

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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## THE GREAT MYSTERY OF LOVING-KINDNESS

*A Sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Nativity of Christ.*

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

*(1 Tim 3:16)*

It is on this day that, throughout the entire inhabited world, the Holy Church brings to our remembrance and observes that most majestic and sublime of mysteries: the Incarnation of God the Word from a Most-pure virgin through an outpouring of, and an overshadowing by, God's Holy Spirit.

Wondrous, inexpressible, and awesome is this mystery, both for the exalted and all-contemplating celestial minds of those who dwell in the heavens: the ranks of the angels, and for the minds of men, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Imagine: the unoriginate God from Whom everything received the commencement of its existence (the Angels, and the human race, and the entire world, both visible and invisible) takes a beginning in His humanity. He Whom the heavens cannot contain, is contained in a virginal womb. God becomes an infant, and is borne upon the arms of a Mother. He Who nourishes every breath, is nourished by paps.

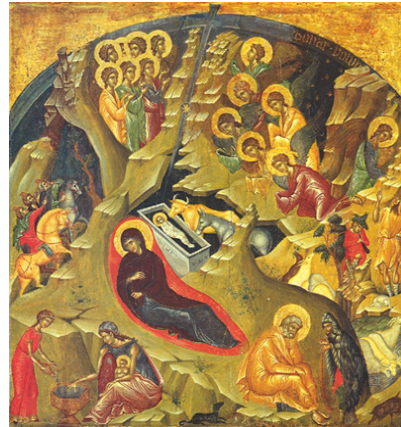
The science of astronomy has learned and affirms that, in the order of creation, our earth is but a barely-noticeable point; that millions of planets

around our own fill up the vastnesses of space. And, lo! This single point, this barely-noticeable globe of God's creation, being inhabited by men, has been accounted worthy of the inexpressible honour of bearing upon itself God-in-the-Flesh, the God-Man. He is the God-Man Who did deign to dwell amongst men, to teach erring mankind the knowledge of God, to work innumerable miracles of good, to preach repentance and complete forgiveness of sins; to suffer and to die as a holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world, to be resurrected through the power of Divinity from amongst the dead (having vanquished death, which is natural to all men) and to make a gift of resurrection to the entire human race.

Not a single one of the visible worlds, save the earth, has been deemed worthy of this greatest of all honors; for it was only upon the earth that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the

heavenly Father, had a Virgin-Mother, and He alone was Her Son by way of humanity. Why was the earth given such preference? Why was it only on earth that God appeared in the flesh? This is a great Divine mystery, a mystery of immeasurable loving-kindness and of God's condescension to perishing mankind.

Thus, God did appear in the flesh. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, O earth; rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born. The Creator Himself did come to you, in order to create you anew; to restore you, who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come the almighty Physician Himself, pow-



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

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erful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin, in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.

Thus, greet Him joyfully, with pure minds and hearts, with bodies chaste and restrained by fasting and abstinence, which the Holy Church has thoughtfully instituted prior to this great feast in order to prepare us worthily to meet the heavenly King, Who comes to us in order to abide in us.

He came to us with the mercy and good will of His heavenly Father, and from us He demands mercy toward our neighbors; He is the righteous King, and He demands of us all righteousness; for He, too, as a man, fulfilled all righteousness (*for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*, Mt 3:15), showing us an example and providing us with grace and the strength to carry it out. He Himself did suffer for us, having borne the cross; and He taught us to deny ourselves, our sins and our passions, and to follow after Him, doing what is holy out of reverence for God (*let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, 2 Cor 7:1).

He came to heal our souls, ailing from sin, and commanded all to repent; let us ever, then, be earnestly contrite, correcting ourselves and striving toward holiness and perfection. The holy Angels, at the Nativity of the God-man, did declare peace unto the world; and unto men—the good will of the Heavenly Father. Let us then, ourselves, have within us a peaceful conscience, and let us be at peace with everyone, if possible. *Be at peace and be holy with all*, sayeth the apostle, *for without this shall none see the Lord*. (Heb 12:14).

Amen.

## TO US A CHILD IS BORN

Again the darkness is past; again Light is made; again Egypt is punished with darkness; again Israel is enlightened by a pillar. The people that sat in the darkness of ignorance, let it see the Great Light of full knowledge. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. The letter gives way; the Spirit comes to the front. The shadows flee away; the Truth comes in upon them. Melchizedek is concluded. He that was without Mother becomes without Father (without Mother of His former state, without Father of His second). The laws of nature are upset; the world above must be filled. Christ commands it, let us not set ourselves against Him. O clap your hands together all you people, because to us a Child is born, and a Son given to us, Whose Government is upon His shoulder (for with it the Cross is raised up), and His Name is called The Angel of the Great Counsel of the Father.

### St. Gregory the Theologian

Angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master; and they are astonished and exultant whenever they behold one who is made of earth forsake his dunghill and ask for what is heavenly.

### St. Isaac of Nineveh (the Syrian)

Without detriment therefore to the properties of either substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality; and for the paying off of the debt, belonging to our condition, inviolable nature was united with possible nature, and true God and true man were combined to form one Lord.

Pope St. Leo the Great

## PATRIARCH PAVLE: ONE YEAR FROM HIS REPOSE (+2009)

By Yuri Maksimov.

I have never personally seen Patriarch Pavle, although I have heard about him for a long time. I first visited Serbia in fall 2006. I very much wanted to see His Holiness, especially because, from what I knew, he was normally accessible. It was not that I expected to have an audience, but I hoped simply to look with my own eyes at a holy man of our time and receive his blessing, and this alone would be a joy. But this did not happen. In the fall of 2006 his health worsened, and in my later visits it grew still worse. I was clearly unworthy of seeing His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle.

While in Serbia I heard many remarkable stories about him from trustworthy people, which I would like to share. His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle, was a unique phenomenon for our times; as such, it would be pointless to make him the measure for other patriarchs, just as it would be, for example, to make St. Philaret the Merciful or St. Alexei the Man of God the measure for the majority of contemporary laypeople. Everyone has his own standard and his own kind of *podvig* (ascetic struggle, *Ed.*). It seems to me that one should simply rejoice that in our lifetime such a person was part of the Orthodox Church.

It is well known that the Serbian Patriarch, even when taking up his high-ranking position, continued his ascetic spiritual struggles and strove to live modestly—although for him this was all quite natural, without any deliberate affectation. He went around town by foot or took regular public transportation, among the throngs of people, was not acquisitive, and ate as little as the ancient desert fathers—simply because that was the way he was.

Mrs. Jana Todorovic told me a story concerning her sister. Once, she was at a reception at the Patriarch's office for some official reason. Discussing business, she happened to look at the Patriarch's feet and was shocked at the sight of his shoes; they were old, had been torn and then repaired. The woman thought: "How shameful for us Serbs, that our Patriarch has to go around in torn shoes; couldn't someone give him some new shoes?" The Patriarch said joyfully: "Look at what good shoes I have! I found them near the garbage cans when I went to the patriarchate. Someone had thrown them away, but they are real leather. I cleaned them and polished them a little bit and, look, they can still serve me for a long time!"

Another story is connected with these same shoes. A certain woman came to the patriarchate with the request to speak with the Patriarch concerning an urgent matter; she needed to speak with him personally. This request was unusual and she was not immediately admitted, but the visitor's persistence bore fruit, and an audience took place. Seeing the Patriarch, the woman said with great excitement that during the previous night, she had dreamed of the Theotokos, who told her to take money to the Patriarch so that he could buy himself new shoes. Saying this, the visitor took out an envelope full of money. Patriarch Pavle, not taking the envelope, responded affectionately: "At what time did you lay down to sleep?" The woman, surprised, asked: "Well... around eleven." "You know, I lay down a little later, around four in the morning," the Patriarch responded, "and I also dreamed of the Theotokos, who asked me to tell you to take the money and give it to those who really need it." Needless to say, he did not take the money...

Once, approaching the patriarchate, His Holiness noticed many cars near the entrance and became interested in whose they were. He was told that these cars belonged to the bishops. To this the Patriarch replied with a smile: "If they, who know the Savior's commandment about un-acquisitiveness, have such cars, just imagine what kind of cars they would have if this commandment did not exist!"

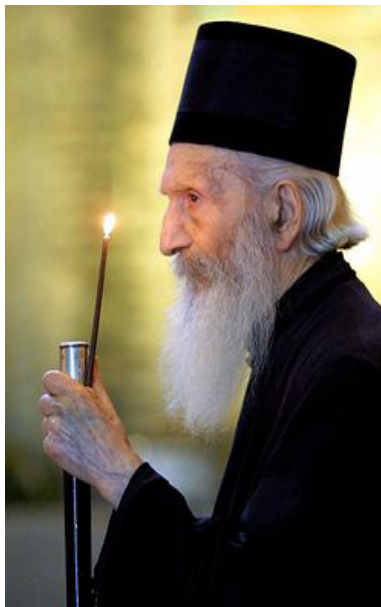
Once the Patriarch was flying somewhere on a visit. While they were flying over the sea, the airplane went into a zone of turbulence and began to shake. A young bishop who was sitting next to the Patriarch asked what he would think if the airplane were to fall. His Holiness, Pavle, replied calmly:

"With regard to myself personally, I would take this as an act of justice: I've eaten so many fish in my life that it would be no surprise if they were to eat me now."

We are citing here a passage from a conversation between Nikolai Kokukhin and Deacon Neboisha Topolic:

"By God's mercy we have such a spiritual pastor as His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle... He leads an ascetic life and is a living example of an evangelical pastor. He lives in Christ in the full sense of this word... As an Orthodox monk he fasts, that is, does not eat meat, and keeps a very strict fast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays... He serves the Liturgy every morning in a small chapel in the building of the patriarchate. There is no choir there, and only the parishioners chant.

"He vests himself before the service and unvests after the service, he confesses and communes parishioners himself. He has worn the same *rasa* and *cassock* from the time of his tonsure to the angelic order (and this was fifty years ago). He



does not replace them. He washes, irons, and mends them himself. He prepares his own food. Once he told me that he had made himself a pair of good boots out of women's boots. He has all the instruments for fixing boots; he himself can fix any shoes. He frequently serves in different churches, and when he sees that a priest has a torn *rasa* or *phelonion*, he says to him: 'Bring it, and I'll fix it...' Being around such a person is a great benefit for the education of our soul, for spiritual growth."

Patriarch Pavle was a doctor of theology (he had received this before becoming Patriarch), and was the author of several books: a monograph on the "Monastery of St. Joannicius of Devich" and the three-volume "To Clarify Certain Questions of Faith," several selections of which have recently appeared in translations into other languages.

Due to his poor health, Patriarch Pavle had been in the hospital for some time prior to his repose. The Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church performed the functions of ecclesiastical administration during his lengthy illness. Patriarch Pavle had repeatedly requested to be retired for reasons of health, but the last Council of Bishops had decided that he would remain the spiritual head of the Serbian Church until his very last breath.

Patriarch Pavle was very close to the people, and the people loved him very much. He was a unique figure, even for the Serbian Church and the next Patriarch, of course, is different.

Predrag Miodrag, who knew the Patriarch well, wrote the following: "He was very accessible. When his sister was alive, he frequently walked to her house by foot. He generally liked to go about by foot, without an escort. Anyone could approach him and speak with him. He received visitors at his residence every day. People went to him with their needs and their small questions, and he always offered the right comfort-word of consolation for each one of them.

"He got up very early and, when everyone was still sleeping, he served the Liturgy, praying for the entire Serbian people. All of Serbia was in his heart. He was small in stature, but great in spirit. He had thin fingers, but when he formed these fingers into the sign of the cross, legions of demons fled; he wore thin cotton vestments, but beneath these vestments was hidden the soul of a brave warrior. The Serbian people used to say: 'This is our angel, who protects and defends us.' They were right..."

Patriarch Pavle belonged to a different tradition. He was a mystically prayerful monk, rather than a sanguine Prince of the Church. He was a Patriarch who blended, harmoniously, three key functions of his throne: that of the father, of the priest, and of the prophet. He understood, and lived, the legacy of Prince Lazar, martyred at Kosovo in 1389: *The Kingdom on Earth is but paltry and small; yet the Kingdom of Heaven is forever and knows no bounds.*

May his soul dwell with the Righteous!

## DEVELOPING THE INTELLECT AND WILL OF THE SOUL

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



In the soul we find three powers: the intellect, the will, the heart, or, as the Holy Fathers say, the intellectual, desiring and incensive powers.

Each of them is assigned particular curative exercises by the holy ascetics. These related exercises are both receptive and conducive to grace. They need not be contrived according to some theory, but rather chosen from tested

ascetic labors particularly suited to a given power.

### For the mind:

1) Reading and hearing the Word of God, the writings of the Holy Fathers and the lives of the God-pleasers. 2) Studying and impressing upon yourself all the God-given truths in brief statements (the catechesis). 3) Asking questions of those older and more experienced. 4) Mutual informative discourse with friends.

### For the will:

1) Submission to the whole church rule. 2) Submission to civil order, or to family duty, for they are conduits of God's will. 3) Obedience to God's will as manifested in your fate. 4) Obeying your conscience in the doing of good deeds. 5) Subjecting yourself to the spirit that is zealous to fulfill its vows.

### For the heart:

1) Attending holy Church services. 2) Prayer, as specified by the Church; home prayer rule. 3) Using holy crosses, icons and other sacred substances and objects. 4) Observing holy customs established and promoted by the Church.

For each of these three powers, corresponding exercises are given to them. They act directly to develop the powers, but in a way that does not quell the spirit—to the contrary, it ignites the spirit more and more. The latter serves as a measure and stabilizer to the former, which subjects itself to the latter to the point of speechless submission or even total cessation. [Ed.: An article by St. Theophan addressing exercises for the development of the heart was presented in *Orthodox Heritage*, May-June 2008 issue. This article addresses the saint's guidance for the mind and the will.]

† † †

### Exercises That Develop the Intellect, and Also Warm the Spiritual Life

A Christian intellectual development occurs when all the truths of the Faith are impressed so deeply into the intellect that the intellect's whole existence is made up of these truths alone. When it begins to reason over something, it

reasons according to what it knows of the Christian truths, and would never make the slightest move without them. The Apostle calls this keeping the image of *a sound mind* (2 Tim 1:7).

Exercises or work related to this are: reading and hearing the Word of God, patristic literature, Lives of the Holy Fathers, mutual discourse and asking questions of those more experienced. It is good to read or listen, better to have a mutual discourse, and even better to ask questions of those more experienced.

The most fruit-bearing is the Word of God, then patristic literature and the Lives of Saints. Incidentally, it is needful to know that the Lives of saints are better for beginners, patristic literature for the intermediate, and the Word of God for the perfect.

All of these are the sources of Truth as well as the means for drawing from them; obviously, impressing them in the mind along with preserving the spirit of zeal also help.

Often one text will warm the spirit for more than a day. There are Lives of which the mere remembrance is enough to inflame zeal. There are also passages in patristic writings that inspire. Therefore we have this good rule: write down such passages and save them, in case you need them later to warm your spirit.

Often neither internal nor external work helps—the spirit remains sleepy. Hasten to read something from somewhere. If this does not help, run to someone to discuss it. The latter performed with faith is rarely fruitless.

There are two kinds of reading: one—ordinary, almost mechanical, and another—discriminating, according to spiritual need and advice. But the first kind is also not useless. It is, as we have said already, what is simply repeated and not studied.

It is most necessary for everyone to have someone with whom he can discuss spiritual matters—someone who already knows all our problems and to whom we can boldly reveal everything on our soul. It is best if it is only one person; two is too many. Idle conversations carried on only in order to pass the time should be avoided at all cost.

Here is a rule for reading:

- Before reading you should empty your soul of everything.
- Arouse the desire to know about what is being read.
- Turn prayerfully to God.
- Follow what you are reading with attention and place everything in your open heart.
- If something did not reach the heart, stay with it until it reaches.
- You should of course read quite slowly.
- Stop reading when the soul no longer wants to nourish itself with reading. That means it is full. If the soul finds one passage utterly stunning, stop there and read no more.

The best time for reading the Word of God is in the morning, Lives of Saints after the mid-day meal, and Holy Fathers before going to sleep. Thus you can take up a little bit each day.

During such occupations, you should continually keep your mind on the main goal—impressing the truth on yourself and awakening the spirit. If reading or discourse does not bring this about, then they are but idle itching of the tongue and ears, or empty discussion. If it is done with intelligence, then the truths impress themselves and rouse the spirit, and one thing aids the other. But if the reading or discourse digresses from the proper image, then there is neither one nor the other—truth is stuffed into the head like sand, and the spirit becomes cold and hard, smokes over and puffs up.

Impressing the spirit is not the same as searching for it. This requires only that you clarify what the truth is, and hold it in your mind until they bond together. Let there be no deductions or limitations—only the face of truth.

We can see that the rule for everyone is this: impress the Holy little truth in a way that will awaken you. The methods for fulfilling this rule vary, and it is not at all possible to prescribe the same one for everyone.

Thus, reading, listening and discourse that do not impress the truth or awaken the spirit should be considered wrong, as they lead away from the truth. It is a sickness to read many books out of curiosity alone, when only the mind follows what is being read, without leading it to the heart or delighting in its flavor.

This is the science of dreaming; it is not creative, does not hasten success, but is devastating and always leads to arrogance. All your work should be limited, as we have said, to the following: clarify the truth and hold it in the mind until the heart tastes of it. The Holy Fathers put it simply: remember it, hold it in the mind, and have it always before your eyes.

† † †

### Exercises for Developing the Will, Focusing Also On Awakening the Spirit

Developing the will means impressing upon it good dispositions or virtues—humility, meekness, patience, continence, submissiveness, helpfulness and so on. Thus, in blending with and grafting onto the will, the virtues would eventually constitute its very nature, and when something is undertaken by the will, it would be undertaken according to their inspiration and in their spirit, and they would govern and reign over our deeds.

Such a disposition of will is the safest and most stable. But inasmuch as it is contrary to the spirit of sin, its achievement requires toil and sweat. That is why the activity related to this is for the most part directed against the chief infirmity of the will, that is—self-will, unsubmissiveness, and intolerance of the yoke.

This infirmity is healed by submission to the will of God, with denial of your own and of any other. The will of God is revealed through the various forms of obedience that each person carries. Its first and most important requirement is observing the laws or commandments according to each person's duty or calling; next is observing the rubrics of the Church, the dictates of civil and family order, the dictates of circumstance that are wrought by providential will, and the demands of a zealous spirit—all done with discernment and counsel.

All of this is within the field of righteous deeds which is open to anyone and everyone. Therefore, know only how to arrange this for yourself and you will not experience a dearth of means for developing the will. For this you must clarify for yourself the sum of righteous deeds that are possible for you to do—in your station, calling and circumstances—together with an assessment of what, when, how, in what measure, and what can and should be done.

