

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]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

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

Vol. 10, Issue 07-08

July-August 2012

Brotherhood of St. Poimen

In This Issue:

- The Prisoner's Angel (p. 4)
- Prayer and our Lord's Transfiguration (p. 6)
- Frequent Communion (p. 9)
- Reform Your Life! (p. 10)
- On Despondency (p. 12)
- The Holy Feast of the Dormition (p. 21)
- A Worthy Example (p. 23)
- Mixed-up George (p. 25)
- On Homeschooling (p. 26)
- Curing the Illness of Pharisaism (p. 28)
- Ἡ Μητέρα τῆς Ζωῆς (σελ. 13)
- Ἡ Ψῆφος τῶν ... Ἄγγελων (σελ. 15)
- Φοβερὴ Προφητεία (σελ. 17)
- Μὴ Γίνεσθε Σκλάβοι τῶν Ἄνθρώπων (σελ. 19)
- Σεπτεμβριανὰ... (σελ. 20)



Publisher: St. POIMEN Greek Orthodox Brotherhood

Editor: George Karras

Story Editors:

Markos Antoniathis &
Kostas Matsourakis

BUILDING A LIFE WITH GOD

By Hieromonk Seraphim of Mt. Athos (+1981).

A man can live with God (or without God—as some people do). It is possible to live with God by reason of His good pleasure for man to do so, and also by reason of a man's own positive inclination. Here, the circumstances of the man's life appear either favorable or unfavorable; in other words, it becomes evident that the essential elements of such an existence are not dictated by outward circumstances but by the person's own predilection, his desire, his intent.

In order to live with God, to make this a reality, one must leave space for Him in one's daily activities, must give Him room!

The personal desire to live with God must be joined in the heart by the remembrance of God. A person is free to choose, according to his desire or lack of it, whether or not to incorporate the remembrance of God into his life. From this point, this choosing, the two paths increasingly diverge. One man desires it, another doesn't give it a thought; he doesn't seek it. It may be that outwardly they live side by side, i.e., in similar circumstances, similar surroundings; but one lives with God, the other without God. Thus, the first element of a life with God is desire.

Next in order of importance is the extent to which a person is caught up in his external affairs; to what extent he is enslaved by worldly affairs and how important and urgent he considers them. For example, are there circumstances whereby his work superiors make many demands of him, beyond "normal" work periods such as "finish this as soon as possible," and "have it done by..." or does he have certain personal needs or

cares for those close to him requiring his added attention. Whatever the case, the result for the individual Christian is that he gets caught up in outward activities and this greatly hinders remembrance of God. And without remembrance of God, how is it possible to live with God? One must therefore set a goal for oneself: to battle for liberation [from this enslavement] in order to maintain within oneself the remembrance of God—no matter what! This is a task which is both lawful for man, right before God, and possible within the conditions of man's earthly life. Try it and see yourself. The obstacles to this goal are mostly superfluous and may be overcome.

It is true: the beginning is difficult. But this is only because we are not accustomed to it and not because the remembrance of God actually disturbs whatever it is we are doing; not at all. He who so desires and looks into this matter will find the possibility of attaining it within himself. This will both amaze him and convince him that remembrance of God is of great help in all his endeavors, including the normal pursuit of worldly affairs. In reality, it also makes him more peaceful and significantly more successful in his undertakings. Life becomes more enjoyable; he is happier. And to support this we turn to the Psalmist: *For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name (Pss 33:21); and my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in His salvation. (Pss 35:9).*

Once the soul's enslavement by outward affairs weakens, it becomes possible to "make room" for God in the midst of all these worldly matters and thereby to live with Him. Man's life is occupied by human affairs, but if among them a place can be found for God, there, too, is life with God.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688
USA

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.orthodoxheritage.org)

Orthodox Heritage is published monthly by the “Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen,” a laity brotherhood.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Brotherhood at the Phoenix address or the e-mail address above.

Please visit our website for our mission and other useful information.

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

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

Please note that the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. POIMEN is a publicly supported organization as described in section 509(a)(2) of the IRS Code and that it is exempt from federal income taxes under section 501(a) of the Code as a 501(c)(3) organization. Our supporters and donors can thus deduct contributions to the extent that they are gifts, in accordance with section 170 of the Code.

Checks should be made out to “Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.” PayPal users may utilize their credit card and address payments to our e-mail address, “poimen@mail.com.” Please visit our website for the applicable links.

One, however, may wonder as to how, practically speaking, this is accomplished. Remembrance of God is simply the beginning. Next there are the feelings of the heart. These are the very life of a man. Think about it: throughout a man’s life, in all that he does, his feelings (such a diversity!) move in him; they live, change, accompany his every action, and share in every part of his outward life. Pleasure, displeasure, irritation, joy, distress, jealousy, striving towards or repulsion from something—these inner feelings accompany all the outward activities, his whole life. They exist. They are not imagined!

Among these feelings are those which are akin to the remembrance of God, conducive to it: fear of God, faith, piety, gratitude towards God (how patient He is with us great sinners... He even showers gifts upon us...), hope, love for Him, trust in Him, a readiness to fully entrust oneself to His care. He is good, mercifully kind, very much like a tenderhearted mother: *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.* (Isa 49:15). These exact feelings must be found in our hearts, singled out from among all other feelings and nurtured accordingly. With their help, the desired aim can be achieved—to live with God!

Together with remembrance of God, one must join all of these feelings and good inclinations to his actions, i.e., to his outward activities which, like some kind of rising air bubbles or vessels, get filled (and they do indeed fill up) with these gifts that arise from the heart. Thus, in remembering God while we work, let us concentrate on all these feelings which are akin to the remembrance of God and, in turn, all these emotional conditions will be with us as we go about

fulfilling our earthly tasks. The result shall be the beginning of our life with God. For this is just what it is!

The Lord desires to be with man: *My delights were with the sons of men* (Prov 8: 31), *and they shall be My people and I will be their God* (Jer. 31:33), *and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isa 62:5). Our desire and hope to live with God lies within these verses and it is truly left up for man to cooperate with this will of God. In his fallen state (and the Lord knows this—He “takes it into account,” humanly speaking) man can cooperate through remembrance of God, through his feelings towards Him—even though these are weak and confused. What is most important here is man’s desire, and effort, both of which rely upon man’s faith! The Lord will fulfill and strengthen whatever else is necessary. Therefore, begin with this faith and the corresponding confidence!

“Enslavement” comes from the influence of the external world upon man. It must be resisted. What is necessary from the world for man’s survival must be addressed as such; however, these external influences must never be allowed to control the heart. One can truly do whatever is necessary for the body’s survival and the heart can be either at liberty or in bondage. Man’s heart must be kept at liberty, because a free heart can remember God and give attention to Him, even as one attends to his worldly tasks. This predisposition and corresponding behavior opens up the possibility for man to live with God; and a beginning of a life with God is realized.

The balance can also realize a shift: spiritual vigilance and a desire to be with God can transitionally become strong enough to outweigh the soul’s enslavement to mundane, outward activities. The activities themselves are not eliminated; they remain, but their power over the soul weakens

altogether. A shift occurs in the inner life which attends to the outward actions. Previously, the latter fully occupied the person's attention, while the inner life passed unnoticed; the person gave it no heed (how it was sustained was quite unknown to man, perhaps "by itself," like abandoned children left to grow up by themselves). But when the power of the external world over the man is weakened, there is a gradual shifting of positions: external things become unimportant to the soul; they lose their former significance, while the inner life draws all the attention to itself and acquires preeminence. This allows for the very real possibility to live with God, when the thoughts and feelings of the heart are constantly with Him!

When a man elevates his awareness to this level and realizes this type of a life he becomes indifferent towards the daily race often observed in conducting one's worldly tasks and affairs; man is no longer preoccupied or overly concerned with them—all this is merely a hindrance to his spiritual existence. It obstructs the effort to "live with God" while attending towards the daily "business" matters. Previously the "doing" was everything, and the inner life was, by contrast, some kind of fog which was ignored; all attention was focused upon the "doing." But now these things, these activities, are but a covering, a covering beneath which is carried on the principal activity which is, in essence, a true life with God! This is a source of joy, happiness, light! And when this is achieved, man can exclaim and realize the shining *upon the world as the light of knowledge* (from the Nativity Troparion).

It appears, then, that without a sustained level of outward activity it becomes more difficult to "live with God"; there's nothing to secure the attention, and feelings towards Him (after all, they are weak in the beginner, just as his attention is scattered) and thus easily dissipate. Without outward activity a person is left like a plant pulled from the ground—its roots have neither firm support, nor do they absorb the strengthening elements of the ground. So, too, without any outward activity, a person's inner life weakens and he loses the possibility of life with God.

The Lord established human life. Take heed! God gave men earthly cares so that they wouldn't fall into something worse! "Vanities" are earthly activities undertaken without God, but they are preferable to the actions of irrational and destructive passions and sins to which fallen man is so prone. And if these "vanities," i.e., these earthly, human affairs are undertaken with the thought of God, with the aim of salvation, they become a pathway leading to heaven.



True happiness is not the honors and pleasures of the body. As many as fight to acquire virtue—to put into practice the commandments of God—these are the truly happy.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

CLEAVE UNTO CHRIST

By St. Cyril of Alexandria.

No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. [Lk 9:62]

† † †

For just as the husbandman, who has begun to break up his land by the plough, if he grow weary and leaves his labor half done, sees not his field thick set with ears, nor his threshing-floor full of sheaves, and suffers of course the loss which is the natural result of idleness; the absence, I mean, of produce, and the consequent penury, and incurs also the ridicule of those that see him. Likewise, **he who wishes to cleave unto Christ, but does not bid farewell to the things of the world, and abandon all love of the flesh, and even deny his earthly relatives, is not fit for the kingdom of God.** One who cannot attain to this resolution, because his mind is fettered with indolence, is not acceptable unto Christ, nor fit for His company, and necessarily is refused permission to be with Him.

Such were those of whom Christ spake, when forming that similitude in the Gospels. For He said, *A rich man made a banquet for his son; and sent therefore his servants to call them that were bidden, saying, My oxen and my failings are killed, and every thing is ready: come to the banquet. But they, it says, would not come: but one said, I have bought a field, and I cannot come. And another, I have bought a yoke of oxen: and another, I have taken a wife, hold me excused.*

Thou seest that they were called, and while it was in their power to partake of the feast, they excused themselves, and gave themselves up without restraint to those temporal and earthly matters, which rapidly fade, and the possession of which must quickly be abandoned. And yet surely it was their duty rather to have understood, that a wife and lands, and those other possessions, are but finite pleasures, short in duration, and fleeting like the shadows, and, as it were, a bitterness mingled with honey. But to be members of the church of God, from which they, I know not how, foolishly fled, would have procured for them an eternal and unchanging joy. **Whoever would follow Christ, let him be thoroughly constant, and intent solely upon this end; let him not be divided; let him not be possessed by timidity and slothfulness; let him be free from all carnal lust, and prefer nothing to his love unto Him.** But if he be not so disposed, nor so affected in his will, even if he do draw near, he will not be accepted.



Labor to acquire thanksgiving toward God for everything, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and then you will find peace.

Sts. Barsanuphius & John

THE PRISONER'S ANGEL

Elena Andreyevna Voronova is a rare example of a righteous woman who neither married, nor was a nun, nor a fool-for-Christ. Her life might well have remained hidden were it not for the spiritually sensitive soul of one of Russia's most talented authors, Sergei Nilus. The following, taken from Nilus' book, "On the Banks of God's River," is a brief illustration of what strength of spirit can be contained in a "fragile" vessel.

The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.

[1 Cor 7:34]

† † †

From childhood Elena Andreyevna Voronova suffered from weak lungs. Upon finishing her higher education, she went south to Crimea so that she can benefit from the warm climate of that region. Despite her fragile health, Elena had an energetic temperament. Her heart was filled with love and the desire to serve her fellow man. Under the rays of the warm Crimean sun, her health improved and she set about founding a model school which elicited the admiration and approval of the country's ober-prokurator, K. P. Pobedonostsev, whose friendship with Elena lasted the rest of his life. [*Ed.*, "ober-prokurator," also Chief Procurator, was the title of the lay supervisor of the Apostolic Governing Synod, who effectively was the lay head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a member of the Tsar's cabinet.]

Returning to the northern capital, Elena soon became involved in a benevolent society which ministered to prisoners. Here it was that she blossomed forth with all of her Christian soul's meek and warm qualities. There were numerous criminals, already sentenced to death, who were granted reprieve by the Tsar due to the intercessions of this compassionate woman; she often pleaded on behalf of all prisoners whose repentance she felt was firm and genuine. Elena would bring her "case" before Metropolitan Anthony (Votkovsky) who in turn served as mediator between her and "her" prisoners, and the Tsar.

One of Elena's most beloved duties in her work among the prisoners was to read aloud to them either from the Holy Scripture or from some other soul-profiting book. Even among hardened criminals she would discover hearts which were not deaf to the call of the Christian faith and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, there are very

few recorded accounts concerning those prisoners who were converted to a new life under the influence of Elena Andreyevna Voronova. But among those which do exist, one case deserves special notice.

It was Elena Andreyevna's custom to visit the prison hospital, bringing with her some books and small crosses to be given to those prisoners who did not have them and who wouldn't refuse them. She was well-known there by both the guards and the prisoners, with whom she had established a friendly and trusting rapport. This was not easily done with prisoners but, as she herself testified, God helped her in this by the prayers of the Optina elders to whom she went for spiritual guidance.

One day, when she came to the prison hospital, she noticed a prisoner whom she hadn't seen before. He was lying on his hospital bed; his face had a very dark although intelligent expression. On his feet were shackles—evidently he was a particularly dangerous criminal. When Elena sat down to read, he gave her a look of hatred and then turned his face towards the wall. His whole demeanor, his sick body, and especially his



fetters, made a very strong impression on Elena's compassionate heart. Later, she related that she could not remember what it was she had discussed that day, or what she had read, only that God helped and everything went well.

After the discussion, she noticed that the new prisoner had, in the course of her reading, turned his face once again towards her; it seemed that his expression was less harsh. She began to hand out the crosses to

those prisoners who requested them—every prisoner asked for one. Approaching the new prisoner, she timidly offered him a cross. The thought crossed her mind: what if he should turn away or utter some blasphemy? But with her heart she prayed for him; he neither turned away nor said a word as she put a cross around his neck.

Some time passed and Elena again visited the prison hospital. She noticed that the fettered prisoner was no longer there. When she inquired about him she was told that he was placed in solitary confinement; his case had been tried and for political crimes and the murder of five persons he had been sentenced to death. The other prisoners said that in leaving he had asked them to tell her that he was still wearing the cross she had given him; he had also requested that she come to see him if at all possible before the execution.

Elena was very moved by this news and decided with God's help to somehow arrange a meeting with him. Permission was granted and here she found out that his name was Hilarion and that only after a long search he had at last been caught in his sister's apartment. Just before the police arrested him, he had fired a shot which went straight into his pregnant sister's abdomen, killing her unborn child; this was his fifth murder. Clearly he was a vicious criminal and fully deserving of the death penalty. Nonetheless, Elena's heart went out to him, hoping to see, even in such a darkened soul, at least a glimmer of God's image.

As she entered the cell, the door was locked and bolted behind her. Left alone face to face with such a criminal, her heart momentarily gave way and she all but regretted having come. Hilarion was lying on the bed and when she entered he began to get up and pull his legs with the clanking fetters over the side of the bed. It was a painful sight.

—Thank-you for coming! I was afraid you wouldn't. Did they tell you I hadn't taken off your cross?

—Yes, they told me.

—Then I'm grateful to them too. You probably already know that I'm sentenced to death; my days are numbered. Tell me, you were explaining things so well there in the hospital, could you explain for me the meaning of a dream which I had here? I saw that I was in a dark place—such as a swamp or somewhere much worse—and I was covered all over with the most disgusting filth. Only my legs were left white. What does this mean? I don't understand it but somehow I feel this dream is significant; it left such a strong impression. Can you explain it to me?

At this moment Elena felt that the explanation of this dream was a key to something very important for Hilarion's soul; the turning of this hardened sinful soul from darkness to light might well depend on its correct interpretation—not according to human reasoning, but inspired from above. In her heart Elena Andreyevna fervently begged God for wisdom.

—I think, Hilarion that this dream was given you from above, to show you that no matter how sinful you are before God and man, you too can hope in God's mercy—on the condition, however, that you continue towards Him along the path of repentance which you have already begun; after all, you did not remove the cross you were given; on your legs, even during your illness, were iron fetters which caused you great pain, and so your legs, cleansed by this suffering, were shown to you to be white. Is it not from above that you have been assigned the death penalty and all its accompanying torments as a final cleansing, just as the cross for the repentant thief, so that together with him you might be in paradise? Only say as he did—first: I am justly condemned, for *I have received the due reward of my deeds*, and then: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* (Lk 23:41-42).

When she finished speaking, Elena Andreyevna glanced at Hilarion. His head was bowed and two tear drops were quietly running down his cheeks. He was silent for moment and then he said:

—You are right; I must suffer to atone [*Ed., make amends*] for all the evil I have done. Thank you; you have done something very great for me; you have opened up for me a new world. What is left to me of this life I must lay upon the cross of my final sufferings, before my death. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.

The reader can well imagine what went on in Elena Andreyevna's soul on hearing these words and sensing Hilarion's genuine repentance. She knew she could ask Metropolitan Anthony that his sentence be lightened, and yet., knowing something greater than the prolongation of an earthly life was at hand she kept silent. Hilarion continued:

—I shall not ask you, as would be usual in my case, to have me pardoned. Just call for me the prison priest; I must cleanse my soul by repentance and receive, if only I am worthy, the Holy Mysteries—God grant that this be so! Of you, Lord, I have this last request...

After a tearful embrace they parted for the last time.

Never in very good health, Elena Andreyevna became ill and was forced to give up her prison visits. She developed angina pectoris [*Ed., a syndrome characterized by an extreme pain below the sternum*], and this, combined with her ailing lungs, caused her much suffering. For several months before her death she lay in bed. Then on Monday of Passion Week, 1916, she became radiant and said to her friend:

—Sonia, I shall die on Good Friday. The Lord Himself came and told me!

And so she died, having seen God, on the day of the great suffering of the Lord, and offering her own sufferings for the countless prisoners whose repentance—and freedom—was bought by the compassionate tears and heartfelt prayers of her God-loving soul.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. (Mt 5:8)



With fear and reverence you should stand in church, for our Christ is invisibly present with the holy angels. He fills the attentive and reverent with grace and blessings, whereas He censures the inattentive as unworthy. Try to receive Communion as often as possible—you have my permission to do so freely—for Holy Communion is an excellent aid for those who struggle against sin.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

PRAYER AND THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

By the Blessed Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow.



The saintly Metropolitan Philaret was one of the most outstanding hierarchs of the Russian Church, he was born Basil Drozdov, the son of a priest: Although small in stature he stood out among his fellow students at the St. Sergius Holy Trinity Seminary by reason of his lively intelligence and genuine piety. His early talent for preaching brought him to the attention of Metropolitan Platon of Moscow,

who said of him, "I give sermons like a man, but he speaks like an angel."

In 1808 he received the monastic tonsure with the name Philaret, after Saint Philaret the Almsgiver. After being ordained to the diaconate, he taught Greek, Hebrew, and rhetoric at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, where he prevailed upon the authorities to have courses taught in Russian rather than in Latin. This concern to make the understanding of Orthodoxy as accessible as possible motivated many of his subsequent undertakings in the course of his fifty years in the episcopal rank. He was responsible for having the Holy Scripture translated into Russian, and he himself wrote a Catechism, which has remained a standard text of the Russian Church ever since its initial publication in 1823.

