

# 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 ἐδίδαχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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## A GREAT SIGN

### A HOMILY ON THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

Excerpts from a 2014 homily, by Fr. Matthew Baker (+2015).

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.*

[Rev 12:1]

† † †

Today we celebrate a great and joyous solemnity: the falling asleep of the Mother of God in Jerusalem, and her bodily translation into glory.

### The Whole Mystery of the Economy

The readings this evening—from Genesis, Ezekial, and Proverbs—present us with a series of images, all with reference to the Theotokos. She is the ladder ascending from earth to heaven, beheld by the patriarch Jacob in a vision (Gen. 28:12). She is Beth-el, God's house, and the gate of heaven (Gen 28:17). She is the east gate of the Temple sanctuary, which remains shut—virginal: no man enters, *for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered through it*, as Ezekiel prophesies (Ezek 44:2). She is wisdom, or the house of wisdom, of which king Solomon speaks. (Prov 9:1).

These readings—from Genesis, Ezekiel, and Proverbs—represent the three divisions of the Jewish Bible: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Together they comprise a “bouquet” representing the whole of what we call the Old Covenant. It is as if to say: Mary is the sum towards which the whole history of Israel was pointing all along. She is the daughter of Zion, the hinge of salvation history. In her is the beginning of the New Covenant.

In the words of St John of Damascus, *in the name Theotokos is contained the whole mystery of the economy*. Economy—oikonomia, as we often hear in our

hymns—refers to God's ordering of His *household*, His governance of creation and history according to His plan for our salvation and glorification. There is an order to God's plan, and a unity of meaning. This unity is revealed in the person of the Holy Virgin.

Mary's role in this economy, her identity as *Mother*, does not end with giving birth or rearing her child. We see her not only at the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus, but also at His first miracle in Cana, at the foot of the Cross, and with the Church at Pentecost. As St. John of Damascus said, *the whole mystery of the economy*.

In the festal cycle of our liturgical year, which begins September 1, the first great feast is the birth of the Theotokos, on Sept 8. The last great feast is today, her falling asleep and bodily assumption into heaven. Our liturgical remembrance of Christ's work of salvation begins and ends with Mary. We begin with her birth, we end with her glorification. Indeed, *in the name Theotokos is contained the whole mystery of the economy*.

### A Woman Clothed with the Sun

At the end of his life, in exile on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John had a vision. “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” (Rev. 12:1). Most commentators take this image from the book of Apocalypse to be referring to the Church, or the remnant Israel. Some, however, see here an image of Mary, especially as she is the daughter of Zion, and she typifies the Church. Some even see an image of her bodily assumption.

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun.* (Rev 12:1). In the bodily translation of the Virgin, the Church recognizes a *great sign*. A prophetic sign, that speaks to us of our

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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.

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destiny, of the meaning of death, of bodies, of human relations. This sign tells us: death is not the final end of the human being. We are not lastly, as the philosopher Heidegger thought, only “being-unto-death.” Finite time and death are not our ultimate horizon. The mother of Jesus was *translated unto life*.

This sign tells us: a *heaven* of pure spirits is not our last estate. Christians are not Platonists! The body is not the soul’s prison, a cocoon to be sloughed off for the *true self* to emerge like a butterfly. Plato was wrong: our true person, as God intended it, is not just soul, but also body. Salvation of the person means salvation of the body.

This sign tells us: through the resurrection of Jesus, each one of us will rise again in our body, restored, as we were also once conceived in our mother’s womb: as male or female. *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun.* (Rev 12:1). Risen to glory, Mary is still Woman.

Certain ancient heretics, called Gnostics, believed that here was something to be overcome: in the kingdom of heaven, there would be no male and female, or perhaps women would become like men (Gospel of Thomas, *logion* 114). These Gnostics scorned marriage, and especially procreation. They sought liberation from the bonds of nature.

We still have our Gnostics today. Our Gnostics would like us to think of man and woman, mother and father, as interchangeable, shifting identities: not the Creator’s good

and lasting design, but inventions of society, or plastic self-constructions.

But today the Church holds out to us a different vision. It is a sign to our age, *a sign of contradiction*. (Lk 2:34). *You were translated to life, O Mother of Life*. This sign says: risen to glory, Mary is still Mother. In the bodily glorification of Mary, we are given an image, a pre-installment, of the glory of the Kingdom which we hope to inherit. It is fully embodied glory, wherein the beauty of created difference is preserved. A glory in which

natural bonds of love will not be dissolved. A glory in which each of us will remain mother or father, and son or daughter, to someone. And to everyone who, like the beloved disciple, has rested a head upon the Lord’s bosom, or stood by his Cross in prayer, Christ will say: *Son, behold thy Mother.* (Jn 19:27).

There is no human person more exalted than the Virgin Mary, the Panaghia. And there is no greater title for her in our theological glossary than *Mother*. This should tell us something. This word, mother, extends far beyond physical childbearing. It names an all-encompassing human concern, a spiritual bond, a calling from God. This spiritual maternity, beyond blood offspring, is the gift and calling of every woman: married or unmarried; bearer of many, one or none. It is a gift, of which every one of us—all humanity—is the blessed beneficiary. This is the good gift of our Creator—not our fashioning. And as today’s feast reminds us, it does not end in death.



## REGARDING THE LOWLINESS (HUMILITY) OF MIND

Source: "Our Holy Father Dorotheos of Gaza: Various Soul-Profiting Instructions to His Disciples," translated by Most Reverend Chrysostomos, Metropolitan Emeritus of Etna, "Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies," Etna, CA (2017), pp. 52-66.

The Greek title of this Instruction, «Περὶ Ταπεινοφροσύνης», literally means "regarding lowliness (or humility) of mind" «ταπεινότητα φρονήματος». The Greek word «ταπεινότης», humility, denoting a «ταπεινή κατάσταση» or humble state is nearly synonymous with «ταπεινοφροσύνη». However, in the Orthodox Hesychastic tradition, lowliness or humility of mind refers to a refinement of thoughts by a humble outlook or mentality that eventually leads to the attainment of the virtue of humility in the heart (which is, according to Orthodox Patristic teaching, the seat of the soul). The state of the heart responds to the purity of the mind and thoughts, and the two, working in synergy by Grace, give rise to genuine and abundant humility. It is for this reason that St. Paul attributes lowliness of mind to the elect of God in his Epistle to the Colossians (3:12).

† † †

One of the Fathers said: *More than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind, being ready at every word we hear to say, 'Forgive me,' for with the weapon of lowliness of mind, all of the snares of the Enemy and Adversary are destroyed.*

Let us investigate the deeper meaning of the Elder's words. Why does he say that "more than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," and does not say, preferably, "more than anything else, we have need of self-control," inasmuch as the Apostle Paul tells us that *Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things?* (1 Cor 9:25). Or why does he not say that, more than anything else, we need fear of God, since Holy Scripture says: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?* (Pss 110:10). And again, in another place, it is said: *By the fear of the Lord everyone departs from evil.* (Prov 16:6). Why does he not say, "more than all else, we need almsgiving and faith," inasmuch as Holy Scripture says that *by alms and by faith sins are purged away*, (Prov 15:27) while the Apostle Paul says, *without faith it is impossible to please God?* (Heb 11:6).

If, then, it is not possible to please God without faith, if sins are cleansed by almsgiving and faith, if with fear of the Lord everyone avoids every evil, if the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, and if he who struggles is temperate (self-

controlled) in all things, how can he say that "more than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," yet leave out all of the other things that are so necessary?

The Elder wishes to show us that neither the fear of God, nor almsgiving, nor faith, nor self-control, nor any other virtue can be efficacious without lowliness of mind. For this reason he says: "More than anything else, we have need of lowliness of mind," that we might be prepared at every word we hear to say, "Forgive me," since with the weapon of lowliness of mind all of the snares of the Enemy and Adversary are destroyed.

See, therefore, my brothers, how great is the power of lowliness of mind. Look how effective it is to say, "Forgive me." But why, also, is the Devil called both the Enemy and the Adversary? He is called the Enemy because he is a misanthrope, a hater of good, and treacherous. And he is called the Adversary because he undertakes to impede everything that is good.

Does a person wish to pray? He places himself in the way, impeding one by evil thoughts, by captivating the mind, and by spiritual listlessness. Does one wish to give alms? He impedes him with greed or niggardliness (cheapness, *Ed.*). Does someone wish to keep vigil? He impedes him with sloth and indolence. In this way, he opposes us in everything, in every good thing that we tackle. For that reason he is called not only the Enemy, but the Adversary. With lowliness of mind, therefore, every misanthropic and hostile action of the Devil is neutralized.

### A Great Virtue!

Indeed, lowliness of mind is truly a great virtue. And everyone of the saints went forth with lowliness of mind and with toil and made short the path, as it is said: *Look upon my lowliness and my toil, and forgive all my sins.* (Pss 24:18). For we can surely enter into the Kingdom of Heaven by humility alone, as Abba John the Elder used to say, though at a slower pace. Let us also, then, humble ourselves a little, and we will be saved. And if, being weakened by illness, we cannot toil, let us at least take care to be humble. I believe that, in God's mercy, by virtue of the little done with humility, we too will be found in the realm of those Saints who so assiduously toiled and labored in God. Yes, we are ill and cannot toil; but can we not humble ourselves?

Blessed, my brothers, is he who possesses humility. Humility is formidable. And on the mark was that holy man who described one who has true humility in saying that: *Humility is neither angered, nor does it anger anyone.* (Attrib-



uted to Abba Mattoes, 5<sup>th</sup> century). This may seem to be a curious thing, since humility, in fact, stands in opposition to vainglory, and it ostensibly guards a person against it in particular. Now, one can become angry over money or food. Why, then, does he say that humility is neither angered nor angers anyone?

Humility is a formidable virtue and has the power to bestow Grace upon the soul. Thus, when this Grace of God comes, it protects the soul from these other two weighty passions (i.e., anger and angering another). For what is more weighty than for one to become angry or to anger his neighbor? As Abba Makarios also said: *It is totally alien to a monastic to become angry.* In fact, if this is not quickly covered by humility, little by little one will succumb to a demonic state, unhinging himself and others. So it is said that: *Humility neither renders one angry nor angers anyone.*

However, why does he say that humility covers these two great passions? Humility protects the soul from every passion, from every temptation. When St. Anthony saw all of the snares of the Devil laid out and, groaning, asked of God, “Alas, who can be saved from these?” what did God say to him? He answered him: *Humility overcomes them.* And what other wondrous thing did He add? He added: *They cannot even approach it* (i.e., humility).

Do you see the power, my brothers, of the grace of this virtue? Nothing is stronger than humility, and nothing vanquishes it. And if something regrettable happens to a humble man, immediately he rouses himself before such things, chastising himself as though he deserves all that takes place. He does not abide by the judgment of another or burden another with the cause of such; and in this way, he prevails without becoming upset, without chagrin, and is perfectly at peace. For this reason, he never becomes angry; nor does he anger anyone. It is thus meet that the saint said, *Above all else, we have need of humility.*

### The Forms of Pride and Humility

Now, there are two forms of humility, just as there are two kinds of pride. The first kind of pride is when one disdains his brother, when he demeans him as being nothing, and considers himself to be above him. If such a one does not speedily come to his senses and diligently work to correct himself, bit by bit, he will arrive at the second kind of pride and degenerate to the point of showing arrogance before God Himself, ascribing whatever he achieves to himself and not to God.

Indeed, my brothers, I once knew a man who ended up in this deplorable condition. At first, if some brother would say something to him, he would spit and say: “Who is he? No one is worth anything except Zosimas and his disciples.” Later, he began to run down them, too, and say: “No one but Makarios is worth anything.” And not long after, he again began to say: “Who is Makarios? He is a nothing,

Only Basil and Gregory are of worth.” And after a time, he also demeaned them, saying: “Who are Basil and Gregory? Only Peter and Paul are worth anything.” I told him, “And shortly you will reject them.” Believe me, after a short time he started saying, “Who are Peter and Paul? Nobodies. Only the Holy Trinity is worthwhile.” Thereafter, he showed arrogance towards God Himself, and thereby lost his mind. For this reason, my brethren, we must struggle against the first form of pride, so that we do not shortly fall to total pride.

Now, there is also pride of a worldly kind and of a monastic kind. Worldly pride obtains when one is arrogant on account of his brother, thinking himself richer, more attractive, better dressed, or more gallant than he. So, when we ourselves are caught in vanity over such things, or think that our monastery is bigger or more wealthy, or that we have many brothers, we should know that we are still in the thick of worldly pride. Moreover, it happens that at times one is vain about various natural charisma. Heed what I mean: Someone shows vanity because he has a good voice or sings beautifully, or is skilled and performs with diligence and precision and serves unpretentiously. These are more refined forms of pride than the foregoing, but they too, nevertheless, belong to the realm of worldly pride.

One has monastic pride if he is vainglorious about doing vigils, or when he thinks himself pious, virtuous, or illustrious. It so happens, many times, that one will humble himself in order to be praised. These things belong to the realm of monastic pride. It is preferable, of course, given that all are prideful, to show pride with regard to monastic things than worldly ones. Note, then, that we have said what the first form of pride is, as well as the second; similarly, we have said what worldly and monastic pride are. Let us now learn what the two forms of humility are.

The first kind of humility is when someone considers his brother wiser and in all ways better than himself and, in a word, as that holy one said, to consider oneself “worse than all others.” The second kind of humility is for one to attribute his every success and every accomplishment to the Grace of God. This is the perfect humility that the saints had. This humility is created in the soul as a natural result of faith and the subservient keeping of the commandments of God. Just as the branches of trees producing much fruit are bent by this fruit downward, while barren branches that produce no fruit grow high and stand upright—indeed, some trees, since their branches grow straight up, produce no fruit, though if one takes rocks and affixes them to the branches, pulling them downward, then they will bear fruit—thus it is with the soul. When it is made humble, it produces fruit; and the more fruit that it produces, so much more is it humbled. Hence, the saints, the closer they draw to God, the more they see themselves as sinners.

### The Humility of the Saints

I remember once a certain nobleman from Gaza who, hearing us speaking of humility and saying that the closer one is to God, the more sinful he considers himself, was surprised and asked: "How does that come to be?" And not knowing, he wished to learn. I said to him, "Sir, tell me how you view yourself when you are in your city?" He said to me: "I consider myself one of the principals and an influential citizen of the city." I said to him: "If you were to leave and go to Caesarea, how would you view yourself there?" He said: "I would see myself as a most lowly and insignificant man among the local noblemen." I said: "If you leave and go to Antioch, how will you think of yourself?" He told me: "I would think of myself as an uncouth villager." I said to him: "If you go to Constantinople, in the presence of the Emperor, how would you see yourself there?" He said to me: "I would feel like a pauper." And I then said: "Now you see precisely what the saints are like. The nearer they are to God, so much the more they see themselves as sinners."

For this reason, when Abraham beheld the Lord, he called himself *dust and ashes*. (Gen 18:27). And Isaiah said, *Oh, how wretched and unclean I am*. (Isa 6:5). The same thing occurred with Daniel. When he was in the lions' den and Avvakoum came, holding food and saying, "Take the food that God has sent you," what did Daniel say? *God has remembered me*. (Dan 6:16). Do you see what humility he had in His heart? Though he found himself in the lions' den and they did not disturb him, and not just one time, but also a second time, after all that he said with astonishment: *God remembered me*.

Do you see the humility of the saints? Do you see the humble sentiments that they nourished in their hearts? Out of humility, avoiding glory, even when sent by God to the aid of other men, the saints resisted. For just as someone wearing a pure silk garment dodges, when a soiled rag is thrown at him, so as not to soil his expensive clothing, so the saints, clothed with virtues, evaded human glory, so as not to be fouled by it. Those who desire glory are like unto a naked person who seeks to find some rag or whatever to cover his nakedness. And such is a person who is naked of virtues, who seeks after the glory of men. Therefore, when the saints were appointed by God to help others, out of humility they did not agree to do so. Rather, Moses, for one, said: *I beseech thee, Lord, choose another who is able;*

*I am weak in speech, and slow of tongue*. (Exo 4:10). And Jeremiah the Prophet, on his part, said: *I am a child*. (Jer 1:6). And every one of the saints achieved this humility, as we have said, by the faithful application of the commandments. No one, however, can express with words how this humility is formed within the soul of man, unless he learns it by the experience of the ascetic life. **With words, one cannot learn it.**

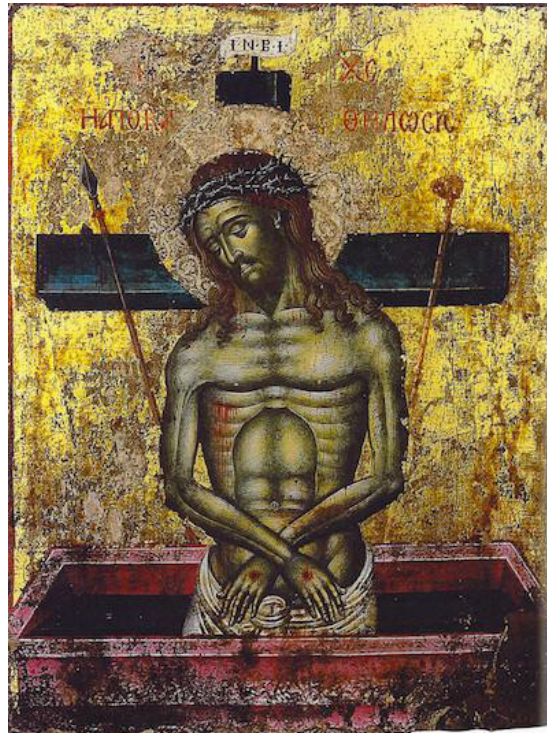
### The Path to Humility

Abba Zosimas was once speaking about humility and a sophist who was there, listening to what was being said, wanted to know precisely what he was talking about. [A sophist was, in ancient Greek and Roman society, an intellectual or teacher who used the methods of philosophy to teach the precepts of virtuous living. *Trans.*] He asked the Abba: "Tell me how

it is that you call yourself a sinner? Do you not know that you are a holy man? Do you not know that you have virtues? Do you not see that you keep the commandments? How, doing all of this, can you be a sinner?" The Elder, however, could not find a way to reply. He told him only: "I do not know how to explain it, but this is how I feel: sinful." But the sophist persisted, wanting to know how such a thing could be. And the Elder, with his holy simplicity, said: "Do not misconstrue me, I truly am a sinner."

As soon as I saw that the Elder did not know how to respond, I said to him: "I wonder if, perhaps, this is similar to the knowledge of philosophy or medicine; that is, slowly, as the physician or philosopher comes to learn well his art and how to apply it, the practice of philosophy or medicine becomes for him an entrenched and automatic ability incorporated into his person, though he cannot say or explain how he came to acquire that ability. Slowly, as I said, the soul acquires this ability through active application. So it is, after this fashion, with humility; somehow, **by the keeping of the commandments, this entrenched quality comes about, without one being able to explain it.**" The moment that Abba Zosimas heard this, he immediately embraced me with joy and said: "You grasped it; it is just as you say." This also satisfied the sophist, and he accepted the explanation.

While, on the one hand, the ancient Elders have told us some things about what humility is, on the other hand, no one can portray in words that quality which is created within the soul by humility.



When Abba Agathon (4<sup>th</sup> century) was near death and the brothers said to him, "Are you afraid, Father?" he told them: "For the whole of my life, I have done what I could to observe the commandments, but I am a man. How do I know if my deeds pleased God? For God judges in one way and man in another." Note, now, how this Elder opened our eyes, that we might comprehend humility, and how he showed us the way to achieve it. However, what its nature is and how the soul acquires it, as I have many times said, no one can say; nor can we grasp it with our logical minds, except if the soul itself, by means of practicing it, is made worthy to learn of it. Yet the Fathers have told us what it is that can bestow it on man. Indeed, it is said in the writings of the Elders that a brother inquired of a certain Elder, saying: "What is humility?" And the Elder said: "Humility is a great and divine work. And the path that leads to humility is that of bodily labors that beget understanding; of considering oneself lower than any created thing; and, yet again, of praying without ceasing." This is the path that takes one to humility. The nature of humility, however, is divine and beyond comprehension.

[Note: Bodily labors, however heavy and exhausting they may be, do not by themselves lead to humility, nor do they have value in and of themselves; rather, they constitute a means for the acquisition of spiritual poverty and purity.]

#### Bodily Labors and Lowliness of Mind

Why, however, does he say that bodily labors lead the soul to humility? For what reason are bodily labors a virtue of the soul? Because, as we noted earlier, it is by considering oneself below every created thing that one wars against the first kind of pride. For how can one consider himself more important than his brother, or become prideful over something or denigrate someone, when he thinks himself lower than all creation?

And similarly, it is obvious that *unceasing prayer* wages war against the second kind of pride, since it is crystal clear that a pious man, a reverent person, since he knows that the soul can achieve no good thing without the help and protection of God, does not cease to ask God to have mercy on him. Moreover, one who prays unceasingly, even if he is capable of achieving something, knows with Whose strength he achieves it. Therefore, he cannot become prideful or attribute it to his own strength, but attributes to God every achievement, always thanking and beseeching Him, fearing that he might lose God's aid and that his own ailing and weak character might show forth. So, too, with the help of lowliness of mind, he prays, and with prayer he is made humble. And the more that he excels at something, so much the more he becomes humble; and to the extent that he is made humble, he is aided and flourishes under the power of lowliness of mind.

