

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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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

An Anonymous Paschal Exhortation by an Orthodox priest.

In greeting my true friends with these joyful tidings, there are so many bright and kindly wishes that my heart desires to convey. But of all these wishes there is one which I have especially chosen to communicate here, for I consider its fulfillment your most important concern.

On this chosen and holy day, I want your hearts to affirm that which once the blessed Psalmist voiced. Loving the Lord with all his mind and with all his soul, he said: *With my whole heart have I sought after Thee, cast me not away from Thy commandments.* (Pss 118:10). In celebrating the Light-bearing Resurrection of Christ, it is my earnest desire that you surrender yourselves entirely to our Saviour—giving to Him your whole heart, all your love and your soul's principal endeavor. This is my fervent wish for you, my friends, because *the love of Christ constraineth us ... for Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.* (2 Cor 5:14-15).

I once visited a spiritual man especially dear to me and found him wiping tears from his eyes. When asked the cause of his weeping he burst into fresh tears, and it was a few minutes before he could answer. "I am crying on account of a growing awareness of Christ's grief over the increasing coldness manifest towards

Him in the hearts of men. I see believers who come to pray a little, to repent a little, to bring a meager offering. But I rarely see any souls truly dedicated to Him; I don't see any believers who have wholly given themselves over to Him. If it grieves me to see how many—who consider themselves believers—abbreviate their responsibilities towards Him and hurry away from His Liturgy to the marketplace of earthly life, how then must He look upon such Christians?"

There is no doubt that we live in times of spiritual impoverishment and disregard for truth. People feel no regret in abandoning their *first love* (Rev 2:4). Not so very long ago one could meet everywhere Christians of burning faith. Today's believers prefer to hide their little faith and to conceal it from the eyes of strangers. Inexplicable, unconquerable fears have seized the hearts of the Orthodox faithful. Obsessed by such fears, people are afraid to wear crosses, afraid to make the sign of the cross in front of others. And when the godless ones begin to utter profanities in the company of such Christians, there is no longer anyone who will stand up to them.

Surrounding us today is a sea of the most shameless vulgarity directed against that which we hold most precious, and this vulgarity not only meets with no rebuff from us, but even receives indirect support: not only do we keep silent in the face of such abuse, but we adopt an air of casual indifference which only encourages the impious.



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

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

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And how little there is among contemporary believers in the way of deeds of love and Christian compassion. There is a sad story. A poor man prayed that the Lord might help him. As he was praying the Lord appeared to him and gave him a small silver coin, saying, "Do not be offended at My giving you so little. I Myself receive even less from people nowadays."

When we hear words of admonition, we usually respond by excusing ourselves: "Forgive me, but that's just the way I am." But is this really the way you should be, my friend? Think, were you always like this? If you changed from better to worse, is there any reason why you cannot change from worse to better? If you have changed for the worse through the power of sin, why can't you change for the better through the invincible power of Christ's Resurrection? Has your heart shrunk in its capacity to love God? Does not the life-creating, almighty power of the Resurrected Christ rest upon you? Is it not through His power that you live and have your being to this very day? Change yourself, my dear friend—you who have been signed by the unapproachable light of His Resurrection, and place your whole heart at the feet of your Lord. If you neglect to do this, what kind of Pascha can you expect? You will only grieve Him with your celebration.

Through many profound and sorrowful reflections we are given to know the circumstances of our Saviour's burial. How few were those servants of His who gathered to take Him down from the Cross, to wrap Him in the shroud, to prepare His tomb and to give Him the last kiss. Where were all those to whom He gave sight, those whom He cleansed of leprosy, whom he fed, whose lips He made to speak? Where was Jairus' daughter? Where was the paralytic from the sheep's pool, and the blind Bartimeus? Where was the one blind from birth whom the

Lord healed? The man with the withered arm, the deaf and dumb man, the possessed Gadarene, and the many others who believed on Him? The news of what had happened to their Benefactor had at that time spread throughout all Judea. Why didn't all these believers hasten to give witness of their love for the Crucified One? Was it not because they were afraid, because they preferred their own concerns, because they shunned such a difficult exploit, because, although they believed in Him, they had not yet given Him their hearts?

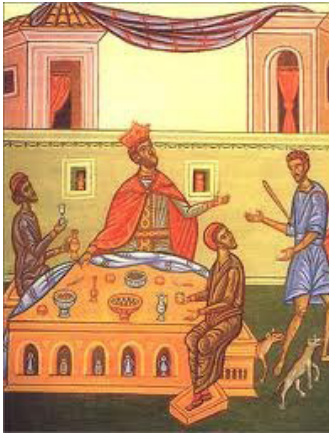
Then there came into the world the power of His Resurrection, His victory which conquered the world. And just see, my friend, what this victory has accomplished. How many people have loved Him with their whole heart, their whole soul, and have given their whole life to Him. Just look at the multitude of His saints. Can you even begin to number all His martyrs, all His righteous ones, all those shining lamps which burned with love for Him in all nations and all ages? Can you recount all their ascetic labors, their deeds of spiritual valor and Christian charity which they performed by means of His power working through them?

And you, my friend, unite yourself to this glorious and immense company of Christ's true followers and slaves. Celebrate the day of His bright Resurrection as it was celebrated by those who pleased Him. Remember that you will truly experience the New Passover of Christ only then when your whole heart is full of love for Him. *If a man love Me, He says, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.* (Jn 14:23).

In your celebration of Pascha, may His blessed name be preserved in your hearts. May your lips sing His praises unceasingly, and may your eyes behold continually His Most Pure Face and His heavenly glory. Amen.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

By Fr. Gregory Naumenko.



Whatever we may hear about the federal deficit or gloomy economic predictions, such talk is dispelled by the general picture of affluence which our society presents. By any measure the United States enjoys a high standard of living, and even if none of us is anywhere near the financial upper crust, we are all affected to some degree by the glittering image of “the

American way of life,” in which the pursuit of happiness and success is invariably associated with the accumulation of wealth and possessions—today’s definition of “good fortune.” Even for the “have nots” it is very difficult not to succumb to this mentality.

As Christians we should be especially concerned to develop a correct attitude towards wealth, for, as we know from the Gospel, it can greatly affect our salvation. Our Lord said, *And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* (Mt 19:24). But, you may say, I am not rich. Is there anyone among us who can say that he possesses nothing in excess? We all face the question which so perplexed the disciples: *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?* (Mt 19:24).

The question of material wealth and its effects on salvation is dealt with very directly in the familiar parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). The rich man enjoyed a life of ease; he ate fine foods every day and walked about attired in expensive clothes. By contrast, just outside his gates lay the sick beggar Lazarus who kept himself alive by eating crumbs from the rich man’s waste. Neither the rich man nor anyone in his household paid any attention to Lazarus whose only relief came from the dogs which licked his sores. Then death came, and their fortunes were reversed: the parable tells us that in the afterlife the rich man went to Hades to suffer unending torments, while Lazarus was received into the bosom of Abraham to enjoy an eternal state of blessedness.

This parable illustrates for us the proper understanding of wealth and poverty—of who is rich and who is poor. Lazarus—old, decrepit, covered with sores, hungry, lonely—endured his condition with patience, without grumbling, and at the end of his life he reaped the spiritual benefit of his earthly struggle. The rich man—fat with temporal goods—showed no concern whatever for Lazarus, and did

not even think to send one of his servants to allay the poor one’s misery; he was starved of virtue, a spiritual pauper. St. Paul writes that those who live in pleasure are dead while they live: *But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.* (1 Tim 5:6). The parable opens our eyes to see that it is the rich man who, in the final analysis, is poor and covered with sores.

The story, may have been very different if only the rich man had extended a helping hand to the unfortunate Lazarus. Such an action would have improved the lot of both men, Both would have lived comfortably in this temporal life, both would have received their reward after death—the first for his charity (*above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins* [1 Pet 4:8]), the second for his ungrumbling patience and acceptance of God’s will. Neither would have suffered torment—not in this life, nor in the life to come.

The parable does not teach that we must renounce all possessions in order to achieve salvation. Both those who have been granted earthly riches and those who have not can lead a life pleasing to God—provided that the matter of wealth is put in its proper perspective. It is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of money. St. John Chrysostom writes: *I do not blame the owners of houses, of fields, of money, of slaves, but I want them to possess these things in a proper way. What does “in a proper way” mean? It means mastering them in good order and not becoming their slaves; it means to use them but not to take profit from them.* Those who “have” are in no way hindered from attaining the Kingdom if they do not put their riches above their love for God and for their fellowman. Likewise, those who “have not” can be close to God if they do not grumble at their lot or become possessed by the desire “to have.”

A proper perspective on earthly possessions is fundamental to a correct Orthodox understanding of life. If we recall the Ten Commandments, we find two basic rules concerning this: *Thou shalt not steal*, and *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.* (Exod 20:15, 17). This tells us that we are not to obtain possessions at the expense of our fellow men.

At this point one may ask: “But, is it not permitted to obtain wealth by honest means?” Yes, this is permitted, but we cannot allow our quest for wealth to interfere in any way with our serving God, for the first commandment requires that *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me* (Exod 20:3). Unfortunately, it is nearly always the case that in search of wealth and profit one becomes obsessed by the whole process and all but forgets God; material wealth becomes a antagonist in the process of salvation. Why? Because, as the Gospel explains to all: *No man can serve two masters: for*

either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (i.e., riches). (Mt 6:24, Lk 16:13).

We are all subject to physical death. Every one of us will pass on to the life beyond this world, leaving behind all of our temporal possessions, all that those “of the world” so earnestly covet—glory, wealth, power, beauty. None of this will help us when we stand before the Just Judge and have to give an account of ourselves; *for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* (1 Tim. 6:7). And we shall be found truly naked if we do not begin now to adorn ourselves with virtues and good works, and to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Rich or poor, may we learn to use our circumstances for our spiritual benefit: material abundance gives us the opportunity to share with others, to practice temperance and self-discipline; times of hardship give us the opportunity to grow in patience and trust in God. Through God’s Providence and love for men, each of us is given the means to become rich in spiritual goods. Let us not spend time accumulating empty wealth, but rather pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, that we may lay hold of eternal life with Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all honor and glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and ever. Amen.



It often happens that a person, either young or old, falls in love with another person, or even an object. Some people fall in love with gold, and cannot be separated from it—or from their wealth, house and possessions—and they become enslaved. ... Many times, the powers of evil bring such people to the brink of self destruction. ... That kind of love [corrupted by evil spirits] is without discernment. But the love of God is boundless.

Our Lord is pleased with the good deeds we perform. Works of mercy and everything else we do for our salvation and the benefit of our neighbor and the Holy Church, all this is pleasing to God. However, what pleases Him most is simple, innocent and child-like love, which cleaves to His heart. This is what is most pleasing to Him and what he wants from us. This is what every person can give Him—rich or poor, young or old.

The fear of God is when you love Him, when you truly love him with all your heart and strive never to offend or sadden Him, not only with your deeds, actions and words, but also with your thoughts. You try to please Him in everything you do or say. That is the fear of God: the fear of doing anything that might sadden or offend our Parent.

Holy Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

“LICENSED” THEOLOGIANs

By Fr. John Romanides (+2001).

Some fifty years ago, when I was a student at the theological academy, our professor of Dogmatics, Father John Romanides, told us a story about his student days at the Theological School of the University of Athens. In order to obtain his doctorate from the University, Father John, a newly ordained priest at that time [the 1950’s], had to defend his dissertation before a panel of theological professors. The subject of his dissertation was “The Ancestral Sin” [meaning the sin of our ancestors, Adam and Eve; this is sometimes mistranslated into English as “the Original Sin”]. As various questions about his dissertation were being fired at him from the professors [all of whom had received their credentials at Roman Catholic or Protestant universities in Europe], Father John answered to the best of his considerable ability. Finally, the head of the theological department, the big gun himself, Dr. Panagiotis Trembelas, took aim at Father John, who, as is customary in these interrogations, was standing before the panel of seated professors.

“You have many citations in your dissertation from the writings of Symeon the New Theologian,” said Dr. Trembelas.

“That is correct, Sir Professor,” answered Father John, with the proper deference.

“You must delete them,” continued Dr. Trembelas. “Symeon cannot be cited as a source in your work, because he never received a theological degree.”

[Yes, you just read the foregoing sentence correctly—Dr. Trembelas was truly challenging the young priest...]

Without batting an eyelash at Trembelas’ unbelievable remark, Father John answered calmly, “Very well, as you say, Sir Professor. Would you want me to delete also all my references to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the Evangelists, since they, too, never received a theological degree? They, too, were not licensed theologians.”

Stifled laughter could be heard coming from the panel of distinguished professors.



Locusts, wars, drought, disease—they are all scourges. They’re not God’s way of educating human beings, but the result of our moving away from God. They happen because we stray from Him. God’s wrath comes to make us remember Him and ask for help. It’s not that He arranges and orders, so to speak, these calamities to happen. Rather, God allows them to happen because He sees how far human evil can go and how unwilling we are to change our ways. and so He tries to bring us to our senses. But they are not of His own making.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI

By St. John Chrysostom, from his 88th homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 27:45-48), edited for length.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, and said, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that said, this man calleth for Elias. And straight way one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.

† † †

There is a sign which He had promised to give them when they asked for it, saying to them, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas* (Mt 12:39); that sign is encompassed in His cross and His death, His burial and His resurrection. And again, declaring in another way the virtue of the cross, He said, *When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.* (Jn 8:28). And what He said is to imply: *When ye have crucified me, and think ye have overcome me, then, above all, shall ye know my might.*

After the crucifixion, the city was destroyed, and the Jewish state came to an end; and the gospel flourished and His word was spread abroad to the ends of the world. Both sea and land, both the inhabited earth and the desert perpetually proclaim His power. Indeed, it was much more marvellous that these things should be prophesied by Him when He was nailed to the cross, than when He was walking on earth.

And observe when it took place. At midday, that all that dwell on the earth may know it, when it was day all over the world. After all their insulting, and their lawlessness, this is done, soon after they had let go their anger, when they had ceased mocking; it is then that He shows the deep darkness, in order that at least so (having vented their anger) they may profit by the miracle.