As Metropolitan of Moscow, Philaret succeeded in having restored some measure of independence from the State, which the Church had lost in the "reforms" of Peter I. He labored to improve the caliber of seminaries and theological schools, and he gave crucial support to the spiritual revival generated by St. Paisius Velichkovsky and his monastic followers, at a time when many hierarchs and clergy looked askance at the institution of eldership, or "starchestvo" and the practice of unceasing prayer which this revival prompted. Metropolitan Philaret's own spiritual father was a close disciple of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, and although Philaret kept concealed his inner life, its excellence is manifest in the various miracles wrought by his prayers: a girl dumb for thirteen years began to speak, a merchant was spared the necessity of having his arm amputated, an eight-year-old paralyzed girl began to walk.

Metropolitan Philaret reposed on November 19th, 1867, being forewarned of the date two months earlier by his father in a dream. In his theological writings, Metropolitan Philaret often focused on the life of grace that is opened to believers in Christ. It is clear that he himself experienced this grace while still in this temporal world and certain that he now enjoys it in the fullest measure in the company of the saints.

And he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were

Moses and Elias. [Lk 9:28-30]

† † †

How sublime a spectacle on Mount Tabor! A spectacle indeed worthy of being contemplated with rapture as the apostles contemplated it, and of being solemnly celebrated as we now celebrate it. It is not without meaning, that they who witnessed the great revelations on Sinai and Horeb, not without purpose, that Moses and Elias appear on Mount Tabor also. They shall see more here than they saw there, on Sinai and Horeb, the might and glory of God were revealed unto men, through the powers of visible nature; on Tabor, not only does divinity reveal itself to man, but humanity itself appears arrayed in divine glory, Moses quaked on Mount Sinai (Heb 12:21); Elias complained on Horeb (I Kings 19:14); whereas on Tabor, through the fear of the apostles there shines forth joy: *It is good for us to be here.* (Lk 9:33)

Christians! Your heart is no doubt ready to say of the witnesses of the glory of Mount Tabor: *indeed it was good for them to be there.* What then, if we tell you that the way to the contemplation of the glory of Mount Tabor is not swallowed up in an abyss, is not walled up from us, nor overgrown with thorns, not forgotten, nor lost, but may still be indicated by those who know it, to those who seek it? (It is not difficult to understand that we speak here of the spiritual way, for a carnal way cannot possibly lead us to spiritual visions and divine revelations.)

Why does the evangelist, when about to describe to us the glorious Transfiguration of the Lord, first of all direct his own and our attention to prayer? He went up into a mountain to pray. Why, if not to point out to us in prayer the way to the light of Tabor, the key to spiritual mysteries, the might of divine revelation? If the divinely inspired Evangelist found it so necessary to associate the idea of prayer with the description of the glory of Tabor, then it certainly will not be amiss on our part also, Christians, to associate however short a meditation on the power and efficacy of prayer, with remembrance of the glorious Transfiguration of our Lord.

There are some Christians whose understanding and performing of the act of prayer is in an outward ritual sense, rather than in an inward spiritual one; these souls, while in no way doubting in the general belief that prayer is powerful and efficacious, are mistaken in their conduct. They do entirely err in the application of this truth to themselves and to their prayer.

Praying repeatedly, and seeing no result from their prayer, either in themselves or around them, they, instead of doubt-

ing the sincerity and merit of their own prayers, are prone to imbibe the idea inspired by a spirit of sloth and self-deceit, that powerful and availing prayer must needs be some peculiar gift of grace, reserved for some of God's elect, and for certain extraordinary cases only. To such we say without hesitation that there is no man whose prayer may not become powerful if he only desire it steadfastly and with a pure heart, with faith and hope in God, and that there is no case in which his prayer will not be granted, if only its object be not contrary to the Wisdom and Mercy of God, or to the true welfare of the suppliant. This is saying much. We trust, nevertheless, that we are not deceiving the true lovers of prayer.

Figure to yourselves a man who, by the power of prayer shuts or opens the heavens, stops or brings down rain; commands that a handful of flour and a little oil should suffice to feed several persons for several months, or perhaps even for more than a year and it is fulfilled; breathes on a dead man, and restores him to life; brings down fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice and an altar immersed in water. What can appear more extraordinary than this power of prayer? But it appears so only to a man who knows not what spiritual power is, whilst to one who does, it appears only as the act of a man like unto ourselves.

This is not my own opinion merely, but the teaching of an Apostle, St. James, exhorting us to pray one for another, and wishing to incite us thereto, says that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; and, he confirms this general precept and convincing motive by the example of that extraordinary man whom we have just pictured, and whom he represents as a man like unto ourselves: *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.* (Jas 6:17-18). Why is it said here that this wonderworking Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are? It is just that we, deeming him an extraordinary man, should not be discouraged from imitating him, and from attaining power in prayer.

If it appears to you that imitating the prayers of the prophet is far above your mediocrity and a height unattainable by you, then imagine yourselves as much below the prophet;

imagine yourselves to be even less than all other Christians, and even then, I affirm that your prayer will be powerful and effectual. Furthermore it may convert you from heathenism to Christianity, and it may lead you to the true knowledge and worship of God. Even though all this is unknown to you, and if there be no man near who can direct you, pray and open the heavens and bring down thence an angel unto you who will teach you.

You may ask whether I am dreaming and have been carried away by my desire to invite you to fervent and effectual prayer. No, my brethren and fellow worshippers. I am speaking of things that have actually happened before, and therefore may happen again, and which are contained as testimony within our holy books. The Roman centurion, Cornelius, whom we know from the Acts of the Apostles, was a Gentile. It is not known whether he knew the One God, but certain it is that he did not know Jesus Christ Whom God hath sent; but he did as much good as he was able. He feared and prayed always to God, though to him unknown; a devout man, and one that feared "God" with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. And what did the unceasing prayer of



the Gentile achieve? It did indeed call down heaven upon him, and brought to his aid high and even divine powers. In the midst of his prayers, an angel appears to him, saying, *Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God,* (Acts 10:31); and then instructs him to send for the Apostle Peter. And when the Apostle was preaching unto him Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, even before baptism, was poured from on high upon Cornelius...

But it is time at last to inquire why it is that so many prayers remain without effect, if every prayer may always be so powerful and effectual? For it is for the sake of this question principally that we have said all that which we have as yet spoken. Let us particularly note one instance in which a prayer really answered in an unanticipated and sublime way. Thus, Paul besought the Lord thrice to be delivered from a thorn in the flesh but God answered him: *My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.* (II Cor 12:9). The temptation is not removed; but a victory still more wonderful is granted over the continuing temptation.

If we accept such cases, all unsuccessful prayers are accounted for by this short saying of the Apostle: *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* (Jas 4:3). Our prayers are fruitless for one of three reasons: either because they are not fervent and persevering supplications, which proceed from the depth of our souls, and into which our whole soul is poured forth; instead they are only weak desires which we utter without fervor, thinking; or because our supplications are unclean and evil, inasmuch as we ask that which is hurtful and of no benefit to our souls; or because we ask things not for the glory of God, but for the gratification of our carnal and selfish desires.

Pray, Christian, fervently and with the whole might of thy soul, pray diligently and perseveringly, pray rightly and purely; and if thou art not thyself equal to it, then pray for prayer itself, and by prayer thou wilt first obtain true and effectual prayer, and then this prayer shall overcome all things with thee and obtain all things for thee; it will guide thee unto Mount Tabor or create a Tabor within thee; it will call thy soul into heaven. Amen.



CONFRONTING ECCLESIASTICAL ISSUES WITHIN OUR FAITH IN AN ORTHODOX MANNER

By Elder Paisios the Athonite—the Blessed Geronta helps us to find the right manner in which to deal with the various ecclesiastical issues confronting our Church. He exposes the nuances of ego present in both the extreme modernist and extreme traditionalist. May God protect us and His Church from both!

We must avoid extremes; extreme solutions will never solve a problem. In the old days, the grocer would add little-by-little on the scale, to find the exact amount and get the right balance. He would avoid adding or removing something abruptly. Extreme views, no matter on what side, are always a source of trouble for Mother Church; but also for those who hold them, because - in the end - both will suffer. It's like having a possessed person, full of spiritual insolence (contempt for everything), pulling on one end; and a narrow-minded fool, zealous in his ignorance, pulling on the other.

This is a confrontation, in other words, between a foolish zealot and a man steeped in spiritual arrogance. And the two bicker and strike at each other, because what is missing from both is divine Grace. And the worst that could happen, God forbid, is that there will be no end to their bickering; one

end will keep on striking at the other, with no end in sight. But those who will take these extremes in order to bend them and bring them together—in harmony—will be crowned by Jesus Christ with two unfading crowns.

We must be careful not to create problems in the Church, or magnify the small indiscretions that take place here and there, because this will only make things worse and give pleasure to the devil. The person who gets overly upset and angry at the sight of a minor mistake, and rushes head on supposedly to put things in order, resembles the foolish sacristan who sees a candle dripping and rushes head on to put it out—knocking over people and candle stands in his way and causing even a greater disorder during worship.

Unfortunately, we have so many people keen on disturbing the Mother Church these days! The educated among them have only an intellectual grasp of the dogmas; they don't approach them in the spirit of our Holy Fathers. And the uneducated are not far behind; they have grasped the dogmas with their teeth only, and that's why they cannot discuss ecclesiastical matters without grinding their teeth at each other. As a result, they cause greater harm to the Church than the enemies of our Orthodox Faith. A torrential river is not good, because it will sweep away logs, rocks, even people; but a shallow river is not good either, because it will become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Then there are those who spend their time criticizing each other, instead of working for the common good. Instead of keeping an eye on themselves and their behavior, they watch for mistakes in others. They are on the look out for what others say or write, and they are ready to strike at them without mercy. These people cause great harm, because—on the one hand—they do injustice to their brothers and sisters; while—on the other—they undermine them before the faithful. And these actions also end up scandalizing and sowing unbelief in weak souls.

Those who may justify their malice by claiming their right to correct others instead of concentrating on their own faults, or those who go public with Church problems—even matters too sensitive to discuss—on the principle of tell it to the Church, should do two things: First, they should examine their own little church, their families or their Brotherhood; and only if these pass the test, if they prove good, they should go ahead and embarrass Mother Church. Good children, I believe, will never bring charges against their mother.

Each person complements the character of the other, and we are all obliged to tolerate not only the spiritual temperament of others, but also their human weaknesses. Now, unfortunately, there are those who have irrational expectations of other people. They expect everyone to be like them, to have their spiritual temperament; and if the other person does not meet their standard, if they are a bit more lenient or austere, they are eager to find them non spiritual.

ON FREQUENT COMMUNION

By the Athonite Hieromonk Arsenius, Holy Monastery of Stavronikita (+1846).

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. [Jn 6:56]

† † †



What can be loftier and more desirable than these most comforting words of our Savior in which He expresses all His love, all the boundless abyss of His compassion which is given to man in the Mystery of Communion! With what can we compare the state of a man who is united with the Lord Himself! This is the Mystery of Mysteries, so exalted that it can only be grasped in part by man's limited mind. It is sufficient for us to know that in the Mystery of Communion we are granted, through His grace, the greatest of God's gifts, and therefore we must by all means try to live in such a way that we may more often approach this most Holy Mystery, which the ancient Christians were furnished and partaking of on a daily basis.

Holy Communion, strengthening our spiritual and bodily powers, also serves as an invincible weapon for us in defeating the invisible enemy of our salvation—the devil. This enemy is extremely dangerous for us. How many snares he sets out for our ruin and destruction, in which he tries with all his power to entrap us; wherever we go, at almost every step, this evil spirit tries to wound us, ever trying to deceive and tempt us. We want to do good, but he lures us into evil; we want to pray, but he brings upon us foul thoughts, laziness, heaviness and so forth, taking advantage of our weaknesses and our inclination towards sin. How much care, attention to self, and self-discipline is required of us, lest this cruel spirit of malice prevail over us!

This enemy of mankind is so much the more dangerous in that he is invisible to us and is exceedingly cunning and evil. Against such a dangerous foe we must use a mighty weapon; but what can be more powerful than the most holy Mystery of Communion? In itself it is an almighty power, for in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ we receive the Master of heaven and earth, Whose might is infinite. On the other hand, it contains within itself all the power of our great redemption which was accomplished for us by our Savior, the fruit of which was victorious triumph over the dark kingdom of the devil.

He that rarely approaches this saving Mystery is estranging himself from salvation. Even common sense can grasp the truth of this. He who receives Holy Communion often, also cleanses his conscience often in the Mystery of Confession,

and in reliving his grief and contrition over the sins he has committed, he sets the saving fear of God as seal on his soul, keeping him from sin. To attain this, he must arm himself more often with good thoughts and good works which keep him from sin and draw him nearer to God. Then, according to the frequency of Communion, good dispositions and virtues acquire great power and become essential to the soul.

Each of us knows from experience that frequent repetition of anything forms a habit in us. He that repeats a sin often makes himself a slave to sin; he that strives for virtue becomes a struggler of piety. Thus, the person who partakes of Communion often necessarily acquires the disposition to serve the Lord with fervor, for he truly believes in the power of this Divine Mystery; he praises God with gladness and hope, for he truly trusts that the Lord is his helper and defender; he submits to Him with humility and love, because he truly loves the Lord Who has loved him and bestowed upon him every heavenly gift.

Present-day Christians, for the most part, rarely approach the saving Mysteries of Confession and Holy Communion but Christians of the first centuries were vouchsafed this gift daily. From this it is evident how piety has decreased in our days, and that it will do so further in the future. One can sometimes hear people say that they avoid approaching the Holy Mysteries because they consider themselves unworthy. But who is worthy of it? No one on earth is worthy of it, but whoever confesses his sins with heartfelt contrition and approaches the Chalice of Christ with consciousness of his unworthiness the Lord will not reject, in accordance with His words, *him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* (Jn 6:37).

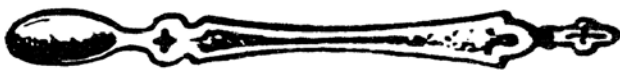
Others are so caught up in the vanity of the world that they find no time to prepare for Communion, or only prepare haphazardly for this most holy Christian duty. What carelessness concerning such a lofty gift of God, what negligence concerning the salvation of one's soul! Throughout the whole year they cannot set aside even a few days for the salvation of their soul, when before their eyes there are almost daily examples of sudden death. And we will not remain silent about the person who indeed approaches the Chalice of Christ unworthily. Of such people the word of God says: *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* (I Cor 11:29).

Approaching this awesome mystery, we say, *neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss.* Who is it that gives the Lord the kiss of Judas? Without a doubt, it is those who, not having cleansed their consciences by heartfelt repentance, not having grieved over their sins, approach the Chalice of Christ without the fear of God, or those who, having been joined to the Lord, having been sanctified by His most holy gift and freely cleansed of their innumerable transgressions,

the spawn of the spirit of malice, return again to their foul deeds, again become enslaved to Satan. Woe, eternal woe, to such people!

Let us conclude our discourse on the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ by pointing out some of the innumerable blessings which it bestows upon those who receive Communion worthily. According to the teaching of the Church (pre-Communion prayers), this most Holy Mystery of the Body and Blood gives to those partaking of it worthily strengthening of joints and bones, healing of divers infirmities, health, strength, preservation, salvation and sanctification of soul and body, estrangement and cleansing of a defiled soul, preservation from every soul-corrupting deed and word, protection from every action of the devil, a rampart and aid in dispersing the enemy (i.e., evil spirits); the driving away of every fantasy, evil act and work of the devil acting mentally in our members; the burning up and utter destruction of wicked thoughts and undertakings, and of nocturnal fantasies of the dark and evil spirits; correction of life and confirmation in holiness of life, keeping of the commandments, increase in virtue and perfection, enlightenment of the senses, peace of the powers of the soul, unashamed faith, fullness of wisdom, enlightenment of the eyes of the heart, boldness and love towards God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, an increase of divine grace; the abiding in our soul of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; strengthening of life, an earnest of the future life and kingdom, provision for eternal life, a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ, and communion of heavenly blessings.

With a conscience cleansed by the Mystery of Confession and with a sincere desire to correct our life, let us more and more often come to partake of the Heavenly Meal given us in the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. And, by worthy reception of this lofty gift, we may in turn receive those innumerable gifts which are bestowed upon us through this great Mystery. Those of us who worthily taste this most Holy Bread here on earth have the eyes of our soul towards Him and we pray that, one day, we may be deemed worthy in partaking Christ more completely in heaven as well. And through His grace, we shall remain eternally in communion with and in the face to face vision of Jesus Christ, our Creator, Master and Redeemer, of which may we all be deemed worthy through His good pleasure and beneficence.

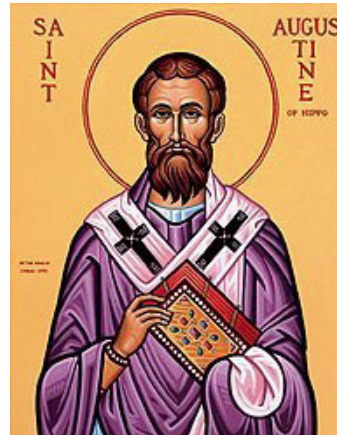


Be especially careful of the demon of apathetic listlessness (*Ed.*, ἀκηδία in Greek). Don't underestimate it. When it subjugates the soul, it drugs and paralyzes it. It is a large demon and enters man together with a great number of other demons.

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

REFORM YOUR LIFE!

By St. Augustine of Hippo (+430), an excerpt from "On Correcting One Another," *Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, Vol. III:100*; Preservation Press, Swedesboro, NJ, 1996.



Come, Brethren, be reformed in your life! You dread lest an enemy should bring you before a court; and you have no fear that God will judge you? Where is your faith? Fear while you have time to fear. The Day of Judgment is indeed far off; but the last day of every individual man cannot be far away, for life is short. And since even this brief span is

uncertain, you know not when your last day will be.

Because of tomorrow correct your life today. Let the reproof in secret profit you now. I speak openly, but I am rebuking you in secret. I knock at the ears of all; but I address myself to the conscience of some in particular. Were I to say, "You, adulterer, mend your ways," I would in the first place say what I did not know, or maybe only suspect from something chance heard. But I do not say, "You, adulterer, mend your ways;" what I do say is this: "Let each one of you in this congregation who is an adulterer mend his ways." The rebuke is public; the amendment is in secret. He who fears God will, I know, amend his life.

I have come to know, and with me so will any man who has reflected even a little, that there is no man who fears God who will not amend his life at His word, unless it is the man who thinks he has a longer time to live. It is this that brings spiritual death to so many, as they keep saying, "tomorrow, tomorrow;" and all of a sudden the door is closed. He remains without, with his raven's croak, because his voice was not the grieving voice of the dove. Tomorrow, tomorrow... the voice of the raven. Mourn like the dove, and beat your breast; but as you beat your breast, let what you beat amend itself, lest you seem not so much to be beating your conscience as ramming it hard with blows; making a bad conscience more unyielding instead of more obedient. Mourn, but not in fruitless grieving.

It may be that you say to yourself: "God has promised me forgiveness, whenever I reform; so I am safe. I read in the Holy Scripture: *If the wicked do penance for his sins which he hath committed, and shall do justice, I will not remember all his iniquities.* (Ezek. 18:21, 22). I am safe; tomorrow, when I amend my life, God will pardon me and all of my sins." And what am I to say? Am I to cry out against God? Am I to say to God: Do not give him pardon? Am I to say that

this is not written in the Scripture, that God has not made this promise? If I were to say that, I would say what is false. You are right; what you say is true.

