

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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ON THE GREAT AND HOLY LENT

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+2003), edited for length.

Contrary to what many think or feel, Lent is a time of joy. It is a time when we come back to life. It is a time when we shake off what is bad and dead in us in order to become able to live, to live with all the vastness, all the depth, and all the intensity to which we are called. Unless we understand this quality of joy in Lent, we will make of it a monstrous caricature, a time when in God's own name we make our life a misery.

This notion of joy connected with effort, with ascetical endeavor, with strenuous effort may indeed seem strange, and yet it runs through the whole of our spiritual life, through the life of the Church and the life of the Gospel. The Kingdom of God is something to be conquered. It is not simply given to those who leisurely, lazily wait for it to come. To those who wait for it in that spirit, it will come indeed; it will come like the Judgment of God, like the thief who enters when he is not expected, like the bridegroom, who arrives while the foolish virgins are asleep.

It may strike us as strange to hear that in Church we proclaim the Gospel—the *good news*—of judgment, and yet we do. We proclaim that the Day of the Lord is not fear, but hope, and declare together with the spirit of the Church: *Come, Lord Jesus, and come soon* (cf. Rev 22:20).

So long as we are incapable of speaking in these terms, we lack something important in our Christian consciousness. In spite of what we say, we are still pagans dressed up in evangelical garments. We are still people for whom

God is a God outside of us, for whom His coming is darkness and fear, and Whose judgment is not our redemption but our condemnation; we dread the moment when we will meet our Lord and do consider it to be the event we long and live for. Unless we realize this, Lent cannot be a joy, since Lent brings us both judgment and responsibility: we must judge ourselves in order to change, in order to become able to meet the Day of the Lord, the Resurrection, with an open heart, with faith, ready to rejoice in the fact that he has come.

Every coming of the Lord is judgment. The Fathers draw a parallel between Christ and Noah. They say that the presence of Noah in his generation was at the same time condemnation and salvation. It was condemnation because the presence of one man who remained faithful, of just one man who was a saint of God, was evidence that holiness was possible and that those who were sinners, those who had rejected God and turned away from him, could have done otherwise. And the same is true of the coming of the Lord.

There is also another joy in judgment. Judgment is not something that falls upon us from outside. Yes, the day will come when we will stand before God and be judged; but while our pilgrimage still continues, while there still lies ahead of us the road that leads us towards the fullness of the stature of Christ, then judgment must be pronounced by ourselves. There is a constant dialogue within us throughout our lives. Recall the parable in which Christ says: *Make your peace with your adversary while you are on the way.* (Mt 5:25). Some of the spiritual writers have seen in the adversary not the devil (with whom we cannot make our peace, with whom we are not to come

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to terms), but our conscience, which throughout life walks apace with us and never leaves us in peace. Our conscience is in continuous dialogue with us, gainsaying us at every moment, and we must come to terms with it because otherwise the moment will come when we finally reach the Judge, and then our adversary will become our accuser, and we will in turn stand condemned.

So while we are on the road, judgment is something which goes on constantly within ourselves, a dialogue, a dialectical tension between our thoughts and our emotions and our feelings and our actions; they stand in judgment before us and we stand in judgment before them. But in this respect we very often walk in darkness (due to our darkened mind, our darkened heart, and the darkening of our eye—which should be clear). It is only if the Lord himself sheds his light into our soul and upon our life, allowing us to see what is wrong and what is right in us.

There is a remarkable passage in the writings of St. John of Kronstadt in which he says that God does not reveal to us the ugliness of our souls unless he can see in us sufficient faith and sufficient hope for us not to be broken by the vision of our own sins. In other words, whenever we see ourselves with our dark side, we can then understand ourselves more clearly in the light of God, that is, in the light of the divine judgment. This means two things: it means that we are saddened to discover our own ugliness, indeed, but also that we can rejoice at the same time, since God has granted us his trust. He has entrusted to us a new knowledge of ourselves as we are, as he himself always saw us and as, at times, he did not allow us to see ourselves, because we could not bear the sight of truth.

Here again, judgment becomes joy, because although we discover what is wrong, yet the discovery is conditioned by

the knowledge that God has seen enough faith, enough hope and enough fortitude in us to allow us to see these things, because he knows that now we are able to act. We are in darkness, God is in light. We see nothing but our judgment and condemnation at the very moment when we should be emerging out of darkness into the saving act of God, which is both our judgment and our salvation.

The Orthodox Church, through Her wisdom, introduces Lent with a series of preparatory weeks in which the readings of the Gospel lead us step by step from outer darkness, as it were, to the point of light and judgment.

The first, dramatic stage in which we find ourselves consists in the fact that we are blind and yet are unaware of our blindness. The first reading from the Gospel that confronts us with this aspect of our preparation for Lent is the story of Bartimaeus, the blind man at the gate of Jericho, a man who either had lost his sight or was born blind, but was left there in the darkness, in the outer darkness. There was no light for him, there was no life for him, either, and there was no joy for him. He probably had come to terms with his distress. He continued to exist, since he could not live. He continued to exist day after day thanks to the cold, indifferent charity of passers-by.

But one thing made his misery both dramatic and tragic: he lived in the time of Jesus. More than once Bartimaeus must have heard of this man of God who had come to the world, who was healing and renewing people and things, a man who had opened the eye of blind men, who had given sight to the man born blind. The presence of the possibility of salvation, of an impossible healing, must have made his darkness even darker. Possible it was, if God came his way, yet impossible, because how could he find the itinerant preacher and healer who never was still, never in the

same place? How could a blind man keep pace with him? Darkness came into his awareness because there was a possibility that he might see. His despair became deeper than ever before, because there was hope. And so, when Christ came near him he could ask for healing from the very depth of his despair and from the very depth of a total, passionate longing for salvation. The coming of God had made him aware of darkness as he had never been before, aware as never before of the tragedy which he lived.

This is the first step, which we must accept and which we find so difficult to accept: we must face our true situation, not consoling ourselves with the thought that we have some sort of life within us that can replace divine life. We must accept that we are in darkness as far as the light of God is concerned. And then we must do something about it. We must become aware of the fact that without light we are lost, because the darkness is death, the absence of God. But when it comes to doing something, there are two things that stand in our way. First, we will not act unless we are aware of our desperate state. We will instead pray and ask God to do something. Even though we are not even praying, we hope that He will come and act. And, it is only out of a sense of deadly urgency that we begin to act, like Bartimaeus, whom no one could stop from crying out, shouting for help, since he knew that this was the decisive moment. Christ was passing by. In a minute he would be gone and the darkness would become permanent, irremediable.

Another thing that prevents us from doing something is the way we are afraid of people. I remember a man in prison who told me how marvelous it was to be found out, because, as he said, "So long as I had not been found out, I spent all my time, and my effort, trying to look as though I was alright. The moment I was caught I felt, 'Now I can choose: I can either remain what I was, a thief and a cheat, or else I can change. Now I am free to become different, and no one will be any more surprised than they were to discover that I was a thief.'"

As long as you have appearances to maintain it is terribly difficult to change, and this is what the parable of Zacchaeus, which follows the story the Blind Man, brings out so clearly. The problem of Zacchaeus was this: he wanted to see Christ. Would he take the risk of being ridiculed or not? To be ridiculed is a lot more difficult than to be disapproved of, because when we are sharply disapproved of we can hide behind our own pride. But to be laughed at, to be ridiculed, is something which is beyond the courage of most of us. Can you imag-

ine a bank manager in a small town climbing a tree in the midst of a big crowd, with all the boys whistling, pointing at him with their fingers, making cat-cries and the rest, just for the sake of meeting Christ? Well, that was the position of Zacchaeus, the rich man. But for him meeting Christ was so essential, such a question of death and life, that he was prepared to disregard the ridicule, the humiliation, attached to his action; and he saw Christ.

There are two ways out of our dependence upon human opinions and human judgments. We must either do what Zacchaeus did, accept humiliation because it is essential to be saved, or we can let our hearts be hardened, and accept the pride that will negate the judgment of others. There is no third way. We have all experienced situations whereby we knew what was right, and we knew what was wrong, and never decided for either right or wrong. Why? Because whenever we turn to the wrong we are afraid of the judgment of God, while whenever we turn to the right we are afraid of the judgment of men. Pride or humility are the only two



paths by which we can leave this situation. And then there is the problem of God's judgment. The story of Zacchaeus shows how we can oscillate between the judgment of men and the judgment of God. Now comes the opportunity for another move.

Isn't it time, when we are confronted with life and death, for us to judge ourselves and not be completely dependent upon others? We see this in the Publican and the Pharisee—the first,

sharp, definite judgment which is both human and divine, because both coincide. If we ask ourselves how it is possible that the Pharisee could be so proud in spite of knowing so much about God and things divine, how it was that the Publican could be so truly humble in spite of being simple, I think we can find the answer in this: the terms of reference for the Pharisee were found in the law, the letter of the law. One can always be right as far as the law and the letter is concerned. One can always fulfill rules and commandments. One can always have "done one's duty" and feel irreproachable. The terms of reference of the Publican, however, were different. He was not a good man. What he knew of the law was this: certain aspects of the law condemned him because he knew what he was like. Certain other aspects of the law he could use in order to extort whatever he wanted out of other people. The law for him was a powerful, cruel, hard instrument in his hands or in the hands of God. And as he knew life, he knew perfectly well that the only salvation from the law was human mercy, human compassion, a human approach and attitude to one another.

That was the only thing that could save a debtor from prison or save an extortioner from the judgment of the magistrate: a human touch. The Publican's terms of reference were people, his neighbors, including that invisible neighbor, God. This is why he could stand at the threshold of the temple and beat his breast, though hopelessly: in spite of all the logic of things, he knew that in his world of hard, cruel, implacable men there were moments when all things become possible, for a man can be a man even when he is hardened and cruel. And so it was with God. The law was there to condemn him, but God was "Someone." He was not only the Law-giver. He was not only the One who made sure that the law is observed. He was free within His law to act with humanity. This knowledge made the Publican humble before God, because his terms of reference contained hope, and the object of his hope was mercy, pity, charity. This made all things possible, in spite of the fact that it is so humiliating to be loved and to be saved by love.

The same truth appears in another way in the next parable, that of the Prodigal Son. Here again we find two men, one who is righteous and another who is unrighteous. The Prodigal Son is in a way another aspect of the Publican, and the elder brother is the same as the Pharisee. But here we are confronted not only with the tension between a law that is objective, but we are also confronted with the theme of sin itself. What does it mean to be in sin? It can be clearly defined in terms of the short conversation between the son and the father at the beginning of the parable. And if you want to put it in words more modern and cruder than the Gospel, it really amounts to this: "Father, I want to live, and you stand in my way. As long as you are alive the goods are yours. Die, for all intents and purposes. Let us suppose that you are already dead. I have no time to wait until you die in fact. Let us agree that as far as I am concerned I have no father left, but I have his goods because I have inherited them."

This is the sort of speech which we find, with the same or perhaps lesser hardness, on so many occasions between children and parents, between people who are related to one another in one way or another. It really involves saying: "As a person you do not matter. You stand in my way. The only thing that is of value to me is what I can get out of you. And so that I may get all I can from you, you must surrender even your existence. You must accept not to be."

This is grave sin, sin with regard to God, and sin with regard to man. With regard to God we are happy to take everything he gives and then turn him out of our lives. We are happy to go into a strange country to spend all he has given, while denying his existence with the same ruthlessness with which, in Holy Week, the soldiers covered the eyes of Christ so he could not see, so that they would be able to laugh at him more freely. The same is so often true of our relationships with people. And this is sin as well. This is the very point: to rule the other out because he doesn't matter. What matters are things—and the use I can make of them.

And then there is another aspect in this parable: hunger, distress, loneliness, all those things which we so hate in life, and yet which come to us as our only salvation, because as long as we are surrounded with comfort, we don't notice our true situation. We prove unable to move inward and to see that we are lonely in the midst of this crowd and that we are poor in the midst of all this richness. It is important for us to realize that all that comes our way which is bitter, which is hard, which is difficult, which we hate with all our greed and with all our fear—that is our salvation. To be deprived is essential for us. And if we are not deprived, we must learn to deprive ourselves to the point of becoming aware that we are face to face with the living God, at all times!

We misjudge our situation so badly in this respect. There is a beautiful passage in the *Tales of the Hassidim* translated by Martin Buber, in which he tells about a man, a rabbi, who lived in appalling misery and yet every morning and every evening thanked God for his generous gifts. One of those who heard his prayer said to him, "How can you be so hypocritical? Don't you see that God has given you nothing?" And he said, "No, you are mistaken. God looked on me and thought, 'This man, to be saved, needs hunger and thirst and cold and loneliness and illness and dereliction.' And he has given me these things in abundance." This is the true, Christian attitude, the attitude of a believer for whom the soul really matters. And this is what the return of the Prodigal Son to himself shows us. It also shows us another thing. The Prodigal Son comes back, having rehearsed his confession, and says: *I have sinned against heaven and against thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son. Let me be like the hired servants.* But the father does not allow him to say the last words.



Each of us can be a prodigal son, a prodigal daughter, an unworthy son, an unworthy daughter, an unworthy friend. What no one can do is to adjust himself to a relationship, however worthy, below his rank. No one who is an unworthy son can become a worthy hireling. We cannot step down from our birthright, from the right which love gave us in the first place. And therefore we are not to look for compromise and for legal readjustments with God and say, "I can't give you my heart but I will behave well. I can't love you but I will serve you," and so forth. This is a lie, a relationship which God is not prepared to accept and will refuse to accept.

The last step on our way towards Lent is one which is shown to us in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It sets before us the following problem: what are we going to judge and to be judged about? We may have thought that we will be judged on whether we have a deep knowledge of God, whether we are theologians, whether we live in the transcendental realm. This parable makes it absolutely clear that God's question to us, before we can enter into any kind of divine reality, is this: *have you been human?* If you have not, that you may become like the God-Man Jesus, who is the measure of all things. This is very important, because the type of judgment which we are constantly making is a falsified judgment. We notice how pious we are, how much knowledge of God we have, questions belonging to the realm of what an English writer has called "Churchianity" as contrasted with Christianity. But the question which Christ asks us is this: Are you human or sub-human? Are you capable of love or not? I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, I was in prison, I was ill. What did you do about it? Were you able to respond with your heart to my misery, were you able to respond at a cost and with all your humanity—or not? At this point we must remember what we have said before concerning the Pharisee and the Publican. Christ does not ask us to fulfill the law. He will not count the number of loaves of bread and of cups of water and the number of visits we pay to hospitals and so forth. He will measure our heart's response. And this is made clear from the words of Christ in another part of St. John's Gospel, where he says, *And when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants.* The doing means nothing. We become human at the moment when, like the Publican, like the Prodigal Son, we have entered into the realm of broken-heartedness, into the realm of love which is a response both to divine love and to human suffering. This cannot be measured. We can never, on that level, say, "I am safe. I will come to the judgment and be one of the sheep," because it will not be a question of whether or not we have accomplished the law, but whether this law has become so much ourselves that it has grown into the mystery of love.

There, at that point, we will be on the fringe, on the very threshold of entering into that spring of life, that renewal of life, that newness of all things, which is Lent. We will have gone through all these stages of judgment, and will have emerged from blindness and from the law into a vision of the mysterious relationship which may be called *mercy* or *grace*. And we will be face to face with being human. But we must remember that to be human does not mean to be "like us" but "like Christ." With this we can enter Lent and begin to experience through the readings of the Church, through the prayers of the Church, through the process of repentance, that discovery of the acts of divine grace which alone can lead us towards growth into the full stature of the likeness of Christ.

I have brought you to the gate. Now you must walk into it.



The more people distance themselves from a natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do. Worldly stress is a result of "worldly happiness," of worldly pleasures and self indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, thousands of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatry...

When we see a person, who has everything, be stressed, anxious and sad, we must know that God is missing from his life. In the end, even wealth will make people suffer; because the material goods cannot really satisfy them. Theirs is a double affliction. I know wealthy people who have everything and are miserable. They do not even have children, but they are still miserable. They are too lazy to lie down or take a walk.

"Fine," I told someone, "since you have some free time, do something spiritual: read one of the Hours of prayer, read a passage from the Gospel." "I cannot," he said. "Then," I told him, "try doing something good: go to the hospital to visit some sick person." "Why should I go all the way there," he says, "what will become of it?" "Go help some poor person in your neighborhood." "No," he says, "that does not please me either." Can you believe that this person is miserable despite the fact that he has everything: free time, numerous houses and so on? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing!

By Elder Paisios the Athonite

IT IS PAST TIME FOR ALL TO TAKE ACTION

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, This excellent pro-life encyclical (provided below) from the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in North America was issued on January 22nd, 2013. I give thanks to God for these Spirit-filled words, and I pray that ALL Orthodox Christians—Clergy and Laity—will put them into ACTION in their everyday lives. It is PAST time for we Orthodox to be in the FRONT LINES defending the right to life for the innocent, defenseless child in the womb! It is PAST time for our clergy to preach and teach on this issue and to organize their faithful to join groups like 40 Days for Life, and stand in prayer in front of these death chambers, especially those of Planned Parenthood: a truly demonic organization that kills over 325,000 babies every year for profit!

And while we must give deep love and God's healing grace to those women who have had abortions and repent of their evil deed, we must also—in love—OPENLY chastise those Orthodox doctors, nurses, counselors, politicians, news media personnel, celebrities, AND clergy who have taken part in—or defended—this legalized infanticide. We do not help these people find salvation by giving them honors, when they should be given penances for the healing of their souls! Is it not PAST time to reach out to each one of these misguided people, admonishing them in love, and calling them to confession and repentance? If they refuse to change their ways, then—again out of LOVE for their souls—should we not excommunicate them, so that they can feel the pain of being separated from the Cup of Life and then return, with tears of repentance, to be restored to the Church?

During the past 40 years, over 55 MILLION babies have been slaughtered on the ungodly altar of the three-headed, secular-humanistic god of privacy, pleasure and profit. Many other Christians, especially the Roman Catholics, have been very active—in their words AND actions—in defense of these innocent ones. But where have WE been during this time, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ? Other than a few beautiful encyclicals and a few dedicated laity and clergy who have started Orthodox pro-life groups, the Orthodox presence in the pro-life movement has been, at best, one of “benign neglect.”

In the opinion of this sinful and unworthy priest, this Encyclical should be regarded as a FINAL CALL to all Orthodox Christians to not only “talk the talk”, but also “walk the walk” in the defense of the God-given right of every child to be born! If God came to judge the world tomorrow, what would He have to say about the deafening silence of over 90% of Orthodox Christians, while

the “silent screams” of 3600 babies being slaughtered—everyday, for 40 years—are ascending to His Throne in the heavens? When each of us stand before His fearful Throne, awaiting His righteous judgment, will those 55 million souls be our defenders or our accusers before Him?

O my beloved sojourners on the sea of life, I fear the code blue button is about to be pushed on our Nation's soul! When will we Orthodox take our rightful position in leading the fight for the ones who cannot fight for themselves? No other issue—economy, ecology, clean air, education, proper food diet, physical health, etc.—can have meaning as long as we permit this legal infanticide to continue! This most ungodly of all actions in our Nation's history (perhaps in the history of the world!), this murder-for-profit of living ikons of God, must stop! It is Satan's greatest weapon in his efforts to destroy true motherhood and the family unit.

In the midst of all this loss of personal and family identities, in this hurricane of destruction called Secular Humanism, laying waste to Christian moral principles regarding the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, (and other things, like traditional marriage), there is still reason to have hope, still time to change, before the death rattle—in both the soul of our Nation and the souls of so many of its citizens—becomes irreversible. Of course, I am not speaking of the false and shallow hope and change being promoted by our political leaders in both parties; I speak of the One Who IS our hope, Who—alone—can transform us and our Nation: from darkness to light, from death to life, from perdition to salvation!

