

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

By St. John Maximovitch.

When the Lord had finished the Mystical Supper with His disciples and given them His Instructions, He went with them to the Mount of Olives. On the way He continued His final teachings, after which He addressed the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and those who would believe their word (Jn 17).

On crossing the stream of the Cedron, the Lord and His disciples went into the garden of Gethsemane, where He had been accustomed to gather with them earlier. Here, He left His disciples, except for Peter, James and John, telling them to sit down for a time while He prayed. Then, He Himself with Peter, James and John went on a little further. He wanted to be on His own as much as possible, but knowing all that was going to happen, He began to sorrow, to be distressed and horrified, and He said to those with Him: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.* And going a little further off, He fell face down on the earth and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer, and went up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were there, but not watching: sleep had overcome them. In vain did their Divine Teacher exhort them to watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples again fell asleep and immediately the Savior departed from them in order to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour of the betrayal of the Son of Man into the hands of sinners drew near. Jesus' intensity of prayer reached the highest degree—He

came out in a bloody sweat which fell in drops on the earth (Lk 22:44).

What did Jesus pray about with such fiery intensity? What did He beseech the Heavenly Father, falling face down to the earth three times? *Abba, My Father! All is possible to Thee; O if only Thou wouldst grant that this cup be taken from Me. If it is possible, let this cup pass by Me; take this cup from Me. However, not as I will, but as Thou wilt; not My will, but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me, but I must drink of it, may Thy will be done.*

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. The Divine and human natures, without merging into each other and without changing, *undivided and unseparated* (the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council) were united in Him in one Person. In accordance with His two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one substance with God the Father and had one Will with Him and the Holy Spirit. But as perfect man, consisting of a soul and a body, the Lord also had human feelings and a human will. His human will was completely obedient to His Divine will. The Lord subjected His human will to the Divine will—He sought only to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was *to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34).

But the work which was set before Him to finish was greater than any other, and even unfeeling, soulless nature was bound to be amazed at it. It was necessary for Him to redeem man from sin and death, and reestablish the union of man with God. It was necessary that the sinless Savior should take upon Himself all human sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, should feel the weight of the sin of all humanity and sorrow over it in such a way as

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

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

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was possible only for complete holiness, which clearly feels even the slightest deviation from the commandments and Will of God. It was necessary that He, in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united, should in His holy, sinless humanity experience the full horror of the distancing of man from his Creator, of the split between sinful humanity and the source of holiness and light - God.

The depth of the fall of mankind must have stood before His eyes at that moment; for man, who in Paradise did not want to obey God and who listened to the devil’s slander against Him, would now rise up against his Divine Savior, slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy to live upon the earth, would hang Him on a tree between Heaven and earth, thereby subjecting Him to the curse of the God-given law (Deut 21:22-23). It was necessary that the sinless Righteous One, rejected by the sinful world for which and at the hands of which He was suffering, should forgive mankind this evil deed and turn to the Heavenly Father with a prayer that the Divine righteousness should forgive mankind, blinded by the devil, this rejection of its Creator and Savior. Such a holy prayer could not fail to be heard, such a power of love was bound to unite the source of love, God, with those who even now would feel this love, and, understanding how far the ways of men had departed from the ways of God, would manifest a strong determination to return to God the Father through the Creator’s reception of human nature.

And now there came the time when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours the Son of Man, raised upon the cross, would draw all men to Himself by His own self-sacrifice. Before the force of His love the sinful hearts of men would not be able to stand. The love of the God-man would break the stone of men’s hearts. They would feel their own impurity

and darkness, their insignificance; and only the stubborn haters of God would not want to be enlightened by the light of the Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who would not reject Him Who called them, irradiated by the light of the love of the God-Man, would feel their separation from the loving Creator and would thirst to be united with Him. And invisibly the greatest mystery would take place—mankind would turn to its Maker, and the merciful Lord would joyfully accept those who would return from the slander of the devil to their Archetype. *Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.* (Pss 84:10); righteousness has pressed close from Heaven, for the incarnate Truth has shone out on the cross from the earth. The hour had come when all this was about to take place.

The world did not suspect the greatness of the coming day. Before the gaze of the God-Man all that was to happen was revealed. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the human race. And now He came for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. Here He would accomplish that sacrifice which would save the race of men. He would voluntarily give Himself up to sufferings, giving Himself over into the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice would not be saving if He would experience only His personal sufferings—He had to be tormented by the wounds of sin from which mankind was suffering. The heart of the God-Man was filled with inexpressible sorrow. All the sins of men, beginning from the transgression of Adam and ending with those which would be done at the moment of the sounding of the last trumpet—all the great and small sins of all men stood before His mental gaze. They were always revealed to Him as God—*all things are manifest before Him*—but now their whole weight and iniquity was

experienced also by His human nature. His holy, sinless soul was filled with horror. He suffered as the sinners themselves do not suffer, whose coarse hearts do not feel how the sin of man defiles and how it separates him from the Creator. His sufferings were the greater in that He saw this coarseness and embitteredness of heart, the fact that *men have blinded their eyes that they should not see, and do not want to hear with their ears and be converted, so that they should be healed*. He saw that the whole world was even now turning away from God Who had come to them in human form. The hour was coming and had already come (Jn 16:31) when even those who had only just declared their readiness to lay down their lives for Him would be scattered. The God-Man would hang in solitude upon the Cross, showered with a hail of insults from the people who would come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls remained faithful to Him, but they, too, by their silent grief and helplessness would increase the sufferings of the heart of the Virgin's Son, overflowing with love. There would not be help from anywhere...

True, even in these minutes He would not be alone, for the Father was always with Him (Jn 8:19; 10:30). But so as to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, the Son of God would voluntarily allow His human nature to feel even the horror of separation from God. This terrible moment would be unendurable for His holy, sinless being. A powerful cry would break out from His lips: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* And seeing this hour in advance, His holy soul was filled with horror and distress.

Still earlier, when some Hellenes came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of that dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* came to Him, the God-Man saw that the hour when everyone would come to Him as He was raised upon the cross, was near. His human nature shuddered, His soul was in distress. But Jesus knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, that without them His earthly activity would leave a trace as small as that of a grain which lies for a long time on the surface of the earth before being dried up by the sun. It was therefore at that time that He appealed to His Father

not to allow human weakness to prevail over all the thoughts and feelings of His human nature: *Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? And yet for this purpose have I come to this hour.* (Jn 12:27).

And as if heartened by the remembrance of why He had come to the earth, Christ prays that the Will of God for the salvation of the human race be carried out: *Father, glorify Thy name.* (Jn 12:28)—glorify it on earth, among men, show Thyself to be not only the Creator but also the Savior (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, Bk 4). *I have glorified it and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28) came a voice from Heaven announced that the time for the fulfillment of the Mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the age was coming (Col 1:26; Eph 1:9; 3:9).



And now that time had already come. If before the human nature of Christ had shuddered and been troubled at the thought of what was to come, what did it experience now, when in expectation of the coming of His enemies and betrayer He for the last time prayed alone to God? The Lord knew that every prayer of His would be answered (Jn 11:42), He knew that if He would ask the Father to deliver Him from torments and death, more than twelve legions of angels would appear (Mt 26:53) to defend Him. But had He not come for this? So that at the last moment He should refuse to carry out that which He had fore-announced in the Scriptures?

However, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. The spirit of Jesus now burns (Rom 12:11), wishing only one

thing—the fulfillment of the Will of God. But by its nature, human nature abhors sufferings and death (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, chapters 18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theodoret; St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, word 6, *On the Remembrance of Death*). The Son of God willingly accepted this weak nature. He gives Himself up to death for the salvation of the world. And He conquers, although He feels the approaching fear of death and abhorrence of sufferings. Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not so much in themselves, as from the fact that the soul of the God-Man was shaken to its depths.

The sin of man that He takes upon Himself is inexpressibly heavy. This sin weighs Jesus down, making the sufferings that are to come unendurable.

Christ knows that when His sufferings reach their peak, He will be completely alone. Not only will no man be able to relieve them *I looked for one that would sorrow with Me and there was none, for one that would comfort Me and none was found.* (Pss 68:21). *I looked, but there was none to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.* (Is 63:5). But in order that He should feel the full weight of sins, He would also be allowed to feel the burden of separation from the Heavenly Father. And at this moment, His human will can wish to avoid the sufferings. But it will not be so. Let His human will not diverge for one second from His Divine Will. It is about this that the God-Man beseeches His Heavenly Father. If it is possible for mankind to re-establish its unity with God without this new and terrible crime against the Son of God (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* Bk 4), then it is better that this hour should not come to pass. But if it is only in this way that mankind can be drawn to its Maker, let the good Will of God be accomplished in this case, too. May His Will be done, and may the human nature of Jesus, even at the most terrible moments, not wish anything other than the fulfillment of the will of God, the completion of God's economy. This is precisely what Christ prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane: *He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 5:7).

He offered up prayers and supplications to Him Who was able to save Him from death, but He did not pray for deliverance from death. It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as follows to His Father: **Abba, My Father, the Father of Him Whom Thou has sent to gather into one the people of Israel and the scattered children of God—the people of the Gentiles, so as to make out of two one new man and by means of the cross reconcile them with Thee. All is possible to Thee, all is possible that is in accord with Thy boundless perfections. Thou knowest that it is natural for human nature to abhor sufferings, that man would always like to see good days** (Pss 34:14) **But he Who loves Thee with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind wishes only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I have come down to earth to fulfill Thy wise will and for this purpose I have communed with flesh and blood, assuming human nature with all its weaknesses, except the sinful ones. I also have wished to avoid sufferings, but only on one condition—that this is Thy holy will. If It is possible that the work of economy should be completed without a new and terrible crime on the part of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these mental sufferings, to which in a few hours' time will be united the terrible sufferings of the human body; if this is possible—deliver Me then from**

the experiences and temptations which have already come upon Me and which are still to come. Deliver Me from the necessity of experiencing the consequences of the crime of Adam. However, this request is dictated to Me by the frailty of My human nature; but let it be as is pleasing to Thee, let not the will of frail human nature be fulfilled, but Our common, pre-eternal Council. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not reject It. But I ask only one thing: may Thy will be done. May Thy will be done always and in all things. As in Heaven with Me, Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thee there is one will, so may My human will here on earth not wish anything contrary to Our common will for one moment. May that which was decided by us before the creation of the world be fulfilled, may the salvation of the human race be accomplished. May the sons of men be redeemed from slavery to the devil, may they be redeemed at the high price of the sufferings and self-sacrifice of the God-Man. And may all the weight of men's sins, which I have accepted on Myself, and all my mental and physical sufferings, not be able to make My human will waver in its thirst that Thy holy will be done. May I fulfill Thy will with joy. Thy will be done."

The Lord prayed about the cup of His voluntary saving passion as if it was involuntary. (Sunday service of the fifth tone, canon, eighth *eirmos*), showing by this the two wills of the two natures, and beseeching God the Father that His human will would not waver in its obedience to the Divine will (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). An angel appeared to Him from the Heavens and strengthened his human nature. (Lk 22:43). His human nature, while Jesus Who was accomplishing the exploit of His self-sacrifice prayed still more earnestly, being covered in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and constant obedience to the will of the Father, the Son of God was heard. Strengthened and reassured, Jesus rose from prayer (*Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Bk 3, 24). He knew that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the load of the sins of men would be taken away from Him, and that by His obedience to God the Father He would bring human nature that had gone astray to Him. He went up to His disciples and said: *You all sleep and rest. It is finished, the hour has come: Lo! The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go, he who betrays Me is at hand. Pray that you do not fall into temptation.*

Coming out to meet those who had come for Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. And when Peter, wishing to defend His Teacher, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the servant, and reminded Peter that He was voluntarily giving Himself up: *Put your sword into its sheath: am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given Me? Or do you think that I cannot now ask My Father and He will send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must*

come to pass? And willingly drinking the whole cup of mental and physical sufferings to the bottom, Christ glorified God on earth; He accomplished a work which was no less than the very creation of the world. He restored the fallen nature of man, reconciled Divinity and humanity, and made men partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which *the Father gave Him to do*, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which He as God had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and sat in His humanity at the right hand of God the Father, waiting until His enemies should be laid at the footstool of His feet (Heb 10:13).

Having been made for all those who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), Christ remains even after His ascension *known in two natures without confusion*" (*Dogmatikon* of the sixth tone), *bearing two wills according to each nature unto the ages* (Sunday canon of the fifth tone, *troparion* of the eighth *eirmos*), but His glorified body cannot now suffer and does not need anything, while in accordance with this His human will, too, cannot diverge from His Divine will in anything. But with this flesh Christ will come again on the last day *to Judge the living and the dead*, after which, as King not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His humanity, He will be subject to God the Father together with the whole of His eternal kingdom, so that *God may be all in all*. (1 Cor 15:28).



We all receive God's blessings equally. But some of us, receiving God's fire, that is, His word, become soft like beeswax, while the others like clay become hard as stone. And if we do not want Him, He does not force any of us, but like the sun He sends His rays and illuminates the whole world, and he who wants to see Him, sees Him, whereas the one who does not want to see Him, is not forced by Him. And no one is responsible for this privation of light except the one who does not want to have it.

God created the sun and the eye. Man is free to receive the sun's light or not. The same is true here. God sends the light of knowledge like rays to all, but He also gave us faith like an eye. The one who wants to receive knowledge through faith, keeps it by his works, and so God gives him more willingness, knowledge, and power.

St. Peter the Damascene

THE GREAT MIRACLE OF ORTHODOXY THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Gathered from various Orthodox pamphlets.

TTrue Orthodoxy, how much our Lord Jesus Christ loves you, to send his Holy Light and blaze down our hearts with Heavenly jubilation, light up our minds and raise our hope?

Every Holy Saturday, at noon, in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem reoccurs the Great Miracle of the Holy Light that stirs, affects rejoices and gives delight and faith to those who have the honor and blessing to be there for the ceremony of the Holy Light.

Description of the Annual Miracle

1. Preparation of the Holy Sepulchre: In the morning of the Holy Saturday, before the ceremony of the Holy Light takes place a very thorough check of the tomb and after that they seal it with a mixture of honey and wax that was prepared in the morning. This check takes place so that everyone is ascertaining that there is nothing in the Holy Sepulchre that can cause a fire or create a flame. After the tomb is sealed, the authorities affix the wax with their seals. All the other doctrines that have rights in the Holy Sepulchre show great interest in this procedure. This interest is by no means accidental. If for one year the miracle of the Holy Light doesn't happen when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch performs the ceremony, the other doctrines will try to undertake the precedence in the Holy Sepulchre.

The examination begins at 10:00 and finishes at 11:00. While this takes place, Orthodox Arabs demonstrate in the church for the Orthodox rights. It must be recorded that this ostentatious check of the Holy Sepulchre is conducted by the representatives of the Armenians and several other doctrines.

2. The Ceremony of the Holy Light: The ceremony of the Holy Light takes place at 12:00 and constitutes of three stages: a) The Litany, b) The entry of the Patriarch in the Holy Sepulchre and c) The prayers of the Patriarch in order for the Holy Light to come out.

Following the tradition, at noon of the Holy Saturday the Greek Orthodox Patriarch with his escort—archpriests, priests and deacons and the Armenian Patriarch—enter the Holy Sepulchre, while the bells strike mournfully. Before the entry of the Patriarch the keeper of the Sacristy of the Holy Temple carries the unsleeping oil lamp, (it is put out that day in order that it be lit with the Holy Light). From the interior entry of the Temple of Apostle Jacob the Patriarch enters in the sanctuary and seats on the Patriarchal throne. Then the representatives of the Armenians, the Arabs, the Copts and others pass and kiss the hand of the Patriarch so that they will have the right to receive the Holy Light.

According to the privileges if they don't kiss the hand of the Orthodox Patriarch they do not have the right to receive the Holy Light from his hands. Immediately afterwards begins the Holy Litany that goes three times around the Holy Sepulcher and then it stops in front of the Holy Sepulcher where the officials stand.

After the litany, the Holy Sepulcher is unsealed and the Patriarch takes off his pontifical vestments and remains only with his white priest's tunic. The governor of Jerusalem and the police director examine the Patriarch in front of everybody so that everybody is assured that he is not carrying anything that can transmit light (create a flame). After this, his Beatitude, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem takes the (extinct) torches and enters the Holy Ciborium. All the lamps are off and nothing is on in the Holy Temple and the Holy Sepulcher.

3. How the Holy Light Comes Out: Inside the Holy Sepulcher the Patriarch prays kneeling and reading the special wishes requesting our Lord Jesus Christ to send His Holy Light as a gift of sanctification for the people. And in the absolute quietness at the hour, when the patriarch prays a wheeze is heard and almost simultaneously blue and white lightning's of Holy Light penetrate from everywhere, as though millions of photographic flashes turn on embracing the walls and all the lamps light up miraculously. In the Holy Sepulcher the torches the Patriarch holds while he prays are instantaneously lit by the Holy Light. The crowd bursts out in cheers while teardrops of joy and faith run from the eyes of the people.

For a few minutes the Holy Light does not have the attributes of fire. This happens the first minutes after the patriarch comes out of the Holy Sepulcher and gives the Light to the people. Anyone can touch the fire of the 33 candles and does not burn. After 33 minutes the flame becomes normal.

A Miracle of Orthodoxy—1549 A.D.

As far as the claim that it proves the truth of Orthodoxy the following incident occurred in the 16th century. The split

column where the Holy Fire went thru to light the candles of the Orthodox Patriarch is still there and is depicted in the depicted photograph. A tremendous lesson for all heresy loving pseudo Orthodox Hierarchs and clergy...

In the year 1549 A.D., the Arabs occupied Jerusalem, the Armenians took advantage of their presence. They approached the Moslem governor with gifts of gold, and asked for the

privilege to receive the Holy Light. This they asked and this they succeeded. They also implored to him that the Orthodox be forbidden entrance to the Holy Sepulchre for the sacred ritual.

Holy Saturday dawned and the most Holy Church of the Resurrection was closed to all the Orthodox. Even the Patriarch and the clergy were not allowed to enter. The Patriarch was kneeling at the entrance of the Most Holy Church. He was holding in his hand the bundle of the thirty three candles and praying. Tears

streamed down his face as he pleaded to God: "Lord, You who abhors injustice, heed the prayers of our children. Grant that Your glory may appear through Your miracle and do not deprive Your Holy Light from Your faithful people."

On that fateful Holy Saturday in 1549, the Divine Light did not visit the Holy Sepulchre where the Armenians were in charge and waiting. Instead before the amazed eyes of clergy and pilgrims, the Holy Light flashing brilliantly, struck the column the Patriarch was standing behind with the sound of a forceful wind. Instantly the stone column was split and blackened near the bottom. And the light appeared and lit the candles of the Patriarch. The column is still there on the left hand side of the entrance to the Sepulchre (depicted within the photo on this page).