Having clarified all this, determine the general outline of the deeds and their order, so that nothing you do would be accidental. Remember at the same time that this is only an outline—details may change according to what is required under the circumstances. Do everything with discernment.

Therefore it is best to daily go over all the possible occurrences and deeds. Those who are used to doing righteous deeds never pre-determine what they are going to do, but do always the deeds that God sends to them; for everything comes from God. He reveals His own determinations to us through different occurrences.

By the way, all of this is only deeds. Doing them only straightens you out. In order to flow also into virtues through them, you must forcefully keep a true spirit of good works. To be more precise, do everything with humility and fear of God according to God's will and to His glory. He who does something out of self-reliance, with boldness and audacity, out of self-gratification or man-pleasing, no matter how righteous the works may be, only fosters within himself an evil spirit of self-righteousness, arrogance and pharisaism.

Carrying a right spirit, you should also be in remembrance of the laws, especially the law of graduality and constancy; that is, always begin with the small and ascend to what is higher. Then, once you have begun, do not stop.

By this you can avoid:

- Embarrassment that you are not perfect, for perfection does not come all at once. The time will come.
- Thoughts that you have already done everything; for there is no end to the heights.
- Arrogant aspirations, ascetic feats beyond your strength.

The last stage is when good deeds have become natural for you, and the law no longer weighs upon you as a burden.

The one who achieves this most successfully is one who is blessed with the grace of living with an actively virtuous

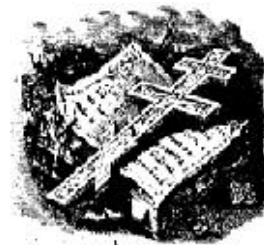
man, especially if he is being taught this science. He will not have to repeat and re-do every failure he has allowed through ignorance and inexperience. As they say, even if you do not read or intellectualize, only find a reverent man, and you will quickly learn the fear of God. This is applicable to any virtue.

Incidentally, it is good to choose one outstanding virtuous work according to your character and station, and stick with it unswervingly—it will be the foundation or basis from which you can go on to others. It will save you in times of weakness—it is a strong reminder and quickly inspires. The most reliable of all is almsgiving, which leads to the King.

This concerns only works and not dispositions, which should have their own inner framework that is founded on the spirit, and are in a certain way independent of the consciousness and free will—they are as the Lord grants. All the saints accept the beginning of this to be the fear of God, and the end to be love. In the middle are all the virtues, one building upon another. Although they are perhaps not all the same, they are inevitably built on humble, compunctionate repentance and sorrow over sins, which are the essence of virtue. A description of each virtue—its nature, activity, degrees of perfection, and deviations from them—is the subject of special books and patristic instructions. Get to know all of this through reading.

This kind of virtuous activity directly develops the will and impresses the virtuous into it. At the same time it also keeps the spirit in constant tension. Just as friction causes warmth, so do good works warm the heart. Without them a good spirit also grows cold and evaporates. This is what usually befalls those who do not do anything, or those who limit themselves to merely not doing evil and unrighteousness. No, we must also find good works to do.

Incidentally, there are also those who make too much fuss over their works, and therefore quickly exhaust themselves and dissipate the spirit. Everything should be done in moderation.



The man who still loves empty fame or is attached to some material thing is the one who is offended at men for the sake of temporal goods, who bears them grudges or hate, who is a slave of shameful thoughts; to the God-loving soul all these things are foreign.

St. Maximus the Confessor, (+662)

## EVIL AND INQUIRING INTO GOD'S JUSTICE

*By Elder Paisios the Athonite.*

In his desire to demonstrate how God provides and cares for His creation, whenever we tend to become indignant and not understand His actions, the Elder would tell us stories such as the following one:

An ascetic who had observed the injustice that exists in the world prayed to God and asked Him to reveal the reason that righteous and pious people suffer misfortunes and are tortured without any obvious explanation, whereas the unrighteous and sinners become wealthy and enjoy comforts. In the middle of the ascetic's prayer, he heard a voice instructing him as follows:

"Do not ask for those things that your mind and the power of your knowledge cannot reach, nor seek to learn what is hidden, because the judgments of God are an abyss. However, because you have requested to learn, go down into the world and sit in a certain spot discreetly and note whatever you shall see from there, so that with this minor test, you will get an idea of what God's judgments are. That way, you will come to understand just why God's providential administration in all things is unsearchable and unfathomable."

On hearing this, the old ascetic carefully walked down towards the inhabited areas until he reached a meadow that was crossed by a busy main road. There was a spring and an old tree nearby, so the elder hid himself carefully in the hollow trunk of the tree and decided to observe from there. Soon after, a wealthy man on horseback rode past. He stopped at the spring for a drink of water and lay down on the grass to rest. After quenching his thirst, he took out a pouch with 100 gold coins from his garment and began to count them. When he finished counting, he placed the pouch back in his garment; however, without realizing it, the pouch fell to the ground, into the grass.

He ate, he rested, he slept a little, and then he got back on his horse and rode off, without realizing he had lost the pouch with the gold coins.

After a while, another passer-by came to the spring. He found the pouch with the gold coins, grabbed it, and ran off with it, into the fields.

A little while later, another passer-by appeared. Tired as he was, he too stopped at the spring, took a drink of water, took out a piece of bread that he carried with him and sat down to eat.

Just as that poor man was eating, the wealthy horseman reappeared in a fury, his face red with anger. He pounced upon the unsuspecting man, yelling at him to give him back his gold coins. The poor man, not having any idea about those coins, reassured him with solemn oaths that he had seen no such thing. But angry as the horseman was, he began to beat the poor man until he eventually killed him. He then proceeded to search through the poor man's clothes, found nothing, and left him, greatly shocked and saddened.

The elder saw all these things happen before his eyes, and stood in wonder, overwhelmed with sorrow at the unjust murder that he had witnessed and turned in prayer to the Lord, saying:

"Lord, what is the meaning of this will of Yours? I beg You to explain how Your Benevolence can tolerate such an injustice? A person lost the coins, another found them, and another was unfairly murdered!"

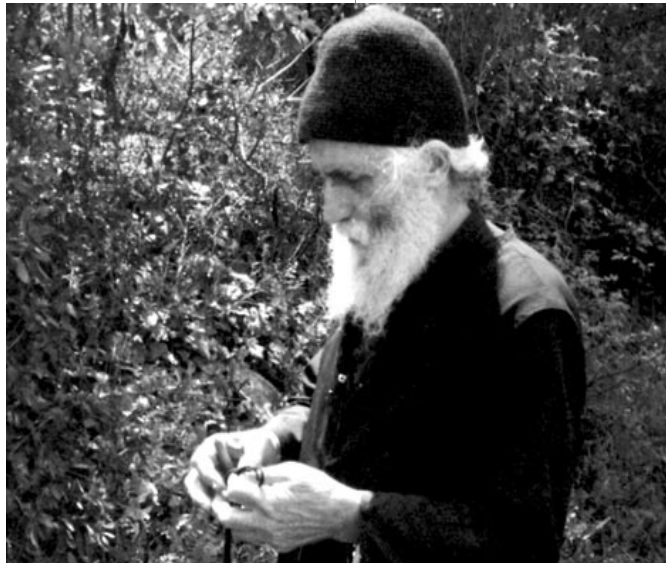
As the elder continued to pray with tears, an Angel of the Lord descended and said to him:

"Do not be sorrowed, elder, nor be disillusioned and imagine that all these things happened supposedly without the

will of God. Because of all the things that you just witnessed, some were by God's concession, others were for education, and others had providential reasons. So listen now: He who lost the coins was the neighbour of the one who found them. The latter had an orchard worth 100 gold coins. Being greedy, the rich man forced him to give up the orchard for only 50 coins. Unable to do anything else, the poor man prayed to God to take care of the injustice. Therefore, it was God's providence which had responded to the poor man's prayer and had given him back the money, two-fold.

"The other man—the poor and weary one—who had found nothing and yet was unfairly murdered? Well, he had committed murder, but only once in his life. However, he had repented sincerely, and for the rest of his life had made sure that his works were Christian and pleasing to God. He constantly beseeched God to forgive him for the murder he had committed, and would usually say, 'My Lord, please give me a death just like the one that I had inflicted!'

"Naturally, the Lord forgave him from the very first moment that he showed signs of repentance. But He was especially



moved by the sensitivity of His child, who not only made sure he upheld all His Commandments, but also desired to pay for his old crime. Thus, the Lord granted his wish, allowing him to die in the manner that he had prayed for. God did not deprive him of his wish, and allowed him to die a violent death, just as he had asked, and then took him into His bosom, in fact even crowning him with a glorious wreath for the sensitivity he had shown!

“Finally, the other man, the greedy one who lost all the gold coins and then committed murder, he would have had a disastrous end on account of his greed and his love of money, so God allowed him to fall into the sin of murder, so that his soul would be severely pained and thus seek to repent. Given the turn of events, that person has now abandoned all worldly pleasures and is going away, to become a monk!

“Now then, in which of these cases did you find God to be unjust or cruel or insensitive? “For this reason, you must no longer concern yourself with in-depth examinations of God’s judgments, because He metes them out fairly, in the manner that He deems appropriate, when you on the other hand misconstrue them as injustices.

“You should also know that there are many other things that happen in the world by the will of God, for reasons that people cannot understand. Thus, the proper thing to say is: *You are Just, O Lord, and straight are Your judgments.* (Pss 137).

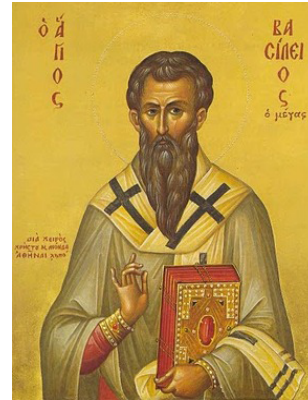


It was said of Abba Agathon that he forced himself to fulfill all the commandments. When he sailed in a vessel he was the first to handle the oars and when the brethren came to see him he laid the table with his own hands, as soon as they had prayed, because he was full of the love of God. When he was at the point of death he remained three days with his eyes fixed, wide-open. The brethren roused him saying, “Abba Agathon, where are you?” He replied, “I am standing before the judgment seat of God.” They said, “Are you not afraid, Father?” He replied, “Until this moment, I have done my utmost to keep the commandments of God; but I am a man; how should I know if my deeds are acceptable to God?” The brethren said to him, “Do you not have confidence in all that you have done according the law of God?” The old man replied, “I shall have no confidence until I meet God. Truly the judgment of God is not that of man.” When they wanted to question him further, he said to them, “Of your charity, do not talk to me any more, for I have no more time.” And so he died with joy. They saw him depart like one greeting his dearest friends. He preserved the strictest vigilance in all things, saying, “Without great vigilance a man does not advance in even a single virtue.”

From “Sayings of the Desert Fathers”

## THE VISION OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT, AND JULIAN THE APOSTATE

Translated from the Greek Orthodox periodical “Transfiguration” («Μεταμόρφωσις»).



In the years when Julian the apostate wished to revive idolatry—as some try to do in our days (neo-idolatry)—and to build again the Temple of Solomon (in his attempt terrible flames poured forth from that place and he was unable to complete his task), he stopped near Caesarea on his way to Persia [for war].

St. Basil the Great knew Julian from Athens; the two of them studied together, however each took a different road. The Metropolitan of the city [St. Basil] therefore went out to meet the emperor and he brought three loaves of bread from those that the Saint ate. The Saint ate barley bread and it is from those loaves that he offered to Julian.

Julian accepted the gift and ordered St. Basil to be rewarded grass from the surrounding fields!

The Saint, seeing this scorn, said: “We, O emperor, from that which we eat offered to you, just as you requested. And your kingdom, as is appropriate, returned the gift from that which you eat.”

As soon as the emperor heard these words, he was greatly angered and abruptly told the Saint:

“For now accept this “gift of grass.” And when I return from Persia a victor, then I will burn your city and I will remove your infantile people and enslave them, because you dishonor the gods which I worship, and you will thus receive the appropriate reward [i.e., punishment].”

And when he finished these terrible threats, the emperor Julian headed for Persia.

The Saint returned to Caesarea and called all of the people. When he told them the threats of the king to destroy the city and enslave them, he advised them to consider gathering a great gift of moneys and gold for the emperor; he thus instructed them to gather whatever they had in one place and when the king would return, they would throw their treasures in the streets, and being avaricious, he would be appeased and would not do any evil upon them.

The Christians obediently went and gathered an uncountable treasure: gold, silver, and precious stones! The Saint placed it in the treasury, writing the name of each to keep them, until he learned of Julian’s return.



Some time later, when he learned that he was returning, St. Basil gathered the Christians and told them all to fast for three days. Then they all ascended the mountain of Caesarea called Didymos (“Twin”), because it had two peaks.

On that mountain was a Church of the Most-Holy Theotokos, where all the Christians, when they reached it, began with contrite heart to entreat the merciful Christ and His Most-Pure Mother, that the decision of the impious emperor be changed. Then as they were continuing in prayer, St. Basil saw a multitude of heavenly armies circle the mountain and among them was a woman sitting on a throne with much glory, who said to the Angels that were around:

“Call Mercurius to me, that he go and put to death the enemy of my Son, Julian!”

Then the Archbishop of Caesarea observed that the Holy Martyr Mercurius arrived, armed with his weapon, and having received the command from that woman who was the Most-Holy Theotokos, he immediately disappeared! At that very moment, Julian the Apostate, as he was on his Persian campaign, was wounded by the spear of an unknown soldier, who immediately disappeared. The mortally wounded Julian, as he lay dying, cried out, “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!”

Then, the Queen of all Angels, Panagia, called St. Basil and gave to him a book which contained the details of Creation and the manner by which man fallen from God. In the beginning of the book was an epigraph which exclaimed, “He said,” while prior to the end of the book (which talked of the fall of man) was written the word “End.” This meant that the Saint would author a hermeneutical book on the Six Days of Creation of Moses (and on the creation of the World in general), titled “The Hexaimeron.” However, the chapter on the creation of man by God would not be completed by him; and as prophesied by the Holy Mother, it was actually completed after his repose, by his brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa.

The Saint “awoke” from the vision right away and with some of the clergy descended immediately to the city of Caesarea, where the Church of the St. Mercurius was located; therein he found St. Mercurius’ relics and his weapons. (The saint was martyred at that same location a hundred years prior).

St. Basil entered this church and (not seeing the relics or the weapons), he asked the protector of the relics of the Church what occurred. He of course did not know anything. Then the Great Basil understood that it was a true vision and that the most impious Julian would be killed that night.

Immediately, the Holy Metropolitan again ascended the mountain and told the Christians:

“Rejoice and be glad today, my brethren. Our prayer was heard, because the infamous king suffers the appropriate punishment. Therefore giving thanks to God, let us return to the city that each may receive the money that he gave.”

As soon as the Christians heard these, they all said with a loud voice:

“We were planning to give to the impious king to preserve our lives. Now should we not offer them to the King of Heaven and earth, who granted us life?”

The Saint therefore praised their willingness and ordered a third be given back to each from whom it was given, and the rest to be given to build homes for the poor, homes for strangers, hospitals, orphanages, etc. (all of these later comprised the wondrous Christian, philanthropic complex called Basiliad).

† † †

**From the Editor:** Another version of the above story informs us that the Saint did not separate the gold and coins given by each of the faithful. Thus, after the death of the emperor, St. Basil asked some of his people to bake loaves of bread within which he hid their coins, jewelry, etc., and handed the bread out to his flock. Miraculously, each loaf contained precisely what each person had given. It is thus that the tradition of “vasilopita” started and continues all the way to our days. Vasilopita (Greek: Βασιλόπιτα, Vasilópita, literally: “St. Basil’s pie”) is a traditional New Year’s Day bread or cake (January 1<sup>st</sup> is also the Feast day of St. Basil). This custom exists in Greece and many other areas in eastern Europe and the Balkans; the cake often contains a hidden coin or trinket which gives new year “blessings” to the receiver.

† † †

### Apolytikion of St. Basil in the First Tone

*Your voice resounded throughout the world that received your word by which, in godly manner, you taught dogma, clarified the nature of beings, and set in order the character of people. Venerable father, Royal Priesthood, intercede to Christ God to grant us great mercy.*



I, too, will proclaim the greatness of this day: the Immaterial becomes incarnate, the Word is made flesh, the invisible makes itself seen, the intangible can be touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes the Son of Man—Jesus Christ, always the same, yesterday, today and forever...

This is the solemnity we are celebrating today: the arrival of God among us, so that we might go to God, or, more precisely, return to Him... Revere the Nativity, which releases you from the chains of evil. Honor this tiny Bethlehem, which restores Paradise to you. Venerate this crib; because of it, you, who were deprived of meaning (logos), are fed by the divine Meaning: the divine Logos Himself.

St. Gregory the Theologian

## THE LITTLE THINGS IN LIFE

By St. John Maximovitch.

*St. John Maximovitch was well known for his remarkable faith which he exemplified in his daily life, both as a shepherd as well as an Orthodox Christian. Vladika John's constant attention to self mortification had its root in the fear of God, which he possessed in the tradition of the ancient Church and of Holy Russia.*

*The following incident, told by O. Skopichenko and confirmed by many from Shanghai, well illustrates his daring, unshakable faith in Christ.*

*"A Mrs. Menshikova was bitten by a mad dog. The injections against rabies she either refused to take or took carelessly.... And then she came down with this terrible disease. Bishop John found out about it and came to the dying woman. He gave her Holy Communion, but just then she began having one of the fits of this disease; she began to foam at the mouth, and at the same time she spit out the Holy Gifts which she had just received. The Holy Sacrament cannot be thrown out. And Vladika picked up and put in his mouth the Holy Gifts vomited by the sick woman. Those who were with him exclaimed: 'Vladika, what are you doing! Rabies is terribly contagious!' But Vladika peacefully answered: 'Nothing will happen; these are the Holy Gifts.' And indeed nothing did happen."*

*The present article exemplifies the depth of simplicity in his faith as well as the manner by which he guided his flock while he was with us.*

† † †

Many people believe that to live according to the faith and to fulfill the will of God is very difficult. Actually, it is very easy. One needs only attend to details, to trifles, and try to avoid evil in the slightest and most trivial things. This is the simplest and surest way to enter the world of the spirit and draw near to God.

A man often thinks that the Creator demands great things of him, that the Gospel insists on complete self-sacrifice, the abolition of one's personhood, etc., as a condition of faith. A man is so frightened by this that he begins to be afraid of becoming acquainted with God, of drawing near to God, and hides himself from God, not even wishing to look into God's Word. "If I can't do anything important for God, then I'd just better stay away from things spiritual, stop thinking about eternity, and live 'in a normal way'."