When the Jews cried out for deliverance under the tyranny of Pharaoh, God heard their cries and sent them a deliverer: His servant, the God-seer Moses. If WE now cry out—with our prayers, tears and actions—will not our Lord Jesus Himself come and deliver us, and our Nation, from this demonic curse of the noetic Pharaoh, the devil?

Let us begin—right this moment and several times each day—to BEG our Most Sweet Lord Jesus to intervene, so that this legalized slaughter will NEVER have another anniversary on the January 22nds that remain before Christ returns! *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Unworthy priest, +Demetrios

† † †

January 22, 2013: The 40th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade

Monday, January 21, 2013

Forty years ago the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a decision, known as Roe v. Wade, granting a “right” for women of the United States to terminate the lives of their children in the womb. This decision has resulted in some 54 million children's lives ending almost before they began.

The Holy Orthodox Christian Faith is unabashedly pro-life. The Lord Jesus Christ was recognized and worshipped in His mother's womb while yet unborn by the Holy Forerunner who was also still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:44); St. Basil the Great (4th Century), one of the universal teachers of the faith, dared to call murderers those who terminate the life of the fetus. The Church has consistently held that children developing in the womb should be afforded every protection given to those outside the womb. There is no moral, religious or scientific rationale which can justify making a distinction between the humanity of the newly-conceived and that of the newly-born.

Abortion on demand not only ends the life of a child, but also injures the mother of that child, often resulting in spiritual, psychological and physical harm. Christians should bring the comfort of the Gospel to women who have had abortions, that our loving God may heal them. The Orthodox Church calls on her children, and indeed all of society, to provide help to pregnant mothers who need assistance bringing their children safely into the world and providing these children loving homes.

On the occasion of this sorrowful anniversary, and as we mourn the violence we all too often visit upon one another, as exemplified by the recent mass killings in Aurora, Colorado and Newtown, Connecticut, we pray for an end to the violence of abortion. Surely the many ways in which we as a people diminish the reverence and respect for human life underlie much of this violence. The disrespect for human life in the womb is no small part of this. Let us offer to Almighty God our repentance for the evil of abortion on demand and extend our hearts and hands to embrace life.

On the occasion of this 40th Anniversary of "Roe v. Wade," we republish the following "Agreed Statement" issued in 1974 by the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in the United States (composed of representatives from the former SCOBA and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops) a statement as timely now as it was then:

An Agreed Statement on Respect for Life

We, the members of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in the United States, after extensive discussions on the sanctity of marriage, feel compelled to make a statement concerning the inviolability of human life in all its forms.

We recognize that human life is a gift of God entrusted to mankind and so feel the necessity of expressing our shared conviction about its sacred character in concrete and active ways. It is true that the Christian community's concern has recently seemed to be selective and disproportionate in this regard, e.g., in the anti-abortion campaign. Too often human life has been threatened or even destroyed, especially during times of war, internal strife, and violence, with little

or no protestation from the Christian leadership. Unfortunately, the impression has frequently been given that churchmen are more concerned with establishing the legitimacy of war or capital punishment than with the preservation of human life. We know that this has been a scandal for many, both believers and unbelievers.

We feel constrained at this point in history to affirm that the "right to life" implies a right to a decent life and to full human development, not merely to a marginal existence.

We affirm that the furthering of this goal for the unborn, the mentally handicapped, the aging, and the underprivileged is our duty on a global as well as a domestic scale.

We deplore in particular the U.S. Supreme Court's decision failing to recognize the rights of the unborn--a decision which has led to widespread indiscriminate early abortion.

We affirm our common Christian tradition with regard to the right of the unborn to life.

We acknowledge our responsibility to mediate the love of Christ, especially to the troubled expectant mother, and thus make possible the transmission and nurturing of new life and its fully human development.

We urge our churches and all believers to take a concrete stand on this matter at this time and to exemplify this evangelical imperative in their personal lives and professional decisions.



Source: The above statement is available at: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2013/jan-22-roe-vs-wade-anniversary>.



Don't pressure your children. In your prayers, say the things you want to tell them. Children don't listen through their ears, but only when divine grace comes to enlighten them. Then they listen to the things we want to tell them. When you want to say something to your children, tell it to the Panaghia and she will bring it to pass. This prayer of yours will be like a spiritual caress that will embrace your children and grab their attention. Sometimes we try to caress them and they react, but they never react against the spiritual caress.

Children are not edified by constant praise. They become self-centred and vain. All their lives they will want everyone to be praising them constantly, even if they are being told lies. Unfortunately, nowadays all people have learned to tell lies and the conceited accept those lies as their daily sustenance. "Say it, even if it's not true, even if it's ironical," they say. God does not want this. God wants truth. Unfortunately, not all people understand this and they do the very opposite.

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

ON FASTING

A commentary from an Orthodox pamphlet on the related teachings by St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (+1359); the saint's feast days are November 14th and the second Sunday of Great Lent, known as the "Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas."

But fasting is not simply abstention from certain foods, nor the selection of certain foods. Of course, this too is called fasting, because by obeying the Church and the way in which the Church appoints fasting, we can do nothing else but submit our personal will to the catholic will of the Church. In other words, we obey Christ and the holy Fathers of the Church, who have decreed it. Beyond this, fasting is a broader virtue.

In the first place, fasting is also purity of the senses to the maximum extent possible. The saint writes: "If you fast from foods, but you have your eye on adultery and curiosity and jealousy in the inner chamber of your soul, and your hearing is susceptible to insults, unchaste songs, and evil whisperings, and the other senses are receptive to things which harm in a similar way, what is the use of fasting? Absolutely none." That is to say, there is no use in bodily fasting if you do not at the same time fast with the other senses, such as sight and hearing, which are the doors through which sin enters the soul and arouses passion. Therefore at the season of fasting (and at all times) Orthodox Christians must take care to control all of their senses.

Here we see from the teaching of St. Gregory that theology is not independent of purity even of the senses, because a theology which is not interested in that is simply not Orthodox. True fasting is abstention from evils, and therefore we can speak of fasting from evil. St. Gregory, referring to a passage in the Old Testament and especially to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink* (Isa 29:9) says that there is a surfeit and fiendish drunkenness. Indeed he writes that in those who fast and pray the devil suggests thoughts to remember the faults of others, sets in motion thoughts about rancor and sharpens the tongue for gossip. And the saint suggests that at the time of fasting we should cultivate love for our neighbor.

Another great sin, particularly at the time of fasting is conceit and pride. Of course a great temptation during fasting is self-esteem, when the person fasting tries to show it to people, so that he will be considered a fine Christian. A characteristic type of this tendency is the

Pharisee, who makes a display of his fasting, and in general of all his keeping of the Law. But self-esteem makes "useless our labour of fasting and prayer." The point is that self-esteem spoils both the reward and the labour itself of fasting and prayer.

But fasting should be joined with all the virtues. And naturally when we speak of virtues, we do not mean a few acts of an autonomous moral *deontology* (*ethical theory concerned with duties and rights*, Ed.), but the works of God. And when a person keeps the will of God, he participates in His works and therefore has peace, justice, love and so forth. Thus fasting should be joined with the virtues.

The greatest of the virtues are self-control, mourning, compunction, repentance, brokenness of heart. Fasting should be joined with these in order to be acceptable to God and to give fruits to the person fasting. The saint writes: "For

there must be self-control with fasting. Why? Because even satiety with cheap foods prevents the cathartic mourning and the godly sorrow in the soul and the compunction which shapes firm repentance for salvation; for without a broken heart it is not possible to enter truly into repentance. But decreasing nourishment and sleep and sensations in accordance with the will of God breaks the heart and brings it to mourn over its sins."

Repentance, mourning, and all the other motions of the soul cannot be brought back to their original beauty where there is satiation with material food. Fasting helps towards this aim. But mere fasting, without this necessary atmosphere for it, which is penitence in its full orthodox

sense, does not help in the spiritual life. So one also needs bodily labour, as well as compunction of heart. Otherwise fasting becomes a formal procedure and an outward formal practice, without any essential meaning.

At many points in his homilies, St. Gregory refers to the spiritual atmosphere in which fasting takes place. There is a characteristic passage worth citing. The saint writes that we should fast and pray with a broken heart, with self-reproach and humility "in order that our fasting and our watching and waiting in the temple may be pure and pleasing to God." The fasting that is pure and pleasing to God should be done with self-reproach, a broken heart and humility.

A fast which is not connected with this whole spiritual, ascetic atmosphere is not pleasing to God. The saint writes impressively that a fast which is not connected with the whole ascetic life "has rather an affinity with the evil angels," because even the demons fast, but their own undernourishment is connected with anger, hate, pride, and the opposition to God. So then we are in danger of fasting in the way



of the demons when we do not link our fasting with the whole ascetic life.

But beyond this, a fast also means purity of the nous from fantasies and impassioned thoughts. Interpreting Christ's saying: *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face.* (Mt 6:17), he says that here the Lord is legislating that we should not try to show that we are fasting and so solicit glory and praise from men. Beside this interpretation, St. Gregory also makes an *anagogic* (*mystical*, Ed.) interpretation of the passage. In this we can see his hesychastic life, but at the same time also an extension of the fast which we should not particularly follow, because in this way we can escape the great temptation which lies in wait, the external standardization of fasting and of all the gospel virtues.

The head of a man's soul is his nous, which is the ruling part, that is to say the center of his existence. The imaginative part of the soul, "which is the permanent seat of the sensory energies" is the person. When we want to make a real fast, we must anoint our nous with oil, that is to say we must make the nous charitable. And naturally, our nous becomes charitable when it receives the Grace of God. In this state the nous is illuminated and practices noetic prayer. At the same time we must wash away from our imagination the shameful and unclean thoughts and all anger and cunning. Such a fast not only cures a person from the passions and banishes the devil, but it numbers with the angels those who fast.

These things show the scope of fasting. In other words fasting is not only the avoidance of some foods, even though this is necessary, but at the same time it is purification of the whole inner world, especially of the imaginative part of the soul, from thoughts and images, and furthermore, illumination of the nous, which is the ruling part of the soul.

Those people who connect fasting simply with outward practices, and not with the whole ascetic life, are deluded.



God is present in a mysterious way in every being—most especially in the heart, which is the center of life. It is impossible to unite with God when the stomach is full, for a full stomach causes many cares and worries. All our thoughts, all our emotions, and all our will must be concentrated. When they are not, we are restless and lose our peace.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE PLACES AND WAYS

By St. Theodore the Studite.

A physical harbour is not like a harbour of the mind. When someone comes to anchor in the former, they ease off and have no worries about the storms and dangers of the sea. In the latter on the contrary, the passions become more ferocious with the relaxation of the flesh, and the spirits of wickedness join in the assault like storms: the spirits of fornication, gluttony, avarice, despondency, dejection, pride. The fear is that we may be sunk in harbour. David once looked unguardedly on Uriah's wife, and readers know what he suffered. *Jacob ate and was filled, says Scripture, and the beloved kicked.* (Deut 32:15). Someone touched without meaning to and they were enflamed to lust and gave birth to iniquity.

Take care, you who are listening to this. Flee the destructive places and ways of sin. Govern your sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, your food, drink and sleep, that you may keep from being overwhelmed by the tempest of the passions. This is worth remembering: someone who sails across the physical sea is subject to storms and tempests without their wanting it, while someone who crosses the water of the mind is lord of tempest and of calm. For if they manfully shake off unseemly thoughts, they are filled with calm, having the Holy Spirit as the companion of their voyage. But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves.

Unless the person does not swiftly smooth out their tempestuous thoughts, will end by repeating those miserable words, *I entered the depths of the sea, and a tempest drowned me.* (Pss 68:3). Therefore let reason be in control, and let the better not be dragged down by the worse, but let the spirit be master and act for the better. Or don't you know what sin produces? Didn't it introduce death into the world? Didn't it destroy the earth? Hasn't it filled the inhabited world with graveyards and tombs from the beginning of time until now? For humanity was incorrupt before the fall and none of the things I have mentioned would have started if the first-formed had steadfastly observed the commandment that had been given. Sin is the cause of the everlasting punishments, the fuel of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna, the food of the undying worm; sin that has made humanity, that was in honour, be compared to the unreasoning beasts (Pss 48,13:21).

And so, because sin is like all this, destructive and deadly, we must flee from it, brethren, with all our might, and choose virtue, which makes humans angels, raises them from death, resists the demons, overcomes the rulers of this age, and finally betroths them to the kingdom of heaven. May we all reach it too by the grace and love for humankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Spirit belong glory, might and honour, now and for ever, and the ages of ages. Amen.

A WELL-PRESERVED BYZANTINE CHAPEL [SEALED UNDER TURKISH MUD, AND DISCOVERED DURING THE MYRA-ANDRIAKE EXCAVATIONS]

By Jennifer Pinkowski, January 7, 2013.

DEMRE, Turkey—In the fourth century A.D., a bishop named Nicholas transformed the city of Myra, on the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey, into a Christian capital. Nicholas was later canonized, becoming the St. Nicholas of Christmas fame. Myra had a much unhappier fate.

After some 800 years as an important pilgrimage site in the Byzantine Empire it vanished—buried under 18 feet of mud from the rampaging Myros River. All that remained was the Church of St.

Nicholas, parts of a Roman amphitheater and tombs cut into the rocky hills.

But now, 700 years later, Myra is reappearing. Archaeologists first detected the ancient city in 2009 using ground-penetrating radar that revealed anomalies whose shape and size suggested walls and buildings. Over the next two years



they excavated a small, stunning 13th-century chapel sealed in an uncanny state of preservation. Carved out of one wall is a cross that, when sunlit, beams its shape onto the altar. Inside

is a vibrant fresco that is highly unusual for Turkey.

The chapel's structural integrity suggests that Myra may be largely intact underground. "This means we can find the original city, like Pompeii," said Nevzat Cevik, an archaeologist at Akdeniz University who is director of the excavations at Myra, beneath the modern town of Demre.

Mark Jackson, a Byzantine archaeologist at Newcastle University in England, who was not involved in the research, called the site "fantastic," and added, "This level of preservation under such deep layers of mud suggests an extremely well-preserved archive of information."

Occupied since at least the fourth century B.C., Myra was one of the most powerful cities in Lycia, with a native culture that had roots in the Bronze Age. It was invaded by Persians, Hellenized by Greeks, and eventually controlled by Romans.

Until the chapel was unearthed, the sole remnant of Myra's Byzantine era was the Church of St. Nicholas. (The bishop, also known as Nicholas the Wondermaker, was a native Lycian of Greek descent.) First built in the fifth century A.D. and reconstructed repeatedly, it was believed to house his remains and drew pilgrims from across the Mediterranean. Today, Cyrillic signs outside souvenir shops cater to the Russian Orthodox faithful.

But Myra attracted invaders, too. Arabs attacked in the seventh and ninth centuries. In the 11th, Seljuk Turks seized the city, and the bones thought to be those of Nicholas were stolen away to Bari, in southern Italy, by merchants who claimed to have been sent by the pope.

By the 13th century, Myra was largely abandoned. Yet someone built the small chapel using stones recycled from buildings and tombs.

Decades later, several seasons of heavy rain appear to have sealed Myra's fate. The chapel provides evidence of Myra's swift entombment. If the sediment had built up gradually, the upper portions should show more damage; instead, except for the roof's dome, at the surface, its preservation is consistent from bottom to top.

"It seems incredible," said Engin Akyurek, a Byzantine archaeologist with Istanbul University who is excavating the site. He and his team dug down 18 feet to the base of chapel, where they discovered a few artifacts from the early 14th century. (At the time, Turks were gaining control of Anatolia, and after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the Ottomans ruled for nearly five centuries.)

In the layers of mud between the 14th-century ground level and the late-Ottoman level—which is just shy of the modern surface—they discovered nothing at all.

Ceramics unearthed at the chapel and at St. Nicholas Church indicate that Myra remained unoccupied until the 18th century. And while a sunken city "may sound romantic," said Dr. Jackson, the British scholar, "this mud promises to have preserved a treasure trove of information on the city during an important period of change."

How classical cities transformed into Byzantine cities during the Christian era, especially between 650 and 1300, is a



subject of much scholarly debate. “Each city was different,” Dr. Jackson said, “and so we need high-quality, well-excavated evidence in order to contribute to the debate about the nature of urban change in this period.”

The fresco in the excavated chapel is especially striking. Six feet tall, it depicts the *deesis* (“prayer” or “supplication” in Greek). This is a common theme in Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox iconography, but the Myra fresco is different. Where typically these depictions show Christ Pantocrator (Christ the Almighty) enthroned, holding a book and flanked by his mother, Mary, and John the Baptist, whose empty hands are held palms up in supplication, at Myra both John and Mary hold scrolls with Greek text.

John’s scroll quotes from John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Mary’s is a dialogue from a prayer for the Virgin Mary in which she intercedes on behalf of humanity, asking Jesus to forgive their sins. Dr. Akyurek said this scroll-in-hand version had been seen in Cyprus and Egypt, but never in Turkey.

The chapel is part of a larger dig that includes the Roman amphitheater—largely reconstructed in the second century after an earthquake leveled much of Lycia—and Andriake, Myra’s harbor, about three miles south. Long a major Mediterranean port, Andriake was where St. Paul changed ships on his way to Antioch (now Antakya). Finds there include a workshop that produced royal purple and blue dye from murex snails and a fifth-century synagogue, the first archaeological evidence of Jewish life in Christian Lycia.

Much of Myra is under modern buildings in Demre, so archaeologists are unsure where they will dig next. They are buying property from local residents to prevent illegal excavations, though judging from the paucity of artifacts found so far, looters might be disappointed: the last residents of Myra seem to have looked at the rising floodwaters and packed their bags before they left.



Remember that not a single word is lost during prayer, if you say it from your heart; God hears each word, and weighs it in a balance. Sometimes it seems to us that our words only strike the air in vain, and sound as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. No, no; it is not so!... The Lord responds to every desire of the heart, expressed in words or unexpressed.

St. John of Kronstadt

WISDOM FROM OUR ORTHODOX WORLD

From various Orthodox periodicals, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

We easily admit to our lesser faults so as to convince ourselves that the greater ones do not exist...

Virtues have many teachers but few imitators.

He who knows other’s character is an educated man; he who knows his own character is a wise man.

Go on and spontaneously offer to others those things that they dare not ask you for...

Withstanding injustice and forgiving those who commit it is a greater virtue than performing kind acts.

The torture of conscience is the hell of the living.

Faith is not just a virtue—it is the catacomb through which all virtues pass through!

Clarity is the ornament of clean thoughts.

Good and evil people are not just determined through the deeds they commit but also through those they wish to commit.

Spring arrives for those who patiently await it.

God does not count the number of years of our earthly lives; He weighs them...

He who postpones never starts...

Your good deeds belong to God and need to be attributed to Him.

Good manners demand avoiding exaggerations.

Malice is the ulcer of the soul.

Talents are strengthened in isolation; strong characters, on the other hand, are formed among the many waves of the world.

Study that which is worthy of study.

The longer we keep away from life’s material excesses the closer we draw to our Creator.

He who speaks without thinking is no different than him who shoots without aiming.

A virtuous person never discusses his virtues.

The person who has the correct faith but continues to commit sins is like a face without eyes.



If you want it, the grace of God will visit you.... All things are dependent on us, on our will. I teach you; but if you are indifferent and do not listen, you sustain the loss. I throw you an apple: if you do not catch it, I am not at fault.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

HOW AN ATHEIST CANCER PATIENT CAME TO BELIEVE IN GOD

By Antonios Tenedios (Skalohori, Mytilini, Greece).