The Holy Light symbolizes and reminds us in a miraculous way the Resurrection of Christ. It is a Godsend miracle through centuries from the light of the world, and this light is Christ for the world. Science cannot explain this great miracle and this time in its honor science never tried to explain it not even theoretically. Besides how can anyone explain a genuine miracle?



The Holy Light delivered to the faithful within the church of the Holy Sepulcher, on each and every Holy Saturday



The column struck by the Holy Light in 1549 to miraculously deliver the Holy Light onto the hands of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch who was standing behind it

CARRYING HOME THE FLAME OF FAITH

By Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov, 03 May 2013, delivered following the Matins for Great Friday with the reading of the Twelve Passion Gospels.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

Dear brothers and sisters, we have celebrated the Matins of Great and Holy Friday and our candles have remained kindled following the Gospel's proclamation of the long-suffering of the most humble Savior, Who tasted the fullness of suffering for the redemption of us sinners: betrayal by one of His closest disciples and handing over to the frenzied Jews, who had rejected their Messiah, and later to the cruel Romans. Mockery, abuse, insults, beatings, imprisonment, Pilate's cunning, and the crowd's frenzied cries: "Crucify Him!" And, finally, bearing the Cross and crucifixion thereon.

Not having extinguished our candles after the twelve readings we, according to custom, will carry this flame from the Holy Twelve Gospels to our homes, to bring there the light of the Gospel, to bring there the grace that is abundantly poured out during these days in the Church of God. This journey at dusk, at night, of Orthodox Christians with burning candles is profoundly symbolic: the more impenetrable the darkness and gloom of apostasy and the forgetting of the commandments, the brighter the grace of God shines in God-loving souls who are devoted to and love the Mother Church.

On this evening the Lord's words come true with literal accuracy: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven.* (Mt 5:16). Today another command of the Lord is also being fulfilled for us: **May your lights be burning, and your loins girded by the struggle of fasting and abstinence.** Today we, who are unworthy, are like the wise virgins who went out at midnight to meet the Bridegroom. While the world is immersed in the deep sleep of forgetfulness of the commandments and the law of the Lord, the small flock of disciples is wakeful, not sleeping, but praying and carrying to all corners of the universe the remembrance of Christ's suffering and His saving Resurrection.

For us this flame reflects the spark of God's grace that the right hand of Christ kindled in our hearts at the hour of baptism. It is a flame of warm, living faith, keen-sighted and hot, by whose warmth we keep ourselves from the defilement of the world that lies in evil. Only faith in Christ—Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—can

safeguard us from confluence with the world with its vices and passions.

Have a look at those who do not believe in God, who will not yield to the Gospel: do they have any sense of the danger of their position, at a time when many unfortunates are entangled in the snares of fornication, worldly malice, pride, avarice, and other vices? No, the unseeing world, which has quenched the lamp of faith, is not concerned for the future and does not want to know of the world's approaching end, forever thinking about performing this terrible dance of life that is more akin to death.

But Christians are not such. The flame of faith, illuminating their minds, highlights for them all the specters and horrors of mortal sins and the turbid stream that has drenched the earth. "Blessed is he who believes, his world is warmer," our people say. And, indeed, our path will be better if we conceal this candle of faith in our mind and heart, conversing with God alone rather than participating in the general madness, this "Walsingham's feast" (from Aleksandr Pushkin's "Feast in Time of Plague") that has taken over the entire universe.

For us this flame is a flame of Christ's love. Indeed, the love of God is hot. Its rays, spreading over the Church of God, warm all of God's creation, even the most infirm and wretched. Have a look at how cold today's world is, which calls love that which is contrary to it: lust, self-interest, and defilement. We are witnesses of how the grace-filled warmth of the love of God is going out from the world: how hearts are turning to stone and how smiles are becoming predatory, aggressive, and dangerous. However, despite the multiplying wickedness, from which no one guards even children today, we are called to draw from Christ—at His Cross, kissing His feet and pierced side—the warmth of genuine charity, compassion, pity, and love, for the sake of which the world still stands upon its rotten foundations.

As we heard today in the Holy Gospel, the warmth of love encompasses the mind, thoughts, and feelings, being spread through the words and eyes of Christians, and especially through living acts of help. The warmth of love is a distinguishing quality, the radiant stamp of a true disciple of Christ. If this mystical warmth is present, if it is increased through the struggle of repentance and good deeds, this means that Christ Himself abides in faithful hearts. But if hearts grow cold and turn to stone in their egoism and self-love, overwhelmed by the specters of sensual pleasures and turning in fear to earthly goods, this means that Christ is invisibly removed from this



“country of the Gerasenes,” leaving the unfortunate residents to feed their swine. But where God is present, there will surely become apparent in one way or another—in secret prayer for one’s neighbor, in the considerate effort to listen to him, in the desire to help him—the love that reveals the radiant garment of the Godhead.

Finally, for us this flame is a perpetual reminder of the greatness of the suffering that our Redeemer underwent for each of His disciples. Remembrance of the saving passions is of extraordinary importance for a Christian’s moral life, because by reading the Passion Gospels and remembering the crown that cut into the Savior’s head and the spear that was thrust into His side, the soul is warmed by both faith and love. The Savior’s suffering shows us, who are forgetful and of little faith, the fullness of the Man-Befriending God’s mercy for His creation. For Christ suffered solely out of love for us, His perishing creation. That is why we make the sign of the cross with this flame on thresholds: it is the sign of the Savior’s suffering. The power of this cross watches over and protects our homes from dark powers and wicked people, if we will preserve and multiply in our hearts faith, love, and prayer to the Savior, Who suffered, was crucified, tasted death, and arose again.

Brothers and sisters, we shall depart from God’s church, carefully shielding this flame from the wind and accidental gusts, so that we may bring it back to our homes. Such is the journey of Christians in this cold, cruel world to Christ’s Kingdom and His Dread Judgment, where the souls of the Orthodox will shine with uncreated light and the heart that has been inflamed with faith, love, and prayer will become luminescent, bearing witness that one has loved Christ, fulfilled His commandments, become like unto Him, and allowed Christ’s grace to dwell in his heart to cleanse, transform, and sanctify our nature by this grace.

Thus, let us accomplish our short earthly pilgrimage carefully and prudently, so that with the burning lamp of faith, prayer, and love we might stand before Christ the Lord in the hour in which the deeds of all will be reckoned. The Lord’s Pascha—now the Pascha of the Cross, and in a day the Bright and Light-Bearing Pascha—is an anticipation of the Dread Judgment. Thus we, being of good will, will not be left in these days with a dark, extinguished candle of mind and heart. The Lord, seeing our small labors—our feeble attempts, our effort, our small suffering—will of course touch, and has already touched, the hearts of His disciples in which has been kindled a lamp, not-made-by-hands, of secret inner prayer, of living faith—which allows us to bypass easily all the specters and horrors of this earthly life—and of the love that bears witness better than all else to the sincerity of our faith and the depth of our convictions.

Amen.

THE ANXIETY OF “WHAT-IF” THINKING AND THE CALMNESS OF SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By Hieromonk Alexios Karakallinos, monastery of Karakallou on the Holy Mountain, April 12, 2013.



Sometimes, in this fallen world when it is as though God is far off, there seems to be plenty of reasons for fear. In that context, which is the context of our disconnection with

a loving God, the basic emotion of fear is a powerful and all-too frequent motivator, subconsciously directing our thoughts and our actions. Thinking about fears that have been realized in the past may make us feel depressed, but thinking about fears in the future, that is what can really fill us with dread.

Fearful emotions often rise to the surface when we engage in “what-if” thinking, with thoughts such as “what if I lose my job?” or “what if my child becomes gravely sick?” “what if, what if?” And although these misfortunes happen in life, we feel as though our own personal answers to such questions are too harrowing to even imagine, like a horror story that never ends. It is so different from the history of redemption that we are called to make our own.

Those “what if” thoughts become a self-perpetuating stream of anxiety-producing ruminations that lead us to obsessively focus on the material, transitory aspects of our earthly existence and flee from the present moment and from our God Who is found therein. Such thinking leads us to focus on matters that are very often outside of our control and influence. Yet, because they have seized our thought process, they become the focus of our attention, draining all our energy.

In Saint Matthew’s Gospel, the Lord addresses such harmful thinking when he commands, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.* In his commentary on this very same passage, Saint John Chrysostom remarks, “*When He had set the soul free from anxiety, He also mentioned Heaven, for He came to do away with old things and to call us to a greater country. Thus, He does everything in order to deliver us from unnecessary things and our attachment to the earth. This is also why He mentioned the gentiles, saying that ‘the Gentiles seek after these things;’ they labor solely for the present life with no regard for the things to come, with no thought of Heaven. But these things of the*

present life are not to be your chief concern, for there are other matters. We were not born for the purpose of eating, drinking and being clothed, but that we might please God and attain the good things to come. Since things here come second when we work, let them also come second when we pray. Thus, He said, 'Seek the kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you.'"

Saint John Chrysostom's thoughts put our own "what-if" thoughts into perspective. Our "what-if thoughts" are not so much about seeking God's eternal heaven, but about maintaining our transitory earth. In giving ourselves over to them, we are not putting first things first, but putting first things last or not at all. From the broader perspective of eternity, the very things we fear might even be the way we find our way back to God.

Saint John Chrysostom continues, *"And He said not, 'shall be given,' but 'shall be added,' so that you might learn, that present things are not the greater part of His gifts, compared with the greatness of the things to come. Hence, He does not bid us even to ask for them. Instead, while we ask for other things, we are to have confidence that these things will also be added to those. Seek then the things to come, and you will receive the things present as well. Seek not the things that are seen, and you shall surely attain unto them. Yea, for it is unworthy of you to approach your Lord for such things. And you, who ought to spend all your zeal and your care for those ineffable blessings, do greatly disgrace yourself by consuming your zeal on the desire for transitory things.*

"How then?" one might say, 'did He not bid us to ask for bread?' Nay, He added, 'daily,' and to this again, 'this day.' And He does the same thing here. For He did not say, 'Take no thought,' but, 'Take no thought for the morrow,' at the same time both setting us free and attaching our souls to those things that are more necessary to us."

Saint John Chrysostom and the ancient fathers recognized the dangers inherent in focusing our attention on needs in the near future. They try to set our gaze on further sights, beyond the "what-ifs" of tomorrow into the abiding permanence of eternity, an eternity that can be known in the present moment. They show us that trust in God and the ending of our story that God reveals to us is more important than any story we set spinning in our anxious minds. They show us that if we seek the Kingdom, the calmness of the Kingdom will descend on us like the morning dew.

In previous articles, I have written concerning the psychological and spiritual harm caused by focusing on the future without due regard for the present. Those comments still apply today: We all have a spiritual heart that we can strive to discover through simple repentance and by calling upon the name of our Lord. It will take time for our fears, anxieties, and imaginings to weaken. Remembering

God, remaining in the present, vigilantly guarding the heart against the "terrors of the night" by trust in God will help. Love, we are reminded in Scripture, casts out all fear. Love that is not selfish, but given wholly over to God, does not have the mental space to give itself over to fear. As I mentioned in a previous article, so too, in our own lives, Jesus is not to be found in death (fear). "He is not here." He has overcome death and cast out all fear, trampling down death by death.

Whatever we fear, whomever we fear has been conquered by the glory of the Cross and Resurrection. If we have fear ever dwelling in our hearts, we are harming our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Neuroscience, psychiatry, and the Gospel agree on this point. Such fear is certainly not of God. Such fear keeps us chained to illusory and deceptive thoughts that alienate us from God and one another. Yet, that chain has been broken, Satan has been conquered, fear has been overcome. We need only recognize this and be glad in Him who has made us a new creation. Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me. Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee!

Amen.



Humility is the thought and conviction of our heart that we are more sinful than all men and unworthy of the mercy of God. Reviling ourselves does not mean that we have true humility. True humility is when someone shames and abuses us publicly, and we endure it and say, "God ordered that brother to shame me for my many sins." We should receive everything as a command from God. When someone shames you, say that God commanded him to do it. When someone takes something of yours, God commanded him to take it, in order to make you a monk. When you are removed from a higher place, God changed your place so that you would change from your passions and bad habits.

This is true humility. And the pride is when we trust in ourselves, in our mind, our strength, when we think we are more capable than someone else, better, more beautiful, more virtuous, more pleasing to God. Then it is certain that we are overcome by the ugly sin of pride, from which may God, who humbled Himself for our salvation, preserve us. Let us humble ourselves, brethren, because a proud man cannot be saved. Let us weep for our sins here, so we can rejoice forever in the next life, for after we leave this world everyone will forget us. Let us not hope in men, but only in God..

Father Paisius (Olaru) of Sihla Skete, Romania

ON GREEK PASCHA WHAT HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN SAID ABOUT GREEK PASCHA

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) was a prolific Danish author and poet. This article is an excerpt from his travel memoirs "A Poet's Bazaar: A Journey to Greece, Turkey and Up the Danube," about Paschal festivities in Greece in the 19th century, specifically the early 1840's.

The "Easter" of the Catholics in Italy, and particularly in Rome, is grand, fascinating; it is an elevating sight to see that immense mass of beings fall on their knees in St. Peter's Place, and receive a benediction. The Pascha festival in Greece cannot show such magnificence, its resources are too small; but after having seen both, one comes to the conviction that in Rome it is a feast which in its glory and splendor issues out from the Church to the people; but in Greece it is a feast which streams from the heart and thoughts of the people, from their very life; the Church is but a link in the chain.

Previous to Pascha there is a long and rigorous fast which is religiously observed, the peasants living almost entirely on bread, onions, and water.

The Athenian newspaper appeared on Good Friday with a black border, in memory of the death of Christ: the vignette-title was a sarcophagus with a weeping willow, and above it was a poem on the Passion by Lutzos.

The festival itself began that evening. I went to the principal church; it was splendidly illuminated and completely full: before the altar stood a glass coffin, fastened with silver plates. The coffin contained fresh roses, intended to represent the dead Saviour. A strange humming of voices from the praying congregation sounded through the house of God! Priests, in parti-colored vestments, and bishops, came and went before the altar where they read the prayers.

At nine o'clock in the evening sacred chanting began, and the procession started from the church through the chief street, to the palace. I saw the slowly moving procession conveniently from my window; it was one of the most solemn I have ever seen. It was a glittering starlight night, so mild and calm! Every spectator in the balconies and open windows stood with a burning candle in his hand. The chanting ascended to us from the side-street, the smell of incense filled the air. Mournful music proceeded from the military bands as though the people carried their King to his grave.

The coffin containing the fresh red roses was borne along, surrounded by the priests; over it hung a long red mourning veil which was held by the chief statesmen and higher

officers of the kingdom. A crowd of these officers, and then the great mass of people, all, as I have said, with burning candles, concluded the procession. There was a stillness, an apparent sorrow or devotion, which worked its effect upon every mind. The Bishop made a short speech outside the palace where the King and Queen stood, and then the King kissed the holy Gospel. During the whole ceremony there was a monotonous ringing of bells, always two strokes and then a short pause.

Day and night the church was filled with people. The King, the Queen, and the whole court were there on the midnight before Easter Day: the priests stood praying and mourning around the flower-filled coffin; the whole congregation prayed in silence. The clock struck twelve, and at the same moment the Bishop stepped forth, and said: *Christ is risen!*

Christ is risen burst from every tongue. Kettle-drums and trumpets sent forth their strains; the music played the liveliest dances! The whole people fell on each other's necks, kissed, and joyously cried, *Christ is risen!* Shot after shot was heard



outside; rockets darted into the air, torches were lighted, men and young lads, each with a candle in his hand, danced in a long row through the city. The women kindled fires, slaughtered lambs, and roasted them in the streets. Little children, who had all got new fez and new red shoes, danced in their shirts

around the fires, kissed each other, and exclaimed like their parents, *Christ is risen!* O, I could have pressed each of these children to my heart and exulted with them. *Christ is risen!* It was touching, elevating, and beautiful.

It may be said that the whole was a ceremony; and it may be added, certainly with some truth, that their rejoicings expressed the satisfaction of the people that the rigorous fast was over, and that now they could eat their lamb, and drink their wine: well, admit that the fact was so, still I dare venture to say there was something more; **there was a true, a sincere religious jubilee.** Christ was in their thoughts, as on their lips. *Christ is risen* was the mutual assurance, made as though it were no by-gone event; no, it was as if it had taken place on that night, and in this land. It was as if the assurance had reached their ears at that moment, and for the first time.

There were music and dancing everywhere in the capital, and in every little town throughout the kingdom. All labor was suspended, everyone thought only of pleasure; there were dancing and mirth near Theseus' Temple and under Zeus's marble columns. The mandolin twanged, the old joined in the song; and during the general joy the words of welcome and leave-taking were: *Christ is risen!*

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By Mrs. Helene Kontzevitch, translated from "Russkaya Zhizn," Sept. 20, 1955.

In the spring of 1909 I turned 16. That same year a priest was assigned to the church built by my parents near their estate. Before his arrival we were informed of his appointment by the provincial archpriest who wrote to us the following words: "We hear that an archangel-like bear is coming your way."

We sent the sleigh to the station to pick up Fr. Simeon (our new priest). From the window I saw them arrive. There were three figures in the sleigh, all wrapped in thick, red blankets: Fr. Simeon, his matushka Eulalia Stepanovna, and their faithful servant Paula. When first I set eyes on Fr. Simeon after he had come into the house, I was quite taken aback; his unsightly, rather sickly appearance was almost frightening. The features of his narrow face were ill-proportioned and very homely. "Really," I thought, "just who is this they sent!"

We sat down to dinner. Batiushka was anxious to see the church, so I ran off to have the sleigh readied. The stables and other out-buildings were located a short distance from the house. Batiushka accompanied me. As we were walking, my first impression vanished without a trace. I don't remember now what it was we talked about along the way—it may have been very insignificant but to my amazement, as soon as this rather ugly man began to speak, his uncomeliness simply disappeared. Before me stood a man of enormous strength of spirit and an equally great power of love. He could conquer anyone. The charm of his meek personality was irresistible. He could do with each of his parishioners whatever he wanted—in spite of the spiritually uncultivated nature of those who surrounded him.

Fr. Simeon lived with us for about two years. He found our new church very much to his liking, but thought that the interior was rather poorly furnished. There began to arrive—heaven only knows from where—all sorts of donations for the church. We barely had time to bring a cart-load of crates from the station when another shipment arrived: candlestands, censor, a set of service books, rizas, a silver set of vessels, a shroud.

Not a year had passed and Fr. Simeon engaged a group of artists who covered the interior with frescoes depicting scenes from the Gospel. Batiushka also intended to

purchase a better quality set of bells, but his untimely death cut short his plans. Where did all these gifts to our church come from?

It turned out that Fr. Simeon was known by many in Russia as a man of prayer. For example, I remember he once received a hundred roubles with the request to pray for a certain Ivan. And such requests were numerous. But Batiushka was very reticent on this subject. Our job was simply to send the horses to the station for the boxes. Soon the church interior was transformed beyond recognition.