This miracle was more marvellous than for Him to come down from the cross; for He worked these things while being on the cross! For whether they thought He Himself had done it, they ought to have believed and to have feared; and if not Him but the Father, they ought to have been moved to compunction, for that darkness was a token of His anger at their crime.

And what they saw was not just an eclipse, but both wrath and indignation; and it continued for three hours. We are aware that an eclipse takes place in one moment of time, and those who observed the miracle know this.

How is it then that all did not marvel and account Him to be God? Because the race of man was then held in a state of great carelessness and vice. And this miracle was but one, and when it had taken place, immediately passed away; and no one was concerned to inquire into the cause of it, for great was their prejudice and their habit of ungodliness.

He Himself worked this miracle. And he did so that they might learn that He was still alive, and that they might become by this also more gentle. And he exclaimed *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* (Mt 27:46) so that unto His last breath they might see that He honors His Father, and is no adversary of God. And His cry is from the prophet, (*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [Pss 22:1]), thus bearing witness

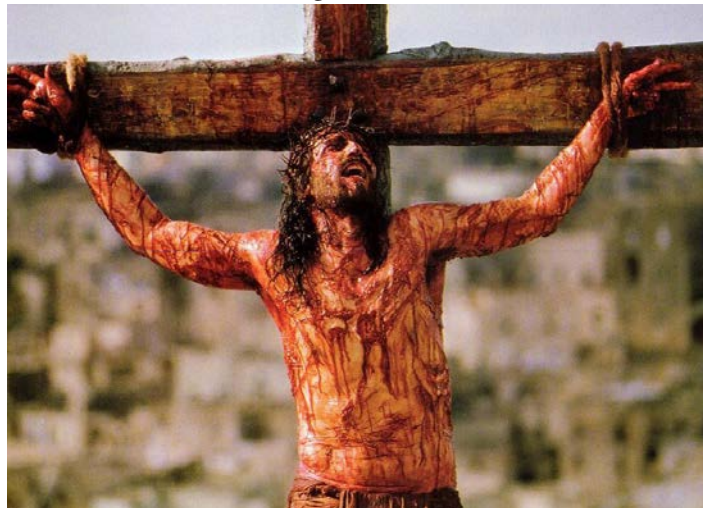
to the Old Testament in His last hour, and in Hebrew, so as to be plain and intelligible to them. By all things, He shows how He is of one mind with Him that begat Him.

Now observe here their maliciousness, ignorance, indulgence and foolishness. They thought (it is said) that it was Elias whom He called, and straightway they *gave Him vinegar to drink.* (Mt 27:48). But another came unto Him, and *pierced His side with a*

spear. (Jn 19:34). What could be more lawless and brutal than these men carrying their madness to such great of a length, offering insult at last even to a dead body? Observe, however, how He made use of their wickednesses for our salvation. For after the blow the fountains of our salvation gushed forth from thence: *and forthwith came there out blood and water...*

And Jesus, when He had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the Ghost. (Mt 27:50). This is what He had said, *I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again, and, I lay it down of myself.* (Jn 10:18). So for this cause He cried with a loud voice, that it might be shown that the act of His death is done by power. Mark the Evangelist informs us that "*Pilate marvelled if He were already dead* (Mk 25:44). And above all, this is the reason that the centurion believed; because He died with power: *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.* (Mk 15:39).

This cry rent the veil and opened the tombs and made the house desolate. And He did this, not as to offer insult to the temple (how could He, when he said *Make not my*



Father's house a house of merchandise [Jn 2:16]) but declaring them to be unworthy even of His steadfastness; and this was also a prophecy of the coming desolation, and a declaration of the change into the greater and higher state and a clear sign of His might.

And He also showed Himself by what followed after these things, the raising of the dead. Elisha, on touching a dead body rose again (2Kings 13:21); but now by a voice He raised the dead, His body continuing up there, on the cross! And they are not merely raised, but the rocks are also rent, and the earth shaken, so that they might learn, that He was able to strike themselves blind, and to rend them in pieces. For He that cleft rocks asunder and darkened the world, could have easily done these things to them, had it been His will. But He would not, but having discharged His wrath upon the elements, His will was to save them by clemency. But they did not abate their madness. Such was their envy. So even after placing a seal upon His tomb, and soldiers watching Him, He rose again, and they heard these things from the very guards; they even gave money, in order both to corrupt others, and to steal away the history of the resurrection.

Observe the great signs He had wrought, some from Heaven, some on earth, some in the very temple, at once marking His indignation, and at the same time showing that what were unapproachable are now to be entered, and that Heaven shall be opened. And they indeed said, *If He be the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross*, (Mt 27:42) but He shows them that He is King of all the world. And whereas those men said, *Thou that destroyest this temple, and buildest it in three days*, (Mt 27:40) He shows that it shall be made forever desolate.

Again they said, *He saved others, Himself He cannot save* (Mt 27:42), but He, while abiding on the cross, proved this most abundantly for so many of his deceased servants. If one considers Lazarus' rise on the fourth day as a great and miraculous event, how much more for all those who had long ago fallen asleep, and at once appeared alive; and this was a sign of the future resurrection to come. For, *many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, it is said, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many*. (Mt 27:52-53). And the Centurion too then glorified God, saying, *Truly this was a righteous man. And the multitudes that came together to that sight, returned beating their breasts*. (Lk 23:47-48).

The power of the Crucified was indeed so great that after so many mockings, and scoffs, and jeers, both the centurion was moved to compunction, and many people. And some say of this centurion that he became a martyr in His name, after he grew in the faith.

And many women were there beholding afar off, which had followed Him, ministering unto Him, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons." (Mt 27:52-53). All these events are closely observed

by the women, for they were most inclined to feel for Him, who were most of all bewailing Him. Observe their diligence and attentiveness. They had followed Him ministering to Him, and were present even during the most dangerous moments and they saw it all; how He cried, how He gave up the ghost, how the rocks were rent, and all the rest.

And these women are the blessed ones that also first see the resurrected Jesus; the sex that was most condemned shows its courage and first enjoys the sight of the blessings. When the disciples had fled, they were present. But who were these? His mother, for she is called mother of James, and the rest. But another evangelist (Lk 22:48) informs us that many women also lamented over the things that were done, and smote their breasts. This, above all, shows the cruelty of the Jews, who gloried in things for which the women were lamenting; the former were neither moved by pity, nor checked by fear.

But Joseph went, and begged the body. (Mt 27:57-58). This was Joseph, who was concealing his discipleship; now, however, he had become very bold after Christ's death. For neither was he an obscure person, nor unnoticed; he is one of the council, highly distinguished and extremely courageous. By his affection to Jesus, he exposed himself to death, taking upon him the hostility and animosity of many; he dared to beg the body of Christ and did not cease his efforts until he obtained it. He showed his love and his courage not only by taking Christ's body and burying it in a costly manner, but also by laying it in his own new tomb. And this was not coincidental; in this manner, there could not be any bare suspicion that one had risen instead of another.

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. (Mt 27:61). For what purpose do they await by the tomb? They had brought ointments, and were waiting at the tomb, so that if the madness of the Jews should relax, they might go and embrace the body. Do you see the women's courage, their affection, their noble spirit in money and their noble spirit even unto death? Let us men imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptations. Even though He was dead, they exposed their lives, but we (for again I say the same things) neither feed Him when hungry, nor clothe Him when naked, but seeing Him begging, we pass Him by.

We say that Christ has done great things, having made angels of men; then, when we are called upon to give account, and required to furnish a proof out of this flock, our mouths will be shut and we will be absent of furnishing deeds in His name.

And let us do at any rate what each of us can accomplish, and from the present time purify our lives and attain the promised blessings, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.

NEW HERESIES

By Metropolitan Augoustinos (Kantiotis) of Florina (+2010); this article may be found under the title, "Νέα Αίρεσις" in the book, "Πνευματικά Σαλιπίσματα Ὁρθοδόξου Ζωῆς καὶ Ὁμολογίας," pp. 109-114.

"We will not deny you, Beloved Orthodoxy"

Joseph Vryennios



Of late, certain theologians, under the influence of contemporary, world-wide currents, have begun to savor the words "ecumenicity," "ecumenical spirit," and "ecumenical movement," as if they were hard-candy. Ecumenicity; what a beautiful word! And yet, behind these words, lay hidden a most fearful danger for Orthodoxy. What is this danger? We will show you by means of an example.

Imagine a woman, a woman faithful to her husband, a woman who will allow no third party to enter into their relationship, ever mindful of the promises which she had made before God and before men. She is a woman of exceptional beauty, drawing the eye of many a man. On account of her uprightness, however, anyone who dares to touch, or to proposition her, immediately meets with her anger. Should such a one persist, this honourable woman will deliver a strong slap to his face in order bring him to his senses.

Those men who are learned in this vile business, however, will try another method. These will try to uncover what it is that this woman likes; does she perhaps love poetry, or philosophy, or art? By means of these things the secret admirer will trap her. With great deftness he will begin having innocent conversations with her on those subjects that are beloved to her. "What a wonderful poem!"; "What a beautiful painting!"; "What a wonderful play!"; "How sweet a piece of music!" And thus begins the dialogue.

Gradually the unsuspecting woman is lured into longer conversations with the deceiver who, while his tongue speaks of philosophy and art, his heart leaps at the hope of taking the woman for himself. Finally, after an air of great familiarity and mutual understanding has been achieved through these conversations, the door is opened to the foul deed, the shameful union. Just as the most-evil serpent succeeded in beguiling Eve by means of a simple conversation, in like manner the seed of shameful union was sown.

Did you catch what we are trying to say, beloved? We have spoken in a parable.

The woman concerning which we have spoken is our Orthodox Church. She is this beauty. She is the woman who, according to the Book of Revelation is *clothed in the Sun*, who wears *upon her head a crown of twelve stars*, and who has *the moon under her feet*. (Rev 12:1-2). It is the Orthodox Church which has remained faithful to the Lord, to the eternal bridegroom. It is she who has kept pure the tradition of the Lord and of the Apostles—both written and unwritten—in accordance with the God-inspired call to, *stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle*. (2 Thess 2:15).

It is she, the Orthodox Church, which for nineteen centuries has fought the hard and bloody battle against various deceptions, against the various heresies which have sought to pollute and corrupt her holiness. One of the worst of these heresies is Papism, which, on account of its delusions, its authoritarian spirit, and its atrocities, caused the rise of Protestantism and the fracturing of all of Christendom. Yes, the Papists are heretics. The enemies of the Orthodox Church, including Papism to be sure, know well that she has persevered in the faith of her Fathers. Yet, having been persuaded through many examples that they cannot conquer that fortress which is Orthodoxy by means of a frontal attack, these enemies have recently begun trying by other means. They have begun a new war, a war of peace, a war worse than the Crusades. Do you not hear the voice of the serpent, seeking to corrupt the minds of Orthodoxy, leading us away from our simplicity? *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*. (2 Cor 11:3).

Here is what the serpent says: O, Orthodox Church! Why do you keep your distance? Why are you afraid of me? I am no dragon; I am a sweet angel bearing the message of love. I am not going to hurt you. Keep your dogmas and your traditions. Leave these things to the theologians... I invite you into my room to discuss other matters. Let us make a common stand against hunger, against poverty, against atheism, against communism, against war. Do these matters not move you? Does this proposition not excite you? Come then, let us begin our conversation on high, on the level of ecumenicity, on the level of mutual understanding. You will see just how beautiful our coming together can be!

O, Orthodox Church! Our suffering mother! Will you accept this proposition? Will you enter into dialogue with Papism? Can you not see the danger inherent in this proposition? That those who ineptly and unworthily represent you are creating conditions favorable to your enemies to such a fearful degree that you, without even taking notice, will fall into the arms of Papism. And what will follow then? A union, a pseudo-union, spiritual adultery, a most vile act; something which ought never to have occurred, and which

will require centuries of repentance from those Orthodox who played the role of pimp for the Orthodox Church. The hour will come when these will sigh and say: “Let the language which we spouted concerning ‘ecumenicity’ and ‘mutual understanding’ cease; let these feet which ran to bring together Orthodoxy and wolves in sheep’s clothing become leprous; let these hands which signed ecumenical epistles and documents fall off!”

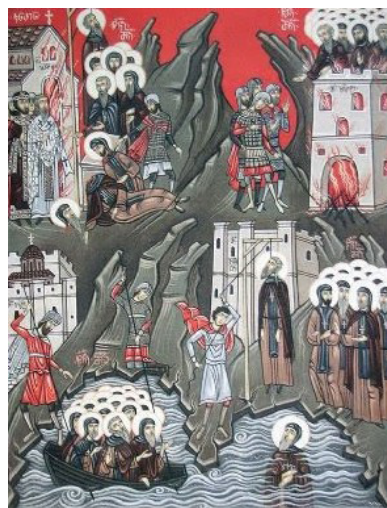
This, my beloved, is the famous ‘theory of ecumenicity’ which our leaders savour!

We repeat: the Ecumenical Movement, under whose umbrella gather all manner of heresies, represents a danger to the Orthodox Church. It deprecates the importance of the dogmas which, having been miraculously articulated in the brief definitions of the Ecumenical Councils, and which are the skeleton, the backbone without which the body becomes a limp and formless lump. It deprecates the Holy Canons, which the ecumenists call obsolete, rusty weapons. To put it concisely, the ecumenists deprecate the Orthodox Church as a whole, saying that it is self-centered, that it is a blasphemy for us to consider her to be the one true Church, possessing the genuine truth of Divine Revelation. Within this context the dogmas and the moral life, inseparably joined in the Orthodox Church, tend to evaporate, leaving behind nothing but a fraudulent version of love. The theory of ecumenicity, the theory which calls all different peoples to live together in the name of some tenuous peace, a theory supported within worldly and political circles in our century and which has already been applied to the spiritual sphere where compromise is unacceptable, will ultimately lead to conflict and turmoil, truly, to Babel.