Quite a few years ago the following real-life story took place. This story was told to me by my good friend, Fr. Demetrios, the parish priest of the St. Vasilios Greek Orthodox Church located at Sah-touri Street, Piraeus, Greece.

I present this story to you just as it was narrated to me by Fr. Demetrios himself.

“One morning after the Divine Liturgy, I went to the Church office. A fifty year old man came in to talk to me. I did not know him and I had never seen him before in my Church. He spoke to me about a forty-two year old man who was admitted to the hospital in Piraeus, Greece. He was diagnosed with cancer. The disease had spread throughout his body and had metastasized into his brain. Following an examination, the doctors had told him that there is nothing that could be done to save his life. He was taking large doses of medicine but they did not help him. This gentleman told me that the hospitalized man was a close relative of his. He requested that I go to the hospital as soon as possible in order to give him Holy Communion.

As requested, I went to the hospital to fulfill this obligation, to administer Holy Communion to the sick man. As soon as I entered the patient’s room, it became apparent to me that he was in bad shape. It was further verified to me that the disease had spread to the brain and there was no chance of survival. His days were numbered. The patient was the only person in the room. The other bed was empty. At a certain point, the patient awakened from his coma and opened his eyes. He immediately saw me and with great difficulty told me the following story:

‘My family admitted me to this hospital facility thirty-five days ago. An eighty year old man was already in the room that I was assigned to. This patient was suffering from bone cancer. He was suffering horrific pains. In spite of his pain, he would continuously pray: *Glory to you, Oh God, Glory to you, Oh God* and this would be followed by a series of prayers. I was an atheist and I was hearing this for the first time in my life. I had never in my life stepped foot in a Church. This is why I became so startled when I observed that after saying his prayers he would calm down and sleep peacefully for two or three hours. But when he woke up again he would groan from unbearable pain. And then he continued to pray *Glory to You, Oh God!*

I was groaning and suffering from immense pain as well, but he, in spite of his pain, continued to glorify God. I, on the other hand, in my frustration from my pain blasphemed the name of Christ and His Holy Mother. The old man was actually thanking God for giving him cancer. Hearing him go on like this constantly and I, suffering my own pain, became upset with him. In addition to his constant praying, he would daily request to receive Holy Communion.

I, the filthy one, swore at him constantly. I would say to him ‘shut up, shut up finally! Can’t you see that the God that you glorify is torturing us severely with this cursed illness? What God? There is no God!’

The old man would calmly hear me and reply: ‘He exists, my child, God does truly exist and He is a loving Father. Through the illness that He has given us, we are being cleansed of our many sins.’ These replies of the old man made me angrier and I began once again to blaspheme both God and demons. I started yelling out and saying: ‘God does not exist! I don’t believe in anything; neither in God, His Heavenly Kingdom nor in the other world.’

Following this exchange between us, the old man would calmly reply: ‘Wait and you will see with your own eyes how the soul of a believing Christian is separated from his body. I am a sinner but the Grace of God will save me. Wait, you will see and believe!’

He continued to glorify God and His Holy Mother. He would say a specific prayer that repeated the word *hail* for the Virgin Mary (taken from the Salutations of the Akathist Hymn). He also chanted the hymns *Oh Virgin, Birth-Giver of God* and *It is truly meet to bless you*.

At one point, he suddenly stopped praying and I heard him say: ‘Welcome, my guardian angel! I thank you for coming with such a resplendent party of angels to take my soul.’

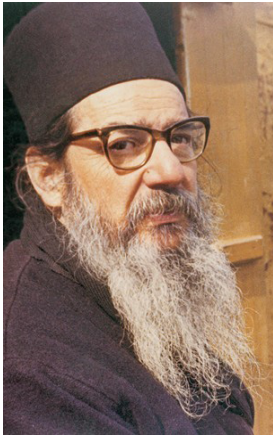
In great shock, I opened my eyes to see before me the heavenly host. The old man then made the sign of the Cross; crossed his arms on his chest and took his last breath. Suddenly the hospital room was filled with brilliant light that was brighter than ten suns. I, the unbeliever, the atheist, the materialist, saw this miracle with my own eyes. Then an extremely beautiful fragrance filled the room. I was dumbfounded by what I saw because I realized at that point that the old man was right all along.

I then called my parents and told them everything that I had witnessed and experienced. I angrily told them off because they had never spoken to me about the existence of God. I then invited my friends and relatives to come close to me and asked them to tell me everything about faith in God which I had never been taught by anyone. Dear Father, I now believe that God truly exists. This is why I am asking you to hear my confession and for you to give me Holy Communion.’ ”

Glory to God in his Saints!

Μελαγολικαὶ Ἐνοράσεις

Γέρων Θεόκλητος Διονυσιάτης (+2006). Αυτό τὸ ὄντως προφητικὸ καὶ ἐπίκαιρο ἄρθρο, δημοσιεύθηκε στὸν «Ὁρθόδοξο Τύπο» στὶς 23 Νοεμβρίου, 2001.



Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, μεταξὺ ἄλλων, λέγει ὅτι «οἱ Μοναχοὶ εἶναι οἱ κήρυκες τῆς ἐρχομένης Βασιλείας, οἱ προφηταὶ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης». Τὴν φράσι αὐτὴ μοῦ θύμισαν κάποιες συζητήσεις, ποὺ εἶχα τελευταίως μὲ τρεῖς φίλους ἡσυχαστῆς, ποὺ καὶ οἱ τρεῖς, ὡσὰν ἀπὸ προφητικὴ διαίσθησι, ἰσχυρίζοντο γιὰ τὴν ἐπέλευσι ἀπιθάνων ἐθνικῶν

καταστάσεων.

Καὶ ποιῆς καταστάσεις εἶναι αὐτές; Ὅτι, τάχα, ἡ Ἑλλάς, σταδιακῶς, δὲν θὰ συρρικνωθῆ μὲν ἐδαφικῶς, ἀλλὰ θὰ κατακτηθῆ ἐκ τῶν ἔνδον ἀπὸ τὸ Ἰσλάμ! Καὶ ἐστήριζαν τὸν ἰσχυρισμὸν των στίς ἡλεγμένες πληροφορίες, ὅπως ἔλεγαν, ποὺ τοὺς μετέδιδαν παλαιοὶ φίλοι τους κορυφαίων πολιτικῶν θέσεων, ποὺ τοὺς ἐπεσκέπτοντο στὴν Ἐρημο τοῦ Ἄθωνος ἢ τοὺς ἔγραφαν.

Καὶ στὴν ἐρώτησί μου: Ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐπιτρέψῃ τὴν ἀντικατάστασι τῆς ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας Του, ποὺ «ἐπεριποιήσατο τῷ ἰδίῳ Αἵματι», μὲ τὸν σκοτεινὸ καὶ δαιμονικὸν μουσουλμανισμὸν μέσα στὴν τοπικὴ Ὁρθοδοξία τῆς Ἑλλάδος; Μοῦ ἀπήντησαν μὲ ἓνα στόμα ὅτι, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τὸ ἐπιτρέψῃ ἐξ ἀφορμῆς τῆς ἐκτεταμένης ἁμαρτίας. Καὶ ἀνεφέρθησαν στοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς Ρωμηοὺς, ποὺ δὲν μετανοοῦσαν.

Καὶ ὅταν πάλιν τοὺς ἐρώτησα πῶς θὰ συμβῆ αὐτὸ καὶ πότε καὶ τί θὰ γίνουν οἱ Ἕλληνες, ἀπήντησαν, ὅτι ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται ἡ ἄλωσις μὲ τὰ 2-3 ἑκατομμύρια τῶν μωαμεθανῶν, ποὺ ὀνομάζονται μετανάστες, καὶ ποὺ θὰ στερεώνωνται σταδιακῶς μὲ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἰθαγένεια, ποὺ θὰ τοὺς χορηγῆ εὐχαρίστως τὸ Κράτος, δηλαδὴ ἡ ἄθη κυβέρνησις. Οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες βαθμιαίως θὰ γίνουν μειονότης, ἕως ὅτου θὰ μείνουν ἐλάχιστοι Χριστιανοὶ ὡς... δείγμα.

Μὴ ἀπορῆς, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, ἔσπευσαν νὰ ἐξηγήσουν, αὐτὴν τὴν τραγωδίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Πολλοὶ θὰ ἀποδεχθοῦν τὸν μουσουλμανισμὸν ἀβιάστως. Ἄλλοι, μὲ κάποιαν βίαν ποικίλης μορφῆς. Καὶ ἄλλοι «Χριστιανοὶ» θὰ μεταναστεύσουν σὲ «Χριστιανικὲς» χῶρες, μὴ δυνάμενοι νὰ συμβιώσουν μὲ τοὺς βαρβάρους αὐτούς, ποὺ τοὺς χρησιμοποιεῖ ὁ Θεὸς ὡς μέσον παιδαγωγίας, ὅπως ἀνὰ τοὺς

αἰῶνας ἐνεργοῦσε στοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες καὶ στοὺς Χριστιανούς, ποὺ δὲν μετανοοῦσαν γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους. Παράδειγμα ὁ Κατακλυσμὸς, τὰ Σόδομα, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, τὸ Βυζάντιον.

Αὐτὰ ὅλα μὲ εἶχαν συντρίψει ψυχικῶς καὶ σκεφτόμουν, τάχα θὰ ἐπιτρέψῃ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὴν τὴν ἀσύλληπτον συμφορὰν; Ἐπηκολούθησε σιωπὴ γιὰ ἀρκετὴ ὥρα. Στὴν συνέχεια, ἔθεσα τὸ ἐρώτημα: Πατέρες ἅγιοι καὶ ἀδελφοί, φαντάζεσθε σεῖς, πῶς θὰ ἀνεχθῆ ὁ Κύριος τὶς μουσουλμανικῆς δαιμονικῆς θυσίαι, ἀντὶ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων θυσιαστηρίων; Τότε ἓνας ἡσυχαστῆς μοῦ ὑπενθύμισε τὴν περίπτωσι τοῦ ἀσκητοῦ πού, μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσι τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, εἶδε ἐπάνω στὴν ἁγία Πρόθεσι ἐρειπωμένον Ναοῦ, μίαν γουρούνα μὲ τὰ νεογνά της καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ κλαίῃ καὶ νὰ ὀδύρεται. Τότε ἐνεφανίσθη Ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἄββᾶ, τί κλαίεις; Γνωρίζεις ὅτι, αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶδες, εἶναι πρὸς εὐάρεστον τὸν Κύριον ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναξίτητα τῶν ἱερέων, ποὺ λειτουργοῦσαν;» Καὶ ὁ Ἄγγελος ἐγένετο ἄφαντος.

Ἡ συζήτησις ἐκράτησε περισσότερον ἀπὸ δύο ὥρες, ὁπότε οἱ ἡσυχαστῆς ἀνεχώρησαν καὶ μοῦ ἐτόνισαν νὰ εὐχαριστῶ τὸν Κύριον γιὰ ὅσα ἐπιτρέπει νὰ γίνωνται ἐξ ἀγάπης καὶ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ψυχῶν. Καὶ νὰ μὴ παρασύρωμαι συναισθηματικῶς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῶν γεγονότων, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἰσδύω στὴν οὐσίαν των, ἀφοῦ εἶναι δεδομένον, ὅτι «ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν».

Κι ἔμεινα μόνος...

Μέσα στὸν συγκλονισμό μου γιὰ τὴν τραγωδίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μας, τὸν κλαυθμὸν καὶ τοὺς στεναγμούς μου πρὸς τὸν πανυπερεύσπλαγγον Θεόν, ἄρχισα νὰ μελετῶ ὅσα εἶπαν μὲ βεβαιότητα οἱ ὅσοι ἐκεῖνοι ἐρημίτες καὶ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ ἀναλύω λογικῶς τοὺς ἰσχυρισμούς τους. Παρ' ὅτι καμμιὰ ἀνησυχούσα φωνὴ δὲν ἀκούεται, ὅμως, κάποια σποραδικὰ δημοσιεύματα πρὸ μηνῶν στὸν γρηγοροῦντα «Ὁρθόδοξον Τύπον» ἤρχοντο νὰ ἐπαληθεύσουν σχεδὸν τοὺς ἰσχυρισμούς τῶν φίλων μου ἡσυχαστῶν. Καὶ μάλιστα κάποια δημοσιεύματα τῶν τελευταίων ἡμερῶν, πάλιν στὸν «Ο.Τ.» ἀπὸ σφόδρονες Χριστιανούς, θεολόγους καὶ συγγραφεῖς, οἱ ὅποιοι μὲ πειστικὰ ἐπιχειρήματα κατέληγαν στὰ ἴδια συμπεράσματα, ποὺ ἐβασίζοντο σὲ ἀντικειμενικὰ στατιστικὰ στοιχεῖα.

Ἄλλὰ τὸ σκάνδαλον εὐρίσκεται στὴν σιωπὴν τῶν κοινῆς πληροφορήσεως μέσων, τῶν λεγομένων μαζικῆς ἐνημερώσεως. Ὅμως, ὅσον καὶ ἂν φαίνεται περιέργη ἢ βαθεῖα σιγὴ ἐπὶ ἐνὸς βοῶντος ἐθνικοῦ κινδύνου, τὸ φαινόμενον δὲν εἶναι ἀνεξήγητον. Πρόκειται περὶ σχεδὸν καθολικῆς πωρώσεως τῶν συνειδήσεων. Καὶ εἶναι ἱστορικῶς ἀποδεδειγμένον, ὅτι ὅταν ἡ ἁμαρτία καθολικοποιῆται, γενικεύεται, ἀκολουθεῖ, δίκην συνδρομοῦ, ἢ ἄγνοια τοῦ κακοῦ.

Ἴδου ἡ ἀπόδειξις: Ὄταν ὁ Θεὸς εἶχεν ἀποφασίσει τὸν Κατακλυσμόν, μὲ τὸ αἰτιολογικὸν «*Οὐ μὴ καταμείνῃ τὸ πνεῦμα μου εἰς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τούτους, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς σάρκας*», ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν στὸν δίκαιον Νῶε νὰ κατασκευάσῃ τὴν Κιβωτόν. Εἰργάζοντο οἱ τεχνίτες ἐπὶ ἓνα χρόνον. Βλέποντες οἱ ἀπονεκρωθέντες ἁμαρτωλοὶ τὴν κατασκευαζομένην Κιβωτόν καὶ τὸν σκοπὸν, πληροφοροῦμενοι, ἔλεγαν: καὶ τί κάνουμε ὥστε νὰ πνιγοῦμε; Καὶ ὅταν οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶπαν στὸν δίκαιον Λῶτ νὰ εἰδοποιήσῃ τοὺς συγγενεῖς του, διότι θὰ ἔρριχναν φωτιὰ νὰ κάψουν τὰ Σόδομα, ὅλην τὴν Πεντάπολιν, οἱ συγγενεῖς του γελοῦσαν μὲ τὸν γέροντα: καὶ τί κάνουμε, ὥστε νὰ μᾶς κάψῃ ὁ Θεός;

Τὸ ἴδιο συμβαίνει καὶ τώρα, σὲ κάποιο μέτρο: τὸ σύνδρομο τῆς πωρώσεως. Καμμία ἐφημερίδα δὲν ἔγραψε γιὰ τὸν ἐθνικὸν κίνδυνον μὲ ἐξαιρέσι τὴν πολὺτιμη Ὁρθόδοξη ἔπαλξι, τὸν «Ὁρθόδοξον Τύπον», ποῦ, καὶ μόνον διότι ἀπὸ ἓνα χρόνο σχεδὸν σαλπίζει, τὸ σάλπισμα τῆς μετανοίας, ἀξίζει τὸν ἔπαινον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν ἐκ Θεοῦ δικαίαν μισθαποδοσίαν. Οἱ ἀπόψεις καὶ οἱ ἀπελπιστικὲς ἐνοράσεις τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων ἐρημιτῶν, ὅσον καὶ ἂν δὲν εἶναι ἀποδεικτικὲς, δὲν στεροῦνται, ὅμως, σὲ κάποιον βαθμόν, πειστικότητος, διότι βασιζονται σὲ ἀπτὰ δεδομένα, ἓνα τῶν ὁποίων εἶναι οἱ ἐνεργούμενες ἁμαρτίες ἀγνωσμένης τῆς μετανοίας, σ' ὅλην τὴν Ἑλλάδα, παρὰ τις ἐλάχιστες νησίδες Χριστιανικῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς ἀντιστάσεως.

Δεύτερον ὅτι, ὁ προφητικὸς λόγος «*ἁμαρτίαι, ἔθνη ἐλαττονοῦσι*», ἔχει πολλάκις ἐπαληθευθῆ. Τρίτον, στὴν δραστηριότητα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, περιλαμβάνονται καὶ οἱ ἓνα ἑκατομμύριον ἐκτρώσεις κάθε τριετίαν. Οἱ ὑπερτεροῦντες θάνατοι τῶν γεννήσεων. Ναρκωτικὰ καὶ ἄλλες ἠθικὲς πληγές. Καὶ τέλος, τὸ κυριώτερον, εἶναι τὰ τρία σχεδὸν ἑκατομμύρια τῶν νομιμοποιουμένων μουσουλμάνων, ποῦ αὐξάνονται καὶ πληθύνονται μὲ ταχυτάτους ρυθμούς, ἓνα φαινόμενο, ποῦ ἐρμηνεύει καὶ τις ἀπόψεις τῶν ἡσυχαστῶν, τῶν μουσουλμάνων ἐνεργούντων ὡς ὄργάνων ἀσυνειδήτων τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅπως ἐπίσης ἀσυνείδητα ὄργανα, ὄχι ἀνεύθυνα, βεβαίως εἶναι οἱ ἄθεοι κυβερνήτες μας, ποῦ ὑποδέχονται τοὺς δεδηλωμένους ἐχθροὺς τοῦ ἔθνους μας, γιὰ νὰ μὴ κατηγορηθοῦν, τάχα, ὡς ρατσιστές ἢ ἐθνικιστές. Αὐτὴ ἡ καραμέλλα ἔχει πολλὴ πέρασι στὴν ἐποχὴ μας, μεταξὺ τῶν ἐπιπολαίων καὶ ἀθέων, ποῦ γίνονται καταγέλαστοι μὲ τις παραδοξολογίες των. Παράδειγμα, «τὸ ἀλβανάκι» πέρυσι καὶ τώρα ἡ γερμανιδούλα τοῦ Βόλου, ποῦ ἂν εἶναι διαποτισμένοι, ὁ πρῶτος ἀπὸ τὸν ἀλβανικὸν ἀνθελληνικὸν σωβινισμόν καὶ ἡ δευτέρα πιστεῦναι στὸ γερμανικὸ «οὐμπερ ἄλλες» τότε, στὰ χέρια των τὸ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὸν

σύμβολον, ἡ γαλανόλευκη μὲ Σταυρόν, εἶναι τιμωρία, δὲν εἶναι τιμὴ! Εἶναι ἀντίφασις.

Τώρα τὸ πρόβλημα, τὸ παμπρόβλημα, εἶναι ἡ ἀλλοτρίωσις τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ χώρου, κατὰ παραχώρησιν Θεοῦ, γιὰ τὴν ἀμετανοησία τῶν πιστῶν. Ὅποτε ἀβιάστως ἀνακύπτει ἡ ὑποχρέωσις τῆς ποιμανούσης Ἐκκλησίας νὰ κηρύξῃ μετάνοιαν στὸν λαόν.