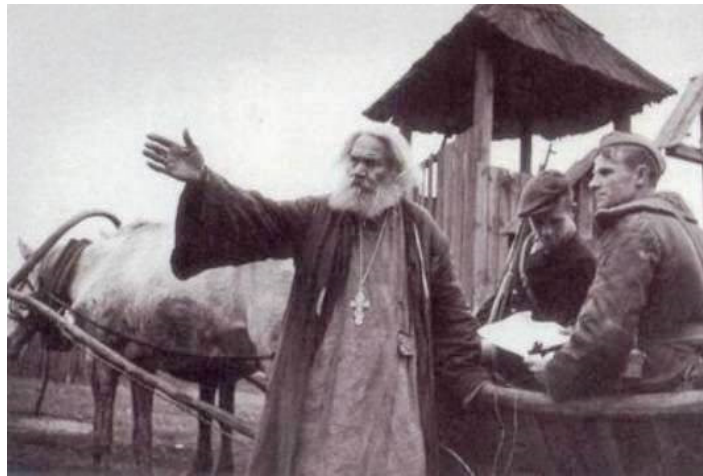
Fr. Simeon used to travel around the border posts where there lived officers and soldiers of the border guard (we lived near the German border). For the military men and their families, his arrival was a joyous occasion. Even the Germans in the neighboring town took part in the general celebration by sending masses of flowers to decorate the makeshift church. In these border towns Fr. Simeon left cups affixed with signs which read: "For the church." These cups soon returned to him filled with the soldiers' pennies.

With the death of Fr. Simeon all this came to an end.

Fr. Simeon's family consisted of four souls: first—his matushka, Eulalia Stepanovna, a tall, dignified older lady. She had a northern accent with its very pronounced, rounded "o's". The eldest son we nicknamed Absalom, because of his thick crop of hair and his endless quarrels with his father. He

was a university student and related to his father with a distinct feeling of his own superiority. The second son was a surveyor, and there was a daughter who was a student. All of them loved their father dearly, but little did they understand him.

To say that Fr. Simeon lived humbly would be an understatement; he cut his own wood, he engaged in carpentry work, he wore homespun cassocks which came from Archangelsk; these were of a nondescript color, sometimes lined with fustian. On his head he wore a broad rimmed hat, also handmade. This outfit gave him a very unique, rather odd appearance. Yes, here was a man from another, a very special world, who had nothing in common with the mediocre, prosaic aspects of the daily provincial life which surrounded us. He was the son of the far north whose beauty, forever impressed in the depths of his soul, enhanced his poetic nature. His sermons were never contrived; rather, they flowed from his heart, conveying a spirit of life and never tiring the listener.



How fascinating it was of an evening to hear Fr. Simeon describe his travels on the White Sea or the majestic beauty of his homeland, wondrous pictures of the northern landscape. Those playing whist threw down their cards and everyone formed a tight circle around Fr. Simeon. Among other things, he described how the bishop who had ordained him invited him, his young protege, for tea, during which he gave him a lesson in manners: how to use the sugar tongs, what was proper and what was not. This bishop was clairvoyant and foretold that Fr. Simeon would fall ill three times and that the third illness would be fatal. Everything came to pass just as the hierarch had said.

I remember the story Fr. Simeon told about meeting Eulalia Stepanovna. Having finished seminary and desiring to become a priest, he had to find himself a wife. He didn't know any eligible girls and didn't trust matchmakers. So, he decided to travel about as a menial laborer. He came to the home of a priest who had five daughters, and was engaged as a workman. One of the daughters was his future matushka. Without suspecting the new workman to be an eligible husband, she showed herself to be very warm and possessed of a kind and good character. Convinced of her positive spiritual qualities, Fr. Simeon revealed his true identity and made her a proposal of marriage. In this way he found himself a good wife.

Souls thirsted for contact with him. Even non-Orthodox—Jews and Catholics—came to him for consolation in their sorrows. I, too, loved to visit him. It happened that you'd go to him with some kind of heaviness on your soul. But after sitting with him in his cozy dining room, without even saying a word about yourself, about what was troubling you, you left as if you had wings, as though your burdens had simply disappeared into thin air.

Fr. Simeon's best and closest friends, however, were the local children. It was a common sight to see Fr. Simeon walking around the village square surrounded by children. Some hung on to his fingers with both their hands, one of the older ones carried his briefcase and walking stick. The little Jewish boys would take off their caps, bow deeply and run on ahead. When Batiushka caught up with them this performance would be repeated. And again they would run ahead and again stop to bow. They, poor things, could express their love only from a distance.

Once the schoolchildren noticed that in winter Batiushka's hands got very cold. They made a collection amongst themselves and together purchased some gloves.

In the school Fr. Simeon gave catechism lessons. Once there was a Polish Catholic holiday and school was cancelled. As a new arrival, Fr. Simeon was unaware of this. The children met him as usual and led him to the classroom. The lesson went on, and on. "Why isn't there a bell?" Asked Fr.

Simeon, puzzled. "Batiushka! Forgive us, we tricked you! Today there is no school," replied the children.

When vacations came the children begged Fr. Simeon not to interrupt the lessons. One boy came more than nine miles on foot to attend the class. They all gathered in church. Even we older ones, almost adults, came. Fr. Simeon was a talented and inspiring teacher. What he communicated was both ancient and eternally fresh and new. It captivated both heart and mind. We listened to the Gospel stories and parables as if hearing them for the first time in our lives.

Of all the children, Batiushka's favorite was a little three-year-old girl, Mary Prilutskaya. One Saturday evening there was the usual vigil. The Gospel reading was from St. John: *Jesus saith unto her, Mary; she turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.* The service ended, the lamps were extinguished, and everyone dispersed. Fr. Simeon was detained in the altar. The children had run home long ago for dinner. But for little Mary there was no greater happiness than to be in the presence of Batiushka, to accompany him on his way home, during which time she enjoyed her special privilege of holding his hand. Batiushka knew this, he knew that she was patiently waiting for him there in the growing darkness of the church. "Mary," he called out to her. "Master," came the little voice of his faithful disciple.

Once, in winter, I drove Fr. Simeon home in the sleigh. I myself sat at the reins and together we rode over the snow-covered fields. Evening was approaching. All that remained of the setting sun was a faint strip of light glowing far away on the horizon. I turned to Fr. Simeon: "Batiushka, what do you think?"

Suppose that a person loves God but has no fear of belittling his brother. If we seriously thought about how closely and inseparably the first and second Gospel commandments are bound together, think how much easier life would be!" It was a moment before Batiushka said anything. "You, at least, have understood me. But little do my own children understand me—let alone anyone else."

This was not quite true. Everyone loved him without exception. Those who were unable at the time to fully grasp what it was he was after, understood this later. Some years afterwards Fr. Simeon's daughter wrote to me about her older brother and said how much his character had come to remind them of their father's.

Fr. Simeon was not with us for long. He was soon struck by a cruel illness: cancer. His physical sufferings were intense. When I came to see him he would hold me by the hand and tell me how much my visit meant to him, because I understood him. Obviously, during the last days of his earthly life the awareness of his spiritual loneliness grieved him terribly.

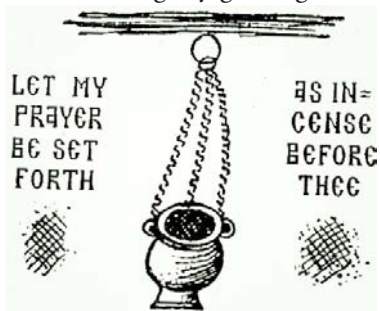
Pascha came. By this time another priest was serving in the church. On Holy Night Fr. Simeon sat at home on the

windowsill of his apartment, listening to the ringing of the bells, the tears running down his cheeks.

Soon the sick one was taken to the medical facility nearest us, a hospital in the German town of Königsberg. There they tried to save him with an operation, but in vain. He died on May 19, 1911.

Two days later a whole crowd of us went to meet his body. All the local inhabitants came, Russian and non-Russian, Orthodox and non-Orthodox. On the day of his funeral there were just as many people crowding the church. His body arrived in a closed coffin, but because everyone was so anxious to see once more their beloved pastor, the coffin was opened. In spite of the fact that the body had been transported 13 miles in a zinc coffin through the sweltering heat, there wasn't the least sign of decay. Fr. Simeon lay there, peaceful and majestic; his marble-like face reflected a spiritual beauty not of this world. He was buried behind the altar in the church yard. On his gravestone appeared the following inscription: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth: You conquered our hearts through meekness and love.*

Nearly a year went by. Again it was Pascha. I arrived at the church before the beginning of Matins and decided to sit for a while on the bench at Batiushka's grave. As I approached I heard a strange sound. Peering into the darkness, I saw a group of school children; they were huddled by the grave, sobbing. The children had not forgotten their meek and kindly Batiushka. And I think that wherever life led them, the image of Fr. Simeon remained in the heart of each and every one of them as a brightly guiding star.



Any sort of theology that has no connection with *hesychasm* (in the Orthodox sense of the word), and any sort of theology that is not the fruit of Orthodox noetic *hesychia* and does not lead towards it, is secularized, rationalistic, cerebral theology, which has **absolutely nothing to offer human beings, but rather increases their confusion and misery.**

Hesychia is the means by which a person is healed and sees the things of God. According to the divinely-inspired words of the God-seeing St. Gregory Palamas, Orthodox noetic *hesychia* is “true praxis, a means of approaching theoria or, to state it more aptly, the vision of God, which is the only proof of a soul in good health.”

Fr. John Romanides, from “Empirical Dogmatics”

NO ONE SHOULD DESPAIR

From “*The Evergetinos.*”

The Blessed Synkletike said: We should laud remiss and indolent souls who are easily exhausted in the struggle for good, as well as those souls who are easily discouraged and fall to despair. Indeed if such souls should display even the smallest good deed, we must praise it and marvel at it, giving them encouragement in their struggle for the good. Contrarily the most serious and greatest of their faults we must characterize, in front of them, as the least and unworthy of note. For the Devil, who wishes to destroy all things, or rather to succeed at our spiritual destruction, resorts to the following ruse. On the one hand, with accomplished and ascetic monastics, he tries to cover their sins and to make them forget them, so as to create pride in them. On the other hand, he constantly exposes the sins of neophytes—whose souls have not yet been strengthened in the ascetic life—before them, exaggerating these sins, so as to drive such neophytes to despair, until they abandon their ascetic efforts.

For this reason, then, these still irresolute souls we must care for with tenderness, reminding them continually of the boundless compassion and kindness of God. Among other things, we must emphasize that our Lord is merciful and long-enduring and that He annuls His righteous judgments against wrong-doers, as long as they surely repent.

To render this teaching of ours convincing, we will bring forth examples from Holy Scripture. Let us recall that Raab was a prostitute, but was saved through her faith; St. Paul was a persecutor, but through repentance became a chosen vessel; and the thief who was crucified together with Christ on Golgotha, who had stolen and murdered, first opened the door of Paradise with one word of repentance: *Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.* Moreover, let us cite the instance of St. Matthew, who was appointed to the Apostolic ranks by the Lord and who, even though a former tax collector, relates the parable of the tax collector, as well as that of the Prodigal Son. In general, then, let us bring to mind all of these stories which emphasize the worth of repentance and which extol the compassion of God towards the repentant man.

On the other hand, we must correct those souls who are ruled by pride by providing them with greater examples, just as we give the weaker souls encouragement, so as not to be ruled by despair. Let us take an example from the work of the best gardeners, who, when they see that a plant is of small stature and sickly, water it profusely and care for it greatly, so that it will grow and be strong; while, when seeing in a plant the premature development of sprouts, they immediately trim the useless sprouts, so that the plant does not quickly wither. Likewise, physicians give rich nourishment to some patients, prescribing that they walk, while to others they give a strict diet and require them to remain at rest.

Θάνατον Θανάτω, Σὺ Θανατοῖς Θεέ Μου!

Θεολογικὸ σχόλιο στὴν Ανάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου, τοῦ Λάμπρου Κ. Σκόντζου, Θεολόγου - Καθηγητοῦ.

Ἡ λαμπροφόρος Ανάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν κορυφαία ἐορτολογικὴ ἐκδήλωση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας. Μόνη Αὐτή, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴν αἰρετικὴ ἑτεροδοξία, βιώνει ἀδιάκοπα τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὡς τὴν πιὸ χαροποὶ καὶ ἐλπιδοφόρα ἐμπειρία τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας. Ὁ κάθε Ὁρθόδοξος πιστὸς δὲν ἐορτάζει ἀπλᾶ τὴν Ἐγερση τοῦ Κυρίου, ἀλλὰ ζεῖ τὸ συγκλονιστικὸ αὐτὸ γεγονὸς, ὡς μιὰ προσωπικὴ μεταμόρφωση καὶ ἀνάσταση!

Τὴν ἀγία αὐτὴ ἡμέρα, τὴν «*ἐορτὴ τῶν ἐορτῶν καὶ τὴν πανήγυρη τῶν πανηγύρεων*» κατὰ τὸν ἱερὸ ὕμνογράφο τοῦ Πάσχα ἐορτάζεται ἡ νίκη τοῦ Ἀγαθοῦ κατὰ τοῦ Κακοῦ, ἡ ἐπικράτηση τοῦ φωτὸς στὸ νοητὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀμαρτίας καὶ τῆς φθορᾶς, ἡ κατάργηση τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα ἡ ἀναίρεση τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦ χειρότερου ἐχθροῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους. «*Ἐσχάτος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος*» (1 Κορ. 15:26) ἀναφωνεῖ ἐνθουσιωδῶς ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος!

Ἡ εἴσοδος τοῦ κακοῦ στὸν κόσμο μαζί μὲ τὰ ἄλλα μύρια κακά, ἔφερε καὶ τὸν θάνατο, ὡς τὴν φυσικὴ κατάληξη μιᾶς ἀφάνταστα μαρτυρικῆς ζωῆς. Ὁ πικρὸς Ἄδης ὑπῆρξε ὁ τόπος κατάληξης ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπινων ψυχῶν. Ἡ ἔννοια τῆς ἀθανασίας, ὡς τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀρχέγονο δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἔμεινε ὡς μιὰ μακρινὴ ἀνάμνηση στὴν ἀνθρώπινη σκέψη καὶ ὡς μιὰ ἀμυδρὴ προσδοκία ἀνάκτησής της στὸ μέλλον.

Ἡ λαχτάρα γιὰ τὴν νίκη τοῦ θανάτου ἐκφράστηκε ποικιλότροπα μέσα στὶς διάφορες μυθολογίες τῶν λαῶν. Οἱ προφῆτες καὶ οἱ συγγραφεῖς τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, ὡς ὄργανα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν προετοιμασία τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους γιὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ σωτηρία, προεῖδαν πιὸ καθαρὰ τὴν μελλοντικὴ νίκη τῆς ζωῆς κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς θὰ δοκιμάσει τὸ πικρὸ ποτήρι τοῦ θανάτου καὶ θὰ νικήσει τὸν Ἄδη, θὰ τὸν συλήσει ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀπ' αἰῶνος δεσμίους τοῦ νεκροῦ καὶ θὰ κλείσει ὀριστικὰ τὸ δρόμο τοῦ θανάτου γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς Του.

Ὁ μοναδικὸς ζωντανὸς Θεὸς εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς σὲ ὅλα τὰ ὄντα. Αὐτὸς «θανατοὶ καὶ ζωογονεῖ, κατάγει εἰς ἄδου καὶ ἀνάγει» (1 Βασιλ. 2:6). Ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ ὁ Ἐλισαῖος ἀνασταίνουν νεκροὺς στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου (3 Βασιλ. 17:23, 4 Βασιλ. 4:33). Ὁ προφήτης Ὡσηέ, προβλέποντας τὴν εἰς ἄδου κάθοδον τοῦ Μεσσία, τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνάστασή Του καὶ τὴν συντριβὴ τοῦ θανάτου διακηρύσσει στοὺς ἄπιστους

συμπατριῶτες τοῦ «*Πορευθῶμεν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωμεν πρὸς Κύριον! ... Ὑγιαίνει ἡμᾶς μετὰ δυὸ ἡμέρας, ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐξαναστηθῶμεθα καὶ ζησόμεθα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ*» (Ὡσηέ 6:1) καὶ γι' αὐτὸ σκιρτώντας ἀπὸ ἄκρατο ἐνθουσιασμὸ φωνάζει νὰ τὸ ἀκούσουν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι «*Ποῦ σου ἡ δίκη σου, θάνατε, ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου ἄδη;*» (Ὡσηέ 13:14).

Στὸ θεανδρικὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βρῆκε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος τὸν πραγματικὸ λυτρωτὴ του. Αὐτὸς, ὡς ὁ σαρκωμένος Θεός, ὑλοποίησε τὸ θεῖο σχέδιο τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ κόσμου. Πέτυχε τὴ σωτηρία μας ὡς διδάσκαλος, ὡς ἱερεὺς καὶ ὡς βασιλεὺς. Δίδαξε πρωτόγνωρη διδασκαλία, ἀποκάλυψε τὰ μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἔδωσε νέο τρόπο ζωῆς στοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἰερουργῆσε τὴν πιὸ ἀποτελεσματικὴ θυσία ὄλων τῶν ἐποχῶν, μὲ ἱερεῖο ἄμωμο τὸν ἴδιό Του τὸν ἑαυτό, πάνω στὸν φρικτὸ Γολγοθὰ καὶ πέτυχε τὴν περιπόθητη καταλλαγὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ τὸ Θεό. «*Ὁ δὲ Θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἡγάπησεν ἡμᾶς καὶ ὄντας ἡμᾶς νεκροὺς τοῖς παραπτώμασι συνεζωοποίησε τῷ Χριστῷ... καὶ συνήγειρε καὶ συνεκάθησεν ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις.*» (Ἐφ. 2:4-6).

Τέλος ὡς θριαμβευτικὸς νικητὴς, νίκησε τὴν ἀντίθετες δυνάμεις καὶ τὸ κακό, νίκησε τὸ θάνατο καὶ ἀνέστη ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκροὺς, ἀνελήφθη στοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ κάθισε στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, συνεχίζοντας τὸ ἀπόλυτο καὶ ἀναντικατάστατο μεσιτικὸ Του ἔργο. Ἀποτέλεσμα: «*Νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτὲ ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγγὺς ἐγενήθητε ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἐχθραν, ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ τὸν κόσμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δογμασι καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δυὸ κτίσει ἐν ἑαυτῷ εἰς ἓνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην*» (Ἐφ. 2:13-15).