Why, then, does the Elder say that bodily labor brings about lowliness of mind? What relationship does bodily labor have with the disposition of the soul?

I will explain this to you: As St. Gregory says, When the soul fell away from the keeping of the commandments of God due to disobedience, it gave itself over to wretchedness, and to the love of pleasure and self-sufficiency, which lead to spiritual delusion; having come to love the things of the body, in a certain way it identified itself with the body, becoming wholly carnal: *My Spirit shall certainly not remain among these men forever, because they are flesh.* (Gen 6:3). From then on, therefore, this wretched soul has suffered together with the body and conforms with all that it does.

This is why the Elder said that bodily labor leads to lowliness of mind. Wherefore, the proclivities of the soul of a healthy man differ from those of an ill man, those of a hungry man from one who is quelled of thirst or hunger. And again, similarly, the qualities of the soul of a man who rides a horse differ from those of one seated on a donkey, those of one seated on a throne from a man seated on the ground, and those of one well dressed from one dressed in rags.

Labor, therefore, humbles the soul. And when the body is humbled, the soul is humbled with it. Thus did the aforementioned Elder rightly say that bodily labor leads to humility. And thus it is that, when Evagrius was assailed by blasphemy, (in that he was aware that blasphemy comes forth from pride and that when the body is humbled the soul is humbled with it), for forty whole days he remained outside, without shelter, until, like a wild animal, as his biographer says, he was covered by ticks. He did not undertake this effort to cure his blasphemy, but to evoke humility. So the Elder was correct in saying that bodily labor leads to humility.

May God, Who is good, grant us humility, for it delivers a man from great evils and protects him from great temptations.



When God created man, He sowed something divine within him: a certain kind of reason, warm and bright, illuminating his *nous* (*the eye, or energy of the soul*) and showing him how to distinguish between good and evil. This is called conscience, and is the natural law. The Patriarchs [*Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc.*] and all the saints followed the law, that is, the law of conscience, before the written law was given; and they were pleasing to God. However, since—through the advance of sin—natural law was buried in the ground and trampled upon by men, we needed the written law, the holy prophets and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. All this in order to rediscover and to rebuild it, to reignite that spark ... by keeping His holy commandments.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

## SIGNS OF APOSTASY

Source: "Archbishop Averky: One Man in the Face of Apostasy," from "Orthodox Word"—1986; on the teachings of the ever-memorable Holy Hierarch Archbishop Averky (+1976) of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery.

### Party Politics

Archbishop Averky saw that, once the savor of Orthodoxy is lost and the Church comes to be regarded first of all as an earthly organization, membership in the Mystical Body of Christ becomes confused with membership in one or another administrative church party. People's lives may then be ruined under the pretext of "cleaning up the Church" if these people do not seem advantageous to the organization. Clergy, lay people and monastics are pitted against and made to distrust each other in order to protect the worldly interests of their respective parties. One church group may split off from another and seek to legitimize its position with any number of legal and canonical formulas.

Various church parties may join to form "super-parties" in order to make themselves feel more legitimate; they may speak of their outward unity as if this represents the true spiritual unity of the Church, but they betray how merely political this unity actually is when they dismiss or use polemics against those Orthodox groups which have not joined their organizations. Those with a "party mentality" may lose the very idea of sanctity, glorifying church figures primarily because they are "recognized" by their particular party or are its most prominent spokesmen. "Canonicity," a major weapon in party polemics, comes to be manipulated quite arbitrarily and becomes wrongly confused with one party's "recognition" by other parties. Accordingly, one appears to become "canonical" when one uses the most effective propaganda.

Archbishop Averky was repulsed by this realm of what he called "party politics," seeing that it had nothing to do with basic Christianity.

Although party politics have indeed reached an extreme in these last times *when the love of many grows cold* (Mt 24:12), the "party mentality" is not, of course, new to the modern age: it is a common tendency of the fallen, carnal side of humanity. Even St. Paul had to deal with it when writing to the church at Corinth: *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in*

*the name of Paul? While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?* (1 Cor 1:12-13, 3:4).

To make the Church a tool of political intrigues, Archbishop Averky said, is "to subject the eternal to the temporal, the heavenly to the earthly, the holy to the sinful." In his article Holy Zeal, he stated further:

"And there is likewise a false, lying zeal, behind the mask of which is concealed the foaming of ordinary human passions—most frequently pride, love of power and honor, and the interests of party politics like that which plays the leading role in political struggles, and for which there can be no place in spiritual life, in public church life, but which unfortunately is often to be encountered in our time and is a chief instigator of every imaginable quarrel and disturbance in the Church, the managers and instigators of which often hide themselves behind some kind of supposed idealism but in reality pursue only their own

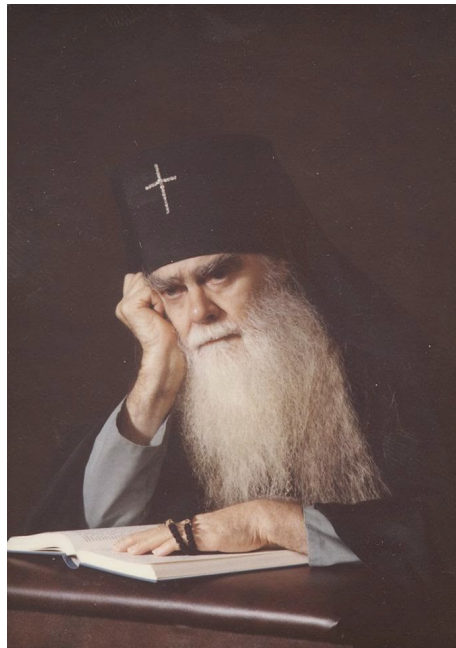
personal aims, striving to please not God but their own self-concern, and being zealous not for God's glory but for their own glory and the glory of the colleagues and partisans of their party. All of this, it goes without saying, is profoundly foreign to true holy zeal, hostile to it, is sinful and criminal, for it only compromises our Holy Faith and Church!"

"The Church," emphasized Archbishop Averky in another place, "was given to us for the salvation of our souls and for nothing else! We cannot make it a tool or an arena for the play of our passions and for the settling of our personal accounts."

As far as Archbishop Averky was concerned, party politics were boring no matter what party was involved. They were hardly worth giving one's life for—

giving up the chance for a wife and family as he had done when becoming a monk. Ironically, it was precisely his lack of unanimity with those of a "party mentality" that made him the victim of their politics. He was dismissed as a permanent member of his council of bishops because he refused to be guided by a "party-line" rather than by his own conscience. Seeing that party politics had infiltrated not only other groups, but his own as well, he once told one of his former seminarians, "does it not follow from this that the grace of the Holy Spirit is leaving our synod?"

Still, it may be wondered why Archbishop Averky spoke so openly about the "uninspiring" phenomenon of party politics. Would it not have been better just to pretend that all the other Orthodox groups did not exist and to



Archbishop Averky  
(+1976)

confine one's attention to one's own circle? No, for Archbishop Averky, this would have been a shirking of his responsibility as an Apostle of Christ. Party politics were poisoning the mission of Orthodoxy in the Free World, turning converts away and making believers listen to the whispers of the devil rather than to the words of Life. To keep silent would have been a crime, since if this issue was not addressed openly, how else would spiritual seekers find the true essence of Orthodoxy, which is inherently above party politics? How would they experience the living reality of the true Church, which, as Archbishop Averky said, is "the close-knit spiritual union of all who truly believe in Christ?"

"Only holy zeal for God, for Christ," wrote the archbishop, "without any admixture of any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning politics, must guide us in all deeds and actions."

### Role-Playing

Archbishop Averky detected another sign that Orthodox churches, even when they adhered to all the outward forms, were losing Orthodoxy's savour. This was the fact that Orthodox leaders and spokesmen were having to play "roles."

Role-playing occurs when small men, out of worldly ambition, want to take on positions which have been instituted in the Church for men of higher spiritual calibre. In most cases, those playing roles, having no real spiritual authority themselves, have to acquire this authority outwardly by resorting to what Archbishop Averky called "man-pleasing." This was spoken of by St. Paul, who in the first years of Christianity had to point out the distinction between the true representatives of Christ and the "man-pleasers:" *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Gal 1:10). But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, Who trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory... (1 Thess 2:4-6).*

In "man-pleasing," one must flatter the right people and, conversely, destroy potential opponents at the right junctures; one must "take into consideration" influential people, regardless of whether this accords with one's conscience. Finally, one must give out awards and ranks and publicize this, thereby binding oneself to alies by mutual "recognition" rather than by heartfelt love. "How many," wrote Archbishop Averky, "give their hearts to the distraction of exalted callings, ranks, orders and awards, being ready to acquire them by any means at all, even by trampling down their consciences."

Archbishop Averky indicated that role-playing may also bring about hostility and divisions in the Church:

"To start the cruel hostility and dissension which cut off at the root the peaceful course of parish life and break up and destroy the parish it is sufficient for just one such person to appear in a parish—a person who imagines that he is the 'hub of the universe,' that everyone should take account only of him and obey him in everything, that all his judgements and evaluations are infallible and without error... For people of this sort it is as if the voice of conscience does not exist and they do not recognize the Law of God: they are capable of every sort of tendentious distortion of the truth, of any sort of lie and malicious slander against those people who do not agree with their conceited inclinations, who do not approve of their attitude of self-satisfaction and their unrestrained desire the play the leading role everywhere, even if those people by lawfully appointed and truly good pastors and men of prayer, of whom there are fewer and fewer nowadays, and who ought to be valued, not persecuted with lies and slander for purely personal, conceited reasons, which is a foul and repulsive sin in the eyes of God.

"It is just such people, possessed by the mad passion of self-love, who are being used by the powers of darkness, the servants of the coming Antichrist, to disrupt and destroy the Church, starting with its individual parishes... They are genuinely living without a conscience!"

In role-playing, a person acts in the way the world expects one in a "respected" position to act. This is the opposite of that which characterizes the authentic modern "links" with Orthodox traditions: a complete naturalness, lack of pretense, and freedom of spirit, with no attempt to fit into some prescribed category.

Of one role-playing church leader, Archbishop Averky said that he wore a "mask." "There are such hypocrites," he wrote, "who like to appear saintly and pious, when, in fact, they are not at all that way, but they will have to answer to God for they attempt to deceive the trusting, and they do so for personal gain."

Role-playing may take many forms. One may take on the role of an authority on spiritual life or even of a "Holy Elder," misapplying lofty standards to the low spiritual calibre of modern times. Using St. Paul's phrase, Archbishop Averky identified this as "zeal without understanding—zeal which loses its value because of the absence in it of a most important Christian virtue: discernment, and therefore, in place of profit can bring harm."

Another kind of role-playing is to be found in false spokesmen of Orthodoxy. We have already discussed the "theologians" of a "restored," innovative Orthodoxy. Such false teachers are to be found, however, not only in the more "liberal" circles, but also among the "patristic experts" and "scholars" of the "conservatives" and "traditionalists." False Orthodox spokesmen may make one feel that one has finally "figured out" Orthodoxy, but most often they leave



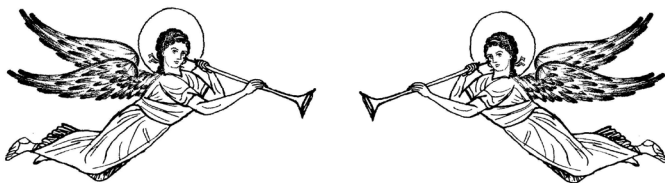
one's soul unmoved and unchanged. Of them, Archbishop Averky remarked:

"Alas! How few people there are in our times, even among the 'educated', and at times even among contemporary 'theologians' and those in the ranks of clergy, who understand correctly what Orthodox is and wherein its essence lies. They approach this question in an utterly external, formal manner and resolve it too primitively, even naively, overlooking its depths completely and not at all seeing the fullness of its spiritual contents."

Once, when some clergymen were attacking the memory of a 14<sup>th</sup> century saint because he did not fit in with their concept of "traditionalism," Archbishop Averky called them "puppy theologians." They were followers (to borrow a term coined by Fr. Seraphim Rose) of "external wisdom." The so-called "liberal" and false "traditionalist" Orthodox teachers were, in Archbishop Averky's view, but two sides of the same coin. They both had a touch of modern criticism, a love of glitter and an attitude of "knowing better," having received Orthodoxy by doing research and forming "reasonable" conclusions rather than by learning from its living vessels. Outward contact with a genuine bearer of tradition is not enough; there must be a loving kinship and "oneness of soul" with that bearer.

The presence or lack of this kinship, it is true, may be hard to discern from the outside, especially when one is not aware of the world of piety in which a true carrier of tradition has been born. For example, one might at first think that Archbishop Averky, from the bold, unequivocal tone of his writings, had the attitude of "knowing better." However, when one comes to understand the spirit of his first and second generation spiritual fathers, Theophan of Poltava and Theophan the Recluse, then one will see that he was entirely in their tradition, that he received everything from them.

Like all true Fathers of the Church, Archbishop Averky taught others not because he had an inflated view of his own knowledge or significance, but because he felt personally responsible for the priceless treasure that had been passed on to him from holy teachers.



**S**in reigns ruthlessly among the people of today, smiting both the body and soul with its death-wielding venom. And for so long as sin maintains its dominion, there can be no liberation or deliverance from the world from all the evils that best it, and it is even meaningless to talk of its prosperity and preservation.

Archbishop Averky

## LIFE AFTER DEATH

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE FIRST 40 DAYS AFTER DEATH

*A Homily by St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco.*

**L**imitless and without consolation would have been our sorrow for close ones who are dying, if the Lord had not given us eternal life. Our life would be pointless if it ended with death. What benefit would there then be from virtue and good deed? Then they would be correct who say: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

But man was created for immortality, and by His resurrection Christ opened the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom, of eternal blessedness for those who have believed in Him and have lived righteously. Our earthly life is a preparation for the future life, and this preparation ends with our death. *It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.* (Heb 9:27). Then a man leaves all his earthly cares; the body disintegrates, in order to rise anew at the General Resurrection. Often this spiritual vision begins in the dying even before death, and while still seeing those around them and even speaking with them, they see what others do not see.

But when it leaves the body, the soul finds itself among other spirits, good and bad. Usually it inclines toward those which are more akin to it in spirit, and if while in the body it was under the influence of certain ones, it will remain in dependence upon them when it leaves the body, however unpleasant they may turn out to be upon encountering them.

For the course of two days the soul enjoys relative freedom and can visit places on earth which were dear to it, but on the third day it moves into other spheres. At this time (the third day), it passes through legions of evil spirits which obstruct its path and accuse it of various sins, to which they themselves had tempted it. According to various revelations there are twenty such obstacles, the so-called *toll-houses*, at each of which one or another form of sin is tested; after passing through one the soul comes upon the next one, and only after successfully passing through all of them can the soul continue its path without being immediately cast into Gehenna. How terrible these demons and their toll-houses are may be seen in the fact that the Mother of God Herself, when informed by the Archangel Gabriel of Her approaching death, answering Her prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared from heaven to receive the soul of His Most Pure Mother and conduct it to heaven. Terrible indeed is the third day for the soul of the departed, and for this reason it especially needs prayers then for itself.

Then, having successfully passed through the toll-houses and bowed down before God, the soul for the course of 37

more days visits the heavenly habitations and the abysses of hell, not knowing yet where it will remain, and only on the fortieth day is its place appointed until the resurrection of the dead. Some souls find themselves (after the forty days) in a condition of foretasting eternal joy and blessedness, and others in fear of the eternal torments which will come in full after the Last Judgment. Until then, changes are possible in the condition of souls, especially through offering for them the Bloodless Sacrifice (commemoration at the Liturgy), and likewise by other prayers.

How important commemoration at the Liturgy is may be seen in the following occurrence: Before the uncovering of the relics of St. Theodosius of Chernigov (1896), the priest-monk (the renowned Starets Alexis of the Goloseyevsky Hermitage, of the Kiev-Caves Lavra, who died in 1916) was conducting the re-vesting of the relics; having become weary while sitting by the relics, dozed off and saw before him the Saint, who told him: "I thank you for laboring with me. I beg you also, when you will serve the Liturgy, to commemorate my parents." And he gave their names (Priest Nikita and Maria). "How can you, O Saint, ask my prayers, when you yourself stand at the heavenly Throne and grant to people God's mercy?" The priest-monk asked. "Yes, that is true," replied St. Theodosius, "but the offering at the Liturgy is more powerful than my prayer." Therefore, *panikhidas* (i.e., *Trisagion* Prayers for the Dead) and prayer at home for the dead are beneficial to them, as are good deeds done in their memory, such as alms or contributions to the church. But especially beneficial for them is commemoration at the Divine Liturgy.

There have been many appearances of the dead and other occurrences which confirm how beneficial is the commemoration of the dead. Many who died in repentance, but who were unable to manifest this while they were alive, have been freed from tortures and have obtained repose. In Church prayers are ever offered for the repose of the dead, and on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, in the kneeling prayers at vespers, there is even a special petition "for those in hell."

Every one of us who desires to manifest his love for the dead and give them real help, can do this best of all through

prayer for them, and particularly by commemorating them at the Liturgy, when the particles which are cut out for the living and the dead are let fall into the Blood of the Lord with the words: *Wash away, O Lord, the sins of those here commemorated by Thy Precious Blood and by the prayers of Thy saints.* We can do nothing better or greater for the dead than to pray for them, offering commemoration for them at the Liturgy. Of this they are always in need, and especially during those forty days when the soul of the deceased is proceeding on its path to the eternal habitations. The body feels nothing then: it does not see its close ones who have assembled, does not smell the fragrance of the flowers, does not hear the funeral orations. But the soul senses the prayers offered for it and is grateful to those who make them and is spiritually close to them.

O relatives and close ones of the dead! Do for them what is needful for them and within your power. Use your money not for outward adornment of the coffin and grave, but in order to help those in need, in memory of your close ones who have died, for churches, where prayers for them are offered. Show mercy to the dead, take care of their souls.

Before us all stands the same path, and how we shall then wish that we would be remembered in prayer! Let us therefore be ourselves merciful to the dead. As soon as someone has reposed, immediately call or inform a priest, so he can read the prayers appointed to be read over all Orthodox Christians after death. Try, if it be possible, to have the funeral in Church and to have

the Psalter read over the deceased until the funeral. Most definitely arrange at once for the serving of the forty-day memorial, that is, daily commemoration at the Liturgy for the course of forty days.

If the funeral is in a church where there are no daily services, the relatives should take care to order the forty-day memorial wherever there are daily services. It is likewise good to send contributions for commemoration to monasteries, as well as to Jerusalem, where there is constant prayer at the holy places.

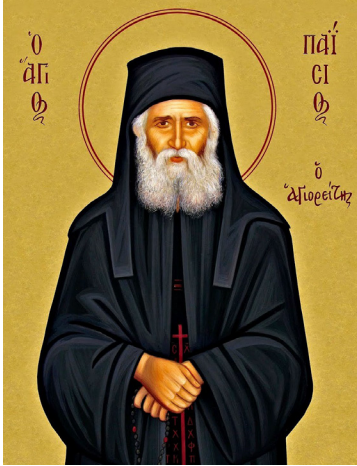
Let us take care for those who have departed into the other world before us, in order to do for them all that we can, remembering that *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*



**St. John Maximovitch serving in Tunis, surrounded by the Uncreated Light (1952)**

## ST. PAISIOS' SEVEN TANGERINES

By Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki.



It was February, 1988. It was very cold in Karyes (capital of Holy Mountain, *Ed.*). It was high above sea level. The humidity usually hampered our movements. But now the weather was dry. The wind was blowing and it was enjoyable if you were suitably dressed. The evening was falling. The sun had just hid beyond the mountain. Elder Paisios

and I were walking along a path. We met Fr. Kallinikos from Koutlousiou skete on our way.

We were approaching the skete's wooden bridge and were surrounded only by bare, lifeless hazel-trees with their bare branches.

"Hmm. Who brought me tangerines?" Elder Paisios wondered with surprise.

In the distance, over sixty-five yards away, we could make out the door of the elder's kallyva (hut, *Ed.*) in the yard, along with something red—or, to be more exact, something orange—hanging on the doorknob. We couldn't see what exactly was hanging there because of the distance.

A little while later we approached the elder's kallyva. In front of ourselves we indeed could see a large transparent, orange cellophane bag full of tangerines. How had he spotted them from so far away? How had he figured out that those were tangerines and not oranges, for example? After all, the bag was orange, and there could have been apples in it!

"Ah, I adore tangerines!" Elder Paisios said with obviously feigned greed in his voice. "I'll take three tangerines... No, let me take five... No, if there is such a brilliant opportunity, I'd better take seven!" he said with a charming smile.

"Fr. Kallinikos, please take the other tangerines and bring them to Elder Joseph who lives in front of my kallyva."

Elder Joseph was an elderly monk who struggled at Koutlousiou Skete. Though he was 103 years old, he would work in his kitchen garden every day.