That God has promised you pardon when you amend your life, I cannot deny. I agree and I grant you and I know that God has promised you forgiveness. But who has promised you tomorrow? Where have you read that you will receive forgiveness (when you do penance), and also the book that tells you as to how much longer you have to live. It is not there, there is no such book, you say. Therefore you do not know how much longer you have to live. Then reform your life, and be always prepared.

Do not live in fear of the last day, as though it were a thief coming to wreck your house while you sleep; but keep watch, and amend your life this day. Why put it off for tomorrow? If your life is to be long, let it be happy as well as long. No one puts off a good long dinner; and by putting off your repentance and amendment, you choose in turn the bad meal, a long evil life! If it is to be long, it will be all the better for being good. If it is to be short, it is as well that its fruits should last. Men so neglect their own life that, in it, they will have nothing bad except the life itself. You buy a house; you look for a good one. You marry a spouse, you choose a good one. You desire children, and you hope they will be good. You buy shoes, and you will not have bad ones. But you love a bad life! What has life done to you that you will only have it bad? That among all the good things that are yours, your life alone is bad?

And so, brethren, should I wish to correct one among you in private, it may be in my prayer and desire that you will listen to me. In public I correct many among you. All of you seem to approve my words; would then some of you do as I say? I do not care for the man who approves of me with his voice, and scorns me in his heart. For when you approve of what I say, and yet do not amend your life, you are a witness against yourself. If your life is bad, and what I say pleases you, then be displeased with yourself; because if your life is bad, and you are displeased with it, once you amend it you will be pleased with yourself.

In all that I am saying to you now, I am placing a mirror before you. These are not my words. I speak to you only at the command of the Lord; for fear of whom I dare not be silent. Who would not rather be silent, and not have to render an account because of you? But we have already assumed a burden which we cannot, and ought not, throw off our shoulders. When the Epistle to the Hebrews was being read, my brethren, you heard these words: *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you* (Heb 13:17).

When do we do this with joy? When we see men draw fruit from God's words. When does the laborer work with joy in

his field? When he looks at the tree, and sees the fruit; when he looks at his crop, and looks forward to an abundant yield on the threshing floor; when he has not labored in vain, nor bent his back in vain, nor worn his hands in fruitless toil, nor borne in vain both heat and cold.

It is for this he says, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. Did he say, Not profitable for them? No; he said, unprofitable for you. For when those placed over you are saddened by your wickedness it is profitable to them; their sadness is profitable to them; but it is not profitable for you. It is our desire that nothing shall profit us that does not profit you. Let us then, brethren, labor together in doing good in God's field, that together we may enjoy His reward.

Turning then to the Lord our God, the Father Almighty, let us, as best we can, give thanks with all our hearts, beseeching Him that in His goodness He will in mercy hear our prayers. And, by His grace, drive evil from our thoughts and actions, increase our faith, guide our thoughts, actions, guide our minds, grant us His holy inspirations, and bring us to joy without end, through His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



The Master of all visible and invisible creation was not ashamed to humble Himself and to take upon Himself our human nature, subject as it was to the passions of shame and desire and condemned by divine judgment; and He became like us in all things except that He was without sin, that is, without ignoble passions. All the penalties imposed by divine judgment upon man for the sin of the first transgression—death, toil, hunger, thirst and the like—He took upon Himself, becoming what we are, so we might become what He is...

Being rich, He became poor for our sake, so that through His poverty we might become rich. In His great love for man He became like us, so that through every virtue we might become like Him.

St. Mark the Ascetic



We ask those of our readers who wish to receive our publication via e-mail (in the form of a pdf file, of approximately 1.5-2.0 Mb size) to let us know. It allows us to make available printed issues of "Orthodox Heritage" to more of our fellow Orthodox who are unable to financially support our effort.

ON DESPONDENCY

Bishop Arsenius Zhadanovsky (+1937).

Despondency springs from various sources, primarily from our physical illnesses. In this case, despondency is suppressed by spiritual inspiration, spiritual interests. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*, it says in Scripture. The holy Apostle Paul was beset by a physical infirmity: *there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.* (II Cor. 12:7). Saint John Chrysostom takes *thorn in the flesh* to mean a severe headache. However, the same Apostle Paul testifies: *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong* (II Cor. 12:10), because he was wholly caught up in serving the Lord. Our bodily infirmities and the resultant despondency can be overcome only by the strengthening grace of God.

Despondency can also stem from a reduction of the powers of the soul, from loss of faith, from moral falls, from our sinfulness. The counsel in such cases is “to take a hair of the dog that bit you,” i.e., replace unbelief with firm belief in the Lord, change your bad ways to good ways, work to become morally renewed, spiritually energized and born again; repent and partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, and you will destroy despondency. To this second type of despondency can also be referred cases when it arises from grief, illness and misfortunes. Here, too, one can discern insufficient faith in the Lord and His Providence, and an excessive attachment to earthly things.

There is yet another type of despondency, one that afflicts people who are troubled by carnal sin. Here despondency is rooted, on the one hand, in a sickly condition, in physical weakness, and on the other hand, in spiritual faintheartedness, in spiritual emptiness. The remedy for this type of despondency lies partly in the physical strengthening of the organism. However, this type of despondency is very persistent and can turn into a chronic disposition. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the underlying causes have disordered our entire psyche: they dull the memory and enfeeble the will. For this reason, we must draw upon ourselves as much of God's all-healing power as possible, for it alone is capable of restoring spiritual and physical strength.

Further, despondency can also be a kind of testing that comes to us as we walk towards the Lord. In spiritual life, this type of despondency is quite common. Here, explain the holy ascetics, the grace of God conceals itself for a time in order to train a person to strengthen his spiritual forces, and, at the same time, to compel him to seek the Lord more zealously and to love Him more ardently, for only in Him is there peace and true happiness. This type of despondency is

overcome by means of internal warfare. One must struggle against despondency, chase it away, not succumb to it; one must pray, compelling oneself if necessary, because despondency stifles all desire for prayer; one must entreat the Lord to banish from us despondency *by Thy holy angels drive away from me demonic despondency* (fourth Prayer Before Sleep of Saint Makarios the Great).

This latter type of despondency affects people who are not firmly grounded in spiritual life. However, it also strikes those renowned for their spiritual experience, when they are seized by a spirit of conceit and spiritual pride—from which may God protect us. In such cases, despondency is not so much a form of testing as it is a form of punishment by God, and often this despondency results in grave consequences: in a complete falling away from the Lord, in despair, and even suicide. However, in all types of despondency our physician is the Lord, and understandably so, for the Lord is our comfort, our joy, our gladness and our consolation.

One must not delay in warring against despondency, for the next step after despondency is despair—which leads to perdition. The melancholy and despondency that visit us from time to time are precursors of that melancholy that will prevail in the last times; as it says in the word of God, there will be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world. Now just imagine the spiritual state of the people of the last times!...



If you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as His incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and He will receive your repentance...

St. Peter of Damaskos



We wish to remind our readers to not neglect sending us their annual contribution to help us cover the costs associated with our humble publication. In addition, we kindly request of those who have the financial ability, that they consider sending us an amount over the requested annual contribution of \$24 to assist us with our educational and philanthropic activities.

Ἡ Μητέρα τῆς Ζωῆς

Πρωτ. π. Γεωργίου Παπαβαρνάβα.

Κάθε χρόνο στις 15 Αὐγούστου ἐορτάζουμε τὴν Κοίμησι καὶ Μετάστασι τῆς Θεοτόκου, ποὺ ὀνομάζεται καὶ Πάσχα τοῦ καλοκαιριοῦ. Ἄν ἡ μνήμη ἑνὸς Ἁγίου ἀποτελῆ ἀφορμὴ χαρᾶς καὶ πανηγύρεως γιὰ ὅλη τὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Κοινότητα, ἡ Κοίμησι τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι χαρὰ καὶ πανηγύρι ὑπέρλαμπρο γιὰ ὅλη τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη οἰκουμένη.

Ἡ Παναγία εἶναι ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐπομένως εἶναι Μητέρα τῆς ζωῆς καὶ αἰτία τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης σωτηρίας. «Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς». Ἐπρεπε ὅμως καὶ αὐτὴ, ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, νὰ πληρώσῃ τὸ «κοινὸν χρέος», νὰ γνωρίσῃ τὸν θάνατο, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Βέβαια, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καταργήθηκε ὁ θάνατος καὶ οἱ ψυχῆς τῶν δικαίων προγεύονται τὸν Παράδεισο. Τὰ σώματά τους θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν πνευματικὰ καὶ ἄφθαρτα, κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ θὰ ἐνωθοῦν τὸ καθένα μετὰ τὴν δική του ψυχὴ. Ὅμως, κατὰ θεία παραχώρησι καὶ φιλανθρωπία, ὑφίσταται ὁ πρόσκαιρος χωρισμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ γίνῃ «τὸ κακὸν ἀθάνατον». Διαλύεται στὸν τάφο τὸ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα μέχρι τὴν κοινὴ ἐξανάστασι.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ θεοδόχο σῶμα τῆς Παναγίας, αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα ποὺ ἐβάστασε γιὰ ἑννέα μῆνες καὶ ἐγαλούχησε ὡς βρέφος τὸν Θεὸν Λόγον, δὲν ἦταν δυνατὸν νὰ τὸ κρατήσῃ ὁ τάφος. Τρεῖς ἡμέρες μετὰ τὴν κοίμησίν της «μετέστησεν αὐτὴν πρὸς τὰς ἐκεῖθεν μονάς, Χριστὸς ὁ ἐξ αὐτῆς ἄνευ σπορᾶς γεννηθεὶς». Τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀναστήθηκε, ἐνώθη μετὰ τὴν καθαρὴ ψυχὴ της καὶ, πνευματικὸ καὶ ἄφθαρτο, ἀναλήφθηκε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι πάντοτε στοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων κοντὰ στὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Θεὸ της. «Διὸ θνήσκουσα, σὺν τῷ Υἱῷ ἐγείρη διαιωνίζουσα» (Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ποιητής, ἀΨδὴ Κανόνος στὴν Κοίμησι τῆς Θεοτόκου).

Στὸ τελευταῖο μυστήριό της ζωῆς της, τὴν ἑνδοξὴ Κοίμησίν της, ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι παρόντες ὅλοι οἱ «αὐτοπται τοῦ Λόγου καὶ ὑπηρεταί», δηλαδὴ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἱεράρχες, ὅπως ὁ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἱεροθέου, πρῶτος Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν. Γι' αὐτὸ μετὰ τρόπο θαυμαστὸ μαζεύτηκαν ὅλοι ἀπὸ τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης, γιὰ νὰ προπέμψουν τὸ Θεοδόχο καὶ ἀκραιφνέστατο σῶμα της. «Θεῖα δυνάμει περαιωθέντες τὴν Σιών κατελάμβανον καὶ πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἐπειγομένην, προέπειπον τὴν ἀνωτέραν τῶν Χερουβίμ».

Τὴν Μετάστασι τῆς Θεοτόκου, δηλαδὴ τὴν Ἀνάστασι καὶ Ἀνάληψι τοῦ σώματός της, βεβαιώνουν πολλοὶ Θεοφόροι Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅπως οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀνδρέας ὁ Κρήτης, Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός, Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, Μάρκος ὁ Ἐφέσου, Θεόδωρος ὁ Στουδίτης καὶ ἄλλοι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ὑμνολογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ τονίζεται καὶ ψάλλεται πανηγυρικὰ: «Τὴν ἐν πρεσβείαις ἀκοίμητον Θεοτόκον, καὶ προστασίαις ἀμετάθετον ἐλπίδα, τάφος καὶ νέκρωσις οὐκ ἐκράτησεν ὡς γὰρ ζωῆς Μητέρα πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μετέστησεν, ὁ μήτραν οἰκῆσας ἀειπάρθενον». (Κοντάκιο Ἑορτῆς).

Ἡ ἔξοδος τῆς Παναγίας ὑπῆρξε ἑνδοξὴ, ὅπως καὶ ὅλη ἡ ἐπίγεια ζωὴ της. Φυσικὰ γνώρισε καὶ αὐτὴ τὸν πόνο, ἀφοῦ αὐτὸς εἶναι συνυφασμένος μετὰ τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τὴν πτώσι. Δὲν ὑπάρχει περίπτωση νὰ μὴν πονέσῃ κανεὶς στὴν ζωὴ του, γι' αὐτὸ σημασία ἔχει τὸ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν ἀναποδιὴ καὶ τὴν θλίψι ποὺ προκαλοῦν τὸν πόνο. Ὁ τρόπος μετὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἀντιμετωπίζονται ἔχει σχέση μετὰ τὴν νοοτροπία τοῦ καθενὸς καὶ τὴν ὅλη προσωπικότητά του. Οἱ ἀρρώστιες καὶ ὁ θάνατος ἀποτελοῦν ὀριακὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς καὶ σὲ αὐτὰς τὴν περιπτώσι εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ ὑποκριθῇ κανεὶς. Ἐτσι φανερώνεται ἡ πνευματικὴ του κατάστασι, τὸ ποῖος πραγματικὰ εἶναι. Ἡ κοίμησι τῶν Ἁγίων, ὅπως ἄλλωστε καὶ ὅλη ἡ ζωὴ τους, εἶναι κάτι τὸ ἐκπληκτικὸ. Βλέπεις ἕνα πρόσωπο ἡρεμο, γαλήνιο, εἰρηνικὸ, χωρὶς ἄγχος καὶ τρόμο, νὰ περιμένῃ τὴν ἔξοδο ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ αὐτὴ μετὰ τέτοια λαχτάρια, ὅπως κάποιος ποὺ λείπει ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγαπημένη τοῦ πατρίδα πολλὰ χρόνια καὶ τώρα, ἐπὶ τέλους, ἐπιστρέφει στὸν τόπο ποὺ λατρεύει.

Τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν τοὺς στενοχωροῦν οἱ θλίψεις, ἀντίθετα μάλιστα, τοὺς πλαταίνουν τὸν νοῦ καὶ τὴν καρδιά καὶ τοὺς ἀνοίγουν νέους ὁρίζοντες κατὰ τὸ Γραφικὸ, «ἐν θλίψει ἐπλάτυνας με» καὶ «ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι». Μία ἁγιασμένη ὑπαρξι ἔλεγε: «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ θὰ μετὰ νὰ στενοχωρηθῶ δὲν ἔχει γεννηθεῖ ἀκόμα».

Ἐπομένως, τὸ πρόβλημα στὴ ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι οἱ θλίψεις, ποὺ πάντα θὰ ὑπάρχουν, ἀλλὰ ὁ τρόπος μετὰ τὸν ὁποῖον ἀντιμετωπίζονται. Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ τρόπος πρέπει νὰ εἶναι τέτοιος ποὺ νὰ βοηθᾷ στὸ νὰ ἀποφεύγεται ἡ σύγχυσι καὶ ἡ ἀπόγνωσι καὶ νὰ διατηρεῖται ἡ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς. Ὡς τέτοιος προτείνεται ἀπὸ τὴν μακρόχρονη πείρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡ ἀπόλυτη ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καθὼς καὶ ἡ καταφυγὴ καὶ προσευχὴ στὴν Μητέρα τῆς Ζωῆς καὶ Μητέρα ὄλων μας.



Ἡ Ψῆφος τῶν... Ἀγγέλων

Τοῦ Πρεσβυτέρου Ἀθανασίου Μηνᾶ.

Ἐὐρέθην πρὸ ἀρκετοῦ καιροῦ στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος μὲ ἀποστολὴ νὰ μεταφέρω τὶς ἀνησυχίες πολλῶν πατέρων, ἱερέων, διακόνων, μοναχῶν καὶ λαϊκῶν θεολόγων σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ τὸν θανάσιμο κίνδυνο γιὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερία τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἑλλήνων, ἐξαιτίας τῆς «Κάρτας τοῦ Πολίτη» καὶ τὴν ὑποχρεωτικὴ χρήση αὐτῆς στὴ ζωὴ τῶν πολιτῶν ποὺ μὲ ἀπειλές οἱ κρατοῦντες προσπαθοῦν νὰ ἐπιβάλλουν δικτατορικὰ στὸ λαό μας.

Ἄφου ἄκουσα τὴν ἀπάντησή τους μὲ προσοχή, ἀντήλλαξα διάφορες σκέψεις ὠφέλιμες μὲ πολλοὺς ἀγιορεῖτες πατέρες, ἡγουμένους καὶ μῆ. Κατενόησα δέ, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀνησυχοῦσαν σφόδρα καὶ ἀνησυχοῦν ἕως τῆς σήμερον. Ἀπόδειξις ἢ γνωστὴ ἐγκύκλιος ποὺ ἐξέδωσε ἢ διπλὴ σύναξις τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους πρὸς τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο πλήρωμα.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγες ἡμέρες, ἐνῶ ἡ ζέση ἦταν ἀνυπόφορη (ἀρχές Αὐγούστου 2010), ἀποφάσισα νὰ ἐπιστρέψω στὴ βάση μου, ἔχοντας ἀποκομίσει ἁγία ἐν πολλοῖς συμπεράσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀνεκοίνωσα σὲ ἄλλους πατέρες.

Περιμένοντας νὰ ἔλθει ἡ ὦρα ποὺ τὸ λεωφορεῖο τῆς γραμμῆς θὰ μᾶς μετέφερε ἀπὸ τὶς Καρυές στὴ Δάφνη, μὲ πλησίασε ἕνας σεβάσμιος γέροντας, ἄγνωστος σὲ μένα, στάθηκε καὶ μὲ ρώτησε: «Πάτερ, εἶστε πνευματικός;»

Ντράπηκα νὰ τοῦ ἀπαντήσω καταφατικά. Τότε ἐκεῖνος μὲ ξαναρωτᾷει, κοιτώντας με διαπεραστικά στα μάτια, δίνοντάς μου νὰ καταλάβω ὅτι αὐτὴ τὴν ὦρα δὲν χρειάζονται ἀρρωστημένες ταπεινολογίες. Τοῦ ἀπήντησα, τότε, ὅτι μὲ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ Ἐκκλησία μου εἶχε δώσει τὴν εἰδικὴ εὐλογία καὶ ἄδεια νὰ εἶμαι ἐξομολόγος.

Εὐθὺς ἀμέσως μου εἶπε ἐπὶ λέξι: «Πάτερ, πρὶν λίγες ἡμέρες εἶδα ἕνα φοβερὸ ὄραμα, τὸ ὁποῖο δὲν μπορῶ νὰ κρατήσω ἐπάνω μου. Νοιώθω τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ τὸ ἀποκαλύψω σὲ πνευματικὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, μὲ τὴν παράκληση ἐκεῖνος νὰ τὸ χειριστεῖ ὅπως τὸν φωτίσει ὁ Θεός».

«Μιλήστε, πάτερ», τοῦ ἀπήντησα.

«Εἶδα, μου εἶπε, μεγάλη κινητικότητα στὶς οὐράνιες δυνάμεις Ἁγίων καὶ Ἀγγέλων, καὶ ἐνοιωσα ὅτι κάποιος μεγάλος κίνδυνος ἔρχεται στὸ ἐγγὺς μέλλον νὰ ἀπειλήσει τὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ ὅλους ἐμᾶς καὶ ὅτι αὐτὴ

ἡ κινητικότητα στὶς οὐράνιες δυνάμεις μου φάνηκε ὡς μιὰ προετοιμασία γιὰ ἄμεση βοήθεια στὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ τὸν λαό μας ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους μας».