Ἄλλοιως; «*Ἐὰν μὴ μετανοῆτε, πάντες ὡσαύτως ἀπολείσθητε!*» (Λουκ 13:3). Τὸ γὰρ στόμα Κυρίου ἐλάλησε ταῦτα!



Τὰ Μελλούμενα... Ἡ τὰ Παρόντα;

Τοῦ μεγάλου Ἑλληνα Νομπελίστα ποιητῆ (καὶ πρόφητη;) Ὀδυσσεᾶ Ἐλύτη (ἀπὸ τῆ συνέντευξη τύπου ποῦ δόθηκε στὶς 19 Ὀκτωβρίου 1979, στὸ ξενοδοχεῖο Μεγάλῃ Βρεταννία, μὲ ἀφορμὴ τὴν ἀναγγελία γιὰ τὴ βράβευσή του μὲ τὸ Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας).

Ἦδη σὰς τὸ εἶπα. Εἶναι ἡ βαρβαρότητα. Τὴ βλέπω νὰ ἔρχεται μεταμφιεσμένη, κάτω ἀπὸ ἄνομες συμμαχίες καὶ προσυμφωνημένες ὑποδουλώσεις. Δὲν θὰ πρόκειται γιὰ τοὺς φούρνους τοῦ Χίτλερ ἴσως, ἀλλὰ γιὰ μεθοδευμένη καὶ οἰονεὶ ἐπιστημονικὴ καθυπόταξη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γιὰ τὸν πλήρη ἐξευτελισμὸ του. Γιὰ τὴν ἀτίμωσή του.

Ὅποτε ἀναρωτιέται κανεὶς: Γιὰ τί παλεύουμε νύχτα μέρα κλεισμένοι στὰ ἐργαστήριά μας; Παλεύουμε γιὰ ἓνα τίποτα, ποῦ ὡστόσο εἶναι τὸ πᾶν.

Εἶναι οἱ δημοκρατικοὶ θεσμοί, ποῦ ὅλα δείχνουν ὅτι δὲν θ' ἀντέξουν γιὰ πολὺ. Εἶναι ἡ ποιότητα, ποῦ γι' αὐτὴ δὲν δίνει κανεὶς πεντάρρα. Εἶναι ἡ ὄντοτητα τοῦ ἀτόμου, ποῦ βαίνει πρὸς τὴν ὀλική της ἔκλειψη. Εἶναι ἡ ἀνεξαρτησία τῶν μικρῶν λαῶν, ποῦ ἔχει καταντήσῃ ἤδη ἓνα γράμμα νεκρῶ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀμάθεια καὶ τὸ σκότος.

Ὅτι οἱ λεγόμενοι «πρακτικοὶ ἄνθρωποι»—κατὰ πλειονότητα οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄστοι—μᾶς κοροϊδεύουν, εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ. Ἐκεῖνοι βλέπουν τὸ τίποτα. Ἐμεῖς τὸ πᾶν.

Ποῦ βρίσκεται ἡ ἀλήθεια, θὰ φανεῖ μία μέρα, ὅταν δὲν θὰ μαστε πιά ἐδῶ. Θὰ εἶναι, ὅμως, ἐὰν ἀξίζει, τὸ ἔργο κάποιου ἀπ' ὅλους ἐμᾶς. Καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ σώσει τὴν τιμὴ ὅλων μας καὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας.

Ποιοί και γιατί Θέλουν να Άφανίσουν την Έλληνορθοδοξία;

Γράφει ο Νίκος Χειλαδάκης, δημοσιογράφος – συγγραφέας – Τουρκολόγος.

Ενώ η χώρα μας έχει ριχτεί στον γκρεμό από μία διεφθαρμένη πολιτική κλίκα, ενώ η Έλληνική κοινωνία θρηνεί σχεδόν καθημερινά τα θύματά της από αυτή την «θύελλα», ένα μεγάλο μέρος αυτής της κλίκας τον τελευταίο καιρό έχει έντεινει τις προσπάθειες αποχριστιανοποίησης του Έλληνικού κράτους, με μία επιχείρηση αποκαθήλωσης όλων των πατροπαράδοτων ὀρθοδόξων συμβόλων από όλες τις δημόσιες λειτουργίες.

Μάλιστα ὅλοι αὐτοὶ πού πνέουν μένεα κατὰ τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας, προβάλλουν πρότυπα δυτικῶν χωρῶν

ὅπου ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ἔχει καταστήσει ἕνα φολκλορικό σύμβολο χωρὶς καμία οὐσία καὶ οἱ ναοὶ γίνονται γυμναστήρια, μπαράκια, ἀκόμα καὶ μουσουλμανικά τεμένη. Ἡ ἐκστρατεία αὐτὴ συνοδεύεται συχνὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἕνα ἀνθελληνικό μένος πού σκοπὸ ἔχει νὰ σβήσει ὅλη τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ἱστορία καὶ νὰ διαστρεβλώσει κάθε



πραγματικὴ ἀλήθεια σχετικά με πρόσφατα ἱστορικά γεγονότα πού σημάδεψαν τὴν πορεία μας σὰν Ἕλληνες, σὰν πρόσωπα Ὀρθόδοξα τῆς μίας ἀληθινῆς, καθολικῆς, Ὀρθοδοξίας, ἐκκλησίας.

Ἐξετάζοντας ἀπὸ πὸν προέρχεται ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ ἐπιχείρηση ἀποορθοδοξοποίησης τῶν Ἑλλήνων, διακρίνουμε κάποιες κυρίες ἀφετηρίες ὅλης αὐτῆς τῆς ἐκστρατείας ἡ ὁποία τελευταία ἔχει ἐντατικοποιηθεῖ σὲ μεγάλο βαθμό. Δὲν θὰ ἀναφερθῶ σὲ διάφορους αἰρετικούς καὶ ἀλλόδοξους γιατί αὐτοὶ εἶναι ἐκτὸς τοῦ πεδίου μας. Ἡ προσοχή μας συγκεντρώνετε σὲ τὸ κύριο σῶμα τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ κόσμου καὶ σὲ ὅλους αὐτούς πού στὴν συντριπτικὴ τους πλειοψηφία εἶναι βαπτισμένοι, ἂν καὶ μεταγενέστερα ἔχουν ἀπαρνηθεῖ συνειδητὰ αὐτὸ τὸ βάπτισμα.

Ἡ πρώτη κατηγορία εἶναι οἱ ἀριστεροὶ με τὶς διαφορὲς διακλαδώσεις τους καὶ οἱ αὐτοαποκαλούμενοι «προοδευτικοί». Αὐτοὶ ἦταν πάντα καὶ ἐκ δόγματος ἀντίθετοι πρὸς κάθε θρησκεία καθὼς προβάλλονται ὡς ὕλιστές. Στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ περίπτωση ὑπῆρχε πάντα μία ἰδιαιτερότητα, καθὼς ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία παράδοση ἦταν ἀνεκαθεν δυνατὴ στὰ λαϊκὰ στρώματα πού ὑποτίθεται ὅτι ἐκπροσωποῦν οἱ ἀριστεροί. Ἔτσι

παρατηρήθηκε σὲ κάποιες ἱστορικὲς συγκυρίες τὸ παράδοξο φαινόμενο ἀριστεροὶ νὰ συμπλεύσουν με Ὀρθόδοξα σύμβολα.

Ἀξέχαστη εἶναι ἡ γνωστὴ φωτογραφία τοῦ παπᾶ τοῦ ΕΑΜ με τὸ ὄπλο στὸ χέρι νὰ πολεμᾷ τοὺς Γερμανοὺς κατακτητές. Στὴν δεκαετία τοῦ ὀγδόντα ὑπῆρξε μία ἀξιοπρόσεκτη προσπάθεια σύγκλισης τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας με τὶς ἀριστερὲς ἰδεολογίες με πρωτεργάτη τὸν ἀξέχαστο διανοούμενο τῆς ἀριστερᾶς καὶ ἱστορικό τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης, τὸν Κωστὴ Μοσκόφ, ἐνῶ καὶ ὁ Μίκης Θεοδωράκης εἶχε δεῖ τότε με θετικὸ μάτι αὐτὴ τὴν κίνηση. Σήμερα δυστυχῶς οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀριστεροὶ εἶναι πῶς στενοκέφαλοι καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς κλασικοὺς σταλινικούς. Πολεμᾶνε με λύσσα κάθε Ὀρθόδοξη παρουσία φτάνοντας σὲ παράλογες ἀπαιτήσεις ὅπως φορολογία τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν κ.ἄ

Βουλευτὲς ἀριστερῶν κομμάτων, ὅπως ἡ γνωστὴ «κυρία τοῦ συνωστισμοῦ», ἀσχολοῦνται συνεχῶς λὲς καὶ ἔχουν λύσει ὅλα τα ἄλλα προβλήματα τῆς κρίσης με τὸ πῶς θὰ κατεβάσουν τὶς εἰκόνες ἀπὸ τὰ δικαστήρια καὶ τὰ σχολεῖα καὶ τὸ πῶς θὰ καταργήσουν τὸ μάθημα τῶν θρησκευτικῶν.

Ἡ δεύτερη κατηγορία προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἀντίθετο πόλο. Εἶναι αὐτοὶ πού αὐτοαποκαλοῦνται νεοφιλελεύθεροι καὶ ἐκ θέσεως ἄθεοι. Εἶναι ὀπαδοὶ μίας χρηματιστηριακῆς «δημοκρατίας», ὅπου οἱ δημοκρατικὲς ἀρχὲς ἔχουν ἀξία μόνο ὅταν λειτουργοῦν στὴν ὑπηρεσία ἐνὸς ἄτεγκου κεφαλαιοκρατικοῦ κατεστημένου. Αὐτὴ ἡ κατηγορία ἀσπάζεται ὅλα τα συστατικά τοῦ σύγχρονου δυτικοῦ καταναλωτικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ πού ἔχει δημιουργήσει ὅλες τὶς σύγχρονες ψυχασθένειες τῆς καταρρέουσας δυτικῆς κοινωνίας. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κατηγορία μετέχει στὴν ἐκστρατεία ἀφανισμοῦ τοῦ Ὀρθοδοξοῦ συναισθήματος τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Στὴν ἐκστρατεία αὐτὴ μετέχει ἐνεργὰ καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ τηλεοπτικὸ κατεστημένο· ἀπὸ τὴν δεκαετία τοῦ ἐνενήντα, ὅταν ἀφέθηκε ἐλεύθερο καὶ ἀσύδοτο, χρησιμοποίησε ὅλη τὴν δύναμή του πού τοῦ ἔδινε ἡ ζωντανὴ εἰκόνα γιὰ νὰ διαστρέψει κάθε ἱστορικὴ παράδοση καὶ νὰ πλάσει ἕνα πρότυπο νεοέλληνα πού τὰ ἰδανικά του εἶναι ὁ εὐκόλος καὶ χωρὶς κόπο πλουτισμὸς, ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ κάθε ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ νομικὴ συνέπεια, ἡ ἐκπόρνευση τῆς νεολαίας καὶ ἡ διακομωδὸμηση κάθε ἔθνικοῦ καὶ Ὀρθοδοξοῦ

φρονήματος, τὸ ὁποῖο μάλιστα καταδικάζεται σαν... φασισμὸς καὶ ἄλλες ἐξυπνες «ετικέτες».

Ἐπὶ ἄρχει ὁμως καὶ ἓνα ἄλλο ἀντιορθόδοξο μέτωπο ποῦ προέρχεται δυστυχῶς μέσα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους κόλπους τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἐκκλησίας. Εἶναι ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ ρασοφόροι ἱεράρχες ποῦ χάριν κάποιας πάλι «προοδευτικότητας» καὶ παρεξηγημένης ἀνεκτικότητας, πρεσβεύουν οὐνιτικὲς ἀπόψεις, παίρνουν μέρος σὲ συλλειτουργίες μὲ αἰρετικούς, ἀκόμα καὶ μὲ ἀλλόδοξους, παραβιάζοντας ἔτσι ὅλους τοὺς κανόνες τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῶν Συνόδων. Ἐδῶ σημαντικὸς εἶναι ὁ ρόλος τῆς ἱεραρχίας, ἡ ὁποία δὲν ἔχει ἀνταποκριθεῖ στὶς μεγάλες τῆς εὐθύνης σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σημαντικό θέμα. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν συμβιβάζεται, δὲν ἐκσυγχρονίζεται, οὔτε ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ «προοδευτικότητας» γιατί εἶναι πέραν ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς στενὲς ἀνθρωπινὲς ἀντιλήψεις καὶ καλύπτει διαχρονικὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἐξέλιξη καὶ κυρίως τὰ βασικὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἐρωτήματα.

Ἦλος αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνελέητος πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἀναμένεται νὰ κορυφωθεῖ. Γιὰ τοὺς νεοταξικοὺς ἰθύνοντες δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐπαναληφθεῖ τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς πτώσης τοῦ Βυζαντίου ὅπου ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἐπέζησε. Τὸ σχέδιο εἶναι παράλληλα μὲ τὴν ἀπώλεια τῆς ἐθνικῆς κυριαρχίας μας, νὰ δοθεῖ καὶ τὸ τελικὸ χτύπημα στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία Ἑλληνικὴ ταυτότητα ἔτσι ὥστε οἱ νεοἝλληνες νὰ καταστήσουν «προβατάκια ἐπὶ σφαγῆ» καὶ ἡ χώρα αὕτη ποῦ κάποτε ἄνθισε καὶ μεγαλούργησε ὁ Ἑλληνορθόδοξος πολιτισμὸς νὰ ἀποτελέσει ἓνα τουριστικὸ μνημεῖο, χωρὶς μάλιστα καὶ πολλὲς ἀξιώσεις ἐπισκεψιμότητας. Θέλουν νὰ μᾶς κάνουν νὰ πιστέψουμε ὅτι εἴμαστε ἀπομεινάρια ἐνὸς θρησκευτικοῦ Μεσαίωνα ποῦ ἐμποδίζει τὴν «πρόοδο» τῆς χώρας. Πὼς ὅτι ἱερὸ καὶ ὄσιο μᾶς τὸ παραδῶσαν οἱ προγονοὶ μας, δὲν εἶναι τίποτα ἄλλο παρὰ ἓνα «σπασμένο βάζο» ποῦ τὰ συντρίμια του εἶναι γιὰ τὰ σκουπίδια.

Ἔχουν τόσο πολὺν παρασυρθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ μένος τους κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποῦ φτάνουν στὸ σημεῖο νὰ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν νὰ πιστέψουμε ὅτι «πρόοδος» εἶναι ἡ... ὁμοφυλοφιλία, τὸ εὐκόλο διαζύγιο, ἡ ἀνοχή τῆς μοιχείας, ἡ ἀποδοχή τῆς εὐδαιμονισμοῦ ὡς ἀνθρώπινου δικαίωματος, ἡ ἀποδοχή τῶν ἐκτρώσεων σαν μία φυσιολογικὴ πράξη, ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ γενετικὴ ἐπέμβαση μὲ τὸ ἔλεγχο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν γέννηση. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐμφανίζονται καὶ ἀνεκτικοί, μᾶς λένε ὅτι ἂν ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπιθυμῆ νὰ ἔχει κάποια ἀξιοπιστία ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴ

«προοδευτικότητά» τῆς, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ παλιὰ ἀναχρονιστικὰ τῆς πρότυπα καὶ νὰ ἀποδεχθεῖ ὅτι ἀρρωστημένο καὶ διεστραμμένο σαν φυσιολογικὸ, ἄσχετα ἂν παραβιάζονται ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ στοιχειώδεις νόμοι τῆς φύσεως καὶ παράλληλα ὅτι παραδοσιακὸ καὶ φυσιολογικὸ σαν ἀναχρονιστικὸ καὶ ξεπερασμένο. Ἄλλωστε, ὅπως πρεσβεύουν, τὸ φυσιολογικὸ δὲν εἶναι τίποτα παραπάνω ἀπὸ μία ὑποκειμενικὴ ἀντίληψη.

Ἐτερόκλητοι παράγοντες συγκλείουν σὲ μία κοινὴ γραμμὴ ἐξόντωσης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ταυτότητας καὶ ἀπάλειψης κάθε ἴχνους καὶ παρουσίας αὐτοῦ ποῦ μᾶς ἐμψύχωσε καὶ μᾶς κράτησε ἐν ζωῇ χιλιετίες ἱστορίας καὶ ἀγῶνων γιατί ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι τὸ τελευταῖο προπύργιο αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας ποῦ ἀκόμα δὲν ἔχει καταστραφεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ νεοταξικὸ καταστημένο τους. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀκόμα τὴν ὑπολογίζουν σοβαρὰ καὶ



γι' αὐτὸ «τρίβουν τὰ χέρια τους» ποῦ στὴν κεφαλὴ τῆς ἱεραρχίας βρίσκεται ὅτι πιὸ βολικὸ θὰ ἤθελαν γιὰ αὐτὴ τὴν συγκυρία τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας συμφορᾶς. Ἀλλὰ ὡς πότε;

Ἡ σημερινὴ Ἑλλάδα περνᾷ μία ἀπὸ τὶς μεγαλύτερες κρίσεις στὴν ἱστορία τῆς. Ἡ κρίση αὐτὴ εἶναι οἰκονομικὴ, πολιτικὴ, ἐθνικὴ, κοινωνικὴ καὶ γίνεται καὶ θρησκευτικὴ. Αὐτοὶ ποῦ μᾶς ὀδήγησαν

ἐδῶ, αὐτοὶ ποῦ ἔφεραν τὴν ἐθνικὴ καταστροφὴ, ἀντὶ νὰ προσπαθοῦν νὰ λύσουν τὰ προβλήματα ποῦ συσσώρευσαν τώρα θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἀποτελειώσουν βάζοντας στὸ στόχαστρό τους καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ὁρθοδοξία.

Ἀλλὰ ὅπως εἶπε καὶ ὁ ἀξέχαστος παππούλης, ὁ πάτερ Παΐσιος, «Σήμερα οἱ φίλοι μας θέλουν νὰ μᾶς τσαλακώσουν λίγο καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ μας νὰ μᾶς ξεσκίσουν. Δὲν πειράζει ὁμως. Ἔχουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὰ σχέδια τους. Ἔχει καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὰ δικά Του...».



Ὅσο ὁ ἱερέας προσεύχεται στὸν Θεὸ γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους κατὰ τὴν Θεῖα Λειτουργία, τόσο περισσότερο ἐλεεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὅσο στόχος τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ ὅταν ἐξομολογεῖ, εἶναι νὰ κερδηθεῖ ὁ ἀμαρτωλός!

Ὅταν εὐλογεῖ ὁ ἱερέας, μεταδίδει τὴ δύναμη καὶ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ.

Γέρων Γερμανὸς Σταυροβουνιώτης (+1982)

Περὶ τῶν Ὀκτῶ Πειρασμῶν τῶν Μοναχῶν καὶ τῶν Λαϊκῶν Χριστιανῶν

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Πνευματικοὶ Λόγοι Γερομ. Κλεόπα Ἡλιε», ἐκδ. «Ὀρθόδοξος Κυψέλη», Συκιές, Θεσσαλονίκη.



Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, Ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς Χριστιανὸς εἶναι πνευματικοὶ μαχητὲς σὲ κάθε στιγμή τῆς ζωῆς τους ἀπὸ τὴν γέννηση μέχρι τὸν θάνατό τους. Εἶναι ὅμως ἀνάγκη νὰ γνωρίζουμε τὴν τέχνη αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου πολέμου καὶ ἀπὸ ποῖα μέρη ἔρχεται ἐναντίον μας ὁ νοητὸς ἐχθρός.