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς διακήρυξε: «*Εγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ, ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται*». (Ἰωάν. 11:25). Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ μόνος, ὁ Ὅποιος μπορεῖ νὰ νικήσει τὸν θάνατο. Μὲ τὴν λαμπροφόρο Ανάστασή Του πραγματοποιοῦσε αὐτὴ τὴν λαμπρὴ νίκη, ἀνάστησε τὸ σῶμα Του καὶ μαζί ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση, δηλαδή ὅλα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πρόσωπα ὄλων τῶν ἐποχῶν, ὡς κύτταρα τοῦ σώματός Του. «*Ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσι, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιηθήσονται*». (1 Κορ. 15:22). Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἤδη ἀναστημένος δυνητικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου.

Εἶναι μιὰ δυνητικὴ κατάσταση τὴν ὁποία μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀξιοποιήσει. Ὁ βιολογικὸς θάνατος, ὡς προσωρινὴ κατάσταση, δὲν αἶρει τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς

ἀναστάσεως καὶ τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς, διότι «ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, ὅτι οἱ νεκροὶ ἀκούσουσι τῆς φωνῆς τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες ζήσονται». (Ἰωάν. 5:25). «Ὁ ἐγείρας τὸν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ζωοποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ σώματα ὑμῶν διὰ τὸ ἐνοικοῦν αὐτοῦ Πνεῦμα ἐν ὑμῖν». (Ρωμ. 8:11). Αὐτὴ εἶναι (πρέπει νὰ εἶναι) ἡ μόνη χαρὰ στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν πιστῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, διότι ἔχουμε τὴ βεβαιότητα, ὅτι χάρις στὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μας, «μεταβεβήκαμεν ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὴν ζωὴν» (1 Ἰωάν. 3:14) καὶ «Πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα». (Ἰωάν. 11:26).

Ἀπτὰ παραδείγματα τῆς ἀναστάσεώς μας εἶναι οἱ θαυμαστὲς νεκραναστάσεις ποὺ ἔκανε ὁ Κύριος κατὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς παρουσίας Του, τῆς κόρης τοῦ Ἰαεῖρου (Μάρκ. 5:21-42, τοῦ γιοῦ τῆς χεῖρας στὴ Ναὶν (Λουκ. 7:11-17), τοῦ Λαζάρου (Ἰωάν. 11:1-44). Ἐπίσης ἡ ἀνάσταση τῶν «κεκοιμημένων ἀγίων» (Ματθ. 27:52) κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Σταυρώσεως τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι οἱ προάγγελοι καὶ τῆς δικῆς μας ἀναστάσεως.

Ἡ λαμπροφόρος Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Σωτῆρος μας σημαίνει ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ὄντολογικὴ ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ κόσμου. Ὁ παλαιὸς πτωτικὸς κόσμος τῆς φθορᾶς ἄλλαξε κυριολεκτικᾶ σύσταση, διότι μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου νικῆθηκαν οἱ ἀντίθεες δυνάμεις τῆς φθορᾶς καὶ ἀπαλλάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ κράτος τοῦ διαβόλου. Χάρη στὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ξαναβρῆκε ὁ κόσμος τὴν πραγματικὴ τοῦ θέσης μέσα στὴ θεία δημιουργία. Τῆ φθορά, ποὺ δημιούργησε ἡ πτώση, διαδέχτηκε ἡ ἀφθαρσία. Ὁ πιστὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν ζεῖ πλέον γιὰ νὰ πεθάνει, ἀλλὰ ζεῖ γιὰ νὰ μεταβεῖ στὴν αἰωνιότητα καὶ νὰ συμβασιλεύει αἰῶνια μὲ τὸν Χριστό.

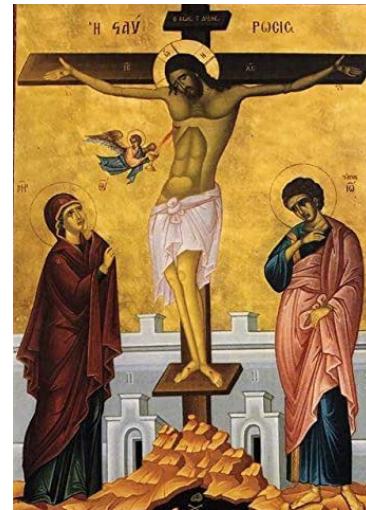
Τὸ μέγα καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτο γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς Του μιὰ διαρκῆς χαρὰ καὶ ἀτέλειωτη αἰσιοδοξία. Οἱ ἅγιοι Ἀπόστολοι ἔγιναν οἱ διαπρύσιοι κήρυκες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου στὰ ἔθνη χάρις στὴν ἐμπειρία τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ. Τὰ νέφη τῶν Μαρτύρων θυσίασαν τὴν πολύτιμη ζωὴ τοὺς χάρις στὴν βεβαιότητα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας ζοῦσαν τὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως ὡς μιὰ ἀτέρμονη προσωπικὴ συγκλονιστικὴ ἐμπειρία.

Αὐτὴν ἀκριβῶς τὴν ἀναστάσιμη χαρὰ καὶ αἰσιοδοξία θέλει ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία νὰ μεταδώσει καὶ σὲ μᾶς σήμερα. Μᾶς καλεῖ νὰ ἀποβάλλουμε τὸ ἄγχος τῆς καθημερινότητος καὶ κυρίως τὸ φόβο τοῦ θανάτου καὶ νὰ διαποτίσουμε τὴν ὑπαρξή μας μὲ τὴν μακάρια ἐλπίδα καὶ τῆς δικῆς μας ἀνάστασης, τῆς ὁποίας τεκμήριο καὶ ἀπαρχὴ ὑπῆρξε ἡ Ζωηφόρος Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Λυτρωτῆ μας Χριστοῦ.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἐν Σιωπῇ

Ἀπὸ τὸν Παναγιώτη Σημάτη, Ἐφημερίδα «ΕΡΕΥΝΑ» Αἰγίου, 27 Ἀπριλίου 2005.



Κάθε χρόνο, ὅταν φτάνει ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδα, ὁ πιστὸς προσκαλεῖται γιὰ μιὰ ἐπανατοποθέτηση τῆς ζωῆς του μπρὸς στὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Πάθους τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀτενίζει καθλωμένος ἐκεῖ στὰ μεσοῦρανα, στὸ Σταυρὸ Του, προσκαλώντας μας καὶ προκαλώντας ταυτόχρονα πιστοὺς καὶ λιγότερο πιστοὺς.

Καὶ ποῖος ἄραγε θὰ μπορούσε νὰ διαβεβαιώσει ὅτι προσπέρασε τὸ Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ αἰώνιο αὐτὸ σκάνδαλο τῆς λογικῆς ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀγγέλων, χωρὶς κλυδωνισμοὺς ἀμφιβολιῶν, χωρὶς κραδασμοὺς στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν αὐτονόητων ἐνδοκοσμικῶν βεβαιότητων;

Φέτος ἰδιαίτερα, καὶ ἐνῶ ἀκόμη εἶναι νωπὲς οἱ ἐντυπώσεις ἀπὸ τὰ σκάνδαλα ποὺ ἤρθαν, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ θὰ ἔρθουν, θὰ ἀντικρίσουμε καὶ πάλι τὸ Χριστό. Ἴσως φέτος νὰ φαντάζει περισσότερο μόνος: δεμένος σὰν κακοῦργος, περιτριγυρισμένος καὶ λοιδορούμενος ἀπὸ τὸν ὄχλο καὶ τὸ ἀρχοντολόι τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ «καιροῦ ἐκείνου»· μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του ἀποσυναρμολογημένους, διασκορπισμένους καὶ ἀνήμερους νὰ τοῦ προσφέρουν κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἄρνηση τοῦ Πέτρου.

Κι Αὐτὸς σιωπηλός, νὰ ἀτενίζει ὅλους, ὅπως τότε τὸν Πέτρο πρὶν λαλήσει ὁ πετεινός, καὶ νὰ ἀναμοχλεύει μέσα μας ὅλες τὶς ἀρνήσεις κι ὅλες τὶς προδοσίες στὸ πρόσωπό Του, ὅλα τὰ πάθη κι ὅλες τὶς πληγές.

Νὰ μᾶς κοιτᾶ μὲ μίαν ἀπέραντα μεγαλόπρεπη Σιωπῇ—ὄση κι ἡ ἀγάπη Του—ποὺ θεραπεύει τὴν κούφια καὶ ὑβριστικὴ πολυλογία τῶν «ἐκπροσώπων» Του, κάθε μεγαλόστομη καὶ ὑπερφίαλη καπηλεία τῆς Σιωπῆς καὶ τοῦ Πάθους.

Μία ἀγιασμένη, πονεμένη Σιωπῇ γιὰ τοὺς πόνους καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, μυστικὴ φωνὴ στὰ μύχια τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Μία μεγαλειώδης, εὐγλωττη, κατανυκτικὴ Σιωπῇ Ἀγάπης.

«Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα». Στὸν πόνο καὶ στὸν θρίαμβο. Καὶ ὅταν ἔκανε τὰ θαύματα, καὶ ὅταν δεχόταν τὰ

ραπίσματα. Καὶ ὅταν εἰσέρχεται θριαμβευτικὰ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα «μετὰ βαΐων καὶ κλάδων», καὶ ὅταν ἐρωτᾶται ἀπὸ τὸν ἀρχιερέα Καϊάφα, τὸν Πιλάτο, τὸν βασιλιὰ Ἡρώδη: «Οὐδὲν ἀποκρίνη; οὐκ ἀκούεις πόσα σου καταμαρτυροῦσιν; Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα».

Σιωπᾶ ὅταν ὁ ὄχλος καὶ οἱ στρατιῶτες τὸν χλευάζουν, ὅταν τὸν προκαλοῦν λέγοντας: «Σῶσον σεαυτὸν εἰ Υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ». Ὅταν καταφέρουν στὸ ἅγιο πρόσωπό Του ραπίσματα καὶ μὲ σαρκαστικὴ εἰρωνεία τὸν ἐξωθοῦν νὰ «προφητεύσει» ποιὸς τὸν ράπισε. Ἀνταποδίδει στὴν παράλογη πρόκληση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης κακότητος τὴν πορφυρὰ Σιωπῆ τῶν σταυρωμένων Του χεριῶν, τὴ ματωμένη καρδιὰ τῆς Ἀγάπης.

Σιωπᾶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς μπροστὰ στὴν μισαλλοδοξία ἐχθρῶν, στὴν ἀλαζονεία καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία τῶν «φίλων», γιατί οἱ λέξεις δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ποῦν τίποτα περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσα πολυσήμαντα μαρτυροῦν τὰ πάθη, ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ ἡ Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶναι διακριτικὴ συνομιλία, ἓνας ἀένας διάλογος ἀγάπης μὲ τὶς ψυχές, ὅταν τὰ λόγια καθίστανται ἀνήμερα νὰ διασπᾶσουν τὰ τεῖχη τοῦ ὀρθολογισμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀμφιβολίας πὸν ἔχουν ἐρμητικὰ σφραγίσει τὰ «ῶτα» μας. Ὅταν τὰ πάθη ἔχουν ἀλλοιώσει τὴν «λογικὴ» ψυχὴ μας καὶ τὴν ἔχουν παραδώσει στὸ παράλογό της τυχειότητος, τὸ χαοτικὸ ἐνήδονο κυνήγι τῆς ὀδύνης.

Συνομιλεῖ καὶ τότε «ἐν τῇ σιωπῇ» ὁ Χριστὸς μαζί μας, γιατί ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποτὲ δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι Εἰκόνα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν χάνει τὴν ἰκανότητα νὰ διαισθάνεται, νὰ ξέρει, νὰ «καταλαβαίνει πολὺ περισσότερο πράγματα ἀπ' ὅσα μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφράσει», ἀπ' αὐτὰ πὸν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀκούσει. Ὁ Σιωπῶν Χριστὸς τοῦ Πάθους, μᾶς ἔχει ἐξασφαλίσει τὸ προνόμιο, ὥστε «νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ» νὰ μποροῦμε νὰ ψιθυρίζουμε τὸ «μνήστητί μου, Κύριε» τοῦ ληστοῦ, ἀκόμα καὶ πάνω στὸ σταυρὸ τῆς πιδ μεγάλης ντροπῆς, τῆς πιδ μεγάλης ἀπελπισίας.

Ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Σιωπῆς, εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀναμονῆς, δηλαδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας: κανένα δὲν ἐξαναγκάζει, μὰ ἀγαπᾶ, σιωπᾶ καὶ περιμένει τὴν μετάνοιά μας. Ἡ σιωπῆ εἶναι ὁ ἐσχατολογικὸς τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖον μιλεῖ καὶ πράττει ὁ Θεός. Ὅποιος ἀγαπᾶ δὲν φλυαρεῖ... μὰ ὑποφέρει καὶ ὑπομένει.

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Λόγου! Τὰ λόγια εἶναι τὰ ἐργαλεῖα τῆς χρονικότητος. Ἡ κατανόηση τῆς οὐσίας τῶν λόγων εἰσάγει στὴν αἰωνιότητα τοῦ ὑπέρ-λόγου, ἐκεῖ ὅπου τὰ λόγια εἶναι περιττά. **Ἡ σιωπῆ εἶναι ἡ γλῶσσα τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ.** «*Ἡ σιωπῆ μυστήριόν ἐστι τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ μέλλοντος οἱ δὲ λόγοι ὄργανόν ἐστι τούτου τοῦ κόσμου.*» (Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος).

Ἡ Σιωπῆ τοῦ Λόγου λογοποιεῖ τὴν παράλογη λογικὴ τοῦ πεπτωκότος ἀνθρώπου. Σιωπηλὰ ἀνασκάπτει τὶς καρδιές, ἀποκόπτει τὰ καρκινώματα τοῦ ἄλογου ἐγωῖσμοῦ, δένει τὰ τραύματα, ζωντανεύει τὴν ἐρειπωμένη πίστη, ἐτοιμάζει τὴν ἐξανάσταση.

Μέσα στὴν σιωπῆ συντελεῖται ἡ θεανθρώπινη συνάντηση. «*Ἴδού, ὁ Νυμφίος ἔρχεται ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός.*» Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ, στὴ σιγῆ τῆς ἡσυχίας, «*τῶν ὑπερφυῶν γεύεται ἀγαθῶν καὶ ὑπερκοσμίων ἀπολαύει καλῶν, καὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγάπης καθίσταται χώρημα καὶ οὕτω ἐρωτοληπτεῖται καὶ χαίρει καὶ εὐθυμεῖ.*» (Ἄγ. Κάλλιστος). «*Ὁ φίλος τῆς σιωπῆς προσεγγίζει τὸν Θεὸ καὶ συνομιλῶντας μυστικὰ μαζί Του, φωτίζεται ἀπ' Αὐτόν.*» (Ἰωάννης Κλίμακος).

Ὅσοι αὐτὴ τὴν Μεγάλην Ἑβδομάδα κατορθώσουμε—ἀτενίζοντες τὸν Ἰησοῦ—ν' ἀφουγκραστοῦμε ταπεινὰ τὴ πολυφθογγὴ Σιωπῆ Του, ἀποφασίσουμε «ἐν μετανοίᾳ» νὰ ἐναποθέσουμε στὰ χέρια Του τὴν ζωὴ μας καὶ μποῦμε στὴ σιωπῆ τοῦ «ὄλβιου» τάφου, θὰ μᾶς χαρίσει ἄλλη μία φορὰ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου Του τὴν «ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἀνάσταση».



Ἡ Ἀνάσταση συνδέεται μὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐνῶ ἡ Ἀνάληψη μὲ τοὺς ἀγίους. Μὲ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του ὁ Χριστὸς νίκησε τὸν θάνατο καὶ ἔδωσε σὲ ὅλους τὸ δῶρο τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Ὅλοι θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ δίκαιοι καὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ· τὴν ἀνάληψη ὅμως δὲν θα ἐπιτύχουμε ὅλοι, ἀλλὰ μόνο ἐκεῖνοι γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἡ ζωὴ εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ ὁ θάνατος εἶναι κέρδος (Φιλ. 1:21), ὅσοι πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατο σταύρωσαν τὴν ἁμαρτία μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν εὐαγγελικὴ διαγωγή. Μόνον οἱ δίκαιοι, οἱ θεοῦμενοι, θὰ ἀξιωθοῦν αὐτῆς τῆς μεγάλης ἐμπειρίας, ὅπως ὁ Μέγας Ἀπόστολος ὁμολογεῖ: «*Καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ Κυρίου εἰς ἄερα, καὶ οὕτω πάντοτε σὺν Κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα.*» (Α΄ Θεσ. 4:16-17). Ὅλοι θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν, ἀλλὰ μόνον οἱ δίκαιοι θὰ ἀναληφθοῦν, θὰ ἀρπαγοῦν μὲ νεφέλες γιὰ νὰ προῦπαντήσουν τὸν Χριστὸ ἐρχόμενο ἀπὸ τοὺς Οὐρανούς. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀπὸ σωτηριολογικῆς ἀπόψεως ἡ Ἀνάληψη θεωρεῖται μεγαλύτερη ἐορτῆ, ἀκριβῶς γιατί αὐτὸς πού μετέχει τῆς Ἀναλήψεως μετέχει τῆς θεώσεως.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς

Πασχαλινό Δῶρο

Ὁ παπᾶς ποῦ δὲν «ἐβγαζε» Ἀνάσταση ἀν δὲν ἦσαν ὄλοι οἱ χωριανοὶ παρόντες!

Πηγή: Γέροντας Δαμασκηνὸς Ζαχαράκης, καθηγούμενος Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Ἀγάθωνος Φθιώτιδος, «Τὸ πάσχα τοῦ Γεωργακοῦ».

Απ' ὅλες τὶς διηγήσεις τῶν παλαιῶν γερόντων, ποῦ κατὰ καιροὺς ἔχω ἀκούσει, τὴν πιὸ ὁμορφὴ καὶ τὴν πιὸ συγκινητικὴ θεωρῶ πὺς τὴν ἄκουσα ἀπὸ τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση Παπαντώνη, τὸν γιὰ πολλὰ χρόνια ψάλτη τῆς ἐκκλησίας μας. Τὴν ἄκουσά το Μεγάλο Σάββατο τοῦ ἔτους 1970, μέσα στὸ σπιτοκάλυβό του, ποῦ βρισκόταν στὸν κάτω μαχαλὰ τοῦ χωριοῦ μας.

Εἶχε τελειώσει, θυμᾶμαι, ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία μὲ τὴν πρώτη Ἀνάσταση. Ἐγώ, φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησία, ἀκολούθησα τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση στὸ σπίτι του.

Μὲ ἀγαποῦσε ὁ γέροντας καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη του μὲ τραβοῦσε κοντά του, καί, ὅπως μ' ἔλεγε, μὲ προετοίμαζε γιὰ διάδοχό του στὸ ἀναλόγιο.