Leaven, if it becomes contaminated, loses its ability to make things rise; Orthodoxy, the most excellent leaven, the leaven of truth, is capable of leavening the whole lump, but only so long as it remains unpolluted by foreign ingredients, so long as it remains pure. For this reason the followers of this theory of ecumenicity are the enemies of Orthodoxy. For this reason we do not hesitate to call this movement—the Ecumenical movement—a new heresy, from which the Orthodox Church must be protected.

In conclusion, during these critical moments when the Orthodox Church stands in danger, we call out to the faithful from our own watchtower: “Orthodox faithful! Remember that Church, of which you are children. Remember the rivers of blood our Fathers spilled to keep our Faith unadulterated; not one iota did they permit to be subtracted or added to our Faith. Remember the rallying cry of the heroes of the Revolution of 1821. These men—may their memory be eternal—struggled first for the faith, and then for their homeland. All of these heroes and martyrs, known and unknown, call to us from their graves: “Stand firm upon the bulwark of Orthodoxy!”

THE HOLY MARTYRS MASSACRED BY LATINS AT IVERON MONASTERY



Georgian monks began to settle on Mt. Athos in the middle of the 10th century, and a Georgian monastery, Iveron, was founded there not long after.

At that time foreign armies were constantly invading Mt. Athos. In the 13th century the Crusaders stormed through the region, and between 1259 and 1306 the pope’s private army devastated

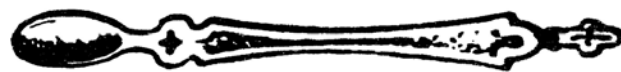
Mt. Athos several times. Monks of Zographou and Vatopedi monasteries and the Protaton were martyred for the Orthodox Faith, and the monks of the Iveron Monastery eventually met the same fate.

During this period Georgian and Greek ascetics labored together at the Iveron Monastery, and many young ascetics of the new generation began to arrive from Georgia.

The Crusaders demanded that the Iveron monks convert to Catholicism and acknowledge the primacy of the Roman pope. But the monks condemned their fallacies and anathematized the doctrine of the Catholics.

According to the Patericon of Athos, the Iveron monks were forcibly expelled from their monastery. Nearly two hundred elderly monks were goaded like animals onto a ship that was subsequently sunk in the depths of the sea. The younger, healthier monks were deported to Italy and sold as slaves to the Jews.

Some sources claim this tragedy took place in the year 1259, while others record that the Georgian monks of the Holy Mountain were subject to the Latin persecutions over the course of four years, from 1276 to 1280.



A man should have zeal and should work, not be idle. Idleness brings many evils upon a man. The indolent man is a thief; he steals from the labor of others. He who works, benefits both the soul and the body. All kinds of work are good, provided that a man wants to work. Iron, if you leave it, rusts; when you use it, it shines. Likewise with man, when he does not work the commandments of God, he rusts. He who is lazy in physical labors, will be slothful in spiritual ones also.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

PASCHA & THE FAMILY BASKET

By Fr. Gregory Wigenbach (first published in "The Orthodox Observer," April 8, 1987. At that time Fr. Gregory was the national director of the Greek Archdiocese Department of Church and Family Life).

Do not turn aside too readily from the ancient traditions you have received from the elders, which they in turn learned at their forefathers' feet, for they may still prove profitable to you and yours in your times of need.

[Wisdom of Sirach]

† † †



If you adopt a new homeland and assimilate its ways and culture into your own, it can certainly be a positive religious and cultural experience. St. Paul's apostolate among the Greeks, as well as the Byzantine-Greek Christians' mission among the Slavic people amply illustrates this. An even richer synthesis of cultures can result, helping the Church to witness to the Word of God among the native people. However, there is also a "negative assimilation," which tends to throw aside elements of prime value from the original heritage. Major historical catastrophes in history can do this. The fall of Byzantium to the conquering Moslem Turks was one such catastrophe whose crippling effects are still with us. Many significant religious traditions have also been lost or their meanings distorted by folk stories or tales.

One of the many ancient customs which "fell by the wayside" among the Greeks (as a likely result of the 400 years of Turkish rule), was the custom of "blessing the family baskets" of food at Pascha. It is still widespread among the Slavic nations who inherited the Orthodox Christian faith and culture from the Greeks. Though during my graduate pastoral internship over a dozen years ago, in northern Greece and in the Peloponnesos region, I did come across the custom in two Greek village communities. I also heard mention of it from a few of my fellow priest-classmates at the University of Thessaloniki.

The custom has its Christian origins from the early Church's Apostolic and sub-apostolic communities. In those days the faithful, as a matter of course, gathered together as an interdependent "family of families," sharing all the fruits of their labor as gifts of God, to be offered and blessed on major feast days. The blessing of the grapes and fruits on the Feast of the Transfiguration still survives among some Greek communities.

The early Christians—whatever their ethnic identity—received the tradition from their Jewish spiritual ancestors. Even the ancient name of "Pascha" was translated directly from the Hebrew "Pesach," meaning "to pass-over." Hence, the

English name among both Jews and Christians of traditional observance is "The Pasch," or "The Passover," not Easter.

According to the ancient tradition the mother and father of the family would carefully set aside the best of certain basic foods and drink, or symbolic portions thereof, during Holy Week. These were foods which the family would deny themselves during the whole of the Great Paschal fast. In certain communities, the local basket-maker would make a large, new basket for each of the parish families, as new an offering as the foods and the "spring cleaning" that took place amidst hymn-singing.

The contents of the new basket were assembled on Holy Saturday (after the morning Liturgy—Vesperal-Liturgy of St. Basil), and normally included the following: (1) The Pascha, loaf of bread; (2) A bottle of red wine; (3) Meats and meat products, including lamb, sausages, and ham; (4) dairy products, such as butter, cheese, and eggs; (5) oil and seasonings; and (6) salt, to represent Christians as Christ Himself described them—the salt that gives the earth its savor. Depending on the particular region, the eggs would be prepared and dyed "Resurrection red," and even perhaps marked with a cross, either on Holy Thursday or Holy Saturday morning.

When all was ready, while all of the family was gathered in front of the "home altar" and its icons, the mother—her head covered by a seamless or embroidered white, tasseled veil—would reverently place all of the food into the basket. Her husband, the father of the household, led all in the chanting of hymns and the Lord's Prayer. An embroidered, or specially dyed, cloth emblazoned with the Cross of Christ and the symbol ICXC ~ NIKA was then placed over the whole basket. Just before leaving for the Church, the oldest child would place a newly-made candle in the basket to be the family's own Resurrection "lampada" (candle) in readiness for the triumphal *Passing of the Light of Life* at the Midnight Services in the village church.

Arriving at the Church, the family took the basket to the foot of the Iconostasis. After the Liturgy and after all had received Holy Communion, the priest or bishop blessed the many baskets as well as the Paschal eggs. Leaving the Church, the whole of the parish or groups of families would gather to share the Paschal eggs, soup, breads, meats and cheese. The remainder of the Paschal basket foodstuffs were eaten by the family, usually together with a whole roasted lamb, after Agape Vespers and during the "Bright Week" that follows.

We can easily see that the blessing of the Paschal food baskets has a deep liturgical, spiritual and familial meaning. It is indeed a pity that such a profound tradition as this has largely "fallen by the wayside" among many segments of Orthodox Christians. Perhaps the time has come, during this period of time dedicated to the Christian Family, for us to begin reclaiming this and other wonderful traditions that are, after all, our very own!

ENDURING WITH PATIENCE

By Fr. David Lesko.

On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, our Church praises the memory of St. Mary of Egypt, celebrating her desert life of penitential endurance, while recommending the patience of her struggle as an example of self-gathering sobriety to all. Without endurance, there is no Christian life; there is fluctuation and tossing, and the too real danger of self-scattered frenzy. *In your patience possess ye your souls*, Jesus promises (Lk 21:19), and to those who question how long struggling might continue, He answers that, *he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*. (Mt 24:13). Nothing is clearer: patience must be actively patient ... to the end.

Discussing the Christian need for endurance, Fr. Alexander Elchaninov (+1934) noted that, "People keep saying, 'Life is hard!' And if you cite the example of the saints, the usual reply is: 'Well, they are not saints for nothing, it is easy for them!'"

This is a common error. It is the saints in particular who found it hard. They overcame not only worldly difficulties but the very essence of their humanity. The usual path of the saint—from the abyss of sin to the summit of holiness—is narrow and arduous. Whereas our course is always an easy one, along the line of least resistance; but the fruits of our course are bitter and burdensome, whereas the hard way yields the reward of true beatitude."

Thus, as the Church praises the memory of St. Mary of Egypt, it is good to recall again—for every day thereafter—that the path of holiness is hard, that blessedness is not to be attained by the "line of least resistance." It is good, in other words, to recall St. Mary's struggles, and the struggles of others who, like her, for salvation's sake, endured.

The Life of St. Mary of Egypt, who reposed in the year 521, was compiled by the Holy Patriarch and Hymnographer Sophronius of Jerusalem (+638) on the basis of the testimony of the Elder Zosimas, the priest-monk whom God had directed to her in the desert beyond the Jordan River. Much of it is written in the form of a dialogue.

"Zosimas asked her: 'How many years have gone by since you began to live in the this desert?'"

"She replied: 'Forty-seven years have already gone by, I think, since I left the holy city...'"

"Zosimas asked: 'Can it be that without getting ill you have lived so many years thus, without suffering in any way from such a complete change?'"

"The woman answered: 'You remind me, Zosimas, of what I dare not speak of. For when I recall all the dangers which I overcame, and all the violent thoughts which confused me, I am again afraid that they will take possession of me.'"

"Zosimas said: 'Do not hide from me anything; speak to me without concealing anything.'"

"And she said to him: 'Believe me, Abba, seventeen years I passed in this desert fighting wild beasts—mad desires and passions. When I was about to partake of food, I used to begin to regret the meat and fish of which I had so much in Egypt. I regretted also not having wine which I loved so much. For I drank a lot of wine when I lived in the world, while here I had not even water. I used to burn and succumb with thirst. The mad desire for profligate songs also entered me and confused me greatly, edging me on to sing satanic songs which I had learned once. But when such desires entered me, I struck myself on the breast and reminded myself of the vow which I had made, when

going into the desert. In my thoughts I returned to the icon of the Mother of God which I had received, and to her I cried in prayer. I implored her to chase away the thoughts to which my miserable soul was succumbing. And after weeping for long and beating my breast, I used to see light at last which seemed to shine on me from everywhere. And after the violent storm, lasting calm descended.'"

'And how can I tell you about the thoughts which urged me on to fornication, how can I express them to you, Abba? A fire was kindled in my miserable heart which seemed to burn me up completely and to awake in me a thirst for embraces. As soon as this craving came to me, I flung myself on the earth and watered it with my tears, as if I saw before me my witness, who had appeared to me in my disobedience and



who seemed to threaten punishment for the crime. And I did not rise from the ground (sometimes I lay thus prostrate for a day and a night) until a calm and sweet light descended and enlightened me and chased away the thoughts that possessed me. But always I turned the eyes of my mind to my Protectress, asking her to extend help to one who was sinking fast in the waves of the desert. And I always had her as my Helper and the Acceptor of my repentance. And thus I lived for seventeen years amid constant dangers. And since then even till now the Mother of God helps me in everything and leads me as it were by the hand...

“The clothes I had when I crossed the Jordan became torn and worn out. I suffered greatly from the cold and greatly from the extreme heat: at times the sun burned me up and at other times I shivered from the frost, and frequently falling to the ground I lay without breath and without motion. I struggled with many afflictions and with terrible temptations. But from that time till now the power of God in numerous ways has guarded my sinful soul and my humble body. When I only reflect on the evils from which Our Lord has delivered me, I have imperishable food for hope of salvation...”

For seventeen years, by her own admission, St. Mary of Egypt endured. And in the 54th of his towering Homilies, Saint Isaac the Syrian (700) remembered a similar struggler, the Persian Rabban Shabur, who died in the middle of the seventh century.

“One of the saints said: ‘There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was lying ill, lying down; and when I embraced him, I sat with him and told him, ‘Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons.’ But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, ‘Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you.’ And I said to him, ‘Yes, I am very young, but I have the temptations of mighty men.’ And he said again, ‘Then it is God’s will to make you wise.’ And I said, ‘How can I become wise? For every day I taste death.’ And in reply he said, ‘God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace.’ And he said again, ‘Know, child, that for thirty years I have made war with the demons, and until the time when I completed the course of twenty years, I had not received any help whatsoever. But thereafter, when another five had also gone by I began to find rest. And as time continued slowly on its way, it increased. The seventh year slipped by, and after

that, when I was in the eighth, it was intensified to a much greater degree. And now that the thirtieth year is running past, and has already reached its end, rest has prevailed to such an extent that I do not even know to what measure it has advanced.’ And he added, ‘When I wish to get up for my office, I am permitted to say a single Glory be; but as for the rest, if I stand three days, I am in awestruck wonder with God, and feel no weariness at all.’” Behold, the labour of many years, and what limitless rest it bore”

Much less remotely, the Elder Gabriel of Pskov and Kazan (1915), one-time spiritual father and confessor to the Holy New Martyr, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, wrote about the need for patient endurance—about his own experience of struggling—in the following way.

“I will begin with the Love of God. Perhaps through your knowledge or through your intellectual capabilities you know far more about the Love of God than my wretched self. Glory be to God! But if you have been smitten in your heart by the Love of God, and if it has illumined you within and without, consumed and transformed you, then, of course, no carnal thoughts nor any other such dark shadows would be in your heart, and nothing would be able to satisfy it except the love of God. Forgive me, my beloved, and don’t imagine that I want to hurt you in any way. No, absolutely not! I wish that I could explain to you, as to my closest friend and brother in Christ, the feeling of God’s love—that very feeling which I myself for so long and so strongly wanted to receive and did not. These desires were the pangs

of my spiritual birth, and these pangs lasted very long, for more than thirty years. I think that the warfare with sin out of the hope of the future joy of union with the Lord and our Creator was of two kinds. One, of my own war with my nature, and the other was God’s battle. But all this was so mysterious and hidden from me through Providence from on high that I could only begin to understand it afterwards. I was exhausted in the battle with myself, with the raging passions of my flesh, but in the face of this, there remained in me a higher and nobler desire than all my sinful impulses. It gave wings to my soul, and I felt that only this desire could satisfy me and nothing else in the whole world, this eternal, creating force given by the Creator: Love toward God.