Πρὶν προλάβω νὰ συνέλθω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκπληξη, μὲ χαιρέτησε, καὶ μὲ τὸ ἀγιορεῖτικο «εὐλογεῖτε» ἀθόρυβα ἀπομακρύνθηκε. Ἐκτοτε δὲν τὸν ξαναεἶδα, οὔτε προσπάθησα νὰ μάθω ποιοὺς ἦταν.

Ἦλθε ἡ ὦρα τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως. Ἄνοιξαν οἱ πόρτες τοῦ λεωφορείου. Ἀνέβηκα καὶ κάθισα μὲ προορισμὸ τὴν Δάφνη, Οὐρανούπολη, Θεσσαλονίκη, Ἀθήνα. Τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ ἐρχόταν περιοδικὰ, στὸ νοῦ μου ἐν τούτοις δὲν τοῦ ἔδωσα ἀπόλυτη προτεραιότητα στὴν ποιμαντικὴ μου διακονία. (Φοβήθηκα κατ' ἀρχὴν, ἐπειδὴ σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς πατέρες ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ πλάνη).

Ὅμως μετὰ τὶς ἐκλογές ποὺ ἐγιναν στὴ χώρα μας καὶ κατανοώντας τὸ ἀδιέξοδο στὸ ὁποῖο ὀδηγοῦμεθα καὶ τὸν ἄμεσο κίνδυνο ποὺ διατρέχουμε νὰ βρεθοῦμε ὅλοι στὸν ἀλληλοσπαραγμὸ ἢ στὸ χάος, θυμήθηκα ἐντονα τὰ λόγια τοῦ γέροντα τότε στὶς Καρυές καὶ σκέφθηκα νὰ δημοσιεύσω τὰ λεγόμενά του σὲ μένα, ὥστε, εἰ δυνατόν, νὰ γίνουν γνωστὰ στὸ πανελλήνιο. Προσευχόμενος ταυτόχρονα, μὲ θερμὴ παράκληση στὸν Κύριο καὶ Βασιλέα Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ νὰ βοηθήσει τὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ τὸν λαό μας καὶ νὰ στρέψει σὲ ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια τὶς καρδιές ὅλων μας ὥστε νὰ ἀντιληφθοῦμε, ἄρχοντες καὶ ἀρχόμενοι, τὴν ἐπερχόμενη δαιμονικὴ μπόρα ποὺ φανερὰ πλέον πλησιάζει.

ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑ

Ὅταν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ, οἱ Γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, οἱ Σαδδουκαῖοι καὶ οἱ Ἑρωδιανοί, σατανοκίνητοι ὄντες, ἀποφάσισαν νὰ ἐξοντώσουν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Θεάνθρωπο Μεσσία Ἰησοῦ, ἐπειδὴ ἡ διαβολικὴ τους ὑπερηφάνεια δὲν τοὺς ἄφηνε περιθώρια νὰ κατανοήσουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, τότε ἀκριβῶς ὁ Κύριος, ἀπεκάλυψε στὶς γυναῖκες ἐκεῖνες ποὺ ἐκλαιγαν, ὅταν ματωμένος περνοῦσε σηκώνοντας τὸν Τίμιον Σταυρὸ Του ἀπὸ μπροστά τους, τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ ποὺ θὰ βίωναν οἱ ἴδιες, τὰ παιδιὰ τους καὶ ἡ πόλις τῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ πολὺ σύντομα. Ὅπως ἐπίσης, καὶ σὲ ἄλλη στιγμὴ ἐνώπιον τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων προεφήτευσε τὴν καταστροφὴ τοῦ Ναοῦ καὶ τὴν ἰσοπέδωση τῆς πόλης. Αὐτὰ συνέβησαν ἀκριβῶς ἐπὶ Τίτου τὸ 67 μ.Χ. ὅπως ἡ ἱστορία ἔχει καταγράψει.



Ὅμως, τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ πάλι, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴν στάση του πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, παρήγγειλε νὰ βρισκονται σὲ ἐγρήγορη ἐκείνοι πού τὸν πίστεψαν, τὸν δέχτηκαν καὶ τὸν ἀγάπησαν, δηλαδή τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους, ἔτοιμοι, ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι, ὥστε ὅταν θὰ ἔβλεπαν τὰ στρατεύματα νὰ κυκλώνουν τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν ἐγκαίρως καὶ νὰ κρυφτοῦν στὶς σπηλιές καὶ στοὺς γύρω λόφους, δίνοντάς τους τὴν ὑπόσχεση ὅτι Ἐκεῖνος θὰ μερμνοῦσε καὶ θὰ τοὺς ἔσωζε ἀπὸ τὴν φοβερὴ αὐτὴ δοκιμασία.

Καὶ πράγματι ἔτσι ἔγινε. Αὐτὸ πού συνέβη εἶναι ὄντως ἐκπληκτικό. Οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, κληρὸς καὶ λαός, πού πίστευσαν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Μεσσίου, ἀτενίζοντας τὰ στρατεύματα τοῦ Τίτου, ἔφυγαν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ σώθηκαν. Οἱ ἐχθροὶ Του δέ, πού τὸν ἀρνήθηκαν, βλέποντας τὰ στρατεύματα νὰ κυκλώνουν τὴν πόλιν, παρέμειναν μέσα σὲ αὐτὴν καὶ στὸ Ναό, ἐλπίζοντας ὅτι θὰ σωθοῦν. Καὶ ὅπως ἀναφερθήκαμε πρὸ πάνω, τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα πού ἦταν τραγικὸ καὶ φοβερό, τὸ ἔχει ἤδη καταγράψει ἡ Ἱστορία. Πράγματι, δὲν ἔμεινε λίθος ἐπὶ λίθου καὶ ὄλοι ὅσοι δὲν τὸν πίστεψαν πέρασαν ἀπὸ στόματι μαχαίρας. Ὁ δὲ Ναός καταστράφηκε καὶ παραμένει ἔτσι ἕως τῆς σήμερον.

Τηρουμένων λοιπὸν τῶν ἀναλογιῶν, ἀγαπητοὶ μου Ὁρθόδοξοι ἀδελφοί, κληρε καὶ λαὸ τοῦ Τριαδικοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, ἀναρωτιέμαι μήπως τώρα εἶναι ἐπὶ θύραις ἢ ὥρα τῆς προφητείας τοῦ πατρὸς Παΐσιου γιὰ τὴν μπόρα τὴν δαμονική.

Ὅσοι ἔχουν νοῦν Χριστοῦ καὶ εἶναι ἀκόλουθοι τῶν Ἁγίων, ἀντιλαμβάνονται ἀκριβῶς ὅτι αὐτὰ πού συμβαίνουν σήμερα δὲν εἶναι ἀπλῶς θέατρον τοῦ παραλόγου, ὅπως μᾶς τσαμπουνίζουν ὄλοι στὰ μέσα μαζικῆς ἐνημέρωσης ἀλλὰ τουναντίον, ἄνθρωποι πού ἀρνήθηκαν καὶ ἀρνοῦνται στὴν πράξη τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ τὴν διδασκαλίαν Του, κατήντησαν κατοικητήρια πολλῶν δαιμόνων, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὄχι μόνο κανοναρχοῦν τὴν δική τους ζωὴ ἕως τῆς τελικῆς ἐξοντώσεώς τους, ἐπειδὴ οἱ δαίμονες δὲν ἔχουν ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ ἀλλοίμονον, παρασύρουν καὶ ὄσους τοὺς ἐμπιστεύονται ἢ θὰ τοὺς ἐμπιστευθοῦν τὴν ζωὴ τους τὶς ἐπόμενες ἡμέρες!

Καὶ γεννάται αἰφνης τὸ ἐρώτημα: «Τὶ μέλλει γενέσθαι; Τὶ ὀφείλουμε νὰ πράξουμε;» Εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλὸ καὶ εὐκόλο ἀδελφοί μου.

Ἄς μετανοήσουμε εἰλικρινὰ ὄλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες κ' ἄς κλάψουμε. Καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸν ἀληθινὸ Ποιμένα καὶ Ἐπίσκοπο τῶν ψυχῶν μας, τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριο τῶν κυριευόντων, ἄς Τοῦ ζητήσουμε μὲ καρδιακὴ προσευχὴ ταπεινὰ νὰ βοηθήσει τὸ ποιμνίό Του, τὴν Ἐκκλησία Του, τὴν πατρίδα μας, τὸν κόσμον ὅλο, πού

κεῖται στὴν ἀπόλυτη ἀποστασία καὶ διαφθορά, ὥστε, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι καὶ ὁλόκληρος ὁ κόσμος, νὰ βαπτισθοῦν Ὁρθοδόξως καὶ νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη πού τοὺς δέρνει καὶ τοὺς καθιστᾷ σκληρόκαρδους καὶ ἀπάνθρωπους.

Μὲ ἐκπληξὴ ἀκούσαμε, αὐτές τὶς ἡμέρες, τὶ ζήτησε ἡ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση ἀπὸ τὴν Σλοβακία γιὰ νὰ γίνει μέλος της. νὰ ἀρνηθοῦν, τοὺς εἶπαν, οἱ Σλοβάκοι τὸ ἔθμικὸ τους δίκαιο καὶ νὰ νομοθετοῦν στὸ ἐξῆς σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ Εὐρωπαϊκὸ Δίκαιο, μὲ πρῶτο τὸν νόμον γιὰ τὴν νομιμοποίηση τῆς ὁμοφυλοφιλίας, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ τὴν σιωπηλὴ ἀνοχή τους στὰ ἐγκλήματα τῆς παιδεραστίας, καθὼς καὶ σὲ κάθε σηπώδη καὶ βορβορῶδη ἀνηθικότητα πού μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ἐκμετάλλευση τοῦ ἐνὸς πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον πρυτανεύουν στὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ κουλτούρα. Ἐσχάτως, σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ ΜΜΕ, σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ τὸν κυνεδισμό, ἀπέκτησαν συνήγορο, τὸν Πρόεδρο τῶν ΗΠΑ, Ὀμπάμα. Τὶ νὰ πεῖ κανεῖς!!! Ἴσως ὁ πόνος καὶ τὰ δάκρυα θὰ δώσουν τὴ λύση παγκοσμίως.

Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Γιὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ζῶντος, ἐλέησον καὶ σῶσον ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν πατρίδα μας ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ πού καθαρὰ φαίνονται στὸν ὀρίζοντα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας καὶ τάχιστα ΚΑΤΑΦΘΑΝΟΥΝ...

Ἀμήν.



Ἐχοντας τὸ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ ζωντανὸ στὴ σκέψη μας, νὰ θυμόμαστε πάντοτε τὸ θάνατο. Νὰ μισήσουμε τὸν κόσμον καὶ ὄλα τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, νὰ μισήσουμε κάθε σαρκικὴ ἀνάπαυση, νὰ ἀαρνηθοῦμε στὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ, γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε μὲ τὸν Θεό. Νὰ θυμᾶστε τί ὑποσχεθήκατε στὸν Θεό. Γιατὶ αὐτὸ θὰ μᾶς τὸ ζητήσει τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς κρίσεως. Ἄς δοκιμασθοῦμε λοιπὸν μὲ τὴν πείνα, τὴ δίψα καὶ τὴ γύμνια. Ἄς ἀγρυπνήσουμε, ἄς πενήθισουμε, ἄς στενάξουμε μὲ τὴν καρδιά μας. Ἄς ἐρευνήσουμε ἂν γίναμε ἄξιοι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε τὴ θλίψη, γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὸν Θεό. Νὰ καταφρονήσουμε τὴ σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μας.

Ἀββᾶς Ἀντώνιος

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Μέγα Γεροντιοκὸν»

Ἡ Φοβερὴ Προφητεία Ἐπιγραφή σπὸν Τάφο τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου

Ἀπὸ διαφορῆς πηγῆς.

Τὸ ἱερὸν λείψανον τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου ἀνεκωμίσθη ἐκ Νικομηδείας ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ διαδόχου αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντίνου κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 350 μ.χ. καὶ κατετέθη εἰς τὸν ναὸν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἐκ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (τὸ νῦν Τουρκικὸν τέμενος Σουλτὰν Σελῆμ ἢ Φατίχ).

Ἐπὶ τῆς Χρυσῆς Λάρνακος, ἣτις καὶ σήμερον ἀκόμη ὑπάρχει καὶ ἀσφαλῶς θὰ εὑρίσκειται εἰς τὸ ἐν Ἁγία Σοφία ἀρχαιολογικὸν Τουρκικὸν Μουσεῖον, εἶναι ἐγκαραγμένη μετὰ ἐλλειπογράμματους στίχους ἡ ἀναφερομένη προφητεία τὴν ὁποία ἐξήγησεν ὁ Γεώργιος Σχολάριος, ὁ πρῶτος μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης (μετονομασθεὶς Γεννάδιος).

Τὸ κείμενο τῆς ἐγκαραγμένη ἐπιγραφῆς-προφητείας, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς βρέθηκε πάνω στὴν πλάκα τοῦ μνήματος, ἦταν αὐτὸ:

Τ. πτ. τ. ιδτ. Η βελ. τ. ιμλ. Ο Κλμν. μαμθ. μ. δ. ν. τροσ. γν. τ. πλολγ. τ. επιτλφ. κρτσ. εσθ. βελε. εθν. ππλ. κτξ. κ. τ. νο. ερμσ. μχο. τ. εξν. πτ. ιστρογντν. πθσ. τ. ινδκτ. πλυσ. κτδ. τ. εντ. τ. ιδκτ. ε. τβρ. τ. μρ. μλ. δ. ν. στροτ. τ. δκτ. τ. ιδκτ. τ. δμτ. τροσ. πλ. εσπτιψ. ετ. χν. τ. δμτ. πλμ. εγρ. μγ. μρκτ. στροβν. κ. τ. πλθ. κ. τ. φλ. σνδ. τ. επρ. δ. θλσ. κ. ξρ. τ. πλμ. σνω. κ. τ. ισμλ. τροσ. τ. απγν. ατ. βολσ. ελτ. μκρ. ολγ. τ. δ. ξθ. γν. αμ. μτ. τ. πκτρ. ολ. ιμλ. τισ. τ. επλφ. επρο. μετ. τ. προμ. ττ. πλμ. εγρ. εφλ. ηγρων. μχ. τ. ππτ. ωρ. κ. φν. βο. ττ. στ. στ. μτ. φβ. σπστ. πλ. σδω. ε. τ. δξ. τ. μρ. αδ. ερτ. γν. θμστ. κ. ρμλο. ττ. εξτ. δσπν. φλ. γ. εμ. υπχ. κ. ατ. προλβτ. θλμ. εμ. πλρτ.

Ἡ ἀποκωδικοποίηση τοῦ κειμένου ἀπὸ τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριάρχην Γεννάδιο:

Τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Ἰσμαῆλ ὁ καλούμενος Μωάμεθ μέλλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσιν γένος τῶν Παλαιολόγων τὴν ἐπτάλοφον κρατήσει ἔσθθεν βασιλεύσει ἔθνη πάμπολλα κατάρξει καὶ τὰς νήσους ἐρημώσει μέχρι τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου ἰστρογείτονας πορθήσει τῇ ὀγδόῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου Πελοπόννησον κατάρξει τῇ ἐνάτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου εἰς τὰ βόρεια τὰ μέρη μέλλει διὰ τὴν στρατεύσει τῇ δεκάτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου τοὺς Δαλμάτας τροπώσει πάλιν ἐπιστρέψει ἔτι χρόνον τοῖς Δαλμάταις πόλεμον ἐγείρει μέγαν μερικὸν τε συντριβῆναι καὶ τὰ πλήθη καὶ τὰ φύλλα

συννοδοὶ τῶν ἐσπεριῶν διὰ θαλάσσης καὶ ξηρᾶς τὸν πόλεμον συνάψουν καὶ τὸν Ἰσμαῆλ τροπώσουν. Τὸ δὲ ἀπογόνων αὐτοῦ βασιλεύσει ἔλαττον. Τὸ δὲ ξανθὸν γένος ἅμα μετὰ τῶν πρακτόρων ὄλων Ἰσμαῆλ κατατροπώσουν τὴν ἐπτάλοφο ἐπάρουν μετὰ πάντων προνομίων τότε πόλεμον ἐγείρουν ἔμφυλον ἠγριωμένον μέχρι τῆς πεμπταίας ὥρας καὶ φωνὴ βοήσει στήτε στήτε μετὰ φόβου σπεύσατε πολλὰ σπουδαίως εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ τὰ μέρη ἄνδρα εὗρητε γενναῖον θαυμαστὸν καὶ ρωμαλέον τοῦτον ἔξετε δεσπότην φίλος γὰρ ἐμοῦ ὑπάρχει καὶ αὐτὸν παραλαβόντες θέλημα ἐμὸν πληροῦται.

Λεπτομερῆς Ἀνάλυσις

Εἶναι βέβαιον καὶ οὐδεμία ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ὁ χρησμοὶς ἢ μᾶλλον ἡ καταπληκτικὴ αὕτη προφητεία ἐγράφη ὑπὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ ἐν γνώσει καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος Διαδόχου τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου.

Ἡ ἀνάλυσις τῆς προφητείας ἔχει ὡς ἐξῆς (μετὰ ἔντονα τὸ πρωτότυπο κείμενο, ἀκολουθεῖ ἐρμηνεῖα τοῦ κ. Γεώργιου Η. Μπούρα, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Πνευματικὴ Διαθήκη», 1972).

Τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου ὁ καλούμενος Μωάμεθ μέλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσιν γένος τῶν Παλαιολόγων.

Ἡ λέξις ΙΝΔΙΚΤΟΣ ἔχει εὐρύτεραν σημασίαν δηλοῦσα ἐποχὴν μακρὰν καθ' ἣν ἐγένοντο αἱ διάφοροι Τουρκικαὶ κατακτήσεις. Οἱ Τοῦρκοι ὀνομάζονται ΙΣΜΑΗΛΙΤΑΙ ὡς ἀσπασθέντες τὴν Μουσουλμανικὴν θρησκείαν. Ἡ ἐπόμενη φράσις «ὁ ΚΑΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ ΜΩΑΜΕΘ μέλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσει γένος

τῶν Παλαιολόγων», ἐννοεῖ τὸν κατακτητὴν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνον Παλαιολόγον, ὅστις ἔπεσε κατὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τὸ ἔτος 1453. Παρατηρήσατε τὸ 353 μ.χ. ἡ προφητεία ὁμιλεῖ διὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Παλαιολόγου καὶ τοῦ κατακτητοῦ Μωάμεθ! Δηλαδή πρὸ 1.100 ἐτῶν ποῖος ὅθεν ἀμφιβάλλει ὅτι ἡ προφητεία αὕτη δὲν εἶναι Θεόπνευστος;

Τὴν ἐπτάλοφον κρατήσει, ἔσθθεν δὲ Βασιλεύσει καὶ τὰς νήσους ἐρημώσει μέχρι τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου.

Ἰστρογείτονας πορθήσει, τῇ ὀγδόῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου Πελοπόννησον καταρξει.

Ἡ λέξις ΙΣΤΡΟΓΕΙΤΟΝΕΣ εἶναι οἱ περὶ τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰστρὸν ἢ Δούναβιν γειτονιάζοντες νῦν Ρουμάνοι.



Τῇ ἐννάτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου εἰς τὰ βόρεια τὰ μέρη μέλλει διὰ τὴν στρατεύση.

Τῇ δεκάτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου τοὺς Δαλμάτας ἐκτροπώση πάλιν δ' οὗτος ἐπιστρέψει.