Ὅταν φθάσαμε στὸ σπίτι, καθίσαμε κοντὰ στὸ ἀναμμένο τζάκι. Ἡ θεία Θανάσαινα, ἀφοῦ μὲ καλωσόρισε, ἔσπευσε νὰ γεμίσει τὴ χούφτα μου μὲ ξερὰ σῦκα, καρύδια καὶ σταφίδες. «Σήμερα παιδί μου», μοῦ εἶπε, «ἔχουμε αὐστηρὴ νηστεία, γι' αὐτό σου δίνω, νὰ φᾶς, ξηροὺς καρπούς. Αὔριο, ποῦ θὰ εἶναι Λαμπρὴ, ἔλα νὰ σὲ κερᾶσω κόκκινο αὐγὸ καὶ γλυκιά καρυδόπαστα ποῦ ἐφτιάξα γιὰ τὴ γιορτῆ».

Τὴν ὥρα ποῦ ἡ θεία Θανάσαινα μοῦ ἔλεγε αὐτά, εἶδα τὸν μπαρμπα-Θανάση νὰ κουνᾶει δακρυσιμένος τὸ κεφάλι του καὶ αὐθόρμητα τὸν ἐρώτησα: «**Τί συμβαίνει μπαρμπα, γιατί κλαῖς;**»

«Ἄχ, Δημήτρη μου, (αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ κοσμικὸ μου ὄνομα) μοῦ εἶπε, μέρα ποῦ εἶναι σήμερα, ὁ νοῦς μου πῆγε στοὺς παλιότερους χωριανούς μας ποῦ ἔζησαν ἐδῶ στὸν τόπο μας καὶ ποῦ τώρα ἀναπαύονται κάτω στὸ κοιμητήριό τοῦ χωριοῦ. Ἦταν ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι αὐτοί, παιδί μου, δὲν τοὺς φτάνουμε ἐμεῖς στὴν πίστη καὶ στὴν ἀγιότητα. Αὐτοί, χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία, μιλοῦσαν μὲ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀγίους Του.

Θυμᾶμαι, σὰν ἀπόψε, Μεγάλο Σάββατο, κάτι θαυμαστὸ ποῦ συνέβη ἐδῶ στὸν διπλανὸ συνοικισμό. Ὅταν χτύπησε ἡ καμπάνα τῆς ἐκκλησίας, γιὰ τὴν

Ἀνάσταση, ὅλο το χωριό, κατὰ οἰκογένειες, ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὴν ἐκκλησιά.

Μαζί τους ἀνέβαιναν καὶ ὁ γερο-Γεωργακός, ὁ τσέλιγκας, μὲ τὴ φαμελιά του. Μόλις πέρασαν τὴ μεγάλη ἀνηφόρα, ἄκουσαν, μέσα στὴν ἠσυχία τῆς νύχτας, πέρα στὰ μαντριά τοῦ Γεωργακοῦ, μεγάλο θόρυβο. Ὁ Γεωργακὸς ἔκαμε λίγο πιὸ πέρα καὶ ἔβαλε αὐτὶ γιὰ ν' ἀκούσει καλύτερα τί συμβαίνει. Μαζί του στάθηκαν καὶ ἄλλοι χωριανοί.

«Λύκοι μπῆκαν στὸ μαντρί μου, εἶπε. Ἀπόψε διάλεξαν νὰ τὸ κάνουν. Εἴρω ἐγώ, ὁ σατανᾶς τοὺς ἔστειλε γιὰ νὰ μὲ ἐμποδίσει νὰ πάω στὴν Ἀνάσταση, ἀλλά, ἐννοιά του, δὲν θὰ τοῦ κάνω τὸ χατίρι.»

Κοίταξε πέρα πρὸς τὰ μαντριά καὶ φώναξε δυνατά: «Ἀπόψε προβατάκια μου σᾶς δίνω τοῦ Θεοῦ μου». Καὶ στρέφοντας τὸ πρόσωπό του στοὺς συνοδοιπόρους τοῦ χωριανούς, τοὺς εἶπε: «Ἐγὼ θὰ πάω στὴν ἐκκλησία

νὰ ἀκούσω τὸ **Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη**, ποῦ τόσο πολὺ το περιμένω καὶ τὸ λαχταρῶ. Θέλω νὰ λειτουργηθῶ μὲ τὴ φαμελιά μου καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε τὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια. Πενήντα μέρες ἐτοίμαζόμαστε γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη αὐτὴ νύχτα, δὲν τὴ χάνω μὲ τίποτα.»

«Τί εἶναι αὐτὰ

ποῦ λὲς Γεωργακέ;» τοῦ εἶπαν οἱ πλησιέστεροι συνοδοιπόροι του. Τρέξε γρήγορα νὰ γλυτώσεις τὰ πρόβατά σου καὶ νὰ σώσεις τὴν περιουσία σου ποῦ μὲ πολλοὺς καὶ πολύχρονους κόπους ἐφτιάξες. Φύγε γρήγορα, μὴ χασομερᾶς. Κάθε λεπτὸ ποῦ περνᾶει ἡ ζημιὰ ποῦ σοῦ κάνουν οἱ λύκοι γίνεται καὶ πιὸ μεγάλη. Σκέψου, σὲ παρακαλοῦμε, τὴν οἰκογένειά σου ποῦ ζεῖ ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ πρόβατα.»

«Ἐνα νὰ μὴν μείνει, τοὺς ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ τσέλιγκας, ἐγὼ θὰ πάω στὴν Ἀνάσταση καὶ ὅ,τι θέλει ὁ Θεὸς ἄς γίνει».

Αὐτὰ εἶπε καὶ κίνησε γιὰ τὸ Ναό, σκορπίζοντας σ' ὄλους τοὺς χωριανούς του τὸν θαυμασμὸ γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη του πίστη!

Στὴν ἐκκλησιά, πρῶτος καὶ καλύτερος ὁ τσέλιγκας! Στεκόταν, ἀγέρωχος, στὸ στασίδι τοῦ κρατώντας στὰ χέρια τοῦ τὴν ὀλοφώτεινη λαμπάδα του, ποῦ μὲ τὸ φῶς τῆς χαΐδευε τὸ ρυτιδωμένο πρόσωπό του.

Στὸ κάλεσμα τοῦ ἱερέα: «**Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ, πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης προσέλθετε**», πῆγε πρῶτος αὐτὸς καὶ μαζί



του ιεραρχικά ὅλη ἡ φαμελιά του καὶ κοινώνησαν τὰ Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια.

Ὅταν ὁ λειτουργὸς διάβαζε τὸν Κατηχητικὸ Λόγο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου, ὁ Γεωργακὸς στεκόταν μπροστὰ στὴν Ὁραία Πύλη καὶ ἄκουγε μὲ προσοχή.

Στὰ λόγια του παπᾶ: «Ὁ Ἄδης, φησὶν, ἐπικράνθη», ἐπαναλάμβανε τὸ «ἐπικράνθη» μὲ πείσμα καὶ θυμὸ, λὲς καὶ ἐκδικιόταν τὸν Ἄδη καὶ μαζί του τὸν διάβολο μὲ τὴ σκοτεινὴ δυναστεία του. Καὶ ὅταν τὸ κείμενο ἔφτασε στὸ: «*Ἀνέστη Χριστὸς καὶ ζωὴ πολιτεῖται*», ὁ τσελιγκας, στὴν κάθε ἐπανάληψη τοῦ «Ἀνέστη», φώναζε δυνατὰ καὶ θριαμβευτικά, μὲ φωνὴ πού σκέπαζε ἐκεῖνες τῶν συνορταστῶν του, τὸ δικό του «Ἀνέστη».

Παρὸτι δὲν ἤξερε πολλὰ γράμματα, ὁ τρόπος πού ἀντιδρούσε στὸ ἄκουσμα τῶν ρημάτων «ἐπικράνθη καὶ Ἀνέστη», ἔδειχνε πὼς ὄχι μόνον τὰ καταλάβαινε, ἀλλὰ κυριολεκτικὰ τα βίωνε μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ του. Χωρὶς, δηλαδή, νὰ τὸ ξέρει, θεολογοῦσε!

Βγαίνοντας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιά, ἀφοῦ εἶπε τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη» μὲ τὴ φαμελιά του καὶ τοὺς χωριανούς καὶ ἄκουσε τὸ «Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη», κίνησε γιὰ τὸ σπίτι του, γεμάτος ἀναστάσιμη χαρὰ καὶ ἀγαλλίαση.

Ὅταν ἔφτασαν στὸ σπίτι, ἀφοῦ πρῶτα ἄναψαν τὸ καντήλι μὲ τὸ Ἀναστάσιμο Φῶς, ἔστρωσαν τραπέζι γιὰ νὰ φάνε τὴν παραδοσιακὴ μαγειρίτσα καὶ νὰ τσουγκρίσουν τὸ κόκκινο αὐγὸ.

Ἀφοῦ φάγανε καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ἀποσύρθηκαν γιὰ ὕπνο, ὁ Γεωργακὸς, πού δὲν τὸν χωροῦσε ὁ τόπος, πῆρε τὴν γκλίτσα του καὶ βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι γιὰ νὰ πάει στὰ μαντριά νὰ δεῖ τί ζημιὰ τοῦ ἔκαναν οἱ λύκοι καὶ πόσα ἀπὸ τὰ πρόβατα τοῦ ἀπόμειναν. Ἀνέβαινε τὸν ἀνηφορικὸ δρόμο πού ὀδηγοῦσε στὶς στάνες του, μὲ γρήγορο βηματισμὸ, ἔχοντας διαρκῶς τὸ νοῦ του στὰ ζωντανά του.

Ὅταν ἔφτασε πολὺ κοντὰ τὸν ἀνησύχησε ἡ μεγάλη ἡσυχία πού ἐπικρατοῦσε ἐκεῖ.

«Ἄιντε, εἶπε, πᾶνε τὰ προβατάκια μου, δὲν θὰ γλύτωσε κανένα», καὶ μ' αὐτὲς τὶς σκέψεις, μπῆκε στὸ μαντρί. Ἐκεῖ, ἔζησε ὅλο το θαῦμα τῆς Ἀνάστασης.

Τὰ πρόβατά του εἶχαν στρωμνοχθεῖ ὅλα μαζί στὴν ἀριστερὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ μαντριοῦ, ἀκίνητα, σὰν μαρμαρωμένα. Στὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ, εἶδε νὰ γυαλίζουν, μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι, τέσσερα μάτια. Πάνω στὰ ξερὰ χορτάρια πού στρώνουν οἱ βλάχοι γιὰ νὰ νᾶναι τὰ ζωντανά τους στεγνά καὶ ζεστά, κάθονταν, σὰν τὰ ἡμερὰ σκυλιά, δύο λύκοι καὶ τὸν κοίταζαν.

Συγκλονισμένος ἀπ' αὐτὸ πού ἔβλεπε, πῆγε ἀθόρυβα καὶ ἄνοιξε σιγὰ-σιγὰ τὴ μαντρόπορτα. Ὅστερα, στάθηκε λίγο παράμερα καὶ γιὰ νὰ διώξει τοὺς δύο λύκους, κτύπησε μὲ δύναμη τὶς παλάμες τῶν χεριῶν του. Οἱ λύκοι πετάχτηκαν ἀμέσως ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ μαντρί καὶ ἔξαφανίστηκαν.

Ὁ Γεωργακὸς τότε στράφηκε πρὸς τὰ πρόβατα. Τὰ μέτρησε ἓνα πρὸς ἓνα καὶ ὦ τοῦ θαύματος! Τὰ βρῆκε ὅλα, ὄχι μόνον ζωντανὰ καὶ σωστὰ στὸν ἀριθμὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνέγγιχτα! Οἱ λύκοι, δηλαδή δὲν τὰ εἶχαν ἀκουμπήσει. Οὔτε καν μία σταλαγματιὰ αἵματος δὲν βρέθηκε πάνω στὸ μαλλί τους καὶ στὸ δάπεδο!

Ὁ πολυπείρος βοσκὸς, πού στὰ τόσα χρόνια πού φρόντιζε τὰ πρόβατά του, γνώρισε κι ἄλλες τέτοιες «ἐπισκέψεις», πού ὅλες εἶχαν τὸ κόστος τους, ἄλλες μικρὸ καὶ ἄλλες μεγάλο, κατάλαβε πὼς αὐτὸ πού τοῦ συνέβηκε τὴν Ἀναστάσιμη αὐτὴ νύχτα, ἦταν Θεῖα παρέμβαση!

Χωρὶς καμιά, γι' αὐτόν, ἀμφιβολία, ὁ Ἀναστᾶς Κύριος φίμωσε τὰ στόματα τῶν λύκων καὶ προστάτευσε τὰ πρόβατά του. Γι' αὐτό, πῆγε καὶ γονάτισε ἀνάμεσά τους καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔκανε τρεῖς φορὲς τὸν σταυρὸ του, φώναξε θριαμβευτικά: «*Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!*» Καὶ τότε, ὦ τῶν θαυμασιῶν Σου Κύριε, ὅπως ἔλεγε στοὺς χωριανούς του, ἄκουσε τὰ πρόβατα νὰ τοῦ ἀποκρίνονται, μὲ ἀνθρώπινη φωνή: «*Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!*»

Τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι, παιδί μου, ζοῦσαν στὰ χωριά μᾶς ἐκεῖνα τὰ χρόνια», εἶπε ὁ μπάριμπα-Θανάσης τελειώνοντας τὴν ἱστορία του, «ἄνθρωποι, φτωχοὶ μὲν, ἀλλὰ ἀληθινοὶ χριστιανοί, μὲ μεγάλη πίστη καὶ εὐσέβεια. Καὶ συνέχισε:

Ἦταν ἀδιανόητο, γιὰ ὅλους μας ἀνεξαιρέτως, νὰ λείψουμε, τὴν ἀγιασμένη νύχτα τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου, ἀπ' τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Ὁ παπᾶς μας δὲν «ἔβγαζε» Ἀνάσταση ἂν δὲν ἦσαν ὅλοι οἱ χωριανοὶ παρόντες, ἀπὸ τὰ βυζανιάρικα παιδιὰ μέχρι τοὺς γέροντες, μόνον οἱ κατάκοιτοι ἔξαιρούνται».

Ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ μπαριμπα-Θανάση κυριολεκτικὰ μὲ μάγεψε καὶ ἀπὸ τότε φυτεῦθηκε γιὰ πάντα μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ μου καὶ ποτὲ δὲν ξαναβγήκε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ. Κάθε Μεγάλου Σάββατο τὴν ἀναπολῶ καὶ ἡ θύμησή της μὲ συγκινεῖ βαθύτατα. Τὴν θεωρῶ πνευματικὴ ἔνεση πού μὲ δυναμώνει καὶ μὲ ἐνισχύει πνευματικὰ γιὰ νὰ γιορτάζω καὶ ἐγώ, μὲ τὴν πρόεπουσα εὐλάβεια, τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου μου. Τὴν διηγούμαι καὶ στοὺς πιστοὺς πού ἔρχονται στὸ μοναστήρι μας γιὰ νὰ ὠφελοῦνται καὶ αὐτοί.



Ἡ δύναμη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι νὰ ἀναλάβῃ τὴν εὐθύνη τῶν κακῶν του πράξεων ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ περιμένη πειρασμὸ ἕως τὴν στερνὴ του πνοή.

Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν

Κεραυνός ἐν Αἰθρία: Ἄσμα Διαβολικὸν Ἠκούσθη, ἐν Μέσῳ ... Εὐσεβείας καὶ Ἀγιότητος

Γεώργιος Κ. Τζανάκης Ακρωτήρι Χανίων. 3/3/2021.

Μὲ τὴν ὑποχωρητικότητα μας μπροστὰ στὶς ἀπαιτήσεις τῶν ἐξουσιῶν δείχνουμε ὅτι ἔχουμε πνεῦμα δειλίας καὶ ἔλειψι ἀνδρείας καὶ διαθέσεως νὰ ὑπερασπιστοῦμε τὴν πίστι μας.

Μὲ τὴν ὑποχωρητικότητά μας αὐτὴν δουλώσαμε τὴν Ἐκκλησία στὶς σατανοκίνητες μαριονέτες ποὺ κυβερνοῦν.

Μὲ τὴν μετατροπὴ τῶν ναῶν ἀπὸ χώρους χάριτος, ἀγιότητος καὶ θεραπείας σὲ χώρους μολύνσεως καὶ ἀπιστίας καὶ τρομοκρατήσεως, σπείραμε τὴν ἀμφιβολία καὶ τὸν φόβο στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Κλωνίσαμε τὴν πίστι, παγώσαμε τὶς καρδιὲς κάναμε τὸν φόβο παντοδύναμο στὰ μάτια τους.

Μὲ τοὺς μασκοφορεμένους δεσπότες καὶ παπάδες, μὲ τὴν ἀπαγόρευσι τῆς τελέσεως τῶν ἀκολουθιῶν καὶ τῶν λειτουργιῶν, μὲ τὰ κορδελάκια καὶ τὰ... ψεκαστήρια μεγαλώσαμε τὴν φοβία ποὺ καλλιεργοῦν οἱ πουλημένες ἐξουσίες καὶ οἱ πληρωμένοι εἰδικοί.

Μὲ τὶς ἐνέσεις τῶν ἐμβολίων νὰ τρυποῦν τὰ μπρατσάκια τῶν μασκοφορεμένων δεσποτάδων σὲ βίντεο ἢ σὲ φωτογραφίες ἐντυπώθηκε στὶς καρδιὲς ἡ σφραγίδα τοῦ φόβου, καὶ μὲ τὶς ἐγκυκλίους τοὺς στέλνουν τὸ τρομοκρατημένο κοπάδι στὰ ἐμβολιαστικὰ σφαγεῖα τῶν Μεγάλων Φαρμακευτικῶν κολοσσῶν...

Δὲν διστάζουν νὰ γελοιοποιήσουν καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους ὑποθετώντας τὶς γελοιογραφίες τῶν ἐκκλησιομάχων οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ μητροπολίτες στὰ ἐντυπά τους... καὶ μετὰ ζητᾶνε καὶ συγνώμη...

Καὶ τρίβουν τὰ χέρια τους οἱ Γκειήτζδες καὶ οἱ Τσιόδρες καὶ ὅλα τὰ ὄργανα τοῦ σατανᾶ...