Fr. Kallinikos received Fr. Paisios's blessing and left. Then Elder Paisios and I entered his little cell. There he asked me to read one of his handwritten texts. About twenty minutes passed and we heard someone knock at the kallyva's entrance door. I thought it was some pilgrim wishing to speak to the elder.

"Geronda, shall I open the door?" I asked.

"You'd better not do it. If they are curious pilgrims, they will leave soon. But if they are suffering and spiritually hungry people, they will insist on meeting with me."

We continued our reading. A few minutes later someone knocked at the door again.

"Geronda, what shall we do this time?" I asked again.

A strip of bedsheet was hanging over his window instead of a curtain.

"Look at them from the side so that they can't see you. And tell me how many of them there are."

"I can't count them. I can't see them from here," I replied.

"Well, did you really learn mathematics? What did you do in America for so many years? Let's wait. They'll knock again."

And he was right. A few minutes later the pilgrims knocked at the door for the third time.

"Now I'll go and try to count them. True, I didn't finish primary school, but I'll manage," he said to me.

The elder stood up and opened the door of the kallyva.

"Guys, why have you arrived at this time? What have you come to me for?"

"Geronda, we want to talk with you a little. May we speak to you?"

"Yes, you may. But let me treat you to something first. How many of you are here? One, two... seven. Let's see, what can we find in our 'shop' right now."

Elder Paisios stepped back into his cell and soon came out with seven tangerines.

"What a marvelous person he is!" I thought with surprise. "How did he know how many tangerines he should leave for himself? Did he foresee this? Did God enlighten him, while he was unconscious of it?"

"Where have you come from?" the elder wondered.

"We are from Athens. Bruce and John are from the USA."

"From the USA? So if we treat them to tangerines, the whole world will laugh at us! Let me look for something American in the 'supermarket'."

He left again and soon returned with a packet of American biscuits and a bag full of many varieties of nuts of a well-known American brand. Stunned, the young men expressed their amazement and were deeply impressed.

"Geronda, what does the *semantron* (a percussion instrument used in monasteries to summon the monastics to prayer, *Ed.*) beaten at Orthodox monasteries symbolize?" one of them asked timidly.

"I don't know what it symbolizes. And it doesn't matter. The one who multiplies his God-given talents instead of beating the *semantron* is worth a lot. Listen, it is late and it's time for you to leave. I would like to make only one remark: The problem with Americans is that in English they always capitalize the pronoun 'I', while we Greeks

don't always capitalize our pronoun 'ἐγώ' [meaning "I" in Greek, *Ed.*]."

The pilgrims laughed at the funny remark and the Americans asked:

"What does it mean? What ought we to do?"

"My children, remove the word 'ego' from your vocabulary! Egoism is a great enemy of ours. All of us without exception should struggle against it."

Nobility, gentleness and refinement are among the elements of holiness. Elder Paisios neither spoke about wisdom, nor pronounced theological words, nor spoke about supernatural revelations. But he did fill the hearts of all pilgrims. He would think soberly, hiding his gift of grace, treating his visitors in a courteous, beautiful, and original manner, instructing them with his words and comforting them by his presence. He would convince everybody of the greatest things without trying to convince anybody of anything. You would be enlightened, rejoice and find consolation with him. You would feel like Mary at Jesus's feet or like the apostles on Mount Tabor (the mountain of the Transfiguration), and you would want to stay in his cell forever.



**W**e must take advantage of our time and use it wisely, so that we enrich ourselves in Christ unto eternal life. When we waste our time aimlessly, without making spiritual gains, we depart from this life empty-handed. ...

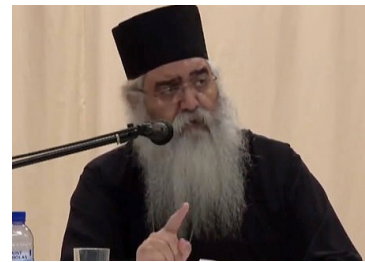
For this reason, we should try to do something good each day with the time our Christ gives to us. For example, it is beneficial when we carry out the instructions of our spiritual father who advises us: "My child, try to complete your morning prayers, do your prostrations and read the Gospel. In the evening read the Supplicatory Canon. Before retiring at night, say your prayers again [like the Small Compline] and do your prostrations. Remember God constantly! Always keep Him in mind. Say the Jesus Prayer and expel evil thoughts."

When someone carries out these directions, he fills the page of each day with earnings. If, however, you never go consult with a spiritual father, and he does not put things in order for you, then—as the spool of life is slowly reeled in—you will reach the end of your rope, and you will not have many things in your possession. This is why a person's life is enriched when he is obedient to a spiritual father. At some point in the future, such a person will appear before God full of virtues, as a tree whose branches are heavy and abounding with plentiful fruit."

Holy Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona,  
The Enlightener of America (+2019)

## SHOULD WE SEND OUR KIDS TO SCHOOL IF THEY ARE REQUIRING THEM TO WEAR MASKS?

*By Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou, from a Q&A session held by the Metropolitan on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, in the yard of the chapel dedicated to Panaghia Katafigiotissa, at Platanistasa, Cyprus. Translated and transcribed by "Orthodox Ethos," <https://orthodoxethos.com/>.*



**Q**uestion: They want our kids, from 6 years up, to wear masks in school. What should we do?

**A**nswer: Listen, my brother Aristeides, you who ask this good question: "Our children and our eyes!" [A Greek saying meaning "all your attention and care on your kids!"]. "Your kids and your eyes!" Both the [human] eyes and the mouth wish for a face that will see God—without a mask.

The ancient Greeks—do you know where they would put on masks? In the tragedies (theatre). And the comedies.

If our children grow accustomed to masks from now, in twenty years we'll have a society of demons. Did you hear that? Not of humans: of demons! My opinion is this: find a way so that your children may never wear a mask. This is my opinion. I'm speaking to you responsibly. It is better that they remain without the so-called education of Europe for a few months, or a few years. And what an education! What a joke! You should do school at home. Did you hear? School at home! Do churches at home. Do pharmacies at home.

You will see that soon they will be telling you that they have run out of medicine. They want to push society over into chaos, into terror. They want us to be scared, *chaosed*—see what a beautiful word the old Cypriots have, "chaosed." It's when you don't know what is happening with you: *Deep calleth unto deep*. (Pss 41:7). It is all so that we'll say to them, "The vaccine! Please give us a vaccine!" So, they are after our will, they are after our freedom: in brief, they are after our soul. It's not simply the European "rights" that they want to steal from us. Do not be deceived. They are after our immortal soul!



**S**in has reigned over us and the inventor and father of sin has lorded it over all who dwell under the sky, provoking the transgression of the divine laws. In Christ, however, we see human nature, enjoying freedom of access to God.

St. Cyril of Alexandria

## Λιτανείες και Ασθένειες

**Κάποτε οι Λιτανείες Σταματούσαν Λοιμικές Ασθένειες. Προσοχή: Σήμερα Μας Λένε Μερικοί Αρχιερείς Ότι Μεταδίδουν Ασθένειες....**

ΠΗΓΗ: Έπικαιρο άρθρο από το «Ρωμαίικο Όδοιπορικό», 10 Αύγουστου, 2020.

Με λίγα λόγια ο Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αθηνών και πάσης Ελλάδος αυτό μας λέει.

Με υπεύθυνη θέση, η Έκκλησία της Ελλάδος τηρεί την ίδια γραμμή των απαγορεύσεων για το «υπέρτατο αγαθό» που μας έδωσε από τον Θεό, την σωματική Υγεία. Για την πνευματική υγεία ούτε λόγος βέβαια... Ούτε από τον Αρχιεπίσκοπο, ούτε από κανέναν από την Ίερά Σύνοδο.

Όσο για τους υπόλοιπους Μητροπολίτες, εκτός ελαχίστων εξαιρέσεων, με κάτι αδύναμες και εκ του ασφαλούς αντιδράσεις, «σιγή ιχθύος», μην τυχόν και στεναχωρήσουμε κανέναν, μην μας συμβεί και κανά κακό...

Και πώς να γίνει λόγος για πνευματική υγεία; Μήπως την έχουν οι ίδιοι;

Δυστυχώς περάσαμε στα χειρότερα, έχουμε την Δ.Ι.Σ. να προτρέχει των κυβερνώντων και να κάνει πρώτη συστάσεις για την αντιμετώπιση αυτού του τόσο «θανατηφόρου κοροναϊού», που όπου και αν βρεθούμε «μας κυνηγάει για να μας σκοτώσει». Είναι τόσο μεγάλη η άνησυχία της Έκκλησίας για εμάς, για



την υγεία μας, που προνόησε εδώ και μέρες για το θέμα αυτό, να κάνει λόγο «για λιτανείες χωρίς συνωστισμό και σύντομες σε διάρκεια». Έδώ πρέπει να ξέρετε, ότι ο κορονοϊός κυνηγά τις μεγάλες σε διάρκεια ακολουθίες, λιτανείες κ.λπ., αλλά όχι τις σύντομες σε διάρκεια...

Ο Άγιος Αρχιεπίσκοπός μας, κατά δήλωσή του, μας λέει πως είναι ευχαριστημένος και περήφανος που στάθηκε από την αρχή της εμφάνισής της «πανδημίας» στο πλευρό της υπεύθυνης κυβερνήσεως και ευτυχώς όχι στο πλευρό κάποιων με «υπερβάλλοντα ζήλο» Χριστιανών, που πιστεύουν ότι μέσα στους ναούς δεν υπάρχει κίνδυνος να κολλήσει ο άνθρωπος οποιαδήποτε ασθένεια ή ότι οι λιτανείες μπορούν να σταματήσουν μια πανδημία.

Αυτή είναι η υπεύθυνη και αγία αντιμετώπιση της πανδημίας από την πλευρά της Έκκλησίας μας και όχι μόνον αυτό. Κατά δήλωσή του, «έχουμε γίνει και

έπαινετο παράδειγμα σε όλόκληρη την οικουμένη», που «προστατεύσαμε το υπέρτατο αγαθό της ανθρώπινης ζωής και υγείας».

Έαν βγάξετε νόημα έσεεις, άλλο τόσο βγάξω και εγώ... «το υπέρτατο αγαθό της ανθρώπινης ζωής και υγείας»... ποιο είναι τελικά αυτό το αγαθό;

Βέβαια καταλαβαίνουμε τι θέλει να μας πει, όπως καταλαβαίνουμε και το τί του λένε κάθε φορά να μας λέει, αλλά μεγάλος άνθρωπος είναι, θα κάνει και κάποια «λαθάρια» και κάποιες φορές τὰ μερδεύει.

Μας λέει πάλι, ότι χωρίς τους ανθρώπους ούτε Πολιτεία υπάρχει ούτε Έκκλησία. Τον ρωτούμε λοιπόν, Έκκλησία χωρίς Χριστό υπάρχει; Διότι δεν είδαμε πουθενά να αναφέρει κάτι τέτοιο, εκτός και για τον Αρχιεπίσκοπο, Έκκλησία είναι το κτίσμα, ο ναός και όλα τα άλλα είναι φαντασίες μας και ζηλωτικές καταστάσεις που δεν έχουν θέση στο σήμερα, διότι τὰ πράγματα άλλαξαν και προχωράμε μπροστά.

Συνεχίζει την δήλωσή του: «Άποστολή της Έκκλησίας δεν είναι άλλη, από το να διακονεί τον άνθρωπο θυσιαστικά κ.λπ. για το πρόσωπό του και για την ύπαρξή του».

Για ποιο πρόσωπο έννοει, για αυτό με το φμίωτρο που μοιάζουμε σαν τὰ σκυλιά που τους το φορούν για να μην δαγκώσουν κάποιον άνθρωπο; Για ποιά ύπαρξη του, για μιὰ ύπαρξη χωρίς Χριστό, παραδομένη μόνο στην ύλη και στις ανθρώπινες δυνάμεις;

Είναι δυνατόν να έκστομίζονται τέτοιες δηλώσεις από έναν

Έλλη-νορθόδοξο Αρχιεπίσκοπο; Υπηρετεί την Έκκλησία αυτός ο άνθρωπος; Τόσο άθεολόγητος είναι ή τόσο ολιγόπιστος για να μην πω τελείως άπιστος, που παραδόθηκε στην υπηρεσία της άθλιας και αντίχριστης κυβερνήσεως που μας κυβερνά; Μιας κυβερνήσεως που συνεχίζει με υπέρτερο ζήλο το καταστροφικό έργο της προηγούμενης, με τελειωτικό σκοπό την πλήρη αποδόμηση της Πίστεώς μας και την υποταγή μας στις έπιταγές των παγκοσμιοποιητών.

Επιτέλους, θα βρεθούν κάποιοι Επίσκοποι παλληκάρια να ζητήσουν την καθαίρεσή του και την καθαίρεση όλων όσων στέκονται στο πλευρό του και στηρίζουν τις αντίχριστες θέσεις του; Και λέω καθαίρεσή τους, διότι πολλές έπιστολές έχουν σταλεί και στον ίδιο και στην Δ.Ι.Σ. για άλλαγή γραμμής και μετάνοια για όσα κάνουν και να πάψουν να συγχύζουν και να

πλανοῦν τοὺς πιστοὺς, μὲ τὶς νεοπατερικὲς ἐρημηνεῖες καὶ διδασκαλίες τους, ἀλλὰ κανένα ἀποτέλεσμα, ὅλους τοὺς ἔχουν γράψει στὰ παλαιὰ των ὑποδήματα.

Ὅλοι βλέπουμε καθαρὰ τὸν πόλεμο ποὺ ἔχουν στήσει οἱ ἀντίχριστες δυνάμεις ἐναντίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν πιστῶν, μὲ τὴν ἀπόλυτη συνεργασία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου καὶ τῆς ἀνιερῆς συνόδου, ποὺ ἀποδόμησαν καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ ἀποτελειώσουν ὅτι Ὁρθόδοξο ἔχει ἀπομείνει μέσα στὶς καρδιὲς καὶ συνειδήσεις τῶν πιστῶν.

Ἐναπομείναντες πιστοὶ ἀρχιερεῖς, ἱερεῖς, μοναχοὶ, μοναχὲς καὶ πιστὲ λαὲ πόσο ἀκόμα θὰ ὑπομένουμε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀντίχριστους καὶ Προδότες τῆς Πίστεώς μας καὶ Πατρίδος; Πόσο ἀκόμα θὰ τοὺς ἀφήνουμε νὰ δηλητηριάζουν τὶς ψυχές μας μὲ τὶς βλάσφημες καὶ προδοτικὲς τοὺς ἀποφάσεις, στερωῶντας μας τοὺς ναοὺς μας γιὰ τὴν λατρεία μας στὸν Κύριό μας, στερωῶντας μας τὴν συμμετοχὴ μας στὶς ἀκολουθίες καὶ στὴν Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας μας ὅπως πρέπει, χωρὶς φίμωτρα καὶ ἀποστάσεις καὶ γενικὰ ὅπως αὐτοὶ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν;

Δὲν βλέπουμε πὼς ἂν τοὺς ἀφήσουμε ἀνενόητους σὲ λίγο θὰ ἀπαγορεύσουν διὰ παντὸς ὅλες τὶς ἀκολουθίες, Θείες Λειτουργίες, μυστήρια κ.λπ. καὶ θὰ μετατρέψουν τοὺς ναοὺς μας σὲ ἀπλοὺς χώρους προσωπικῆς προσευχῆς καὶ αὐτὸ πάντα μὲ τὰ δικά τους μέτρα;

Πόσο μακρὰ εἶναι ὁ κίνδυνος νὰ μετατραποῦν οἱ ναοὶ μας στὸ μέλλον μὲ τὴν σημερινὴ ἀδράνεία μας, σὲ μουσεῖα ἢ τζαμιά βλέποντας τὴν μωαμεθανολατρεία ἀπὸ κάποιους ταγοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας; Μήπως ξεχάσαμε τὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο ποὺ κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή του σὲ hotspot, ἔβγαλε τὸ ἐγκόλπιο του γιὰ νὰ μὴν προσβάλλει τοὺς μωαμεθανούς;

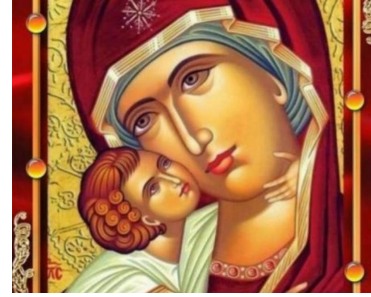
Ξεχάσαμε πόσες φορὲς χρησιμοποιήθηκε σὲ πόσες περιστάσεις ἢ ἴδια δικαιολογία σὲ σημεῖο τέτοιο ποὺ νὰ ἔχουν ἀποδομηθεῖ σωρεῖα ἀπὸ τὰ τῆς Πίστεώς μας;

Πότε θὰ βροντοφωνάξουμε ὅλοι μαζί γιὰ τὴν ἀντικατάστασή τους μήπως καὶ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἐπέμβει ὅπως Ἐκεῖνος γνωρίζει; Δὲν βλέπουμε τί ἔρχεται, δὲν πήραμε κανένα μάθημα ἀπὸ τὰ ὅσα δεινὰ μᾶς ἔχουν βρῆ μέχρι τώρα; Πὼς νὰ μεσιτεύσει ἡ Μεγαλόχαρη τῆς Τήνου, ἡ Παναγία ἢ Σουμελᾶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὅπου ὑπάρχει ναὸς ἀφιερωμένος στὴν κοίμησή της, ἀφοῦ ἀπαγορεύτηκε ἡ λιτάνευση τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ θαυματουργῶν εἰκόνων της;

Ἄς προσευχηθοῦμε ὅλοι μὲ τὶς μεσιτεῖες τῆς γλυκειᾶς μας Παναγίας, νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Κύριος καὶ νὰ φωτίσει κάποιους ἀπ' τοὺς πλανεμένους ταγοὺς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὴν Ὁρθὴ Πίστη καὶ παίρνοντας τὰ ἡνία, νὰ ὀδηγήσουν τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο λαὸ μας, στὴν μετάνοια, στὸ φῶς καὶ στὴν ἀληθινὴ Πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας! Ἀμήν!

## Τὰ Χαρακτηριστικά τοῦ Προσώπου τῆς Παναγίας

Ἅγιος Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης.



Ἐῖχε τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ σώματος μέσον καὶ σύμμετρον, δὲν ἐπαρουσιάζετο εἰς κάθε ἄνθρωπον ἢ το μακρὰν ἀπὸ τὸν γέλωτα καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ κάθε ταραχὴν καὶ θυμόν.

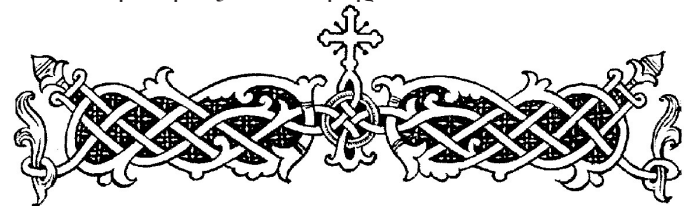
Τὸ χρῶμα τοῦ Θεοδόχου τῆς σώματος ἦτο ὅμοιο μὲ τὸ χρῶμα τοῦ σιταριοῦ. Εῖχε ξανθὰς τὰς τρίχας τῆς κεφαλῆς, εῖχεν ὀφθαλμοὺς πολλὰ ὠραίους, χρωματισμένους μὲ θεῖαν σεμνότητα, ὠραιομένους μὲ κόρας ὀξεῖς καὶ ὁμοίας μὲ τὴν ἐλαίαν καὶ καλλυνομένας μὲ βλεφαρίδας φαιδροπρεπεῖς.

Εῖχε τὰ ὀφρύδια μαῦρα, κυκλικῶς σχηματισμένα. Εῖχε τὴν μύτην ὁμαλὴν καὶ εὐθείαν.

Τὰ πανάμωμα χεῖλη τῆς ἦτον ἀνθηρά, λάμποντα κοσμίως μὲ ἐρυθρὸν χρῶμα καὶ γέμοντα ἀπὸ τὴν τῶν λόγων γλυκύτητα.

Εῖχε τὸ ἱεροπρεπὲς πρόσωπον ὀλίγον μακρὺ, εῖχε τὰς θεοδόχους χεῖρας τῆς μακρὰς καὶ τοὺς δακτύλους τῶν χειρῶν μακροὺς μὲ λεπτότητα.

Καὶ διὰ νὰ εἰποῦμεν καθολικῶς, ἡ Κυρία Θεοτόκος ἦτο κατὰ τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος γεμάτη τόση Θεῖαν Χάριν καὶ σεβασμιότητα, ὥστε ὅπου ὅστις ἔβλεπεν Αὐτήν, ἐλάμβανε εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν του κάποιον φόβον καὶ εὐλάβειαν καὶ χωρὶς νὰ Τὴν ἠξεύρη προτύτερα, ἐγνώριζεν ἀπὸ μόνον τὸν ἐξωτερικὸν χαρακτήρα τῆς ὅτι Αὕτη ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ Μήτηρ Θεοῦ...