“I thirsted to love God with all my heart. But how is one to love? If one is to love God, one has to be worthy of God. But on the contrary, I saw myself to be not only a sinner, but to be persisting in my sins...



“And so it was pleasing to my Lord that I should fall ill, and I became ill. But I had not yet tasted of this love. I fell ill and wept fervently during the time of my illness that I would triumph over my sins, but I did not yet have this love. I was quick to repent not just once or twice. I repented a great many times and received joy, for I saw that sin began to lose its hold over me, so that my soul no longer delighted in sin. Sinful thoughts did not arise in my heart, and my repentance was united with thanksgiving to God.

“The more I suffered, the better I would feel. I felt a powerful longing to receive Communion, and I was given Holy Communion often. After receiving the Holy Mysteries my spirit was winged with unutterable hope in God, and my heart overflowed with thanksgiving to our Lord Jesus Christ. In this immeasurable love of God towards the world in the redemption of the human race was revealed to my wretched self. This love, as it were, began to make itself known in me throughout my whole being with such yearning for the Lord that I did not feel my sufferings...

“I was deeply aware that I was a sinner, but at the same time a fiery hope in the saving love and mercy of the Lord truly uplifted my spirit. Tears of tender-feeling poured forth from my eyes. And what my heart experienced at such moments, I cannot describe. I felt no need of food. I was burdened when others visited me. I was blissful, struck with love for the Lord. I was willing to remain even eternally alone and suffer, if only I could be with the Lord and be filled with love toward Him.”

Finally, only yesterday so to speak, Tatiana Goricheva, who was born in the former Soviet Union in 1947 and who immigrated to France in 1980, published a spiritual diary in 1985 in which she recalled having met a nun Mother Onouphria, whose patient struggle, though different, was just as intense as that described by Saint Mary of Egypt nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

“Mother Onouphria told me that she woke up on the day after taking the habit as a nun, not only without any living sense of the presence of God, but also with a coldness in her soul which told her that her whole faith was only a deception, that there never had been a God and that there never would be one. After taking the habit, Mother Onouphria, formerly a woman with a strong and burning faith, felt that she was an atheist. And this state of feeling abandoned by God lasted for several years. God was absent and the whole world around her changed into a dark, gloomy cave. Mother Onouphria told the *starets* everything. He explained to her that God sends such testing only to particularly strong children, the most elect and those whom He loves best... God wants us to love Him freely and not for any reason, just as He loves us. God as it were raises up those whom He has chosen into His ‘solitude’... This sharing in the suffering of being abandoned

by God was experienced most powerfully by Jesus Christ Himself on Golgotha.”

“But I see,” wrote St. Anatoly of Optina (1894) to another nun, “that you wish to throw off your fashionable shoes with ornaments and your ballroom dress, and this very minute become holy, righteous, to shine right away. No, Matushka, it does not happen that way with spiritual things. Here, patience comes first and foremost; after that comes more patience; and finally all this is crowned by patience once more.”

The Holy New Martyr, Archimandrite Simeon (Kholmogorov), author of the Life of the Elder Gabriel, remembered that the latter used to say: “For a long time, I attempted to break myself, and I couldn’t succeed. Then finally I broke.” But, he added, it unfortunately “remained indefinite what exactly he ‘broke’ within his heart...” If a consensus can be discerned though, among all the strugglers whose testimonies constitute the ascetical literature of the Church, can it not be maintained that what “broke,” for the Elder Gabriel and for all, was the seal of the stone closing tight the tomb of their hearts? Saint John of the Ladder (603) affirmed nothing other than this:

“The man who has withdrawn from the world in order to shake off his own burden of sins should imitate those who sit outside the city among the tombs, and should not cease from his hot and fiery streams of tears and voiceless heartfelt groaning until he, too sees that Jesus has come to him and rolled away the stone of hardness from his heart, and loosed Lazarus, that is to say, our mind, from the bands of sin, and ordered His attendant angels: Loose him from passions, and let him go to blessed dispassion...”

In your patience, possess ye your souls, Jesus promises.



There is no greater evil than egotism. It gives birth to all temptations and troubles, and woe to whomever it entangles—it will deform him! Only the good disciple will make his soul with spiritual beauty. Do not let time pass unfruitfully, for the yarn is being wound, and suddenly we shall hear, *Put your house in order, for you will die; you will live no longer!* (Isa 38:1). Strike egotism with all your might; learn humility. Work with contrition, with mourning, with the fragrance of humility. Only deeds which have humility will be rewarded. The deeds poisoned by egotism and self-will will be taken by the four winds and scattered like rubbish, and we shall be left empty-handed.

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

Ἀνέστη Χριστός, Ἡ Δοκιμασία τοῦ Λογικοῦ

Φώτης Κόντογλου.



Ἡ πίστη τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ δοκιμάζεται μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν τὸ χρυσάφι στὸ χωνευτήρι. Ἄπ' ὅλο τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι τὸ πλεόν ἀπίστευτο πράγμα, ὁλότελα ἀπαράδεκτο ἀπὸ τὸ λογικὸ μας, ἀληθινὸ μαρτύριο γιὰ αὐτό. Μὰ ἴσια-ἴσια, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἓνα πράγμα ὁλότελα ἀπίστευτο, γιὰ τοῦτο χρειάζεται ὁλόκληρη

ἡ πίστη μας γιὰ νὰ τὸ πιστέψουμε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι λέμε συχνὰ πὼς ἔχουμε πίστη, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἔχουμε μονάχα γιὰ ὅσα εἶναι πιστευτὰ ἀπ' τὸ μυαλό μας. Ἀλλὰ τότε, δὲν χρειάζεται ἡ πίστη, ἀφοῦ φτάνει ἡ λογικὴ. Ἡ πίστη χρειάζεται γιὰ τὰ ἀπίστευτα.

Οἱ πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἄπιστοι. Οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ μαθητὰδες τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν δίνανε πίστη στὰ λόγια τοῦ Δασκάλου τους ὅποτε τοὺς ἔλεγε πὼς θ' ἀναστήθῃ, μ' ὅλο τὸ σεβασμὸ καὶ τὴν ἀφοσίωση ποὺ εἶχαν σ' Αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὰ λόγια Του. Καὶ σὰν πήγανε οἱ Μυροφόρες τὴν αὐγὴ στὸ μνήμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ' εἶδανε τοὺς δυὸ ἀγγέλους ποὺ τὶς μιλῆσανε, λέγοντας σ' αὐτὲς πὼς ἀναστήθηκε, τρέξανε νὰ ποῦμε τὴ χαροποιὰ τὴν εἶδηση στοὺς μαθητές, ἐκεῖνοι ὁμως δὲν πιστέψανε τὰ λόγια τους, ἔχοντας τὴν ἰδέα πὼς ἦτανε φαντασίες: *«Καὶ ἐφάνησαν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὡσεὶ λῆρος (τρέλα) τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν, καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς»...*

Βλέπεις καταπάνω σὲ πόση ἀπιστία ἀγωνίσθηκε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός; Καὶ στοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς μαθητὰδες του! Εἶδες μὲ πόση μακροθυμία τὰ ὑπόμεινε ὅλα; Καὶ μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ, ἴσαμε σήμερα οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ μᾶς εἴμαστε χωρισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ μ' ἓνα τοῖχο παγωμένον, τὸν τοῖχο τῆς ἀπιστίας. Ἐκεῖνος ἀνοίγει τὴν ἀγκάλη του καὶ μᾶς καλεῖ κ' ἐμεῖς τὸν ἀρνιόμαστε. Μᾶς δείχνει τὰ τρυπημένα χέρια Του καὶ τὰ πόδια Του, κ' ἐμεῖς λέμε πὼς δὲν τὰ βλέπουμε. Ἐμεῖς ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε στηρίγματα στὴν ἀπιστία μας γιὰ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσουμε τὸν ἐγωϊσμό μας, ποὺ τὸν λέμε Φιλοσοφία καὶ Ἐπιστήμη. Ἡ λέξις Ἀνάσταση δὲν χωρᾶ μέσα στὰ βιβλία τῆς γνώσης μας... Γιατί ἡ γνώση τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίσει ἄλλο τίποτα, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ ἓνα πλῆθος λογισμῶν, ὅχι ὅμως ἐκεῖνο ποὺ γνωρίζεται μὲ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας.

Ναί, ἐκεῖνους ποὺ ἔχουνε αὐτὴ τὴν εὐλογημένη ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας, τοὺς μακάρισε ὁ Κύριος, λέγοντας: *«Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι*

αὐτῶν ἐστὶ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται». Καὶ στὸν Θωμᾶ, ποὺ γύρευε νὰ τὸν ψηλαφήσῃ γιὰ νὰ πιστέψῃ, εἶπε: *«Γιατὶ μὲ εἶδες Θωμᾶ, γιὰ τοῦτο πιστέψες; Μακάριοι εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ δὲν εἶδανε καὶ πιστέψανε».*

Ἄς παρακαλέσουμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μᾶς δώσει αὐτὴ τὴν πλούσια φτώχεια, καὶ τὴν καθαρὴ καρδιά, ὥστε νὰ τὸν δοῦμε ν' ἀναστήνεται γιὰ νὰ ἀναστηθοῦμε κ' ἐμεῖς μαζί του.

Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνηξερῖα (ἡ ἄγνοια) εἶναι ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὴ γνώση: *«Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἄγνοια ἡ ὑπερτέρα τῆς γνώσεως».* Καλότυχοι καὶ τρισκαλότυχοι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τὴν ἔχουνε.

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!



Τὶς διαφορὲς θεωρίες τῶν θεολόγων νὰ τὶς περνᾶτε ἀπὸ τὸ «πατερικὸ κόσκινο». Πρέπει νὰ τὶς κοσκινίζετε μὲ βάση τοὺς Πατέρες καὶ ὅτι εἶναι σκουπίδια ἢ πίτουρα νὰ τὰ πετᾶτε. Να ψάχνετε μὲ βάση τοὺς Πατέρες. Προσεῖτε ἓνα παράδειγμα. Ὑπάρχει τὸ μπακίρι, ὁ μπροῦντζος καὶ ὁ χρυσός.

Ἀκόμη καὶ μπακίρι καλὸ καὶ ἄσχημο, μπροῦντζος καλὸς καὶ ἄσχημος, χρυσὸς 12 καρατίων καὶ χρυσὸς 24 καρατίων. Εσεῖς νὰ διαλέγετε τὸ χρυσὸ τῶν 24 καρατίων. Καὶ τὰ ἄλλα χρειάζονται, ἄλλα ὅλοι νὰ προτιμᾶτε τὸ χρυσό!

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔχουν δίκιο θέλουν καὶ καλὰ καὶ σώνει νὰ ἔχουν ὅλο το δίκιο μὲ τὸ μέρος τους. Κι ἂν δὲν τοὺς φτάνει, τότε δὲν γυρεύουν τὴ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ πηγαίνουν στὰ κοσμικὰ δικαστήρια νὰ τὴ βροῦν.

Ὅποιος δὲ μᾶς πειράζει, νὰ μὴ λέμε ποτέ, «ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὸν πληρώσει», γιατί ὁ Θεὸς πληρώνει πολὺ ἀκριβὰ. Ἀπλῶς νὰ συγχωροῦμε καὶ νὰ μὴ μιλάμε πολὺ. Ὁ Θεός, σ' ἐκεῖνον ποὺ σιωπᾶ, μιλάει περισσότερο καὶ τὸν εὐεργετεῖ.

Πρὶν ἐπιτρέψῃ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ ἔρθῃ μία δοκιμασία, πὲργάστηκε μὲ καλὸ τρόπο, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸν καταλάβαιναν, γι' αὐτὸ μετὰ ἐπέτρεψε τὴν δοκιμασία. Βλέπετε, καὶ ὅταν ἓνα παιδὶ εἶναι ἀνάποδο, στὴν ἀρχὴ ὁ πατέρας του τὸ παίρνει μὲ τὸ καλὸ, τοῦ κάνει τὰ χατίρια, ἀλλά, ὅταν ἐκεῖνο δὲν ἀλλάξῃ, τότε τοῦ φέρεται αὐστηρά, γιὰ νὰ διορθωθῇ. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Θεὸς μερικὲς φορές, ὅταν κάποιος δὲν καταλαβαίνει μὲ τὸ καλὸ, τοῦ δίνει μία δοκιμασία, γιὰ νὰ συνέλθῃ.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος Ἀθωνίτης

Για τους Ήσχατους Καιρούς

Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος.



Ο Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος (ή Στέφανος ο Καρουλίτης) ήταν μία πολύ σημαίνουσα προσωπικότητα της Ορθοδοξίας, πὸν ἔζησε ἐπὶ μισὸ αἰῶνα στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος. Στὴ διάρκεια αὐτῶν τῶν δεκαετιῶν, ὁ μοναχὸς αὐτὸς διακρίθηκε γιὰ τὶς διδακτικὲς του ἀρετές, τὴν ικανότητά του νὰ μεταδίδει τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ πίστη, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ διάφορα σημαντικὰ ζητήματα ποὺ ἀπασχολοῦν

τὸν σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο. Γεννημένος τὸ 1922, κοιμήθηκε τὸν Δεκέμβριο τοῦ 2001 (μὲ τὸ παλαιὸ ἡμερολόγιο, στίς 21 Νοεμβρίου 2001) στὸ Βελιγράδι, σὲ ἡλικία 79 ἐτῶν. Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ἔζησε ἀπὸ τὸ 1950 ἕως τὸ 2000, ἕνα χρόνο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατό του.