Ἔ! Τί τὸ παράξενο νὰ στείλουν καὶ ἓνα τραγούδι στὴν Γιουρροβίζιον γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐκπροσωπήσει, τὸ ὁποῖο ὑμνεῖ τὸν διάολο; Ὅλες οἱ ἄλλες πράξεις μας ποιὸν ὑμνοῦν; Τὸ φιλόδοξο, τὸ λιγώτερο, κοριτσάκι φταῖει ποὺ τὸ βάλανε νὰ τραγουδάει αὐτὰ τὰ ἄσματα; Νὰ μὴν γίνῃ καὶ αὐτὸ σὰν τοὺς πατέρες του; Σὲ ποιά μεριά ἔχει κατευθυνθῆ ἡ καρδιά τους; Ποὺ ἔχει πιστέψει τὸ πνεῦμα τους;

Τόσο καιρὸ, ἐδῶ καὶ ἓνα χρόνον, πόσα τέτοια τραγούδια καὶ τέτοιους χοροὺς στὸν ἕξω ἀπὸ δῶ δὲν λένε συνεχῶς ἐπίσκοποι, παπάδες καὶ πιστοί; Ἦ δὲν

καταλαβαίνουμε τί κάνουμε; Ποιὸν ὑμνοῦμε ὅταν ξεφτιλίζουμε τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας;

Ὅταν ἀποδεχόμασταν τὸ «μάσκα, ὁ φύλαξ πάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης-μάσκα ἡ ὠραιότης τῆς ἐκκλησίας» ξεχνώντας ὅτι ὁ Σταυρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου εἶχε αὐτὲς τὶς ιδιότητες, καὶ ἔτσι παρουσιαζόμασταν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τελοῦσαμε τὰ μυστήρια ποιὸν ὑμνοῦσαμε (καὶ ὑμνοῦμε) καὶ ποιοῦ τὸν χορὸ χορεύαμε (καὶ χορεύουμε);

Τώρα ποὺ κοιτάμε τὴν σύριγγα τοῦ ἐμβολίου καὶ μὲ ὅλη τὴν ὑπαρξί μας λέμε: «Τὴν πᾶσαν ἐλπίδα μου εἰς σὲ ἀνατίθῃμι» τί κάνουμε; Δὲν γνωρίζουμε ποιὸι θέλουν τὴν Μεγάλῃ Ἐπανεκκίνησι τοῦ πλανῆτη καὶ μεθοδεύουν αὐτὲς τὶς διαδικασίες; Τόσο πολὺ κοιμώμαστε;

Ἄφοῦ βλέπει ὁ διάολος ὅτι ὅσα σχεδιάζουν τὰ ὄργανά του γίνονται ἀσυζητητὶ ἀποδεκτὰ χωρὶς τὴν παραμικρὴ ἀντίδρασι, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἀπαιτήσῃ ὑμνοὺς καὶ ἄσματα ἀγάπης καὶ ἀφοσιώσεως; Νὰ μὴν πανηγυρίσουν τὰ ὄργανά του; Νὰ μὴν τραγουδήσουν; Πότε μέχρι τώρα στὴν ἱστορία τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος εἶχε κερδίσει τέτοια νίκη; Ποτέ!

Πότε ξανάδε ἱεράρχες νὰ κλείνουν τοὺς ναοὺς, νὰ διώκουν τοὺς ἱερεῖς, νὰ κυνηγοῦν τοὺς πιστοὺς, νὰ τοὺς λένε ὅτι δὲν ὀφελεῖ νὰ πηγαίνουν στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ νὰ μεταλαβαίνουν;

Πότε εἶδε πνευματικοὺς νὰ τιμωροῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τὸ θέλουν νὰ πᾶνε νὰ μεταλάβουν τὰ παιδάκια τους, καὶ ταυτόχρονα νὰ λένε ὅτι ὅσοι δὲν πᾶνε νὰ κοινωνήσουν εἶναι ἐνάρετοι καὶ ταπεινοὶ ἐνῶ ὅσοι τὸ ἐπιδιώκουν εἶναι μιὰ ἐλίτ ὑπερηφάνων καὶ ἀπανθρώπων; Πότε ξανάδε τόσους ἀνθρώπους νὰ αὐτοκτονοῦν νὰ σκοτώνονται δολίως καὶ νὰ τρελαίνονται;

Μποροῦσε ποτὲ νὰ σκεφτεῖ τέτοιες ἐπιτυχίες;

Τώρα ποὺ τὰ βλέπει νὰ μὴν ζητήσῃ καὶ ἀπὸ μᾶς ἓναν ὕμνο στὴν Γιουρροβίζιον; Στὸ δικό του μαγαζί; Τόσα χρόνια ποιὸς ὑμνεῖται ἐκεῖ μέσα;

Ἄς μὴν φωνασκοῦμε καὶ ταρασσόμαστε, λοιπόν. Θάρθει καιρὸς ποὺ τέτοια ἄσματα θὰ γίνουν ὑποχρεωτικά, ὅπως τὶς μάσκες, καὶ θὰ τὰ λέμε μέσα στὶς ἐκκλησίες. Δὲν προσέξατε τὰ ντεκὸρ ποὺ ἔχουν οἱ παπιστὲς στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῶν ὀφιοειδῶν αἰθουσῶν τους, ὅπου συντρέχουν καὶ συναγελάζονται μαζί τους καὶ τὰ δικά μας ἐκκλησιαστικὰ λεβεντόπαιδα; Γιὰ ψάξτε καὶ δεῖτε...



Ψυχραιμία, λοιπόν. Είναι μόνον ή αρχή. Όπως ακούγαμε «Βάλτε τή μασκούλα σας» και τώρα «κάντε τὸ ἐμβολιάκι σας» θὰ ἀκούσουμε «πέιτε τὸ τραγουδάκι σας». Καὶ ὅπως συνηθίσαμε τὶς μασκούλες, ἔτσι θὰ συνηθίσουμε καὶ τὰ ἐμβολιάκια— θὰ εἶναι ἀπαραίτητα καὶ ἀναγκαῖα καὶ προαιρετικῶς ὑποχρεωτικά. Γιατί ὄχι καὶ τὰ ἄσματα;

Δὲν εἶπαμε ὅτι ὄλους τοὺς ἀγαπάμε; Γιατί ὄχι καὶ τὸν διάβολο; Θὰ ἐρμηνευτῆ καὶ θεολογικῶς. Ποῦ βλέπετε τὴν δυσκολία; Μὲ λίγη καλὴ θέλησι θὰ διαστρέψουμε λίγο τὸν ἅγιο Ἰσαάκ καὶ νάτο. «Καῦσις καρδίας... καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν δαιμόνων». Ἐδῶ τὸ Πιστεύω λέει: «Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν» καὶ οἱ λαμπροὶ ποιμένες μας ἀπεφάνθησαν συνοδικῶς ὅτι ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς τέτοιες ἐκκλησίες, μία ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος, καὶ δὲν τρέχει τίποτα.

Όλα καλά, ὅλα εὐλογημένα. Καὶ κεφαλὴ τῆς ἐκκλησίας δὲν εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς ἀλλὰ ὁ.. πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ χωρὶς αὐτὸν ... δὲν ὑπάρχει ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὰ τὰ λένε εἶναι ἀρχιεπίσκοποι καὶ ἐπίσκοποι. Ἄλλοι διακηρύσσουν ὅτι τὸ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με» εἶναι λάθος προσευχή. Εἶδατε κανέναν νὰ ἐνοχληθῆ ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ νὰ φωνάξῃ, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ κάτι φανατικούς καὶ κολλημένους καὶ περιθωριακούς; Οἱ σοβαροὶ ποιμένες μας καὶ μοναχοὶ μας, ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν προσευχή, ἀσκοῦν σιωπὴ, ἐξετάζουν λεπτομερῶς τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους, καὶ κυρίως κάνουν ὑπακοή— τὴν ὁποία ἀπαιτοῦν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ποίμνιο—καὶ δὲν ἔχουν χρόνο γιὰ τέτοιους περισπασμούς. Εἶναι ὑπεύθυνοι καὶ συνετοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ ταπεινὰ τὸ λένε καὶ ἐγγράφως...

Φυσικὰ θὰ «καταδικάσουν» τὸ διαβολικὸν ἄσμα καὶ θὰ διαμαρτυρηθοῦν γιὰ τὸ ἀτόπημα, ὅπως ἔκαναν καὶ γιὰ τὸ κλεισμο τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, μιὰ ποὺ «πονοῦσε ἡ καρδιά τους νὰ εἶναι μακρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ποίμνιόν τους» κτλ. Όπως βλέπετε πλησιάζει τὸ δεῦτερο Πάσχα ποὺ θὰ εἶναι κλειστὲς οἱ ἐκκλησίες... Σιγά-σιγά θὰ πολλαπλασιαστοῦν καὶ τὰ τραγουδάκια. (Ἰπῆρχαν καὶ παλιὰ ἀρκετά, ἀλλὰ βέβαια κανένα δὲν εἶχε σταλεῖ στὴν Γιουροβίζιον καὶ δὲν εἶχε τόσο ξεκάθαρο στίχο. Εἶναι καὶ στὰ ἐγγλέζικα, ὁπότε δὲν καταλαβαίνουν ὄλοι...)

Ἀλλὰ, γιατί νὰ ὑποκρινόμεθα ἀδελφοί. Ἀφοῦ αὐτὸν ἀγαπάμε, τὰ δικὰ του ἔργα ποιοῦμε, γιατί νὰ μὴν τὸ τραγουδοῦμε;

Δὲν εἶναι μεγάλη ἁμαρτία ἡ ὑποκρισία; Ἐδῶ εἴμαστε ὑπερήφανοι γιὰ ἄλλα καὶ ἄλλα καὶ κάνουμε καὶ πορεῖες ὑπερηφανείας καὶ ἐνίοτε τιμοῦμε ἐκκλησιαστικῶς τοὺς πρωτοστατοῦντες.

Ἀφοῦ τιμοῦμε τὰ παιδιά νὰ μὴν τιμήσουμε καὶ τὸν πατέρα; Ἔστω καὶ μὲ ἓνα τραγουδάκι;

Καλὴ μαθητεία λοιπὸν στὸ κατηχητικὸ τοῦ διαβόλου... καὶ καλοὶ χοροὶ στὸ πάρτυ του. Τὸν χορὸ τὸν σέρνουν οἱ καλοὶ μασκοφορεμένοι ποιμένες κραδαίνοντας σύριγγες καὶ μὲ τὰ μπρατσάκια ἔξω. Μὴν χαλᾶμε τὴν εἰκόνα με ἄκαιρες διαμαρτυρίες... Μὴν ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νέο ἀφεντικό, τὸ «*Ἡυλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ὠρχήσασθε*», ὅπως τὸ ἀκούσαμε καὶ ἀπ' τὸν Χριστό.

Ἔνας μογιγάλος καὶ ἀνάπηρος.



Κάποτε ἓνας πιτσιρικὰς εἶχε κάνει ἓνα καραβάκι. Το πῆρε στὸ ἀκρογιάλι καὶ τὸ ἄφησε νὰ ἐπιπλεύσει. Κάποια στιγμὴ ὅμως, κόπηκε ὁ σπάγκος καὶ τοῦ ἔφυγε τὸ καραβάκι στὰ βαθιὰ καὶ τὸ ἔχασε. Το παιδί στενοχωρέθηκε πολὺ.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγες μέρες τὸ ἀγόρι πέρασε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγορὰ καὶ παραδόξως βλέπει τὸ καραβάκι του σὲ μία βιτρίνα ἐνὸς καταστήματος. Το ἀναγνώρισε ἀμέσως.

Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ καραβάκι, ἔγραφε ἓνα χαρτάκι: «Πωλεῖται».

Ἀφοῦ βεβαιώθηκε ὅτι ἦταν δικὸ του, μπαίνει μέσα στὸ κατάστημα καὶ λέει στὸν καταστηματάρχη:

- Κύριε, αὐτὸ εἶναι δικὸ μου, ἐγὼ τὸ ἔφτιαξα.

Ὁ καταστηματάρχης δὲν συγκινήθηκε καθόλου καὶ τοῦ λέει:

- Πλήρωσε ὅσα γράφει ἐκεῖ πάνω καὶ θὰ εἶναι δικὸ σου...

Ὁ πιτσιρικὰς, ὅμως, δὲν εἶχε χρήματα καὶ πάει στὸν πατέρα του καὶ τοῦ διηγεῖται τὰ συμβάντα. Ὁ πατέρας του τοῦ δίνει τὰ λεφτὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγόρι ἀγόρασε τὸ καραβάκι του.

Το πῆρε, τὸ ἔβαλε στὴν ἀγκαλιὰ του καὶ λέει:

- Τώρα εἶσαι δυὸ φορὲς δικὸ μου, μία πού σὲ ἔφτιαξα καὶ μία πού σὲ ἀγόρασα.

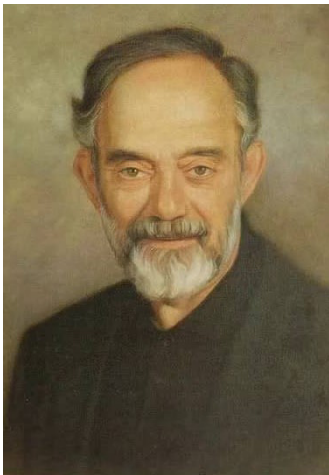
Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός! Εἶναι Αὐτὸς πού μᾶς ἔπλασε, ἀλλὰ καὶ Αὐτὸς πού μᾶς ἐξαγόρασε μὲ τὸ Αἷμα Του! Ἀπὸ φιλότιμο καὶ μόνο, γι' αὐτὰ πού μᾶς ἔκανε ὁ Χριστός, ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀλλάξει κάθε ἄνθρωπος καὶ νὰ πολιτευεῖται διαφορετικὰ στὴ ζωὴ του, ἐν μετάνοια.

Δημήτριος Παναγόπουλος, Ἱεροκήρυκας

MAN AND HIS TRUE LIFE

ACCORDING TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX SERVICE BOOKS

Source: "A Realism of Glory: Lectures in Christology in the Works of Protopresbyter John Romanides," by James L. Kelley, published by Orthodox Research Institute, Rollinsford, NH, orthodoxresearchinstitute.org (2009), pp. 9-15.



Fr. John Romanides' lecture on "Man and His True Life" proposes to answer the query: "If man can be thought of only in relation to his destiny to become perfect as Christ is perfect, how can we characterize this perfection, especially in the context of the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church?"

First, Fr. John lays the groundwork by emphasizing the Hebraic anthropology of

the Orthodox, which allows no Hellenistic dualism of soul and body, but rather sees the center of man as his *kardia* or heart, which is located in each part of man, and thus indicates man in his totality: soul, spirit, and body.

When we speak of the heart, we speak of our spiritual heart which coincides with the fleshly one; but when man achieves illumination and sanctification, then his whole being becomes a heart. The heart is synonymous with the soul, with the spirit; it is a spiritual place where man finds his unity, where his mind is enthroned when it has been healed of the passions. St. Gregory Palamas says that the heart is the very body of our body, a place where man's whole being becomes like a knot. When mind and heart unite, man possesses his nature and there is no dispersion and division in him any more. However, when mind and heart are united by the grace of God, then man has only one thought—the thought of God; he has only one desire—the desire for God; and only one sensation—the noetic sensation of God. That is why repentance and tears are so much appreciated: they help us to find that healing, that state of integrity because no human being can weep having two thoughts; we weep because of one thought that hurts us. If we are hurt by the thought that we are separated from God, that *salvation is far from the sinner* (cf. Pss 119:155) and all those things that inspire this pain in our heart, then, of course, we can cry.

This holistic anthropology of a heart-centered man is then shown by Fr. John to be the only Christologically sound view of man since Christ's life was not a mere manifestation of intellectual or rationalistic truth, but the Incarna-

tion of Life himself. The rest of his lecture illustrates the sacramental theology of the Orthodox Church by commenting upon the Christological basis of Holy Baptism, Holy Confession, and Holy Orders. Throughout, Fr. John's main point is that all of the services in the *Orthodox Mega Euchologion* presuppose the same thing: Man is saved from Satan and his power of disunity by sharing in the *Love, Life, and Truth* of God which is the destruction of the death and corruption inaugurated by the fall and the simultaneous incorporation of each into the unique, unconquerable unity that is the Body of Christ.

Along the way, Fr. John develops the following points:

[1] "Baptism is not a negative forgiveness of guilt inherited as a consequence of the sin of Adam. On the contrary, it is a release from the powers of the devil. This abolition of the power of the devil, however, does not happen with only a passive participation of the one being baptized. He must have not only faith, but also the desire to die with Christ in the waters of baptism."

[2] The actual, concrete spiritual labor required of the catechumen corresponds to an actual, concrete local community into which the Baptized enters. There is no catholic Church in general, only local centers where the Holy Eucharist is offered and where real people struggle together in a physical body against Satanic powers which operate both spiritually and materially.

[3] In the entire service of baptism there is not one statement made about the forgiveness of any kind of guilt that may have been inherited from Adam." The implication here is that the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has an organic relation to the new Christian's lifelong internal and ecclesial struggle against the devil.

[4] There cannot be any *ex opere operato* (a Latin phrase meaning "from the work performed", *Ed.*) version of sacraments and ecclesiology whereby the recitation of a magical formula relieves someone from corruption and enslavement to Satan. Instead, Holy Baptism, as the culmination of a long ascetic struggle fortified with spiritual instruction and corporate prayers, is "the reaching of that stage at which one can freely choose to die with Christ to the vanity of the ways of this world and live within the love of the corporate life in the body of Christ."

[5] Life in Christ is life in His Body, in the eucharistic cup. Holy Eucharist is an end in-and-of-itself, since it is participation in the *kenotic* (self-emptying) love of Christ. Because this love is unity in self-offering that aims at transcending any utility or necessity, no "individualistic piety" can exist

within it. Instead, one achieves eucharistic love according to “the measure by which he fights the devil and struggles to empty himself of self-concern within the life of Christ whose body is made up of real people.”

[6] Because there can be no reality higher or even on the same level as the unity of the Eucharist, there can be no “extra sacramental institutionalism,” such as a papacy. A corollary of this eucharistic conception of the Church is the notion that the Sacrament of Holy Confession, as it has developed throughout the centuries, in no way makes it possible for “a halfway spiritualistic membership in the body of Christ.” This would be a denial of the “reality of the Incarnation.” A further sub-point is the “royal priesthood” tradition, which Fr. John mentions to support the Christological basis of Orthodox ecclesiology. According to biblical and patristic “royal priesthood” teaching, each communing member of the Church who is engaged in the corporate, sacramental defeat of Satan “has his definite liturgy to perform whereby the body is being continuously formed together as a whole and not in parts.”

The thematic axis around which these keen in-sights into the Orthodox conception of sacraments and clergy orbit is the *kenotic* love of Christ. In Fr. John’s presentation of Orthodox theology, Christ is the unifying center. The key to this Christological axis is deification. Accordingly, “Man and His True Life” establishes the *theoric* basis of Orthodox sacramentology and ecclesiology by showing that both are constituted by a concrete unity in Christ’s self-denying love. (Note: *theoric* is from the Greek *theoria* meaning pertaining to glorification or union with the divine light).