There exists, at the entrance to the spiritual realm, a "hypnosis of great deeds:" one must either do some big thing or do nothing. And so people do nothing at all for God or for their souls! It is very strange—the more a man is devoted

to the little things of life, the less he wishes to be honest or pure or faithful to God in those same little things. And, moreover, each one must adopt a correct attitude toward little things if one wishes to come near to the kingdom of heaven.

"Wishes to come near"... In this is summed up all the difficulties of the religious life. Often one wishes to enter into the kingdom of heaven quite unexpectedly, in some miraculous and magical way, or, by right—through some kind of great feat. But neither the one nor the other is the right way to find the higher world.

One does not enter God's presence in some wondrous manner while remaining indifferent on earth to the needs of the kingdom of God and its bright eternity, nor can one purchase the treasures of the kingdom of God by some kind of eternal act, however great that act might be. Yet good deeds, holy deeds are necessary for one to grow into a

higher life, a bright will, a good desire, a heavenly psychology, a heart that is both pure and fair.

*Verily, verily I say unto you that whosoever offers one of the least of these but a cup of cold water, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose his reward.* In this saying of the Lord is the highest expression of the smallness of the good. *A glass of water*—this is not much...

In every communication between people there must without fail be a good spirit. This spirit is Christ, openly manifest or hidden.

*In the name of a disciple*—this is the first step in communicating with another person in the name of Jesus Christ Himself. Many people, not as yet knowing the Lord and the wondrous fellowship

in His Name still have among themselves an unselfish, pure and human fellowship which brings them ever closer to the Spirit of Christ.

As a matter of fact, the lesser good is more necessary for mankind than the greater. People can get along with their lives without the greater good; without the lesser they can not exist. Mankind perishes not from a lack of the greater good, but from an insufficiency of just this lesser good. The greater good is no more than a roof, erected on the brick walls of the lesser good.

The lesser, easier good was left on this earth for man by the Creator Himself, who took all the greater good upon Himself. Whosoever does the lesser, the same creates—and through him the Creator Himself creates—the greater good. Of our little good the Creator makes His Own great good. For as our Lord is the Creator who formed all things from



nothingness, so is He more able to create the greater good from the lesser.

Through such lesser, easy work, done with the greatest simplicity, a man is accustomed to the good and begins to serve it with his whole heart, sincerely, and in this way enters into an atmosphere of good, lets down the roots of his life into new soil, the soil of the good. The roots of human life quickly accommodate themselves to this good earth, and soon cannot live without it. Thus is a man saved: from the small comes the great. *Faithful in little things* turns out to be *faithful in the greater*.

Lay aside all theoretical considerations that it is forbidden to slaughter millions, women, children, and elderly; be content to manifest your moral sense by in no way killing the human dignity of your neighbor, neither by word, nor by innuendo, nor by gesture.

Do not be angry over trifles *against your brother vainly* (Mt 5:22) or in the daily contacts of life speak untruth to your neighbor. These are trifles, small change, of no account; but just try to do this and you will see what comes of it.

It is hard to pray at night. But try in the morning. If you can't manage to pray at home than at least as you ride to your place of employment attempt with a clear head the *Our Father* and let the words of this short prayer resound in your heart. And at night commend yourself with complete sincerity into the hands of the Heavenly Father. This indeed is very easy.

And give, give a glass of cold water to everyone who has need of it; give a glass filled to the brim with simple human companionship to everyone that lack it, the very simplest companionship,

O wondrous path of little things, I sing thee a hymn! Surround yourselves, O people, gird up yourselves with little works of good—with a chain of little, simple, easy and good feelings which cost us naught, a chain of bright thoughts, words and deeds. Let us abandon the big and the difficult. That is for them that love it and not for us for whom the Lord in His Mercy, for us who have not yet learned to love the greater, has poured forth the lesser love everywhere, free as water and air.



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## ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS SERVICES

*By Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, from "The Services of Christmas," published by the Orthodox Church in America.*

### The Nativity Cycle

As Orthodox Christians, we begin the celebration of the Nativity of Christ (December 25) with a time of preparation. Forty days before the feast of the birth of Our Lord we enter the period of the Christmas Fast, to purify both soul and body to enter properly into and partake of the great spiritual reality of Christ's Coming.

This fasting season does not constitute the intense liturgical season that is characteristic of Great Lent; rather, the Christmas Lent is more of an "ascetical" rather than a "liturgical" nature. Nevertheless, the Christmas fasting season is reflected in the life of the Church in a number of liturgical notes that announce the coming feast.

Within the forty days preparation the theme of the approaching Nativity is introduced in the services and liturgical commemorations, little by little. If the beginning of the fast on November 15<sup>th</sup> is not liturgically marked by any hymn, five days later, on the eve of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, we hear the first announcement from the nine "Irmoi" of the Christmas Canon:

**"Christ is born, glorify Him!"**

With these words something changes in our life, in the very air we breathe, in the entire mood of the Church's life. It is as if we perceive far, far away, the first light of the greatest possible joy—the coming of God into His world! Thus the Church announces the coming of Christ, the Incarnation of God, His entrance into the world for its salvation.

Then, on the two Sundays preceding Christmas, the Church commemorates the Forefathers and the Fathers: the prophets and the Saints of the Old Testament who prepared that coming, who made history itself into the expectation, the waiting for, the salvation and reconciliation of mankind with God.

Finally, on December 20<sup>th</sup>, the church begins the Forefeast of the Nativity, whose liturgical structure is similar to the Holy week preceding Pascha—for the birth of the Son of God as child is the beginning of the saving ministry which will lead Him, for the sake of our salvation, to the ultimate sacrifice of the Cross.

### The Eve of the Nativity

The liturgical services of December 24<sup>th</sup>, the Eve of the Nativity, are:

- The Hours
- Vespers, and
- The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great.

Coming at the end of the Forefeast, and indeed of the entire "Advent," the Hours summarize all the themes of the fast and make them into a last and solemn announcement.

In the special Psalms, hymns and biblical readings prescribed for each hour, the joy and power of Christ's Coming are proclaimed. It is one last meditation on the cosmical meaning of the Nativity, on the decisive and radical change it performed in the entire creation.

Vespers, which usually follows the Hours, inaugurates the celebration of the feast itself, for, as we know, the liturgical day begins in the evening. The tone of this celebration is given by the five stichera on *Lord, I call...* What they really are is an explosion of joy for the gift of Christ's Incarnation which is now fulfilled! Eight biblical readings show that Christ is the fulfillment of all prophecies, that His Kingdom is the Kingdom of *all ages*, that all human history finds its meaning in it, and the entire cosmos its centre.

The Liturgy of St. Basil which follows Vespers was in the past the baptismal liturgy at which catechumens were baptized, chrismated and integrated into the Church, the Body of Christ. The double joy of the feast, for the newly-baptized and other members of the Church, is reflected in the prokeimenon of the day:

*The Lord said to me: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Thy possession.*

Then, at the end of the Liturgy, the celebrant, taking a lighted candle to the very centre of the Church, and surrounded by the entire congregation, intones the Troparion and kontakion of the feast:

*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,  
Has shone to the world the light of wisdom.  
For by it, those who worshipped the stars  
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,  
The Sun of Righteousness,  
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.  
O Lord, glory to Thee!*

### The Vigil and the Liturgy

Since Vespers of the feast already have been celebrated, the Vigil begins with Great Compline and the joyful proclamation from Isaiah "God is with us!" The order of Matins is that of a great feast. Now, for the first time, the full Canon "Christ is born," one of the most beautiful canons in Orthodox worship, is sung while the faithful venerate the icon of Christ's Nativity. The Praises follow, summarizing the joy and themes of the entire feast:

*Make glad, O you righteous!  
Greatly rejoice, O heavens!  
Dance for joy, O mountains; for Christ is born!  
The virgin has become like the cherubic throne.  
She carries at her bosom God the Word, made flesh.  
Shepherds glorify the newborn child.  
Wise men offer the master gifts.  
Angels praise Him and sing:  
O Lord, past understanding, glory to Thee!*

Concluding the celebration of the Nativity of Christ is the Liturgy of the day itself with its festal antiphons proclaiming:

*The Lord will send Thee the scepter of power from Zion: Rule in the midst of Thine enemies. With Thee is dominion on the day of Thy birth, in the radiance of holiness.*

### The Post-Feast

On the second day of the feast, the Synaxis of the Theotokos is celebrated. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Mary as the one through whom the Incarnation was made possible. His humanity—concretely and historically—is the humanity He received from Mary. His Body is, first of all, her body, His life is her life. This feast, the assembly in honour of the Theotokos, is probably the most ancient feast of Mary in the Christian tradition, the very beginning of her veneration by the Church.

Six days of post-feast bring the Christmas season to a close on December 31<sup>st</sup>. At the services of all these days, the Church repeats the hymns and songs glorifying Christ's Incarnation, reminding us that the source and the foundation of our salvation is only to be found in the One who, as God before the ages, came into this world and for our sake was *born as a little Child*.



### ON THE GREAT MYSTERY OF THE MOTHERHOOD OF OUR PANAGHIA

The Lord entered into her and became a servant; He, Who is the Word, entered and became silent within her; thunder entered her, and made no sound; there entered the Shepherd of all, and—in her—He became the Lamb... The mighty One entered, and put on insecurity in her womb; the Provisioner of all entered, and experienced hunger; He, Who gives drink to all, entered, and experienced thirst. Naked and stripped there came forth from her He, Who clothes all! Praise be to Thee, to Whom all things are easy; for Thou art almighty.

If she could carry Thee, it is because Thou, the great Mountain, hast lightened Thy weight; if she feeds Thee, it is because Thou hast taken on hunger; if she gives Thee her breast, it is because Thou, of Thine own will, hast thirsted; if she caresses Thee, it is because Thou, Who art the fiery coal of mercy, hast preserved her bosom unharmed. ... Whoever saw a child, who beholdeth every place? His look is like One Who orders all creatures that are above and that are below."

St. Ephraim the Syrian

## Μέγα Μυστήριο: Ἡ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

**Μ**υστήριο ξένον, λέγει ὁ Ὑμνωδός, τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ νὰ γεννηθῆ σὰν ἄνθρωπος, ὄχι κανένας προφήτης, ὄχι κανένας ἄγγελος, ἄλλα ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός! Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ φθάσει σὲ μία τέτοια πίστι; Οἱ φιλόσοφοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τετραπέρατοι σπουδασμένοι, ἦταν δυνατὸ νὰ παραδεχθῶν ἓνα τέτοιο πράγμα; Ἀπὸ τὴν κρισάρα τῆς λογικῆς τους δὲν μπορούσε νὰ περάσει ἡ παραμικρὴ ψευτιά, ὄχι ἓνα τέτοιο «τερατολόγημα»! Ὁ Πυθαγόρας, ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ ἄλλοι τέτοιοι θαυματουργοί, ποὺ ἦταν καὶ σπουδαῖοι φιλόσοφοι, δὲ μπορούσαν νὰ τοὺς κάνουν νὰ πιστέψουν κάποια πράγματα πολὺ πιστευτά, καὶ θὰ πιστεύανε ἓνα τέτοιο τερατολόγημα; Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Χριστὸς γεννήθηκε ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἄπλους ἀνθρώπους, ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀπονήρευτους τσοπάνηδες, μέσα σὲ μία σπηλιά, μέσα στὸ παχνί, ποὺ τρώγανε τὰ βόδια.

Κανένας δὲν τὸν πῆρε εἶδηση, μέσα σὲ ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀπέραντο κόσμον, ποὺ ἐξουσιάζανε οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι, γιὰ τοῦτο εἶχε πεῖ ὁ προφήτης Γεδεών, πὼς θὰ κατέβαινε ἡσυχὰ στὸν κόσμον, ὅπως κατεβαίνει ἡ δροσιὰ ἀπάνω στὸ μπουμποῦκι τοῦ λουλουδιοῦ, «ὡς ὑετὸς ἐπὶ πόκον». Ἀνάμεσα σὲ τόσες μυριάδες νεογέννητα παιδιὰ, ποῖς νὰ πάρει εἶδηση τὸ πιὸ πτωχὸ ἀπὸ τὰ πτωχά, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὄχι σὲ καλύβι, ὄχι σὲ στρουγγα, ἄλλα σὲ μία σπηλιά; Καὶ κείνη ξένη, γιὰ τὴν εἶχανε οἱ τσομπαναρέοι νὰ σταλιάζουνε τὰ πρόβατά τους.

Τὸ «ὑπερεξαισίον καὶ φρικτὸν μυστήριο» τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινε τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ βασιλευε ἓνας μοναχὰ αὐτοκράτορας ἀπάνω στὴ γῆ, ὁ Αὔγουστος, ὁ ἀνιψιδὸς τοῦ Καίσαρα, ὕστερα ἀπὸ μεγάλη ταραχὴ καὶ αἱματοχυσία ἀνάμεσα στὸν Ἀντώνιο ἀπὸ τὴν μία μεριά, καὶ στὸν Βρούτο καὶ τὸν Κάσσιο ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη. Τότε γεννήθηκε καὶ ὁ ἓνας καὶ μοναχὸς πνευματικὸς βασιλιάς, ὁ Χριστὸς. Κι' αὐτὸ τὸ λέγει ἡ ποιήτρια Κασσιανὴ στὸ δοξαστικὸ ποὺ σύνθεσε, καὶ ποὺ τὸ ψέλνουνε κατὰ τὸν Ἑσπερινὸ τῶν Χριστουγέννων: **Αὐγούστου μοναρχήσαντος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἡ πολυαρχία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπαύσατο. Καὶ τοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος ἐκ τῆς ἀγνῆς ἡ πολυθεΐα τῶν εἰδώλων κατήρηται. Ὑπὸ μίαν βασιλείαν ἐγκόσμον αἱ πόλεις γεγέννηται. Καὶ εἰς μίαν δεσποτείαν Θεότητος τὰ ἔθνη ἐπίστευσαν...**



Τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν προφητέψανε οἱ προφῆτες. Πρῶτος ἀπ' ὅλους τὴν προφήτεψε ὁ πατριάρχης Ἰακώβ, τὴ μέρα ποὺ εὐλόγησε τοὺς δώδεκα υἱοὺς του, καὶ εἶπε στὸν Ἰούδα **δὲν θὰ λείψει ἄρχοντας ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰούδα μήτε βασιλιάς ἀπὸ τὸ αἷμά του, ὡς ποὺ νὰ ἔλθει ἐκεῖνος, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖον εἶναι γραμμένο νὰ βασιλεύει ἀπάν' ἀπ' ὅλους, καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν περιμένουνε ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη.** Ὡς τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, τὸ γένος τοῦ Ἰούδα, εἶχανε ἄρχοντες, δηλαδὴ κριτὲς καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς, ποὺ ἦτανε κ' οἱ πολιτικοὶ ἄρχοντες τους. Ἀλλὰ τότε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἔγινε ἄρχοντας τῆς Ἰουδαίας ὁ Ἡρώδης, ποὺ ἦτανε ἐθνικὸς καὶ ἔβαλε ἀρχιερέα τὸν Ἀνάνιον «ἀλλογενῆ», ἐνῶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς εἶχανε πάντα μητέρα Ἰουδαία. Τελευταῖος Ἰουδαῖος ἀρχιερεὺς στάθηκε ὁ Ὑρκανός.

Καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι προφῆτες προφητέψανε τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, προπάντων ὁ Ἡσαΐας. Τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴ λένε οἱ ὕμνωδοὶ (**τὸ πρὸ αἰῶνων ἀπόκρυφον καὶ ἄγγελοις ἄγνωστον μυστήριο**), κατὰ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Παύλου ποὺ γράφει: **Ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὐτῆ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸν ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τὸν ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰῶνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα γνωρισθῆ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ.** (Ἐφεσ. 3:8-10). Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος λέγει, πὼς αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριο δὲν τὸ γνωρίζανε

καθαρὰ καὶ μὲ σαφήνεια οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι, γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριὴλ μὲ τρόμο τὸ εἶπε στὴν Παναγία.

Καὶ στοὺς Κολασσαεῖς γράφοντας ὁ θεόγλωσσος Παῦλος, λέγει: **Τὸ μυστήριο τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰῶνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν, νυνὶ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ, οἷς ἠθέλησε ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίσαι τίς ὁ πλοῦτος, τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὅς ἐστὶ Χριστὸς ἐν ἡμῖν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης.** Λέγει, πὼς φανερώθηκε αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριο στοὺς ἁγίους, ποὺ θέλησε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὸ μάθουνε, καὶ αὐτοὶ θὰ τὸ διδάσκανε στὰ ἔθνη; στοὺς εἰδωλολάτρεις, ποὺ προσκυνούσανε γιὰ θεοὺς πέτρες καὶ ζῶα καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα κτίσματα.

Ἐξακόσια χρόνια πρὸ Χριστοῦ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ναβουχοδονόσορ εἶδε στὸ ὄνειρό του, πὼς βρέθηκε μπροστά του ἓνα θεόρατο φοβερὸ ἄγαλμα, καμωμένο ἀπὸ χρυσάφι, ἀσημι, χάλκωμα, σίδερο καὶ σεντέφι. Κι

ἄξαφνα, ἓνας βράχος ξεκόλλησε ἀπὸ ἓνα βουνὸ καὶ χτύπησε τὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ τὸκανε σκόνη. Καὶ σηκώθηκε ἓνας δυνατὸς ἄνεμος καὶ σκόρπισε τὴ σκόνη, καὶ δὲν ἀπόμεινε τίποτα. Ὁ βράχος ὅμως ποὺ τσάκισε τὸ ἄγαλμα ἔγινε ἓνα μεγάλο βουνό, καὶ σκέπασε ὅλη τὴ γῆ. Τότε ὁ βασιλεὺς φώναξε τὸν προφήτη Δανιὴλ καὶ ζήτησε νὰ τοῦ ἐξηγήσει τὸ ὄνειρο.

Κι ὁ Δανιὴλ τὸ ἐξηγήσε καταλεπτῶς, λέγοντας πὼς τὰ διάφορα μέρη τοῦ ἀγάλματος ἦταν οἱ διάφορες βασιλεῖες, ποὺ θὰ περνούσαν ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὸν Ναβουχοδονόσορα· καὶ πὼς στὸ τέλος ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἀναστήσει κάποια βασιλεία ποὺ θὰ καταλύσει ὅλες τὶς βασιλεῖες, ὅπως ὁ βράχος ποὺ εἶχε δεῖ στὸ ἐνύπνιό του ἐξαφάνισε τὸ ἄγαλμα μὲ τὰ πολλὰ συστατικά του: **Καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῶν βασιλέων ἐκείνων, ἀναστήσει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν, ἣτις εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας οὐ διαφθαρήσεται**, κάποιο βασιλεῖο, λέγει, ποὺ δὲν θὰ καταλυθεῖ ποτὲ στοὺς αἰῶνες τῶν αἰῶνων.