Ὁ ἅγιος Μελέτιος ὁ Ὁμολογητὴς μᾶς λέγει ὅτι ὁ πειρασμὸς ἔρχεται ἀπὸ ἕξι σημεία ἐναντίον μας, ἐνῶ ὁ ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἄγιορείτης γράφει ἀπὸ ὀκτώ, δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ ἐπάνω καὶ ἀπὸ κάτω, ἀπὸ δεξιά καὶ ἀριστερά, ἀπὸ ἐμπρὸς καὶ πίσω καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα καὶ ἔξω. Στὴν συνέχεια θὰ ὁμιλήσουμε ἐκτενέστερα γιὰ τὸν πολυμερῆ αὐτὸν πόλεμο τοῦ διαβόλου μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Πανάγαθου Θεοῦ.

1. Ὁ ἀπὸ ἐπάνω πειρασμός:

Εἶναι δυὸ εἰδῶν: Τὸ πρῶτο συμβαίνει ὅταν ἀρχίζουμε νὰ κάνουμε μία ἀδιάκριτη καὶ ἀπερίσκεπτη ἀσκήση ποὺ ὑπερβαίνει τὶς δυνάμεις μας, ὅπως ἐπὶ παραδείγματι: ὑπερβολικὴ νηστεία, συνεχὴ ἀγρυπνία, πολλὲς μετάνοιες, καὶ ἄλλες ὑπερβολικὲς ἀσκήσεις. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀσκήση ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ ἀδυνατίζει τὸ σῶμα μας καὶ νὰ ἀδυνατοῦμε νὰ ἐργασθοῦμε τὶς ἀρετὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Συγχρόνως ταράζεται ὁ νοῦς μας γιατί δὲν ἀναπαύεται σ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τὶς ἀσκήσεις. Τὸ δεύτερο εἶδος πειρασμοῦ συμβαίνει ὅταν ἐρευνοῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή χωρὶς νὰ διαθέτουμε τὴν ἀνάλογη πνευματικὴ ἡλικία καὶ κατάσταση μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα, ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν εὗρεθεῖ νὰ μᾶς χαλιναγωγῆσει, θὰ φθάσουμε στὴν τρέλλα, τὴν αἴρεση καὶ τὴν βλασφημία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή εἶναι ἡ ἀπύθμενη θάλασσα τῆς σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ ἐμεῖς πρέπει νὰ βγάλουμε ὅσο εἶναι δυνατὸν καὶ ἀπαραίτητο γιὰ νὰ ἀνακουφισθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴ μας δίψα. Ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος βγάζει μὲ τὸν κουβᾶ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν στὴν κανάτα καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ παίρνει μὲ ἓνα ποτήρι νὰ δροσισθεῖ καὶ δὲν προσπαθεῖ μὲ μία φορὰ νὰ βγάλει τὸ νερὸ τῆς σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔξω, διότι δὲν ἔχει τὰ κατάλληλα ἐργαλεῖα καὶ ὑπάρχει βεβαίως ὁ φόβος νὰ πνιγεῖ. Ἔτσι πνίγηκαν πολλοὶ ἐρευνητὲς τῶν Γραφῶν λόγω τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας των καὶ ἔγιναν ἀρχηγοὶ αἱρέσεων καὶ ὀδήγησαν μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς των χιλιάδες ψυχὰς στὸν Ἄδη.

2. Ὁ ἀπὸ κάτω πειρασμός:

Ἀπὸ κάτω ἔρχεται ὁ πειρασμὸς καὶ μᾶς πειράζει μὲ τὴν ἀκηδία καὶ ὀκνηρία γιὰ τὴν ἐπιτέλεση τῶν ἔργων τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐνα παράδειγμα: Ὅταν κάποιος εἶναι δυνατὸς καὶ ὑγιὴς στὸ σῶμα καὶ ἐκ προθέσεως ἀποφεύγει τὶς δουλειὲς ἢ τὰ διακονήματα τῆς Μονῆς, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἀνάλογα τῶν δυνάμεων του. Ἡ ἓνας λαϊκός, ὁ ὁποῖος δὲν θέλει νὰ κοπιᾶσει γιὰ τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἀρετῶν, τὴν νηστεία, τὴν ἀγρυπνία, τὴν ὑπηρεσία καὶ βοήθεια τοῦ πλησίον, τὴν προσευχὴ κ.λ.π. Μὲ τὴν ἀδιαφορία ἢ ὀκνηρία μας αὐτὴ στεροῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ μας τὸν μισθὸ τῶν πνευματικῶν ἔργων, ἐπειδὴ δὲν κοπιᾶζουμε στὴν ἐφαρμογὴ τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν. Καθένας ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς λοιπόν, ἔχουμε καθῆκον νὰ ἀνεβαίνουμε τὶς πνευματικὲς βαθμίδες τῶν ἀρετῶν, γνωρίζοντας ὅτι ἡ μέση καὶ διακριτικὴ ὁδὸς εἶναι ἡ βασιλική, διότι τὰ ἄκρα εἶναι τοῦ διαβόλου.

3. Ὁ ἐκ δεξιῶν πειρασμός:

Αὐτὸς ὁ πειρασμὸς πάλι εἶναι δυὸ εἰδῶν: Τὸ πρῶτο εἶδος εἶναι, ὅταν ἐργασθοῦμε τὰ καλὰ ἔργα μὲ κακὸ σκοπὸ, ἐνῶ τὸ δεύτερο εἶναι, ἐὰν δεχθοῦμε τὴν ἐμφάνιση τῶν δαιμόνων μὲ τὴν μορφή ἀγγέλων καὶ ἁγίων, ἢ μὲ τὴν μορφή τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ ἄλλων οὐρανίων μορφῶν. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος λέγει ὅτι «οἱ δαίμονες τῆς κενοδοξίας καὶ ὑπερηφάνειας ἐμφανίζονται στοὺς ἀδυνάτους στὸν νοῦ ὡς προφήται». Ἐνῶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος μας δείχνει στὴν Β' πρὸς Κορινθίους (11:14) ὅτι: «ὁ σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός».

4. Ὁ ἐξ ἀριστερῶν πειρασμός:

Ἀπὸ τὰ ἀριστερὰ μᾶς πειράζει ὁ διάβολος ὅταν γνωρίζουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν θέλησή μας ἀποφασίζουμε νὰ τὴν ἐκτελέσουμε. Ἐνα παράδειγμα: Κάποιος γνωρίζει ὅτι εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ κλέπτει, νὰ πορνεύει, νὰ μεθᾶ, νὰ βλασφημεῖ τὰ Θεῖα, νὰ ἐκδικεῖται τὸν πλησίον τοῦ ἢ νὰ κάνει ὀποιοδήποτε ἄλλο κακὸ ἔργο. Παρ' ὅλα ὅμως αὐτὰ ἀφήνει τὸν ἑαυτό του νὰ νικηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία μὲ τὴν θέλησή του καὶ εἰς γνῶσιν του. Ὅποτε, ὅταν ἐμεῖς γνωρίζουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ ὅμως τὴν ἐπιτελοῦμε εἴτε μὲ τὸν νοῦ, τὸν λόγο, τὸ αἶσθημα ἢ τὴν πράξη, τότε πειραζόμεθα ἐξ ἀριστερῶν.

5. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἐμπροσθεν πειρασμός:

Μᾶς πειράζει ἀπὸ ἐμπρὸς ὁ διάβολος ὅταν μᾶς παρουσιάζει σκέψεις καὶ φαντασίες γιὰ ἔργα τὰ ὅποια δῆθεν θὰ μᾶς συμβοῦν στὸ μέλλον. Ἐνα παράδειγμα: Ὅταν θορυβοῦμεθα ὅτι θὰ ἔλθει ἐναντίον μας κάποιος κίνδυνος, κάποια παγίδα ἢ ἀσθένεια, ὅτι θὰ ξεσπάσει κάποιος πόλεμος, ὅτι θὰ δυσφημισθοῦμε ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, θὰ γίνουμε πτωχοί, μᾶς ταράζει κάποιος ὅτι δὲν θὰ ἐπιτύχουμε στὶς ἐξετάσεις ἢ σὲ κάποιο ἄλλο ἔργο.

Όλα αυτά μᾶς τὰ φέρνει ὁ νοητὸς ἐχθρὸς στὸν νοῦ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς ταράξει καὶ νὰ μᾶς κλονίσει μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ νομίζουμε ὅτι θὰ ἔλθουν ἐναντίον μας.

Γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λογισμοὺς ἃς προσέχουμε τὰ λόγια τοῦ Σωτῆρος ποὺ λέγει: «Μὴ οὖν μερμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μερμνήσει τὰ ἑαυτῆς ἄρκετον τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἢ κακία αὐτῆς.» δηλαδή μὴ μερμνᾶτε ... φτάνει ἢ στεναχώρια τῆς ἡμέρας. (Ματθ. 6:34). Δὲν δόθηκε σ' ἐμᾶς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ νὰ γνωρίζουμε οὔτε μία ὥρα πέραν τῆς παρούσης ὥρας τί θὰ γίνῃ. Ὅποτε σὲ τέτοιου εἴδους πειρασμὸ νὰ λέγομε: «Ἄς γίνῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου».

6. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ὀπισθεν πειρασμός:

Πειραζόμεθα ἐκ τῶν ὀπισθεν ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν στὸν νοῦ μας μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα ποὺ κάναμε στὸ παρελθόν, ὅταν εἴμασταν παιδιὰ ἢ νεοὶ καὶ μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες ποὺ κάναμε. Ἡ μνήμη μας πολὺ συχνὰ βοηθεῖ τὴν φαντασία μας στὰ κακὰ ποὺ κάναμε, προπαντὸς ὅταν περάσαμε τὴν ζωὴ μας χωρὶς προσπάθεια γιὰ τὴν φρούρηση καὶ κάθαρση τοῦ νοῦ μὲ τὴν νοερὰ προσευχή: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλό».

Οἱ Πατέρες λέγουν ὅτι τόσο ἀνόητη εἶναι ἡ φαντασία, ὥστε ἐὰν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος ἀντίκρισε στὴν νεότητά του μία ὡραία γυναίκα μὲ ἐμπάθεια καὶ ἔλθει ὁ καιρὸς νὰ πεθάνει αὐτὴ καὶ ἴδει τὴν νεκροκεφαλὴ της, ἐν τούτοις ἡ φαντασία του τοῦ ὑπενθυμίζει τὸ ὡραῖο πρόσωπό της, ὅταν ζοῦσε. Γι' αὐτὸ ὀνόμασαν οἱ Πατέρες τὴν φαντασία «γέφυρα τοῦ διαβόλου», ἐπειδὴ καμιὰ ἁμαρτία δὲν περνᾷ ἀπὸ τὸν νοῦ καὶ τὴν αἴσθησι παρὰ μόνο ἀπὸ τὴν γέφυρα τῆς φαντασίας.

Ὅποτε, Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, γιὰ νὰ νικήσουμε στὸν πόλεμο αὐτό, ἔχουμε μεγάλη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν νοερὰ ἐργήγορη καὶ προσοχή, τὴν μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου, τῶν βασάνων τῆς κολάσεως καὶ τῆς ἀκαταπαύστου νοερῆς προσευχῆς.

7. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἔσω πειρασμός:

Πειραζόμεθα ἀπὸ μέσα μας μὲ τὸν ἐρεθισμὸ τῶν παθῶν, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐξέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά μας, κατὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Σωτῆρος, ποὺ λέγει: «Ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνείαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι.» (Ματθ. 15:19). Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή μᾶς λέγει ὅτι «βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιά παρὰ πάντα» (Ἱερ. 17:9), ἐπειδὴ ἀπ' αὐτὴ πηγάζουν ὅλες οἱ κακίες στὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ δὲν τὴν φυλάγει μὲ τὴν προσευχή καὶ τὴν μετάνοια· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὴ πηγάζουν πάλι, ὅλες οἱ ἀρετὲς σ' αὐτὸν ποὺ τὴν καθαρίζει μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας καὶ τὴν συντριβή. Ὅποτε ἀπαλασσομέθα ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τῆς καρδίας μας μὲ τὴν ἀκατάπαυστη προσευχή καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

8. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἔξω πειρασμός:

Προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τὰ ὁποῖα εἰσέρχονται στὴν ψυχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὶς πέντε αἰσθήσεις ἢ ὅπως ὀνομάζονται

τὰ παράθυρα τῆς ψυχῆς, γιὰ τὶς ὁποῖες ὁ προφήτης Ἱερ. 21 λέγει: «ἀνέβη θάνατος διὰ τῶν θυρίδων ὑμῶν» (9:21). Αὐτὲς οἱ πέντε αἰσθήσεις εἶναι τὰ πέντε ζεύγη βοῶν μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα ζοῦμε στὴν κακία καὶ ἐμπάθεια καὶ δὲν θέλουμε νὰ πάμε στὸ Δεῖπνο ποὺ μας καλεῖ ὁ Μέγας Βασιλεὺς (Λουκ. 14:19). Ὅποτε ἡ ἀπόκρουση ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ πάθη γίνεται μὲ τὴν πολυχρόνια νήψη τοῦ νοῦ, τὴν ἀκατάπαυστη προσευχή, τὴν συντριβὴ τῆς καρδίας καὶ μὲ τὸ νὰ ζητᾶμε μὲ πόνο καὶ μετάνοια τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἐν κατακλείδι, παρακαλῶ μὲ ταπεινὴ, Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, νὰ βοηθήσετε καὶ ἐμένα τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ καὶ ἀδιάφορο γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία μου, μὲ τὴν προσευχή σας, ὥστε νὰ αἰσθανθῶ τουλάχιστο ἐντροπὴ γιὰ τὰ ἀνωτέρω λόγια ποὺ σας εἶπα καὶ ἔτσι νὰ ξυπνήσω καὶ ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναισθησία μου καὶ νὰ καλῶ τὸ Ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου μας γιὰ βοήθειά μου.



Ἄπλά, ἀπαλά θὰ κάνετε τὸ καθετί. Δὲν θὰ κάνετε τίποτε μὲ σκοπιμότητα. Νὰ μὴ λέτε «θὰ τὸ κάνω ἔτσι, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα», ἀλλὰ θὰ τὸ κάνετε ἔτσι ἀπαλά, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ξέρετε. Δηλαδή προσεύχεσθε ἀπλά καὶ δὲν σκέφτεσθε τί θὰ χαρίσει ὁ Θεὸς μὲς στὴν ψυχὴ σας. Δὲν κάνετε ὑπολογισμοὺς. Ξέρετε, βέβαια, τί χαρίζει ὁ Θεὸς στὴν ἐπαφὴ μαζί Του, ἀλλὰ εἶναι σὰν νὰ μὴν ξέρετε. Νὰ μὴν τὸ συζητᾶτε, οὔτε μὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σας. Ἔτσι, ὅταν λέτε τὴν εὐχὴ «Κύριε, Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με» νὰ τὴν λέτε ἀπαλά, ἀπλά καὶ νὰ μὴ σκέφτεσθε τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ μόνο τὴν εὐχὴ. Αὐτὰ εἶναι πολὺ λεπτὰ πράγματα καὶ χρειάζεται νὰ ἐπενεργήσει ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ καρδιά σας νὰ εἶναι ἀπλή, ὄχι διπλή καὶ ἁνελικρινής, ἀγαθὴ κι ὄχι πονηρὴ καὶ ἰδιοτελής. Τὴν ἀπλή καὶ ἀγαθὴ ψυχὴ ὅλοι τὴν ἐπιζητοῦν, ἀναπαύονται σ' ἐκείνη, τὴν πλησιάζουν χωρὶς φόβο, χωρὶς ὑποψία. Καὶ ἡ ἴδια ζεῖ μὲ ἐσωτερικὴ εἰρήνη, ἔχει ἀγαθὴ σχέση μ' ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ μ' ὅλη τὴν κτίση. Ὁ ἀγαθός, ὁ καλοκάγαθος, αὐτὸς ποὺ δὲν ἔχει πονηροὺς λογισμοὺς, ἐλκύει τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κυρίως ἡ ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἡ ἀπλότητα ἐλκύουν τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι οἱ προϋποθέσεις, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ «μονὴν εὐρήσει». Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζει ὁ ἀγαθὸς καὶ τὶς πονηρίες τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, διότι πολὺ θὰ ταλαιπωρεῖται, ἀλλιῶς θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ζεῖ σὲ κοινωνία ἀγγέλων

Γέρων Πορφύριος (+1991)

Τό Έθνος τών Ρωμηών

Μητροπολίτη Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου, ἀπό τήν «Ἑλληνορθόξη Πορεία», Ἀνθολόγιο κειμένων, Ἀθήνα 2008.



Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι καυχόμαστε γιά τήν Ἑλληνική μας καταγωγή καί τήν σχέση μας μέ τόν Χριστό καί μέ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ὄχι ἀδίκως βέβαια, παρόλο πὸν καμιά φορὰ εἴμαστε λίγο ὑπερβολικοί, ὅμως ἡ ἱστορία δικαιώνει τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ἔθνος.

Πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ ἄκουσαν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ δέχθηκαν τὶς ἐπισκέψεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, πρὸς στιγμὴν ἔγιναν Χριστιανοί, ἀλλὰ στὸ πέρασμα τῶν αἰῶνων εἴτε χάθηκαν γιὰ τὸ ὑποδουλώθηκαν ἀπὸ ἄλλους λαοὺς, εἴτε ἄλλαξαν θρησκεία ἐξολοκλήρου, εἴτε προσχώρησαν σὲ αἱρέσεις καί ἄλλες κακοδοξίες οἱ ὁποῖες νόθευσαν τὴν Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ φυλὴ, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, οἱ Ἕλληνες, παρὰ τὶς πολλὲς δυσκολίες πὸν εἶχαν, κράτησαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, κράτησαν τὴν πίστη στὴν Ἐκκλησία, στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη. Καί ὄχι μόνο δὲν τὴν ἔχασαν ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας ἔδωσαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καί σὲ ἄλλους λαοὺς (π.χ. Ρώσους, Βούλγαρους, Ρουμάνους, Σέρβους, Γεωργιανούς), σὲ ὅλη τὴν ἀνατολικὴν Εὐρώπη. Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ Ρωμιοὶ προγονοὶ μας ἐπέμεναν, παρόλο πὸν ἡ Δύση ἀντιδρούσε σὲ αὐτό, ὅτι οἱ νέοι Ὁρθόδοξοι λαοὶ ἔπρεπε νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴ γλῶσσα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ καί οἱ Ἅγιοι Κύριλλος καί Μεθόδιος πὸν μετέφεραν στοὺς Σλάβους τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἔφτιαξαν ἀλφάβητο, ὥστε νὰ μποροῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ ἔχουν δική τους γραπτὴ γλῶσσα, νὰ μορφώνονται, νὰ ἐκπολιτίζονται καί νὰ ἔχουν τὴ δική τους συνείδηση καί νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴ δική τους γλῶσσα. Οὐδέποτε χρησιμοποιήθηκε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἕλληνες ὡς μέσο κατάκτησης τῶν ἄλλων λαῶν. Ἀντίθετα, ἦταν μία προσφορὰ σ' αὐτοὺς τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ἐπ' ἐλευθερία, ποτὲ μὲ τὴ βία. Δὲν ἔχουμε φαινόμενα στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἐπιβολῆς τῆς Ὁρθόδοξίας μὲ τὴ βία.