Kenotic love is thus a dynamic movement of the whole man into a deeper and deeper unity with God and neighbor. This freedom in Christ is indeed man’s “true life” because it transcends the relative, utilitarian freedom of philosophical abstractions, magical religious rites, and ideological institutions.

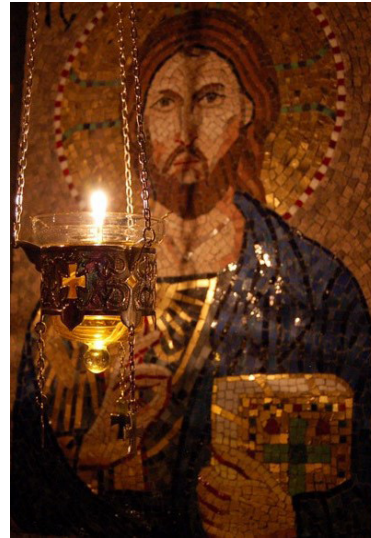


The commemoration of Christ’s saving Passion is at hand, and the new, great spiritual Passover, which is the reward for dispassion and the prelude of the world to come. Lazarus proclaims it in advance by coming back from the depths of Hades and rising from the dead on the fourth day just by voice and command of God, Who has power over life and death.

St. Gregory Palamas

LIFE IN THE FACE OF DEATH

By Fr. Vladimir Anderson, St. John the Almsgiver Mission, Willits, CA. From “Orthodox America” vol. VII, no. 2, August 1986.



In the Orthodox Church services, we often pray for a *Christian ending to our lives, painless, blameless, peaceful, and for a good defense at the dread judgment-seat of Christ*. Fortunate are those who are able so graciously to depart this life. The Church, in Her teachings tries to prepare us for such an end, but we are slow—sometimes even unwilling—pupils. Life in our modern world

is fast-paced and mobile; if we meet with hard times, we can always have hope there will come a change for the better. And therefore we have great difficulty in grasping the concept of eternity, of a changeless destiny which offers no chance of upward mobility.

Imagine, if you will, that you have just been diagnosed as having an incurable blood disease and the doctor has given you a matter of months to live. What is your reaction? Some people set about in a flurry of activity to fulfill the dreams and desires of a lifetime: a trip to Hawaii, dinners in fancy restaurants, golf in Palm Springs... Such a response reflects the pagan attitudes commonly found in our society: “Let us drink and make merry, for tomorrow we die.” Some spend all their remaining energy in seeking, at any and all cost, the prolongation of physical life. They may become angry at the doctors for being helpless, or at God, Who until that time had been comfortably anonymous. The Christian, while he is not likely to rush off in either of these directions, may throw himself into a similar frenzy of activity—of making amends, almsgiving, confession, increased prayer. The very fact that the prospect of death should invite a radical transformation of life magnifies our singular lack of preparedness for the one thing in life which is inevitable.

The Holy Fathers often speak of the need for a constant thought of death. Those Christians who have been able to benefit from a close encounter with death understand the wisdom of this counsel. The proximity of death opens a new perspective on life. Suddenly one is struck by the frailty of life and one’s utter dependence upon God. One of man’s first lessons after the Fall was *dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return*. While often

treated as a poetic image, it acquires a sobering reality in the face of death.

Without the knowledge of Christ and hope in His salvation, the prospect of death can be terrifying. Even a Christian secure in his faith suddenly experiences a quickening fear of God and His judgment. Knowing that *a contrite heart God will not despise*, he begins a thorough examination of his conscience. Are there any sins which, through shame or negligence, have never been confessed? In confession the priest reminds the penitent: *“But if thou shalt conceal anything from me, then shalt thou have the greater sin. Take heed, therefore, lest having come to the physician thou depart unhealed.”*

In making peace with God, a person preparing for death is naturally led to make peace with his neighbor. Has he offended anyone? Is he harboring any ill feelings or resentment of wrongs, which will weigh him down on the Day of Judgment? This thought inspires a spirit of forgiveness which, under normal circumstances, is often stifled by pride. But in the face of death and eternity, even longstanding animosities are more easily erased in the desire to meet God with a clean heart.

The imminent prospect of death gives new value to earthly riches as a means towards heavenly gain. It no longer seems necessary to replace the car with a newer or fancier model, and last year’s wardrobe appears perfectly adequate without the addition of the latest fashions. Instead, the Christian living in the face of death may discover in himself a previously unknown generosity in giving alms, in seeking to help the poor.

Time becomes very precious; it is not wasted in frivolous amusements, in sitting for hours before the television. Each and every day is appreciated for what it is—a gift from God. Faced with death, the wise Christian uses his time in preparing for his journey into the next world: inwardly—by intensified prayer, by spiritual reading, and by becoming more closely acquainted with the saints, those who are already citizens of paradise; and outwardly—seizing every opportunity to do good, to spend quality time with family and friends, to visit the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned. How many such opportunities we let slip away, never stopping to think that we may be committing a sin of omission just as deplorable as any sin of commission.

In expectation of death a Christian more readily speaks out in situations when subjects such as premarital sex, homosexuality or abortion are raised, where previously he kept silent out of fear of offending, of appearing “fanatic” or being unwilling to “rock the boat.” Silence is not always “golden.” And he becomes more concerned in seeking the approval of God rather than man. Power, prestige and popularity appear superfluous before the sight of an open grave.

These are but a few ways in which we might want to change our lives if we were given to behold the approach of death. But who are we to assume we shall be granted such a chance to transform ourselves into “real” Christians at death’s door? To most of us death will come unannounced. Will our lamps be trimmed and burning? Let us make use of our imagination—too often the playground of the devil—to see death just around the corner and thereby motivate ourselves to live as though our days were numbered—for indeed, they are.

Let us then keep close to our minds and within our heart the advice by the great saint and teacher of the desert, St. Anthony the Great:

It is well to meditate on the Apostle’s saying: *I die daily*; for if we live every day as if we were dying we shall not sin. And,

Never flag in the pursuit, nor relax your labors, nor say, “we have continued long in the exercise;” but rather, beginning anew each day let us increase our diligence. For the whole of man’s life is exceedingly short, compared with the ages to come, and the promise of eternal life is bought for a small price.



While we cannot see God, there is something we can do to open a way for the eye of our understanding to come to Him. It is certain that we can see now in His servants one whom we can in no way see in Himself. When we see them doing astonishing things, we can be sure that God dwells in their hearts.

In what is immaterial, let us take advantage of immaterial things. None of us can look directly at the rising sun by gazing at its orb. Our eyes are repelled as they strain to see its rays. But we look at mountains bathed in sunlight and see that it has risen. Because we cannot see the Sun of righteousness Himself, let us see the mountains bathed in His brightness, I mean the holy apostles. They shine with virtues and gleam with miracles. The brightness of the risen Sun has poured over them. Since He is invisible Himself, He has made Himself visible to us through them, as if through mountains bathed in light.

St. Gregory the Great

THY CROSS WE WORSHIP, O MASTER!

By Archimandrite George Kapsanis (+2017), previous abbot of the Athonite Grigoriou Monastery, translated by Constantine Zalalas, Rochester, NY, March 2018.



The precious and life-giving Cross is the holiest symbol of our Faith. All the Holy mysteries are completed by the invocation of the Holy Spirit and the seal of the Holy Cross. All the Hieratical prayers—of Holy Baptism, Holy Chrism, Holy Eucharist, Holy Matrimony, etc.—begin and end with the sign of the Cross. The Holy Temples, the Holy vessels and the liturgical vestments, and all liturgical

actions are sanctified by the sign of the Holy Cross. Moreover, the Cross is the most faithful companion of every Orthodox Christian. From the moment we enter this world until we exit it in our final resting place—our tomb—we are accompanied by the blessing of the Cross. We bless ourselves with the sign of the Cross daily; we keep crosses at our homes, at our places of work and in our automobiles because we believe in the beautiful hymn of our Church...

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

The symbol of the Cross is so indispensable that in its absence a church would be anything but a church of the Crucified Christ. The grace and power of the Cross is not due to the shape of the Cross *per se* but because it is the Cross of Christ. The Red Cross, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the green cross of pharmacies or doctors—all these crosses are insignia of human institutions and, as such, totally irrelevant to the Cross of Christ.

The Cross of Christ, on the other hand, is the organ by which He saved the world, the altar on which He offered Himself as the perfect offering, the pure offering of the prophecy of Malachi. All the *kenosis*, poverty, humiliation, pain, affliction and death He willingly accepted for us merge on the Cross. He suffered the greatest humiliation and pain upon the Cross; He became a curse to free us from the curse of the Law and the bondage of sin. All Christ's work and all His philanthropy gravitate toward the Cross. By being bound on the Cross, Christ loosed the tragedy of

human bondage caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve; and by being obedient unto death, the death of the Cross, He re-orientated our human freedom towards our Maker, the Triune God. Upon the Cross He conquered our death, by making our death His own death and by His Resurrection He has granted to us life and incorruption. Through the Cross He reconciled us to God the Father and granted us remission of sins.

On the Cross He demonstrated to us in the most convincing way that He loves us with infinite, unconditional love—a love that did not diminish an iota even during His most horrific pain and suffering. Through the Cross He brought together all of us from different and once-scattered nationalities, and further united us as members of one Body, renewing us with the water and blood that spilled out of His side, which water and blood are the two central mysteries of the Church. He broke down the high walls that divided us, re-creating by His blood the new man of grace. On the Cross He cleansed and sanctified the sky, the air, and the earth. He was crucified under the sky, hanging in midair; and His most precious blood was dripping into the earth.

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

There is a poignant story about a very holy man, John Vostrinos, who had the authority to expel unclean spirits; it is said that when they brought to him several young women who were victimized by evil spirits, he questioned the evil spirits inside of them: What do you fear the most from the things that we do in Church? And the evil spirits answered, We are mainly afraid of three things: [1] That which you hang around your neck... (that is how much they fear the Cross: they could not even say its name...but they described it periphrastically or in a round-about way.) [2] That bath that you are given at the church (Holy Baptism), and [3] that which you eat at your liturgies (Holy Communion).

These are the three greatest weapons against the demons; and that is why they are so viciously fought and totally distorted by sectarian and heretical Christians. The death of the Lord on the Cross is life-giving and redeem-

ing because it was totally voluntary and willing. Christ journeyed to the Cross not as a condemned defendant but as a King, offering his life giving blood as transfusion like the Pelican who broke his chest open to revive his poisoned children. That is why He said, *I have a baptism to be baptized with—a baptism of death—and how am I constrained till it be accomplished.* (Lk 12:50). This is why the Eastern Orthodox write on the Cross *The King of Glory* and not simply *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*. They depict the Lord on the Cross as Master: with His hands spread horizontally, in total control and not hanging miserably and helplessly conquered by despair and pain, as seen in the crosses of the West.

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

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

Those outside of the Church and inside of the Church, who think otherwise and ascribe a fallen human nature to Christ, try to interpret Christ with their own fallen mindset. The person of Christ cannot be interpreted by a fallen man, but the fallen man needs to be interpreted by the God-man. When we attempt to theologize about the God-man with our ill rationalism we fall prey to the scandal of the Cross—much like the unbelieving Jews and the Athenian philosophers. We empty the mystery of the Cross of Christ, according to St. Paul. The theological pen of St. Gregory Palamas adds the following: "This is the wisdom and power of God; to conquer through weakness, to elevate through humility, to make wealthy through poverty. It is not surprising that the Lord did not wish to maintain the glory of Transfiguration which would certainly make him avoid the Cross...who would dare approach Him...His enemies would vanish like smoke... the Jews could not even look at Moses' face when he returned from the top of Mount Sinai. Likewise, Pilate and Herod, Annas and Caiphas would not be able to glance at a transfigured Christ...yet he chose not to violate their free will."

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

On His descent from Mount Tabor the conversation was not centered on His glory but he was rather preparing his disciples for the Cross. His work was to convey to us that without the life of the Cross and voluntary discomfort, we will not share in the glory of the Resurrection or Transfiguration. As the Captain of our Faith, having brought many sons to glory (through discomfort, *askesis* and suffering (like Joseph, Moses, the prophets, the 7 Maccabees, and the 3 youths in the fire)), He, also being their captain of salvation, needed to finish His life through suffering (Heb 2:10, which is terribly mis-translated by our English Bibles): *For it was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.*

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

That is why Christ severely rebuked Peter, who was suggesting to Him to avoid the Cross. He called him Satan, only a few hours after He had praised him for his God inspired confession. *Get behind Me, Satan; you are a scandal to Me, because you are not thinking in Godly terms, but you think by the logic of men.* On His way to His voluntary Passion He was saying, *Now the Son of Man is glorified.* And in other verses of the gospel, the Cross is presented as the Glory of Christ.

As St. John the Chrysostom writes, the Cross before Christ was the means of shame and condemnation, but now it is the cause of honor and glory. This is also overt from the words of the Lord: *Father, glorify Me with the glory I had before the world received its existence from You.* He was referring to the Cross, the Cross is the glory of Christ. After His rebuke of Peter, Christ instructed the rest of His disciples to embrace the gospel of the Cross. *Anyone who wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, carry his cross and follow Me.* To the sons of Zebedee and their mother, who were seeking to be first, the Lord said, *You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink? or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?*

So the Cross is not just a symbol or a metaphor, but the way of life for those who would like to be called Christians. As it would be inconceivable to consider Christ without

the Cross, likewise it is inconceivable to be considered a Christian without sharing in the sufferings and the Cross of Christ. *Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot become My disciple.*

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

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

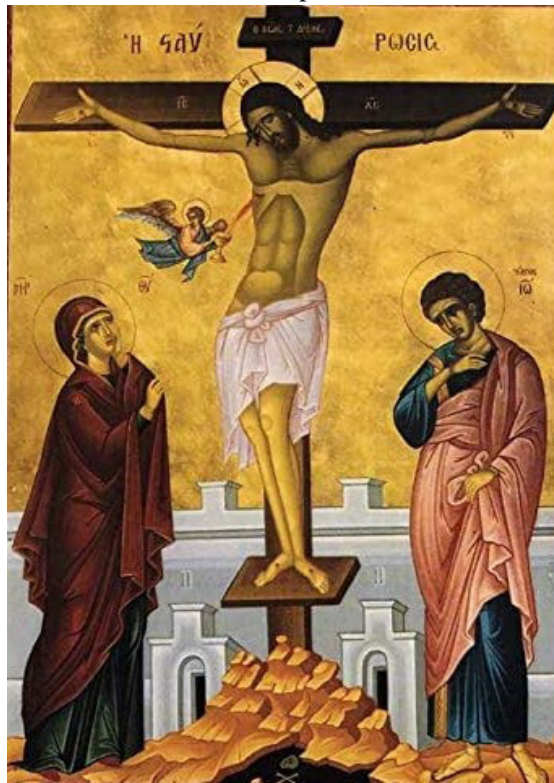
We must die to the world, as St. Paul repeatedly teaches. We must die to the world before Christ can live in us. *I no longer live, but it is Christ who lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). St. Gregory Palamas calls this the first mystery of the Cross: to distance all influences of the world around me which cause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

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

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

If the power of the Cross was active in the life of all the righteous in the Old Testament, it is also certain that it was active in the life of the Most Holy Theotokos, who did nothing whatsoever to displease God. She never polluted herself, not even with a single thought, and at

the tender age of three did what Abraham did in his old age. She left the home of her parents and entered the Holy of Holies where, by elevating her mind above every earthly thought, she united her *nous* with God and thereby maintained a constant vision of God. The power of the Cross in the righteous of the Old Testament was aiding them in their struggle against sin; whereas the energy of the Cross in the life of the spotless Virgin was an enhancement to elevate her to greater spiritual heights: from glory to glory and from *theoria* to *theoria*. From the moment she was born she was creating an abode for the One Who could save man. She was struggling to create within her a beautiful dwelling, a dwelling that could house



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

Thus, the first method of being crucified together with Christ is to renounce the sinful passions of our fallen Adam-ic nature.

The second method is to forbear the involuntary afflictions of this earthy life courageously and thankfully, according to the Pauline adage: *En panti efxaristeite*. Give thanks to God for everything, for the sweet things and the bitter things, painful and incurable diseases, the death of loved ones, injustice, disrespect, slander, persecutions that we will often undergo as Christians—all of these will grant us the opportunity to share in the sufferings, crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. If we become indignant under these trials, we will suffer loss. If we accept these misfortunes stoically—with the “what-can-we-do” attitude—we will not benefit much. If we accept these difficulties as a visitation from God for the purpose of our perfection, then we will benefit greatly. The voluntary acceptance of pain as our cross—as the gift of God’s love for our spiritual development and perfection—elevates us to the ranks of the Holy martyrs. The Christian who courageously suffers on the bed of pain and in the process glorifies God for making him a participant in His Son’s suffering will be considered a confessor of the Faith and a contemporary martyr. According to St. Paul, if we endure by imitating Him in His suffering, we also will reign with Him.

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

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

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

Voluntary discomfort and relative pain for the love of Christ will lead to spiritual freedom and blessedness.

Most of us Orthodox, however, prefer the way of the antichristian world, a world that demonizes discomfort, pain and suffering. Painkillers are prescribed for every age and find their way into every cupboard, whether we really need them or not.

Christianity is about joy, they tell us. God does not want us to suffer. God wants us to feel good and be happy. But joy cannot be bought with money. True Christian joy comes after the pain and suffering for the sake of the gospel. Today we want to follow Christ empty-handed, without our cross; the idea of the Cross makes us tremble because we are enslaved to a life of comforts. Comfort is the worst enemy of Christianity, according to the Fathers. All the contemporary evils are the illegitimate children of the comfortable and Cross-despising lifestyle of the West. The world today is facing the plagues prophesied in the Book of the Revelation, which are not the work of God but the consequences of a world that chose an antichristian journey, a journey that despises the Cross.

The answer is repentance. Without repentance this world will self-destruct, no doubt. It is only a matter of time. As Christians of these most perilous times, we must increase our vigilance and struggle to avoid being pulled into these strong torrents. Our life preserver is the love of the Cross of Christ: the love of discomfort, or *philoponia*. It is a matter of choice for all of us to follow either the life of the Cross or the wide path that leads to destruction. As wise spiritual investors, let us never forget the undying words of the immortal Saint Paul. I reckon that the sufferings of this age are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us... (cf. Rom 8:18).

Amen.



Regard as free not those whose status makes them outwardly free, but those who are free in their character and conduct. For we should not call men truly free when they are wicked and dissolute, since they are slaves to worldly passions. Freedom and happiness of soul consist in genuine purity and detachment from transitory things.

St. Anthony the Great

THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAY

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



One frequently hears people say: “The Lord, having created man, led him into Paradise and provided him with everything for his enjoyment. After the fall, although man was expelled from Paradise, his capacity for pleasure and the means for pleasure remained: flowers offered the delight of smell, fruits—taste; the starry sky—sight; the singing of birds—hearing. Later,

along the same lines, man invented music. Everything in nature speaks of the goodness of the Creator. There are those, however, who, in spite of God’s good will, want to place restraints everywhere, limitations. They violate nature; they misrepresent God, holding forth a very distorted image.”