Αὐτὴ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ αἰώνια, ἡ ἀφθαρτὴ, εἶναι ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ βασιλεία τῆς ἀγάπης στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἰδρῦθηκε μὲ τὴν ἀγία Γέννηση τοῦ Κυρίου ποὺ γιορτάζουμε σήμερα. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ εἶναι τέτοια βασιλεία, γι' αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι αἰώνια, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν θὰ χαλάσει ποτέ, ὅπως γίνεται μὲ τὶς ἄλλες ἐπίγειες καὶ ὑλικὲς βασιλεῖες. Ὅπως ὁ βράχος μεγάλωνε κι ἔγινε ὄρος μέγα καὶ σκέπασε τὴ γῆ, ἔτσι καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ξαπλώθηκε σ' ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, μὲ τὸ κήρυγμα τῶν Ἀποστόλων: **Εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν, καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν.**

Ὅστε βγήκε ἀληθινὴ ἡ ἀρχαιότερη προφητεία τοῦ Ἰακώβ, πὼς σὰν πάψει ἡ ἐγκόσμια ἐξουσία τῶν Ἰουδαίων, θὰ ἔρθει στὸν κόσμον ἐκεῖνος ποὺ προορίστηκε, **ἡ προσδοκία τῶν ἐθνῶν.**

Σημείωσε πὼς οἱ Ἑβραῖοι πιστεύανε πὼς ἡ φυλὴ τους μονάχα ἦταν βλογημένη, καὶ πὼς ὁ Θεὸς φρόντιζε μονάχα γι' αὐτή, καὶ πὼς οἱ ἄλλοι λαοί, «τὰ ἔθνη», ἦταν καταραμένα καὶ μολυσμένα κι ἀνάξια νὰ δεχτοῦν τὴ φώτιση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Λοιπὸν εἶναι παρὰξενον νὰ μιλά ἡ προφητεία τοῦ Ἰακώβ γιὰ τὰ ἔθνη, γιὰ τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρεις θὰ περιμένουν τὸν Μεσσία νὰ τοὺς σώσει καὶ μάλιστα νὰ μὴ λείει κὰν πὼς τὸν ἀναμενόμενο Σωτῆρα τὸν περιμένανε οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι μαζί μὲ τὰ ἔθνη, ἀλλὰ νὰ λείει πὼς τὸν περιμένανε μονάχα οἱ ἐθνικοί: **καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν.**

Ὅπως κι ἔγινε. Γιατί, τὴ βασιλεία ποὺ ἴδρυσεν ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν κόσμον, τὴ θεμελίωσαν μὲν οἱ ἀπόστολοι, ποὺ ἦταν Ἰουδαῖοι, ἀλλὰ τὴν ξαπλώσανε καὶ τὴν στερεώσανε μὲ τοὺς ἀγῶνες τους καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοὺς οἱ ἄλλες φυλές, «τὰ ἔθνη».

Εἶναι ὀλότελα ἀκατανόητο, γιὰ τὸ πνεῦμα μας, τὸ ὅτι κατέβηκε ὁ Θεὸς ἀνάμεσά μας σὰν ἄνθρωπος

συνηθισμένος καὶ μάλιστα σὰν ὁ φτωχότερος ἀπὸ τοὺς φτωχοὺς. Αὐτὴ τὴ μακροθυμία μονάχα ἄγιες ψυχὲς εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ τὴ νιώσουνε ἀληθινά, καὶ νὰ κλάψουνε ἀπὸ κατάνυξη.

Κάποιοι, μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶπαμε, δὲν θὰ νιώσουνε τίποτα ἀπὸ τὸ Μυστήριο, ποὺ γιορτάζουμε. Σ' αὐτοὺς, ἐγὼ ὁ τιποτένιος, δὲ μπορῶ νὰ πῶ τίποτα. Μοναχὰ θὰ τοὺς θυμίσω τὰ αὐστηρὰ λόγια ποὺ γράφει στὴν ἐπιστολὴ του ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστής, ὁ ἀγαπημένος μαθητὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ' ὁ θερμότερος κήρυκας τῆς ἀγάπης: **Πᾶν πνεῦμα, ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστι. Καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα, ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν. Οὗτος ἐστὶν ἀντίχριστος!**



**Τ**ὸ βασικότερο πρᾶγμα εἶναι νὰ κρατοῦμε πάντοτε τὴν ἐπίγνωση τῆς ἀνεπάρκειάς μας ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τότε μπαίνουμε σὲ διαρκὴ ἔνταση ἀνάμεσα στὴν αὐτομεψία καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴ μετάνοια καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα στὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπὸ τὴ μία πλευρὰ ζοῦμε στὴν ὀδύνη, γιατί εἴμαστε τόσο μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ποὺ ἀγαπάμε. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, αὐτὴ ἡ ὀδύνη καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνεργοῦν σὰν ἐσωτερικὴ φωτιά, πού μᾶς ὠθοῦν μὲ δύναμη πρὸς τὸν Θεό.

Ἡ ἔνταση αὕτη βρῆκε τὴν «τομωτέρα» ἐκφρασὴ τῆς στὸ λόγο τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν Γέροντα Σιλουανό: **Κράτει τὸν νοῦ σου εἰς τὸν ἄδην, καὶ μὴ ἀπελπίζων.** Ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ προκαλέσει φόβο, φρίκη καὶ πανικὸ ἀλλὰ δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς συντριβεῖ. Ἀποτελεῖ τὴ θεμελιώδη ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς μας.

**Γέροντας Σωφρόνιος Σαχάρωφ  
«Περὶ Πνεύματος καὶ Ζωῆς»**



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

## Ὁνειρον Ἀλεξάνδρου Παπαδιαμάντη, Ἀμίσθου Ἱεροψάλτου

Ν. Δ. Τριανταφυλλοπούλου, φιλολόγου καὶ ὑπεύθυνου διὰ τὴν κριτικὴ ἔκδοση τῶν «Ἀπάντων» τοῦ Ἀλ. Παπαδιαμάντη.

**Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐκδότη: Ὁ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης (4 Μαρτίου 1851 - 3 Ἰανουαρίου 1911) ἦταν κορυφαῖος Ἕλληνας λογοτέχνης, ἐπονομαζόμενος ὁ «Ἅγιος τῶν ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων». Εἰς τὸ παρὸν διήγημα, ὁ συγγραφεὺς παρουσιάζει μερικὲς στιγμὲς ἀπὸ τὶς τελευταῖες ὥρες τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλεξάνδρου: Ὁ γέρον τῆς Σκιάθου σχεδιάζει τὸ τελευταῖο του διήγημα, λίγο προτοῦ ἀποδημήσει, παραμονὲς τῶν Φώτων...**

† † †



Ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, υἱὸς τοῦ ἱερέως Ἀδαμαντίου Ἐμμανουήλ, διηγηματογράφος καὶ ἱεροψάλτης, ὠνειρεύθη τὴν νύκτα τῆς 2<sup>ας</sup> πρὸς 3<sup>ην</sup> Ἰανουαρίου 1911, εἰς τὴν Σκιάθον, ὅτι εὕρισκετο εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας, ἔλαβε δὲ σημεῖωμα τοῦ Βλ. Γαβριηλίδου, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ὁ διευθυντὴς τῆς «Ἀκροπόλεως» τὸν ἐκάλει νὰ περάσῃ τὸ ταχύτερον ἀπὸ τὰ γραφεῖα τῆς ἐφημερίδος. Μολονότι ἐνόησεν ὅτι ἐπρόκειτο περὶ ἀναθέσεως ἐργασίας, καὶ μολονότι ἡ οἰκονομικὴ του κατάστασις πᾶν ἄλλο ἢ ἀνθηρὰ ἦτο, ἐδυσφόρησεν ἐλαφρῶς, ἔκαμε βῶλον τὸ σημεῖωμα καὶ τὸ κατέπιεν, ἀλλ' ἢ κατὰποσις ὑπῆρξεν ὀδυνηρὰ· πῶς καὶ ἠύχθη τότε νὰ εἶχεν ὀλίγον γάλα.

Αἰφνιδίως ἐπαρουσιάσθη ὁ φίλος του Νιρβάνας, ὅστις τοῦ ἔτεινε ποτήριον γάλακτος λέγων:

—Ἀλέξανδρε, τόσον καιρὸν ἐπιμένω ὅτι, ἐὰν ἔπινες τακτικώτερα γάλα, θὰ ὠφελεῖσο πολὺ, ἀλλ' ἐσὺ μὲ πείσμα μου ἀντιτάσσεις τὴν ἀπαράγραπτον τήρησιν τῆς νηστείας. Σήμερα, ὅμως, ἡμπορεῖς ἀνενόχως νὰ καταλύσῃς, καθ' ὅτι διανύομεν τὸ Δωδεκαήμερο.

Ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἔλαβε τὸ ποτήριον, ἀλλ' ὅταν τὸ ἔφευρεν εἰς τὰ χεῖλη του διεπίστωσεν ὅτι περιεῖχε διάλυμα ἀσβέστου, ταυτοχρόνως δὲ εἶδεν ὅτι ὁ Νιρβάνας διελύετο ὡς καπνός! Τοῦ Ἀχιτόφελ βουλαί, παίγνια τοῦ Βεελζεβούλ!

Τοῦτο τὸν ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὴν ὑπόψιαν ὅτι ἐνδεχομένως καὶ ὁ Γαβριηλίδης ἤθελε νὰ τὸν βάλῃ εἰς πειρασμόν. Ἐνθυμήθη ὅτι πρὸ ἐτῶν τοῦ ἐξήτησεν ἀσυστόλως νὰ μεταφράσῃ, Μεγαλοβδομαδιάτικα κιόλας, τὰ πρακτικὰ τῆς διεξαγομένης τότε ἐν Ἀγγλίᾳ δίκης θηλυπρεποῦς καὶ ἀκολάστου συγγραφέως. Εἶχε μετὰ βδελυγμίας ἀρνηθῆ, ἀλλ' εἰς τῶν συντακτῶν τῆς «Ἀκροπόλεως» εὔρε τὴν εὐκαιρίαν, ὡς ἐνόμισε, νὰ τοῦ δώσῃ, ἀκαίρως καὶ δωρεάν, μάθημα φιλοχριστίας εἰπών:

—Κύριε Ἀλέξανδρε, δὲν κινδυνεύετε νὰ φανῆτε ἀντίχριστος, ὅταν ἀντιμετωπίζετε μὲ τόσην ἀνεπιείκειαν τὰς ἀδυναμίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων;

Τρομερῶς ἐξερράγη τότε αὐτὸς καὶ ἀνταπέδωσεν ἐντόκως τὴν διδαχὴν, τοῦ ἔκοψε δὲ τὴν καλημέραν ἐπὶ ὀλόκληρον μῆνα διὰ τὸ βλάσφημον «ἀντίχριστος».

Θὰ ἐπήγαινε, λοιπόν, εἰς συνάντησιν τοῦ Γαβριηλίδου, πλὴν ὅμως «κουμπωμένος».

Καθ' ὁδὸν εὗρέθη ἀντίπρωρος πρὸς τὸν συμπατριώτην του Λαλειῆτρον, ὅστις τὸν ἐχαίρετίσεν μὲ ἄκραν διαχυτικότητα καὶ μὲ ἴσην ἀφελότητα τὸν ἐκάλεσε νὰ καθίσωσιν εἰς παρακείμενον ζαχαροπλαστεῖον, ὀνομαστὸν διὰ τοὺς λουκουμάδες του. Ἐδέχθη τὴν πρόσκλησιν, εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸ κατάστημα καὶ ὁ Λαλειῆτρος παρήγγειλε δυὸ μερίδας. Ἦσαν λουκουμάδες ἐξαίρετοι καὶ τοὺς ἐτίμησαν δεόντως. Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐποτίσθη μέχρις ὀνύχων ἀπὸ τὴν ἠδύτητά των, ὅλην ἄρωμα!

—Εὐχαριστῶ διὰ τὸ κέρασμα· μὲ ἔκαμες νὰ θυμηθῶ τὴν πατρίδα, εἶπεν εἰς τὸν Λαλειῆτρον.

—Ἐχω ὅμως ἓνα παράπονον, ἀπήντησεν, ἀπροσδοκῆτως ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ συστολῆς ἐκεῖνος

Θορυβηθεὶς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης τὸν ἠρώτησεν ἂν τυχὸν τοῦ ὀφείλει χρήματα καὶ τὸ ἐλησμόνησεν· ἂν περὶ αὐτοῦ πρόκειται, νὰ μὴ ἀνησυχῆ, θὰ λάβῃ σήμερα καλὴν παραγγελίαν καὶ προκαταβολήν, θὰ τὸν ἐξοφλήσῃ ἀμέσως. Πάσχων νὰ τὸν πείσῃ ἡσθάνετο νὰ ἀναπέμπωνται ἐκ τοῦ στομάχου εἰς τὸ στόμα οἱ λουκουμάδες ὡς γεῦσιν χολῆς.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος συνεστάλη ἔτι περισσότερον, ὅταν ὡς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐπῆρε τὸν ἀνασασμόν του, ἐμορμύρισεν ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἔτυχε νὰ ἔχουν χρηματικὰς δοσοληψίας, καὶ πῶς εἶχε σκεφθῆ αὐτὰ τὰ περὶ χρέους; Ἄλλης λογῆς ἦτον τὸ παράπονό του, ὅτι δηλαδὴ τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ Γιάννη τ' Μοθωνιοῦ, ὅπου ἐγύρισε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀμερικὴ καὶ ἐπανδρεύθη τῆ σασιτικιά του, τὸ Μελαχρῶ τῆς Κουμπουρτζίνας, ὁ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος τὴν εἶχε βάλει στὸ χαρτί, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἰδικήν του, ὅπου καὶ αὐτὸς ἐβασανίσθη πέντε χρόνια στὴν Ἀλάσκα κ' ἐτυφλώθη, καὶ ἐπέστρεψε στὴ Σκιάθον θαυματουργὰ θεραπευμένος, αὐτὴν λοιπὸν τὴν ἐλησμόνησεν.

Ἐξέφραξε τὸ παράπονον μὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν κάτω νεύουσαν, καὶ ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης μειδιῶν τοῦ ὑπενθύμισεν ὅτι ὁ ἐξάδελφός του, ὁ Ἀλέκος, εἶχεν ἀφηγηθῆ εἰς ὑπερεβδομήκοντα σελίδας τὸν νόστον του, ἄρα ἀδίκως παρεπονεῖτο, κινδυνεύων οὕτω νὰ θεωρηθῆ ἀχάριστος. Ὁ Λαλειῆτρος ἠκροῶτο ταπεινῶς, ἐντούτοις εὔρε τὸ θάρρος ν' ἀπαντήσῃ:

—Ἐχεις δίκιο, κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρε, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ μὴν τὸ πῶ· ἐσὺ θὰ τὴν ἔγραφες νοστιμώτερα. Ἰστώσο, σὲ παρακαλῶ, νὰ μὴν κάνῃς λόγο στὸν ἐξάδελφό σου γιὰ τὴν κουβέντα μας γιατί νὰ τὸν πικράνω;

Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἠσθάνθη ὑποχωροῦσαν τὴν πικρότητα τῆς γεύσεώς του. «Ἴδου ὅτι καὶ ὁ Λαλειῆτρος ἔχει, καθὼς λέγουν, προτιμήσεις ὕφους!» εἶπεν ἐνδομύχως καὶ παρευθὺς ἄκανθα οἰήσεως ἀνεφύη ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ του καὶ ἦτο εἰς τὴν ἀκμὴν νὰ κομπάσῃ «Ἀλέκο, σέ...», ἀλλὰ συνῆλθε πάραυτα καὶ ἀνελογίσθη τὸ ἀποστολικὸν **Τί ἔχεις, ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες; εἰδὲ καὶ ἔλαβες, τί καυχᾶσαι ὡς μὴ λαβὼν;**

Ἔτεινε τὴν χεῖρα του πρὸς τὸν Λαλειῆτρον.

—Ὁραῖοι οἱ λουκουμάδες! Θὰ εἰπῶ εἰς τὸν Μωραϊτίδην ὅτι ἐκεῖνον ἠθέλες νὰ κεράσῃς, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸν εὔρες καὶ ἐπωφελήθην ἐγώ...

Ἀπεχωρίσθησαν, καὶ ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐτάχυνε τὸ βῆμα. Ὅταν ἔφθασεν εἰς τὴν «Ἀκρόπολιν», ὁ Γαβριηλίδης τὸν ὑπεδέχθη μὲ πλαστὴν ἀγανάκτησιν:

—Ἀλέξανδρε, εἶπεν, ἐχάθηκαν τὰ μόνιπα; Ἄς ἔπαιρνες ἓνα, ἀδελφέ, κι ἄς τὸ ἐχρέωνες εἰς ἐμέ! Βουλιάζουμε, Ἀλέξανδρε!

Τοῦ ἀνεκοίνωσεν ὅτι ἡ ἐφημερὶς εἶχε κατακλυσθῆ ἀπὸ χεῖμαρρον ἐπιστολῶν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῶν ὁμογενῶν τῆς ἀλλοδαπῆς. Διεμαρτύροντο οἱ ἀναγνώσται διὰ τὴν ἀπουσίαν ἐορτίου διηγήματός του εἰς τὸ χριστουγεννιάτικον καὶ πρωτοχρονιάτικον φύλλον καὶ διεμήνουν ὅτι ἂν καὶ ἡ ἔκδοσις τῶν Θεοφανείων στερῆται παπαδιαμαντικοῦ ἀφηγήματος, δὲν θὰ ἠγόραζον τὴν ἐφημερίδα καὶ ἄς κρατήσῃ ὁ κύριος διευθυντὴς τὰς ἐπιστροφὰς τῶν φύλλων διὰ νὰ τυλίγῃ τὸ προσφάγι του ἢ νὰ ψήνῃ ρέγγες!

—Ἀκοῦς, Ἀλέξανδρε, ἐπέφερε μὲ βεβιασμένον πῶς γέλωτα, ἀκοῦς τὰ ἀπειλητικὰ αἰτήματα τοῦ ἀναγνωστικοῦ συνδικάτου; Κακὴν δημοκρατίαν τοὺς ἐδιδάξαμεν, φίλτατε, ἀλλὰ παρέλκει τώρα πᾶσα συζήτησις περὶ τοῦ ἀρίστου τῶν πολιτευμάτων. Λοιπὸν, ἔχομεν τέσσαρας ἡμέρας ἕως τὰ Φῶτα, φρόντισε, Ἀλέξανδρε τὴν Παραμονὴν τὸ πρῶν, νὰ μοῦ παραδώσῃς τὸ διήγημα.