Ἐτι χρόνον τοῖς Δαλμάταις πόλεμον ἐγείρει μέγαν μερικὸν τὲ συντριβεῖναι.

Δία τῆς φράσεως ETI XPONON TOIS DALMATAIΣ POLEMON EGHEIPEI MEGAN MERIKON TE SYNTRIBHNAI ὑπονοεῖται ἡ μέχρι Βιέννης προέλασις κατόπιν τῶν Τούρκων πρὸ τῆς ὁποίας ἀνεκόπησαν, ἠττηθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν Οὐγγῶν καὶ τῶν συμμάχων αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1683.

Καὶ τὰ πλήθη καὶ τὰ φύλλα συνωδοὶ τῶν ἐσπερίων διὰ θαλάσσης καὶ ξηρᾶς τότε Πόλεμον συνάφουν καὶ τὸν Ἰσμαὴλ τροπώσουν.

Ἡ φράσις ὑπονοεῖ τὴν ἦτταν τῶν Τούρκων ὑπὸ τῶν Δυτικῶν Δυνάμεων κατὰ τὸν 1ον Παγκόσμιον πόλεμον 1924-1918.

Τὸ δὲ ἀπόγονον αὐτοῦ βασιλεύσει ἔλαττον.

Ἡ φράσις ἐννοεῖ τὸν διάδοχον τοῦ Σουλτανικοῦ καθεστώτος, τὸ ψευτο-δημοκρατικὸν πολίτευμα τῶν καιρῶν μας, τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ κρατήσει πολὺ ὀλίγον.

Τὸ δὲ ξανθὸν γένος ἅμα μετὰ τῶν πρακτόρων ὄλων Ἰσμαὴλ κατατροπώσουν τὴν ἐπτάλοφο ἐπάρουν μετὰ πάντων προνομίων.

Ἡ φράσις ἐννοεῖ τὴν κατάληψιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως μετὰ τῶν στενῶν ἐν τῷ ἅμα ὑπὸ τοῦ ΞΑΝΘΟΥ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ ΤΟΥ ΡΩΣΣΙΚΟΥ καὶ τῶν δορυφόρων αὐτοῦ Βουλγάρους κ.λπ.

Ὅτι τὸ Ξανθὸν γένος εἶναι τὸ Ρωσικὸν οὐδεμία ἀμφιβολία ὑπάρχει διότι τοῦτο ἀναφέρει σαφῶς ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ κατὰ Χριστὸν Σαλὸς ἀκμάσας κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 340 μ.χ. καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος λέγει: «Ἐγὼ δὲ φημι ὅτι τὸ Ξανθὸν γένος εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν καὶ τὰ κῶλα τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καταστρέψουσιν, ἄρχεται δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ δεκάτου ἐβδόμου γράμματος τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἀλφαβήτου ἀνακεφαλαιούμενον». Τὸ 17^{ον} γράμμα τοῦ ἀλφαβήτου εἶναι τὸ (Ρ)ωσικόν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ταράσιος, Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀναφέρει: «Ἰσχύς δὲ πρῶτον ἔσται Βορείων ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑπταλόφου Γέτας δὲ οὗτοι Μασσογέται Ρώσσοι». Ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ ὁ Προφήτης Ἰεζεκιήλ, 600 ἔτη πρὸ Χριστοῦ, ἀναφέρει ὅτι τὸ γένος τοῦτο θὰ κατέλθῃ ἐκ τοῦ Βορρᾶ καὶ θὰ κατασυντριβῇ εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως: «ΓΩΓ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΓΩΓ ΗΓΕΜΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΡΩΣ».

Παρατηρήσατε τὴν πορφητεία τῆς Λάρνακος τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου: οὐδεμίαν μνεῖαν κάμνει διὰ τὸν 2^{ον} Παγκόσμιον Πόλεμον, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸν 1^{ον} ἀναφέρει μόνον τὸ Δημοκρατικὸν καθεστῶς τῆς Τουρκίας ποῦ θὰ βασιλεύσῃ ὀλίγον καὶ ἀναφέρει

κατόπιν τὴν κατάληψιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὑπὸ τοῦ Ξανθοῦ γένους τῆς Ρωσσίας. Ἡ Τουρκία οὐδόλως ἀνεμίχθη εἰς τὸν 2^{ον} Παγκόσμιον Πόλεμον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς δὲν ἀναφέρει περὶ αὐτῆς.

Τότε πόλεμον ἐγείρουν ἔμφυλον ἠγριωμένον μέχρι τῆς πεμπτῆρας ὥρας.

Καὶ φωνὴ βοήσῃ στήτε στήτε μετὰ φόβον σπεύσατε πολλὰ σπονδαίως εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ τὰ μέρη ἄνδρα εὐρητε γενναῖον θαυμαστὸν καὶ ρωμαλέον τοῦτον ἔξετε δεσπότην φίλος γὰρ ἐμοῦ ὑπάρχει.

Καὶ αὐτὸν παραλαβόντες θέλημα ἐμὸν πληροῦται.

Ἡ φράσις «καὶ φωνὴ βοήσῃ τρίτον ΣΤΗΤΕ ΣΤΗΤΕ ΜΕΤΑ ΦΟΒΟΥ» ἐννοεῖ τὸ θαῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν δι' οὗ θὰ σταματήσῃ ὁ Πόλεμος καὶ τὸ ὁποῖον θαῦμα θὰ γίνῃ ἄνωθεν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ θὰ στραφῇ τὸ τόξον ἐκ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ πρὸς τὰ δεξιὰ, τὰ μέρη τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐξ' ἧς θὰ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἐκλεκτός του Θεοῦ Βασιλεὺς Ἰωάννης.

Διὰ τὸ θαῦμα τοῦτο γράφει ἐκτεταμένως ὁ Λέων ὁ Σοφὸς Αὐτοκράτωρ τοῦ Βυζαντίου τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὁραθήσεται γὰρ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ νεφῶδες στερέωμα λαμπρότερον τοῦ ἡλίου, ἄνωθεν δὲ κρεμασθήσεται Σταυρός. Εὐωνύμου δὲ τοῦ Σταυροῦ τοῦ πορφυροῦ ἐκτεταμένον τόξον, οἷον ἔθετε τοῖς Πατράσιν ἡμῶν εἰς Διαθήκην αἰώνιον, ἀγνοούντων δὲ πάντων ἀνακληθήσεται τὸ τόξον διὰ τοῦ νοτίου μέρους, ὁ ἔσται ἐκτελούμενον ἐν τῷ κλίματι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ πληρωθήσεται τὸ πέρας ἕως τῆς σκηνῆς, ἀναδειχθήσεται δὲ τὴ θέσει τῆς καλλίας τοῦ Ἀληθινοῦ Βασιλέως. Τότε οἱ Λαοὶ ἰδόντες δοξάσουσι τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ δρομαίως σπεύσουσιν εἰς τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ τόξου καὶ λαβόντες τὸν Πολύτιμον καὶ γηραιὸν Ἄνακτα μετὰ λαμπάδων καὶ Βαίῶν φέρουσιν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ Ἁγίᾳ Σοφίᾳ. Καὶ κῆρυξ βροντώδῃ τῇ φωνῇ καὶ μὴ φαινόμενος ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ πρὸς τὸν Λαὸν εἶπη: ΑΡΕΣΤΟΣ ΥΜΙΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΟΥΤΟΣ!»!



Λοιπόν, ζωὴ χωρὶς Χριστὸν δὲν εἶναι ζωὴ. Πάει, τελείωσε. Ἄν δὲ βλέπεις τὸ Χριστὸν σὲ ὅλα σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τίς σκέψεις, εἶσαι χωρὶς Χριστό. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι νέα ζωὴ. Πῶς τὸ λέω; Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ Πᾶν. Εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ, εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ, εἶναι τὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινό, ποῦ κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ χαίρεται, νὰ πετάει, νὰ βλέπει ὅλα, νὰ βλέπει ὅλους, νὰ πονάει γιὰ ὅλους, νὰ θέλει ὅλους μαζί του, ὅλους κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος Κουσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Μὴ Γίνεσθε Σκλάβοι Ἀνθρώπων

K. Ζουράρις, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «Ἄρδην» τ. 11.

**La science est trop lente,
que la priere qalope
et que lumiere gronde.**

**Ἡ ἐπιστήμη εἶναι πολὺ ἀργή,
ὅτι ἡ προσευχὴ καλπάζει
καὶ τὸ φῶς βρυχᾶται.**

[Ἀρθοῦρος Ρεμπὼ, «*Une Saison en Enfer*»—
«Μία Ἐποχὴ στὴν Κόλαση»]

† † †

Ἐπάρχει στὸν πλανήτη ἓνας τόπος ὅπου θάλλει ὡς καθεστῶς, μόνιμο διότι εἶναι καὶ νόμιμο, ἡ οἰκουμενικότης. Τόπος τέτοιος δὲν εἶναι βεβαίως ὁ ΟΗΕ, διότι ἐκεῖ σαρώνει τὸ Συμβούλιο Ἀσφαλείας του. Καὶ μέχρι νὰ καταργηθῆ τὸ Συμβούλιο Ἀσφαλείας, οἰκουμενικότης δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρξει. Ἄλλωστε, καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνδεχομένη τοῦ ἐξαφάνιση, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ καταργηθοῦν καὶ οἱ ψηφοφορίες ἀπὸ τὸν ΟΗΕ. Μὲ νόμιμο τὸ νόμιμον, ἄλλωστε, 51%-49%, καθεστῶς οἰκουμενικότης δὲν ὑφίσταται. Κατατυραννεῖ, ἀπλῶς, ἡ δικτατορία τῆς «ψηφοφορίας». Κι ἂν ὑπάρχει ἀντίρρηση ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἄς ρωτήσουμε τὸ νικημένο 49%, πῶς νοιώθει...

Οὔτε τὸ Ἴντερνέτ, βεβαίως, παράγει οἰκουμενικότητα, διότι ἄλλο κυκλοφορία κι ἄλλο εὐφορία. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο δὲν παράγει καθεστῶς οἰκουμενικὸ, διότι χρειάζεται νὰ ἔχει ἐνορίες. Χωρὶς ἐνορία, πατριαρχεῖο Οἰκουμενικὸ δὲν νοεῖται, ἄρα, χωρὶς κάποια τουλάχιστον ὄρια, τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο παύει ὑφιστάμενο.

Ἡ οἰκουμενικότης ὅμως εἶναι ἓνα καθεστῶς, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὸ ὄριον, εἶναι πέραν τῶν ὁρίων ποὺ θέτουν ἀμοιβαίως ἢ ἑτεροβαρῶς οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὅπως π.χ. τὸ τραγωδίας σημαντικόν, «*ἀρχομεν τῶν ἐκεῖ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπακούωμεν ἄλλον*»...

Ἡ οἰκουμενικότης, ὡς καθεστῶς γιὰ ὅλους τους καθεστῶτες, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι μία ὑπερορία, ἀλλοιῶς ξαναπέφτει στὸ σύνορο. Τὸ μόνον, λοιπόν, στὸν κόσμον μὴ συνοριακὸ καθεστῶς, εἶναι ὁ τρόπος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Κι ὅμως ἔχει σύνορα καὶ μάλιστα περιορισμένα, ἀφοῦ αὐτὰ ὀρίζονται ἀπὸ ἓναν τόπο μικρὸ κι ἓνα κατὰ φύσιν ἄτοπον, δηλαδή τὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ θηλυκοῦ. Ὁ ὅποιος ὅμως τοῦ βίου πλάνης καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπείων γυρολόγος, αὐτός,

μόλις πάρει ἀντίδωρο τὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, γνωρίζει πιὰ τί πάει νὰ πεῖ γιὰ τὰ σωθικὰ τοῦ τὸ «ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοί».

Πουθενά, σὲ κανένα καθεστῶς, δὲν νοιώθεις τόσο ἐλεύθερος, τόσο ἀπελευθερωμένος ἀπὸ τὴν «*πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν*», ποὺ εἶναι τὸ τραγικόν, ἔς ἀεί, σύνορο τοῦ θουκυδιδείου καθεστῶτος γιὰ μία σὺφρονα συνύπαρξη μεταξὺ τῶν ἐμφοβῶν συμπαικτῶν τοῦ ἀντιπάλου δέους. Ἐκεῖ, στὸ περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας, καταργεῖται ἡ περὶ καθεστῶτος ὀρθοφροσύνη, ποὺ ἐπιτάσσει ὅτι «*τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ δέους ξυνίσταται*», ὥστε αὐτὰ τὰ πάντα, νὰ μποροῦν νὰ συνίστανται ὡς καθεστῶς τῆς ἑτερότητας τῶν συμπαικτῶν, δηλαδή ὡς καθεστῶς ἐλευθερίας. Διότι, ἐκεῖ, ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπη τῆς Ἐλεούσας, βλέπουμε στὸ πετσί μας καὶ τὴν σάρκα τῶν ἄλλων νὰ λειτουργεῖται σὲ καθ’ ὀλοκληρίαν καθημερινότητα, τὸ ἄλλως ἀνέφικτον παντοῦ, τὸ ἀψηλάφητο ἀλλοῦ,

νὰ πετυχαίνει τὸ ἐπίτευγμα, τὸ πανηγυρτζίδικο αὐτό, «*Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀμερίμνους εἶναι*». Νὰ λειτουργεῖται καὶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ ἡ ἀμερμνησία, δηλαδή νὰ ἐφαρμόζεται ἐμπράκτως ἡ οἰκουμενικὴ τῶν πάντων ἐλευθερία, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὸ δέος μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ φοβισμένου ἐνώπιόν μου ἄλλου: ἐλευθερία οἰκουμενικὰ ἀμερμνη, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὰ σύνορα. Ὁ φόβος παράγει πάντοτε τὰ

σύνορα, ἐνῶ ἡ οἰκουμένη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον!

Ἐπάρχει ἓνα συνεχὲς «*δωρεᾶν*» στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ καταλάβεις, ἂν δὲν νοιώσεις, ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ «*δωρεᾶν δότε*» ἐκρέει ἀπὸ μία ἀέναη ἔκρηξη ἐλευθερίας, ποὺ ἐκρήγνυται ἐκεῖ, μέσα ἀπὸ μία συνεχὴ ἐνδορρηξία τῆς ἀνθρωπαρεσκείας καὶ τοῦ ἐγῶ. Τὸ «ἐγῶ» αὐτοκενοῦται, ὄχι ἀπλῶς μέσα σ’ ἓνα κοινοβιακὸ «ἐμεῖς», ἀλλὰ σ’ ἓνα «ἐσὺ» τοῦ πλησίον κι ἔτσι τὸ καθεστῶς, ἐκεῖ, γίνεται Διακονία. Καὶ γνωρίζουμε—χωρὶς ἐμεῖς νὰ τὸ πετυχαίνουμε—ὅτι ἡ Διακονία τοῦ πλησίον εἶναι μία Οἰκουμενικότης ἐν κινήσει, ποὺ νικᾷ τὸ ἀκίνητο σύνορο τοῦ φόβου.

Πουθενὰ ἄλλοῦ, ἔξω καὶ παντοῦ, δὲν βλέπεις νὰ χιτίζεται σκαλι-σκαλί, ἐκεῖνο τὸ δυσθεώρητο ἀνθρωπίνους ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸ «*ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου*», ὅσο στὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας. Μία ἀνειρήνευτη προσευχὴ ὑπὲρ τοῦ σύμπαντος τς εἰρήνης, μία εἰρηνευμένη καταλλαγή ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐμπολέμου σύμπαντος κόσμου, τέτοια οἰκουμένη εἰρήνης ὀργώνει, σπεῖρει, ἀρδεύει καὶ συνάγει αὐτὸς



ὁ θεοδοτὸς στῦλος τῆς ὑπομονῆς. Μία εἰρήνη ποῦ ἀναπαύει δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους, διότι καταργεῖ τὸ δίκιο καὶ τὸ ἄδικο τοῦ καθενός, διὰ τῆς κενωτικῆς—ὑπὲρ τοῦ οἰουδήποτε διπλανοῦ—ἀγάπης.

Καὶ ὅταν καθεστηκυία τάξις γίνεται ἡ ἀγάπη, ἐκεῖ, τὰ σύνορα πάσχουν τὴν «καλὴν ἀλλοίωσιν» καὶ μεταμορφώνονται σὲ οἰκουμένη. Ἡ ἀγάπη δὲν γνωρίζει σύνορα. Ἀγάπη κατ' ἐπιλογὴν, δηλαδή ἀγάπη μὲ σύνορα-ὄρια, σημαίνει ὅτι ζῆ ἀκόμη ὁ «ζοφώδης ἔρως τῆς ἁμαρτίας», δηλαδή ἡ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς ἡδονῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἐπὶ τῆς ἡδονῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου. Στὸ θεοφρούρητο περιβόλι, ὡς εἰρήνη ἱερουργεῖ ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη ὅμως σημαίνει οἰκουμενικὴ ἀγκαλιὰ καὶ ἡ ἀγκαλιὰ δὲν κάνει διακρίσεις: ἀγκαλιάζει. Πλαστοργεῖ οἰκουμένη. «*Εἰ θέλοι, δύνασαι ὅλος πῦρ εἶναι*», μᾶς παροτρύνει, ἀγαπητικὰ καὶ περιγελαστικά το Γεροντικόν, ὅμοια μὲ τοὺς γελαστοὺς Γέροντες τοῦ Ὁρους, ποῦ σὲ πρᾶνουν, κοροϊδεύοντας τρυφερὰ τὴν γεώδη σου τρυφή. Ἄν θέλεις...

Ἄν θέλεις, μπορεῖς νὰ γίνεις φωτιὰ καὶ νὰ πυρπολήσεις τὰ ἀναλώσιμά σου, τὰ νευρωσικά σου τὰ φθαρτά, αὐτὰ ποῦ σὲ πνίγουν μέσα στὴ συσσώρευση τῶν φθαρτῶν, μέσα σου. Ἄν θές, ἂν ἀντέχεις τὴν ἀριστοκρατικὴ σου ἔκρηξη, σπάστα ὅλα! Ὅλα τα ἀναλώσιμά σου, πέταξέ τα ὅλα καί, εἰ θέλοι, πέταξε! Ποτὲ καὶ πουθενὰ ἄλλοῦ δὲν ἀκούγεται ὡς βροντὴ ἐλευθερίας καὶ πράξις ὑποποιοῦ κενώσεως ὁ ἐπινίκιος ὕμνος, ναί, «*τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα*». «Ναί» στὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τοῦ σαρκίου μας ἀπὸ τὸ σαρκίον μας, ἄρα, «ναί», στὴν οἰκουμένη τῆς ἐρωτικῆς Μετοχῆς.

Στὴν Ἁγία ἀνηφόρα τοῦ Ὁρους, ὅλα τα «ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ», ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλα τα ἄυλα «ἀγαθὰ», ὅπως ἡ πρωτιά, τὸ ἀρχηγῆλικι, ἡ ἀνθρωπαρέσκεια, ὅλα τους παίρνουν τὴν κατηφόρα καὶ καταντοῦν ἐκεῖ στὴ θάλασσα τὸ Ὁρος, στὰ ψάρια ποῦ τρέφουν τοὺς Μοναχοὺς καὶ ἐμᾶς τοὺς μοναχοὺς. Τὸ περιβόλι τῆς Κουροτρόφου ἀνήκει σὲ ὅλους, Οἰκουμενικὴ ἰδιοκτησία τῆς Παγγενῆς καὶ τῆς Λαοθάλασσας, μᾶς τρέφει ὅλους, ὅλους μας ντύνει καὶ μᾶς στολίζει. ἴσους καὶ ἀριστοκράτες, Ὁμοίους, κατὰ Διάκρισιν πάντοτε τῆς ζωοποιοῦ μας νεκρώσεως: ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ το μαδᾶς καὶ τὸ φοφᾶς μέσα σου τὸ «δικό μου καὶ δικό σου», τόσο πλουσιώτερος γίνεσαι κι ἀνακαλύπτεις καὶ μέσα σου καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω σου, ἓνα ἄλλου εἶδους ἀρχηγῆλικι, παραμυθιασμένο ἀπὸ τὴν ὑποποιοῦν σου κένωσιν καὶ σαλταρισμένο πρὸς τὴν θέωσιν.