Δὲν σοῦ λείπει ἡ εὐτυχία. Ὁ Χριστὸς σοῦ λείπει... Ἄν ὑπάρχει ἁμαρτία στὴ μέση, εὐτυχία δὲν ὑπάρχει. Δὲν δημιουργεῖ τὴν εὐτυχία τὸ χρῆμα, οὔτε τὴν δυστυχία ἢ φτώχεια. Ὁ Χριστὸς δημιουργεῖ τὴν εὐτυχία καὶ ὁ Διάβολος τὴν δυστυχία. Εἶναι ἄφρων ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἐπιδιώκει τὴν εὐτυχία, ἄνευ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερον εἶναι δυστυχημένοι, διότι εἶναι πνευματικὰ ἀποτυχημένοι καὶ ἀναζητοῦν τὴν χαρὰ στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἐφόσον ἡ πραγματικὴ χαρὰ βρῖσκεται στὴν ἀναμαρτησία.

**Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος (+1982)**

**Ὁ ἀείμνητος Ἱεροκλήρυκας τῶν καιρῶν μας**

## Ἑσεῖς τί Ζητᾶτε στή Ζωή σας;

ΠΗΓΗ: Περιοδικό Κυριακή, 30 Απριλίου 2017, γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μητροπολίτης πρώην Φλωρίνης κ.κ. Αὐγουστῖνος Καντιώτης, (+2010).

Ἐδῶ στὸ ναὸ παρουσιάζομαι σήμερα ἐνώπιόν σας, ἀδελφοί μου, γιὰ νὰ μιλήσω. Θὰ σᾶς παρακαλέσω νὰ κάνετε ὑπομονὴ λίγα λεπτά, γιὰ ν' ἀκούσετε λόγια ἀπλᾶ.

Ὅταν, ἀγαπητοί μου, συμβῆ κάπου ἔγκλημα, τὸ μέρος αὐτό, ὁ τόπος ποὺ σκοτώνεται ἄνθρωπος καὶ βιάζεται μὲ αἷμα, ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ἐκείνη ἀποκτᾶ κάποια ἀγριότητα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν ἀποφεύγουν· γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιά, τὴ νύχτα ἰδίως, φοβοῦνται νὰ περάσουν ἀπὸ 'κεῖ. Ὑπάρχουν καὶ λαϊκὲς παραδόσεις—ποὺ βέβαια δὲν εἶνε σωστές, ἀλλ' ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει ἐκφράζουν αὐτὴ τὴν ἀντίληψη—ὅτι ἐκεῖ ποὺ χύνεται αἷμα ἄδικα ὁ τόπος βρυσκολαιάζει. Στὸν κόσμον ὅλο, ὅπως καὶ στὸν τόπο μας, πολλὰ ἐγκλήματα ἔχουν γίνεῖ, ἰδίως τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια, καὶ νομίζει κανεὶς ὅτι ἔχουν βρυσκολαιάσει τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὰ λαγκαθία μας καὶ βογγᾶ ἡ γῆ μας.

Ἄλλ' ἂν μὲ ρωτήσετε, ποῖός εἶνε τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἔγκλημα ποὺ ἔγινε ποτὲ πάνω στὴ γῆ, θὰ σᾶς πῶ ὅτι εἶνε ἡ Σταύρωσις τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἦταν ἓνας ἀτελής ἄνθρωπος ὅπως ὅλοι ἐμεῖς εἶνε ὁ Ἄθως καὶ Ἀναμάρτητος. Δὲν εἶχε κάνει καμμία ἁμαρτία, καὶ συνεπῶς δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ ὑποστῇ αὐτὸ τὸν ἀτιμωτικὸ θάνατον ποὺ ὑπέστη. Ἐκρυσπε ὁ ἥλιος τὶς ἀκτίνες του, σείστηκε ἡ γῆ, σχίστηκε τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ, ἀνοιξαν τὰ μνήματα. Τρόμος καὶ φόβος κατέλαβε ὅλους ἐκείνους ποὺ εἶχαν συντελέσει στὴν Σταύρωσί Του (βλ. Ματθ. 27:51. Λουκ. 23:45). «Πατεῖς με - πατῶ σε» ἔφυγαν ἀπὸ τὸ Γολγοθᾶ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ φαρισαῖοι, δὲν ἔμεινε κανένας ἐκεῖ.

Ἐμείνε μόνος ὁ Χριστὸς κρεμασμένος ἐπ' αὐτὸν σταυρὸν. Ἐκεῖ ἦταν μόνος οἱ στρατιῶτες κι ὁ ἐκατόνταρχος, γιὰ νὰ ἐκτελέσουν τὴ διαταγὴ τῆς προϊσταμένης τους ἀρχῆς, ποὺ ἦταν νὰ φρουροῦν τὰ πτώματα τῶν ἐκτελεσθέντων. Αὐτοὶ καὶ μετὰ τὴν Ἀποκαθήλωσι, ἡ ὁποία ἔγινε μὲ εὐλάβεια ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τοῦ Ἰωσήφ καὶ τοῦ Νικοδήμου, ἔμειναν τὴ νύχτα ἐκεῖ καὶ φύλαγαν τὸν τάφον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴ ποὺ εἶχαν ἀπὸ τὸν Πόντιον Πιλάτον, ἔτοιμοι καὶ νὰ ἐκτελέσουν ἀκόμη ἐπὶ τόπου ὅποιον ποὺ θὰ τολμοῦσε νὰ πλησιάσῃ. Νύχτα μυστηρίου, νύχτα φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐκάλυπτε τὸ μέρος. Ποιὸς τολμοῦσε νὰ πάῃ ἐκεῖ; μήπως ὁ Πέτρος ἢ κανεὶς ἄλλος ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητὰς τοῦ Κυρίου; Κανεὶς.

Καὶ ὅμως στὸν φρικτὸ ἐκεῖνον τόπον τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ καὶ τοῦ τάφου πῆγαν—ποιοί; Κάποιες γυναῖκες, οἱ μυροφόρες· κι αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖ αἰώνιον ἔπαινό τους, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας ἐορτάζει καὶ τὴν ἱερὰ

μνήμη τους. Αὐτές, τὸ «ἀσθενὲς» λεγόμενο φύλον, ποὺ ἀγαποῦσαν τὸ Χριστὸ πάνω ἀπὸ ὅ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο, δὲν φοβήθηκαν οὔτε τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς νύχτας οὔτε τοὺς ὀπλισμένους στρατιῶτες οὔτε τὴ μεγάλη πέτρα ποὺ ἔφραζε τὴν εἴσοδον τοῦ τάφου. Λὲς καὶ εἶχαν φτερὰ στὰ πόδια ἔτρεξαν καὶ πρὶν τὴν ἀνατολὴν τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ βρέθηκαν ἐκεῖ. Γι' αὐτὸ, ὡς ἀμοιβὴ τῆς φλογερῆς ἀγάπης τους, τοῦ κόπου καὶ τῆς θυσίας τους, ἄκουσαν πρῶτες αὐτὲς ἀπ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμον τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη».

Δὲν θέλω, ἀγαπητοί μου, νὰ σᾶς κουράσω μόνον μιὰ σκέψιν νὰ κάνουμε πάνω στὰ λόγια ποὺ εἶπε ὁ φτερωτὸς ἄγγελος στὶς μυροφόρες.

Ὁ ἄγγελος τοὺς εἶπε: «Μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε», μὴν τρομάζετε (Μάρκ. 16:6), «μὴ φοβᾶσθε ἐσεῖς» (Ματθ. 28:5). Ἑσεῖς δὲν ἔχετε τὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ Πιλάτου, τοῦ Ἄννα, τοῦ Καιάφα ἢ τοῦ Ἰούδα. Ξέρω, ὅτι ἐσεῖς ἀνεβήκατε ἐδῶ μὲ αὐταπάρνησι κι ἀπὸ ἀγάπην. Ξέρω πολὺ καλὰ τί θέλετε· ξέρω ὅτι, περισσότερον ἀπὸ ὅ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο στὸν κόσμον αὐτόν, ἐσεῖς «ζητεῖτε Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζαρητὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον»· λοιπὸν «ἠγέρθη, οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἔθηκαν αὐτόν» (Μάρκ. 16:6).

Αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶπε καὶ βεβαίωσε ὁ ἄγγελος, ὅτι οἱ γυναῖκες ἐκεῖνες ζητοῦσαν Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, αὐτὸ σὰν νὰ τ' ἀκούω τώρα καὶ ἐδῶ νὰ τὸ λὲθ σ' ἐμᾶς. Ἐὰν λοιπὸν ἓνας ἄγγελος, ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ποὺ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν μας μᾶς συνοδεύουν καὶ ἀοράτως βρίσκονται ἀνάμεσά μας, ἂν ἓνας ἄγγελος μᾶς κάνῃ τὸ ἐρώτημα «Τί ζητᾶτε, τί θέλετε;»· ἂν τὸ κάνῃ σ' ἐμένα, σ' ἐσᾶς, στὸν ἀνώτατον ἄρχοντα, σ' αὐτόν ποὺ εἶνε μέσα στὸ κατὰσθημα ἢ στὴν τράπεζα, ἢ στὸν ἐργοστασιαρχὸν, στὸν ἐργάτην, στὴν γυναῖκα, στὸ παιδί, ἂν ὁ ἄγγελος μᾶς πῇ «Τί ζητᾶτε στὸν κόσμον αὐτό, τί ψάχνετε νὰ βρῆτε;», ποιά θὰ εἶνε ἡ ἀπάντησί μας; Οἱ μυροφόρες γυναῖκες ζητοῦσαν ὄντως, ἐκατὸ τοῖς ἐκατό, «Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζαρητὸν τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον»· ἐμεῖς τί ζητᾶμε, τί ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε στὸν κόσμον αὐτόν;

Ἄν εἴμαστε εἰλικρινεῖς, ἂν βάλῃ ὁ καθένας τὸ χέρι στὴν καρδιὰ καὶ ἐρευνήσῃ τὸ ἐσωτερικόν του, ἐνδοσκοπήσῃ τὸν ἑαυτό του, τότε θὰ ὁμολογήσῃ ὅτι κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸ Ναζωραῖο ζητᾶμε. Φοβᾶμαι ὅτι ὅπως τὰ πεινασμένα σκυλιὰ τρέχουν δεξιὰ - ἀριστερὰ νὰ βροῦν κρέατα σάπια, ἔτσι κι ἐμεῖς γυρίζουμε ψάχνοντας στοὺς δρόμους καὶ στὶς ἀγνιὲς τοῦ κόσμου. Τί ζητοῦν οἱ ἄντρες, οἱ γυναῖκες, οἱ νέοι καὶ οἱ νέες μας; Τί ζητᾶει ὁ κόσμος; Ζητᾶει λεφτὰ - χρήματα, ζητᾶει δόξα - τιμὴ - ἀξιώματα, ζητᾶει ἡδονές - διασκέδασεις - γλέντια. Ὁ κόσμος ζητᾶει κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸ Ναζωραῖο.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει δυστυχῶς ζήτησις ἀνωτέρων πραγμάτων, δὲν ἐκτιμοῦμε ἐμεῖς τὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ τὰ ἅγια πράγματα. Κάποιος μῦθος τοῦ Αἰσώπου λέει, ὅτι σὲ μιὰ αὐλὴ ἓνας κόκορας σκάλιζε ζητώντας νὰ βρῆ σκουλήκια καὶ σπόρους. Ψάχνοντας, τὸ νύχι του σκόνταψε—ποῦ

σ' ένα διαμάντι. Και τὸ ἀνόητο πουλὶ τὸ κλώτσησε, τὸ πέταξε πέρα, τὸ περιφρόνησε. Δὲν μπορούσε νὰ τὸ ἐκτιμήσῃ· σκουλήκι ἤθελε, ὄχι διαμάντι. Ἔτσι κ' ἐμεῖς περιφρονοῦμε τὰ μεγάλα καὶ πολύτιμα πράγματα, ζητᾶμε μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα καὶ σ' αὐτὰ δίνουμε ὅλη τὴν καρδιά μας.

Νὰ ποῦμε τὴν ἀλήθεια· ἀκόμη καὶ μέσα στὴν ἐκκλησία, σὰς ἐρωτῶ, ποιὸς ἀπὸ τὸ «*Εὐλογημένη ἡ βασιλεία...*» μέχρι τὸ «*Δι' εὐχῶν...*» ἔχει τὸ μυαλὸ καὶ τὴν καρδιά του στὸ Θεό; Ὁ καθένας τότε θὰ βρῆ νὰ σκεφτῆ ὁ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο. Εἴμαστε—ἄς ἐπιτραπῆ ἡ λέξι—θεομπαίχτες, καὶ θὰ μᾶς κλείσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὶς ἐκκλησιές. Στὰ παλιὰ τὰ χρόνια τὰ εὐλογημένα, ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν οὔτε ραδιόφωνα οὔτε τηλεοράσεις, ἀλλὰ εἶχαν πίστι, ἔμπαιναν στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ «*ὄρθρου βαθέος*», ἔπιαναν μιὰ γωνιὰ καὶ προσεύχονταν χωρὶς νὰ κοιτάζουν ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο, κι ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια τους ἔτρεχαν δάκρυα ποὺ ἔβρεχαν τὰ πλακάκια. Ποῦ τώρα εὐλάβεια, ποῦ πίστις, ποῦ δάκρυα! Οὔτε καὶ τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ τὴν ἱερὰ δὲν ζητοῦμε Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον.

Καὶ θὰ θυμηθῶ πρὶν τελειώσω κάτι ποὺ εἶπε ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός. Ἔνας πραγματευτῆς - ἔμπορος πενήντα χρόνια γύριζε καὶ ἔψαχνε στὸν κόσμον νὰ βρῆ καλὰ πράγματα, πολύτιμα πετράδια, καὶ τὰ μάζευε σ' ἓναν τορβά. Ὄταν ὁ τορβάς γέμιζε, τὰ πῆγε ὅλα σ' ἓνα σαράφη - χρηματιστῆ. Αὐτός, ἀφοῦ τὰ ἐξέτασε ὅλα, τοῦ λέει: Ἀνθρωπέ μου, ἀπ' ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πετράδια ἓνα μόνο ἀξίζει, τοῦτο τὸ μικρὸ, τὸ διαμάντι· ὅλα τ' ἄλλα εἶνε ψεύτικα, πέταξέ τα στὸ ὄρεμα. Δὲν τὸν πίστεψε καὶ πῆγε σὲ δεύτερο, σὲ τρίτο, σὲ τέταρτο σαράφη· κι αὐτοὶ τὸ ἴδιο τοῦ εἶπαν, ὅτι πράγματι ἓνα μόνο ἀξίζει, τὸ διαμάντι. Τὸ πῆρε λοιπὸν τὸ διαμάντι καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐξακριβώσῃ τὴν ἀξία του, ὅταν στὸ δρόμο εἶδε ἓνα τυφλὸ, κάνει μὲ τὸ διαμάντι τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, τὸ ἀγγίζει στὸ μάτι του, καὶ ὁ τυφλὸς εἶδε τὸ φῶς του. Παρακάτω βλέπει ἓνα κουφὸ, τὸ ἀγγίζει στὸ αὐτί του κάνοντάς τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, καὶ ὁ κουφὸς ἀκούει. Παρακάτω βλέπει μιὰ γριὰ κ' ἓνα γέρο, τὸ ἀγγίζει πάνω τους καὶ γίνονται νέοι. Παρακάτω περνοῦσε μιὰ κηδεῖα, ἀγγίζει τὸ διαμάντι πάνω στὸ νεκρὸ καὶ ὁ νεκρὸς ἀνασταίνεται. Ποιὰ εἶνε ἡ ἐρμηνεία· ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε οἱ πραγματευτὰδες, ὅλοι μας, ποὺ ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε ἀλήθεια στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο, καὶ μαζεύουμε καὶ μαζεύουμε... Πεύτικα εἶνε ὅλα, ἓνα ἔχει ἀξία, τὸ διαμάντι, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Ὄπου τὸ ἀγγίξῃς, κάνει θαύματα, ἀρκεῖ νὰ πιστεῦς πραγματικά. Αὐτὸ τὸ διαμάντι, τὴν πίστι στὸ Χριστό, ἀξίζει νὰ ζητᾶμε.

Στὸ ἐρώτημα λοιπὸν «τί ζητᾶτε;» ἄς ἀπαντήσουμε κ' ἐμεῖς, ἀγαπητοὶ μου· «Χριστέ μου, δὲν ζητᾶμε τίποτε ἄλλο· σὺ φτάνεις!». Αὐτὸν νὰ ζητᾶμε, τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο. Καὶ πῶς νὰ τὸν ζητᾶμε; Θεομά, ὄχι ψυχρά· ὅπως ὁ πεινασμένος τὸ καρβέλι, ὅπως ὁ διψασμένος

τὸ νερό, ὅπως τὸ μικρὸ παιδὶ τὴ μάνα του, ὅπως ὁ φυλακισμένος τὴ λευτεριά του, ὅπως ὁ φτωχὸς τὴν ἄνεσί του, ὅπως ἡ μέλισσα τὸ ἄνθος, ὅπως τὸ ἀρνάκι τὴ γλῶση.

Ζητᾶτε Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο, καὶ τότε θὰ εἴστε εὐτυχισμένοι ἑκατὸ τοῖς ἑκατό. Ὅποιος ἔχει τὸν Ἰησοῦ τὸν Ναζωραῖο, ἔχει τὸ Θεό, τὴν εὐτυχία, τὴ χαρά. Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον, ὃν ὑμνεῖ πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων ἀμήν.



Τώρα θὰ εἶναι τὸ ξεκαθάρισμα.....!!!!

Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πειρασμὸς τώρα ποὺ συμβαίνει μὲ τὸν λεγόμενο κορωνοϊό, ἄλλοι τὸν λέν κορωνοϊό, μερικοὶ εἴρωνες κοροδοϊό. Ὅτι καὶ νὰ ἴναι, πρῶτα καὶ κύρια ξέρετε τί εἶναι; Εἶναι ἡ δοκιμασία τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Πρῶτα ἡμῶν τῶν ρασοφόρων, πατριαρχῶν, ἀρχιερέων, ἱερέων, διακόνων, ψαλτῶν, καλογήρων.

Καὶ ποὺ εἴσατε ἀκόμα. Αὐτὴ ἡ χρονιὰ ἴσως καὶ ἡ ἄλλη, λὲν αὐτοὶ ποὺ βλέπουν, θὰ εἶναι οἱ χρονιές τῶν ἐξετάσεων. Θὰ δώσουμε ἐξετάσεις μὲ ἀφορμὲς πολλές. Ὅχι μόνον ἀρρώστεις. Μὲ διάφορες ἀφορμές. Μιὰ θὰ φεύγει, ἄλλη θὰ ἔρχεται. Μᾶς προετοίμασαν οἱ ἅγιοι ἀλλὰ ποιὸς τοὺς βάζει αὐτὶ τοὺς ἀγίους;

Γιατί θὰ ἔχουμε αὐτὲς τὶς ἐξετάσεις; Γιατὶ χρειάζεται ὁ Χριστός, τοὺς δικούς του ἀνθρώπους τώρα. Γιὰ νὰ φτιάξῃ «**τὸ καινούργιο πλήρωμα τοῦ σκάφους Του**». Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σκάφος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ἀποφάσισε ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ ἀποκαθαρίσῃ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτοῦ τοῦ σκάφους. Καὶ πλήρωμα δὲν εἴσατε μόνον ἐσεῖς οἱ ἀπλοὶ Χριστιανοί. Εἶναι καὶ οἱ κυβερνήτες, οἱ δεσποτὰδες καὶ οἱ πατριαρχὰδες, εἶναι καὶ οἱ παπὰδες, εἶναι καὶ οἱ μοῦτσοι καὶ οἱ ναῦτες ὅπως εἶναι οἱ διάκoi καὶ οἱ καλόγεροι καὶ οἱ ψαλτάδες.

Τώρα θὰ δώσουμε ἐξετάσεις ὅλοι. Κανένας μὴν ἔχει πεποίθησι στὲς παλαιές περγαμινές του. Μὰ ἐγὼ ἔκαμα τόσα προσκυνήματα, μὰ ἐγὼ εἶχα τὸν τάδε Γέροντα, τὸν τάδε ἅγιο. Τώρα, σὰν νὰ ξεκινᾶ καινούργια ζωὴ. Καὶ θέλει ὁ Χριστός, τώρα ποὺ εἶναι τὸ μεταίχιμο, ἀπὸ τὴν παλαιὰ ζωὴ στὴν νέα ἐποχὴ, ὄχι τοῦ ὑδροχόου ποὺ λὲν αὐτοὶ οἱ δαίμονες τῆς νέας ἐποχῆς. Ὅχι. Ἡ νέα ἐποχὴ ποὺ προετοιμάζει τὸ σχέδιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν ἔχει μόνον σχέδια ὁ Κίσινγκερ καὶ ὁ Μπιλ Γκέιτς καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι καὶ οἱ Ρῶσοι μεγιστάνες καὶ ὀλιγάρχες. Ὅχι. Ἔχει σχέδια καὶ ὁ Χριστός. Καὶ μᾶς ἀγαπᾶ πῶς πολὺ ἀπὸ ὅλους. Πῶς πολὺ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ μάνα μας ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀγαπᾶ...