—Μόνον ἂν ἐπήγαινα στὴν Σκιάθον, ὑπέλαβεν ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, θὰ ἠμποροῦσα, ἴσως, νὰ τὸ γράψω.

—Λοιπὸν, τί περιμένεις; ἐβρυχήθη ὁ Γαβριηλίδης. Ναυλὼν πλοῖον καὶ ἀποπλέεις εἰς τρεῖς ὥρας, μόλις φθάσῃς στρώνεσαι στὸ γράψιμο, οὔτε κεφάλι θὰ σηκώσῃς, Ἀλέξανδρε, οὔτε νερὸ θὰ πιῇς, οὔτε λέξις θὰ ἀπευθύνης εἰς ἄλλον καὶ τὴν Παραμονὴν τηλεγραφεῖς τὸ διήγημα.

—Ἀλλὰ ἐνδέχεται λόγῳ τοῦ καιροῦ νὰ μὴ λειτουργᾷ ἡ τηλεγραφικὴ γραμμὴ, εἶπεν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος.

—Τότε πλέεις εἰς Χαλκίδα καὶ τηλεγραφεῖς ἐκεῖθεν, καὶ δὲν ἀναχωρεῖς εἰς τρεῖς ὥρας ἀλλὰ τώρα ἀμέσως, καὶ λάβε τὸ ἡμισυ τῆς ἀμοιβῆς, εἶπεν ἐν ἐξάψει ὁ Γαβριηλίδης καὶ τοῦ ἐνεχείρισε φάκελον.

Ἀνάρπαστοι κατέβησαν εἰς Πειραιᾶ, ὁ Γαβριηλίδης ἐναύλωσε ταχύπλουν, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐπεβιβάσθη, καὶ τὸ σκάφος ἀπέπλευσεν. Ἐκ πείσματος τοῦ πλοιάρχου δὲν εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸν Εὐβοϊκόν, τοῦ ὁποῖου ὁ διάπλους εἶναι καταφανῶς ὀλιγότερον τρικυμιώδης ἀπὸ τὴν θαλασσίαν ὁδόν, τὴν διὰ τοῦ Αἰγαίου. Ἀνελπίστως ἐπέρασαν τὰ ἐπικίνδυνα τοῦ Καφηρέως ἄνευ ἰσχυρῶν κλυδωνισμῶν, ἀργότερα ὁμοῦς ὁ καιρὸς ἤρχισε νὰ χειροτερεύῃ καὶ ὅταν πλέον προσήγγιζαν εἰς τὴν Σκύρον ἦτο ξίδι μοναχό, θάλασσα κιαμέτ!

Ὁ καπετάνιος ἠγκυροβόλησε στὲς Τρεῖς Μπουῦκες, τὸν ἀσφαλέστατον λιμένα τῆς νήσου, καὶ ἐδήλωσεν ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται «νὰ σηκώσῃ ἄγκυραν, ἂν δὲν ξανοίξῃ». Εἰς μάτην διεμαρτυρήθη ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, λέγων ὅτι

τὸ πλοῖον εἶχεν ἀδρῶς ναυλωθῆ καὶ ὁ πλοίαρχος ὄφειλε νὰ κάμῃ νόμο-τρόπο, ὥστε αὔριον, τὸ βραδύτερον, νὰ εὐρίσκωνται εἰς τὴν Σκιάθον. Ἐκεῖνος ἀντέτεινε ὅτι καμμία ναύλωσις δὲν εἶναι ὑπερτέρα τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ σκάφους, καὶ ἄς μὴ λησιμονῇ ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος ἔχει περιγράψει εἰς διήγημά του ἀβαριάς ἀναγκαίας πρὸς ἀποφυγὴν καταποντισμοῦ σκάφους καὶ ψυχῶν.

Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐκλείσθη εἰς τὸν θαλαμίσκον του. Ἦτο ἡ τετάρτη πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς ἡμέρα. Ἐξάπλωσεν εἰς

τὴν κουκέταν του καὶ ἐσυλλογιζέτο ὅτι, ἂν δὲν «ἐπεφτε ὁ καιρὸς» ἐκινδύνευε νὰ μὴ γράψῃ τὸ διήγημα καί, τὸ χειρότερον, νὰ χάσῃ τὰς Ὁρας τῶν Θεοφανίων. Ἄλλ' ἂν ἐνέδωσεν εἰς τὴν παράλογον ἀπαίτησιν τοῦ Γαβριηλίδου, τὸ ἔκαμεν ἐπὶ τῇ προσδοκίᾳ τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τῶν Ὁρῶν ἐν τῇ προσφιλέστατῃ νήσῳ. Ὅχι, δὲν θὰ ἐπέτρεπεν ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μὴ τὰς συμψάλῃ μὲ τὸν κυρ-Ἀλεξανδρῆν, τὸν ψάλτην τοῦ ναοῦ τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν!

ἤρχισε νὰ αἰσθάνεται θέρημν, καὶ μικρὸν ῥίγος τὸν διεπέρασεν. Ἐσκεπάσθη καλῶς καὶ ἐσκέπτετο πλέον ὅτι ἡ ἐσπευσμένη ἀναχώρησις δὲν τοῦ ἐπέτρεψε νὰ μηνύσῃ εἰς τὸν ἐξάδελφον Ἀλέκον νὰ μὴ λείψῃ ἐκεῖνος κἂν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιον Ἐλισσαῖον. Ἄλλ' ἐνεφανίσθη τότε ὁμιλος ἐνοριτῶν καί, κυρίως, ἐνοριτισσῶν τοῦ ναυδρίου, οἱ ὅποιοι ἐπρόβαλαν τὴν ἀπαίτησιν νὰ ἐπιστρέψῃ διὰ νὰ ψάλῃ αὐτὸς τὰς Ὁρας. Ἄλλως, ἠπεύλουν, θὰ ἐκκλησιάζοντο ἄλλοῦ.

Τοὺς ἐνουθέτησε καὶ τοὺς ἐξώρρισε νὰ μὴ ἐκπειράζωσι Κύριον τὸν Θεόν των, εἰς τὰ θεῖα δὲν χωροῦν ἐκβιασμοί, καὶ πῶς ἦτον δυνατὸν νὰ εὐρεθῇ πάλιν εἰς Ἀθήνας ἄνευ





θαύματος; Ἀπεδείχθησαν ὅμως «ἀγύριστα κεφάλια», καὶ ἐκεῖνος, διὰ νὰ μὴ κολασθῶσιν, ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ κατάστρωμα καὶ ἐρρίφθη εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν. Συντόνως κολυμβῶν ἔφθασεν αἰσίως εἰς Πειραιᾶ καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀνήλθε διάβροχος εἰς Ἀθήνας καὶ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸν θαλπερὸν ναῖσκον, καθ' ἣν στιγμήν ὁ τριτεξάδελφός του ἠτομάζετο νὰ ψάλλῃ τὸ ἕξαισίον καὶ ἀθάνατον Δοξαστικὸν τῆς Ἐνάτης Ὁρας. Θεωρῶν ὅμως, ἄνευ ἐκπλήξεως, εἰσερχόμενον τὸν καταστάζοντα Παπαδιαμάντη τοῦ λέγει φυσικότητα:

— Ἀλέξανδρε, ἰδικόν σου τὸ Δοξαστικόν!

Ἡσθάνθη φρικίασιν εὐφροσύνης καὶ ἐξύπνησε καὶ ἐνόησεν ὅτι δὲν θὰ προλάβῃ τὰς Ὁρας τῶν Φώτων. Ἡ ἀδελφή του Κυρατσούλα, ποὺ εἶχε τὴν ἔγνοια του, τὸν ἠρώτησεν, ἐν συνοχῇ καρδίας:

— Τί θέλεις, Ἀλέξανδρε; Ἀφυπνίσθησαν σχεδὸν ἔντρομοι καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι, ὅπου ἐλαγοκομῶντο εἰς τὴν διπλανὴν κάμαρην.

— Ἡσυχάσατε!, εἶπε πρᾶεως, θὰ ψάλλω τὸ Δοξαστικόν.

Εἶτα μὲ τρέμουσας φωνήν, ὡς πτηνὸν ἀποδημητικὸν ἀπερχόμενον εἰς θερμοτέρους οὐρανοὺς, ἐμινύρισε τὸ πανηγυρικὸν ᾄσμα:

**— Τὴν χεῖρά σου τὴν ἀψαμένην τὴν ἀκήρατον κορυφήν τοῦ Δεσπότου... ἔπαρον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πρὸς αὐτὸν Βαπτιστά...**

Καὶ βλέπων ὅτι ὁ μέγιστος ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν τὸν ἐπεσκίαζεν ἤδη διὰ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ τῶν περὺγων του, ἔκλινε πρὸς τὴν πλευρὰν τῆς καρδίας καὶ ἀπέπτη...



Ὅ καθένας θὰ πρέπει νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν τέχνην ἢ τὸ ἐπάγγελμά του. Ὁ στρατηγὸς νὰ συνεχίσῃ νὰ διοικῇ, ὁ ἀγρότης νὰ καλλιεργῇ τὴ γῆν, ὁ τεχνίτης νὰ ἐξασκῇ τὴν τέχνην του. Καὶ θὰ σὰς πῶ γιατί. Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦμε στὴν ἔρημο, νὰ τρῶμε ἀνούσια τροφήν, νὰ ἀλλάξουμε τὰ ἐνδύματά μας, νὰ ἀδιαφορήσουμε γιὰ τὴν υγείαν μας, ἢ νὰ κάνουμε ὀτιδήποτε ἀνόητο, ἐπειδὴ μπορούμε νὰ μείνουμε στὰ σπίτια μας χωρὶς νὰ ἀποχωρισθοῦμε τὰ πράγματά μας, καὶ νὰ ἐξασκοῦμε ταυτόχρονα τὴν συνεχὴν προσευχήν.

**Ἅγιος Νικόλαος ὁ Καβάσιλας**

Ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ κρίνεται ἄξια ν' ἀπολαύσῃ τὴν κοινωνίαν μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς λάμπει πάνω της μὲ τὴν ὁμορφίαν τῆς ἁφατῆς δόξας Του, ἐτοιμάζοντάς της γιὰ θρόνον καὶ κατοικίαν δικήν Του, γίνεται ὅλη φῶς, ὅλη πρόσωπο, ὅλη μάτια· καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει μέρος σ' αὐτὴν ποὺ νὰ μὴν εἶναι γεμάτο ἀπὸ τὰ πνευματικὰ μάτια τοῦ Φωτός.

**Ἅγιος Μακάριος ὁ Αἰγύπτιος**

## Ἕνας Ἀσκητὴς Ἐπίσκοπος

**Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος (+2005)**

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου ἐναλλακτικοῦ ραδιοφώνου.



Ὁ Μακαριστὸς Σεβασμιότατος Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος Κόμπος γεννήθηκε τὸ 1920 στὸ Ἄργος τῆς Ἀργολίδος ἀπὸ φτωχοὺς καὶ εὐσεβεῖς γονεῖς. Ἦταν ἀπόφοιτος τῆς Μαρασλείου Παιδαγωγικῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν καὶ τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν.

Κάτοχος μεγάλης θεολογικῆς παιδείας, συμπλήρωσε τῆς σπουδῆς του στὰ Πανεπιστήμια Ὁξφόρδης καὶ Παρισίων. Διετέλεσε καθηγητὴς καὶ Διευθυντὴς Ἱερατικῶν Σχολῶν.

Κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1971-74 ὑπηρέτησε ὡς ἱεροκέρυκα εἰς τὴν Ἱερὰν Μητρόπολιν Αἰτωλίας καὶ Ἀκαρνανίας. Ἐχειροτονήθη διάκονος στὶς 03.12.1967, πρεσβύτερος δὲ στὶς 04.12.1967 καὶ τὴν 23ην Μαΐου 1974 ἐξελέγη Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης. Ἐξέδωσε ἀξιόλογα ἐπιστημονικὰ ἔργα. Δημοσίευσε βιβλιοκρισίας καὶ ἄρθρα ἐποικοδομητικὰ εἰς διάφορα περιοδικὰ. Εκοιμήθη ἐν Κυρίῳ τῇ 17/12/2005.

† † †

**Ὁ «Ἀσκητὴς τῆς Πόλης»**

**ποὺ δὲν εἶχε... Λιμουζίνα,**

**ποὺ ἔπαιρνε τὸ Λεωφορεῖο καὶ τὸ Τρόλεϊ!**

«Δὲν μὲ πειράζει ποὺ δὲν ἔχω αὐτοκίνητο, ὅπως οἱ ἄλλοι μητροπολίτες, οὔτε ποὺ μὲ ἀποκαλοῦν δεσπότη τῶν τρόλεϊ. Μπορεῖ νὰ κουράζομαι ἀλλὰ, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἀκόμη κρατιέμαι γερὰ στὰ πόδια μου».

Τὸν χαρακτηρίζουν «ἀσκητὴ τῆς πόλης». Μαγειρεῖ μόνος του, καθαρίζει ὁ ἴδιος τὸ μητροπολιτικὸ σπίτι, δὲν χρησιμοποιεῖ κινητὸ τηλέφωνο, ἐνῶ σπάνια μιλά καὶ στὸ σταθερό. Ἐπισκέπτεται τὴν Ἀθήνα γιὰ νὰ συμμετάσχει στὶς Συνόδους χρησιμοποιώντας... τὸ λεωφορεῖο τοῦ ΚΤΕΛ, κάνει περιοδείες στὰ «κουτσοχώρια» μὲ τὰ πόδια καὶ ἔχει ξεχάσει πῶς εἶναι τὰ πλούσια ἀρχιερατικὰ ἄμφια. «Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἕνας καλόγερος», ἐπιμένει ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὁ 84χρονος Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος ξεχωρίζει γιὰ τὴν λιτὴ καὶ ταπεινὴ ζωὴ ποὺ κάνει.

«Τί νὰ τὸ κάνει ἕνας καλόγερος τὸ κινητό, ἀφήστε ποὺ βλάπτει κιόλας», ἀπαντᾷ μὲ χαμόγελο στὴν παρατήρηση τῶν «ΝΕΩΝ», ὅτι δὲν ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν τεχνολογία. «Ἐγὼ εἶχα γέροντα τὸν Μητροπολίτη Κορινθίας, ποὺ πῆγε μετὰ στὴν Ἀμερική. Αὐτὸς μοῦ εἶχε πεῖ ὅτι ὁ ἐπίσκοπος εἶναι καλόγερος καὶ ἔτσι πρέπει νὰ εἶναι». Ὅταν καλεῖται νὰ σχολιάσει τὸ ὅτι δὲν συμβαίνει τὸ ἴδιο μὲ ἄλλους μητροπολίτες, περιορίζεται νὰ πεῖ πὼς «πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ἀκτιμοσύνη, καρτερία καὶ παρθενία, αὐτὲς εἶναι οἱ ἀρετὲς τοῦ μοναχοῦ».

### «Ἅγιος Ἄνθρωπος»

Οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Σιάτιστας κάνουν λόγο γιὰ «ἅγιο ἄνθρωπο», ποὺ εἶναι κλειστός, δὲν δίνει δικαιώματα καὶ ζεῖ ὅπως οἱ καλόγεροι. Μερικοὶ ὑποστηρίζουν ὅτι ἔχει περιορισμένη παρουσία στὰ κοινά, τονίζοντας πάντως ὅτι ἀποτελεῖ «στάση ζωῆς» γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο.

«Εἶναι κάτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ καλός. Δὲν εἶναι διακοσμητικός, ἀρνεῖται τὰ λοῦσα καὶ τὶς πολυτέλειες, οὔτε αὐτοκίνητο δὲν ἔχει», εἶπε ὁ κ. Γιώργος Ρᾶμος, ποὺ διατηρεῖ περίπτερο στὴ Σιάτιστα. «Τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει αὐτὸς ὁ μητροπολίτης μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους, ποὺ ἔχουν καταθέσεις δισεκατομμυρίων», συμπληρώνει ὁ κ. Νίκος Τζάλας.

Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης ἀπαντᾷ μὲ χαμόγελο σὲ ὅλα. Ὅταν ὅμως καλεῖται νὰ σχολιάσει τὰ σκάνδαλα ποὺ συνταράσσουν τὸ τελευταῖο διάστημα τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος, παίρνει ἀποστάσεις. «Δὲν θὰ κρίνω κανέναν, ἐγὼ εἶμαι πιδ ἁμαρτωλὸς ἀπ' ὅλους, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ πῶ τίποτε. Ἡ Ἱεραρχία ἀποφάσισε νὰ γίνεῖ κάθαρση», λέει καὶ κλείνει τὸ θέμα.

### «Εὐτυχῶς Ἔχουμε Δωρεές»

Ὅσο γιὰ τὶς περιουσίες τῶν Μητροπόλεων, ὁ ἴδιος ἀποκαλύπτει, χωρὶς μάλιστα νὰ ἐρωτηθεῖ, ὅτι τὰ ἐτήσια ἔσοδα ἀπὸ τοὺς ναοὺς δὲν ὑπερβαίνουν τὶς τέσσερις χιλιάδες εὐρῶ. «Εὐτυχῶς ἔχουμε καὶ κάποιες δωρεές καὶ φροντίζουμε τὰ παιδιὰ νὰ σπουδάσουν: μὲ πενταροδεκάρες καὶ φραγκοδίφραγκα χτίσαμε μοναστήρια», λέει. Ἡ Μητρόπολη Σιατίστης πληρώνει τὸ ἐνοίκιο δυὸ φοιτητῶν στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ἐνῶ χορηγεῖ μηνιαῖο βοήθημα 100 εὐρῶ σὲ φοιτητὲς ποὺ κατάγονται ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ.

Εἶναι πρόθυμος νὰ ξεναγήσει στὰ διαμερίσματα τῆς Μητροπόλεως, ἐνῶ παράλληλα ἱκανοποιεῖ ὅλα τὰ

αἰτήματα ὑπαλλήλων καὶ μοναχῶν. Ἡ μοναχὴ Εἰρήνη, ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι τῆς Κοίμησης τῆς Θεοτόκου, ποὺ ἐπισκεφθῆκε τὴ Μητρόπολη γιὰ δουλειὲς τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ, λέει: «Δὲν τὸν βλέπετε, πόσο ταπεινὸς εἶναι; Ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ ράσα του τὰ πλένει ὁ ἴδιος: δὲν ἀφήνει κανέναν νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει».