«*Τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν*», πρὸς τὸν κάθε πλησίον διπλανό μας! Ὅλα δικά του ἂς εἶναι! Καὶ γι' αὐτὸν τὸν πλησίον, ὅλα δικά μου πρέπει νὰ εἶναι! «*Ἀλλήλων ἰσόδουλοι, ἀλλήλων κύριοι... ἐν τῇ ἀμάχῳ ἐλευθερία*» μας... Ἐνα πανηγυρτζίδικο μηδὲν-μηδὲν ἢ καλύτερα,

μία διαρκῆς ἰσοπαλία ἀνάμεσά σε δύο ἐγωπάθειες, γιὰ ἓνα γιορταστικὸ ἓνα-ἓνα! Διαρκῆς «μετάδοσις», «ἀντίδοσις» ὅλων πρὸς ὅλα καὶ ὅλους, «*σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα*», μόνον τόσο-πολύ, μόνον συνεχῶς ἐκεῖ, στὸ Ἅγιον Ὁρος.

Ἐκεῖ, μόνον τόσο ἐκεῖ, καὶ μόνον τόσο πολὺ, ζῆ καὶ βασιλεύει τὸ οἰκουμενικὸ κοινωνικὸ-πολιτικὸ Καθεστῶς του «δὲν ὑπάρχουν δικά σου καὶ δικά μου»! Τὸ ἀγιορείτικο κοινωνικὸ «σύστημα» δὲν εἶναι οὔτε «κεφαλαιοποιητικὸ» οὔτε «ἀναδιανεμητικὸ». Εἶναι κοινωνικῆς ἀσωτείας ὀλοποιητικόν. Ὅλοι τους ποιητὲς τοῦ Προσφόρου, οἱ καλόγηροι ποιοῦν συνεχῶς τὸ Ὁλον. Καὶ τὸ προσφέρουν Πρόσφορον πρὸς ὅλους, κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα, μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν καθημερινή τους ἀπογύμνωση καὶ τῆς Παγγενῆς τοὺς τὸ οἰκουμενικὸ πανηγύρι, γιορτὴ καθημερινή καὶ διὰ-σκεδάση (διὰ-σκεδάννυμι)—σκόρπισμα, ἀσωτεία «*ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου... τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν*»...

Μόνον στὸ περιβόλι τῆς Βρεφοκρατούσας καταλαβαίνεις πόσο νηπιώδης νεύρωση εἶναι νὰ γίνεσαι μίξερὸς ἰδιοκτήτης, κτήρῳ τοῦ ἰδίου, ἐνῶ, ἂν πετάξεις τίς κτήσεις καὶ κατακτήσεις σου τίς «ἴδιες», μπορεῖς νὰ γίνεις Κτήτῳ-πρωτομάστορας τοῦ αἰδίου ποῦ, δυνάμει, κατοικοεδρεῖ ἐντός σου καὶ γιὰ τὰ ἔξω σου.

«*Τὸ δὲ ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ σὸν τοῦτο, ρήματά ἐστι ψιλὰ μόνον*», ψιλὰ γράμματα γιὰ παίκτης μὲ ἀποψιλωμένη λογικὴ. Μόνον ὅσο ἀποψιλῶνεις τὸ «ἐμὸν» καὶ τὸ «σόν», μόνον μὲ τὴν ἀποψίλωση τοῦ ἐδάφους καὶ τοῦ ὑπεδάφους σου ἀπὸ τοῦτα τὰ «ψιλὰ ρήματα», ποῦ σοῦ χαϊδεύουν τὸ μαλακό σου ὑπογάστριο, μόνον ἔτσι γίνεσαι ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Οἰκουμένης καὶ παίζεις στὸν μεγάλο τελικό. Ἄλλοιῶς, παραμένεις πάντοτε ἐπαρχιακὸς προύχοντας καὶ μικρομεσαῖος νταβατζῆς. Κι ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ μένεις κολλημένος στὰ εἶδη διατιμῆσεως, τόσο πιὸ πολὺ γίνεσαι δοῦλος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, γιατί πρέπει νὰ τοὺς κολακέψεις, νὰ τοὺς ὑποτάξεις, νὰ τοὺς ἐξαγοράσεις καί, τότε, χάνεις τὴν Οἰκουμένη ποῦ ἔχεις μέσα σου καὶ ἔξω σου.

Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὁρος παράγεται μία παραγωγικότητα κι ἓνα ὑπερπροϊόν, ποῦ ἐπιβάλλει ἓνα ὀλοκληρωτικὸ καθεστῶς, ὅπου «ἡ τιμὴ, τιμὴ δὲν ἔχει». Ὅπου ἡ τιμὴ εἶναι τὸ μόνο, καθολικὸ, ἐνικώτατο καὶ οἰκουμενικὸ «ἀγαθὸ», ἀδιατίμητο. Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὁρος, παντοῦ κι ἐδῶ, «*...τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων*».



Ἄθρα καὶ κεκρυμένως καὶ οὐδενῶς ὀρῶντος Ἀπροσεύχεσθα»

Ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἀλεξανδρείας (+444)

Ὁ «Γέροντας» Ἀρχάγγελος

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Ἀγιορείτικο Βῆμα».

Ὁ ὅσιος Μακάριος, Ρωμαῖος στὴν καταγωγή, ἦταν γιὸς συγκλητικοῦ. Ὅταν ἐνηλικιώθηκε, οἱ γονεῖς τοῦ τὸν ἀνάγκασαν νὰ νυμφευθεῖ. Ἐκεῖνος ὁμως, τὴ νύχτα τοῦ γάμου, ἐγκατέλειψε τὴ νύφη κι ἐξαφανίστηκε.

Βαδίζοντας γιὰ τὴν ἔρημο, συνάντησε κάποιον γέροντα.

- Ποῦ πηγαίνεις, πάτερ; τὸν ρώτησε.
- Ὅπου πηγαίνεις κι ἐσύ, ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος.

Ὁ ὅσιος ἀκολούθησε τὸ γέροντα, κι ἔτσι βιάδιζαν κι οἱ δυὸ γιὰ πολλὰς μέρες στὴν ἔρημο. Λίγο πρὶν φτάσουν στὸν προορισμό τους, ὁ γέροντας ἔγινε ἄφαντος. Ὁ Μακάριος ἄρχισε νὰ λυπάται καὶ νὰ κλαίει. Τότε ἐμφανίζεται πάλι ὁ γέροντας καὶ τοῦ λέει:

- Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ. Νὰ δοξάζεις τὸ Θεό, γιατί ξεπέρασες τοὺς σκοτεινοὺς τόπους κι ἔφτασες στοὺς φωτεινοὺς.

Ἀμέσως ὁ ἀρχάγγελος ἐξαφανίστηκε, ἐνῶ ὁ ὅσιος συνέχισε χαρούμενος τὴν πορεία του. Σὲ πέντε μέρες ἔφτασε σ' ἓνα σπήλαιο. Ἐκεῖ ἐγκαταβίωσε καὶ ἀσκήτεψε.

Μὲ τὸ κύλισμα τῶν χρόνων τὰ μαλλιά τοῦ ἔγιναν λευκὰ σὰν τὸ χιόνι καὶ τὸ δέσμα τοῦ σκληρὸ σὰν τῆς χελώνας. Τὰ φρύδια τοῦ κατέβαιναν χαμηλὰ καὶ σκέπαζαν τὰ μάτια, ἐνῶ ἡ γενειάδα τοῦ ἔφτανε μέχρι τὰ γόνατα.

Κάποτε ὁ ὅσιος πειράχθηκε σκληρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ δαίμονα τῆς πορνείας, καὶ ἐνίωσε γιὰ μίαν στιγμὴ τὴν καρδιά του νὰ κλίνει πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ἀμέσως ὁμως συνήλθε καί, μετανοημένος πικρά, κίνησε νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο.

Τότε φανερώνεται μπροστά του ὁ προστάτης τοῦ Ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ καὶ τοῦ λέει:

- Ποῦ πηγαίνεις, Μακάριε;
- Φεύγω ἀπὸ τὸν τόπο, ὅπου ἁμάρτησα.
- Δὲν μπόρεσες ν' ἀντέξεις ἓνα πειρασμό; Γύρισε πίσω στὸ κελί σου.
- Ποιὸς εἶσαι, κύριέ μου;
- Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ, ποῦ σὲ ὁδήγησα σ' αὐτὸν τὸ δρόμο.

Καὶ λέγοντας αὐτά, ἔγινε ἄφαντος.

Ὁ ὅσιος γύρισε στὴ σπηλιά του, γονάτισε καταγῆς καὶ πέρασε ἔτσι νηστικὸς σαράντα μέρες. Μόλις σηκώθηκε, εἶδε τὴ σπηλιά γεμάτη φῶς. Εἶδε ἀκόμη κάποιον νέο, πορφυροντυμένο καὶ στεφανωμένο μὲ χρυσοὺς στεφάνι. Τὸν ἄκουσε μάλιστα νὰ ψάλλει μίαν πρωτάκουστη ᾠδὴ μὲ πλούσια φωνή, σὰν νὰ ἔψαλλαν πολλοὶ μαζί.

Μόλις σταμάτησε ἡ ψαλμωδία, ἀπλώθηκε τριγύρω μίαν μεθυστικὴ εὐωδία. Κι ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνος πέταξε στὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ χάθηκε ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια του.

Σεπτεμβριανὰ...

Εἶναι ἐντολὴ τῶν προγόνων μας, καὶ ὑποχρέωση γιὰ κάθε Ἑλληνορθόδοξο, νὰ μὴ λησμονῆ τὴν ἱστορία του!...



Ὁ Σεπτέμβριος τοῦ 1955 ἀποτελεῖ μίαν «μαύρη ἡμερομηνία» γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό. Πιὸ συγκεκριμένα, στὶς 6 Σεπτεμβρίου τοῦ 1955, πραγματοποιήθηκαν τὰ λεγόμενα «Σεπτεμβριανὰ», δηλαδή μίαν ὀργανωμένη, μαζικὴ καὶ βίαιη ἐπίθεση ἀπὸ ἓναν ἐξαγριωμένο Τουρκικὸ ὄχλο ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (καθὼς καὶ ἄλλων μὴ μουσουλμανικῶν μειονοτήτων), λεηλατώντας καὶ πυρπολώνοντας ἑλληνικὰ καταστήματα, σπίτια, σχολεῖα, βιβλιόθηκες ἐκκλησιῶν (ἀκόμα καὶ νεκροταφεῖα) καὶ δημιουργώντας τρομοκρατία καὶ ἀνασφάλεια γιὰ τὶς ὑφιστάμενες μειονότητες.

Ἀφορμὴ γιὰ αὐτὲς τὶς ἐπιθέσεις ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (πογκρόμ), ἀποτελέσθηκε τὸ γεγονός τῆς βομβιστικῆς ἐπίθεσης στὸ πατρικὸ σπίτι τοῦ Κεμάλ Ἄτατοῦρκ στὴν Θεσσαλονίκη, ποῦ ἀποδείχθηκε στὴν συνέχεια ὅτι ἦταν σηματοθετημένη προβοκάτσια ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν τότε τουρκικὴ κυβέρνησι, ἡ ὁποία ὀργάνωσε αὐτό...

Τὰ «Σεπτεμβριανὰ» ἀποτελοῦν ἓνα μέρος ἐνὸς μακροῦ καταλόγου διώξεων κατὰ ἄλλοθρήσκων μειονοτήτων ποῦ ξεκίνησαν περὶ τὰ τέλη τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας, πλὴν ὁμως ἐντάθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Νεοτούρκων καὶ ὕστερα.

Τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς βίας τῶν Τούρκων, τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ τὸν ὁποῖον ὁ Ἀμερικανὸς συγγραφέας, καὶ πρῶην πρέσβυς τῶν ΗΠΑ, George Horton ἀποκάλεε ὡς τὴν «ΤΥΦΛΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΣΙΑΣ» ἦταν ὡς ἑξῆς:

- † Θάνατο 16 Ἑλλήνων καὶ τὸν τραυματισμὸ 32.
- † Βιασμὸ 12 Ἑλληνίδων.
- † Βιασμὸ ἀδιευκρίνιστου ἀριθμοῦ ἀνδρῶν (ἐξαναγκάστηκαν νὰ ὑποστοῦν περιτομή).
- † Καταστροφὴ:
 - 4.348 ἐμπορικῶν καταστημάτων,
 - 110 ξενοδοχείων,
 - 27 φαρμακείων,
 - 23 σχολείων,
 - 21 ἐργοστασίων,
 - 73 ἐκκλησιῶν,
 - περὶ 1.000 ἑλληνικῆς ἰδιοκτησίας κατοικιῶν.



THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION

Condensed from "The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary," Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976; translated from the Menology of St. Dimitry of Rostov.

The grave and death could not hold the Mother of God, who is sleepless in her intercessions and an unchanging hope in her mediations. For as the Mother of Life she was transferred to life by Him Who dwelt in her ever-virgin womb.

(Kontakion for the Feast)

† † †

The last of the twelve great feasts in the Church year, the Dormition of the Mother of God, culminates the cycle of feasts and indicates God's ultimate plan for mankind—that having completed this earthly life, the faithful shall be resurrected in body and soul and united with Christ for eternity.

The Most Holy Theotokos, whose entire life had been spent in accordance with God's will, is the most perfect example of humanity, greatest among the saints and *more honorable than the cherubim*. Only through such a pure vessel could the Incarnation of God the Word occur, for Jesus Christ, born of the Holy Virgin, was perfect man and perfect God. For this reason she is honored above all of God's creation and at the close of her earthly life, she was bodily taken to heaven without having to await the fearful Day of Judgment. Thus did God glorify his obedient handmaid having instructed all generations to call her blessed.

While nothing is mentioned in the Scriptures concerning the Dormition of the Mother of God, the account has been preserved in the Sacred Tradition of the Church and has come down to us in Church services and early icons depicting this event.

The Most Holy Mother of God had reached an advanced age and she wished to leave the body and go to God as soon as possible. Her one great desire was to see the sweet face of her Son, Jesus Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Suddenly there appeared before her the Archangel Gabriel. He told her that in three days she would depart from this life and be with Christ. As a sign that death would have no power over her, he gave the Holy Virgin a branch from paradise. The Archangel said it was to be carried before the bed of the Mother of God when her body was carried to burial.

At these words the Blessed Mother of God filled with joy and began to prepare for her death. First she told the beloved disciple John, who had adopted her, about it. Then she told the rest of her household and ordered her rooms to be sprinkled with perfume and as many lamps as possible to be lighted in them. St. John sent word to St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and he informed all the Christians in the surrounding area. Several of the faithful arrived promptly and could not restrain their tears. The whole house was filled with weeping, but the Mother of God dried their tears, consoled them, and asked them to rejoice.

O ye Apostles, from afar being now gathered together here in the town of Gethsemane, give burial to my body; and Thou my Son and my God receive Thou my spirit. (Exapostelarion sung during the Dormition Fast).

Our most Pure Lady arranged for her two garments to be given to two poor widows who had faithfully served her.



She asked that her body be buried on the Mount of Olives, where her parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, and her "spouse," St. Joseph, were buried.

Suddenly a noise like a clap of thunder was heard and a cloud encircled the house. By the command of God, angels had seized the Apostles, who were scattered to the ends of the earth preaching the Gospel, and brought them on

clouds to Jerusalem. St. John went out to greet them and told them of the speedy departure of the Mother of God. This filled their hearts with great sorrow.

On August 15th, the blessed hour that all were awaiting arrived. It was the third hour of the day (about 9 a.m.). The holy Apostles were praising God; the Immaculate Virgin lay on a beautifully adorned bed. Suddenly there shone in the room a wonderful light. The roof opened and the glory of the Lord descended from heaven with hosts of angels and archangels and with the Holy Fathers and prophets of old who had prophesied about the Holy Virgin. At the sight of this, the Mother of God cried aloud with great joy: *My soul doth magnify the Lord...!* And, raising herself, she worshipped her Son. Looking at her with love, He said: *Come My Near One, come My Dove, come My precious treasure and enter the abodes of eternal life.*

My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready (Pss 107:2), the Holy Virgin replied, surrendering her pure soul into the hands of the Lord. She felt no pain whatever, but fell

as it were into a sweet sleep. At once there was wonderful angelic singing: *Rejoice, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.* (Lk 1:28).

For a long time the Apostles stood transfixed with amazement. When they came to themselves they worshipped the Lord and they surrounded the bed of His Mother, whose face shone like the sun. There began the solemn procession for her burial. Reaching the Garden of Gethsemane, they put down the bed with the most precious body and all the Christians came forth to give a last kiss, weeping at the loss of such a treasure. Even after the great stone had been rolled across the entrance to the tomb, the Apostles remained by the tomb for three full days, singing psalms day and night.

By God's special arrangement, however, the Apostle Thomas was not present at these events. He arrived only on the third day and was very sorry that he had not been allowed to say farewell to the Immaculate Mother. Taking pity on him, the Apostles decided to open the tomb so that he might at least see the dead body of the Mother of God. But when they rolled away the stone they were amazed! The body of the Mother of God was not in the tomb! All that remained were the burial clothes and a wonderful fragrance. They prayed that the Lord would reveal to them where the body had been taken. Later, they saw standing in the air the Immaculate Mother of God, surrounded by a multitude of angels, and she said to them: *Rejoice, for I am with you all the days.*

From that time forth the Apostles taught the whole Church of Christ that the Mother of God was raised by her Son and taken to heaven on the third day after her burial.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!



OLady, generously share thy mercy and thy graces with all thy people—thine inheritance. Rescue us from the terrors that encompass us. See how many dangers of all kinds afflict us, from our own people and from strangers, from within and without. Through thy power, turn everything for the best. Bring mutual calm between fellow-citizens at home, and drive away those who attack like wild beasts from outside. Bestow thine aid and healing on us to counteract our passions, and give our souls and bodies abundant grace—sufficient for every need. And if we are unable to contain it, increase our capacity and give us more, that—saved and strengthened by thy grace—we may glorify the pre-eternal Word, Who took flesh from thee for our sake, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto unending ages. Amen.

St. Gregory Palamas

THE GRANDMOTHER'S CLOCK

Author unknown, from "The Divine Spark."

—Grandma, why is it that you always count each time your clock strikes, and then you look as though you're thinking about something? The seven-year-old girl put this question to her dear grandmother as she climbed onto her lap.

—I've developed a habit of counting the chimes, and then I reflect on the fact that, with each passing hour, the life still ahead of me is that much shorter and death is that much closer. The clock begins to strike and I think to myself, "Another hour of my life has flown into eternity; I have an hour less to live in this world." The striking of the clock, like the tolling of a funeral bell, reminds me that eventually the last hour of my life will strike, and then the funeral bell will let people know that my time on earth has come to an end.

—But why, Grandma, do you think about this? It can't be very pleasant. Surely you don't want to die...

