. “Look,” I said to him, “you may be tossing golden crowns studded with diamonds to other people, but the way that you throw them can smash heads, not only the sensitive ones, but the sound ones as well.”

Let’s not stone our fellow-man in a so-called “Christian manner.” The person who—in the presence of others—checks someone for having sinned (or speaks in an impassioned manner about a certain person) is not moved by the Spirit of God; he is moved by another spirit.

The way of the Church is love; it differs from the way of the legalists. The Church sees everything with tolerance and seeks to help each person, whatever he may have done, however sinful he may be.

I have observed a peculiar kind of logic in certain pious people. Their piety is a good thing, as is their predisposition for good; however, a certain spiritual discernment and amplitude is required so that their piety is not accompanied by narrow mindedness or strong-headedness. Someone who is truly in a spiritual state must possess and exemplify spiritual discernment; otherwise he will forever remain attached to the “letter of the Law,” and the letter of the Law can be quite deadly.

A truly humble person never behaves like a teacher; he listens, and, whenever his opinion is requested, he responds humbly. In other words, he responds like a student. He who believes that he is capable of correcting others is filled with egotism.

A person that begins to do something with a good intention and eventually reaches an extreme point lacks true discernment. His actions exemplify a latent type of egotism that is hidden beneath this behavior; he is unaware of it, because he does not know himself that well, which is why he goes to extremes.

Quite often, people begin with good intentions, but look where they may find themselves! This was the case with the “icon-worshippers” and the “icon-combatters” in the past: both cases were extremes! The former had reached the point of scraping icons of Christ and placing the scrapings into the Holy Chalice in order to “improve” Holy Communion; the latter, on the other hand, burnt and totally discarded all icons. That is why the Church was obliged to place icons in higher places, out of reach, and, when the dispute was over, lowered them so that we can venerate them and thus confer the appropriate honor to the persons portrayed therein.