### «Εἶναι κατ' Οὐσίαν Ἀσκητής...»

«Εἶναι κατ' οὐσίαν ἀσκητής, ζεῖ γι' αὐτὸ ποὺ τάχθηκε, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἐπάγγελμα ἀλλὰ λειτουργημα», ὑποστήριξε ὁ ὑπάλληλος τῆς Μητροπόλεως κ. Ζήσης Γούτας. Ὁ Μητροπολίτης ἀσχολεῖται καὶ μὲ τὶς δουλειές, ἐξυπηρετώντας τὸν κόσμο ποὺ ἔρχεται νὰ τὸν συναντήσει. «Δὲν ἀρνεῖται σὲ κανέναν νὰ ἀσχοληθεῖ μὲ τὸ πρόβλημά του».

Ἡ μεγάλη ἀγάπη του εἶναι τὰ «κουτσοχώρια», ὅπως χαρακτηρίζει ὁ ἴδιος, τὰ ὄρεινὰ χωριά τῆς περιφέρειάς του, αὐτὰ τῶν 20 καὶ 30 κατοίκων. «Πήγαινα σὲ ἕνα χωριὸ μὲ στρατιωτικὸ αὐτοκίνητο καὶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τὰ περπατοῦσα μὲ τὰ πόδια». Αἰσθάνεται ἀκμαῖος γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει τὶς περιοδείες του σὲ ὅλες τὶς ἐνορίες τῆς Μητροπόλεως, παρὰ τὰ χρόνια του. «Ὅταν ὕστερα ἀπὸ χρόνια δὲν θὰ μπορῶ ἄλλο, θὰ ἀποσυρθῶ στὸ μοναστήρι, ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ μου», καταλήγει.

Ἐνα παράδειγμα τῶν παράξενων ἡμερῶν μας γιὰ ὅλους μας... καὶ ἰδιαίτερα γιὰ τὸν κλῆρο μας...

Αἰωνία του η μνήμη!



Τὸ νὰ γίνεις ἀπαθὴς—μὲ τὴν Πατερικὴ καὶ ὄχι μὲ τὴ Στωικὴ ἔννοια τοῦ ὄρου—παίρνει καιρὸ καὶ θέλει σκληρὴ δουλειά, μὲ αὐστηρὴ ζωὴ, νηστεία καὶ ἀγρυπνία, προσευχή, ἰδρώτα αἵματος, ταπεινώση, τὴν καταφρόνια τοῦ κόσμου, σταύρωση, τὰ καρφιά, τὴ λόγχη στὴν πλευρά, τὸ ξύδι καὶ τὴ χολή, ἐγκατάλειψη ἀπ' τὸν καθένα, προσβολὲς ἀπὸ τρελοὺς ἀδελφοὺς συσταυρωμένους, βλαστήμιες ἀπ' τοὺς περαστικούς. Καὶ μετὰ, ἀνάστασις ἐν Κυρίῳ, τὴν ἀθάνατη ἀγιότητα τοῦ Πάσχα.

**Πρ. Θεόκλητος Διονυσιάτης**



Μὲ τὸν ἀγορευτὴν ἀσκητὴ π. Γαβριὴλ εἰς τὴν Σκήτιν Ἱ. Μονῆς Κουτλουμουσίου.

## Άπεικόνιση του Μεγάλου Αλεξάνδρου σὲ Ἐκκλησία

Συντάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Μακεδονικὸ Πρακτορεῖο Εἰδήσεων (ΜΠΕ), Τρίτη, 14 Σεπτεμβρίου 2010.

Στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀχιλλεῖου, στὸν Πεντάλοφο Κοζάνης, ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα εἶναι κατανυκτική. Μέσα στὴν κατάγραφη ἀπὸ ἀγιογραφίες ἐκκλησία, πὺν χτίστηκε τὸ 1740 καὶ ἀντέχει ἀκόμη στὸ χρόνο, μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ διαπιστώσει τὸ λόγο πὺν ὁ ναὸς αὐτὸς ἀποτελεῖ σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς τοῦ ἑλληνισμοῦ ἐπὶ αἰῶνες.

Στὸ νάρθηκά του ἀπεικονίζεται μίᾳ πολὺ οἰκείᾳ μορφῇ γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Ἕλληνες, πὺν ὅμως δὲν ἀνήκει στὸ χῶρο τῶν ἁγίων. Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν Μέγα Ἀλέξανδρο, πὺν οἱ Χιοναδίτες ζωγράφοι (ἀπὸ τοὺς Χιονάδες τῆς Κόνιτσας) συμπεριέλαβαν στὶς πλούσιες τοιχογραφίες, πὺν κοσμοῦν τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ἐξέφρασαν τὸ σεβασμὸ τοὺς σὲ μίᾳ προσωπικότητα πὺν προετοίμασε τὸ ἔργο τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ εὐαγγελίου, μέσω τῆς διάδοσης τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας καὶ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ.

«Ἡ τοιχογραφία ἔχει θέμα τὴν κόλαση, τὸν πύρινο ποταμὸ καὶ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Ἐκεῖ, ἐμφανίζονται ἱεράρχες, μάρτυρες, προφῆτες καὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ στὴ συνέχεια ἔβραιοι καὶ τύραννοι βασιλεῖς, ὅπως οἱ Πέρσες, Δαρεῖος, Κύρος καὶ Πῶρος, πὺν ἀπεικονίζονται, κρατώντας στὰ χέρια τοὺς σπαθιά. Ἀκριβῶς δίπλα τοὺς ἐμφανίζεται ἡ μορφῇ τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου, ὁ ὁποῖος νίκησε τοὺς Πέρσες βασιλεῖς. Στὰ χέρια του κρατᾷ βασιλικὸ σκήπτρο καὶ στὸ κεφάλι του φορᾷ κορῶνα. Εἶναι δὲ χαρακτηριστικὸ ὅτι, οἱ συγκεκριμένοι βασιλεῖς ἀναφέρονται στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, κάποιοι μάλιστα ἀπὸ προφῆτες», ἐπισημαίνει ὁ ζωγράφος Ἀργύρης Παφίλης.

«Τέτοιον εἶδος ἀπεικονίσεις δὲν δημιουργοῦν δογματικὸ ζήτημα, καθὼς οἱ συγκεκριμένες μορφές ἐμφανίζονται στὸν νάρθηκα τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ χωρὶς φωτοστέφανο. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ ναοῦ, πὺν βρίσκεται στὴ λίμνη τῶν Ἰωαννίνων. Ἐκεῖ, ἔχουν τοιχογραφηθεῖ οἱ μορφές ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφων, ὅπως ὁ Σωκράτης καὶ ὁ Πλάτωνας, μὲ τὸ σκεπτικὸ ὅτι ὁ καθέννας, μὲ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ διακόνησε τὸ ἔργο τῆς ἐκκλησίας, κατὰ τὰ χρόνια πὺν ἀκολούθησαν», ἐξηγεῖ ὁ μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Παῦλος.

Ὅπως ἀναφέρει χαρακτηριστικά, ἡ ἐκκλησία δὲν φοβήθηκε τέτοιες ἀπεικονίσεις, καθὼς ἀποδίδει σὲ

τέτοιες μορφές σημαντικὸ ρόλο στὸ σχέδιο τῆς Θεῆς Οἰκονομίας. «Ἡ Οἰκονομία τοῦ Θεοῦ προετοίμασε τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου μέσα ἀπὸ πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων, πὺν τυπικὰ φαίνονται νὰ εἶναι ἄσχετοι μὲ τὴν ἐκκλησία, ἀλλὰ οὐσιαστικὰ εἶναι μέσα στὰ σχέδια τοῦ Θεοῦ», προσθέτει.

Ἀντιλαμβανόμενη τὴν ἱστορικὴ σημασία τοῦ ναοῦ, ἡ νομαρχία Κοζάνης προχώρησε στὴν ὑπογραφή σύμβασης, ὕψους 215.000 εὐρώ, γιὰ τὴν ἀποπεράτωσή του, καθὼς ἤδη εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ φανερώνει τὰ σημάδια τοῦ χρόνου.

Οἱ τοιχογραφίες εἶχαν ἀρχίσει νὰ καταστρέφονται, ἡ σκεπὴ ἐπέτρεπε στὸ νερὸ νὰ κυλάει στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ του ναοῦ, ἐνῶ ἡ ὑγρασία ἔκανε ἔντονη τὴν ἐμφάνισή της. «Ἐγιναν σημαντικὲς ἐργασίες, ἀπαραίτητες γιὰ τὴ στερέωση καὶ τὴν ἀνάδειξη τοῦ μνημείου, μὲ κύριο γνώμονα τὴ διατήρηση τῆς αἰσθητικῆς του ἀξίας», ἐπισημαίνει ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τῆς ἡ ἀρχιτέκτων μηχανικὸς τοῦ ἔργου, Δήμητρα Κοψαχειλὴ καὶ ἀναφέρει ὅτι, οἱ ἐργασίες περατώθηκαν μὲ τὴν ἐποπτεία τῆς 17<sup>ης</sup> Ἐφορείας Βυζαντινῶν Ἀρχαιοτήτων Κοζάνης καὶ τὴ Διεύθυνση Τεχνικῶν Ὑπηρεσιῶν τῆς νομαρχίας Κοζάνης.

Μιλώντας γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ναοῦ, σημειώνει ὅτι στὴν ἀνατολική του ὄψη βρίσκεται ἐντοιχισμένη μίᾳ πλάκα πὺν ἀναφέρει ὅτι χτίστηκε τὸ 1740, ἐνῶ κοσμήθηκε στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς στὰ 1774, μὲ τοιχογραφίες ἀπὸ τοὺς Χιοναδίτες ζωγράφους. Ἐνδιαφέρον παρουσιάζουν τὸ ξυλόγλυπτο τέμπλο, τὰ προσκνητάρια, ὁ δεσποτικὸς θρόνος καὶ ὁ ζωγραφιστὸς ἄμβωνας. Ἡ κ. Κοψαχειλὴ δὲν παραλείπει νὰ ἀναφερθεῖ καὶ στὴ μεγάλη ἀγάπη τῶν κατοίκων γιὰ τὴ συγκεκριμένη ἐκκλησία, σὲ σημεῖο πὺν, ὅταν τὴν ἔβλεπαν νὰ καταρρέει, προσφέρονταν οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ βοηθήσουν στὶς ἐργασίες ἀποπεράτωσης.

Εἶναι πράγματι συγκινητικὴ ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ εὐλάβεια καὶ ὁ σεβασμὸς τῶν κατοίκων τῆς περιοχῆς τοῦ Πεντάλοφου στὸν ναό. Κάθε χρόνο τελεῖται λειτουργία τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς γιορτῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀχιλλεῖου.

Πέρσι, μάλιστα, ἡ Θεῆ Λειτουργία μᾶς ἐπιφύλαξε μίᾳ μεγάλη ἔκπληξη», σημειώνει ὁ μητροπολίτης Παῦλος καὶ ἐξηγεῖ: «Ὅταν πῆγα νὰ λειτουργήσω, βρήκα ἕνα ἀντιμῆνσιο τοῦ 1912, ἕνα ὕψασμα πὺν ἀπεικονίζει τὴν ἀποκαθήλωση καὶ χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ τὴν τέλεση λειτουργίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκτὸς ναοῦ. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ χρόνια, τὸ ἀντιμῆνσιο βρισκόνταν στὴ συγκεκριμένη θέση καὶ ἡ ἀνακάλυψή του ἦταν ἡ καλύτερη ἀνταμιοβὴ γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς συγκεντρωμένους.»



## Ποιός θὰ Ἐμπνεύσει;

*Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση, ἐβδομαδιαία ἑφημερίς «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», 6 Αὐγούστου, 2010.*

Στὴν ἐποχή μας ἡ ἁμαρτία ἔχει ἐξαπλωθεῖ παντοῦ. Ὁ Θεὸς ἀπουσιάζει ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν συγκινεῖ. Ὁ διάβολος κάνει κουμάντο στοὺς περισσότερους. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ ἀληθινοὶ κληρικοὶ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἠσυχάσουν. Στενοχωροῦνται γιὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν καὶ σκέφτονται τρόπους προσέλκυσης τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ περιορισμοῦ τῆς δράσης τῶν ὀργάνων τοῦ ἀντιχριστοῦ.

Τὰ ἀποτελέσματα ὡστόσο εἶναι πενιχρά. Παρόλο ποὺ στὴ μικρὴ μας πατρίδα ὑπάρχουν πάνω ἀπὸ ὀγδόντα Μητροπολίτες καὶ ἀρκετοὶ βοηθοὶ ἐπίσκοποι, δὲν ἔχει γίνει κάτι σπουδαῖο. Σὲ αὐτὸ μερίδιο εὐθύνης ἔχουν καὶ οἱ ἐφημέριοι κληρικοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι μερμινοῦν μόνο γιὰ τοὺς ἐκκλησιαζόμενους, ἐνῶ ἔχουν ξεχάσει τὸ δυσεξαρίθμητο πλῆθος τῶν λεγόμενων χριστιανῶν, ποὺ βρίσκεται ἐκτὸς τοῦ Ἰ. Ναοῦ.

Γενικὰ τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν Μητροπολιτῶν καὶ τῶν κληρικῶν δὲν φωτίζει πιά. Οὔτε καὶ ἡ Ἱ. Σύνοδος γίνεται σεβαστή. Παρατηρεῖται παντοῦ μιὰ ἁμαρτωλὴ ἐκκοσμίκευση καὶ ἕνας ἀπαράδεκτος συμβιβασμός. τὸ ἦθος τῶν κληρικῶν εἶναι ὑποβαθμισμένο. Οἱ ἀποφάσεις τῆς Συνόδου δὲν οἰκοδομοῦν πάντα. Ὑπάρχουν πολλές περιπτώσεις ὅπου «οἰκονομοῦν» τὸ κοσμικὸ φρόνημα τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐκφράζουν μιὰ ἀδικαιολόγητη ἀνοχή. Θὰ ἔλεγα ὅτι ἡ Σύνοδος εἶναι ὄργανο τῶν καταφατικῶν ἀπαντήσεων. Δὲν τολμᾷ νὰ πεῖ «ὄχι», γιὰτὶ ὑπολογίζει τὸ θόρυβο, ποὺ θὰ ξεσηκώσουν οἱ δημοσιογράφοι καὶ οἱ πολιτικοί. Λείπει ἡ ἀρετὴ τῆς παρρησίας. Λείπει ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ὁμολογίας.

Ἀλήθεια, σκέφτηκε κανεὶς πόσο δειλοὶ εἶναι οἱ Μητροπολίτες μας ἀπέναντι στὸν Οἰκοθμενικὸ Πατριάρχη, ποὺ πρωτοστατεῖ στὸν Οἰκουμενισμὸ καὶ ἐξισώνει τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία μὲ τὸν Παπισμὸ καὶ Προτεσταντισμὸ;

Εἶναι πολλὰ τὰ κακῶς κείμενα στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας. Πιὸ ἐνοχλητικὴ ὅμως εἶναι ἡ ἀδράνεια γιὰ τὴ διόρθωσή τους. Δὲν ὑπάρχει τὸ ἕνα πρόσωπο, ποὺ μὲ τὴν ἀγιότητα βίου καὶ τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει ἢ καλύτερα νὰ ἐμπνεύσει τοὺς ἀξιωματούχους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἀπλὸ κληρὸ.

Στὴν συνέχεια παραθέτω μιὰ σύντομη ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου πρὸς τὸν Μέγα Ἀθανάσιο ἐπίσκοπο Ἀλεξανδρείας, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι χρήσιμη καὶ στὶς μέρες μας καθὼς ἀναφέρεται σὲ ἕναν Ἅγιο, ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει στὴ θεραπεία πολλῶν ἀρρωστημάτων, γιὰτὶ διέθετε τελειότητα, δύναμη στὶς προσευχὲς του καὶ κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία. Γράφει λοιπὸν ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος:

«Ὅσο τὰ ἀρρωστήματα τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν γίνονται βαρύτερα, τόσο περισσότερο στρεφόμεστε ὅλοι πρὸς τὴν τελειότητά σου, διότι ἔχουμε πιστέψει ὅτι μόνο μιὰ παραμυθία γιὰ τὰ δεινὰ μᾶς ἔχει μείνει, ἡ δική σου προστασία. Πράγματι ὁμοφώνως ὅλοι ὅσοι γνωρίζουν τὴν τελειότητά σου, ἔστω καὶ λίγο, εἴτε ἐξ ἀκοῆς εἴτε ἐκ προσωπικῆς συναντήσεως, πιστεύουν ὅτι ἐσὺ μπορεῖς νὰ μᾶς διασώσεις ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν τρικυμία καὶ λόγω τῆς δύναμης τῶν προσευχῶν σου καὶ λόγω τῆς ἰκανότητάς σου νὰ δείχνεις τὰ καλύτερα στὶς δύσκολες περιστάσεις. Γι' αὐτὸ μὴ παύεις νὰ προσεύχεσαι ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν μας καὶ νὰ μᾶς διεγείρεις μὲ τὰ γράμματα. Ἐάν γνώριζες πόση εἶναι ἡ ὠφέλεια ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα, δὲν θὰ ἄφηγες καμιά εὐκαιρία νὰ μᾶς γράφεις. Ἐάν δὲ ἀξιωθοῦμε, μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν προσευχῶν σου, νὰ σὲ δοῦμε καὶ νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὰ ἀγαθὰ σου καὶ νὰ προσθέσουμε στὴν ἱστορία τῆς ζωῆς μας τὴ συνάντησή μὲ τὴν πραγματικὰ μεγάλη καὶ ἀποστολικὴ σου ψυχὴ, θὰ θεωρήσουμε ὅτι λάβαμε παραμυθία ἀπὸ τὴν φιλάνθρωπία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀντίρροπο γιὰ ὅλες τὶς θλίψεις, ποὺ δοκιμάσαμε στὴ ζωὴ μας».

Μακάρι νὰ βρεθεῖ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἕνα πρόσωπο, μὲ τὶς ἀρετὲς τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου, γιὰ νὰ στηρίξει τοὺς κληρικοὺς καὶ λαϊκοὺς στὶς δύσκολες μέρες ποὺ περνᾶμε.



Ἐπιπλέον ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν Κύριον καὶ μετὰ δακρύων ζητῶ Αὐτόν. Πῶς νὰ μὴ Σὲ ζητῶ; Σὺ πρῶτος μὲ ἐζήτησες καὶ ἔδωκας εἰς ἐμὲ νὰ γευθῶ τῆς γλυκύτητος τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Ἁγίου καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Σὲ ἠγάπησεν ἕως τέλους. Τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον τῆς ζωῆς μου εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον, ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐγνώρισε τὸν Κύριον καὶ τοῦτο ἔμαθον ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ὅτι πολὺ ἀγαπᾷ ἡμᾶς ὁ Κύριος.