Τὸ ἐρώτημα εἶναι, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι, πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ ταυτίσουμε τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα μας σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας;

Ὡς Ἕλληνες καί ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι, καυχόμαστε ὅτι μέχρι σήμερα βαστάζουμε τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας ἀπαρσάλευτη καί ἀπαραχάρακτη καί μαζί μὲ αὐτὴν ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία νὰ βαστάζουμε τὸ σταυρὸ, τὸν εὐλογημένο σταυρὸ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φυλῆς μέσα στὸν κόσμο, πὸν κουβάλησε ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἔνδοξή μας ἱστορία. Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, ἔχοντας πανάρχαιες ρίζες

μέσα στὴν ἱστορία, ἔφτασε σὲ τόσο μεγάλη μέτρα γνώσεως τῆς ἀνθρώπινης σοφίας καί ἐλευθερίας, ἔφθασε σὲ τόσο ὑψηλὰ ἐπίπεδα φιλοσοφικῶν πτήσεων καί ἀποκαλύψεων ὥστε νὰ θεωρεῖται πρῶτος τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Νομίζω ὅτι τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἕλληνας, τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμηός, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερηφάνεια ἀλλὰ εἶναι σταυρὸς καί μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ καί σὰν διακόνημα μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε σήμερα. Εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες, ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία, ὅπως ὁ κάθε λαὸς καί ἀναγνωρίζουμε σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο αὐτὸ τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ καυχᾶται γιά τὴν ἱστορία του, γιά τοὺς προγόνους του. Καυχόμαστε σὰν Ἕλληνες ὄχι γιὰ τὴν λατρεύαμε τοὺς ψεύτικους θεοὺς τοῦ Ὀλύμπου, ἀλλὰ καυχόμαστε γιὰ τὴν εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς μὲ φιλοσοφικὲς ἀναζητήσεις, καυχόμαστε γιὰ τὴν εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς πὸν γέννησε τὴ δημοκρατία, τὴ φιλοσοφία.

Οἱ ἐθνικὲς γιορτὲς εἶναι βέβαια γιορτὲς μνήσεως στὸ νόημα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι καί κρίση τῆς ἴδιας τῆς ζωῆς μας. Καί πρέπει νὰ ὑφιστάμεθα αὐτὴ τὴν κρίση γιὰ τὴν διαφορετικὰ θὰ μᾶς κρίνει ἡ ἱστορία ὡς ἀνθρώπους πὸν δὲν διδάχτηκαμε ποτὲ ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἱστορία καί τὴ πορεία μας.

Ἡ ἱστορία ὀφείλει νὰ μᾶς διδάξει καί ἐμεῖς ἂν εἴμαστε ἄξιοι τῶν προγόνων μας, πραγματικὰ παιδιά τους, τότε πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ διδασκόμαστε, γιὰ τὴν ἔχουμε τὴ βαρύτερη αὐτὴ κληρονομία νὰ εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία ἔνδοξη σὲ πολέμους καί σὲ ἀγῶνες. Οἱ Ἕλληνες κρατοῦσαν τὴ σημαία τους, γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται ὅπως ἔλεγαν «ὑπὲρ βωμῶν καί ἐστιῶν», γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ συγκεκριμένα ἰδανικά, ἦσαν ἰδεολόγοι, δὲν ἦσαν πολεμιστὲς μὲ τὴν πραγματικὴ σημασία τῆς λέξεως, ἀλλὰ γίνονταν πολεμιστὲς ὅταν ἡ ἀνάγκη τοὺς καλοῦσε καί ἦταν πράγματι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνάγκη ἀδήριτη, γιὰ νὰ φυλάξουν τὴν πίστη τους καί τὴν πατρίδα τους.

Σήμερα, ἀδελφοί μου, καλούμαστε νὰ κρατήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν πατρίδα μέσα στὰ περιθώρια πὸν οἱ ἥρωές μας τὴν παρέδωσαν καί ὅπως αὐτοὶ βάδισαν τὸ δρόμο τους μὲ σύνεση πολλή, μὲ σοφία πολλή, μὲ ὑπομονὴ πολλή.

Οἱ ἥρωές μας ἦταν παιδιά, ἦταν ἄνθρωποι τοῦ τόπου πὸν βγήκαν μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ καλύτερο λίκνο, τὸ λίκνο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καί πραγματικὰ στέκει κανεὶς μπροστά τους μὲ μεγάλο θαυμασμὸ καί μὲ μεγάλη συγκίνηση, γιὰ τὴν διαβάσει κανεὶς γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ τους, διαβάσει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολές τους, διαβάσει αὐτὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ἔγραψαν καί ὄχι ἀπλῶς συγκινεῖται συναισθηματικὰ ἀλλὰ τὰ κείμενα αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, αὐτὲς οἱ ἐπιστολές τῶν ἡρώων τοῦ '55-'59 μᾶς θυμίζουν συναξάρια, μᾶς θυμίζουν λόγια νεομαρτύρων, μᾶς θυμίζουν τὶς

ἐπιστολὲς τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως, τὶς ἐπιστολὲς καὶ τὰ γραπτὰ τῶν νεομαρτύρων τῆς τουρκικῆς κατοχῆς στὸν Ἑλληνικὸ ἠώρο. Δὲν διαφέρει καθόλου τὸ ἦθος τοὺς ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πατρίδας. Διαβάξει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολὲς ἐκεῖνες καὶ βλέπει ποὺ ἔστεκαν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ βλέπει τί ἤθελαν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τόπο. Δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος μισαλλοδοξίας, δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος τρομοκρατίας, κι ἂς τοὺς κατηγοροῦσαν τότε ὅτι ἦταν τρομοκράτες. Διαβάξει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολὲς τοὺς καὶ βλέπει ἓνα ἰλαρὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τῆς πίστεως τὸ ὁποῖο τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς πατρίδας τοὺς, τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀλλὰ δὲν τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε ποτὲ στὸ μῖσος ἀκόμα καὶ αὐτῶν ποὺ τοὺς εἶχαν κατακτήσει. Καὶ ἂν χρειάστηκε νὰ κάνουν πόλεμο καὶ νὰ κάνουν ἐπανάσταση, αὐτὸ ἦταν γιατί μὲ τὰ δεδομένα τῆς ἐποχῆς καὶ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης ἦταν μία ἀνάγκη καὶ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ κάμουν διαφορετικά.

Μέσα στὶς ἐπιστολὲς τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ἡρώων βλέπει κανεὶς τὸ Θεό, τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ βασιλεύει, ποὺ τοὺς ἔδωσε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ νικήσουν τὸ θάνατο· νὰ ὑπερβοῦν τὸ θάνατο, ποὺ αἰσθάνονταν τὴ ψυχὴ τοὺς νὰ φτερουγίζει γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θρόνο τοῦ Θεοῦ, τί ἄλλο εἶναι παρὰ τὰ ἴδια βιώματα τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως; Δὲν εἶναι αὐτὰ οἱ ἐπισκέψεις τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ὁποῖες παρηγοροῦσαν τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ βρισκόντουσαν μόνο λίγο πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; Ταυτόχρονα, βλέπει κανεὶς τὴν πίστη τοὺς καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοὺς πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὄχι ὡς γεωγραφικὸ ἠώρο μόνο, ἀλλὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὡς τὴν κοιτίδα τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ, τὴ μητέρα τῆς φιλοσοφίας, τὴ μητέρα τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης.

Ὁφείλουμε λοιπὸν νὰ μαθαίνουμε μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ διδασκόμαστε. Ὁφείλουμε νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦμε προστὰ στὰ διάφορα γεγονότα τῆς ἱστορίας μας καὶ νὰ κρίνουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, σιωπώντας καὶ περιορίζοντας τὰ λόγια μας καὶ τὴν ἐξωστρέφειά μας καὶ νὰ ἀφήσουμε νὰ μᾶς δεῖξουν ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ μάρτυρες τῆς πατρίδας τὸ δικὸ τους φρόνημα καὶ νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν παράδοσή μας, νὰ μᾶς δεῖξουν ἀπὸ ποῖο δέντρο καταγόμαστε κι ἀκόμα, νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ δοῦμε ποῦ εἴμαστε ἑμεῖς σήμερα.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ νὰ ποῦμε τὴ μεγάλη ἀλήθεια, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ τόπος, εἰάν θέλει νὰ ζήσει πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ Ἑλληνικὸς τόπος κατὰ κυριολεξία. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ τύχει παιδείας, παιδείας φιλοσοφικῆς, παιδείας πνευματικῆς, παιδείας ρωμαϊκῆς, μὲ ρωμηοσύνη ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι θὰ ἀπολαύσει ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἱστορία τῆς παραδόσεώς μας. Οὔτε ἀρχαιολάτρες εἴμαστε ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ Βυζαντινόπληκτοι εἴμαστε. Ξέρουμε ὅτι ὁ

τόπος ζύμωσε τὴν ἀρχαία φιλοσοφία καὶ παράδοση μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Καὶ Ὁρθόδοξος σημαίνει ἐλεύθερος. Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ Ρωμηὸς σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος χωρὶς παρωπίδες, σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος ὁ ὁποῖος ἀγαπᾷ τὸν ἄλλο καὶ δὲν φοβάται τὸν ἄλλο ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ἔχει ἀρχοντιά, γιατί δὲν εἶναι κομπλεξικός, γιατί δὲν αἰσθάνεται μειονεκτικὰ προστὰ σὲ κανένα, γιατί εἶναι περήφανος γι' αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ περηφάνια δὲν εἶναι ἀλαζονεία ἀλλὰ εἶναι τὸ «γνώθῃ σαυτὸν» τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων· εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση τῆς βαρύτατης κληρονομίας τὴν ὁποία κουβαλοῦμε πάνω μας. Αὐτὴ ἡ ρωμαϊκὴ ὑπερηφάνια μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπηρετήσῃ καὶ ὄχι νὰ ὑπηρετεῖται, μπορεῖ νὰ σταθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀγκαλιάσει τὸν κόσμον ὅλο καὶ νὰ γίνῃ διάκονος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος.

Ἐμεῖς σὰν Ρωμηοὶ πάντοτε εἶχαμε τὴ μεγάλη ὑπομονὴ ἢ ὁποία ἦταν γέννημα τῆς πίστεως. Καὶ ὁ πιστὸς ἄνθρωπος βλέπει πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ φαινόμενα, πέραν τῶν φαινομενικῶν πραγμάτων. Δὲν μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει ἐμᾶς ἂν μᾶς μισοῦν ἢ ὄχι οἱ Τοῦρκοι. Ὁ Θεὸς τί θὰ πεῖ στὸ τέλος; Δὲν θὰ γίνῃ τίποτα περισσότερο καὶ τίποτα λιγότερο ἀπὸ ὅσα ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐπιτρέψει. Πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ ἔχουμε τελεία ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸ Θεό. Ἐὰν ἐλπίζεις στὸ Θεὸ καὶ πιστεύεις ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Πατέρας σου, τότε λοιπὸν γιατί φοβάσαι;

Ἄς ἀνοίξουμε τὸ δρόμο στὴν ἀληθινὴ παιδεία· νὰ φτιάξουμε πρῶτα ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους καὶ ἂν φτιάξεις ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους, τότε θὰ ἀποκτήσεις καὶ πατρίδα ἐλεύθερη. Ἄν ἔχεις ἀνθρώπους δούλους, τότε καὶ ἡ ἐλεύθερη πατρίδα θὰ γίνῃ δούλη. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἐλευθερώνεται πρῶτα καὶ ὕστερα ἐλευθερώνει καὶ γεωγραφικὰ τὸ τόπο του. Ἄν ἐνδιατρίψουμε στὴν ἱστορία μας, ἂν γνωρίσουμε τὴν παράδοσή μας, ἂν ἀσκήσουμε καλόβουλη καὶ θετικὴ κριτικὴ στὶς παρελθοῦσες πράξεις καὶ ἐνέργειές μας, ἂν εἴμαστε ἔντιμοι, ἀνυστερόβουλοι καὶ εἰλικρινεῖς, τότε θὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε ὅτι ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἥρωες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ μάρτυρες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἡγέτες, ὅπως τοὺς ἡγέτες οἱ ὁποῖοι σήκωσαν τὸν τόπο αὐτὸ καὶ ἔδωσαν τὴν ἀνάσταση στὴ πατρίδα μας καὶ στὴ φυλὴ μας. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μήνυμα τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης, τοῦ πόνου καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τὴ πατρίδα μας.

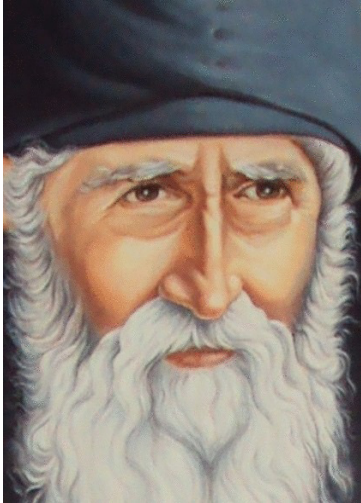
Τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἑλληνας, τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμηός, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερηφάνια ἀλλὰ εἶναι σταυρὸς καὶ μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ καὶ σὰν διακόνημα μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε!



Τὰ ἐλαττώματα μοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς προβολεῖς τῶν αὐτοκινήτων. Μόνο τῶν ἄλλων μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν. Τὰ δικά μας μᾶς βολεῦουν...

JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man", Part 1, Chapter 4, p. 87-104, Holy Monastery "Evangelist John the Theologian" Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece.



It is important for a man to have God's blessing. It is great wealth! What God blesses will stand firm; it will not crumble. Whatever is not blessed, will crumble. Injustice is a great sin. All sins have some "extenuating circumstances," but injustice has none. Injustice draws the wrath of God. It is a tremendous thing! Those who commit injustice set their heads on fire. You see them do all kinds

of injustices, and then their loved ones die and they seem not to care at all. How can people who are so unjust prosper? They do the things they do, they give the devil rights over them, and for this reason they suffer so much, they get sick and so on and then they come to you and say, "Pray that I get well!"

Most bad and harmful things happen when we wrong other people. For example, when a fortune is made unjustly, the owners may live a few years like royalty, but, in the end, they will spend all their money on doctors. Remember the saying: *What is gathered by the wind is also scattered by the wind.* Or remember what the Psalm says: *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.* (Pss 37:16). What they collect is spent, blown away. Rarely will an illness, a bankruptcy and so on be sent as a trial from God. In such cases, one's reward will be great, and he will later become richer, as happened with Job. Some people are buried and their bodies do not decompose; it's usually because they have done some kind of injustice.

The Unjust Person Is Tormented

An unjust person and in general all those who commit injustice and do not ask for forgiveness, end up haunted by their conscience and the indignation of those they have treated unjustly. For if the wronged do not forgive and complain, then the unjust are tormented and suffer very much. They cannot sleep. They feel like they are at the mercy of crashing waves that twist them around from every side. It's a mystery how the perpetrator is informed of this! When we love somebody and think about him in a good way, he knows it. So too, in this case, the victim's pain tears the unjust into pieces! It does not matter where he may be, in Australia or in Johannesburg; as long as the person he has treated unfairly is indignant with him, he cannot find peace.

- And what happens if he is insensitive?

- Do you think that insensitive people do not suffer? The best they can do is resort to some sort of entertainment so that they get distracted. Then again, those wronged may have forgiven the offender but still harbour some resentment. In this case, the victim suffers to a degree, but the wrongdoer suffers to an even greater extent from his victim's indignation. But if the perpetrator seeks forgiveness and his victim refuses to forgive him, then it's the victim that suffers. There is no greater fire than the inner burning of the soul by the conscience. Unless one repents in this life for the injustices he has committed and makes reparation, his soul will be tortured and eaten away by wood worm and in the eternal life by the *sleepless worm*. Even if he has no other way of showing repentance, the least he can do is have the right intent.

I remember how this one lawyer, who committed many injustices, suffered at the end of his life. He practiced his profession in a province with many stock-breeders. Naturally, their herds would damage the fields, and many shepherds would hire him because he could convince the Justice of the Peace or the agronomist with his cunning arguments. The poor farmers could rarely find justice for damage done to their crops, and they even found themselves in trouble. Everyone knew this lawyer and no honest man went near him.

I should tell you about the advice that a Spiritual Father gave a sensitive shepherd. This shepherd had a small herd and a sheep dog. The dog had given birth to puppies and he gave them all away except one that he kept for the mother. It happened that one of the female sheep had gone missing leaving behind its little lamb that was still suckling. With its mother missing, the little lamb would run after the dog to find nourishment, something that relieved it as well. Thus, the two animals had got used to each other and one would find the other. As hard as the poor shepherd tried to separate them they would not part. Because the shepherd was a sensitive man, he thought of asking his Spiritual Father if the lamb's meat would be edible or not. Knowing how poor the shepherd was, the Father thought for a while and then said to him, "My son, this lamb is not edible because it fed on the dog's milk, but you know what you should do? Since all the other shepherds bring gifts of lambs and cheese to this certain lawyer, you should bring him this lamb to eat. He is the only one who has a blessing to eat it, since everyone knows what an unjust man he is."

When this unjust lawyer reached old age, he became bed-ridden and suffered from nightmares for years and could not sleep. He also suffered a stroke and could not even speak. The local priest urged him to at least write down his sins, but he had lost control of himself. The priest was thus forced to read him the blessing of the Seven Youths so that he could close his eyes and get some sleep. He even read exorcisms to give him a little peace, until finally the man passed away and was laid to rest. May God grant him the true rest.

- Geronda, many people believe that they are under a magical spell. Is it really possible to put a spell on someone?

- If a person repents and goes to confession, such spells are not effective. For witchcraft to stick, a person must be guilty of some injustice, such as harming someone or destroying a virtuous young girl. In this case, he must repent and ask for forgiveness, confess, settle spiritually and restore the wrong he has done. Otherwise, even if all the priests in this world would read an exorcism for him, the "spell" would still not go away. But even if no witchcraft is involved, the resentment borne by the soul he has treated unjustly is enough to torment him.

There are two forms of injustice: material and moral. Material is when we harm another person with regard to material things. Moral injustice is when the wrong is of a moral nature, such as when a man deceives a woman; and if she happens to be an orphan, the burden on his soul is five-fold. Do you know that bullets will go after wrongdoers in war? There you can clearly see the justice and protection of God. There's no room for dishonor in war. A bullet will find its way to an immoral person.

Once, my company was on its way to replace a battalion. On the way, we got hit and returned fire. I remember that one man from my company had actually committed a dishonorable act the day before.

He had raped a pregnant woman, poor woman. And guess what? He was the only one who got killed that day! Horrible, isn't it? Everybody was saying, "This beast deserved to die." In the end, the devious and cunning try to escape one way or another, but they are not spared. We know from experience that those who truly believe and, as a result, live an honest, Christian life, have their honest bodies protected from enemy fire; it's like they carry a relic of the Holy Cross and perhaps even more than that.

One's Descendants Are Also Tormented by Injustice

- Geronda, when I left to join the Monastery, my family was unjust to me. Should I ask for what legally belongs to me?

- No, that's not the proper thing to do.

- I fear that something bad may happen to them as a result of this injustice.

- Now, this is what I call pure *filotimo* (*love of honor*, Ed.) If I were you, I would tell them, "I want nothing for myself. But I would like you to give the share that is rightfully mine to the poor, with your own hands, starting with our poor relatives. I am asking for this because I don't want the wrath of God to fall on your children." You see, sometimes a father may give away his fortune for the good of his soul,

to create a charitable institution for example, and leave nothing to his own child.