A sad state of affairs indeed! And I, having written you in my last letter that even laymen should not shrink from monastic strictness if they want to be genuine Christians, thought that I had convinced everyone and that all your perplexities had been resolved. But what a muddle we have here! Why on earth have you put yourself in such a quandary—as if truth is on their side. You should say to them: “Go ahead, my friends, have fun, amuse yourselves, open wide all the gates of pleasure and delight, and revel at the banquet of this life... No one is holding you back, no one will place any barriers in your way. Live as you want.”

However, you are told, in the words of the Lord, that there are two paths for the sons of men: the narrow path and the broad path, and that the first leads to life, while the latter leads to perdition. Read it for yourself, if you will. Here it is straight from the Gospel: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

If you want to hear, then hear, but if you do not want to hear, then do as you like. This is not some human invention; it is a command of the Lord, nothing less. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*, says the Lord on another occasion, *for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* (Lk 13:24). “Strive,” i.e., hasten, as if you are racing, competing with others to enter this strait and narrow gate, disregarding others, snatching it away from others: “Let me in, let me in!” as if fearful that these gates might close.

Why this is so is not for us to judge. The Lord ordained it this way, and that is that! Yes, and what Lord is this? He,

Who, for our salvation, Himself went ahead of us along this narrow path and, after all manner of suffering, gave His soul to God from the Cross, saying to the crucified thief, *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.* He is, after all, our Saviour! All those who wish to be saved must follow after Him. And to follow after Him is possible only by carrying one’s cross: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* (Mk 8:34). This is the way of all those who desired salvation: apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, saints, and all those who attained salvation and who now inhabit God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem.

So, what is to be done? Certainly, one cannot be saved otherwise when, among those that are saved, there is not one who attained eternal blessedness by any other path. Is it not better to submit to this necessity, even though it may not be that sweet? After all, to suffer eternally is worse. Let those who wish to be saved somehow constrain themselves, and not seek excuses. It is hard, but what can you do? Not without reason is life called a struggle, a *podvig*. As Saint Paul says, *Fight the good fight* (*podvigom dobrym podvizakhsya*—1 Tim 6:12). As for those who do not wish to submit, they will do as they please. They should know, however, that the various rules and constraints are not man’s invention; they are commands of God.

A word of explanation might be added here. Why is it that this or that constraint is necessary? Why, for example, do we need to fast, why solitude, why so much prayer, etc.? However, I will not go into this. Those who follow the salvific path know how necessary all this is, while those who shun this path would rather not hear about it.

Concerning those skewed interpretations of scripture that you had in your letter, I think I have already written to you. In Paradise, it is true, there were many things that brought man enjoyment, but these constituted but an external adornment of paradisiacal life; they were secondary elements. Man’s primary purpose was not to delight in these but to be in communion with God through the voluntary fulfillment of God’s will. If Paradise had remained man’s dwelling-place, people would certainly have taken pleasure in these externals as well, but they would not have thought anything of it, it would not have been a concern; it would have been a natural adjunct, a shadow of a God-pleasing life.

So you see, even in Paradise, they did not discuss or fuss about pleasures, while we, who have lost Paradise, want to set pleasure as the principal goal of life. If delights could lawfully have been the lot of fallen man, the Lord would not have expelled our forefathers from Paradise. By expelling them, He showed that a life of ease and pleasure does not befit fallen man. As you know, through the fall the entire order of things was changed. To man’s life was added a brief period of earthly existence, full of sorrows and troubles designed to enlighten, correct, and cleanse man, to make him worthy

of eternal enjoyment in a different, eternal paradise. Man's true life comes after the grave, or, more precisely, after his resurrection; while the present life is merely a threshold, a preparation for that future life. It is in the nature of this present life, as ordained by God, to have various external sorrows and misfortunes, and He prescribed for it various strictures as a means of cleansing.

Martyrs were flayed with iron claws, and thereby prepared for Paradise. This is an image of man's present life, in which, through these cleansing restrictions or constraints, like scourges, he is prepared for a blessed eternity! If you can get a man to understand well and to take to heart the brevity of this present life and how much benefit there is in its restrictions and confinements for the future, unending life, he will not only cease to shun them but, on the contrary, he will ask for them and strive for them as after something good and positive. This is how all those proceed who properly understand the meaning of this present life.

The fact that, after his expulsion from Paradise, man was not deprived of all means of pleasure, does not mean that there is no place for constraints in the order of the present life. In reaching for an explanation of this point, there come to mind the words of my dear teacher, Y. K. Amphiteatrov.

One day I was walking with him through a grove, and I asked him in passing, "Why are there such disparities in nature? Here is a lovely flower, and next to it is a stinging nettle or jimsonweed. And the sky: sometimes it is clear and sometimes it is overcast and dreary."

"Silly fellow," he replied. "These disparities are no trifling matter in the economy of God's providence concerning our salvation. The merciful God thereby says to you: It is only right that the sweat never leave your brow; it is your lot to be wearied by toil; but I sometimes give you to taste the sweetness of life, I allow your eyes to fill with light, your brow to be smoothed of furrows, and a smile to play upon your lips, so that you not lose hope and fall into despair. It is only right that the earth bring forth thorns and thistles for you, but I have ordained that it sometimes produce for you an abundance of delights so that you might not lose the assurance that there still exists the possibility of recovering the lost blessedness. It is only right that in the air above your head and all around you should be nothing but storms, thunder, lightning; but you often see bright sun and enjoy the pleasant coolness of morning and the delightful

tranquility of evening—so that you would remember that heaven is not altogether closed for you, that My embrace is always open towards you, and that I am ready to receive you into the heavenly habitations."

This, then, is the reason why certain enjoyments remain in nature, and not so that we might make these crumbs into a life-long party, or build out of these fragments a temple of happiness on earth! But our pleasure-seekers think otherwise. In their opinion, every constraint, every barrier to enjoyment is a violation of man's nature and is contrary to God's will. I have already said that this is not so, that God Himself ordained that man walk the narrow path. That this is in no way a violation of human nature may be understood from the following.

When man fell, he not only fell below his dignity, he also accepted internally some principles foreign to his proper nature, the seeds, as it were, of every kind of evil. Consequently, in fallen man we

must differentiate what is proper to his nature and what is alien to it, although this, too, is found in man. All constraining rules and measures, prescribed and established by God, are exclusively aimed against these alien and evil seeds, in order to crush them, to suffocate them, and thereby to set at liberty man's true nature.

So, constraints are not a violation of nature but are like beneficial tools or means. They are what an operation is for the surgical removal of a malignancy, or a plaster for the drawing out of harmful matter. Our nature is in bondage. By placing various restraints upon us, the Lord wants to free our nature. But we resist: "Do not touch! Do not hedge us in with rules!" And thereby, instead of defending, we calumniate ourselves.

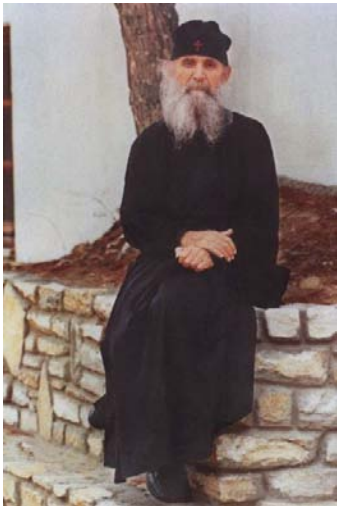
Pleasure-seekers are lost souls. It is not to say that there is no place in life for pleasure; we should accept everything from the hands of God with thanksgiving. At the same time, we should not strive after enjoyments, nor, all the more, rebel against all kinds of restraining precepts. This is not why the Lord Himself prescribed them. Such rebelliousness manifests not only a lack of understanding of the matter in question, but even a militant antitheism. You see where it all leads! But they think lightly of it.

For the present they may be all right, but what will they find in the next world? Straitness and, against their will, a bitter and wretched straitness, for then it will be of no benefit. Lord, have mercy and save us!



THE DIVINE LITURGY

By the blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona and Philotheou (+2019).



The Divine Liturgy, what a splendor indeed! Man has been honored by God in such a way that **He Himself comes down to earth with His Angelic Orders every time there is a Liturgy**, in order to nurture man with His Most Holy Body and His Most Precious Blood! For He has given us everything. Is there anything physical or spiritual, perishable or everlasting, that has not been offered to us? None! Is there anything superior

to His Most Holy Body and Blood, which is given to us on a daily basis? There is certainly not. God has enabled man, who is full of soil and dirt, to serve the Divine Liturgy. So priceless is the Divine Love that just a tiny drop exceeds any earthly, physical and secular love.

Adam and Eve's sin was the starting point of all the distressing events that have occurred to this day and of those that will occur until the end of time. Disobedience, like a sperm inside Eve's womb, gave birth to and transmitted physical and spiritual death to all of humanity. Poor Eve, could there have been a way for her to see that "the split second" taste of the fruit would cause such turmoil, thus compelling the Holy Trinity to have a "co-entreaty" so that the one Person of the Life-Giving Trinity would be sent to the world and endure, by the works of His hands, the blows, insults, whipping, spitting as well as all kinds of obscenity and ultimately be hung on the Cross as a curse! *Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.* (Gal 3:13).

The sweet redemption of our Jesus, the light of our troubled souls, His Passion and Life-Giving Resurrection, are re-enacted in every Divine Liturgy through which every sinful soul is delivered. Great indeed is Jesus' love for us! For He took on our human nature and was hung on the Cross, giving us freedom and thus wiping clean all our debts towards our Heavenly Father. And as our beloved Brother He makes us worthy of His co-inheritance which consists of the infinite riches of His Heavenly Father. And if during the time when the Law, which existed before Christ, had overshadowed things, and the blood of oxen and goats as well as a calf's embers purified those who had partaken of them, **how much more will Christ's Most Holy Blood, which is partaken from the Holy**

Altar of the Holy Churches of God, cleanse us from sin and warm up our souls in order to receive the divine love of our most sweet Jesus. The Lamb which was slaughtered for our personal salvation will rinse us with His Most Precious Blood from the filth of our sins and give us eternal rest.

In any case, we owe it to ourselves to become partakers of this heavenly banquet which offers us this most wonderful Mystery of the Holy Altar. **Once inside the church, we should stand in fear and devoutness, since our Lord Jesus Christ and His holy angels are present. Those who are attentive and devout are filled with grace and blessings; however, those who are inattentive are condemned, being unworthy.**

On the one hand, the Angels serve the Divine Liturgy, and on the other, the faithful come to church in order to partake of the Body and Blood of Christ—*Receive the Body of Christ and taste the Fountain of Immortality*—so that they will live in Christ and not perish in sin. Thus, *let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* (1 Cor 11:28-29).

For instance, when someone wants to appear before a king, it takes him days to get ready, in terms of general preparation, cleanliness, speech, manner, ethos, etc., so that he would succeed in drawing the king's compassion and, in this way, have his desirable request granted. Even though there is no comparison as far as the two different kings are concerned, **each believer should prior to Holy Communion prepare oneself in order to obtain divine mercy and forgiveness.** Those who appear before a secular king are, most of the time, adorned by iniquity, flattery, pretense as well as deceit, in order to obtain that which is desired; nevertheless, **the Christian believer who appears before the King of kings who in turn keeps an eye on the inner person must be adorned by holiness, humility and the sheer ethos of the soul that is more precious than lost gold.**

The Lord created His Church on earth as a Bride, so that She would intercede for His children. **He left us the Great Mystery of the Holy Eucharist, in order to be cleansed, become holy and thus become one with God.** He has invited us all; some in their childhood, others in their middle as well as old age. As He is Good, He took hold of us like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, in order to make us partakers of His divine Kingdom. **Nothing repelled Him—no ulcer, no wound, no illness, not even the deformity of spiritual phenomena which may characterize our soul.** As a father He accepted us, as a mother He breast-fed us, and as an unmercenary doctor He took care of us and clothed us in the garment of adoption, with grace ignoring the heavy debt of our

trespasses. We thus owe Him infinite love and worship. Love should remain in the heart like a life-giving source, gushing forth springs of communion wine and streams of divine eros.

We should be partakers of the Sacrifice of the Slaughtered Lamb as often as we can, and as long as we are free to do so, since Holy Communion is a great aid for the believer which in turn helps him to fight sin. Also, we should approach this divine Mystery in a spirit of *compunction, crushed hearts, and a good sense of our sins.* Great is the mercy of God Who condescends to enter into us; not abhorring the multitude of our sins. Nonetheless, due to His infinite love and affection, we are sanctified, and in this way we are made worthy to become His children and co-heirs of His Kingdom. Hence, **let us prepare with a pure conscience aiming at the fortification of our senses, and in chastity let us enter along with the Holy Apostles to the Mystical Supper and partake of our sweet Jesus** so that He should dwell with us unto the infinite ages of ages.

Unworthy as I am, I serve my Lord. A ministry rendered that is holy and mighty. Everyday I offer God a well-pleasing sacrifice, the Lamb of God, Immaculate to His Immaculate Father and God, in order that He might be merciful for the things with which we sadden the most good God. He whom we cause grief and Who sacrificed His only begotten Son. My God, Your most beloved Son for our sake! And who are we to deserve this ultimate sacrifice! *For being enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.* (Rom 5:10).

The most unworthy of all,

‡Father Ephraim



ON FORCEFULNESS, COURAGE, AND SELF-DENIAL

By the blessed saintly Elder Ephraim of Arizona and Philotheou (+2019), from "Counsels from the Holy Mountain from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim."

I pray that you become fighters in a glorious battle whose victorious outcome the angelic powers will applaud, for we have the same Master, the same abode in the heavens; in the very same abundant light shall we live the eternal, blissful life—a life without end or evening, a truly divine day!

The Apostle of the Gentiles cried out in a stentorian voice: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness?* (Rom 8:35). I am

convinced that no one is able to separate us from the love of Christ when our longing burns like a furnace sevenfold. Yes, this is how I pray that you will become, so that He may be glorified—He Who for our sake became the object of insults, reproaches, slappings and death—even death on a cross!

Do not despair when you fall into temptations and afflictions. Do not think that God has abandoned us because of our sins. No, but He is chastising us in order to teach us wisdom. He does not want us to be ignoramuses, but wise in divine wisdom.

If we are not fought against, how will it show that we are soldiers of Christ? A soldier might get wounded in battle, but this does not mean that he has been defeated. Even if we are defeated, once again we shall rise and fight.

Of course, in the beginning of our calling, when we have chosen a life of chaste dedication to our Jesus, we are unable to meet His requirements because, as we know, there is another law within us which wars against the law of God and the lifestyle we have chosen, and it fights to separate us from the love of our Jesus. However, this fight does not mean that we are not worthy of our calling, but rather the fight to abolish the law of sin within us will render us more fervent in our love for Christ. For if it were possible to acquire the love of Christ without a struggle, our own will would have no merit, since we would gain it without a struggle.

So this is why we shall be rewarded when, despite all the opposition caused by the love of the world, we obtain the life-giving love of God, and when, despite the attraction of sin, we stand as firm towers of virtue!

Clouds will rise up against our goal, threatening destruction and havoc; they will try to frighten and demoralize us with their thunder. But take courage and fear not; *through many tribulations and trials shall we reach the gates of the kingdom of heaven!* (Acts 14:22).

The martyrs struggled with faith and complete and self-denial, and thus they *obtained promises* (Heb 11:33) and crowns of eternal glory! Thus, we too, through faith in our Christ and complete self-denial, shall be able to prevail by His grace.

Our inner courage must reach the point of saying with resolution: “Even if I am put to death, I will not take a single step away from my faith in Christ Who has called me. I will give up my life for Christ, but not one inch of concession will I concede to sin.”

If our inner courage boasts in this manner, we may hope that victory, by the grace of God, will be ours. Say the prayer fervently; struggle mightily; abstain; pray; wear simple, humble clothes; read spiritual books; get up at night and pray in order to be warmed and become as sturdy as a rock. This is also, how I, the wretch, used to struggle when I was still in the world; I secretly got up at night and did *metanoias*; I prayed our Panaghia miraculously intervened for me, the lowly one.

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The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

THE JOY OF THE RESURRECTION

By George Papazahos, professor of Cardiology at the University of Athens.

The following story was told by the cardiologist of Elder Porphyrios, Dr. George Papazahos, when he visited the Elder in his cell one Bright Tuesday following Pascha.

I went to see him as a doctor. After the cardiological examination and the usual cardiogram, he asked that I not leave.

I sat on the stool near his bed. His face was shining with joy. He asked me:

“Do you know the *troparion* that begins, *We celebrate the slaying of death...*”

“Yes Elder, I know it.”

“Chant it.”

I began to chant it quickly. *We celebrate the slaying of death, the destroying of hell, the beginning of another way of life that is eternal. And leaping for joy, we sing a hymn to the Cause, the only blessed and most glorious God of our fathers.*”

“Did you understand it?”

“Of course I understood.” I thought he was asking me about its interpretation.

He made a sudden movement with his hand and told me:

“You understood nothing, George my man! You said it quickly like a chanter in a hurry. Listen to what awesome things are said in this hymn: Through Christ and His resurrection, we do not get across a river, a gorge, a canal, a lake, or even the Red Sea. We have moved across an abyss that no human being could cross on his own. Ages came and went

with the world waiting for this Pascha, for this passage. Our Christ passed from death to life! That’s why today *we celebrate the slaying of death, the destroying of hell*. Death is no more. We celebrate today *the beginning of another way of life that is eternal*, a life with Him.

He spoke with enthusiasm and conviction. He was moved. He paused for a moment then continued more loudly:

“Now chaos, death, and hades do not exist. Now there is all joy, thanks to the Resurrection of our Christ. Together with Him human nature was resurrected. Now we can be resurrected and live eternally near Him. What happiness is in the Resurrection! ‘And leaping for joy, we celebrate the Cause.’ Have you ever seen the little goats now in the Spring who jump on the grass? They eat a little from their mother and begin to jump again? This is what it means to leap – to jump. This is how we should also jump for unspeakable joy at the Resurrection of our Lord and our own.”

He stopped speaking again. I breathed in a joyous atmosphere. He continued:

“Can I give you some advice? In your every sorrow, in your every failure, concentrate for a moment within yourself and say this hymn slowly-slowly. You will see that the greatest thing in your life – and in the life of the whole world – happened. The Resurrection of Christ, our salvation. And you will realize that everything that is upside down which is occurring will seem to you very small to spoil your mood.”

He squeezed my hand saying:

“I pray that you leap for joy, looking at the chaos behind you from which the Risen Christ crossed you over, ‘the only blessed of our fathers’. Now chant *Christ is Risen!*”