**Ὁ Πανιερώτατος Μητρ. Μόρφου Νεόφυτος**



## Ἄχριστη (καὶ Ἄχρηστη) Μασκοφορία

Γράφει ὁ Κώστας Νούσης, Θεολόγος - Φιλολόγος.

Ἐὰν θέλεις νὰ ὑποστηρίξεις τὴ χρήση τῆς μάσκας μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς, μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ κάνεις ἐπιλέγοντας ἐπιχειρήματα ὠραιοφανῆ καὶ πνευματόσχημα.

Τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει γιὰ κάθε προεπιλεγμένη θεωρητικὴ στάση καὶ ἐπιλογή. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, μπορεῖς νὰ ἐπικαλεστεῖς τὴν ἀποβολὴ τῆς μάσκας τῆς ὑποκρισίας καὶ νὰ ἀποδεχτεῖς τὴν ἰατρικὴ συμβουλὴ περὶ τῆς μασκοφορίας στὶς ἐκκλησίες. Εἶναι δεδομένο πὼς ὅ,τι ἐπιλέξεις, μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ τεκμηριώσεις μὲ τὶς ἀνάλογες κοπτορραφές, ἀκόμη καὶ μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἀγία Γραφή. Προαιώνιο κόλπο τῶν αἰρετικῶν...

Εἶναι σεβαστὴ, βέβαια, κάθε ἀποψη, ὡστόσο θὰ πρέπει νὰ τὴν τεστάρουμε πάνω στὴν κρησάρα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης παράδοσης, εἰδικὰ ὅταν πρόκειται γιὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ζήτημα.

Γιὰ τὸν γράφοντα, τὰ ὄρια μεταξὺ γραφικότητας καὶ βλασφημίας εἶναι εὐκόλως προσπελάσιμα ἔνθεν κακεῖθεν καὶ αὐτὸ φάνηκε στὴν πρόσφατη φωτογραφία, στὴν ὁποία ρουμάνος κληρικὸς μὲ μάσκα κοινωνοῦσε τοὺς πιστοὺς! Ἐὰν καὶ σὲ αὐτὸ χωράει ἡ πρόκριση τῶν «ιατρικῶν συμβουλῶν», τότε δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσει κάποιος τὴ συνέχεια τοῦ παρόντος κειμένου.

Τὸ πρῶτο καὶ κυριότερο εἶναι πὼς οὔτε ἰατρικῶς ἔχει γίνε ἀποδεκτὴ ἡ εὐρεία χρῆση τῆς μάσκας. Τὸ ὅτι ὑπάρχει μία ἐπιστημονικὴ μονομέρεια στὴ χρῆση καὶ ἀποδοχὴ συγκεκριμένων ἐπιστημονικῶν ἀπόψεων, αὐτὸ εἶναι ζήτημα ὄχι τῆς παρουσίας διαπραγμάτευσης.

Ἐάν, ὁμως, ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ὄντως εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη προστασία ἀπὸ τὶς μεταδοτικὰ νοσήματα, τότε προκύπτει τὸ πρῶτο πρόβλημα—ἀναφερόμαστε πάντοτε στὴ θεολογικὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ θέματος: ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ στὸ ἐξῆς θὰ εἰσερχόμαστε στοὺς ναοὺς μὲ μάσκες, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι κλειστοὶ χώροι;

Τὸ ζήτημα εἶναι καὶ πολιτικοκοινωνικό, ἀλλὰ εἶπαμε δὲν θὰ τὸ πιάσουμε ἀπὸ κεῖ. Καὶ διογκώνεται μὲ τὴν ἀπλή σκέψη ὅτι πάντοτε θὰ ὑπάρχει κάτι μεταδοτικὸ γύρω μας, ὅπως ἡ κοινὴ γρίπη. Ἐὰν ἀποδεχτοῦμε τὴ μάσκα στὴν ἐκκλησία μὲ «θεολογικὰ» κριτήρια, τότε ἀπλὰ καταρρίπτουμε μία Χριστιανικὴ παράδοση αἰώνων, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ἡ προσφυγὴ στὴ Θεία βοήθεια εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο φάρμακο ἐναντίον σὲ κάθε πανδημία καὶ κάθε Θεομηνία.

Αὐτὸ φυσικὰ δὲν καταργεῖ τὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὸν σεβασμὸ πρὸς τὴν τελευταία. Ἀπλὰ ὀριοθετεῖ τὶς περιοχὰς δράσης θρησκείας καὶ ἐπιστήμης, γιὰ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ ἀνούσιων συγκρούσεων καὶ παρεξηγήσεων. Κάποτε,

λοιπόν, βγάξαμε τὰ Λεῖψανα καὶ τὰ λιτανεύαμε μαζί μὲ τὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες. Κάναμε Εὐχέλαια, Παρακλήσεις καὶ Λειτουργίες, ὥστε νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Κύριος καὶ νὰ παύσει τὰ δεινά. Τώρα, ὄχι μόνον δὲν κάνουμε Λειτουργίες καὶ Λιτανεῖες—πρὸς ἀποφυγὴ τάχα «συνωστισμοῦ»—ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπαγορεύουμε μέσω τῆς μάσκας τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν φορέων τῆς Χάριτος... Πόσο πλανιόνταν, φαίνεται, οἱ ἀρχαῖοι καὶ παλαιότεροι Χριστιανοὶ καὶ πόσο ξεπεράσαμε ἐμεῖς οἱ σύγχρονοι αὐτὲς τὶς «προλήψεις»—ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς ἐλεήσει...

Γιὰ νὰ μὴ θεωρητικολογοῦμε συνέχεια, ἄς δοῦμε πρακτικά, βῆμα - βῆμα, τὴ βλασφημία ποὺ διαπράττει ὁ μασκοφόρος Χριστιανὸς καὶ ὅσοι τὸν συμβουλεύουν σχετικὰ, ἔστω καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ συνειδητοποιοῦν. Εἰσέρχεται ὁ πιστὸς στὸν Ναό. Φοράει τὴ μάσκα του ἤδη. Πὼς θὰ προσκυνήσει τὶς εἰκόνες; Μὲ ἢ χωρὶς τὴ μάσκα; Ἄν μὲ αὐτὴν, τότε καλύτερα νὰ μὴν πλησιάσει καθόλου τὶς ἅγιες εἰκόνες. Ἡ ὑπόκλιση εἶναι κινεζικὸ ἢ γενικότερα ξενικὸ ἔθιμο. Ἐμεῖς κατασπαζόμαστε τὶς ἱερὲς εἰκόνες, πιστεύοντας ἀκράδαντα στὴν ἐπιπολάζουσα σὲ αὐτὲς Ἄκριστη Θεία Χάρη.

Προχωρᾶμε παρακάτω ἀκολουθώντας τὸν μασκοφόρο Ὁρθόδοξο προσκυνητὴ. Στέκεται μὲ τὴ μάσκα του σὲ κάποια ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τοὺς γύρω του, ὅποτε δὲν χαιρετᾷ τοὺς ἀδελφούς του, παρὰ μόνον διὰ νεύματος ἢ ὑποκλίσεως. Ἡ κοινωνία τῶν προσώπων, δομικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς λατρείας μας, ἀρχίζει ἤδη νὰ ἀποδομεῖται μέσα στὴν περιχαράκωση μίας καθαρὰ ἀτομιστικῆς εὐσέβειας.

Ὁ φόβος τῆς ἀσθένειας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου ἐπικρατεῖ ἐπὶ τῆς παρούσης Χάριτος στὸν ναὸ καὶ στὴ Θεία λατρεία. Ἡ νίκη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ θανάτου φαντάζει παραμῦθι, ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι τουλάχιστον... Ἡ αὐτοαπομονωτικὴ προστασία τοῦ ἐγὼ καταργεῖ κάθε πίστη καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸν Θεάνθρωπο καὶ παραμερίζει ἀπαξιωτικὰ τὸν παραπλησίως συμπροσευχόμενο συνάνθρωπο.

Ἦδη ἡ Ἐκκλησία μετατρέπεται σὲ ἓναν ἀπλὸ οἶκο προσευχῆς (= Προτεσταντισμός), μακριὰ ἀπὸ κάθε μυστηριακὴ διάσταση, ὅπως ἔχουμε στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μας. Καὶ ἡ ἐπόμενη κίνηση, εὐλόγως, προκύπτει ἀπὸ τὰ πράγματα: τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν ναῶν ὡς περιττῶν καὶ ἐπικίνδυνων, ἐφόσον ἡ προσευχὴ μπορεῖ νὰ τελεσθεῖ ἀτομικὰ καὶ ἄρα πὶδ ἀκίνδυνα...

Φτάνουμε στὴν κορυφωση. Ὁ Χριστὸς διὰ τοῦ ἱερέως μας καλεῖ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε. Ἡ πὶδ τίμια καὶ λογικὴ στάση, μὲ βάση τουλάχιστον τὰ προηγηθέντα, θὰ ἦταν νὰ μὴν πλησιάσει ὁ μασκοφόρος στὴν κεντρικὴ «ἐστία μικροβίων», ποὺ εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ Ποτήριον, ἢ κοινὴ Λαβίδα, τὸ κοινὸ μάκτρο. Ἐφόσον ἤδη ὁ πιστὸς αὐτὸς «προστατεύθηκε» μὲ

τὴ μάσκα ἀπὸ κάθε πιθανὸ προηγούμενο κίνδυνο— ἤδη προαναφερθέντων—θὰ ἦταν τουλάχιστον ἀνακόλουθος εἰς ἑαυτόν, νὰ μὴν πῶ σχιζοφρενής, ἐὰν προσέλθει στὴ Θεία Μετάληψη.

Στὴν περίπτωση, βέβαια, ποὺ πάει νὰ κοινωνήσει μὲ ἰσχυρὴ πίστη στὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια, δηλαδή στὴν Ἄκτιστη Χάρη ποὺ ἀπορρέει ἐξ αὐτῶν, τότε εἶναι νὰ ἀπορεῖ κανεὶς γιὰ ποιὸν λόγο δὲν ἐμπιστεύεται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὴν εἴσοδο στὸν Ναὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ἴδια Χάρη ποὺ εἶναι παροῦσα στὰ λείψανα, στὶς εἰκόνες κλπ. Ἐδῶ πῶς ἡ σχιζοειδέεια εἶναι πιὸ ὁρατὴ...

Οἱ θιασῶτες τῆς ὑπὲρ τῆς μασκαράτας θεωρίας ἐντὸς τῶν ναῶν θὰ ἐπικαλεστοῦν ὡσεὶ ἔσχατον ἐπιχειρήματα τὸν σεβασμὸ στὴν ἐπιστήμη μὲ διάκριση καὶ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τῶν ζηλωτικῶν—τῶν ἡμετέρων, ὑποτίθεται, δηλαδή—ἀκροτήτων. Ὅμως, ὡς προαπεδείχθη, ἐκόντες ἄκοντες οἱ μασκοφόροι ὀδηγοῦνται σὲ βλάβη κινήσεις. Συνεχίζουμε τὴ συνοδοιπορία μὲ τὸν μασκοφόρο ἀδελφὸ: ἀφοῦ κοινωνήσει, τότε θὰ πρέπει νὰ ξαναφορέσει τὴ μάσκα του ἢ μήπως ὄχι;

Ἐὰν ναί, τότε εἶναι σὰν νὰ παραδέχεται ὅτι ὁ ἄρτι εἰσαχθεὶς ἐντὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι, ἂν ὄχι ἐστία μόλυνσης, σίγουρα πάντως ἀνενεργὸς καὶ ἀδύναμος νὰ προστατέψει τὰ παιδιὰ Του ἀπὸ ἓνα μικροβίο! Καλύτερα, λοιπόν, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς νὰ μὴν πάει νὰ κοινωνήσει καθόλου, ἕως ὅτου τοποθετηθεῖ Ὁρθόδοξα καὶ μὲ πίστη ἐναντι τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων. Προτιμότερο ἴσως νὰ μὴν ἐκκλησιασθεῖ καθόλου...

Ἡ λειτουργία τελείωσε. Βγαίνουμε σιγὰ - σιγὰ ἀπὸ τὸν ναό. Νὰ πάει ὁ μασκοφόρος ἀδελφός μας νὰ πάρει ἀντίδωρο καὶ νὰ φιλήσει τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερουργοῦντος; Ἄ πὰ πὰ πά... Μὲ τίποτε! Καταστρέφει ὅ,τι ἔχτισε μέχρι στιγμῆς. Τουναντίον, πρέπει νὰ φύγει τρέχοντας, χωρὶς νὰ ἀσπαστεῖ εἰκόνες καὶ νὰ χαιρετήσῃ κανέναν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφὸ, ἐκτὸς μόνο «δι' ἀγκῶνων». Μὲ λίγα λόγια, οὐσιαστικά θὰ ἀπέλθει ἀκοινωνήτος...

Στὴν ἐπιστροφή στὸ σπίτι του θὰ κατανοήσει, ἐφόσον εἶναι ἐχέφρων καὶ σκεπτόμενος, ὅτι δὲν ὑφίσταται σοβαρὸς λόγος νὰ ξαναπάει σύντομα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἐκτὸς ἂν ἔρθῃ κάποια τεράστια ἐορτὴ τύπου Χριστουγέννων καὶ Πάσχα ἢ ἐφόσον δώσει τὸ πράσινο φῶς ἓνας Τσιόδρας καὶ ἓνας Χαρδαλιάς...

Τὸ πρόβλημα, θὰ ἀπαντήσουμε στοὺς πνευστιῶντας θιασῶτες τῆς (ἀν)ἱερῆς μασκοφορίας, δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἱατρικὴ σύσταση, ἀλλὰ ἡ πίστη μας στὴν ἄκτιστη Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, στὴν ὁποία «κολυμπᾶμε» κυριολεκτικὰ μέσα στοὺς ναοὺς καὶ στὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς τελούμενα. Ἐχει ἀκούσει ὁ γράφων ἓνα κάρο ἠλίθια καὶ ἄσχετα ἐπιχειρήματα, π.χ. ὅτι μέσα στὸν ναὸ μπορούμε νὰ γλιστρήσουμε, ὅτι βίασαν οἱ Τοῦρκοι τὶς Χριστιανὲς μέσα στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία κατὰ τὴν Ἄλωση.

Ὅποτε ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μᾶς προστατεύει πάντοτε ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ! Ὁραία συλλογιστικὴ! Κανεὶς δὲν μίλησε γιὰ μαγικὴ ἀντίληψη περὶ τῶν Μυστηρίων καὶ τῆς ἐνέργειας τοῦ Θεοῦ χωρὶς προϋποθέσεις. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν καταλάβει οἱ κύριοι αὐτοί, ὡστόσο, εἶναι πὼς ἀπιστοῦν κατὰ βάθος στὴ Θεία Χάρη, στὴν Ἄκτιστη Ἐνέργεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ αὐτό, φυσικά, δὲν εἶναι κάτι ἄλλο παρὰ Εἰκονομαχία καὶ Βαρλααμισμὸς...

Φυσικά καὶ δὲν θὰ ἐκπειράσουμε τὸν Κύριο πουθενά, οὔτε μέσα στὸν οἶκο Του. Ὅμως καὶ σὲ καμιά περίπτωση δὲν θὰ ὑποστηρίξω θεολογικὰ τὴ δική μου ὑποχονδρία - μικροβιοφοβία καὶ τὸν ἀτομικισμὸ μου (τὸν ἀπάλευτο φόβο γιὰ τὸν θάνατο) σὲ βάρος τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης λατρείας, πίστεως καὶ παράδοσης.

Ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν ὁ Νεὸς Θεολόγος θεωροῦσε βλασφημία τὴν ἀπιστία τῶν συγχρόνων του στὴ μέθεξη τῆς Θείας Χάρης καὶ στὴν ὄραση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πολὺ φοβᾶμαι ὅτι τὸ ἴδιο, ἀλλὰ σὲ πολὺ μεγαλύτερο βαθμὸ, βιώνουμε καὶ τώρα—«λογικὸ», πέρασαν καὶ χίλια χρόνια ἀπὸ τότε— καὶ τοῦτο εἶναι, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, ἡ βαθύτερη ρίζα τῶν σχετικῶν προβλημάτων.

Στὴν οὐσία, δηλαδή, δὲν εἴμαστε Ὁρθόδοξοι. Ἐχομε πλήρως ἐκδυτικισθεῖ καὶ γιὰ μᾶς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχει μετατραπῆ σὲ ἐργαλεῖο ἱκανοποίησης τῶν θρησκευτικῶν μας ἀναγκῶν, μέχρι βέβαιά το σημεῖο στὸ ὁποῖο δὲν ξεβολευόμαστε ἐν γένει. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ νόσος τῆς ἀπιστίας - βλασφημίας ἔχει μεταδοθεῖ καὶ στοὺς ἱερωμένους. Δὲν ἐξηγεῖται ἄλλως ἢ τόσο καρδιακὴ συμπόρευση ἐνίων μὲ τὶς ἀθεολόγητες καὶ ἀντορθόδοξες κρατικὲς διαταγὲς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας.

Τὸ παρήγορο εἶναι ὅτι, ἐξαιρουμένων τῶν μεγάλων ναῶν τῶν ἀστικῶν κέντρων, στὶς ὁποῖες ἡ διοίκηση εἶναι πιότερο συμπορευομένη μὲ τὴν κρατικὴ, ὁ λαὸς ἔχει ἀγνοήσει ἐπιδεικτικὰ τὴ μάσκα καὶ εἰσέρχεται ἄφοβα στοὺς ναοὺς, προκειμένου νὰ λατρεύσει τὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσει.

Ὁ ἱερέας καὶ ὁ ἐπίσκοπος εἶναι πρῶτιστα λειτουργοὶ τοῦ Ὑψίστου καὶ ὄχι κρατικοὶ ὑπάλληλοι. Φαίνεται τὸ ξεχνᾶνε συνήθως καὶ προκρίνουν τὸν διοικητικὸ τους ρόλο. Εἶναι γεγονὸς, βέβαια, ὅτι τὸ θέμα ποὺ προέκυψε μᾶς ξαφνίασε ὅλους. Ἔτσι χωράει καὶ πολλὴ οἰκονομία. Ὅχι ὅμως καὶ βλάβη ἐσωτερικὴ καὶ ἐξωτερικὴ συστράτευση μὲ τοὺς ἄθεους κυβερνῶντες, ἐντὸς καὶ ἐκτὸς Ἑλλάδας. Στὴν περίπτωση αὐτῆ, ἀντὶ ἀνόητων καὶ ἀθεολόγητων ποιμαντικῶν πρακτικῶν καὶ συστάσεων, κρεῖττον ἢ σιωπῆ.

Γιὰ νὰ μὴν καταστήσουμε τὴ μασκαράτα ἐντὸς τῶν ναῶν παντελῶς ἄχρηστη (βοοῦν ἤδη οἱ ἐπιστήμονες), ἐξάπαντος δὲ καὶ ἄχρηστη, ὅπως βροντοφωνάζει μία Ὁρθόδοξη παράδοση χιλιετιῶν...

## Ἡ Τελικὴ Νίκη Τοῦ Καλοῦ

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο: «Ὁμιλίες Β΄», Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς, Ἐκδόσεις «Ὁρθόδοξη Κυψέλη», <https://www.orthodoxoskypseli.gr/>, Θεσσαλονίκη. Ἀντιγραφή-ἐπιμέλεια: Σάββας Ἡλιάδης - Δάσκαλος.

Στις δύσκολες ὥρες ποὺ περνᾶ σήμερα ἡ πατρίδα μας ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος, εἶναι φυσικό, κάποιους συνανθρώπους μας νὰ τοὺς καταλαμβάνει τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς φοβίας, τῆς ἀπαισιοδοξίας καὶ ἀκόμη χειρότερα, τοῦ ἀδιεξόδου. Κάποιες δυνάμεις, δυστυχῶς, σκοπίμως ἢ μὴ, ἐπιβαρύνουν τὸ κλίμα καί, καθὼς φαίνεται, τρομοκρατοῦν τὸν κόσμο καὶ τὸν κρατοῦν σὲ ἠθικὴ καὶ πνευματικὴ καταστολή. Τέτοιες ὥρες οἱ δικές μας φωνές εἶναι πολὺ ἰσχνές καὶ ἀδύναμες καὶ ἐλάχιστα μποροῦν νὰ βοηθήσουν στὴν καλλιέργεια ἀνδρείου ἐν Χριστῷ φρονήματος.