—No, my child, I don't want to die, but death does not ask us when he will be welcome. However, I've reached the age when the thought of death is there, whether I want it or not. And what kind of Christian would I be if I was afraid to think about death? Our Lord teaches us to think about death and to be prepared for it any day. And so, when the clock begins to strike, I think to myself: "Yet another hour of my life here on earth has gone by. What good or bad have I done in the past hour? Am I becoming a better person or not? Am I prepared to stand before God at His judgment?" If I did or said something bad in the hour just gone by, then I sigh to the Lord over my sin and afterwards try to refrain from committing the same offense. The memory of death helps me to keep from getting cross and saying angry words to the servants or you or anyone else. Instead, I am able to respond with kindness, even love.

—From now on, Grandma, I'm going to do the same. Every time the clock begins to strike, I'm going to think about death, just as you do.

—It is good, my child, for each and every Christian to do that, but at your age it's beyond your ability. Don't promise something you cannot carry through. When you grow up, then you can undertake to do as I do. Until then, do this. When the clock strikes, ask yourself: "My life has grown by another hour. What have I done in this hour, what have I learned, what have I discovered?" If there's something you neglected or forgot to do, hurry and do it. If you offended someone or you have taken offense, be quick to make it up with that person, and in the next hour try not to do anything bad or to repeat the mistakes you made in the hour gone by. In this way, with each passing hour, you will become wiser and kinder; you will grow in body and soul.

—That sounds good, Grandma. I'm going to do just that.

—And may the Lord bless you, my dear child.

A WORTHY EXAMPLE

By E. V. Sarat, translated from "Voskresnoye Chteniye," 1900, Book 10, published by the "Russian Youth Committee," Baldwin Place, NY.

On November 29th, 1899, in the village of Nadezhdin in the Serdovsk district, there took place the burial of an elder who was distinguished for his Christian life and, in particular, for his zeal towards the house of God. He did not come from an illustrious family, nor was he a wealthy man; he was the church caretaker, a retired soldier of peasant stock. His name was Ivan Alekseyevich Alyonov.

His biography is simple and brief. Orphaned in childhood, he was raised by some distant relatives, from whom he received neither a mother's tender caresses nor a father's strict supervision. Nevertheless, there nestled in his heart a spark of God, and he did not go astray. Not because he had committed some offense but simply because he was a loner, he was sent to be a soldier, and he faithfully served twenty-five years. The strict military school of life developed him into a man for whom the fulfillment of one's duties was paramount. Returning from the army already with venerable gray hairs, Ivan Alekseyevich could find no lodgings in the village of his youth, but God did not abandon him; He called him to serve in His house. The parish priest offered him the position of church caretaker, and "Leksevich," as he came to be called, served diligently in that capacity for the next thirty-five years.

In the course of those years, Leksevich accomplished a great deal of good. By his own labors, without any outside help, and at his personal expense, he planted saplings near the church; around the perimeter of the cemetery he planted acacias; he lined the entrance to the church with pine and birch trees, and he planted more trees around the cemetery church. In time these all grew into fine, big specimens. Leksevich could not contain his evident delight. "Look, Batiushka! Look at the poplars, the pines, the birch trees. Can you believe their trunks? To think that I planted them when they were only this big," he exclaimed, holding up his little finger. Leksevich often expressed his pleasure in this manner, while his cheeks glistened with tears of joy, the pure joy of a child.

In spite of his age, Leksevich spent whole days digging in "his" yard, daily watering his "children." He accustomed the

peasants—the parishioners—to stop by the church yard on their way back from the river when they went to haul water, and they would wait for Leksevich to take two pails from each bucket, as a "tax" for his trees.

Leksevich also liked to attend to the cleaning of the church, where, just as in the yard, he kept everything in exemplary order. He derived great pleasure from his work. Someone would say to him, "Leksevich, it's time to rest your old bones. You should stop climbing up the belfry; it's too difficult for you." But the old man looked so dejected at the mere suggestion that he should curtail his duties, that the person regretted having said anything. "As he says, he'll die if he has nothing to do." There is a touching scene that I'll never forget. The parishioners had a new bell cast, three and a half tons. Before



being raised into the belfry, it hung from some trestles, so that any passerby could ring it, testing its tone. One evening I saw Leksevich approach the bell when it was dark and he thought no one was watching. He crept up to the "stranger" and grabbed its tongue. But, alas! The tongue did not respond. The next day I said to him, "Leksevich, you should try ringing the new bell." "No, Batiushka, evidently my days of ringing are over. I'll have to decline." And some tears rolled down his cheeks.

One would have to be an artist to faithfully depict even an approximation of Leksevich's love for the house of God and for the saints. Without exaggeration one can say that he lived exclusively, body and soul, for the house of God. No matter what time you came, he would invariably be looking after the trees, or cleaning the church vessels, or on his knees, polishing. In his childlike simplicity and innocence, he became totally engrafted, as it were, onto the church. More than once I overheard him talking by himself in the church. He would be standing before the icon of Saint Nicholas, for example, and converse with the holy hierarch as if he were present in the flesh. He would wipe the dust from the icons, the candle stands, the vigil lamps; then he would stand back to survey his work. "Now, that's better! Saint Nicholas, you were so dusty. Forgive me for not having noticed this before." And these were not casual or mechanical remarks. No, he spoke from a prayerful disposition. Afterwards he would make a prostration and then step away.

Having such an attachment to the church, Leksevich could not be indifferent to what he saw to be imperfections or deficiencies. "Batiushka," he would say, "that's a poor quality vigil lamp in front of the Iveron icon," or, "It would be

good to have an icon of the Mother of God, ‘Joy of All Who Sorrow,’ hanging here.” And before you knew it, Leksevich had arranged for all this, at his expense! In the last ten years of his life, the good man donated not less than 500 rubles to the church. This came exclusively from his salary of three rubles a month and a pension in the same amount. Sometimes one would inadvertently mention in his presence some need of the church, and Leksevich, deeming it his responsibility alone, would straightway say, “Hold on, Batiushka, I’ll get together the money...” and he would apply all his energy towards accomplishing whatever was needed. Sometimes he would not say anything, but later you would notice that whatever had been mentioned had been taken care of—and Leksevich would be beaming. Although Leksevich’s resources were meager, he found opportunity to give alms to those who were truly indigent, helping them to procure their daily bread. He also liked to send donations to the poor monasteries on Mount Athos.

Leksevich led a decidedly ascetical way of life. He slept on practically bare boards, using a pillow of straw for his head. His food was lenten—he subsisted principally on potatoes, bread and water. Rarely did he eat hot food, and he prepared everything himself. He prayed often and at length. He was literate and liked to read the life of the Mother of God, especially about her Dormition. He donated to the church an icon of the Dormition, and every year he had a molieben with an akathist served before it. Being himself a man of strict and holy life, Ivan Alekseyevich could not tolerate any impropriety in the church during the services. In such cases, he would reprove and correct, in a manner that did not offend. There was something about his face that bore a resemblance to Saint Nicholas: stern yet kind, introspective yet also penetrating. He would go about the church, quietly and unobtrusively, and if he noticed that someone (usually among the women) was standing improperly, he would pause and make a reprimand, without, however, creating the least disturbance.

Everyone feared Leksevich, and everyone loved him. As for Leksevich, he treated all people equally; he exemplified the same level of respect to all persons (excepting clergy, whether of his own or another parish): simple peasants, wealthy men and poor, aristocrats and important “personas”—he addressed them alike with the familiar “you.” But this “you” was exclusively his, and no one took offense; the use of the more formal “thou” would have been altogether out of character for him. More than once I remarked to him privately, “Leksevich, you call everyone ‘you,’ and therefore why not call me ‘you’ likewise?” “By no means. No, no... A priest is a noble servant of God,” said the old man solemnly. To argue with him was useless.

Although Ivan Alekseyevich was uneducated, his view of life and of the afterlife was perfectly correct and in har-

mony with the teaching of the Holy Church. Having a pure heart, he had no fear of death; on the contrary, he liked to talk about death and calmly awaited it, confessing and communing frequently. Several years before his repose, he prepared for himself a “little house” (a coffin). He often looked at it and showed it to others, reminding them of death. He made a number of these “little houses.” He would wait and wait, and then say, “No, it seems that my death is still a way off.” And he would give the coffin for some needy person’s burial. At last the Lord granted Leksevich to lie down peacefully in his “little house,” without any serious or tormenting illness. Although at ninety years old, he had exceeded the bounds of age, he was fully conscious to the end and he died O so peacefully, like a candle that gradually melts away.

The last five years of his life, Leksevich was unable to work, but the grateful parishioners supported him with a pension of three rubles a month, and he continued to life in a private corner of the caretaker’s cottage. In spite of its being a weekday, a great crowd of people gathered for the burial of this revered elder. The local chanters chanted at the funeral, and pupils from the local parochial school likewise desired to pay their final tribute: they also chanted at the Liturgy and participated in the funeral. May your memory be eternal, kind, good Leksevich. Thank you for giving us a good example of how to serve God and how to prepare for ourselves a treasure in the heavens.



The Source of every true joy, of all true tranquility and peace of conscience, of cleansing, of spiritual and bodily healing, the source of spiritual power and boldness, flows in the temple, whilst theaters and various worldly distractions and consolations can never replace that which a true Christian receives in the temple, where God Himself comforts the souls of believers and those whose hearts are turned to Him, as a mother comforts her child. It is from the temple, too, that our departed ones receive consolation and solace, with the cleansing from their sins and forgiveness. How ardently we should love the temple, how we should adorn it! And so do all those who recognize its value; and the Church prays for them, saying, *Let us pray for them that, with faith, piety and fear of God enter in; and further, Let us pray for them that bring forth fruit and do good works in this holy and all-venerable temple; or, Bless those that love the beauty of Thine house. Glorify them in return by Thy Divine might.*

St. John of Kronstadt

MIXED-UP GEORGE

By Elder Porphyrios (+1991).

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. (Elder Porphyrios)

† † †

One day, a mother came here distraught about her son, George. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress.

I said to her:

—Don't say a word. Just pray.

We agreed that, between ten and ten fifteen every evening, we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without asking him, "What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?", or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as possible, "Come and eat, George, there's food in the fridge."

Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

The mother began to apply this tactic, and after about twenty days had passed the boy asked her:

—Mother, why don't you speak to me?

—What do you mean, George, that I don't speak to you?

—You've got something against me, Mother, and you're not speaking to me.

—What strange idea is this that you've got into your head, George? Of course I speak to you. Am I not speaking to you now? What do you want me to say to you?

George made no reply. The mother then came to the monastery and asked me:

—Elder, what was the meaning of this that the boy said to me?

—Our tactic has worked!

—What tactic?

—The tactic I told you, of not speaking and simply praying secretly and that the boy would come to his senses.

—Do you think that is really it?

—That is it, I told her. He wants you to ask him "Where were you? What were you doing?" so that he can shout and react and come home even later the next night.

—Is that so?' she said. What strange mysteries are hidden!

—Do you understand now? He was tormenting you because he wanted you to react to his behavior so that he could stage

his little act. Now that you're not shouting at him he is upset. Instead of you being upset when he does what he wants, now he is upset because you don't appear distressed and you display indifference.

One day George announced that he was giving up his job and going to Canada. He had told his boss to find a replacement because he was leaving. In the meantime I said to his parents:

—We'll pray, I told the grieving mother.

—But he's ready to leave...

—I'll grab him by the scruff of the neck, said his father.

—No, I told him, don't do anything.

—But the boy's leaving, Elder!

—Let him leave. You just devote yourselves to prayer and I'll be with you, I said.

Two or three days later early one Sunday morning George announced to his parents:

—I'm going off today with my friends.

—Fine, they replied, do as you want.

He left, and along with his friends, two girls and two boys, he hired a car and set off for Chalkida (*Ed.*, Chalkida is located to the north of Athens, on Euboea island). They drove around aimlessly here and there. Then they went past the church of Saint John the Russian and from there to Mantoudi, Aghia Anna and beyond to Vasilika, They had a swim in the Aegean Sea, they ate, drank and had a fine time. At the end of it all they set off on the road home. It was already dark. George was

driving. As they were passing through Aghia Anna the car hit the corner of a house and was badly damaged. What could they do now? They managed to bring the car back to Athens at a crawling pace.

George arrived back home in the early hours of the morning. His parents said nothing to him and he went off to sleep. When he woke up he came and said to his father:

—Do you know what happened?... Now we'll have to repair the car and it will cost a lot of money.

His father said:

—Well, George, you'll have to find a solution to this yourself. You know I've got debts to pay and your sisters to look after...

—What can I do, father?

—Do whatever you like. You're grown-up and you've got a brain of your own. Go off to Canada and make some money...

—I can't do that. We have to repair the car now!...

—I've no idea what you should do, said his father. Sort it out yourself.



So, seeing that further dialogue with his father was pointless, he said no more and left. He went to his boss and said:
—I had an accident with a car. I don't want to leave now, so don't hire anyone else.

His boss said:

—That's all right by me, lad.

—Yes, but I would like you to give me some money in advance.

—That's fine, but you were wanting to leave. If you want money, your father will have to sign for it.

—I'll sign for it myself. My father doesn't want to get involved. He told me so. I'll work and I'll repay it.

Now isn't that a miracle? When the boy's mother came again to see me I said to her:

—The method we employed worked and God heard our prayer. The accident was from God and now the boy will stay at home and will come to his senses.

That's what happened through our prayer. It was a miracle. The parents fasted, prayed and kept silent and they were successful. Sometime later, the boy himself came and found me—without any of his family having said anything to him about me. George became a very fine man and now works in the air force and is married with a lovely family...



Be careful not to waste your time aimlessly—leaving no time for your spiritual life; because you will reach a point of being so agitated inside that you will no longer be able to do your spiritual [rule]. Instead, you will try to get involved in some work, or start a conversation, or even look to create a problem to keep you busy. When we neglect the Jesus Prayer and our [daily] spiritual duties, the enemy gets hold of our spiritual “heights” and he begins his assault from up there—using both our flesh and our mind as his weapon. Thus, he renders useless our physical and spiritual strengths; and, by cutting off our communication with God, he leads our soul to be taken prisoner by the passions.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



Please be advised that, in the event of a move, it is necessary to provide us with your new address at your earliest convenience. The Post Office does not forward bulk mail nor do they send it back to us. Our issues are simply discarded!

ON HOMESCHOOLING

By Archpriest Chad Williams, Rector, St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Church, Richmond, ME.

People are generally called intelligent through a wrong use of this word. The intelligent are not those who have studied the sayings and writings of the wise men of old, but those whose soul is intelligent, who can judge what is good and what is evil; they avoid what is evil and harms the soul and intelligently care for and practice what is good and profits the soul, greatly thanking God. It is these alone who should properly be called intelligent. [St. Anthony the Great]

† † †



From the beginning of our marriage and during courtship, my wife and I discussed our concerns about the breakdown in marriage and family life. We scrutinized our own childhood experiences with our parents and brothers and sisters, their subsequent marriages and our own fears, values and commitments. We were most concerned that our family be God-centered. We saw as

specific threats to our family a value system that requires maximizing material successes. We also saw the public schools as a potential threat to our home life—the long hours, the bus rides, the values clarification, the atheism and the peer groups. We thought we would like to educate the children at home. This meant, of course, more time at home for both of us and some material and financial sacrifices. We have been homeschooling now for nearly thirteen years, since the birth of our first child.

Now homeschooling has gained tremendous support nationwide and presents a substantial threat to the public schools in some areas, causing them to upgrade their activities and programs and to lend a newly listening ear to parents who insist on improvements. In our own state, homeschoolers have increased in number nearly ten-fold in the last ten years. In the Russian Church Abroad, some of our own hierarchs have stepped out boldly to endorse homeschooling as not only an alternative to public schools, but as a MUST in order to maintain an Orthodox perspective on life.

When we had first come to our parish, many of the older parishioners expressed real concerns about our children not being in public schools. Now, however, the prevailing comment is totally in support of homeschooling, and of our keeping the children out of the public school. We have heard many concerns about homeschooling, and questioned ourselves thoroughly on these concerns, and discussed some of them at length. The most frequently repeated concern is about

socialization for the children. The other concern is about our ability to teach advanced subjects to our children.

At first glance the concern about socialization seems valid. However, in most homes this is not a problem. First of all, we have an active family life and communicate freely with one another. Secondly, we are in Church and there our children's friends vary widely in age, experience, and culture, but have a common Orthodox Christian foundation. Thirdly, the children are in town and in the stores and libraries and circulate successfully, without the aid of the "socialization" of a public school. The image of the children in the Laura Ingalls Wilder series rises to mind frequently, as well as all the pioneer and missionary children in the world. They tend to do well, even though they may only see other children who share their own values and culture infrequently.

The concern about our ability to educate our children is also valid, but the history of homeschooling shows the home to often be a healthier learning environment than the classroom. Every parent is a natural teacher. However, parents cannot teach all things. We, personally, certainly cannot do all of it. For reading, we didn't need to teach our children to read; we only supported their efforts and they are fine readers. For math it has been the same. For history, biography, literature and science, the children are avid readers and gobble it up whether it is "assigned" or is for their own free reading pleasure. Of the more involved academic skills, we cannot really say from personal experience since our oldest child just turned twelve this year, but homeschool literature shows that homeschoolers in general achieve their academic goals using a variety of resources other than the public school classroom that are available to the average family. There are the books available in nearly every subject. We have friends and neighbors in just about every major field of study who can often lend a hand to eager young learners. Statistics consistently show that homeschooled children, as a whole, score very highly on SAT exams.

But these questions and concerns do not address our primary concerns as Orthodox Christian parents in the education of our children. Our primary concern for our children is that they learn to love God, to know God, and learn to love their neighbor as their own selves. This is the foundation of our home, and everything that is taught in our home despite our many shortcomings and failures. But something else altogether lies at the foundation of the public education system. It is not the spirit of God that breathes through the curriculum, but the spirit of Antichrist. The public school has become the channel for much subtle (and at times, very overt) and skillful persecution of the Christian faith. The public school has also become the government tool for social and moral reform, most of which is distinctly new-age, relativistic and humanistic in spirit. This is of Antichrist. This spirit is a direct threat to our society and to our children.

Of course, it is not only indigenous to the public school; it permeates every corner of public life. Our children are very vulnerable and impressionable and we have chosen to not submit them to forty or more hours of exposure at these tender ages to this anti-Christian environment that threatens the very foundation of the Christian faith, and constantly pits its authority and the opinion of the "peer group" against our authority and that of the Church.

It would be very convenient to use the public schools to provide our children with a basic education. But they seem dedicated to destroying our primary educational goals, rendering this morally indefensible for us. If, in the process of homeschooling, our children do not have access to the latest lab equipment, advanced training in team sports, and opportunities to play in orchestras, or perform on stage, then so be it! These small deprivations are the least of our worries. If homeschooling means added stress, financial sacrifice and a very, very full schedule, so be it!

In the former Soviet Union, to even be known as a Christian was to severely limit the educational, economic and job opportunities of the individual, and could, at times, lead to imprisonment, even death. We are exceedingly grateful to God and our neighbor that we are able to homeschool in a manner that is obedient to conscience without persecution! We feel called upon to make these small sacrifices now by recoiling from a system that is so dedicated to its anti-Christian work.



Listen: God, along with the temptations, also gives patience. He never gives more than we are able to endure. For people who love God, all things work for good. Pray and beseech God to give you faith and patience—to be freed from thoughts of despair. The Saints had the power to rebuke the enemy. We, when we have temptations, ought to take refuge in our Christ and Panaghia—just as a little child runs to his mother.