The grandparents in a family may have done something wrong and still live a good life, without consequences. But their children or grandchildren may suffer. They become sick and are forced to give the money their ancestors made unjustly, to doctors, to pay back the injustices of their grandparents.

A family I once knew was going through many difficulties. The head of the family got very sick first, went through a lot, was bed-ridden for a few years, and then passed away. Then his wife died and later his children, one after the other. His fifth and last child passed away recently. Even though they were a very rich family, they lost everything and ended up poor, because they had to sell their property to pay the doctors and the various expenses. I used to wonder why all these horrible things, sickness and accidents, were happening to them. I happened to know some of the members of the



family and it did not seem to me to be the good kind of trial, the kind that God sends to those He favours. Rather, it seemed to me that God's spiritual laws were put into effect. I wanted to be certain, so I tried to find out more about the family from reliable sources, namely, some old folks who lived in the same town.

I learned that the man had inherited a certain fortune from his father which he increased by doing all sorts of wrong things. So, if a widow, say, were to ask him for a loan to pay for her daughter's wedding, and promised to return the money once she had harvested the crops, he would ask for a piece of land she owned. And, as she was in great need, she would have to sell him the land at any price he offered. Another man would ask him for a loan to pay the bank and promise to repay him after having harvested the cotton. He would demand the poor fellow's land and would get it for nothing, as the farmer was afraid the bank would come after him. When someone else asked him for a small loan to pay the doctors, he would seek to take his cow from him, for pennies. This is how he made his fortune. The pain he caused to all these poor people was returned not only to him and his wife but also to his children.

So, the spiritual laws came into effect and caused them to suffer the very same things that their actions had caused to others. In order to pay all their medical expenses, and so on, they sold their land for nothing and after becoming poor, they left this life for good one after the other. God, of course, with His love and sense of justice will judge them accordingly. The others who were harmed, all the poor folk who were forced to sell out their belongings to pay off the doctors, all these

people will be rewarded for the injustices they endured. And, of course, the unjust will also pay their due.

The One Who Wrongs Us Is Our Benefactor

- Geronda, how should we consider someone who treats us in an unfair way?

- How should we consider him? We must treat him like a great benefactor who makes deposits on our behalf in God's Savings Bank. He is making us eternally wealthy. This is not a matter of minor importance. Are we not supposed to love our benefactors? Shouldn't we express our gratitude to them? In the same way, we must love and feel grateful to the person who has treated us unjustly, because he benefits us eternally. The unjust receive eternal injury, whereas those who accept injustice with joy will be justified eternally.

A pious family man had suffered many injustices in his work. But he was full of kindness and endured it all without complaining. He came to my *Kalyvi* (*hut*, Ed.) once and told me all about it and then asked me, "What do you advise me to do?"

"What you should do," I said, "is to expect the divine justice and the divine return and to be patient. Nothing is lost. In this way, you are putting 'money' in God's 'Savings Bank'. You will surely receive dividends in the next life, for all the trials you are going through now. You should know that the Good Lord rewards the unfairly treated person even in this life. And if He does not always reward him, He will surely do so with his children. God knows. He has providence for His creature. Where there is patience, things fall into place. God provides. We need patience, not logic. Since God is watching, He is observing us, we must surrender unconditionally to Him. You see, the Righteous Joseph did not say a thing when his brothers sold him into slavery. He could have said, 'I am their brother'. But he said nothing, until God spoke and made him king. (Gen 37:20). But when one has no patience, he suffers. From that point on he wants things to come his way, as it suits him, and as is comfortable for him. But, of course, he does not find comfort that way, and things don't come out the way he wants them to come."

When someone is wronged in this life either by men or by demons, God does not worry, because the soul benefits as a result. Many times, however, we say that we are wronged, while in reality we are the ones causing the harm. We must be careful to distinguish the two.

Render Therefore to All Their Due

- Geronda, when we purchase something for the Monastery, some people don't want to issue us a receipt. What must we do?

- They should always issue you an invoice and you should limit your needs and demands. This is what I would do. God will provide for what you need. If we monks ask people not to issue invoices, we make others sin. They think to themselves, "Since the Monasteries are doing it..." When we, who are supposed to obey the commandments of God, operate in this fashion, what will people think? Won't they be scandalized?

The Holy Scripture reads, *Render therefore to all their due.* (Rom 13:7). Even when I send a letter with a person and not through the post office, I still put a stamp on it. Lay people may justify their actions, but if the Monasteries act like them, there will be little honesty left and the Gospel will be put aside. When we do not give from our possessions—and if anyone would sue you and take thy coat, let him have thy cloak as well (Mt 5:40)—we are giving a negative sermon, a negative example, that allows the secular people to find an excuse for

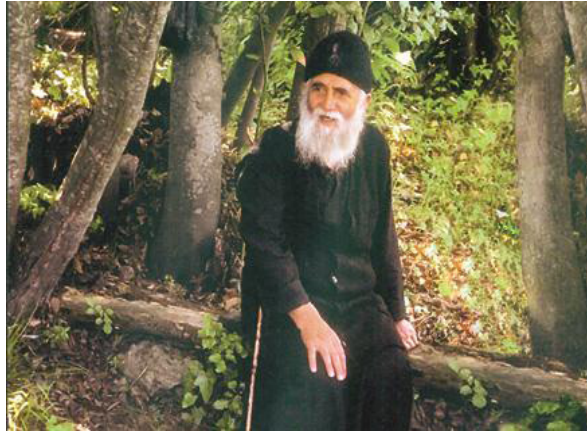
their faults. They are looking for a way to comfort their conscience. We must be careful because we will have no justification for our actions on the Day of Judgment. Our goal should be primarily to defend the spiritual principles and not only the material things. When, for some reason, they do not give you an invoice, you must consider this a spiritual loss.

- Geronda, a workman asked us to fire him so that he would collect unemployment benefits while still working for us.

- Oh no, that is not right. Even a person with only a bit of conscience left in him would not do such a thing. It does not become a Monastery to get involved in such matters. It is better that you pay the workman a double wage, even if you are in financial difficulty, in order to discourage him from such behavior. It's that serious. Blessed deeds bring more blessings, while injustice brings disaster. You should be very careful with these matters. Avoid bargaining with the workmen either. This is why we have fires and other catastrophes in Monasteries.

The world is full of lies. People now grow into liars. They have made up a new kind of conscience. I will not become a liar and turn into something I am not, because society demands it. I'd rather tell the truth and suffer. One must be careful not to enter in the orbit of secularism. Of course, our financial system today is of little help. People are forced to declare a smaller income.

Once, I scolded some income tax officials who happened to be believers. "What are you doing?" I asked them. "You must make sure to keep some of the yeast intact. I know of too many things that go wrong! Someone comes to the Tax Collection office and says, 'I have an income of one million



drachmas.' The official declares that the man has an income of three million drachmas. He assumes that he is revealing only a part of his income, as is common practice, and that this hike will make up the difference. If, however, he is dealing with a conscientious person, tripling his income in this manner will backfire; it will make the man cheat on his taxes the next year. In other words, instead of helping change the situation for the better, you are making things worse." "But we don't know when they are telling us the truth," the income tax person said. "When you start leading a spiritual life, you will know," I replied. "Then you will be able to understand and discern the difference. God will inform you, and you will know."

How the World Has Cheapened

People's malice has exceeded all bounds. They try to deceive one another and they consider it to be an achievement. Our world has become so cheap!.. Everything they make these days is fake. And imagine that today people make more money than their parents and grandparents who were poor and only made a little. The quality of most things is so cheap. One day someone brought me some tomato plants. Each plant was inside a very small bag containing coarse soil, and some coarse sand to keep the moisture. They didn't even bother to pour some water or manure; they had sprinkled some on the top like salt and pepper... When I took them out of the bag, I realized that their roots were rotten. I had to put a layer of soil on top, so that the plants could grow new roots.

They are so clever in tricking people! Listen to this. Someone had brought me a big box with pastries. "I will open it," I said to myself, "when I have a large company.

If I open it now, it will attract ants." So, one day, I had a large gathering and I figured that the box should be enough and I should even have some left-over. As soon as I opened it, I saw that it was full of wrappings ... and the actual container with the sweets was so tiny. The rest of the box was empty. Another time, they brought me a fancy box with pastries, all wrapped in ribbons. "I will keep it," I thought, "for the students of the Athonias Academy." Well, inside there were Turkish delights, stale and hard as a rock! I would never treat people with this kind of sweet!

- Geronda, don't they see that this is a type of injustice?

- No! They consider it to be an achievement. Sin has become fashionable nowadays and cheating someone is considered to be a sign of cleverness. Unfortunately, the secular spirit

sharpens the mind in deception and people consider it a clever achievement to wrong their fellow human beings. There's even an expression, "He's as smart as a devil; he gets things done." Inside, of course, the man suffers from the checks of his conscience, his little hell.

The Just Person Has God on His Side

Not all people fit well in the world today, especially those who want to lead spiritual and honest lives; they seem to have such a hard time.

- Geronda, why don't they fit?

- When someone is sensitive and finds himself in a harsh environment and people make his life hell, how can he put up with it? Either he has to begin cursing, or he must leave. But that's difficult because one needs to make a living. His boss tells him, "I trust you because you don't steal, but put

some rotten produce among the fresh. Take these fresh clover bales and stick some fermented ones in the package." He even makes him a manager, in order to keep him on the job, and the poor man has to do as told to stay employed. And of course, he cannot sleep at night and starts taking sleeping pills. Do you know how hard life is for honest people? They run into all kinds of difficulties and have to take all kinds of abuse from their employers. Life becomes hell for them. And they cannot quit because they have a family to feed. If they stay on, it's trouble everyday. They are between a rock and a hard place. Wherever they turn their eyes, they see a dead end. It makes one go crazy. So, they carry on and try to manage as best they can.

In another case, one employee did all the work while another colleague would only show up to collect his pay check. I know of someone who was department head somewhere. When the new government came to power, they removed him from the post and replaced him with a party member who had not even graduated from High School. They made him department head but he knew nothing about the work and so they could not really send the previous manager away to some other position. What did they do? They just added a second desk in the office. The old boss did the work and the new one was just sitting there smoking, chatting and drinking coffee ... and being completely shameless. And in addition to this, he would say whatever came to his mind while all responsibility fell on the other employee who was doing all the work, until he finally couldn't put up with the situation anymore and left the job, the poor soul. "Maybe I should go somewhere else, there's not enough space for two



desks,” he said one day and got up and left, because the new head was making his life hell. We are not talking about one or two days. It is unbearable to have someone like that over your head every day.

Another person may gain much profit by overpricing. At first, he makes a lot of money and becomes rich, but then people find out that he is dishonest, and his business goes stony broke. On the other hand, the honest merchant gains customers and hires more employees. So he is tested in the beginning, but wins in the end. The good person is tried and tested by evil and cunning people; he has to pass through this period of tribulation unscathed.

When someone follows the devil’s path, and comes up with tricks and all kinds of deceptive schemes, God will not bless his work. Schemes of deception don’t work; they appear to flourish, but they collapse in the end. It’s important that we start with God’s blessing in everything we do. A just man has God on his side. And if he has some boldness before God, then miracles happen. When someone lives according to the Gospel, he is entitled to divine help. He walks with Jesus Christ. What can we say? The man has earned His blessing. This is the foundation of it all. Once that is given, there is nothing to fear. The important thing is that Christ, Panaghia and the Saints should find rest in everything we do, and when that happens, we will have their blessing and the Holy Spirit will overshadow us. Honesty is the most precious Holy Cross. If someone is dishonest even if he has a piece of the Honourable Cross on him, it’s like he has nothing. But if one is honest, he has God’s help even though he doesn’t have a piece of the Honourable Cross. Now, if he has both, well, then he’s got everything!

The Just Person Is Rewarded in This Life

I have seen injured souls who have endured injustice with good thoughts, and have been showered with God’s Grace in this life. Many years ago a pious, simple and good-natured Christian man came to see me. He asked me to pray so that Christ may enlighten his children when they grow up, to endure without grudges a great injustice done against them by their relatives. He told me the affair. As far as I could see, he was really a man of God.

He was the oldest of five children. After the untimely death of his father, he stood by his younger siblings like a good father. He worked hard, increased the family fortune, bought more property, land and so on, and helped his two sisters get married. His younger brothers got married too and they took all the good fields, the olive groves and so on, leaving him with a few useless, barren and sandy fields. In the end he got married too, and had three children. By that time, he was older, and was worried about his children, that they may be bitter over the injustice when they would grow up. He used to say to me, “I am not concerned about it for myself, because I read the Psalter. I do one reading in the afternoon and two before dawn. I almost know it by heart. You don’t read any-

where in the Psalms that the unjust prosper. God looks after the just. You see, Father, I am not sad for the land I lost, but for my brothers who are losing their souls.” He went away at that time, and visited me again some ten years later.

He was very happy: “Remember me, Father?” He asked, “remember me?” “Of course,” I replied and asked how he is doing. “I am wealthy now,” he said. “And how did you get rich, my good brother?” I asked him. “Well, all that useless, sandy land of mine appreciated greatly because of its location on the beach. This time, I have come to ask your advice about how I should spend my money.” “You should make sure your children have a home to stay and put aside enough money for their education.” “I have enough for that,” he said, “and more.” “Well, then give some to your poor relatives and to other poor people that you know.” “I have done so, Father,” he said, “but it’s still a lot.” “Then, you should give some to repair the Church in your village and the Chapels in the countryside.” “I have done that too,” he said, “and I still have plenty.” “Then,” I told him, “I pray that Christ guides you to do good to those who really need it.”

I asked him about his brothers. He started weeping. “I don’t know, Father, I have lost track of them. They sold their land in the village, the olive groves and the fields, and I have no idea where they are now. They had gone to Germany first, then to Australia and that’s the last I’ve heard of them.” I was sorry I had asked about his brothers. I hadn’t realized how sad he would get. I tried to console him and he left at peace. I told him that we should both pray to get good news from them. Later I remembered the Psalm, *I have seen a wicked man overbearing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. Again I passed by, and, lo, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found.* (Pss 37:35-36). That’s exactly what happened to this man’s brothers.

There’s nothing worse than the injustice. Make sure you have God’s blessing in whatever you do.



Regarding your question, my brother in the Lord, if we should correct our fellow human being when he is ungrateful, unfair, etc., or if we should not in order to be rewarded for being patient, I shall answer: If you think that he will benefit through admonitions and advice, we should do so, choosing to benefit our brother rather than ourselves, thus performing the greatest virtue, love. If you think that no benefit will result from your admonitions, choose your own benefit by putting up with his ingratitude and injustice.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From “*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*”

THE VIRTUE AND VICE OF TOLERANCE

By Joseph Sobran, July 1999.

From the Editor: This article's content, albeit approximately 15 years old, certainly rings out timeliness in spite of the years since its authorship.

† † †

If gay marriage is legalized, does the bride's family pay for the wedding and reception? And how do you tell which one is the bride, anyway? Would there be a best man, or would that be the bride too? What about the maid of honor?

I know, I know: I'm intolerant. But why is tolerance such an unquestioned virtue? And by the way, why is it a virtue demanded only of conservatives?

You tolerate a thing when you put up with it despite your disapproval of it. But if you really disapprove of a thing, shouldn't you try to do away with it, or at least discourage it? That depends.

Today's idea of tolerance has its origins in the policy of religious toleration. For centuries England tolerated Roman Catholics, who were regarded as heretics owing their chief loyalty to a foreign power (the papacy). But Roman Catholics were also barred from public offices, universities, and other positions of influence. Toleration wasn't considered a virtue: it was only a policy, based on the assumption that ideally there should be no Roman Catholics in England. The policy was to allow Roman Catholicism to exist (in private), while discouraging people from embracing it.

By today's standards, such toleration was very intolerant. But by England's lights, it was a perfectly rational policy. And many governments have followed that model, putting up with vice without giving it a moral sanction. There was a time when laws against prostitution and pornography went unenforced in certain parts of town, but when they ventured out into the "respectable" neighborhoods, they were sternly prosecuted.

The principle was that vice, in order to be tolerable, must never pretend to be anything better than vice.

The whore plied her trade without exalting it as "sexual freedom." That, of course, was before Hugh Hefner, the pornophilosopher.

Today every vice is a "right" (smoking excepted, of course). In our day, liberals are forever demanding that conservatives be more tolerant of everything from abortion to Communism. But liberals don't merely tolerate such things; they approve and promote them—a very different matter. Liberals don't just put up with abortion and sodomy; they want full legal and moral acceptance for such things, and they call even moral disapproval "intolerance"

or "hate." To say they "tolerate" such things is like saying the Pope tolerates Roman Catholics, or that Israel tolerates Jews. In a word, nonsense. If you like something, you don't have to tolerate it.

When liberals celebrate old Reds like Lillian Hellman and her lover Dashiell Hammett as heroes and victims, they don't mention the monstrous evil of Communism or the moral responsibility of those who supported it. They don't think Hellman and Hammett need forgiveness; they think it was actually quite admirable of them to hold such "progressive" views against the "intolerant" society around them.

On the other hand, liberals aren't particularly tolerant of smokers, gun owners, pro-lifers, or conservatives. They hate them, and they want to cause them as much trouble as possible, even by circumscribing their legal rights. It was thanks to anti-abortion protesters that liberals finally discovered limits to the First Amendment.

Tolerance is a virtue when you put up with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good, such as social peace.

It isn't a virtue at all—it becomes a vice—when it means abandoning your moral standards out of cowardice or pusillanimity. We tolerate a lot in our families for the sake of preserving love and kindness; we tolerate a certain amount of noise and bother from our neighbors for the sake of general harmony. But if you tolerate your son's heroin habit, you deserve to be called something harsher than "tolerant."

At its best, tolerance is charitable patience with human weakness, out of love for the person. It shows itself in the disposition to listen to others and to make an effort of imagination to understand their feelings and point of view. You may still disapprove of what they do, but you've given them a fair chance to explain themselves.

A lot of people who call for tolerance these days probably wouldn't recognize the real thing...



Let us contemplate the punishment of God upon Israel (Judges 10): The Israelites committed that which was evil before the Lord, worshipping the Syrian, Sidonian and Moabite idols and others; and the Lord handed them over in bondage to the Philistines who, for eighteen years, trampled upon them and crushed them. How dreadful is the Lord toward apostates from the true Faith...

St. Nikolai Velimirovic (+1956)

THE VIGIL LAMP OF THE IVERON MONASTERY

Source: "The Plow" Orthodox magazines, July 3rd, 2003, author unknown.

On February 22nd, 1981, a Sunday, I gave a homily during the Liturgy at the Sacred Monastery of Petraki (*near Athens, Greece*, Ed.). I described the lewdness and the immorality, the sinful dances and the sinful revelries which take place during this period of the Triodion. "God cannot put up with it anymore," I said. "I do not want you to think of me as a prophet. I am not a prophet. But I say that God's wrath is coming upon the sons of disobedience. From above from Heaven or from below from the earth."

Two days later, on February 24th, the dreadful earthquake took place, which shook up all of Greece. The damage was significant to many in Greece.

On the following Sunday, the Deacon told me: "The day before yesterday, Father, you prophesied."

"No," I told him. "It is a natural consequence of our sinfulness. Furthermore, God forewarned us, with the shaking of the vigil lamp of the Iveron Monastery. There also is the miraculous icon of *Panaghia Portaitissa* (*Panaghia, the Keeper of the Portal*)

The icon of *Panaghia Portaitissa* is an icon of the Mother of God, which is miracle working and is at Iveron Monastery on the Holy Mountain. It came at the time of iconoclasm to her monastery, by sea, from Asia Minor. When major disasters or wars are about to occur, she often forewarns the monks with the shaking of the vigil lamp of the monastery.