Τώρα εἶναι ἡ ὥρα ποὺ οἱ ψυχές ἔχουν ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὸν λόγο τῶν ἁγίων. Τὸν λόγο τῆς ἀλήθειας, ποὺ τις ἐλευθερώνει, τις εἰρηνεύει καὶ τις ἀντρεϊεύει. Ἐνα τέτοιο λόγο—ἀπόσπασμα ὁμιλίας του—φωτισμένο καὶ παρηγορητικό, θὰ μᾶς ἀπευθύνει ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμίροβιτς: Ὅ,τι κι ἂν συμβαίνει στὴ ζωὴ, εἶναι ἀπολύτως βέβαιο καὶ πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστεύουμε ἀκράδαντα, πὼς τελικὰ θὰ νικήσει τὸ καλό!

† † †

Ἀκοῦστε μιὰ ἀπλή, ἀπλή ἱστορία, μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ δίνει ἀπάντηση στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ εἶναι ἀπαισιόδοξοι λόγω τῆς ἀδυναμίας τους καὶ τῆς ὀλιγοψυχίας τους.

Κάποτε ἓνα Παιδί γεννήθηκε σὲ μιὰ σπηλιά. Πολλὰ παιδιὰ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, παρόλο ποὺ γεννήθηκαν σὲ δωμάτια φωτεινά, σὲ κούνιες μὲ πούπουλα καὶ μετάξι, παραπονιοῦνται γιὰ τὴν ἐπικράτηση τῆς δυνάμεις τοῦ κακοῦ. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν σπηλιά, στὴν φάτνη μὲ ἄχυρα, ποτὲ δὲν παραπονέθηκε, γιὰτὶ πίστευε στὸν Θεὸ καὶ στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν σπηλιά καὶ στὰ ἄχυρα ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ ἀφήσει τὴν γενέτειρά του, ποὺ εἶναι τόσο ἀγαπητὴ στὴν κάθε παιδικὴ καρδιά καὶ νὰ φύγει μὲ τοὺς γονεῖς Του σὲ μιὰ μακρινὴ ξένη χώρα, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν τύραννο, ποὺ τὸν καταδίωκε στὴν πατρίδα Του. Τὰ ἄλλα παιδιὰ, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν ἔνωσαν τὸ πικρὸ ψωμί τῆς ξένης πατρίδας, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν καταδιώχθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν κυβερνήτη τῆς πατρίδας τους,

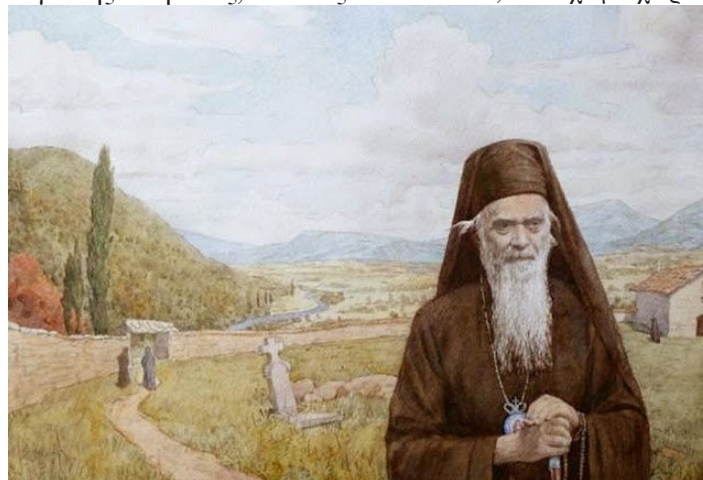
παρόλο ποὺ τὸ μόνο ποὺ αἰσθάνθηκαν ἦταν ἡ πατρικὴ στοργὴ καὶ τρυφερότητα, παραπονιοῦνται καὶ πιστεύουν πὼς τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πιὸ δυνατὸ ἀπὸ τὸ καλό. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Παιδί, παρόλο ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν παιδικὴ ἡλικία αἰσθάνθηκε τὴν κακία, τὴν τυραννία, τὴν δολιότητα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν σκληρὴ ζωὴ τῆς ξενιτιάς, δὲν ἔχασε τὴν πίστη Του. Ἀντίθετα, μέσα του συνεχῶς δυνάμωνε ἡ πίστη γιὰ τὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί μεγάλωσε καὶ ἔγινε ἓνα Ἀγόρι, ποὺ ἔμαθε νὰ ἀσκεῖ τὴν κοπιαστικὴ δουλειὰ τοῦ μαραγκοῦ. Πολλὰ ἀγόρια, παρόλο ποὺ δὲν κάνουν καμιὰ κοπιαστικὴ ἐργασία, μέχρι νὰ φτάσουν σὲ ὠριμὴ ἡλικία, πάλι παραπονιοῦνται γιὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμὸ τοῦ κακοῦ στὸν κόσμο. Ἐκεῖνο τὸ Ἀγόρι, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ πελεκάει τὸ ξύλο μὲ τὸ τσεκούρι καὶ μ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο νὰ κερδίζει τὸ ψωμί Του, δὲν παραπονέθηκε ποτὲ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴ γιὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμὸ τῆς κακίας στὸν κόσμο. Ἀντίθετα, ἄντεχε μὲ χαρὰ κάθε δυσκολία καὶ ἔφερνε σὲ πέρας τὴν δουλειὰ Του, πιστεύοντας στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Παιδί ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν φάτνη μὲ τὰ ἄχυρα καὶ ἔφυγε νωρὶς ἀπὸ τὴν γενέτειρά του, λόγω τῆς τυραννίας ποὺ ὑπῆρχε ἐκεῖ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν νεαρή Του ἡλικία ἔκανε τὴν ἐπίπονη ἐργασία τοῦ ξυλουργοῦ, μεγάλωσε ἓνας Ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγάπησε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,

τὸν κόσμο, τὴν ζωὴ. Μεγάλωσε ἓνας Ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ θέλησε νὰ δυναμώσει τὴν πίστη τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Καὶ δὲν ἦταν εὐκολο νὰ δυναμώσει τὴν πίστη τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, γιὰτὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν καταπιεσμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν φτώχεια, τὰ βάσανα, τὴν ἀμάθεια, τὶς ἀρρώστιες. Ἐτσι, δὲν μπόρεσαν νὰ πιστέψουν στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, γιὰτὶ τὸ κακὸ, ὅπως τὰ ἀγριόχορτα ποὺ πνίγουν τὸ φυτὸ, εἶχε σκοτώσει τὴν πίστη στὴν ψυχὴ τους. Κάποιοι πλούσιοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ κέρδισαν μὲ δόλιο τρόπο τὴν ἐξουσία καὶ τὰ πλούτη τους, δὲν εἶχαν τὴν τόλμη νὰ πιστέψουν στὸ καλό, ἐπειδὴ τὸ καλὸ ἦταν ἀντίθετο μὲ τὸν πλοῦτο τους καὶ τὴν ἐξουσία τους.

Ὁ δαίμονας τοῦ κακοῦ στὴ συνέχεια θέλησε νὰ βάλει αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ δίδασκε στοὺς ἀνθρώπους πὼς ἡ ἔσχατη νίκη ἀνήκει στὸ καλὸ καὶ ὄχι στὸ κακὸ. Τοῦ ἔδειξε ὅλα τὰ βασίλεια τῆς γῆς καὶ Τοῦ εἶπε: *Θὰ σοῦ δώσω ὅλη αὐτὴν τὴν ἐξουσία*



καὶ τὴν λαμπρότητα αὐτῶν τῶν βασιλείων. Σὲ ἐμένα ἔχει παραδοθεῖ καὶ τὴν δίνω σὲ ὅποιον ἐγὼ θέλω. Ἄν, λοιπόν, μὲ προσκυνήσεις, θὰ εἶναι ὅλη δική σου. (Λουκ. 4:6-7). Δὲν κατάφερε ὁμοῦ αὐτὸς ὁ στιγμιαίος θρίαμβος τῆς κακίας, ποὺ ὑπάρχει σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμον, νὰ ἐντυπωσιάσει Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ πιστεῦε σταθερὰ ὅτι ὁ ἔσχατος καὶ αἰώνιος θρίαμβος θὰ ἀνήκει στὸ καλὸ. Ἔτσι, ἀρνήθηκε τὴν πρόταση τοῦ δαίμονα, λέγοντας: Φύγε ἀπὸ μπροστά μου, σατανᾶ. Ἡ Γραφή λέει: Τὸν Κύριο, τὸν Θεὸ σου θὰ προσκυνᾷς καὶ μόνον αὐτὸν θὰ λατρεύεις. (Λουκ. 4:8).

Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ δὲν ἤθελε νὰ προσκυνήσει τὸν δαίμονα τοῦ κακοῦ, παρόλο ποὺ Τοῦ πρόσφερε ὅλα τὰ βασίλεια τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ἄνθρωποι τον χλεύασαν, λόγῳ τῆς πίστεως του στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Δὲν Τὸν χλεύασαν οἱ ἀσήμαντοι, Τὸν χλεύασαν οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ τοῦ λαοῦ του. Ἀλίμονο γιὰ ἕναν λαό, ὅταν οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ του δὲν πιστεύουν στὴν τελικὴ νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Θὰ καταρρεύσουν καὶ ὁ λαὸς καὶ οἱ ἀρχηγοὶ του. Θὰ καταρρεύσουν, ὅπως κατέρρευσε καὶ ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ κυβερνοῦνταν ἀπὸ ἀνανδρους καὶ ὑποκριτὲς πατριῶτες. Θὰ σκοντάψει καὶ θὰ πέσει, ὅπως ὅταν σκοντάφτουν καὶ πέφτουν οἱ τυφλοὶ, ὅταν ὀδηγοῦνται ἀπὸ τυφλοῦς.

Καὶ τελικὰ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ὁποῖος γεννήθηκε στὴν φάτνη μὲ τὰ ἄχυρα οὔτε ὅταν Τὸν φυλάκισαν, Τὸν ἔφτυσαν, Τὸν μαστίγωσαν, Τὸν ἔβαλαν μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ληστῆς, Τὸν καταδίκασαν σὲ θάνατο, Τὸν σταύρωσαν, δὲν ἔχασε τὴν πίστη Του στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ. Αὐτὸς ὅλα τὰ ἄντεξε, μένοντας σταθερὸ στὴν πίστη Του, πῶς ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ κακοῦ εἶναι στιγμιαία καὶ πῶς στὸ τέλος τὸ καλὸ θὰ νικήσει!

Καὶ πραγματικά, ὅταν Τὸν σταύρωσαν στὸν Γολγοθᾶ, ἡ κακία ἀληθινὰ θριάμβευσε. Ποτὲ ὁ θρίαμβος τοῦ κακοῦ δὲν φάνηκε τόσο ὀλοκληρωτικός, ὅσο ἐκείνη τὴ στιγμὴ. Ὅταν αὐτὸς, ὁ Δίκαιος καὶ Ἀμερόληπτος Ἄνθρωπος, ἐξέπνευσε ἐξαιτίας τοῦ μαρτυρίου, στὴν ψυχὴ τῆς Μητέρας Του καὶ τῶν φίλων Του, ποὺ στέκονταν στενοχωρημένοι κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν σταυρὸ, ἐνισχύθηκε ἡ πίστη στὴν ἔσχατη νίκη τοῦ κακοῦ. Ἡ πίστη τους στὴν νίκη τοῦ καλοῦ, ποὺ εἶχε δυναμώσει στὴν ψυχὴ τους ὁ Χριστὸς, ζώντας τόσες μέρες μαζὶ τους, ἔσβησε, ὅπως σβήνει ἡ φλόγα τοῦ κεριοῦ, ὅταν φυσάει τὴν νύκτα ὁ ἀέρας.

Οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου καὶ Δίκαιου Ἀνθρώπου γύρισαν τὸ βράδυ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, βοηθώντας τὴν πονεμένη Μάνα νὰ περπατᾷ πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν πέτρινο λόφο. Ἐνῶ ἡ Μάνα πίσω ἀπὸ τὴν πλάτη της ἄφηνε τὸν Γολγοθᾶ, ὁ Γολγοθᾶς ἀσταμάτητα ἦταν μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια της. Στὸν σκοτεινὸ οὐρανὸ ἔλαμπαν τὰ ἀστέρια καὶ οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου ἀπογοητευμένοι βλέποντάς τα ἔλεγαν: Ἔγιναν τόσα καὶ ὁμοῦ ἐσεῖς

ἀστέρια λάμπετε! Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς χαίρεται γιὰ τὴν ἐπικράτηση τοῦ κακοῦ στὸ καλὸ;

Ἔτσι, πιθανόν, μιλοῦσαν στὰ ἀστέρια μὲ πονεμένη εἰρωνεῖα οἱ μαθητὲς καὶ φίλοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γυρίζοντας ἀπὸ τὸν Γολγοθᾶ. Ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ μιλοῦσαν ἔτσι οὔτε ἡ λύπη θὰ ἔσφιγγε τὴν ψυχὴ τους, ἐὰν ἐκείνη τὴν στιγμὴ μπορούσαν νὰ σηκώσουν τὴν κουρτίνα καὶ νὰ δοῦν πίσω ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὸ μέλλον. Νὰ δοῦν πολλοὺς ναοὺς, χτισμένους στὴν δόξα τοῦ Δασκάλου τους. Οὔτε ἡ πληγωμένη Μάνα θὰ ἔπεφτε ἀπὸ ἐξάντληση περῶντας ἀπὸ τὸν λόφο, ἐὰν τότε ἤξερε πῶς τὸ μαρτύριο τοῦ Γιου της στὸν Γολγοθᾶ δὲν ἦταν οὔτε μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ἡ τελευταία πράξη στὴ ζωὴ του, ὅπως τὸ κακὸ τέλος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἡ τελευταία πράξη σ' ἕνα καλὸ θεατρικὸ ἔργο. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀπλή, ἀπλή ἱστορία, ποὺ ἡ ἐκκλησία σήμερα λέει στοὺς πιστοὺς. Τὸ τέλος αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας εἶναι πῶς ὁ Χριστὸς νίκησε, τὸ καλὸ νίκησε.

Ἔσεῖς, ποὺ εἶστε λυπημένοι, σηκώστε τὸ κεφάλι. Αὐτὴ ἡ παλιὰ ἱστορία μπορεῖ καὶ στὴν δική σας ἐποχὴ νὰ δώσει ξανά ζωὴ σὲ πολλὲς μαραμμένες καρδιὲς καὶ νὰ θερμάνει τὴν πίστη πολλῶν ἀπογοητευμένων ἀνθρώπων. Γιατί ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς μαραμμένες καὶ ἀπογοητευμένες καρδιὲς στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι βαριὰ καὶ ψυχρὴ, σὰν τὸ μολύβι. Εἶναι φυσιολογικὸ νὰ ὑπάρχει τόση ἀπογοήτευση κάτω ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ βάρος καὶ ἐξαιτίας αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχρότητας...



Ὁ τυφλοπόντικας ζῆ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν γῆ διαρκῶς. Ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ τρόπου αὐτοῦ τῆς ζωῆς του, κατέστη τυφλὸς καὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ δῆ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ἀκόμη.

Κάτι ἀνάλογον συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἐμπιστοσύνην στὸν Θεὸν γιὰ τὴν παροχὴν τῶν προσκαίρων ὑλικῶν πραγμάτων. Αὐτὸς ἀσφαλῶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πιστέψῃ οὔτε περὶ τῶν αἰώνιων ἀγαθῶν, ποὺ ὑπεσχέθη ὁ Θεὸς σὲ ὅσους τὸν ἀγαποῦν. Ἡ πραγματικὴ γνώση εἶναι μιὰ μικρὴ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ προσφέρεται στὸν ἄνθρωπο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν μεγαλειώδη χάριν τῆς αἰωνίου δόξης τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Αὐτὴ ἔχει δωρηθῆ ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ διδάξῃ σαφῶς αὐτοὺς, ποὺ τὴν κατέχουν, ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἔχουν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸν Θεὸν γιὰ ὅλα τὰ ζητήματα.

**Ἅγιος Ἡσαΐας**

## WHY WON'T ORTHODOX BISHOPS FIGHT FOR CALIFORNIA?

Source: "Orthodox Reflections" blog, a collaborative effort by converts to the Orthodox Christian faith, August 21, 2020.

*From the Editor: This article presents us with the stark reality of horrible dimensions for the Orthodox faithful in California. We are aware that there exist few but nevertheless present resisting parishes to the bishopric directions that led to the interruption of the spiritual life for so many Orthodox faithful. We are also aware that the events described herein extend to other US states as well as some "democratic" western nations. We pray that this travesty, this horrible spiritual crime in the name of a virus (real or otherwise) comes to an end soon. May the new ecclesiastical new year bring these treacherous actions of so many Orthodox hierarchs, worldwide, to an end. As St. John of Krostadt advised his flock, "Attendance at Divine Services and frequent reception of Holy Communion are vital to the development of an Orthodox conscience."*

† † †

Father Josiah Trenham (Ph.D. and an immensely gifted pastor of the St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside, CA, *Ed.*) posted a wonderful reflection called "The Mother of God Destroys Secularism and Feminism online on the Eve of the Dormition." At the beginning of the video, Father Josiah gave an update on the status of churches in California. They are closed for in-door worship, but Father Josiah went through a list of Protestant pastors that are defying these orders and who are suing to protect the Constitutional and natural-rights of their parishioners to worship God.

No Orthodox jurisdiction or parish was mentioned by Father Josiah among the churches fighting for the right to worship God as He has commanded. In fact, the Orthodox appear perfectly content to live stream worship services from empty churches. Here is an example announcement from the website of the Greek Archdiocese Annunciation Cathedral in San Francisco: "In light of local authority directives, the Annunciation Cathedral will be closed to all public activities until further notice."

Scanning the rest of the site's front page you can see articles on the need to support families in Beirut, an announcement for the program of a cancelled Greek Festival entitled "Physically Distant; Spiritually Connected," and an article about Hagia Sophia reverting to a mosque.

The church is closed until further notice. As in, they have absolutely **no idea** when will they be open again. If ever. No baptisms. No weddings. No funerals. No Holy Eucharist. Cradle Orthodox children growing up with no Christian services or fellowship. And yet, not even one peep of protest. The most the church can manage is a tepid announcement at the top of the cathedral website:

Churches in California are on **indefinite** lock down to combat a virus with a 99.96% survival rate that has killed, officially, 11,523 people with an average age of almost 82 in a state with an estimated population just shy of 40 million. And that is assuming the number of deaths really reflects deaths "from" Covid, as opposed to "with" Covid, which we all know is an ongoing debate. Ironically, the closure of churches has been ordered by a government that has openly welcomed riotous demonstrations of tens of thousands on the streets.

If you visit the Greek Archdiocese's website, you will find nothing about California's suppression of the right of Christians to gather and worship God. Same on the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, though you will, of course, find articles about the Beirut explosion and Hagia Sophia becoming a mosque. Evidently, nothing of sufficient importance is occurring in the United States to warrant a mention by the successors to the Apostles.

Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Archdiocese even had the chance to pray in front of the entire Democratic Party, including the Governor of California responsible for padlocking his own churches. One would think that it would be a perfect opportunity to pray for a return of religious freedom, or an end to the "epidemic" so that we could get back to normal, or even just a prayer asking God to comfort those whose lives and businesses have been devastated by hysterical government overreaction to the equivalent of a bad flu year.

No such luck. **The Archbishop essentially endorsed Joe Biden** for president and then... prayed, "As we face the future as one American nation, bring us to our best selves, and inspire our better angels in peace, in fairness, and in generosity, that we may fight against injustice, inequality, and hatred, that we may achieve a common good, a greater good, in the name of the Holy Trinity we pray. Amen."

California closing churches? Tens of millions of unemployed? Portland is on fire nightly? Commentators on all sides of the political spectrum are openly discussing the possibility of civil war? Evidently, none of that is important enough to pray about.

The modern Democratic Party is dedicated to destroying the family, killing babies, fostering transgender madness, attacking Syria and other foreign nations with substantial Orthodox populations, defunding our police, erasing American borders, furloughing murderers, and promoting pedophiles and pedophilia along with other aberrant forms of sexuality. (Not a complete list of perversions associated with the modern Democratic Party, by the way.)

The only possible reason to offer a prayer over such a Satanic gathering would be to use the opportunity to speak prophetically. There was no justification for His Eminence to ignore religious suppression by Democratic officials, among

a whole host of other evils, in order to pray that God, “would shine the light of Your countenance upon the delegates of this convention, and upon Vice President Joe Biden for the highest office in the land.”

We fully realize what we just said was harsh. But the world we live in is on the fast track to Hell, and the Orthodox hierarchy, especially the Greeks, are pretending that everything is just politics as usual. Politics as usual does not close churches indefinitely in the largest state in the Union. The Orthodox hierarchy is implicitly accepting that Orthodox Church sacraments and services are non-essential and can be closed on the order of any executive who cares to justify the decision on the basis of “public health.”