Ἐνα θέμα γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μίλησε συχνὰ ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος ὁ Καρουλίτης ἦταν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀφοροῦσε τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ συμφραζόμενα μὲ αὐτό: τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου, τὸν ἀριθμὸ 666, κ.λπ. Δὲν ἦταν λίγοι ποὺ τὸν ρωτοῦσαν γιὰ νὰ μάθουν γύρω ἀπὸ τὰ πολὺπλοκα αὐτὰ ζητήματα. Ὁ καλόγερος ἦταν πάντα πρόθυμος νὰ μεταδώσει τὶς δικές του ἀπόψεις γιὰ τὰ θέματα αὐτά, οἱ ὁποῖες ἔχουν καταγραφεῖ.

Νά, λοιπόν, τί εἶχε πει καὶ γράψει ἡ μεγάλη αὐτὴ μορφή τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας:

«Ὅταν δεῖτε νὰ κατασκευάζουν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν ναὸ τοῦ Σολομώντα, πρέπει νὰ ἐτοιμάσετε τροφίμα γιὰ 3-4 χρόνια, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος ἀλεῦρι... Προτοῦ ἀρχίσουν τὴν κατασκευὴ τοῦ ναοῦ, δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐτοιμάσετε. Ὁ Κύριος θὰ ἐπιτρέψει νὰ κατασκευαστεῖ ὁ ναὸς μόνο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ βέβαιο τέλος τοῦ κόσμου. Πρὶν ἀπὸ αὐτό, εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ τὸ πραγματοποιήσουν, γιατί σ' αὐτὸν θὰ βασιλεύσει ἐκεῖνος ὁ δικὸς τους καταστροφικὸς κατ' ὄνομα βασιλεύς, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ὁποῖου ἔχουν ἀρχίσει ἤδη νὰ τοποθετοῦν ὑπὸ τὴ μορφή τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ 666 σὲ ὄλους ποὺ δὲν βλέπουν ὅτι ἐξαιτίας του τοὺς περιμένουν αἰῶνια βάσανα. Αὐτὸς ὁ καταστροφικὸς τους βασιλεύς θὰ καθίσει καὶ στὸ δικό τους τὸ κεφάλι καὶ δὲν θὰ μποροῦν νὰ τὸν διώξουν. Αὐτὸ θὰ τὸ πράξει ὁ Κύριος ὅταν θὰ ἔρθει γιὰ τὴν καθολικὴ Κρίση.

Προτοῦ τελειώσει ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου, θὰ συμβεῖ καὶ ἕνα ἄλλο σημαντικὸ γεγονός, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο οἱ

σύγχρονοι θεολογικοὶ συγγραφεῖς λίγα ἢ σχεδὸν τίποτε δὲν γράφουν. Οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ θὰ περάσουν στὸν Χριστιανισμό. Φυσικά, ὄχι ὅλοι. Πότε θὰ συμβεῖ αὐτό; Ἡ κατὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου, ὅταν δοῦν στὴν πράξη ὅτι πλανήθηκαν μὲ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο, ἢ πρὶν. Αὐτὸ θὰ μᾶς τὸ δείξει ὁ καιρὸς. Ἐδῶ μπορῶ νὰ πῶ μὲ βεβαιότητα ὅτι αὐτὸ θὰ συμβεῖ καὶ τίποτε ἄλλο παραπέρα».

Σὲ ἐρώτηση διάφορων πιστῶν γιὰ τὸ ἂν ὑπάρχουν σημεῖα τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας καὶ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, ὁ Γέροντας ἐξηγοῦσε:

«Σύμφωνα μὲ τὴ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, αὐτὰ τὰ σημεῖα καὶ οἱ φοβεροὶ προάγγελοι τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι:

- ὁ πολλαπλασιασμὸς τῆς ἀνομίας ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους,
- τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐαγγελίου σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, σὲ ὅλα τα ἔθνη,
- οἱ φοβερὲς φυσικὲς καταστροφές,
- ὁ ἐρχομὸς τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου καὶ
- ὁ ἀγῶνας μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ».

Συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα ποὺ ἀνέφερε ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος ἀπὸ τὰ σημεῖα ποὺ θὰ προηγηθοῦν τοῦ τέλους τοῦ ὑλικοῦ κόσμου:

«Κατὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ἀνομίες θὰ ἀναπτύχθουν στὰ ἀνώτατα ὄριά τους. Θὰ κυριαρχήσει τότε στὸν κόσμο ἡ κακία καὶ τὸ μῖσος. Τότε ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει ἀγάπη, οὔτε ἀλληλοσεβασμὸς. Φυσικά, δὲν θὰ ἐκλείψει τελείως, ἀλλὰ στὴν πλειοψηφία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἡ ἀγάπη θὰ ψυχρανθεῖ. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ ἀλληλομισοῦνται, θὰ ἐνδιαφέρονται μόνο γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό τους καὶ θὰ κοιτάζουν νὰ κάνουν ζημιὰ στὸν πλησίον τους.

Συχνῶς μὲ αὐτά, θὰ ταλαντεύεται ἡ πίστη τους καὶ θὰ πιστέψουν στοὺς ἀπατεῶνες καὶ τοὺς ψευδοπροφήτες. Ἡ ἀνομία στοὺς ἀνθρώπους θὰ κυριαρχήσει σὲ τέτοιο βαθμὸ ποὺ δὲν θὰ ἀντιληφθοῦν τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου, ποὺ ὁ Κύριος θὰ στείλει ὑπὸ μορφή διάφορων φυσικῶν κακῶν, καὶ στὸ τέλος, τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου.

Ὅπως ἔγινε στὸν καιρὸ τοῦ Νῶε, ἔτσι θὰ γίνεῖ καὶ μὲ τὸν ἐρχομὸ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου. Στὸν κόσμο θὰ πληθυνθοῦν ὁ ἡδονισμὸς, ἡ γαστριμαργία καὶ ἡ μέθη, σὲ τόσο βαθμὸ μάλιστα ποὺ ὡς καὶ οἱ θλίψεις καὶ οἱ ἀτυχίες ποὺ θὰ στείλει ὁ Κύριος γιὰ νὰ τοὺς συντεῖσει —πεινά, σεισμούς, ἀσθένειες, καὶ τέλος τὸ φοβερὸ βασανιστήριον τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου στοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ μέθυσαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀκολασία—δὲν θὰ προκαλέσουν καμιά αἴσθησι φόβου καὶ ἀνάγκης γιὰ μετάνοια».

Οἱ ἐρμηνεῖες ποὺ ἔδωσε ὁ Γέροντας στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη, καὶ συγκεκριμένα στὴν προσωπικότητα τοῦ

Ἀντίχριστου καὶ τὸν «ἀριθμὸ τοῦ Θηρίου», δηλ. τὸ 666, ἔχουν συζητηθεῖ πολύ. Οἱ ἐριμνεῖες αὐτὲς βασιζονται ἀποκλειστικὰ στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη καὶ εἶναι ἀπολύτως συμβατὲς μετὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας. Νὰ τί ἐπακριβῶς ἀνέφερε ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος:

«Τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ κακοῦ κρύβεται μετὰ μεγάλη μυστικότητα ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἐργάζονται πάνω του—καὶ εἶναι γνωστὸ ποιοὶ εἶναι—κάνουν τὸ πᾶν γιὰ νὰ γεννηθεῖ καὶ νὰ μεγαλώσει αὐτὸ τὸ δημιουργημὰ τοῦ κακοῦ μέσα σὲ μεγάλη μυστικότητα, νὰ ἀνατραφεῖ μετὰ τίς μεθόδους τοῦ Σατανᾶ, δηλαδή νὰ ἀναδειχθεῖ στὴν ἀρχὴ ὡς πολὺ καλός, κόλακας, εὐσεβής, μαθημένος στὴ νηστεία, νὰ προστατεύει τοὺς Χριστιανούς, δηλαδή νὰ παραλλαχθεῖ ὅσο τὸ δυνατὸν καλύτερα καὶ νὰ ντυθεῖ τὴν προβιὰ μέχρι νὰ κυριαρχήσει. Τότε θὰ πετάξει τὴν προσωπίδα καὶ θὰ δεῖξει τόση κακία ὅση δὲν εἶδε ποτὲ ἢ ἀνθρωπότητα.

Αὐτὴ τὴν κακία του θὰ τὴ δοκιμάσουν πρῶτα οἱ Ἑβραῖοι, ποὺ τὸν ἔφεραν στὴν ἐξουσία. Θὰ προσπαθήσουν νὰ τὸν ἀνατρέψουν ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ μπορέσουν. Μόλις τότε θὰ ἀναγνωρίσουν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ μόλις τότε θὰ βγάλουν τὸ προσωπίδι ἢ τὸ βέλο ποὺ φοροῦσαν τόσες χιλιάδες χρόνια καὶ θὰ ἀπευθυνθοῦν στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ θὰ κλάψουν γι' αὐτὸν ὅπως κλαίει χήρα μητέρα ὅταν κηδεύει τὸν μοναχογιό της. Μόλις τότε θὰ δεχθοῦν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ καὶ θὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ».

Ὁ Γέροντας εἶπε ἐπίσης, σχετικὰ μετὰ τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου:

«Μόλις ἀρχίσει τὸ χτίσιμο τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Σολομώντα, τότε εἶναι ἤδη βέβαιο ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος βρῖσκεται ἐκεῖ καὶ ὅτι μᾶς ἔμειναν ἀκόμη μόνο μερικὰ χρόνια ζωῆς στὴ Γῆ. Τότε δὲν μᾶς μένει τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ νὰ συγκεντρώσουμε τροφή, ἢ ὅποια κατόπιν θὰ λείψει τελείως, ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ ἐκείνους ποὺ πῆραν τὴ σφραγίδα τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸ 666. Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες λένε ὅτι εἰδικὰ αὐτοὶ θὰ αἰσθανθοῦν μεγαλύτερη πείνα καὶ ὅτι ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἔλλειψης τροφῆς θὰ φάνε πτώματα ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα θὰ πέφτουν σὲ ὄλες τίς μεριές. Ὅσοι δὲν δεχθοῦν τὴ σφραγίδα καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸ, μετὰ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ κρατηθοῦν καὶ δὲν θὰ φάνε πτώματα».



Ὁ καθένας μας ἔχει τρεῖς χαρακτῆρες. Αὐτὸν ποὺ δείχνει, αὐτὸν ποὺ ἔχει, καὶ αὐτὸν ποὺ νομίζει ὅτι ἔχει...

Ἀνόνημος

Πρὶν τὴν Προδοσία ἢ Συκοφαντία—Μετὰ τὴν Προδοσία ἢ Παλιγγενεσία

Γράφει ὁ Δρ. Κωνσταντῖνος Βαρδάκας.

Ἦ Ἑλλάς, Ἑλλάς, Ἑλλάς χώρα τῶν μεγάλων Ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῶν μεγάλων προδοτῶν. Ποιὰ θεόσταλη μοῖρα σὲ ἔστησε πάνω σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν βράχο, μέσα στὴν θάλασσα, νὰ καμαρώνεις γιὰ ἀνδραγαθήματα καὶ νὰ κλαῖς γιὰ πικρὲς προδοσίες.

Ὁ λογισμὸς ἀρπάζεται μετὰ γρηγοράδα μέσα στὸ παρελθὸν ἄθελά του, στέκεται καὶ σημαδεύει τὸν Ἐφιάλτη στὶς Θερμοπύλες, τὸν Πήλιο Γούση στὸ Σοῦλι, τὸν Νενέκο στὴν Πελοπόννησο καὶ ἀποτροπιάζει σὲ τόσα ἄλλα ἱστορικὰ βδελύγματα. Ἀγανακτεῖ καὶ μετὰ σπαράζει ὅταν ἀντικρίζει τὰ κομματιασμένα Σπαρτιάτικα κορμιά, ὅταν βλέπει τίς τιμημένες Σουλιώτισσες πεσμένες κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ Ζάλογγο, τὴν φυλακὴ τοῦ Κολοκοτρώνη, τὴν ἐπαιτεία τοῦ Νικηταρά, τὴν δολοφονία τοῦ Καποδίστρια, τὸ ξεπάστρεμα τοῦ Καραϊσκάκη, τὴν πονεμένη Βόρεια Ἑπείρο, τὴν προδομένη Κύπρο μετὰ τὴν καθαγιασμένη μορφὴ τοῦ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπου Κύπρου Κυπριανοῦ, τὴν τετραετὴ πάλη τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κύπρου ἐναντία στοὺς Βρετανούς καὶ τοὺς ἐγγχώριους συνεργάτες τους, ποὺ ἀνέδειξε πληθώρα ἡρωικῶν καὶ μαρτυρικῶν μορφῶν ὅπως ἦταν ὁ ἔφηβος Εὐαγόρας Παλληκαρίδης, ὁ Μιχαλάκης Καραολῆς, ὁ Ἄνδρέας Δημητρίου, ὁ Μάρκος Δράκος, ὁ Γρηγόρης Αὐξεντίου, ὁ Στυλιανὸς Λένας καὶ... πολλοὺς ἄλλους ἀκόμη.

Στοὺς χρόνους ποὺ ἄνοιξα τὰ μάτια μου στὴν ζωὴ μαρτύρησαν τὰ παλληκάρια αὐτὰ καὶ περιμένουμε σήμερα ὅλοι ζωντανοὶ καὶ νεκροὶ νὰ ἀνοίξει ὁ φάκελος τῆς προδοσίας τοῦ '74, ὄχι μόνο γιὰ νὰ συναπαντήσουμε τοὺς προδότες ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ὑποδεχοῦμε τοὺς νέους Ἐθνομάρτυρες ποὺ προσμένουν τὴν ἀνθρώπινη δικαίωση γιατί τὴν Θεϊκὴ τὴν ἔλαβαν πρὸ πολλοῦ. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ γιὰ λίγο σταματᾶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ τὸ μυαλὸ μὴ ἀντέχοντας τέτοιους πόνους ἐθνικῶν θυμῆσεων. Μετὰ τὴν παύση αὐτὴ παίρνει χρόνον καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ κατανοήσει τὰ ἀναπάντεχα δράματα τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ἀλλὰ στὶς σκέψεις δὲν ὑπάρχει χωροχρόνος καὶ τότε ὁ λογισμὸς ἐκτοξεύεται πάλι μετὰ ταχύτητα φωτὸς καὶ προσγειώνεται στὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὄδυμοῦ τῆς καθημερινῆς Ἑλληνικῆς πραγματικότητας. Εἶναι ἐκείνη ἡ καθοριστικὴ στιγμή ποὺ δὲν ἀναρωτᾶτε μόνο ὁ λογισμὸς, ἀλλὰ βοᾶ σύγκορμα ἢ ψυχὴ—γιατί Θεέ μου τέτοια διαχρονικὴ προδοσία στὸ γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων;

Ὅμως ἡ ἀπάντηση ἔχει ἤδη δοθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Θεό: «Οἱ ἀληθινοὶ ἥρωες σφυρηλατοῦνται ὡς τὸ καθαρὸ χρυσάφι μόνο μέσα στὸ καμίνι τῶν πειρασμῶν τῆς συκοφαντίας καὶ τῆς προδοσίας».