A Monk sent a related letter to the Greek Orthodox newspaper "Orthodox Press" (*Orthodoxos Typos*). This letter was published in that newspaper on February 20th, four days before the earthquake and it is included below.

† † †

Dear sir, your blessing.

The amazing miracle of the moving vigil lamp of the Sacred Monastery of the Holy Mountain Athos is quite staggering. Its occurrence drove shivers up our spine; full of surprise, the fathers of the Monastery, as well as the visiting pilgrims that were present during the Christmas celebrations, observing at awe this unexpected event (something unusual for most pilgrims), referred to the tradition associated with this unique miracle; this is a miracle that has spanned the ages and blesses us with its occurrence in our days as well.

As it is known, in the central Church of the Sacred Iveron Monastery, the Main Church, and precisely in front of the Royal Gate the ancient large and silver vigil lamp hangs, weighing two or more *okas* (about 3 lbs.). This vigil lamp always presented a strange and mysterious phenomenon, a very manifest miracle, because it refutes the law of gravity and at times moves rhythmically, by an invisible power and for many hours. This occurs on certain great feasts of our Holy Church—during the Services, as well as on other days, not associated with any specific celebration, in a quite extraordinary manner; the latter motions start unexpectedly and are unrelated to the services within our *Katholikon*.

The vigil lamp experiences three types of motions. 1) Horizontally, that is parallel to the iconostass of the Church, 2) vertically to it and 3) circularly. The most common motion is the horizontal one, which is distinguished by its frequency and harmony, thus exemplifying the presence of divine power.

According to a most ancient tradition, preserved by the Elders to this day, the automatic movement of the vigil lamp in the feast implies a joyous character. It is considered to manifest a sign that our *Panaghia* is present at that time in Her Church, co-celebrating with the monks, and the visiting pilgrims, as a Mother with her children, simultaneously blessing and counseling them. With regard to the vigil lamp's motion during daily celebrations, it prophesies that some impending misfortune will happen with more general consequences for the world, such as an earthquake, a war, a mortal plague, etc. This latter miracle is a clear sign of divine providence, through which the Most Holy Theotokos intercedes on our behalf in her customary compassionate manner. It is an opportune forewarning for us to face the upcoming evil with the greatest amount of repentance and prayer and through soliciting from God reconciliation for our many sinful behaviors.

Let me go back. This unique miracle was again observed, as we mentioned above, during and around the Christmas celebrations, nevertheless in a certain usual manner, which imposes worries upon us. Specifically, the movements of the vigil lamp were observed during the whole fifteen days of Christmas, with a vivacious mood, more than any other time. Furthermore, while this was occurring in its usual "celebratory" manner, that is horizontally (parallel to the iconostass), they would suddenly alter into circular movements, around the axis of its suspension.



According to the elderly fathers of the Monastery, the circular movements of the vigil lamp were observed, as they recall, during World War II (the Albanian war). I wish to re-emphasize that this recent movement is completely unrelated to the vigil lamp's motions during the feasts.

As you may gather, the subject event imposes upon us a certain amount of concern and fear as well as restraint. For this reason *as many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ*, let us all cry out with true contrition, from the depths of our hearts, *Lord have mercy and Most Holy Theotokos save us* so that through repentance, we might avert a certain upcoming evil, like the ancient Ninevites...

With great love in the Lord,
Monk M.N.I.



This miracle of the moving vigil lamp of the Panaghia of Iveron is alive. It occurs fore-warningly, so that people can repent and avoid the wrath of God. This was also the case in the recent dreadful earthquake. The proof of its positive impact is that, although the earthquake's strength was unprecedented and impacted almost all of Greece, nevertheless we did not have any victims (aside from a few, who mistakenly jumped from their windows).

This earthquake (and the miracle of the vigil lamp) brought a good result. The 1981 Triodion period was one of the most sober and most reverent periods in Greece for some time. The masquerading, the improper revelries, the sinful dances, the debaucheries, and the immoralities which formerly occurred stopped. The people, as the newspapers write, are running to the churches.

Be careful, however, so we do not forget this and the people fall into materialism, easy living, sinful pleasures, etc. in which case the vigil lamp will not forewarn but the wrath of God will break out.

The movement of the icon, which was at the courthouse of Athens, also impressed everyone. Many people ran to see it, while the minister of Justice ordered that they transfer it to the sacred Church of St. Constantine at Omonoia. By the thousands the people gathered. The important thing is that they saw the chandelier, which was above the icon stand, moving.

God forewarns people with these things, so that they might repent and escape his wrath... *Let him who has ears hear His forewarning!*



Without devotion to God's Providence, you will not acquire peace. You do not humble yourself, and that is why you have no peace.

Saint Ambrose of Optina

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE HOLY MOTHER

By the Russian Holy Hierarch Ilya Minyati (+1990).

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.

(Lk 1:31-32)

When the fullness of time had come, when God the Father deigned to send His Only-Begotten Son and Word that He might be incarnate and become man, Gabriel, the champion of angels, was sent to the Galilean city of Nazareth to the Virgin Mary who was betrothed to Joseph, in order to greet Her with the words, *Rejoice, thou who art full of grace.* (Lk. 1:28).

All circumstances completely corresponded to this divine Annunciation: first, the bearer of it, the Archangel Gabriel, corresponded to it, inasmuch as this mystery is nothing other than the supernatural union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in one hypostasis of the Divine Word—of perfect God and perfect Man; and the name Gabriel means power of God. The place also corresponded to the event—the city of Nazareth, for the consequence of this mystery was the consecration of the human race through the participation of Divine nature, and Nazareth means consecration.

The time also corresponded—the month of March; the world was created at that time, and in this event was the creation of the world perfected. Then, the unsown soil first brought forth flower, and now the unwedded Virgin first conceived.

All the events of the present mystery are miraculous, but the most exalted of all that is miraculous is the Virgin Herself who received the good news—the Virgin and Mother; and this especially corresponds to the mystery, for such should be the Mother of such a Son. The Divine Word became what it never before was, and remained what it was, becoming a man and remaining God; and Mary became what She had not been, and remained what She was, having become a Mother and remaining a Virgin as before. The Divine Word became a Son born without a Father, and Mary became a Mother without a husband, giving birth without a man.

How different is God from man! But God, becoming a man and in taking flesh, did not abandon the nature of the Divinity. And how different a Virgin is from a Mother! But the Virgin, becoming a Mother, in maternal child-bearing did not lose the glory of virginity. What a strange communion of two natures—the Godly and the human, united unmingled in one hypostasis! Divine nature assumed human traits, and God became perfect Man; the human became a participant in the Divine qualities, and the same Person became perfect God. In the same way, what extraordinary union of virginal purity and maternal

childbearing, which in a strange manner were contained in one Woman! Virginitly gave the Mother the purity that the Mother of God should have, *Who is all-pure all-undefiled, fair as the moon, choice as the sun*, as the Holy Spirit calls Her (Songs 6:9). Childbearing gave virginitly the blessing, which a Virgin should have had according to the Archangel's greeting: *Blessed art thou among women* (Lk 1:28). Born there was the miraculous union—the God-Man; here a different union takes place, just as miraculous—the Virgin Mother. *Strange and marvelous, and removed in many ways from ordinary nature: one and the same Virgin and Mother, remaining in the sanctity of virginitly and inheriting the blessing of childbirth*, proclaims the heavenly Basil (the Great). Such a Son, I repeat, should have such a Mother; the Son Who was born a man and did not cease to be God, to the Mother Who gave birth to a Son and did not cease to be a Virgin.

This mystery could not have occurred in any other way; the very God-Man, the very Son, Who is eternally born of the everlasting Father, and is born in time from a woman. One Son, Who knows both a Father in Heaven and a Mother on earth, but in heaven, where He has His Father, there is no place for a mother; while on earth, where He has His Mother, there is no place for a father. There is no place for a mother in heaven—and the Son is born without passion; there is no place for a father on earth—and the Son is born without seed; thus, the relationship of Persons is maintained perfect. He is the Only Son, and the Only Son has One Father, one Mother, who is by nature an unwedded Virgin.

Now, O Christian, I say to you what the Lord said to King Achaz: *Ask for thyself a sign of . . . in the depth or in the height* (Isa 7:11); look down upon the earth, gaze upwards to heaven, search the present and past ages, and you will not find another sign like unto this one, which God revealed many centuries before through the lips of the prophet Isaiah: *behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son* (Is. 7:14), and which was fore-written in many fore-types: in the burning bush, in the sprouting rod (of Aaron), in the uncut mountain, and in the closed gates that faced the east, through which the Lord alone entered and left. How could Solomon say that there is nothing new under the sun? Here is a new wonder that was never matched. A Virgin and Mother, but the Mother of God. And there can never be anything like this new wonder.



O Mother of God! I confess a truth that I cannot comprehend, nor can I explain the heights of this dignity. I turn to the holy fathers to at least in some way understand, but I find that the holy fathers are also perplexed and pass over it in silence. The angels themselves remain speechless, even if they should have wanted to explain it to us. Even the Virgin, Whose mind was illumined for contemplation incomparably more than the minds of all the angels, the Virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit, bearing the Divine Word, explains it to us in Divine words: *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things* (Lk 1:49), and says nothing more.

If She were the Mother of the Messiah (as the Hebrews believed in Him), that is, of only a man, and not God; and if She had given birth to the yearning of ages, the Son of blessing, the Redeemer of Israel, then as the mother of such a glorious king she would as a result of this honor and happiness have surpassed all the mothers of the world, and for this alone all generations should have called Her blessed. But to be the Mother of God, to give birth to the Savior of the whole world, to give birth in time to the very Only-Begotten Son, Whom God the Father begot outside of time—this is an honor that makes Her godlike. At the beginning of the ages, when to the angels was revealed the great mystery of the economy of the incarnation, and Lucifer saw this honor, he was immediately stricken with envy, he thought a vain thing, departed from God, and fell like lightning from the heavens. Thus is the opinion of St. Maximos the Confessor, based upon the Apostle Paul's famous words: *And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him* (Heb 1:6; question and answer 42 on the Epistle to the Hebrews).

The Mother of God! The more I think upon it, the more I am convinced that this cannot be understood, that this is a limitless splendor, which raises Her to the highest throne of the Thrice-radiant Divinity and brings Her nearer to God the Father. Rise up and behold the heights, O Christian, and contemplate on one side the eternal Father, and on the other, Mary, full of grace, and in the center, the Only-Begotten Son, the incarnate God-Man. He has two natures: the Divine and the human; the Divine is the offspring of the Father, the human is the offspring of Mary; the Son of God, as God, the Son of Mary, as the child both God and Man. But this Son has only one hypostasis, which contains two unmingled natures.

The hypostasis is undivided, and therefore there are not two Sons—one, the Son of God the Father and the other, the Son of the Virgin Mary. This is one Person, in which, because it is not mingled, the particular qualities of two natures differ; nevertheless in this difference is preserved their undividedness, and in their duality—unity; there is only one Jesus Christ: God and man. The Father is the Father of Christ and the Father of God and man; Mary is the Mother of Christ and Mother of man and God. Thus, the relationship that God the Father has to the Only-Begotten Son is the same relationship that the Virgin Mary has to the same Son, and therefore She has in her birth of the God-Man Son the same glory, like unto the glory of the Father. Gabriel wants to express this in words: *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest* (Lk 1:31–32); *He shall save his people from their sins.* (Mt 1:21).

Could the mind conceive of a more exalted splendor?! Now transfer your gaze from such a height to the world below, to all other rational creatures, as far from Her as the earth is from heaven, and look at how small and insignificant is all the grace and glory of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs compared to the grace and glory of the Mother of God. What does King Solomon say? That there is nothing new under the sun? But here is a new miracle—the Virgin and Mother. This is a new miracle, the likes of which there never was. A Virgin—the Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Virgin exceeding grace. The Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Mother a most exalted honor.

This is a miracle of miracles, and one that no other faith can boast—only the Christian Faith, in which this mystery is the beginning and end of all mysteries.



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ON THE DAYS OF THE GREAT FAST

By St. Theodore the Studite.

Brethren and fathers, fasting is good if it possesses its own special characteristics, which are to be peaceable, meek, well-established, obedient, humble, sympathetic and all the other forms of virtue. But the devil hurries to suggest the opposite to the faithful and to make them insolent, angry, bad-tempered, puffed up, so as to produce hurt more than gain.

But let us not be ignorant of his plans, but continue our path peaceably, gently, meekly and steadfastly bearing with one another in love, knowing that this is what is acceptable to God.

“For as much as our outer nature is perishing,” it says, “by so much the inner is being renewed day by day.” And our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding weight of glory.

So that looking at the recompense, let us bear the toils of virtue with long-suffering, giving thanks to the God and Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.

Do we not communicate each day of his immaculate body and blood? What could be sweeter and more filled with enjoyment than this, since those who partake with a pure conscience will obtain eternal life? Do we not converse each day with the godly David and the other Holy Fathers through taking in the readings? What could bring greater consolation to the soul? Have we not broken off contact with the world and with our relatives according to the flesh?

Again is anything more blessed or higher than this? For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to Himself. And so, my brothers, let us rejoice and be glad as we repudiate every pleasure.

“All flesh is grass, and all human glory like the flower of the grass.”

The grass withered and the flower faded, but the work of virtue endures for ever.

Is anyone among you suffering? As the brother of God says, Let him pray. Is anyone sad? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone tempted by evil passion, since the tempter is always at work? Let him endure patiently as he listens to the one who says,

Blessed is the one who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him. And, *if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them,* said the Lord, to whom be glory and might, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

THE ICON OF THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

From various Orthodox pamphlets.

Among the important icons depicted on the walls of our churches is the icon of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This icon is given great prominence, usually in the narthex of some of the churches or *trapezas* of Mount Athos, as well as in some parish churches throughout the world.

The icon is a depiction of the famous spiritual classic entitled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* written by St. John Climacos (of the Ladder), who lived during the 17th century and whose memory is celebrated on March 30th as well as the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. In this book, St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development, which he likens to thirty steps upward on a ladder. The steps lead the struggler to *theosis*, divinization, and salvation—the ultimate goal of *askesis* or spiritual struggle.

St. John's Ladder expresses the Orthodox understanding that *theosis* and ultimately salvation is not something attained all at once, as by a leap, but comes after a long and arduous process of spiritual striving or asceticism. In this process, with sustained effort one rises gradually from lower to higher and higher levels of spiritual development. As St. John writes, *no one can climb a ladder in one stride*. Just as St. John's book, the icon stands as a witness to the violent effort needed for entrance into God's Kingdom. The spiritual struggle of Christian life is a real one, *not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the present darkness, the hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*. (Eph 6:12).

In the icon, a ladder stands on the earth and reaches to Heaven. St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development in his book and he likens the stages to thirty steps upward on a ladder. At the right side of the scene is shown a monastery building. Standing outside its door is St. John Climacos. His right hand points at the ladder and watching monks stand behind him. In his left hand he holds a scroll on which is written: *Ascend, ascend, Brethren*.

Some of the Icon's Details

Ladder: St. John Climacos was inspired by the Ladder which the righteous Jacob saw in a dream. Jacob saw a ladder which rose from earth to Heaven, on which some angels were ascending and others were descending. His vision is described in the book of Genesis: *And Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God*

of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. ... And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. (Gen 28:12-13, 15). The ladder in this icon is sometimes depicted in such a way to express the idea that more effort is required for rising to the highest levels of spiritual development.

Christ from Heaven: With His right hand Christ blesses the monk who has climbed to the top of the ladder. The scroll in His left hand is symbolic of His Gospel. Reaching this heaven is a heaven of the mind within the heart. Its effect is to sanctify the mind and to detach it from material things, and it does so in such a way, that after entering this heavenly harbor, a man, for most of his earthly life, is enraptured, like someone already in heaven, and he is lifted up to the contemplation of God.



Climbing Monks: Below the victorious monk, there are other monks at various stages of ascent. Some stand on the ladder firmly, and are about to rise to the next rung. Others, however, are barely retaining their hold, as they are drawn by demons. One of the monks has fallen off the ladder and is being swallowed by a dragon with wide open jaws.

Demons: The demons are flying at the ladder. The demons are depicted in order to remind the observer that they exist. Such evil spiritual beings act upon us through mental suggestion and assaults. Their tails symbolize their fallen state, their animalistic state. The demons also symbolize various sins. Saint John's book minutely analyzes the nature of the pas-

sions of pride, gluttony, lust, anger, despondency, malice, and so on.

Dragon: The dark dragon is used as a symbol of Hell.

Angels: Angels are viewed as real beings. The angels also symbolize positive qualities, virtues, the opposites of the "passions," humility, temperance, chastity, gentleness, hope, love, etc.



Do not listen to other people's wicked words; for in your desire to do so, the wicked words are engraved in your soul. When you hear evil words, be angry with yourself—not with the man who spoke them; *for he who repeats wicked tidings is also wicked.*

Abba Mark

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARCH 25TH TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX NATION

Source: Holy Monastery of "Axion Estin," Melbourne, Australia.

Of all the solemn days in Orthodoxy the day of March 25th is one not only of religious significance but of political significance as well, allowing the Greek Orthodox to commemorate God's message to Mary and the independence of Greece on the same day. The expression *For God and Country* has real meaning for the Greek Orthodox on the 25th day of March, a day on which he can celebrate two events without diminishing either one for the obvious reason that devotion and patriotism have the same emotional root—love. If Christianity could be compressed into a single word, that word would be love. The same holds true for patriotism.

Uppermost in the true Greek's mind on March 25th, however, is the Holy Theotokos, chosen from all the women in the world to be our Lord's mother. When Gabriel brought the momentous message from God, the gentle Mary must have felt a disquieting apprehension at the prospect of this awesome responsibility. Assured by the Archangel, her answer was a simple: *Let it be according to the will of God*, and the rest is glorious history.

The world of Mary of two thousand years ago is envisioned as one in which life was simple and free of the complexities that plague the modern world, but in that age of self-sufficiency there were problems which would be insurmountable today. The mother of that day was all things to her family, and it can safely be said that when the Archangel Gabriel departed, the prospective Mother of

God must have for several moments felt terribly alone. Everyone knows about the nativity and the mission of our Lord, but the details of the days, months and years in between are known but to Mary and to God.

The political importance of March 25th is fully realized only when the suffering of four centuries is called to mind. In 1458 the Ottoman hordes overran all of Greece and most of the Balkans and held hostage a people whose culture dated back more than two thousand years, and who gave more to the world than it could ever receive in return. It seems that the world just stood by while the cradle of democracy and Christianity was being defiled by a scourge that would have undone a less hardy breed.

Hopelessly outnumbered, Greece endured nearly four hundred years of brutal oppression, but the spirit of its people knew not a single moment's weakness. The fires of rebellion that the Turks thought they had snuffed out, but which had smoldered in Hellenic hearts for almost 400 years, were kindled into a conflagration on March 25th 1821, not by a bemedalled general but by a man of the cloth, Bishop Germanos of Patras, Greece, who chose the day of the Annunciation knowing God would be on the side of the Greeks.

The good bishop held the Cross of Jesus Christ aloft on the 25th day of March, 1821, and proclaimed freedom for all Greek Orthodox Christians. It was a motion seconded by every Greek in the country. In addition to engaging in a war for independence, the Greeks were actually waging a holy war because it was not only Greek against Turk but Christian against Muslim; the subsequent Greek victory was a true triumph of Christianity.