The Very Rev. Fr. Tryphon, Abbot of All-Merciful Saviour Monastery on Vashon Island in the Puget Sound near Seattle, Washington, recently posted this on Facebook:

*Nonessential...*

*Is the Church truly less essential than a laundromat?*

*Live streaming the services does not impart God's grace in the same way the Mystical Supper imparts God's grace. Christ's Church is an essential institution far beyond a drug store or gas station, yet we continue to allow the government to tell us this is not so. How can the Church ever reclaim her position as the grace-imparting institution founded by Christ Himself, while allowing the government to declare us a non-essential service?*

*Is the forced shutdown of our public services really about a virus, or is it something more? Looking at the actual deaths directly related to the coronavirus is not any different than a serious flu epidemic, yet certain elements within our society would have us believe it is indeed a direct threat to the whole of our society, and even the world. Not even the communist revolution was able to declare the Church as a non-essential institution.*

*With love in Christ,*

*Abbot Tryphon*

Orthodox worship is **less essential** than laundromats. Than casinos. Than liquor stores. Than marijuana dispensaries. Than box stores. Walmart is open. You can buy a TV in California, but you cannot drink from the Fountain of Immortality. According to the Abbot's estimation, America has managed to suppress the Church more effectively than even the Communists.

The Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. In Her traditions and dogma (including the Bible she gave the world), she preserves the fullness of the Faith once delivered to the Apostles. The Church is perfect. Part of her perfection is the office of bishop, which is essential to the functioning of the Church.

The problem is not with this God-ordained office. The problem is with the men who are occupying the office. They are actually standing by while petty politicians have declared that the Church is non-essential. We, the concerned faithful Orthodox Christians, are not even asking the bishops to go to jail or be martyred for the faith. At this point, they can take action from the comfort of their own offices.

Among those fighting California's ban on worship is the American Center for Law and Justice, one of the nonprofit law firms representing churches in various lawsuits against the state. Jordan Sekulow is the executive director who said, “**This ban is clearly targeted at religion. It is clearly a violation of the First Amendment and a direct violation of religious liberty.**” There is no reason Orthodox Bishops could not join a lawsuit, start their own, or at least speak out in favor of the ones ongoing.

Instead, apparently, they are doing nothing but bowing down to authority.

Such passivity in the face of gross injustice is not the Orthodox Faith. Many times in history, Orthodox Christians have met, often in secret, to worship God in defiance of government edicts. Even our brethren in Muslim and commu-

nist nations still gathered to worship, despite the dangers they faced. As one priest wrote, “The truth is, however, it has never been safe to be a Christian. In the catacombs around Rome rest the remains of more martyrs for Christ than live in my home city—over half a million martyrs. Being a Christian and going to church was always a risk for them—and so it will be for every generation of Christian, unto ages of ages.”

Unfortunately, it appears in North America our bishops do not understand their own flocks. Even if the threat of Coronavirus were a hundred times what it really is, many of us would rather risk our health at Divine Liturgy than to risk our souls by keeping our churches closed or hampered by severe restrictions. Did not Our Lord and Savior



Church of Panaghia Sarantaskalioitissa,  
Island of Samos, Greece

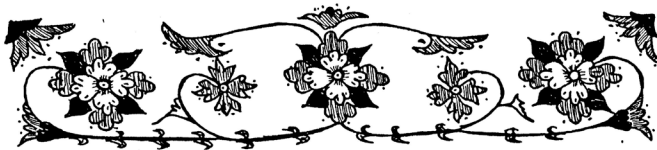
say, *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

We do not want to sacrifice our Orthodoxy for the appearance of safety. We would rather be in Church, in the fullness of the faith, than cowering at home watching live streams and keeping “safe.”

Our bishops have caved to a godless government that says it is perfectly fine to riot and kill, but not to attend Divine Liturgy. The bishops give sermons about the Martyrs of our faith who refused to give even a pinch of incense as offering to pagan emperors. Yet they allow churches to be closed indefinitely without so much as a press release in opposition.

Our bishops need to understand that we have established a precedent now that can be abused more and more going forward. This is not the end, but only the beginning. There will be more “public safety” crises in the future, even if the current “crisis” is allowed to pass. **Churches can now be singled out for closure on essentially any pretext, even if other public gatherings are allowed to proceed. God, you see, is uniquely dangerous to those who wield power.**

A future crisis could very well be much worse. And since the bishops did not rally the Orthodox to stand for the faith now in the face of relatively mild persecution, why have we reason to expect better in the face of real danger? The powers of this world may tire of simple acquiescence from our bishops. The demands can easily escalate. Having taught the faithful to value their own health and safety above the Faith, what will happen if the powers that govern this world demand the bishops’ outright apostasy? Will the faithful, conditioned to obedience of governmental authority above all else, stand with the bishops in face of an actual grave threat? Or will the faithful simply watch the bishops humiliated and, perhaps, even marched to the gallows on live stream from the **comfort and safety** of their homes?



**T**hey thought that by closing the churches they would stop the virus... Lord have mercy! Is this the first outbreak of a virus? From what I know, during epidemics the churches are open day and night and the Liturgy is offered nonstop. Some have attempted to create doubt about Holy Communion, that it can impart infection. Do you know what is the Divine Liturgy? The Body and Blood of the Resurrected Christ. Do you know of a God who defeats death but transmits sicknesses? And there are Hierarchs who tell you to change the *lavida* (Holy Communion spoon) and to dip it in disinfectant... God forbid!

**Metropolitan Neophytos of Morphou (Cyprus)**

## A CRY FROM MY HEART:

IS MY DAILY LIFE BASED ON MY FALLEN REASONING, OR MY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AND HIS BRIDE?

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, August 14, 2020.

**M**y beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, May our Most Beloved Panaghia embrace your precious soul—filling it with healing and renewed hope in Jesus, Who is our Hope!

I am not sure where this heart-centered essay will take me, but I feel compelled to share some things with all of you. If my poor words cause you to leave my list, then I entreat both your forgiveness and your prayers.

On a few occasions in the past, I have shared with you what I believe was given to me, through one of the “time-released blessings” (may it please God that they never stop!) from my Spiritual Father, Geronda Ephraim of Arizona, of blessed memory, in early March of 2019. Our thoughts, words and actions in this temporal life will either reflect that our faith in Jesus Christ and His Church is based on our fallen reason, or that our fallen reason is based on our Faith.

Over the past two generations in the USA, we have seen some of the ungodly “fruits” that are produced when man’s fallen reasoning is in control of his life, rather than God: legalized abortion, resulting in the slaughter of over 60 million innocent babies; the endorsement of same-sex marriages by a 6-3 vote of the US Supreme Court Justices; the promotion (even idolization) in the news media, public schools and universities of the homosexual life-style and transgenderism; the active application of euthanasia in many hospices throughout our Nation; the legalization of marijuana in several states; and one of the more recent actions, taken by several governors, to place having abortions in the necessary activities category but regulating worship in churches to the unnecessary one.

Another victory for the evil one, is the fear that the Covid-19 virus has placed in the hearts of so many people—even those who are regular Church-goers. And this fear, which is NOT a Godly fear, is quite prevalent in every canonical Orthodox jurisdiction in the USA and Canada. I was able to attend the Holy Liturgy in a Greek Orthodox Church today for the Feast of St. Panteleimon, the Great-martyr and healer. All but one of the faithful was wearing a mask. I am sure that one can assume that in the overwhelming majority of Orthodox churches in North America, on any given Sunday, at least 90% of these new worship practices will be present: you have to call ahead and reserve one of the limited spaces available, due to government imposed restrictions; your temperature will be taken when you enter the narthex; there is a document which states the Church cannot be held responsible if you contract the Covid-19 virus while in worship; you must wear a mask; you are not

permitted to kiss the holy ikons, a blessing cross or the hand of the priest; a parish council member will usher you to your seat; you must practice “social distancing” (a classic oxymoron) while in church; the priest wears a mask or shield while giving Holy Communion; in many churches, the *antidoron* (blessed bread) is in individual plastic bags and each person takes it out of the bowl; you are not allowed to congregate or touch each other, and are told to head for your cars immediately after church is over.

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, this cannot become the “new normal” for worship in the Orthodox Church. There is already talk that another “lockdown” will take place in the late fall or winter. God forbid! However, if this happens, then it is time for all Orthodox Christians to state a resolute NO to their governments. The elected officials must be told that we will not close our churches, nor will we limit the number of people that can worship, nor will we change the manner in which we have worshipped for the past 1400+ years, or the manner in which Holy Communion has been given for the past 1000 years!

Jesus Christ, the Word of God, our Saviour and Lord, through Whom the entire universe was created out of nothing, took our flesh upon Himself, gave us His Gospel, died upon the Cross, rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and sent His Holy Spirit upon His disciples to start His Church. And the faith-centered lives of tens of millions of holy martyrs, the dogmas and canons of the seven Ecumenical Councils, and the Spirit-filled writings and teachings of the holy Church Fathers perpetually confirm that *the gates of hell will not prevail against [His Church]!* (Mt 16:18). From this moment forward, until my final day in this temporal life, I will daily beg our most beloved Panaghia to entreat that Jesus grant me His Grace to always struggle to incarnate a life, in which my thoughts, words and actions confirm: that my fallen reasoning will be based on my faith in Jesus Christ and His Bride—my Holy Orthodox Faith!

Will you please consider joining with me in offering a similar prayer for your daily life as well? God gave to every human being an innate desire to worship Him. He has given us the ultimate form of worshipping Him through the Divine Liturgy, during which He sends His Holy Spirit upon the bread and wine, so that it becomes His Body, His Blood! That is why the devil hates the Divine Liturgy, because this ineffable, God-established form of worship permits us to become Christ: *the clay is no longer clay, when it becomes the Body of the King!* [St. Nicholas Cabasilas].

As I stated in an earlier teaching, in which I quoted the Fool-for-Christ, Gabriel of Georgia: If we knew how sacred the interior of our church is, with the hundreds – even thousands – of times that the Holy Spirit had descended *upon us and the Gifts set forth*; if we were aware that there are angels and saints worshipping with us in every Holy

Liturgy, we would *wash our faces with the dust on the floor!* Therefore, it is imperative that we do our part—both clergy and laity—to assure that the current “new normal” in worship will never become permanent. Furthermore, if our worship is not restored to its pre-Covid-19 state very soon, then may God raise up bishops to bring about this restoration.

Forgive me, brothers and sisters, please forgive me! But my heart is aching, as I sense a spirit of lethargy, even indifference, around us. Is it possible that “virtual Liturgies” are becoming popular, even among people who regularly attended Liturgy in the past? How many people, who attended Church almost every Sunday, have attended five Liturgies, or less, in the past five months? How many of those, who regularly confess their sins, have not been unable to have the *Epitraheilion* of their priest upon their head? How many of our brethren will choose to never again kiss a holy ikon, blessing Cross, or the hand of a priest? How many will feel it is necessary to continue to wear a mask in Church, even when the pandemic is a thing of the past? How many dear Orthodox faithful will cut back on the times that they prepare to receive Holy Communion, because they fear that the holy spoon, which symbolizes our Panaghia, could pass on a disease to them?

Our Most Sweet Lord Jesus is ready to grant us His Grace to restore proper worship, and to never again permit any virus, plague or government to hinder our worship in any manner. Yes, beloved and dear co-sojourners on the narrow path to Paradise, this will indeed happen! It is up to me and to you: Will we allow anything, or anyone, in this world to convince us that our fallen reason should control the way in which we live each day? May it not be! Instead, let us say to the evil one, *The Lord rebukes you, O devil! With God's Grace, my faith in Him will control my actions and my fallen reasoning. With God's Grace, you will never again be able to close our Churches! With God's Grace, I am ready to suffer and die for Him!*

My Panaghia, please take my poor words to Jesus!

Unworthy priest, +Demetrios



As soon as we cry out to Panaghia, she rushes to our help. You don't even finish saying, *All-holy Theotokos help me*, and at once, like lightning, she shines through the nous and fills the heart with illumination.

St. Joseph the Hesychast



## OVER 400 PRO-LIFE LAWS HAVE BEEN PASSED SINCE 2010 AND ABORTIONS HAVE DROPPED 50%!

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Pro-lifers are rightly disappointed by today's Supreme Court ruling in *June Medical Services v. Russo*. The narrow 5-4 decision struck down a set of popular common-sense health and safety regulations of abortion facilities that were enacted by the Louisiana state legislature. This marks the second time in four years that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled against abortion facility health standards that protect women. In 2016 in *Whole Women's Health v. Hellerstedt*, the Court struck down another set of protections that were enacted in Texas. However, since that time, Trump appointees Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh have been confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court. As such, pro-lifers were hoping that their appointments would result in a durable five-vote majority that would uphold incremental pro-life laws. However, today's ruling shows that is not the case.

Indeed, the Court's decision to double down on the status quo of *Hellerstedt* is certainly a setback.

In light of this, it is all the more important for pro-lifers to steel their resolve to do as much as we can to save lives moving forward—and there are still many ways to do that, including by challenging *Roe v. Wade* more directly, which this particular case was not designed to do.

Recent history shows that persistence has paid off for the pro-life movement. In the past, when pro-life laws have been struck down by the courts, pro-lifers have successfully appealed these decisions. In other cases, revised laws have been upheld. For instance, the federal Hyde Amendment was struck down by lower courts before it was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Harris v. McRae* in 1980. On multiple occasions during the 1970s, the Supreme Court struck down pro-life parental involvement laws before upholding such laws in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a state partial-birth abortion ban in *Stenberg v. Carhart* in 2000, before upholding a revised partial-birth abortion ban in *Gonzalez v. Carhart* in 2007. As such, a revised set of standards may well be upheld in the future.

Furthermore, while there is no way to predict which cases the court will hear, the plethora of pro-life state laws enacted

over the past 10 years means other significant cases involving pro-life legislation could reach the Supreme Court in the near future. According to the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, over 400 state-level pro-life laws have been passed since 2010—more than one-third of the total since *Roe v. Wade*—and these laws are increasingly protective. Just last year, Alabama enacted a law protecting all unborn children throughout pregnancy. Twenty-one states have enacted laws limiting late-term abortion after five months of pregnancy when there is clear scientific evidence that unborn children can feel pain. Pro-life legal analysts think laws like these may have the best chance of reaching the court and presenting a challenge to *Roe v. Wade*. This is because evidence of fetal pain might represent another compelling state interest to protect the preborn.

This is all happening in the context of positive pro-life trends in society. For instance, the pro-life movement has made durable, long-term gains in the court of public opinion. Polling by Gallup shows that the percentage of people identifying as pro-life has increased by 16 percentage points since 1995. Additionally, between 1991



and 2019, the number of abortion facilities has fallen by more than two-thirds, while the number of pregnancy help centers has steadily increased. Most importantly, data from both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Guttmacher Institute shows that the U.S. abortion rate has fallen by more than 50 percent since

1980. Additionally, an important reason for this long-term abortion rate decline is because a higher percentage of unintended pregnancies are being carried to term. This shows that pro-life educational, service and legislative activities have all been effective.

Overall, arguably more damaging than the policy implications of the Supreme Court's decision is its potential to demoralize pro-lifers during a key election year. As we approach the election, it is important to remember that a vote for Joe Biden and other Democratic candidates is not a vote for the status quo on abortion. Biden now opposes the Hyde Amendment and therefore supports forcing taxpayers to fund unlimited elective abortions through the Medicaid program. Additionally, Biden has promised to pick judicial nominees who decidedly favor the legality of abortion on demand – potentially rolling back a variety of pro-life precedents and reversing decades of progress. Pro-lifers should resist the temptation to give up on a long-sighted strategy that has resulted in real gains, or to lose sight of the extremely high stakes; rather we must redouble our efforts and continue to build a culture of life.

## PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

*By Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus. Since March 4, 2020, His Eminence Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol has been conducting weekly conversations with the faithful, interpreting the Scriptures, delving into the needs of the faithful, and answering their questions.*



We left off with the seventh chapter of the Second Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians. At the very beginning of the chapter, the apostle says the following: *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Cor 7:1). Then the apostle Paul speaks about the sorrows that the Corinthians had to endure. This is very

useful for us to hear today, because thereby we see that the first Christians also faced life's hardships, temptations, and sins, that their life was not angelic. However, it is important that they perceived them through a spiritual prism: through repentance, through the labor of self-correction.

In the previous chapter, the apostle Paul says that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that God lives in man. As our body is such a sanctuary, we must take care not to pollute the temple of God, as, for example, we treat any church building: We consider it a sacred place, and we do not even think of committing any vile act there. It should be the same with our body, our soul, and our entire existence, which is the temple of God. *For ye are the temple of the living God.* (2 Cor 6:16), says the apostle. The Lord calls us to reject sin, evil, and every temptation, to truly become the people of God, so *the Lord Almighty would become our Father, and we His sons and daughters.* (cf 2 Cor 6:18).

Thus, the beginning of the seventh chapter says: *Having therefore these promises...* He Who promises is the Lord Himself. He promises that He will be our Father, and we His children when we renounce sin and everything that contaminates our existence. And if God promises something, He never lies. The Lord's promises are fulfilled; He is unlike us, who usually promise the moon and then cannot fulfill even half of it. Thus, the spiritual struggle we perform has the prospect of eternal life.

Receiving a promise from the Lord, we cannot always fully comprehend it. Usually we expect something from God that fits into the framework of our perception and understanding. However, everything that we receive from God is in

reality much larger and broader than we can imagine. The promises of God work as a counterbalance. On one side of the scale: the weight of our spiritual labors, patience, expectation—everybody has something; and on the other side: the promises of God. The result is not just a balance, but the promises of God neutralize these hardships of our lives. The Lord is incomprehensible. It is impossible to truly understand and embrace anything that we receive from God. The Lord is rich. He is not like us, who have our own measures, our own limitations. God is generous in mercy; the love of God is boundless, and no single creature can fully contain it. A man who feels the love of God struggles to describe it, because it is indescribable.

I remember how St. Paisios told me about when he saw St. Euphemia. It was in Great Lent, as we are now [at the time of this talk], in about the second week. She appeared to him in the morning, in the Kallyva of the Precious Cross in Kapsala, and stayed with him the entire day. St. Euphemia described her entire life to him, because the Elder did not know her hagiography. He had heard that there was a St. Euphemia but did not know anything about her. She told him that as a young girl in the fourth century in the city of Chalcedon, she had to endure the most terrible sufferings for Christ. As she was telling him, the Elder saw her entire life before him, like a film on TV. Reaching the point of her sufferings, Elder Paisios was afraid of what he saw and asked: "How could you bear all of these sufferings?" After all, she was a young girl, and the sufferings were the most savage imaginable. And the saint answered him: "Geronda, had I known what glory the martyrs receive in Heaven for their sufferings, I would have tried to suffer even more, because it is all temporary, but the glory of God is eternal."

Therefore, the apostles and the holy fathers always tell us that if we endure a certain trial for the sake of the love of Christ, then we should understand that the reward of Christ will be much greater. We should strive to receive this reward from the Lord and have eternal communion with Him. Yes, perhaps it may look self-serving that we are thirsting for a reward, but we are weak people after all, and we simply need to see the prospect of our actions—such is our nature.

The prospect of eternal life is the promise given us by God. Therefore, when difficult times come in our lives, we need to remember the promises of God; we have to reflect upon our ascent to the Heavenly Kingdom, that our life does not end with the passing of these few years that we are allotted to live here on Earth, but our life will continue in the eternal Kingdom. Thus, we will be able to overcome any difficulty we face, whether on a personal level, a social level, or a global level, as, for example, the danger from various viruses or the encroachment of enemies on our

security and peace of mind. Of course, we are people, and it is intrinsic within us to worry for our lives. But who can guarantee our safety? Who can tell us with certainty that we will not catch the coronavirus? Only God can give this world security.

When a man gives his life over to God and says, “God’s will be done in all things,” then he truly begins to feel peace of soul. This is what our ancestors said, and they were peaceful people. They always said: “The Lord’s will be done,” and believed what they said. At the same time, they were ready to endure whatever happened in their lives, having faith that the Lord sees our entire life. And even if death comes, that is, the worst thing that can happen to a person, then it is not so terrible, because Christ has overcome it.

We experience the victory of Christ over death every day in the Church. Death is destroyed through the death of Jesus Christ. And if we have hope in the Resurrected Lord, then we overcome death, corruption, fears, insecurity, etc. Christ promised to ever be with us. He asks but one thing of us—to cleanse ourselves from sin. How can we do this?

Our cleansing, of course, is accomplished through ascetic and spiritual struggles that we all must perform: the struggle of purification from the passions, the struggle of fasting, prayer, spiritual reading, confession, participating in the Church Mysteries, alms, through any spiritual labor within the power of any individual man. By our fallen nature, we all have our own weaknesses, and we cannot overcome all of our sins. Our salvation does not consist in a sinless experience, but in repentance. We must learn to repent of our sins, to ask forgiveness from God, from men, from ourselves for all those sins and weaknesses we have. Thus, through repentance and prayer we receive the grace of God, and repentance becomes the cause of a man’s salvation.

In the end, it is not a sinless life that saves us (none of us lives our entire life without mistakes or without sins). And we will make mistakes and commit sins, all because of our weakness. Engaging in the ascetic struggle of battling with sin, we will realize that we are not able to cope with everything. And it is precisely when we feel our weakness, our inability to cope with sin, that we need to sincerely repent. Repentance is a sign of humility. A humble man is ever repenting, but a proud man—never, because he has a very high idea of himself and does not feel the need to repent before God.