It is better for us not to believe in dreams at all, because many have gone astray on their account. There are three kinds of dreams: those from God, those from our thoughts, and those from the enemy. If they are from God, and we don't believe them, God does not take offense; because we do not believe them out of fear, lest we be led into deception. Wine and vinegar have the same appearance. From the taste, you understand the difference. If the dreams are from God, they bring calm; if they are from the enemy, they bring turmoil. Beware of deceptions. Better to protect yourself, and not believe anything outside of what our Church teaches.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

CURING THE ILLNESS OF PHARISAISM

Transcript of a homily by Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus (as transcribed by the Orthodox Center for Dogmatic Enquiries—translated by the staff of “Orthodox Heritage,” edited for length).

Having promised yesterday, I will say a few words on the topic of Pharisaism.

All these things that take place—everything that we do—our pilgrimages, our candles, our night-vigils, our prayers, our fasts, our gestures of charity—everything that we do in our life—are for what purpose and what is the reason that we do them? The answer to this question is very important, because correctness about our spiritual life is dependent on it.

Let me give you an example: I ask children at our summer camps: “what is God’s greatest commandment? What is God’s most important commandment, my children?” And all the children—all of them—quote various commandments: do not steal... do not lie... do not be unjust to your fellow-man... respect your parents... love your neighbor... However, none of the children suspect that not a single one of these is God’s first commandment. I suspect that the same is likely true among most grown ups as well.

God’s first and only commandment—all others are in reality the result of this first one—is to love God with all of your heart. Christ Himself said that the first commandment is: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.* (Mk 12:30)

And a second commandment, similar to the first—which springs from within the first commandment—is the one that says *love thy neighbor*. Everything else is a result of these. If you love your neighbor, you will not rob him, you will not lie to him, you will not be unjust with him, you will not take his things, you will not tamper with his wife, you will not interfere with his home, you will not censure him... That is what we mean by “it springs from the first commandment.” The *love thy neighbor* is likewise a result of the first commandment. If you truly love God, it is impossible to not love your neighbor. Therefore, the first and only commandment by God is to love God Himself with all our heart. Subsequently, whatever we do in church, has that precise purpose. And that is why we go to pilgrimages, why we fast, why we pray, why we go to confession, why we light candles, why we read the lives of saints, ... It is our way of loving Christ.

Now, where is our mistake? The mistake is that, unfortunately, we say that we do all these things in order to just become good people... and that is where the big hoax lies. It is the step that we all stumble over. Because, if the purpose of the church was just to make us better people, then there wouldn’t be any need for a personal relationship with Christ,

nor would there be any reason for Christ to have come to the world. Why do you think we aren’t able to understand the saints? Or, to ask it in a simpler manner, why is it that we cannot understand those who love God?

We often ask whether it is necessary to do certain deeds in order to be saved, to be near to God. Is it necessary, let’s say, to depart to the mountains or the desert (as some saints did)? Of course not. If we could understand that our relationship with God is not only for the sake of salvation, but is a relationship of love, only then will we understand the saints and why they did the things they did (much of which cannot be interpreted rationally). This is because love transcends logic. Even secular love—the way that one person loves another person—for example when one wants to get married, he loves the young lady that he will wed, and the same applies to the young lady—then they do things that seem totally irrational. If, for example, you were to ask her or him who is the most beautiful or handsome one in the world, they will probably say it is their beloved. Naturally, they are seeing the other through their own eyes... Our eyes see something entirely different... The prospective bride will describe her man with the finest words. She sees no flaws in him, no faults... she can’t see anything bad about him, because love transcends all these things. And, of course, the same holds true for the groom as well.

Love cannot be forced into the molds of logic. Love is above logic. That is how God’s love is. God’s love surpasses human logic. That is why we can’t judge with logical criteria those people who love God. That is why the saints reacted with a logic of their own; they had a different kind of logic, and not the logic of humans; because their logic was the “logic” of love. So, the church does not teach us just to become good people, not in the least. It is only natural, that we have to become good people, because if we don’t, then what have we succeeded in doing? Our Church teaches us to love Christ, to love the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Inside the church, a relationship develops. It is a personal relationship between man and Christ; not with the teaching of Christ and not with the Gospel. The Gospel is something that helps us to reach the point of loving Christ. When we reach that point of truly loving Christ, the Gospel “will no longer be needed.” Nothing will be needed... all these things will cease... only man’s relationship with God will remain. That is the difference between the church and religion.

Religion teaches you to do your duties, the way the idolaters did. An example: let’s say that we went to our pilgrimage sites, paid our respects, left some money in the charity box, left some lit candles, some oil, or even our entreaties, our names, our offering-bread, everything. All these things are religious duties, but our heart has not changed in the least. The hour of duty ends, and we are the same as we were before: we are ready to attack the other, ready to protest about the other,

ready to be sour again, the way we were before.... Our heart has not changed. And thus, we do not acquire that relationship with Christ, because we simply confine ourselves to duties—to religious duties.

And you must know that such people—you know, “religious” people—can become the most dangerous kind in the church. May God protect us from them... Once, when I was officiating in church and we were citing the words *Lord, save the pious...*; a Holy Mountain monk jokingly remarked: “Lord, save us from the pious...” In other words, God save you from those “religious” types, because their behavior often implies a warped personality, which has never had a personal relationship with God. These types [of persons] merely perform their duties towards Him, but without any serious relationship involved and that is why God says nothing about this type of person. And I too, must confess, that—from my own experience—I have never seen worse enemies of the church than this type of “religious people.”

Whenever the children of religious people, or of priests and theologians—or even of those who in church act like theologians and with self-importance—tried to become monks or priests, they [the parents] became even worse than demons. They would become exasperated with everyone. I remember parents who would bring their children to our homilies, and when their child progressed spiritually, they became the worst among all and found faults with all others. And I would say to them: “But you were the ones who brought the child to the homily; I didn’t bring him...” One other time, I told a father whose daughter I could tell had a zeal for the church: “Make sure you don’t bring her again to any homily. Don’t bring her to talk with me, because your daughter will become a nun and afterwards you will say that I was to blame.” He replied: “Oh no, father, far be it! We adore you!” And his daughter did in fact become a nun... It has been seven years now, and he still isn’t talking to me...

People who wouldn’t miss a single homily, all those who were always the first to show up at homilies, night-vigils, Bible studies... they would also bring their children along; however, when the time came for the children to exercise their freedom—to decide by themselves which path to choose—then those people would move to the extreme opposite camp, thus proving that Christ had never spoken to their hearts. They were merely “religious people.” That is why religious people are the toughest kind in the church. Because you know what? Sometimes, people like these will never be cured, because they only think they are close to God.

Sinners, on the other hand—the “losers,” so to speak—at least they are aware of their sinful nature. That is why Christ said that publicans and prostitutes will go to the Kingdom

of God, whereas to the Pharisees He had said: *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* (Mt 15:8). They had merely adhered to the observance of religious formalities.

Therefore, we should all pay close attention and understand that the church is a hospital that cures us and helps us to love Christ, and our love for Christ is a flame that ignites inside our heart so that we can examine ourselves, to see if we are within God’s love. If we discern all those forms of malice and selfishness and wickedness inside us, then we should be concerned, because it is not possible for Christ to be in our heart when we are full of “vinegar” inside. How can you be praying and at the same time be full of bile towards another person? How is it possible to read the Gospel and not accept your brother? How is it possible to be part of the church for so many years—either as a monk or a priest or whatever—and yet, where is the alpha and omega of our faith, which is love? Where is that patience towards your brother? By not embracing true love, it means that you have accomplished absolutely nothing.

We saw how Christ reached the point of telling those virgins that He would have nothing to do with them. He threw them out of the wedding hall even though they had all the virtues; what they didn’t have was love. It is as if He was telling them that “you may have external virtues, you may have remained virgins, you may have done a thousand things, but you didn’t achieve the essence of that which is the most important.” What’s the use, whether I consume olive oil today, or I don’t? I may [fast and] not eat olive oil, for example, but I devour my brother from morning to night... They used to say on the Holy Mountain “don’t ask if I eat fish; as long as one doesn’t eat the fisherman, he can eat fish”; or, “as long as you don’t eat the oil-bearer, you can have a drop of olive oil to eat.” To “devour” someone with a sharp tongue is far worse than consuming a spoonful of olive oil. And yet, we focus on things like that: we eat oil, we don’t eat oil; we eat fish, we don’t eat fish...

You can see how ridiculous these things are and how the demons make fun of us, as well as all those who are outside of the Church. And when such non-Orthodox minded folks approach us, instead of seeing the people of our Church transformed into Jesus Christ—into sweet-natured people and mature people, well balanced, fulfilled people, full of harmony inside them—they instead observe us driven by all of our passions and the sourness that accompanies them; and they will inevitably say: “What? And become like one of them? I’d rather not!”

You, who are a churchgoer, tell me how the church has benefited you. You have visited several pilgrimage sites, you saw the fathers, you saw the holy relics, you saw the Holy Mountain, the Holy Mother at Tinos Island. What was the end benefit of all these experiences? Was your

heart transformed? Did you become humbler people? Did you become sweet-natured? Did you become meeker people in your homes, your families, your monastery? Or at your place of work? That is what truly counts. If we did not achieve those things, let us at least become humbler, with true repentance. And, if we did not manage that either, then we are worthy of many tears—we are truly pitiful...

When asked how many years he had lived on the Holy Mountain, Elder Paisios used to say: "I came here the same year as my neighbor's mule." (His neighbor, old Zitos, had a mule—and you know how every cell on Mount Athos has an animal, a mule, for carrying their things. That animal has a long life span; you don't buy a mule every day—they are too expensive). "Well, the year that I came here, to the Holy Mountain, my neighbor purchased his mule in the same year. We have the same number of years on the Holy Mountain, and yet that poor beast remained a mule, but then so did I. I didn't change at all."

So, we quite often say "I've been here for forty years;" and we, priests and monks, tend to say these words: "I have been in the monastery for forty years." But what we do not realize is that all these years are not in our favour. God will say to us: *Forty years, and you still haven't managed to become something? You are still angry after forty years, you still censure, you still contradict, you still resist, you still are not submissive to your Elder? You've had forty years, and you still have not learnt the first thing about monastic life and about Christian life. What am I supposed to do with your years? What am I to do with you, if you have spent fifty years with frequent confessions and you cannot respond to another person with a kind word? What use are all these things to Me?"*

All of these facts weigh against us. And I am saying all these things first about myself. Because they apply to me first... And because I know these things from myself, that is why I am telling you about them (and why you must also think I am saying them to each one of you). People think that I'm referring to them, but it is not so. It is first about me that I mentioned these things... about me first... We need to consider these things to at least humble ourselves; let's keep our mouth shut, as all those egotistically-driven behaviors ridicule us and make us look foolish in the presence of the Lord.

If we humble ourselves and cease to have grand ideas about ourselves, maybe then can we begin to correct ourselves, gradually, through true repentance, which is born out of true humility. He who does not strive to justify his actions truly repents. He who keeps justifying himself will never repent; and that person who always justifies himself—either externally or internally—will never learn the meaning of repentance. That is why we should always examine ourselves. As the Apostle says, let us test ourselves, to see if there is a

love of God inside us, if we are living within the realm of repentance, so that God can cure our existence; this kind of association with the Church can heal us, and thus we can become people who have been cured of their passions and their sins.

Many ask how we can reach this point. How do we get there? Well, we do it by leaving ourselves in the hands of the Good Physician—God; when we leave ourselves trustingly in His hands; because when we are in various circumstances, in difficulties, God knows what is best for each one of us and will lead us along those paths that will slowly, over the years, perfect us. All we need to do is give ourselves to God with trust, the way we give our trust to a doctor, or the captain of a ship. We show trust. He leads us, and we do not worry about the destination and the arrival timer; we know that the one steering the ship is mindful, vigilant, and he knows the way and is careful.

Another important element that I would like to discuss a little further with you (also because some of you have asked me to do so) is on the issue of time.

Did you notice during these days that we have been spending on this ship, how we had no external distractions? We had nothing to draw our attention elsewhere, like at home, for example our televisions. Did you see how much time we had available? We even conversed among ourselves. You who are married had time to talk to each other. The children played together, they talked amongst themselves, and we had lots of time to ourselves and we communicated with each other, and that is the most important element of all: that we could communicate. The most tragic thing is at home, when everyone is sitting in front of the television and they don't talk to each other... time slips away and people do not communicate with each other. And even worse than this are the program we see on television! They are the source of the worst corruption for us, for our children and for our souls.

One day, when we had disembarked and were walking about, I noticed in one of those refreshment cafes, that a television was on; and, even though nobody was paying attention to it, the TV was still on. So I stood there for a moment, to see what it was showing; I guess it was something like some people who were chasing after some other people all the time, and there was a constant chase, there were guns, bullets, cars, explosions, jumping from one house to another, etc. But these are things that your children, your young children, sit and watch; so much violence... and I'm not even discussing the obscenities that can be heard, which have destroyed even elderly folks. I hear about such things during confession. Elderly people, very old people, who are otherwise very respectable, have been ruined by television, from all that vulgarity that they are exposed to every day. I'm not referring to that specific damage right now; I am

referring to all the other things—all the violence that the television projects. Our children become over-familiarized with violence and will naturally become unruly and disobedient; they will do things that are entirely foreign to their human nature!

Have you any idea what an ugly sight it is, when you see young children mimicking older people? They mimic adults, and they destroy their innocent childishness. Sometimes, when I am invited to an event, they bring along tiny toddlers and tell them to dance. And you see these little girls or boys, ten or twelve years old, full of innocence, making dance moves that they have seen older men and women do, entirely disgraceful, with another morality altogether. You can actually see how those children are being destroyed, with their emulations of the adults that they see on television. And also doing all sorts of things and entertaining themselves with choices that are catastrophic. And I am not saying this from the spiritual aspect only, but from every aspect—psychological, social and family.

Keep your children as far away as possible from such things. Help your children to not be dependent on television, because they will be filled with obscene images, and so will you. If you don't allow your children to watch obscene movies, but you the adult does, then what's the use? And what about those silly warnings that they write on screen—that the movie is not suitable under 17 or 13 or... Does that mean that if they turn 13 this sight becomes a suitable one? Of course those warnings only arouse the youngsters' curiosity, and every one of them will inevitably watch the film. They think to themselves that if this movie is forbidden for those younger than 13, it must have something that is deserving of every curiosity...

In my opinion, the destruction that is inflicted on people's inner world is incalculable. All positive and good images that one absorbs are extremely beneficial in one's spiritual life. The same applies in reverse; the bad images that a person observes create damage that is literally extreme, and sometimes, we cannot tell if it can be cured.

If someone would study this phenomenon, he would see just how great a catastrophe television can wreak on a person's psyche, and especially in younger people. But that is only the beginning; one evil will bring on another. It will be a whole chain of evils, because it destroys communication, it destroys time, it destroys the innocence of a person's soul, and then man becomes exhausted; and being exhausted, he has no desire to do anything, especially anything spiritual. His soul gets filled with things that wearied him, and then he wonders why he is tired—he cannot understand why... Try eliminating television and the like (or at least minimize these evils), and you will see how much more relaxed you will become and how much free time you will have at your disposal.

Naturally, these things are not unrelated to our spiritual life, because a person's spiritual life is a product of all the activities that a person does. By this, I don't mean to say stop watching television altogether. I am not against it per se; it's just that things like these make our life more difficult instead of making it easier, and they destroy it, the way it was destroyed by technological "progress" which has—otherwise—facilitated our lives. You catch a plane, and you are there. You get on a ship, and you get there quickly... or a thousand other conveniences. In the long run, such conveniences may have facilitated our lives, but they also trapped us and made us lose ourselves; they made us lose the beauty of our life and we eventually destroyed the world we live in, and now we want even more sciences and discoveries, to see if we can salvage what is left of it...

All these things that constitute the tragedy and by-product of our Fall make it abundantly clear just how impossible it is to humanly tackle this problem; and yet, if one turns to God, then we will see that which Christ had said that: *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.* (Mt 19:26). We can see around us that miracle by God, which, even in our day, with all the information and all these provocations taking place around us, and the accessibility to sin, still, there are people who love God and from among the thorns, we see roses spring forth.

Roses blossom from among the thorns, and the immense miracle of man's salvation becomes reality, regardless of our own human weaknesses, our wretched state, our problems, the difficulties with our self, our church, our family, our society and the other elements that unfortunately bombard every person. That is why, to return from all these things, we need to return where we started from, when we said that the solution and the answer to all problems is for man to turn towards loving God, and that when man loves God, then God will cure him; God will resurrect him—even if that person is dead and decomposing—God will restore him, provided man discards from inside him all that is useless and put in his heart a love for God, and build his life around that love for God. And atop that love for God, to build his life, his marriage, his family, his path, his studies, his course in life. If man does that, then he will truly come to enjoy life and his life will become a paradise, because paradise is nothing more than God's love, whereas "hell" is nothing more than the absence of God's love.

So, it is my wish, as a conclusion to this homily, that the love of God will always accompany all of you, and that we should not forget that everything we do, we must do for that reason, and not just to be religiously behaving people. We must become God-loving people, so that our lives can be transformed correctly and we ourselves be transformed into Jesus Christ our Lord.

God be with you.

GREEK ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN
PO Box 38688
PHOENIX, AZ 85069-8688



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

US POSTAGE
PAID
PHOENIX, AZ
PERMIT NO 100

A 501(c)(3) ORGANIZATION
[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)
POIMEN@MAIL.COM

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

A PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

By St. Philotheos, Patriarch of Constantinople (+1379, commemorated October 8th).



Truly immaculate and most-pure Virgin and Theotokos, an awesome miracle to angels, an inexplicable wonder to mankind, or rather—in reality—an awesome and incomprehensible miracle to both: thou art the very beginning of our race, the most pure vessel of divinity, the workplace of our salvation; and—in a way beyond any thought and reason, out of extreme goodness—thou didst bring to us the One of the Trinity,

our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is perfect God and perfect man, and Who came to be united to our fallen human nature and thereby to save it and restore it to its original high dignity.

Thou art the restoration of those who fall, and—after the salvific economy of God the Word—thou didst also, without hesitation, deliver me from many dangers, unworthy as I am of any help and providence, for I sin arbitrarily in every way, time and place. Look, now, again upon my wretchedness, and visit me often; for I am overcome and do not know what will happen to me. If I look upon the multitude of my innumerable sins, I see myself far away from [the] dread Mysteries; and altogether unworthy. Again—if

I do not draw near for a long time, being afraid to participate unto my condemnation—I become completely subservient to the adversary. Therefore, by throwing the great multitude of my transgressions into the ocean of the inexorable compassion of thy Son and God, and by proposing thee as a strong mediator, I take courage and draw near.

I implore thee, O immaculate Lady, make use of thy motherly boldness before Him; and make Him merciful to me. Yea, O most-pure one, stay before me and do not abhor me, the one who is conquered by many sins, and defiled and abused by deeds, words, movements of mind, and the myriad of devices and designs and well-contrived demonic deceptions through all of the senses. Show thyself to be my co-worker even in this time, by beseeching the Lord—Who is most conciliatory and forgiving—not to reject me and prove me empty of His grace. May He overlook my numerous transgressions, and through His holy Body and His sacred and life-giving Blood, sanctify, illumine, save and make me a son of light, walking and directing myself towards His holy commandments.

Let me not return again and be defiled by sin, so that I may participate—without condemnation—in the immaculate awesome gift of grace, now and in the future. Let me also receive the most perfect promise: to escape eternal punishment and to be made worthy of eternal life, through thee, who art my sure hope and protectress, that I may glorify and magnify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Most-Holy and blessed Trinity unto the ages of ages. Amen.