Τὰ χρόνια πού πέρασαν ἐπάχυναν ὄχι μόνο τὰ κορμιά τῶν Νεοελλήνων, ἀλλά ἐμαλάκωσαν σφόδρα καί τὴν διάνοιά τους. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἀπέβη τραγικὸ γιατί στερήθηκε ἡ ράτσα μας ἀπὸ ἥρωικὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἀνώτερα ἰδανικά, ἐνῶ τὴν ἴδια στιγμή γέμισε μὲ ἀποψυχωμένες καὶ καταφρονημένες φιγούρες, ἔρμαια σὲ χέρια προδοτῶν καὶ συκοφαντῶν.

Ἔτσι τοὺς τελευταίους τρεῖς χρόνους ζήσαμε γιὰ τὰ καλὰ στὸ πετσί πρωτόγνωρη καὶ γενικευμένη συκοφαντία ἀπὸ κύκλους μέσα καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πατρίδα μας. Δὲν πέρασε πολὺς καιρὸς καὶ ἔπεσε ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν μας καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸ παιδί τῆς συκοφαντίας δηλ. ἡ ἐπαίσχυντη Προδοσία. Τώρα κλαῖμε, πονᾶμε καὶ θὰ πεινᾶμε, μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο ὅμως πλησιάζει ἡ ἱστορικὴ συγκυρία πού θὰ γίνουμε Κύριοι τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῆς Πατρίδας μας, μὲ τὴν πλήρη κατανόηση τῶν ὄσων θὰ συμβοῦν ἱστορικά. Σήμερα εἴμασθε πνευματικὰ κληῖρες καὶ γευόμασθε Θεία Χάριτι τὸ καλύτερο φάρμακο ἴασης καὶ αὐτογνωσίας πού δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ ἡ ἐπίγνωση τῶν συνεπειῶν τῆς ἀτομικῆς, οἰκογενειακῆς καὶ κοινωνικῆς προδοσίας τῶν ζωῶν μας ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους καὶ συστήματα πού ἐμπιστευθήκαμε.

Εἶναι λοιπὸν χρήσιμοι οἱ συκοφάντες καὶ οἱ προδότες ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ καταδικαστέοι; Μήπως λειτουργοῦν καὶ σὰν ἱστορικοὶ καταλύτες σὲ γεγονότα Ἐθνικῆς Παλιγγενεσίας; Τὸ σίγουρο εἶναι ὅτι ὁ πόνος καὶ ἡ καταστροφή πού ἐπιφέρουν ξυπνάει τὸν λαὸ ἀπὸ τὴν λήθη καὶ τὴν ἀποβλακωμάρα του.

Αὐτὸς λοιπὸν ὁ ἀγουροξυπνημένος λαὸς σήμερα ἐκφράζεται μὲ ἓνα κοινὸ ἐρώτημα. (Μὰ δὲν θὰ βρεθεῖ κάποιος Ἄνδρας, κάποιος μπροστάρης γιὰ νὰ σταματήσει αὐτὴν τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὸν κατήφορο;). Καὶ φυσικὰ ὁ ἓνας ὑποδεικνύει τὸν ἄλλον ἀναπαυόμενοι ὅτι δῆθεν κάναμε τὸ καθῆκον μας. Ἐνῶ γνωρίζουμε ὅτι ὅλοι σὰν Ἔθνος Ἑλλήνων βρεθήκαμε ἀναπάντεχα μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι τοῦ Νοητοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ Πλάτωνος, παρόλο αὐτὰ ἀποφεύγουμε νὰ βάλουμε πλάτες ἀντιστήριξης ὁ ἓνας μὲ τὸν ἄλλον γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ βγοῦμε στὸ ξέφωτο τῆς Λευτεριάς.

Ὅπως ζητᾶμε αἷμα ἐπειγόντως, ἔτσι καὶ αὐτὲς τὶς στιγμὲς τῆς ἀνείπωτης θλίψης ἀπαιτεῖται κοινὸ ἥρωικὸ φρόνημα, ἀρχοντικὴ λεβεντιά καὶ ἀνθρώπινη ἀλληλεγγύη γιὰ νὰ πυροδοτήσουν τὸ καλὸ τμήμα τοῦ γενετικοῦ ὕλικου μας σὲ πράξεις ἀνδραγαθίας καὶ πνευματικῆς ἀνάτασης.

Ἐνα καλὸ μάτι μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγνωση τῆς Παγκόσμιας Ἱστορίας βλέπει ὅτι ὁ Ἅγιος Θεὸς δὲν εὐλογεῖ τὸ ἄδικο καὶ τὴν συκοφαντία πόσο μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν προδοσία πού τὴν γεύθηκε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεάνθρωπος, Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Ἄρα οἱ προδότες εἶναι ἀπὸ τώρα ἤδη τελειωμένοι πνευματικά. Καὶ φυσικὰ μὲ τὰ ἀργύρια τῆς προδοσίας ἀγοράζονται μόνο νεκροταφεῖα, ὅπως ὁ ἀγρὸς τοῦ Κεραμῆως στὰ Εὐαγγέλια τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδας.

Οἱ σημερινοὶ ἐξουσιαστὲς μιλάνε γιὰ ἀνάπτυξη καὶ πρόοδο, δὲν γνωρίζουν ὅμως ἓνα βασικὸ σημεῖο, ὅτι γιὰ νὰ λειτουργήσῃ ὁ Ρωμηὸς χρειάζεται πρῶτα νὰ γλυκάνει τὸ μέσα του καὶ νὰ ἀποτινάξῃ τὸν ἱστὸ τῆς πνευματικῆς καὶ οἰκονομικῆς σκλαβιάς.

Δὲν θὰ κρατήσῃ πολὺ αὐτὴ ἡ περίοδος τῆς θλίψης

γιατί ὁ Ἕλληνας βιώνει μὲ φιλότιμο τὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς Λευτεριάς καὶ ἀποτροπιάζει στὸ βίωμα τῆς προδοσίας. Τὰ ψέματα τελείωσαν καὶ τώρα ἀρχίζουν οἱ ἀλήθειες.

Αὐτὴ ἡ προδοσία εἶναι πού θὰ ὀδηγήσῃ τὸν κατατρεγμένο Ρωμηὸ στὴν δευτέρη καὶ τελικὴ πνευματικὴ ἔξοδο τοῦ Μεσολογγίου, ἀλλὰ τώρα τέτοια θὰ εἶναι ἡ ὁρμή του

πού θὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσῃ πολὺ μακριὰ καὶ ἀλώβητο νὰ χορεῦει Ζεῖμπέκικο Κύπρου, Κυπριακὴ σούστα, χορὸ τοῦ δρεπανιοῦ, Τάτσια ἢ Σίτα, Μασιέρι (Μαχαίρι ἢ Τσιάκκιν), Καντήλα (Ποτήρι), Καρσιλαμὰ Κύπρου, Καλαματιανό, Ἡπειρώτικο, Κρητικὸ, Ποντιακὸ, Μακεδονικὸ καὶ Μπάλο σὲ σχηματισμοὺς τεράστιων ἀνθρώπινων κύκλων μπροστὰ στὶς ὑψηλὲς θύρες τῆς Τρόφου καὶ Μάνας Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας, στὸ μεγαλύτερο πανηγύρι Παλιγγενεσίας τοῦ Ἐθνους καὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μας.

Πάντα τὰ κλοπιμαῖα γυρίζουν πίσω στοὺς φυσικοὺς ἰδιοκτῆτες τους καὶ τότε αὐτοὶ χαίρονται γιατί θὰ τὰ ἀποδώσουν στὰ παιδιά τους καὶ στὴν προκειμένη περίπτωση θὰ εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη πνευματικὴ κληρονομία πρὸς αὐτά.



Προτιμῶ ἀνθρώπο ἁμαρτωλό, πού ἀναγνωρίζει τὸ σφάλμα του καὶ ταπεινώνεται, παρὰ ἐνάρετο μὲ αὐταρέσκεια.

Ἀββᾶς Σαρματίας

Ἡ Πόλις Ἐάλω: Γιατί Ἄραγε;

Πρωτ. π. Γεωργίου Δορμπαράκη.



Ἡ 29^η Μαΐου εἶναι ἡ ἐπέτειος τῆς τραγικῆς ἡμέρας γιὰ τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Ἑλληνισμό, τῆς ἀλώσεως τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους τὸ 1453. Ἡ χιλιόχρονη

αὐτοκρατορία ἔπεσε τότε καὶ παραδόθηκε βορὰ στὰ βάρβαρα στίφη τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν, ποὺ γέμισαν μὲ τὰ πτώματα τῶν Χριστιανῶν τὰ περισσότερα σημεῖα τῆς μεγάλης Πόλεως.

«Καὶ ἡ γῆ σὲ μερικὰ μέρη δὲν φαινόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς νεκρούς», μὰς λέει ὁ γνωστὸς ἱστορικὸς τῆς ἀλώσεως Γεώργιος Φραντζῆς στὸ «Χρονικόν» του. Γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει: «Ἦταν φοβερὸ θέαμα καὶ ἄκουγες θρήνους πολλοὺς, ποικίλους καὶ ἔβλεπες ἀμέτρητους ἑξανδραποδισμοὺς εὐγενῶν, ἀρχοντισσῶν καὶ παρθένων καὶ μοναχῶν, ποὺ τὶς ἔσερναν ἀλύπητα οἱ Τούρκοι ἀπὸ τὰ ροῦχα καὶ τὰ μαλλιά καὶ τὶς κοσιίδες ἔξω ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκκλησίες, ἐνῶ ἔκλαιαν καὶ ὀδύρονταν... Ἔβλεπες τὸ θεῖο αἷμα καὶ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ χύνεται στὴ γῆ καὶ νὰ πετιέται...».

Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ περισσότερο τραγικὸς στὴν περιγραφή του γιὰ τὴν ἄλωση εἶναι καὶ ὁ πρῶτος μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος. Σὲ θρηνητικὴ του ἀναφορὰ γιὰ τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκεῖνη γράφει: «Θυμηθεῖτε πόσο μεγάλο καὶ πόσο ἐκλεκτὸ ὑπῆρξε τὸ γένος μας. Γιατί ἦταν σοφὸ, ἔνδοξο, γενναῖο, φρόνιμο, ἡρωϊκό. Ὑπέταξε ὀλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη σ' ἓνα βασίλειο καὶ μὲ τὸν ἐνάρετο μάλιστα ζῆλο του ἀπορρόφησε ὀλόκληρη γενικὰ τὴν ἀρετὴ, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὸ σφουγγάρι τὰ νερά. Ἀλλὰ τώρα, ἀλλοίμονο γιὰ τὰ κακά! Χάθηκε τὸ πᾶν, ἀφοῦ ἔπεσε στὰ χέρια τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη, ποὺ ἡ ἀνάμνησή της καὶ μόνον μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς κάνει νὰ ξεσπάσουμε σὲ κραυγὲς πόνου καὶ γοερὰ κλάματα καὶ νὰ ψυχορραγήσουμε.

Πράγματι, ὅταν κυριεύτηκε ἡ Πόλη, βεβηλώθηκαν τὰ θυσιαστήρια, καταπατήθηκαν τὰ ἱερὰ σκεύη καὶ ἀντικείμενα, χύθηκε πολὺ αἷμα, ἀτιμάσθηκαν μοναχές, βιάσθηκαν παρθένες, ἀποκεφαλίστηκαν βρέφη, φονεύτηκαν μὲ τὰ μαχαίρια τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἄρχοντες, ἱερεῖς, ἄντρες, γυναῖκες, ἄνθρωποι κάθε ἡλικίας. Ἀλλοίμονο σ' ἐμένα τὸν ταλαίπωρο καὶ ἄθλιο! Ποιοὺς εἶναι ἱκανὸς νὰ ἐξιστορήσει κατὰ τρόπο δραματικὸ τὸ μεγάλο αὐτὸ πάθημα καὶ νὰ ἀναγγεῖλει στοὺς μεταγενέστερους τὴ συμφορὰ; Ἀλλοίμονο! Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ βασιλικὴ πομπὴ καὶ παράταξη; Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ στρατιωτικὴ παράταξη

τῶν ἀνακτόρων; Ποῦ εἶναι τὸ τόσο μεγάλο πλῆθος τῶν ἀρχόντων; Ποῦ εἶναι τὰ διδακτήρια τῆς σοφίας; Ἀλλοίμονο σ' ἐμένα τὸν δυστυχημένο! Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ πατριαρχικὴ διοίκηση; Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ ὁμορφιὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τόσο πολυπληθὴς καὶ τόσο ἐκλεκτὸς χορὸς τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς καὶ μοναχικῆς τάξεως; Ὁ Μωάμεθ ἔξαφάνισε τὰ πάντα. Καὶ τὰ κακὰ δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνον στὴ Βασιλεύουσα, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς μικρότερες πόλεις. Καὶ σ' αὐτές μάλιστα περισσότερα καὶ πάρα πολὺ φοβερά».