Τώρα ἐγήρασα καὶ ἐτοιμάζομαι διὰ τὸν θάνατον καὶ χάριν τοῦ λαοῦ γράφω τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ὁ ἀδελφοί μου, πίπτω εἰς τὰ γόνατα καὶ παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς: Πιστεῦτε εἰς τὸν Θεόν, πιστεῦτε ὅτι ὑπάρχει τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα. Αὐτὸ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς ὅλας τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν καὶ εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν μου.

Εἶμαι μεγάλως ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ ὅμως εἶδα τὴν ἄμετρον ἀγάπην καὶ τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ. Τὸ ἰλαρὸν καὶ πρᾶον βλέμμα τοῦ Κυρίου ἔθελε τὴν ψυχὴν μου.

Ὁ! Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου! Δὲν ἔχω δυνάμεις νὰ περιγράψω αὐτήν. Διότι εἶναι ἀπείρως μεγάλη καὶ θαυμαστή. Δὲν δύναμαι νὰ Σὲ λησμονήσω. Σε νοσταλγεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Κύριε, καὶ μὲ δάκρυα Σὲ ζητῶ...

«**Ἡ Ἀγάπη Πάντοτε Ἐλπίζει, Ὁ Γέρον Σιλουανὸς**»  
**Ἄρχ. Σωφρονίου (Σαχάρωφ)**

## ATHEISM: THE UNFORTUNATE BOAST OF OUR DAYS

By Photios Kontoglou, from the Greek Orthodox magazine "Orthodox Philotheos Martyrdom," Orthodox Kypseli publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

**A**theism! A great title and boast of the contemporary man. Whoever receives it (to receive it you only need to be tonsured as a "monk" of the godless and the faithless) appears to others as wise, even though he is illiterate; serious, even though he is ridiculous; official, even though he is insignificant; important, even though he is unimportant; he even appears as a scientist even though he is incompetent.

I am not referring to the person who truly wishes to believe but cannot, even if the deep rooted reason of unbelief is always human pride, this viper that hides so cunningly in man, the viper that man cannot understand. Whatever it may be, the people who truly struggle and fight against their faithless self have our deepest sympathy. For them we, who believe, beg God to help them believe as He did to the father with his sick child, by begging Christ to heal him. And He replied *if you believe, everything is possible to the believer*. And the father cried loudly and with tears replied, *I believe Lord. Help me in my little faith*.

The unbelievers about whom we refer in this article are not so. They are the type of people that have never cried with pain and contrition to open the closed door, the door of repentance, as that tormented father did. Most importantly, they have neither been moved nor felt any bitterness from their unbelief; they simply refuse to assume any responsibility or blame. All the blame is God's who does not appear to them to tell them, "Come, poke me, touch me, talk to me as you talk between yourselves, analyze me with your chemistry, dissect me with your anatomy blades, weigh me, measure me, satisfy your faithless feelings, and satiate your insatiable logic."

These self-appointed unbelievers, when they show off their "bright minds," pumped up by airs of pride and the cunning agility of their brains, are unable to comprehend how silly and narrow-minded they appear to those who believe. To believe, they demand certain proofs that make the believer pity them for the limited view they have on the spirit and spiritual matters.

The believer is well aware how far the pondering of the unbeliever can get, for he too as a person has the same logic, the logic of the flesh, the worldly logic. The unbeliever, on the other hand, is unaware of what is within the believer; he is also unaware of what is beyond practical knowledge, namely the mysteries that are hidden from the eyes, and as such he decides that they simply do not exist. Thus, with his

over-exemplified foolishness, he feels smug and talks with disdain for those that are in a position to feel the deeper meaning of the world; he reminds us of an unfortunate person who is blind and deaf and yet he believes he can see and hear everything.

The believer has spiritual sight and spiritual hearing as well as some type of "super feeling." Conversely, the unbeliever is unable to comprehend that mystical world with the coarse means at his disposal, namely his bodily, physical senses and feelings. How could he touch the fine and odd messages of the world, when this poor, miserable human being does not have the aeriels that are needed to receive them?

St. Paul, in his 1<sup>st</sup> epistle to the Corinthians and in a manner known only to himself, writes about what is possible for believers and unbelievers to respectively sense and comprehend. *We preach*, he says, *the wisdom of God that is embedded in mystery and is hidden, the wisdom that God destined before time, for our glory. None of the rulers of this world (namely, the wise men of worldly wisdom) came to know this mystery. Our Lord uncovers that which according to the scriptures no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has ascended to the heart of any man, the things that God prepared, for those that love Him. God has revealed the truths through His Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit that probes everything, even the depth of God.*

Man knows the *modus operandi* of man through the spirit that is within him. Likewise, the mysteries of God are only known to the Spirit of God. We did not receive the spirit of the world (namely the philosophy and worldly knowledge); instead, we have been gifted the Spirit of God to understand all the things that He gave us. And these divine gifts are not expressed with words that human wisdom uses but words that the Holy Spirit teaches; the Holy Spirit that speaks spiritually with spiritual people.

Unfortunately, the (rational) man of worldly knowledge does not accept what is spoken by the Spirit of God, because he believes them to be "nonsense" and is thus not in a position to understand how to examine it spiritually. The spiritual man examines every person while he himself cannot be examined by anyone. Unbelief existed always. Today, however, with the atrocious vanity that consumes us, we display it as if it accords us great value.

The person who believes in God and the revealed truth is ignored as narrow minded and foolish and often becomes the brunt of all jokes. He is looked upon as "defective" by most people, especially the "high achievers," the ones the world characterizes as "successful." These are the people that make lots of money and have a "good" time, giving not a cent to anyone; they live their lives according to the saying "Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

For this reason, he who believes in God needs to be courageous and ignore the worldly honours and material interests.

Conversely, for the person that boasts that he believes in nothing:

(1) The world holds him in high regard and respect; the more the unbeliever he claims to be, the more regard and respect is shown to him by the clever and serious world. Such a man frowns upon others, offers few and heavy words, is short tempered and gruff, and is seen as a “positive man,” a “strong man.”

(2) Everything happens to him conveniently and is neither bothered nor is he worried for anything. He has no responsibilities and is pestered by nothing. “Down here” he says, “is both hell and paradise. Life is to be enjoyed, for us the clever ones. Those sleeping or drugged with the poison of God, let them die...”

Bottom line, there is no easier thing than to be an unbeliever! Just press one switch and everything comes conveniently. The devil said to Christ, “kneel and worship me and the stones will become bread.”

So says the “smart” one: “It is ridiculous for any man to sit with and waste his time with nonsense, like a bunch of old women, with gods, with hell and paradise, with lampadas, censings, with chalices, priests and nuns! And especially in our age, and at a time that science delivers men to other planets! Listen my friend, can you believe how foolish these people are?”

That is what the smart ones and the honourable ones of this world say about the believers. And as they lay down these theories, they are applauded by many, being regarded as sensible in everything because they do not “chase shadows” but are strong minded and thus succeed in everything they try.

Yes, they succeed only in the short term; unbelief is “the wide gate, and the broad road” which the unbelievers do not believe that “leads to perdition” as Christ said, but “to world prosperity.” Conversely, belief is “the narrow gate and the grief-stricken road” which the unbelievers do not believe “leads to life” but “to world unhappiness and disdain.” *Many are they that enter through the wide gate* according to our Lord, and *few are those who find the narrow gate*.

All the unbelievers say that if they witness a miracle they would believe. However, belief does not happen by force but with the involvement of the soul. For this, to all who ask for a miracle to believe it is not granted, according to our Lord’s address to the Pharisees, *This evil and adulterous generation, demands for a sign to be given it*.

However, even if an unbeliever witnesses a miracle, his pride would not allow him to believe for he fears that he may be seen as gullible and thus become disdained by his social circle.

Sometime ago I wrote five or six brief articles on the miracles that were happening in a village on the island of Mytelene, with the title “Amazing Mysteries.” Many readers were signifi-

cantly moved, especially the humble and illiterate people, *the babes of the world and the weak ones*. The clever ones, however, paid no attention to it and a few of them mocked me and publicly remarked that I write nonsense.

But *God is not mocked*. From then to now, the miracles have not ceased and progressively became more numerous and even terrifying for some. People that see them, write to me about them in detail and I compile them in a book that will be like a hot iron for the unbelieving mouths (it concerns the book “Great Sign” that was published by “Astir” publications).

During this age, discoveries are made of ancient churches with relics of those who appear as alive to simple people, in their sleep, or while they are awake, or in icons and other heirlooms. Everything could have been found and could have quickly and completely uncovered this terrible crater, that would have swept the unbelievers with its sacred lava, if there were greater means at the disposal of the poor ones who dig with fire like faith.

However, whatever the circumstances of this world may be, with God’s grace, *the healer of the sick and the replenisher of those lacking*, it will all come to a good end, in accordance with His divine will. Our indestructible faith will triumph, and this and all other blessed tasks will achieve their Godly purpose and a thundering voice will be heard to the ends of the world saying: *What god is so great as our God? You are the God who alone does great wonders*.



#### PRESIDENT OBAMA DROPS “CREATOR” FROM DECLARATION QUOTE

On Wednesday, Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010, President Obama attended the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute’s 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Awards Gala at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, Mr. Obama took the “liberty” to remove the reference to the Creator from the Declaration of Independence when he quoted a portion at a meeting of the Congressional Hispanic Congress. For those having access to the videotapes speech, the reference appears shortly past the 22-minute mark of his speech.

Mr. Obama said, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

But the actual quotation is:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

## GROUND ZERO MOSQUE CONTROVERSY MISSES BIGGER ISSUE

*By Fr. Barnabas Powell (Fr. Barnabas is the priest of St. Michael's Orthodox Church, in Pueblo, Colorado).*

As sympathetic as I am toward opponents of the proposed Ground Zero mosque, I don't think they realize how fortunate they are to be able to voice their opinions. Eastern Christians have never had such luxury. The former cradle of Christianity is now filled with mosques. Many were originally our churches, and were taken as spoils of conquest.

Consider Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom. Built in the seventh century, this magnificent temple was later visited by emissaries of the Russian Prince Vladimir, a pagan seeking a new faith. "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth," the delegates reported, adding, "we know only that God dwells there among men."

Hagia Sophia was the Patriarch of Constantinople's cathedral for a thousand years, until 1453. Then, after generations of effort, the Turks sacked the capital, extinguishing Eastern Christendom's temporal glory and throwing millions of Orthodox Christians into centuries of darkness.

When the Turkish Sultan Mohammed II battered down the doors of Hagia Sophia (where Orthodox clergy were celebrating a final Eucharist) and proclaimed the Islamic credo, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger," Hagia Sophia was transformed into a mosque. Icons that couldn't be destroyed were plastered over. Crosses were torn down, replaced with the crescent moon.

Appointing a new Patriarch, the Sultan consigned him to a ruined church out of sight. Over ensuing generations, the patriarchate was progressively dispossessed of its churches until today it huddles on the verge of extinction within a walled compound in Istanbul's red light district. This is an abiding theme of Orthodoxy's encounter with Islam: defeat followed by dispossession, prominent churches becoming prominent mosques.

I've never been to Constantinople, but I've seen a similar story in Serbia. On a tour of her spiritual treasures, I journeyed to Serbia's oldest temple—the 7<sup>th</sup> century St. Peter's Church. It wasn't converted into a mosque, but a forest of minarets now surrounds it. When the Turks conquered this land, many Orthodox families became Muslim to avoid the "tribute in blood." This was the policy that each infidel family must surrender their eldest son to be converted to Islam and enrolled in the Genitsars—the Sultan's personal bodyguard. To keep their children, the population of Serbia's ancient capital became overwhelmingly Muslim. Their ancestors worshipped Christ in St. Peter's Church, but they now heed the call of the muezzin, blasted from loudspeakers strapped around every minaret.

When I spoke with some young, nominally Orthodox Serbs about this jarring juxtaposition, and suggested an effort to

re-evangelize these lost sheep, they thought I was nuts. "You cannot convert a Muslim," they said, "They'll kill you. All we can do is stop them from building mosques. They should at least keep them out of sight."

Which brings us back to Ground Zero. Efforts to block this mosque will fail. Not only will they prove unconstitutional, they'll give Muslims an excuse to claim "persecution," and our liberal "intelligentsia" more ammunition to shoot at our cultural heritage. Counter-intuitive though it seems, perhaps this mosque is precisely what's needed to make us examine our priorities.

In the wake of 9/11, we were told to "go shopping" to demonstrate our resilience, as if our future could be assured through better consumerism. In another age, we might have taken refuge in churches rather than department stores. Perhaps what frightens us about Islam is that it inspires a level of devotion in its followers that we no longer want to be confronted with in our complacent age.

We subconsciously interpret this mosque as a symbol of our own spiritual anemia, and fear the challenge it presents. The real question is not what we're against, but what, if anything, we're for. The tragedy is not that Muslims want to worship their god, but that we've become a stranger to ours.

A crowded mosque is nowhere nearly as disturbing a symbol as is an empty church...



The contentious man, in whom there is no end of strife, is he who is not content with an initial disturbance, but goads himself to get angry for a second time. Obviously, if one gets angry and immediately comes to his senses, recognizes his mistake, and makes a prostration before the brother at whom he was angry, such a person is not called contentious. In the soul of this man, all strife is at rest, and for the present, by making a prostration to his brother, he has prevented the friendship from being destroyed, while in the future, by practicing repentance, he will come into a state of calm and tranquility.

However, one who gets angry and does not recognize his fault, but becomes still angrier, because he regrets that he did not say more than he did when he was upset, is called contentious. In his soul, strife never abates, and at the moment of strife, the agitation of his heart gives way to remembrance of wrongs, distress, and wickedness; and after this, the strife and the agitation caused by anger increase and multiply within him. That is, strife is aroused and it continues spreading until it completely dominates the hapless man and demonizes him. But may Jesus Christ, our good Master and Lord, deliver us from the lot of such people.

*From the Gerontikon*

## THE FIRST U.S. THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION

*Signed in script type by George Washington, appearing in The Massachusetts Sentinel of October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1789.*



*This historic proclamation was issued by George Washington, the Father of our Nation, during his first year as President. It sets aside Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup> as “A Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer.”*

*Signed by George Washington on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1789 and entitled “General Thanksgiving,” the decree appointed the day “to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the*

*many and signal favors of Almighty God.”*

*While there were Thanksgiving observances in America both before and after Washington’s proclamation, this represents the first to be so designated by the new national government.*

*We cannot help but wonder whether our current President would dare go against those who have made our Almighty God a “politically incorrect term” and exercise the needed courage by declaring a similar proclamation.*

† † †

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we

have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed, to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us, and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

George Washington



### THANKSGIVING PRAYER OF ST. BASIL

We bless Thee, O most high God and Lord of mercy, Who art ever doing numberless great and inscrutable things for us—glorious and wonderful; Who grantest to us sleep for rest from our infirmities, and repose from the burdens of our much toiling flesh. We thank Thee that Thou hast not destroyed us with our sins, but hast loved us forever; and though we are sunk in despair, Thou hast raised us up to glorify Thy power. Therefore, we implore Thine incomparable goodness: enlighten the eyes of our understanding and raise up our mind from the heavy sleep of indolence; open our mouth and fill it with Thy praise, that we may be able—without distraction—to sing and confess Thee, Who art God glorified in all and by all, the eternal Father, with Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thine All-Holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen

St. Basil the Great (+Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 379)



## ON GOD'S LOVE AND OUR SORROWS AND SUFFERINGS IN THIS LIFE

By Abbot Nikon (letters to his spiritual children).

Why are you writing such despondent letters? Are you the only one there who is encumbered with difficulties? The point is not in external difficulties, I think you understand that yourself, but in your spiritual constitution. No matter where you may go, you can't hide from yourself or the enemy. All that is yours will go with you and elsewhere will cause you even more suffering than here.

You must not forget that the spiritual law states that *We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God*, (Acts 14:22); *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*, (Mt 16:24); *The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force*, (Mt 11:12); *In your patience possess ye your souls*, (Lk 21:19); *He that endureth to the end shall be saved*, (Mt 10:22); *In the world you shall have tribulation*, (Jn 16:33); *The world hateth you*, (Jn 15:19). If you desire to labor for the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation.

The Holy Fathers express this same thought in a short but powerful way: *Give blood and receive the Spirit*. This is the common law for all who seek salvation. If you turn to examples, you will find in the life of every saint confirmation of this law. An example for all has been given by the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, martyrs, confessors and the righteous. These are shining examples known to all. In a less striking way, all who wished to live piously in Jesus Christ were persecuted, insulted, endured illness and sorrows—both external and internal. Besides this, you should know the prophecy of the ancient fathers, that *in the last times monastics will be saved not through spiritual feats, but through endurance of sorrows*. To such an extent is this true and needful that the surest sign of God's favor and God's love for a person is the multitude of sorrows and sicknesses which befall him. And conversely: *If a man considers himself a believer and has no misfortunes or illnesses, then this, according to the Holy Fathers, is a sign that he has not found favor with the Lord*.

Now apply all this to yourself. The Lord, loving you and desiring your salvation, is sending you the means indispensable for all men without exception—sorrows. And what do you do? You do not understand this; you think that sorrows are useless for you, even ruinous. They are ruinous—not for your soul, but for your sinful fallen nature; they are deadly for the fallen man but salvific for the “new man.” The enemy knows this and confuses you; he gives false thoughts, impatience, despondency, judgment of others—their lifestyles, authority, etc.

You must understand the devil. According to the Word of God, sorrows and sufferings in the earthly life of a Christian are not only evil, but they are God's gifts: *Unto you is given* (in Greek, ‘a gift is given’) *in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake*. (Phil 1:29).

The sorrows necessary for a man's salvation may be accepted with varying degrees of difficulty or ease, depending on one's outlook. If a man accepts on faith the word of God concerning the necessity and unavoidability of sorrows for salvation, if he acknowledges his countless sins in word, deed and thought, he will consider himself fully deserving not only of those sorrows which are sent, but also much greater ones, and he will humble himself before God and man. Then the sorrows will become easier to bear and later will give rise to that which is more precious than the whole world with all its earthly joys. In the words of the Apostle Paul, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*. (1 Cor 2:9).

If a person complains about his sorrows and illnesses, seeks to put the blame for his misfortunes on someone else, on demons or on circumstances, and tries at all costs to avoid them, then the enemy helps him in this. He shows him the imagined guilty ones (authority, the status quo, neighbors, etc.) evoking in him animosity and hatred toward them, a desire for revenge, a desire to hurt them, and thus bring the soul of such a person into darkness, despair, hopelessness, the depths of the earth, in order not to see or hear the supposed enemy. In fact, he is listening to and satisfying his real deadly enemy, the devil, who is suggesting all this evil to him and wanting to destroy him, sometimes even leading him to suicide—which is certain perdition.