Great Lent, which we are currently going through, is the most beautiful time, filled with repentance and humility. If you listen to the Lenten prayers read daily in Church, then you will see that they are filled with the cry of repentance and humility, which does not lead a man into the darkness of despair and hopelessness, but gives courage,

hope, patience, a way out, a light at the end of the tunnel, which is nothing other than the love of God and His presence in our lives.

Thus, the apostle Paul says: *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.* Here he divides sin into physical and spiritual. In fact, there is no difference between them, because when a man sins, he sins in both soul and body. However, in order to better recognize all the facets of sin, the apostle separates them and calls them filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

There are bodily sins, that is, those committed by the body, which we all know well and with which we fight. But the whole man is saved. For example, we say that we fast, that we abstain from food. Such a bodily fast undoubtedly has a beneficial effect on our soul as well, because man is the unity of soul and body. It is one thing to eat a light soup, and another to eat a shish kebab. There is a difference. In the same way, there is a difference between a man who fasts and a man who does not fast, between a man who is vigilant and prays and a man who sleeps ten hours. Every movement of the soul or body has an effect on the other—for example, remembrance of wrongs, or holding a grudge. It is a spiritual passion, but it also affects our body. Remembrance of wrongs is reflected on the whole body of a man, on his behavior, his appearance. But the appearance of a pure, virtuous person is completely different. His piety is imprinted on his face. Look at the saints, how beautiful their faces are.

I remember when a group of school teachers from Thessaloniki, about seven or eight of them, came to the Holy Mountain. Two of these teachers, who organized the trip, were believers, but the rest, unfortunately, did not believe in God. And looking at the monks the whole time, in the end they said: “The life of a monk deserves respect, of course; but are they really so different from us who do not live a Christian life?” One of the teachers who organized the trip replied: “I do not know if you will be able to understand, but look at your faces and at the faces of the monks—how you look and how they look. Do you really not see the difference? What radiates from us and what radiates from these people is completely different.”

And indeed, then I noticed it myself. If you look at the face of Christians who are spiritually laboring, you will see some special internal peace in them. A proud, cunning, evil, money-loving man has a completely different look. Of course, we should not judge someone by his appearance, but quite often our face broadcasts the whole truth about us.

When man labors spiritually, his whole being is sanctified, both soul and body, because man is a psychosomatic unity. We cannot divide a person and say here is where

his soul ends and his body begins. No, take bread for an example. To make bread, you have to mix water and flour and knead the dough. When we have baked the bread, we cannot distinguish the water and the flour anymore. It is already one whole. The same is true of the human body and soul. As long as a man is alive, he is an inseparable unity of soul and body; therefore death is the enemy of mankind, inasmuch as it destroys this unity. The body dies, and the soul departs for where souls live. But Christ will abolish death and man will rise again. Only the body will resurrect because the soul does not die. Then the soul and body will be united again. The body will become incorrupt, like the body of Christ after His Resurrection. Man will regain his psychosomatic unity.

Thus, the pollution of the soul and body is any sin committed by the body or soul. Therefore, let us labor with fear of God for the sanctification of our souls and bodies. Holiness is a spiritual ascetic struggle. Everything that a man thinks he is doing for God, he is actually doing for himself. For example, we say: "I fast for the love of Christ," "I give alms for the sake of Christ," "I go to church for Christ." In reality, Christ does not need all of this. If we do not fast today, what is that to the Lord? Or, what does the Lord receive when



Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II

we give alms? In fact, thanks to our spiritual work, it is we who benefit, we receive a blessing, we sanctify ourselves. The Lord gets nothing out of it. We labor in order to be with Christ. We strive to purify ourselves in order to become the very place where the Lord can come and abide. We need only to perform all these spiritual and ascetic struggles with fear of God, in order to have inner purity.

What does *with fear of God* mean? We often say this in church, or we say it about someone, that this or that man has the fear of God. We have to understand that this fear of God has nothing in common with our psychological fear, when, for example, we fear dogs, cats, airplanes, the coronavirus. We do not fear like that. When our Church calls, *in the fear of God, with faith and love draw near...* it does not mean that we should be immediately seized by fear, by worrying, and begin to quake with horror. Instead it means that we feel reverence, holy awe, that is, the feeling that God is Holy, that He is our Father, that He loves us, that He is the most sacred and precious thing in the world. And when a man feels awe, love, and reverence in his heart, all of this together is the fear of God.

The fear of God is essential to building our relationship with God. This is the most important work of our life. How should we build this relationship? Through keeping the commandments of God, through repentance for our sins and contrition for what we have done, through daily spiritual and ascetic struggle, and through participating in the holy Mysteries of the Church, which are a necessary element of the life in Christ. Of course, all of this should happen with every man to the best of his ability. And so, thus laboring in the fear of God, we acquire Divine grace in our hearts.

I remember when I was the abbot of Machairas Monastery, about thirty years ago, and we went to a conference in Georgia organized by the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Georgian Church was only beginning to revive then after so many years of persecution. Everything was in ruins.

Even when we landed at the airport in Tbilisi, I could not believe it was an airport. It felt like we had just landed in an open field: There was wheat growing and cows walking all around. The airport building was one small room. There was a wooden cupboard with "Duty Free" written on it, where they were selling jars of jam and other canned foods! It was a very difficult situation in Georgia then. The Church

was in decline. Many churches were in ruins. It was very similar to what we see today in the territory of Cyprus occupied by the Turks.

On Sunday, we went to the patriarchal service. The Patriarch of Georgia is a holy man, still alive, but quite elderly. According to tradition, the Patriarch is vested during the service in the middle of the church. Deacons and subdeacons help him. I was standing there, watching this ceremony and thinking: "What is all of this for?" (Who knew that it would wind up happening to me [as a bishop]?). And one hieromonk standing near me heard my thoughts and said to me:

"You see how they are vesting the Patriarch?"

"Yes," I said to him.

"Do you know why they dress him like this?"

"No idea. Can he not dress himself?"

"Have you ever seen how an operation goes?"

"I have never been at an operation itself, but I saw one on television when I was little."

"When a doctor is performing a complex operation, where his every move could be fatal, he does not run around the operating room in search of a scalpel, needles, and other in-

struments. He just raises his hand and his assistants should immediately understand what he needs, or in an extreme case he can say the number of the instrument. The doctor should be completely concentrated on the operation. It is the same with a presbyter or bishop when he celebrates the Divine Liturgy—he should not be distracted by what he is going to wear, or anything else. This is why deacons are called deacons (meaning “servant” or “assistant” in Greek—*Ed.*), because they serve and help the bishop, so he can wholly devote himself to prayer and the Divine Liturgy without distraction.

The apostle Paul himself tells us: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* (Phil 2:12). That is, our salvation, our relationship with God, all of our spiritual work must be worked out with fear and trembling. Not hastily or carelessly, not as some side activity, but as the most important thing in our life. For example, when we are driving, our eyes are fixed on the road, but as soon as we begin to look off to the side, then we get in an accident. In much the same way, we should follow the path of God, ascending to holiness with *fear of God*.



Those of us who have passed through pains, either [those of the soul] or physical, know that we never prayed as hard as we did when we were in the bed of pain or when some heavy psychical sadness tested us, while, when we have everything, we forget prayer and fasting, and many things. It is for this reason that God allows pain.

**Blessed Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)**



Our Orthodox faith should never be associated with politics, because someone who loves his neighbor cares for every human being—no matter who he is, no matter what convictions he might hold. When it comes to questions of ideology, Orthodox Christians are primarily concerned about whether the Church has the freedom to carry out Her work, which is to heal the sick in Her care. The Church must have this freedom.

So if an ideology hinders the Church from carrying out Her work, it is immaterial—as far as the Church is concerned—whether it is called atheistic Marxism or right-wing Masonry. For the Church, they are both the same—hostile forces from whom She is equally obligated to defend Herself...

**Fr. John Romanides (+2001)**

## ON REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH, HELL, AND JUDGMENT

*From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim, pp. 144-150.*



The older I grow, the more I perceive the instability, the vanity of earthly things. Oh, why do we trouble ourselves in vain? Our life is short—dust, ashes, a dream—and in a little while, we shall taste corruption. Today you have your health, and tomorrow you lose it; today you are laughing, and tomorrow you are sullen. Now your eyes are shedding tears from an abundance of joy, and soon they will be shedding tears from pain and grief; today the economy is stable, and tomorrow misfortune strikes; today you receive good news, and in a little while bad news replaces it.

In vain we trouble ourselves; life is a shadow and a dream. Where are our parents, our siblings, our grandparents? The tomb has received them all; they have all decayed and have been eaten by worms. The tomb and decay await us also!

Ah, ah, death—bitter is your remembrance. Our Christ has given us the power to become one with God (cf Jn 1:12) by arming us with so many divine weapons to fight our relentless enemy. But we—and I, above all—become prisoners of our enemy by neglecting the weapons Christ gave us, and as we approach death we tremble in agony and try by every means to prolong our life, because the soul is afraid to leave the body. Why is it afraid? Why does it not take courage as a child of God? Is it going perhaps to a foreign king? But the king is its Maker, its Savior, Who shed His blood in order to redeem our soul from its enemy. Why then does it fear and lack courage?

Death is inherently cold—*my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death,* (Mt 26:38) said our Jesus. Yes, death is cold by nature. But unfortunately, most of the fear comes from the conscience: the conscience does not assure the soul that it has lived properly; it has not put itself in order; it has not washed its wedding garment, and so it is ashamed to present itself to the King, thinking about what the verdict will be: yes or no? Will I be saved or not?

If, however, the soul leaves without having confessed and without having repented completely, then woe—this is the *evil day* which the prophet Jeremiah hints at. (Jer 17:17). Let us pray that our holy God will deliver us from this by giving us complete repentance, worthy works of repentance, works of mercy and love, and a spirit of repentance with true humility, so that the just Judge may be merciful towards us, so that when the fearful hour of death comes, the soul will take

courage in the mercy of God and say, “I trust in God, that He will have mercy on my lowliness.”

The years roll by and pass, and day by day each one of us draws closer and closer to the end of his life. Our precious time rolls by and disappears before our eyes, Without our realizing, of course, what is escaping us unnoticed. For if the little child knew the worth of gold, he would not prefer to have a cheap candy instead. Doesn't this also hold true for people, and above all for me?

When our Lord comes at the appointed time to judge the world: when the heavens are rolled up like a piece of paper, and the earth, which has been thoroughly defiled by those dwelling upon it, is renewed; when the sun, the moon, and the stars fall like autumn leaves; when the trumpet resounds throughout the entire world, and the scattered dry bones are reconstructed and flesh and life come upon them (Ezek 37:1-14); when the ranks of the angels will gather in the vastness of heaven in honor of the fearful Judge Who is to come; when small clouds rise up from the infinite multitude of resurrected people and lift upon themselves the holy and saved people to meet the Lord in the air—then those who have remained below and see all these things will weep most bitterly and beat their breasts in despair, reflecting that they wasted their precious time here in pleasures, in drunkenness, in acquiring wealth, in illicit deeds, in avarice, and in every sin, which now condemn them to this most pitiful and lamentable condition of theirs. Will they not pathetically seek to have a little time to run to the poor, to the sick, and to every destitute person, so that they also might hear the sweet voice of the Lord saying to them, *Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you ... for I was hungry and you gave Me food ... I was naked and you clothed Me, etc.?* (Mt 25:34-36).

At some time in their lives they heard these things. However, in Hades there is no repentance. For this reason, the utmost despair will seize them. They will seek death; they will have a burning desire for it to deliver them from their boundless sufferings, but unfortunately they will not find it, for everything will have already been transformed into immortality! And all this holds true for me...

Man comes into the light of this world crying, he passes his life in weeping and sorrows, and he leaves the world in tears and pain. O vanity of vanities! The dream vanishes, and man awakens into the reality of the true life. No one notices how this vain life flows by—the years pass, the months roll by, the hours disappear, the moments slip by imperceptibly, and then without any warning, the telegram comes: *Put your house in order, for you will die; you will live no longer!* (Isa 38:1).

Then the deception is uncovered, and a person dying realizes what an important role the world played for him. He feels regret and distress; he yearns for the time that is gone; he would give all his wealth to buy one day in order to repent

and receive communion. Unfortunately, though, not one favor is given to him. Previously, time was at his disposal for years; he, however, wasted it in business, in bars, in cinemas, and in every shameful desire.

Wise is the merchant who realized the deceit of this temporal life, became wise, and sent his merchandise to heaven before the fair of life ended, in order to find it there in the treasuries of the heavenly city of God with accrued interest and dividends. Blessed is that wise man, for he will live the painless and blessed life unto the ages of ages, while the unwise, the drunkards, the greedy, the lovers of money, the lewd, the murderers, and the rest of my fellow-sinners—of whom I am the first—will be thrown into the furnace of unquenchable fire!

Now that the sun is shining and the day casts its sweet light upon us, let us walk quickly along the road of our correction, before the night of the future afterlife overtakes us, at which time we shall no longer be able to walk. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor 6:2), cries the Apostle Paul in his immortal words.

Oh, how much the memory of death should flourish in the soul of the Christian! Since he believes in the real truth, it is impossible for him to ignore death.

After my Elder's heart condition had passed, he wept and recited a line from the funeral service: *Alas, what a struggle the soul has as it parts from the body!* Indeed, this is the truth! How beautifully the psalmist expresses what peace a prepared soul has: *I prepared myself and was not troubled.* (Pss 118:60).

At any moment, every soul can expect the telegram from heaven to break off all relations with earthly things, to seal the time of this “fair,” to render an exact account of his spiritual trading, and to seal his eternal fate either in the heights of heaven or the depths of hell.

Ah, When I reflect upon this, what can I say! May the all-compassionate God be merciful to my wretched soul, which has nothing but its indifference and unreadiness. My mind stops when it contemplates this absolute truth about salvation.

*Eternity*—oh, what a great mystery! The world, the flesh, and the devil lead us astray and throw us into forgetfulness—and suddenly a voice is heard: *Behold, the Bridegroom comes!* When we are breathing our last, what preparation can we make then, when our conscience has already been cauterized and can no longer feel anything or cry out to us? Then the voice of truth is heard: “Only when the sun was setting did you remember God; what were you doing all day long when the sun was shining?”

*Watch and be ready,* (cf Mt 24:43, 44) cries our Jesus! Blessed are those who have ears to hear, who hear and get ready, for they will be counted worthy of eternal happiness. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord will find ready when He comes, for they will rejoice eternally.

Let us patiently endure the sorrows of life, that we may attain the eternal things full of joy. *In vain does every mortal trouble himself; as soon as we conquer the world, we dwell in the tomb.* As long as there is light, let us walk towards our great destination, for the hour is coming when there will be darkness, and then we shall no longer be able to work for our soul.

Raise your mind to the dread judgment seat of Christ: what defense shall we give on the day of judgment when our deeds are judged? How frightening is the hour in which the soul waits full of fear to hear the decision regarding where it will go to dwell eternally!

The word *eternity* is frightful! To understand in part what eternity means, I shall give you an example. Imagine that the whole earth is one big piece of granite, and every thousand years a bird comes to sharpen its beak on this rock. When the entire rock is worn away by the bird sharpening its beak, then we shall have some faint notion of what eternity means—not that we have actually understood eternity, immortality, or life without end! So this life of ours here on earth determines our eternity, like flipping a coin: paradise or hell! Therefore, how much caution must we have!...

You were patient for so many years, and they passed like a dream. But even if we lived a thousand years, they would still pass like a dream. Oh, how vain is everything that belongs to this world here! Every life is followed by death. Death is man's transfer from this world to the other—the one that is immortal and eternal.

It is not important if someone loses this life here. One way or another, we shall all die someday anyway. The important thing is not to lose our immortal life, the life without end. Endless life in hell—oh, what a fearful thing! My God, save us all.

When God brings the new day, let us think that it is our last day and that when the sun sets we shall depart to the judgment seat of Christ. How should we spend our last day? In silence, prayer, obedience, tears, and repentance, begging God to be merciful!

Likewise at night, we should think that it is our last night, and our bed will be our tomb! Each one of us should think, "Ah, how will I pass through the toll-houses? I wonder, will I pass through them? Who knows which one will stop me? How will I look at the fearful face of the just Judge? How will I hear His frightful voice of reproof? What terror will seize me until I hear the eternal decision regarding where I shall be placed! And what if I am sent to hell—and justly so! Woe to my wretched soul! How will I be patient as I am punished with the demons in the darkness, in the filth, with no light, with no consolation at all—only the sight of demon and nothing else!"

We should ponder these and many other things every day and night, living them as if they were our last! For we do not know when the telegram will come from God's headquarters, from the capital, the Jerusalem above.

Be careful, my child; do not let time pass fruitlessly and without improvement in your soul, for death comes like a thief. Woe to us if it finds us in a state of sloth and laziness—then the mountains and hills will need to weep for us; then we shall be found empty of good works, and Hades will shepherd us eternally!

My child, why should we suffer such a lamentable shipwreck when we are able, with God's help, to avoid it and be rescued at the saving harbor of the kingdom of God! I know that we have to wrestle with formidable enemies and that the labor is great. But with God—that is, with the power of God—everything gives way when man's will and strength cooperate with it.

When you are sitting in your cell, keep your mind meditating on death. Don't let your mind wander here and there, but collect your thoughts and reflect: see the mortality of your body; see how the body chills, changes, and the soul departs from it. What a struggle the soul has as it departs from the body! How much it weeps then; how much it sighs; how great is its regret! *It turns its eyes to the angels, but its entreaties are to no avail. It stretches out its hands to men but finds no helper.*

Meditate on the soul's ascent after it departs. When it ascends and encounters the hordes of evil demons, it trembles as they reveal sins it had committed but had completely forgotten, and wonders what will happen. It ascends from one toll-house to the next, and at every toll-house it only gives a defense, until it passes them all. If it passes all of them and is not found guilty at any of the toll-houses, it then ascends to venerate Christ, according to the Fathers. If, however, it is found guilty and accountable for any passion, it is thrown into Hades!

There was one soul that had passed all except one, the last one, which is the toll-house of mercilessness. "Alas, alas!" said a certain saint who was having a vision of that soul. "He passed them all, and only at the last one was he shaken, and the demons flung him into Hades with a crash!"

There was another saved soul being carried up by the angels of God into heaven. Other angels, who had just taken another soul to heaven descended and embraced that soul, and he sensed an ineffable fragrance from the embrace of those angels who had approached the throne of God. And the angels said, "Glory to God, Who helped this soul to be saved!"

We should never lack this contemplation of death or other such meditations. All these contemplations create watchfulness in the soul and purify and cleanse the mind so that it may feel the contemplation better. This contemplation is a barrier for evil thoughts. When this spiritual contemplation is within us, we shut out evil thoughts; there is no room in us for them because that contemplation has occupied the space of the mind. When we do not have godly contemplations, then indeed we are overcome by passionate contemplations.

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## FAITH ALONE WILL NOT SAVE US

By Archbishop Nikiforos Theotokis. Greek: Νικηφόρος Θεοτόκης; Russian: Никифор Феотоки or Никифор Феотокис; (1731–1800) was a Greek scholar and theologian, who became an archbishop in the southern provinces of the Russian Empire. A polymath, he is respected by the Greek Orthodox church as one of the “teachers of the nation.”

*Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed;*

[Jn. 20:29)]

† † †



Indeed, great is the power of faith! Wondrous are the results of faith! Infinite is the profit that ensues from faith! It grants eternal life, and bestows us with the heavenly kingdom! For it is written, *that by believing ye might have life through His name.* (Jn 20:31). And elsewhere it is stated, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou and thy household*

*shalt be saved.* (Acts 16:31). Therefore, faith does save, and belief in Christ alone is capable of saving man.

But why do the very same Holy Scriptures also state, *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.* (Mt 16:27). Additionally, it says, *Who will render to each [person] according to his works.* (Rom 2:6). Yet elsewhere, “And they who have done good shall proceed unto the resurrection of life; while they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (Jn. 5:29).

What can we make of this? Why do the Holy Scriptures sometimes state that faith saves man, while other times teach that good works are the cause of salvation? Do the God-given words of the Holy Scriptures contradict each other? Dear reader, do not be fooled! God’s teachings are in complete agreement with each other. Neither faith alone, nor good works alone save man; rather, both faith in conjunction with good works save man.

Faith consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. Theoretical faith exists when we believe with our mind everything that our faith teaches without doing any good works. Such faith is dead, of no benefit, and incapable of saving man. “Faith,” affirms the divine St. James, *on its own is dead if it is not accompanied by works.* (Jas 2:17). *My brethren, what good is it if someone proclaims that he has faith but has no [good] works? Is [such] faith capable of saving him?* (Jas 2:14).

Practical faith exists when we not only believe in everything our faith teaches, but also carry out and abide by all its orders and statutes. This is the faith that the Apostle Paul speaks of when he says, *Faith which worketh by love.* (Gal 5:6). Therefore, when the Holy Scriptures proclaim, *So that believing ye might have life through His name, and everyone who believes and is baptized shall be saved.* (Mk 16:16), and other such similar statements, it is speaking of practical faith that is put into action through love, and which co-exists united with good works. Similarly, when the Scriptures teach, “God will render to each [person] according to his works,” and the like, it is referring to people who believe: it is referring to the works that have been carried out as a result of faith.