Πέρα ὅμως ἀπὸ τὶς τραγικὲς περιγραφές τῆς ἀποφράδος ἐκεῖνης ἡμέρας, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἰδιαίτερος προξενεῖ ἐντύπωση σὲ ὅλα τὰ κείμενα τῆς ἐποχῆς, εἶναι ἡ ἐριμνεῖα τὴν ὁποία δίνουν ὅλοι οἱ συγγραφεῖς τους γιὰ τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς πτώσεως. Οὔτε λίγο οὔτε πολὺ ὡς αἴτιο στὸ νὰ χαθεῖ ἡ Βασιλεύουσα θεωροῦνται κυρίως οἱ ἁμαρτίες τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Λέει πάλι ὁ ἅγιος Γεννάδιος στὸν ἴδιο θρήνο ποὺ ἀναφέραμε: «Καὶ ταῦτα πάντα διὰ τὰ ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν! Καὶ ὅλα τοῦτα ἔγιναν ἕξαιτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν μας. Ὅταν δὲ στρέψω τὴν προσοχή μου σ' αὐτά, γίνομαι ἔξαλλος, ἡ ψυχὴ μου ταράζεται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα μου παθαίνει ἵλιγγο».

Καὶ ὁ προαναφερθεὶς Γεώργιος Φραντζῆς περιγράφοντας τὶς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς τῆς Πόλης πρὶν τὴν τελικὴ πτώση, σημειώνει: «Διέταξε λοιπὸν ὁ βασιλεὺς, μαζί μὲ τὶς ἅγιες καὶ σεπτές εἰκόνες καὶ τὰ ἅγια λείψανα, ἱερεῖς, ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ μοναχοί, γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιὰ, νὰ περιφέρονται μὲ δάκρυα στὰ τεῖχη τῆς πόλεως καὶ νὰ ψάλλουν τὸ Κύριε ἐλέησον καὶ νὰ ἱκετεύουν τὸν Θεὸ νὰ μὴ μᾶς παραδώσει γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας στὰ χέρια ἐχθρῶν ἀνόμων καὶ ἀποστατῶν καὶ πονηροτάτων σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, ἀλλὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθεῖ σάν κληρονόμους τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ».

Ἡ Πόλη λοιπὸν ἔπεσε, κατὰ παραχώρηση Θεοῦ, λόγω τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ ἐκτίμηση καὶ ἀξιολόγηση ποὺ ἔκαναν οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ καὶ οἱ κοντινοὶ στὰ γεγονότα ἱστορικοί. Κι εἶναι τοῦτο ἓνα ἀξιοθαύμαστο γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς νεώτερους γεγονός, γιατί δείχνει μὲ πολλὴ καθαρότητα ὅτι ἡ πίστη γιὰ τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς δὲν ἦταν κάτι τὸ θεωρητικὸ οὔτε κάτι τὸ ξεπερασμένο. Ἀποτελοῦσε τὸν ἄξονα τῆς ζωῆς τους, ἀφοῦ πάνω σ' αὐτὸ ἔκριναν τὴν ὁποιαδήποτε σκέψη καὶ ἐνέργειά τους.

Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια μιὰ χιλιόχρονη αὐτοκρατορία ἔκανε μιὰ μεγαλειώδη πορεία πάνω στὴ γῆ—καὶ μὲ τὶς μελανὲς βεβαίως σελίδες της—καθὼς τρεφόταν καθημερινὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Οὐρανό. Κι ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ παρέκκλιση ἀπὸ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἦλθε τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα: ἡ ὑποταγὴ στὸν ἐχθρό. Μὲ σκοπὸ βεβαίως τὴ δημιουργία συνθηκῶν μετανοίας καὶ ἐπανόδου στὸν ὀρθὸ δρόμο.

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ σπεύσουμε νὰ εἰρωνευθοῦμε τὴ σκέψη καὶ τὴν αἴσθηση τῶν προγόνων μας αὐτῶν

ἔμεῖς οἱ νεώτεροι, ποὺ ἔχουμε συνηθίσει νὰ βλέπουμε τὴν ἱστορία μόνο ὀριζόντια καὶ ἄσχετα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνέργεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ τοῦτο γιατί ἡ δική μας θεώρηση εἶναι θεώρηση μυωπική, ποὺ προϋποθέτει ἀπιστία ἢ τὸ καλύτερο ὀλιγοπιστία στὸν Θεό. Ἄν δηλαδὴ πιστεύσουμε ὅτι ἡ ἱστορία γράφεται μόνον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κάτω ἀπὸ τυχαῖες συνθήκες, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει ἡ παρέμβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε ἀπλῶς ἐπιβεβαιώνουμε ὅτι ζοῦμε καὶ ἔμεῖς «ὡς ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ». Καὶ ὅπως δὲν ἔχουμε τὴν ὄραση τῶν πραγμάτων ποὺ διδαχθήκαμε νὰ ἔχουμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό.

Μέσα στὰ πλαίσια λοιπὸν τῆς Χριστιανικῆς πίστεως ἡ ἐκτίμηση τῶν Βυζαντινῶν ὅτι ἡ Πόλις ἔπεσε ἐξαιτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τους ἡχεῖ... πολὺ Χριστιανικά. Θὰ ἔλεγε μάλιστα κανεὶς ὅτι ἡ κρίση τους αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖ κρίση προφητική, ἀφοῦ παρόμοια ἀξιολογοῦσαν τὰ πράγματα γιὰ τὸν Ἰσραηλιτικὸ βεβαίως λαό, τὸν ἐκλεκτὸ θεωρούμενο τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ οἱ σταλμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ προφήτες. Ὅλοι ἀσφαλῶς γνωρίζουμε ὅτι κάθε ἀπομάκρυνση τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ὑποταγὴ του σὲ ξένους ἐχθρικοὺς λαοὺς, μὲ ἀναρίθμητες συμφορὲς καὶ καταστροφές. Κι ὁ σταλμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ προφήτης ποὺ παρουσιαζόταν σὲ κάθε τέτοια κρίσιμη γιὰ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ στιγμή, ἐρμηνεύε τα πράγματα ἀκριβῶς ἔτσι: ὅτι ἡ καταστροφὴ ὀφείλετο στὶς ἁμαρτίες τοῦ λαοῦ, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ διέξοδος ἦταν ἡ μετάνοια καὶ ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὸν Θεό.

Ἡ τραγικὴ ἐπέτειος τῆς 29^{ης} Μαΐου δὲν πρέπει νὰ εἶναι μόνον ἀφορμὴ γιὰ ὄξυνση τῆς ἱστορικῆς μας μνήμης, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ παραδειγματισμὸ καὶ διδασχὴ. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἂν καὶ ἔμεῖς παρουσιάζουμε στὴ ζωὴ μας φαινόμενα ἀπομάκρυνσης ἀπὸ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ—καὶ δυστυχῶς σὲ ἓνα μεγάλο ποσοστὸ δὲν τὰ παρουσιάζουμε σὲ πολλὰ ἐπίπεδα;—τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο μὲ τὶς προγενέστερες ἐποχές: ὁ Θεὸς θὰ παραχωρήσει, ὡς συνέπεια τῆς ἀνορθόδοξης ζωῆς μας, νὰ ὑποστοῦμε καταστροφές. Ἴσως θὰ πρέπει νὰ δοῦμε καὶ τὴν κρίση ποὺ περνᾶμε σήμερα ὡς κοινωνία, ὡς κράτος, ὡς ἄτομα κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν παραπάνω ὀπτική. **Ὅποτε καὶ ἡ διέξοδος ἀποτελεῖ μονόδρομο: ἡ γνήσια μετάνοια καὶ ἐπιστροφή μας στὸν Θεό.**



Πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἀρετές, ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ πρέπει ν' ἀποκτήσῃ ταπεινοφροσύνη. Αὐτὴν ὑπέδειξε πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα ὁ Θεὸς Διδάσκαλος. «*Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι—μᾶς εἶπε—ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*». Ποιοὺς ὀνομάζει πτωχοὺς τῷ πνεύματι; Τοὺς ταπεινόφρονες βεβαίως...

Ἀββᾶς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θηβαῖος

Ἡ Κασσιανή

Κωστῆς Παλαμᾶς (1859-1943), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἡ Κασσιανὴ καὶ τὸ Ἔργο της», τοῦ Παναγιώτη Θ. Παπαθεοδώρου, Θεολόγου –Λυκειάρχῃ.

Ἡ ἑρμηνεία τοῦ τροπαρίου τῆς Κασσιανῆς ἀπὸ τὸν Κ. Παλαμᾶ εἶναι ἡ πλέον λογοτεχνική. Συνδυάζει μεγάλη ποιητικότητα καὶ προσήλωση στὸ πρωτότυπο. Τὸ ποίημα ἀπὸ αἰσθητικὴ ἄποψη εἶναι ἄψογο. Ὁ Παλαμᾶς πρόσεξε ὅλα τα συναισθηματικὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κειμένου καὶ τὰ ἀπέδωσε μὲ τὸν καλύτερο τρόπο. Μετέφρασε τὸ ἰδιόμελο σὲ 8 τετραστίχες στροφές μὲ ἱαμβικὸ μέτρο καὶ πλεκτὴ ὁμοιοκαταληξία.

Κύριε, γυναίκα ἁμαρτωλή, πολλά,
πολλά, θολά, βαριά τὰ κριματά μου.
Μά, ὦ Κύριε, πῶς ἡ θεότης Σου μιᾶ
μέσ' στὴν καρδιά μου!

Κύριε, προτοῦ Σὲ κρῦψ' ἡ ἐντάφια γῆ
ἀπὸ τὴ δροσανγὴ λουλούδια πῆρα
κι ἀπ' τῆς λατρείας τὴν τρισβαθὴ πηγὴ
Σοῦ φέρνω μύρα.

Οἶστρος μὲ σέρνει ἀκολασίας... Νυχτιά,
σκοτάδι ἀφέγγαρο, ἄναστρο μὲ ζώνει,
τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἁμαρτίας φωτιά
μὲ καίει, μὲ λιώνει.

Ἐσὺ ποὺ ἀπὸ τὰ πέλαα τὰ νερὰ
τὰ ὑψώνεις νέφη, πάρε τα, Ἔρωτά μου,
κυλᾶνε, εἶναι ποτάμια φλογερὰ
τὰ δάκρυά μου.

Γύρε σ' ἐμέ. Ἡ ψυχὴ πῶς πονεῖ!
Δέξου με Ἐσὺ ποὺ δέχτηκες καὶ γείραν
ἄφραστα ὡς ἐδῶ κάτω οἱ οὐρανοί.
καὶ σάρκα ἐπῆραν.

Στ' ἄχραντά Σου τὰ πόδια, βασιλιᾶ
μου Ἐσὺ θὰ πέσω καὶ θὰ στὰ φιλήσω,
καὶ μὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου τὰ μαλλιά
θὰ στὰ σφουγγίσω.

Γ' ἄκουσεν ἡ Εὐᾶ μέσ' στὸ ἀποσπερνὸ
τῆς παράδεισος φῶς ν' ἀντιχτυπᾶνε,
κι ἄλαφιασμένη κρῦφτηκε... Πονῶ,
σῶσε, ἔλεος κάνε.

Ψυχοσῶστ', οἱ ἁμαρτίες μου λαός,
Τὰ ἀξειδιάλυτα ποῖδες θὰ ξεδιάλυση;
Ἀμέτρητό Σου τὸ ἔλεος, ὁ Θεός!
Ἄβυσσο ἡ κρίση.

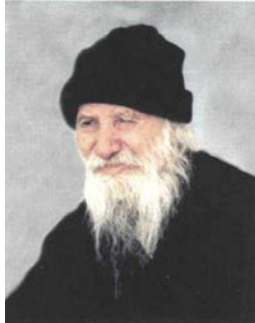


Δὲν θέλω μὲ τὸ φόβο τοῦ θανάτου νὰ πλησιάσεις τὸ Θεό. Θέλω μὲ τὴν πολλὴ ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτὸν νὰ τὸ κάνεις. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀνώτερο, παιδί μου.

Γέροντας Πόρφυριος Κουσοκαλύβιτης

«Παχεία Γαστήρ Λεπτὸν Οὐ Τίκει Νόον»

Τοῦ Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου (+1991), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Βίος καὶ Λόγος», ἐκδ. Τεράς Μόνης Χρυσοπηγῆς, Χανιά 2003.



Δὲν γίνεστε ἅγιοι κυνηγώντας τὸ κακό. Ἄστε τὸ κακό. Νὰ κοιτάξετε πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸ κι αὐτὸ θὰ σᾶς σώσει. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ κάνει ἅγιο τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ λατρεία πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ἡ ὁποία δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφραστεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ... Καὶ προσπαθεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ κάνει ἀσκήσεις, νὰ

κάνει τέτοια πράγματα καὶ νὰ καταπονεῖ τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Κανεὶς ἀσκητὴς δὲν ἄγιασε χωρὶς ἀσκήσεις. Κανεὶς δὲν μπόρεσε ν' ἀνέλθει στὴν πνευματικότητα χωρὶς ν' ἀσκηθεῖ. Πρέπει νὰ γίνονται ἀσκήσεις. Ἀσκησι εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες, οἱ ἀγρυπνίες κ.λπ., ἀλλὰ ὄχι μὲ βία. Ὅλα νὰ γίνονται μὲ χαρὰ. Δὲν εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες ποὺ θὰ κάνουμε, δὲν εἶναι οἱ προσευχές, εἶναι τὸ δόσιμο, ὁ ἔρωτας γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ τὰ πνευματικά. Ὑπάρχουν πολλοὶ ποὺ τὰ κάνουνε αὐτὰ ὄχι γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ ἀλλὰ γιὰ ἄσκησι, γιὰ ὠφέλεια σωματική. Ὅμως οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὸ κάνουνε γιὰ ψυχική ὠφέλεια, γιὰ τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ὠφελεῖται πολὺ, δὲν ἀρρωσταίνει. Πολλὰ καλὰ ἔρχονται.