If you wish to find peace of soul, happiness and sure salvation, humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God and He will raise you up. This means: accept all that happens to you as from the hand of God and not from men, for indeed, nothing which occurs to us can happen without God's will. People and circumstances are only God's tools, and often they do not understand what they are doing. The Lord Jesus Christ told everyone that His forthcoming sufferings on the Cross were not the work of people—the Pharisees, Scribes, Pilate, Judas; they were only instruments: *The Cup which My Father hath given Me, must I not drink it?*

The cup of suffering was given to Jesus Christ not by men, but by the Father in Heaven for the redemption of fallen man. And to all of us who desire to be saved, it is the Lord Who will give us the cup of suffering, and not people. If the Lord suffered for us, then how, tell me, can we not suffer for our countless sins which, moreover, we do not even see. One must beg the Lord, *Grant me to see my own faults*.

If we receive this gift of seeing our sins, if we feel their weight and recognize the full irreconcilability of God with sinful man, the necessity of seeking forgiveness for these sins from the Lord and the cleansing of our leprous soul by the power of God—then we will fall before the Lord; we will weep before Him like the sinning woman and will cry out from our whole soul like the publican, “God be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive my sins, cleanse my leprous soul, do not deprive me of Thy Heavenly Kingdom, do not give me into the hands of my enemies—the demons.”

Humble yourself before God; that is, like the wise thief say from your whole heart, *I have received as I deserve according to my deeds. Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.*

Do not be like the other thief who railed at everyone, cursed, blamed others for his sufferings, and in this way only made his situation worse and perished. The Lord has done everything for our salvation; He wants salvation for all sinners—and we must toil for our own salvation, force ourselves to live (i.e., think, feel) the way our Lord Jesus Christ did and how He taught in the Gospel.



**T**ry to turn your whole life into service to God; if you are reading anything at home, begin this work by a short fervent prayer that God may teach you and make you wise in faith and piety and in the careful accomplishment of your duties; never read idly, in order to pass the time; by thus doing, you lower the word, which should serve entirely for our salvation, and not for idle words, nor as a means for pleasure and spending time agreeably.

If you talk to your neighbor, speak reasonably, prudently, instructively, edifyingly; avoid idle speaking as the poison of a serpent, remembering *that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment* (Mt 12:36)—that is, they shall hear the just sentence of the Judge.

If you are teaching children, your own or those of others, turn this work into God’s service, teaching them zealously, considering beforehand the best means of making the instruction clear, comprehensible, complete (as far as possible), and fruitful. Conquer by the name of the Lord and by the sign of the cross the snares of the enemy, who endeavors to disturb, darken, oppress, and weaken you. *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31).

St. John of Kronstadt  
“My Life in Christ”

## YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS

Long before the Christ Child was born in the flesh in a humble cave outside Bethlehem, His Father had named him for us through His angels and prophets:

**F**or unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6).

**A**nd the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. [that is, “**God saves**”]. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David. (Lk 1:30-32).

**B**ehold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins.” Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel,” which being interpreted is, **God with us.** (Mt 1:21-23, citing Is 7:14).



**T**his Christmas night, peace was bestowed upon the whole world; so let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Gentle One; let no one be cruel. This is the night of the Most Humble One; let no one be proud. Now is the day of joy; let us not revenge. Now is the day of goodwill; let us not be mean. In this day of peace, let us not be conquered by anger. Today the Beautiful One impoverished Himself for our sake; so you rich ones, invite the poor to your table. Today we received a gift for which we did not ask; so let us give alms to those who implore us and beg. This present day’s fast opens the heavenly door to our prayers. Let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness. Now the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the seal of Divinity.

St. Isaac the Syrian

## THE CONVERSION OF A CITY

*By St. Gregory of Nyssa, from "The Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos."  
St. Gregory of Neocaesarea (+270), also known as Gregory Thaumaturgos (or Gregory the Wonderworker) is commemorated on November 17<sup>th</sup>.*



After leaving his solitude, [St. Gregory the Wonderworker] at once hastened to the city where he felt obliged to establish a church for God. He knew that the whole region was under the grip of demons and that the temple of the true God was not yet constructed; the entire city and surrounding area was filled with pagan altars, sacred places and all the people were devoted to images. They adorned the temples and sacred places with images and the madness

of idolatry with processions; their defilement gave substance to rites and ceremonies. Just as a noble commander routs the enemy in combat by the strength of his battle order, so does that great man's valor set an example against the demons. How does he accomplish this?

Upon arriving in the city at evening from the countryside, a violent rainstorm forced [Gregory] into the temple. This place was renowned because one of the demons revered there was accustomed to manifest himself to the temple's custodians, and a certain prophet was empowered to utter oracles. Once [Gregory] entered the temple with several companions, one of the demons was petrified at the invocation of Christ's name. Having purified the air with the figure of the Cross which had been defiled, he spent the entire night in prayer and singing hymns according to his usual custom. In this way [Gregory] transformed the place into a temple of prayer which had been profaned by unclean sacrifices and images [Is 56.7, Mk 11.17]. After completing night prayer, he resumed at daybreak, but when the temple's custodian began to perform his rites to the demons at sunrise, he claimed that he could not approach the temple because [Gregory] blocked the way.

The custodian then attempted to invite demons into the temple using sacrifices of purification and sacred rituals. However, his endeavors were ineffectual because the demons were not accustomed to respond to this enticement. Overcome with a furious rage, the custodian seized that great man and threatened him with various intimidations and to bring him to the leaders.

He wanted to lay hands upon him and reveal his audacity to the king because a Christian who was hostile to the gods had the effrontery to enter the temple. His admission to the temple for performing services was refused, and he could no longer visit places where oracles were made to demons.

The custodian's harsh anger was enkindled at [Gregory's] splendid resolve, and he hurled all kinds of threats against the blessing offered by the true God. He alleged to have more fortitude than his opponent and had the privilege of entering those places anytime he wished as well as being able to prove this. The temple keeper was so struck with admiration at [Gregory's] ability to perform wonders that he again invoked the demons to enter the temple. Having learned about this, the great man suddenly snatched a piece of the book and gave it to the temple keeper while angrily commanding the demons. The words of this epitaph read as follows: "Gregory to Satan: Enter."

When the temple keeper received this little book to place on the altar according to custom, he offered burnt sacrifices and various types of unclean rites and again beheld what he had seen before the demons were ejected from the temple which contained the idols. Having accomplished this, he realized that Gregory was endowed with divine power which made him stronger than the demons. Before leaving the city, he promptly grasped Gregory in order to learn about his secret and about God who had vanquished the demons. When the great man gave a brief account about the mystery of piety, a certain temple guardian approached him who was in all likelihood uninitiated into divine matters. He was inclined to believe that it was too inconsequential for God to appear to men in the flesh. But when Gregory said that these miracles are possible not by reason but by faith, the temple keeper begged to see a miracle which would strengthen him in the faith. Right then and there it is said to everyone's surprise that Gregory performed a great miracle.

After the temple guardian found a huge stone which in his eyes seemed unmovable by human means but only through the power of faith, Gregory ordered it transferred to another place. That great man at once charged the large stone which seemed endowed with life to move to that place designated by the temple's keeper. Once this was accomplished, the man immediately believed and forsook his entire family, household, wife, children, friends, the priesthood and possessions. In their place he requested to participate in [Gregory's] greatness, accomplishments, divine philosophy and teaching.

Thus [Gregory] prevailed against the demons' strength and paraded the temple guardian as a victory trophy, a sight which filled the people with awe. With faith and courage he triumphantly entered the city, not with chariots, horses, asses and boasting in the number of supporters but attended by the full array of virtues. The town's entire populace gathered to learn about this wonder, and everyone desired to see that man called Gregory. They considered him a god who exercised authority and did whatever he wished against the demons in order to subject them. Having vanquished their patron to his authority and despising the honor which was formerly theirs, he changed their way of life and everything which pertained to it.

## THE EVIL OF ABORTION: OUR UNSPOKEN JIHAD

By Matt Spivey, from the "American Thinker" magazine, 01/22/09.

In Arabic, the word "jihad" means "inner struggle," and for those involved in one particular battle, there is no simple answer and varying perspectives cause, in many cases, violent reactions and repercussions. That word has come to signify the murder of innocence and the demolition of security in a time of worldwide uncertainty. The death toll keeps rising as years keep passing, and fighting in this war guarantees earning the label of "radical," "extremist," or "fanatic." Yet those who do keep fighting are actually trying to save lives. With the 36<sup>th</sup> year of "Roe v. Wade" passing today, the war rages on.

Sarah Palin was the only candidate in the 2008 election to take a truly vocal stance in her pro-life values, and as we all have learned, she lives what she believes. For her efforts in promoting life and keeping sacred every human, no matter how small, she received the above adjectives from liberals as famous as Michael Moore, who called her "an extremist," to the most unimportant of bloggers who called her "one of those radical Christians" and a "flaky fanatic." And it's not just the big-mouth blowhards who took the potshots. Even widely read publications like Newsweek have said her "pro-life extremism is ... ethically flawed." The Huffington Post called her "the most extremist" candidate we have seen in decades, if ever. And NARAL unsurprisingly released headlines describing her as "radically pro-life." But perhaps Palin's "pro-life fanaticism" was masquerading as another term her opponents misconstrued—common sense.

In a time when Americans are overseas fighting certain groups of people who believe it is their duty to kill blameless victims for their own religious glorification, equating the terminology associated with such hostile perpetrators to a woman who campaigns to keep alive and treat equally all citizens regardless of their stage of life is not only descriptively inaccurate, but tragically inappropriate.

In addition to misleading the public with misrepresentative words, some celebrities are rewriting the documents of our founding fathers in the process. Roseanne Barr, on "Real Time" with Bill Maher, compared Palin's desire to overturn "Roe v. Wade" to "overturning the laws" that gave women the right to vote. Likewise, fellow comedian Whoopi Goldberg claimed on "The View" that prohibiting abortion

would be like "rewriting the Constitution" and worried of the reinstatement of slavery. As a clear indication of the failure of our public schools, these women clearly do not know the difference between the process of a Supreme Court decision and the creation of Constitutional amendments. As most high school Government students should be able to attest, "Roe v. Wade" is not an amendment and does not need the involvement of an overwhelming majority of the states and a strenuous ratification procedure like the abolition of slavery and institution of women's suffrage each did.

So while we clear the air on appropriate adjectives to describe the beliefs of conservatives and what abortion legislation actually entails and represents, let's look at something that gets overlooked in this heated debate: the facts. According to a 2007 study in the not-so-conservative Time Magazine, less than 1.5% of abortions are attributed to rape or incest. Problems with the health of the mother account for 12% of abortions but do not clarify as to the mortal danger of the mother giving birth; thus we can assume the percentage of the mother's life being at risk to be much lower.



Nearly all other cases of abortion, Time states, are labeled as matters of "convenience," with reasons given by women that include "can't afford it" and "would drastically change my life." No kidding.

The conservative Center for Bioethical Reform puts these numbers at 1% rape/incest, 6% maternal health reasons, and 93% convenience. Other independent sources cite the statistics for abortive occurrences as being even lower in

cases of rape or incest and in life-threatening cases for the mother, while the personal choice number rises to 98%. The reproductive health and policy oriented Guttmacher Institute shows similar results. Despite a few percentage shifts here and there, the blatantly obvious theme we can identify is that the greatest arguments for abortion, even from some Republicans, are actually much rarer than we are led to believe by activists and the media.

Abortion is not an issue about violence against women. If it were liberals would be fine with doctors providing abortions only in cases of rape or incest—the 1% rate does not a case make, however. Therefore, we may deduce that nearly all pregnancies occur through voluntary sex, and those involved are fully aware of the consequences of such an activity. We can then take the next logical step and surmise that abortion is not even about protecting moms. Since all those women having voluntary sex should know the risks of having a living thing growing inside them, they are automatically putting themselves in potential peril for

the purpose of having a child. So let's call the pro-abortion crowd what they really are: activists for having sex without consequence or responsibility.

As a personal contrast to the misguided hype of liberals, I once met a woman with a pro-life stance. I asked her what she would do if she was raped. She explained to me that there are thousands of loving families in this country who would love to raise a child that she was not ready for.

So I asked what she would do if she ever got pregnant through a contraceptive malfunction. She plainly told me that there are no accidents. If you're planning on having sex, you're planning on having a baby.

So I went for the toughest question of all. I asked if she would want to be saved if the baby was endangering her life. Without a second of hesitation, she responded with more grace, toughness, and selflessness than I'd ever seen in another person. She simply said, "Let me go—the baby's more important."

That is true feminism. That is generosity, and determination, and love at its most inspirational. That is what being pro-choice really means: making the right decision, and when a complicated result arises, making another right decision. And then doing that every day. And that's why I married that young woman.

Is my wife a radical? Are conservatives really extremists or fanatics by believing all children should be respected in life and raised in love? Maybe some like Sarah Palin are genuine leaders who will guide not only those closest to them, but all Americans, to do what is right, even when it is difficult. January 22 is a dark day for those who believe in God's gift of life, but maybe the jihad against the unborn can be prevented if facts are made clear, derogatory words are attributed to rightful perpetrators, and we all take more personal responsibility. I don't think that's too extreme.



## THE GOOD TURKISH JUDGE

*From "Elder Hieronymos, the Hesychast of Aegina (+1966)," by Peter Botsis, Athens, 1991.*

Shortly before World War I, a Turk visited Fr. Hieronymos' humble hermitage. The Turk told the elder that his master, a judge, had sent him to invite the elder to his house.

The elder became a little worried. He was not accustomed to receiving invitations to "social receptions" and his mind began to suspect that he might experience some evil or temptation. However, he prayed to God and followed the Turkish servant.

On their arrival at the judge's large home, the judge himself welcomed him, with much warmth, as a matter of fact. They sat on a great divan (sofa-like furniture) and the judge began the conversation:

"Efendi (master, *Ed.*) papa, I am a Turk, a Moslem. From the salary I receive, I keep whatever is necessary for my family's support, and the rest I spend on alms. I help widows, orphans, the poor; I provide dowries for impoverished young women so that they can get married, I help the sick. I keep the fasts with exactness, I pray and, in general, I try to live a life consistent with my faith. Also, when I sit in judgment, I strive to be just, and never take a person's position into account, no matter how great he is."

Then looking deep into the elder's eyes, he asked:

"What do you say? Are all these things that I do sufficient for me to gain that Paradise that you Christians talk about?"

The elder was impressed by all that the Turkish judge told him, and he immediately brought to mind the Roman centurion Cornelius mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Turkish judge and the Roman centurion he perceived two similar lives. He understood that the judge was a just man of noble sentiments.

"Perhaps," thought the elder, "my mission is like that of the Apostle Peter, who instructed the Roman centurion." The elder determined, therefore, that he would bear witness to his Faith.

"Tell me, efendi, do you have children?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you have servants?"

"I have servants also."

"Which of the two carry out your orders better—your children or your servants?"

"Assuredly, my servants, because my children—with the familiarity that they have toward me—often disobey me and do whatever they wish, whereas my servants always do whatever I tell them."

"Tell me, I pray thee, efendi, when you die, who will inherit your wealth—your servants, who executed your wishes faithfully, or your children who disobey you?"

"Well, my children, of course. Only they have rights of inheritance, whereas the servants do not."

"Well then, efendi, what you do is good, but the only thing your good works can do is place you in the category of those that are good servants. If, however, you desire to inherit Paradise, the Kingdom of the Heavens, then you have to become a son. And that can be accomplished only through Baptism."

The Turkish judge was greatly impressed by the elder's parable. They spoke for a long time after this, and at the end he asked the elder to catechize him and baptize him. And thus, after a little while, the good judge was baptized and became a Christian.

## AND ALL THINGS, WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN PRAYER, BELIEVING, YE SHALL RECEIVE [MT 21:22]

*Author unknown (this beautiful story was written by a doctor who worked in Central Africa).*

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter... We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive; as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities.

Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (for rubber perishes easily in tropical climates).

"And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed.

As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

"All right," I said, "put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby... I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children.

"Please, God" she prayed, "Send us a hot water bottle today. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon."

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added:

"And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot.. Could I honestly say "Amen"? I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only

way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the porch was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly... Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

From the top, I lifted out brightly-colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas—that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the....could it really be?

I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could...

Ruth was in the front row of the

children. She rushed forward, crying out:

"If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!"

Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully-dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked:

"Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

"Of course," I replied!

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child—five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "that afternoon."

*And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. (Is 65:24).*

Stop telling God how big your storm is. Instead, tell the storm how big your GOD IS. Believe and you shall receive; doubt and you shall do without!



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## THE DELUDED “ASCETIC” WHO MADE 3,000 PROSTRATIONS A DAY

Source: “Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos,” vol. 1, by Archimandrite Cherubim, pp. 259-60.



*Elder Daniel Katounakiotis of blessed memory was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Athonite elder who had the gift of discernment. His brotherhood, at the Katounakia region of the Holy Mountain, continues to this day and is known as “Danielaioi.”*

† † †

When Elder Daniel Katounakiotis (+1929) was in the Russian Monastery, he observed that a certain monk living in asceticism in a kathisma outside the Monastery played a role of a great ascetic. He fasted severely, wore the most wretched clothes, walked around barefoot even in winter, etc. Among other things, while the rule called for 300 prostrations a day, he made 3000. For this reason the other monks marvelled at him.

Elder Daniel, even though he was younger at the time, displayed no enthusiasm. He discerned a situation that was not pleasing to God. He noticed that the door of his kathisma contained an opening which allowed the passers-by to look in and praise his great asceticism. His love moved him to report the situation to the abbot, and thus save the brother from delusion.

The abbot set out for the kathisma of the “super-ascetic.”  
“How are you doing here, father?”  
“By your prayers, Elder, well. I struggle and weep over my sins.”  
“Only you never come to tell me your thoughts.”  
“What could I tell you, Elder? You know them all. I am a sinner who struggles.”  
“How do you struggle? Tell me, do you make prostrations?”  
“Yes, Elder, I make a few.”  
“How many?”  
“By your prayers, 3,000 a day.”  
“What! Why 3,000? Who gave you a blessing to do so many? No, don’t ever do 3,000 again. What are you trying to portray—a ‘super-ascetic?’ From now on do only fifty, so you won’t get proud.”

With that the abbot left.

The incision had been made, and the abscess soon revealed its foul contents. For the former “great ascetic” made a 180-degree turn. He was unable to make even fifty prostrations. Instead of ragged clothes he now wore whatever was most expensive, and had the choicest foods brought to his poor table. Naturally, the other fathers were astonished, and they understood that his excessive ascetic practices had been fed by the spirit of pride. This explained this surprising change, for the spirit of delusion runs after extremes.

According to patristic wisdom, the extreme, the superfluous, and the excessive are “of the demons”.