Μέσα στὴν ἄσκησι, τὶς μετάνοιες, τὶς ἀγρυπνίες καὶ τὶς ἄλλες κακουχίες εἶναι καὶ ἡ νηστεία. «Παχεία γαστήρ λεπτὸν οὐ τίκει νόον». Ἐγὼ τὸ γνωρίζω αὐτὸ ἀπ' τοὺς Πατέρες. Ὅλα τὰ πατερικὰ βιβλία μιλοῦν γιὰ τὴ νηστεία. Οἱ Πατέρες τονίζουν νὰ μὴν τρώμε δυσκολοχώνευτα φαγητὰ ἢ λιπαρὰ καὶ παχιά, γιὰτὶ κάνουν κακὸ στὸ σῶμα ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ψυχή. Λένε ὅτι τὸ προβατάκι τρώει τὰ χορταράκια τῆς γῆς κι εἶναι τόσο ἡσυχό. Εἶδατε ποὺ λένε, «σὰν τὸ πρόβατο». Ἐνῶ ὁ σκύλος ἢ ἡ γάτα κι ὄλ' αὐτὰ τὰ σαρκοφάγα εἶναι ὅλα τους ἄγρια ζῶα. Τὸ κρέας κάνει κακὸ στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Κάνουν καλὸ τὰ χόρτα, τὰ φρούτα κ.λπ. Γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Πατέρες μιλοῦν γιὰ νηστεία καὶ κατακρίνουν τὴν πολυφαγία καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴ ποὺ αἰσθάνεται κανεὶς μὲ τὰ φαγητὰ τὰ πλούσια. Νὰ εἶναι πιὸ ἀπλὰ τὰ φαγητὰ μας. Νὰ μὴν ἀσχολούμαστε τόσο πολὺ μ' αὐτά.

Δὲν εἶναι τὸ φαγητό, δὲν εἶναι οἱ καλὲς συνθηκὲς διαβίωσης, ποὺ ἐξασφαλίζουν τὴν καλὴ ὑγεία. Εἶναι ἡ ἀγία ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ξέρω γιὰ ἀσκητὲς ποὺ νηστεύανε πολὺ καὶ δὲν εἶχανε καμιά ἀρρώστια. Δὲν κινδυνεύει νὰ πάθει κανεὶς τίποτε ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔχει ἀρρωστήσει ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Πιὸ πολὺ ἀρρωσταίνουν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τρῶνε κρέατα κι αὐγὰ καὶ

γάλατα, παρὰ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ εἶναι λιτοδαίτοι. Εἶναι παρατηρημένο αὐτό. Νὰ τὸ πάρουμε καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἱατρικὴ ἐπιστήμη· τώρα τὸ συνιστᾷ αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα. Οἱ νηστευτὲς νηστεύουν καὶ δὲν παθαίνουν τίποτε· ὄχι ἀπλῶς δὲν παθαίνουν, ἀλλὰ θεραπεύονται ἀπὸ ἀρρώστιας.

Γιὰ νὰ τὰ κάνετε ὅμως αὐτά, πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε πίστη. Ἀλλιῶς σᾶς πιάνει λιγούρα. Ἡ νηστεία εἶναι καὶ ζήτημα πίστεως. Ὅταν ἔχετε τὸν ἔρωτα στὸ θεῖον, μπορεῖτε νὰ νηστεύετε μὲ εὐχαρίστησι κι ὅλα εἶναι εὐκόλα· ἀλλιῶς σᾶς φαίνονται ὅλα βουνό. Ὅποιοι ἔδωσαν τὴν καρδιά τους στὸν Χριστό καὶ μὲ θερμὴ ἀγάπη ἔλεγαν τὴν εὐχή, κυριάρχησαν καὶ νίκησαν τὴν λαίμαργία καὶ τὴν ἔλλειψη ἐγκράτειας.

Ὑπάρχουν σήμερα πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ νηστεύουν μιὰ μέρα καὶ τώρα ζοῦν μὲ χορτοφαγία, ὄχι γιὰ λόγους θρησκευτικούς, ἀπλῶς γιὰτὶ πίστεψαν ὅτι αὐτὸ θὰ κάνει καλὸ στὴν ὑγεία τους. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστέψεις, ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται νὰ πάθεις τίποτε, ποὺ δὲν τρώεις κρέας. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βέβαια εἶναι ἀσθενής, δὲν εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ φάει πρὸς στήριξι τοῦ ὀργανισμοῦ καὶ φαγητὰ μὴ νηστήσιμα.

Τὸ ἀλάτι χρειάζεται στὸν ὀργανισμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὑπάρχει μιὰ φήμη ὅτι τὸ ἀλάτι κάνει κακό. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ αὐτό. Εἶναι στοιχεῖο ποὺ χρειάζεται. Καὶ εἶναι ὀρισμένοι μάλιστα ποὺ τὸ ἔχουν πολὺ ἀνάγκη.

Ἐγὼ τί ὄνειρα ἔχω! Γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος δηλαδή. Παρήγγειλα σιτάρι, γιὰ ν' ἀλέθουμε, νὰ φτιάχνουμε ψωμὶ σταρίσιο. Καὶ σκέφτομαι νὰ πάρουμε διάφορα ὄσπρια καὶ νὰ τ' ἀλέθουμε καὶ νὰ τ' ἀνακατώνουμε, σιτάρι μὲ ρύζι, σόγια, σογιάλευρο μὲ φακὲς κ.λπ. Κι ἔπειτα ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ κολοκύθια καὶ τὶς ντομάτες καὶ τὶς πατάτες κι ὅλα τ' ἄλλα χορταρικά. Καὶ μὲ τὸν πατέρα Ἡσύχιό εἶχαμε ἓνα ὄνειρο. Μιὰ φορὰ λέγαμε νὰ πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἐρημίτες κάπου καὶ νὰ σπεύρουμε σιτάρι καὶ νὰ τὸ μουσκεύουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ τρώμε. Μήπως ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἐκεῖ, στὴν ἔρημο, ἔτσι δὲν ἔκανε;

Ἀλλὰ τώρα ἐμᾶς μᾶς κακοφαίνεται...



Οποιος θέλει ν' ἀκούσει τὴν προσευχή του ὁ Θεὸς γρήγορα, μόλις σηκωθεῖ καὶ ὑψώσει τὰ χέρια του σ' Αὐτόν, ἄς προσευχηθεῖ ὀλόψυχα γιὰ τοὺς ἐχθρούς του. Καὶ τότε, γιὰ ὅ,τι κι ἂν παρακαλέσει καὶ ὁ ἴδιος τὸ Θεό, θὰ εἰσακουστεῖ.

Ἀββᾶς Ζήνων

Ἡ Θυσία τῆς Μάνας

ΠΗΓΗ: Από τις ιστοσελίδες τοῦ <http://elas-lyste.blogspot.com/>.



Εἶναι ἀληθινὴ ἱστορία ἢ ὁποῖα διαδραματίστηκε λίγες ὥρες μετὰ ἀπὸ σεισμό στὴν Ἰαπωνία, πρὶν ἀρκετοὺς μῆνες. Θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ ἓνα παραμῦθι, ὅμως, δὲν εἶναι. Εἶναι ἡ πραγματικότητα ποὺ μᾶς θυμίζει πὼς τὰ παραμῦθια δὲν εἶναι πάντα μῦθος.

Ἐχοντας πλέον ὁ σεισμὸς ὑποχωρήσει, διασῶστες φτάνουν στὰ ἐρείπια τοῦ σπιτιοῦ μίας νεαρῆς γυναίκα καὶ ἀντικρύζουν τὸ πτώμα τῆς μέσα στὰ χαλάσματα. Ἡ στάση τοῦ σώματός τῆς ὅμως ἦταν σχετικὰ περιέργη, θυμίζοντας κατὰ πολὺ τὴν στάση ποὺ παίρνει πιστὸς ἔχοντας λυγίσει στὰ γόνατά του γιὰ νὰ λατρέψει καὶ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ τὸν Θεό του. Τὰ συντρίμια τοῦ σπιτιοῦ, εἶχαν καταπλακώσει τὴν πλάτη καὶ τὸ κεφάλι τῆς.

Ἀντιμετωπίζοντας ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς δυσκολίες, ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ομάδας διάσωσης, ἀποφασίζει νὰ βάλει τὸ χέρι του μέσα ἀπὸ ἓνα στενὸ ἄνοιγμα στὸν τοῖχο γιὰ νὰ φτάσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἄτυχης γυναίκα. Εἶχε ἀκόμη μέσα του τὴν ἐλπίδα ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ γυναῖκα θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ζωντανή. Ὡστόσο, τόσο τὸ κρῦο δέγμα ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἀκαμψία τοῦ σώματος, μαρτυροῦσαν πὼς ἡ γυναῖκα εἶχε σίγουρα πεθάνει. Ὁ ἴδιος μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ὑπόλοιπη ομάδα ἄφησαν αὐτὸ τὸ σπῆτι καὶ κατευθύνθηκαν στὰ ὑπόλοιπα, ἀναζητώντας τὰ ἐπόμενα ὑπὸ κατάρρευση κτίρια.

Κάποιοι ἀνεξήγητοι ὅμως λόγοι, παρακινούσαν τὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῆς ομάδας νὰ ἐπιστρέψει στὸ κατεστραμμένο σπῆτι τῆς νεκρῆς γυναίκα, καθὼς μία ἐντυπωσιακὴ δύναμη τὸν καλοῦσε πίσω. Ἔτσι κι ἔγινε. Πλησίασε, γονάτισε καὶ ἔβαλε ξανά τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἀνάμεσα στὸ ἄνοιγμα ποὺ εἶχε ἐντοπίσει πρὶν, ἀναζητώντας ἓνα μικρὸ κενὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα.

Ξαφνικά, ἄρχισε νὰ φωνάζει μὲ ἐνθουσιασμό! «Εἶναι ἓνα παιδί! Ἦσυχον εἶναι ἓνα παιδί!»

Ὅλη ἡ ομάδα συγκεντρώθηκε γύρω του καὶ προσεκτικὰ ἀφαίρεσε τὶς σωρούς των γκρεμισμένων τμημάτων τοῦ σπιτιοῦ, γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ἄτυχη γυναῖκα. Πράγματι, μπροστὰ τους πλέον, ὑπῆρχε ἓνα τριῶν μηνῶν ἀγοράκι, τυλιγμένο σὲ μία κουβέρτα μὲ μοτίβα ἀνθεῶν, κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα τῆς μητέρας του. Προφανῶς, ἡ γυναῖκα εἶχε πραγματοποιήσει μία ὑπεράνθρωπη θυσία γιὰ τὴν διάσωση τοῦ γιοῦ τῆς. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀντιλήφθηκε πὼς τὸ σπῆτι κατέρρευε, χρησιμοποίησε τὸ σῶμα τῆς γιὰ νὰ δημιουργήσει ἓνα αὐτοσχέδιο κάλυμμα προστασίας γιὰ

τὸν γιό τῆς. Τὸ μικρὸ ἀγοράκι, κοιμόταν ἀκόμα ἤρεμο καὶ γαλήνιο, ἐνῶ ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς τῆς ομάδας διάσωσης τὸν εἶχε πλέον στὰ χέρια του καὶ τὸν ἀπομάκρυνε ἀπὸ τὰ χαλάσματα.

Ὁ γιατρός, κατέφθασε γρήγορα γιὰ νὰ ἐξετάσει τὸ μικρὸ ἀγόρι. Ἀφοῦ ἄνοιξε τὴν κουβέρτα, ἐντόπισε ἓνα κινητὸ τηλέφωνο. Ὑπῆρχε ἓνα μήνυμα κεμένου στὴν ὀθόνη ποὺ ἔγραφε: «Ἐὰν καταφέρεις νὰ ἐπιζήσεις, νὰ θυμᾶσαι μόνο ὅτι σ' ἀγαπῶ»



Ῥωμιοσύνη καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ Ῥωμιοσύνη καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἓνα πρᾶγμα. Ἢ γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάρω τοὺς πολὺ παλιούς, παίρνω δυὸ τρεῖς ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἀγωνισθήκανε γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία τῆς Ἑλλάδας, ποὺ ὅποτε μιᾶνε γιὰ τὴ λευτεριά, μιᾶνε καὶ γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία. Ὁ Ρήγας Φεραῖος λέγει: «νὰ κάνουμε τὸν ὄρκο, ἀπάνω στὸ Σταυρό». Ἦνας ἄλλος ποιητὴς γράφει:

«Γιὰ τῆς πατρίδας τὴν ἐλευθερία
γιὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστη τὴν ἀγία
γι' αὐτὰ τὰ δυὸ πολέμῳ,
μ' αὐτὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιθυμῶ.
Κι ἂν δὲν τὰ ἀποχτήσω
τί μ' ὀφελεῖ νὰ ζήσω;»...

Οἱ ἀγράμματοι ποιητὲς τῶν βουνῶν, μέσα στὰ τραγούδια ποὺ κάνανε, καὶ ποὺ δὲ θὰ τὰ φτάξει ποτὲ κανένας γραμματιζούμενος, μιᾶνε κάθε τόσο γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία μας, γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, γιὰ τὴν Παναγιά, γιὰ τοὺς δώδεκα Ἀποστόλους, γιὰ τοὺς ἁγίους. Πολλὲς παροιμίες καὶ ρητὰ καὶ λόγια ποὺ λέγει ὁ λαὸς μας, εἶναι παρμένα ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ Ῥωμιοσύνη εἶναι ζυμωμένη μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, γι' αὐτὸ Χριστιανὸς καὶ Ἕλληνας ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο.

Ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ γινήκανε Χριστιανοὶ οἱ Ἕλληνες, πήρανε στὰ χέρια τους τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν κάνανε σημαία δική τους: Πίστις καὶ Πατρίς! Ποτάμια Ἑλληνικὸ αἷμα χυθήκανε γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀπὸ τα χρόνια τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ, ἕως τὰ 1838, ποὺ μαρτύρησε ὁ ἅγιος Γεώργιος ὁ ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων. Ποιὰ ἄλλη φυλὴ ὑπόφερε τόσα μαρτύρια γιὰ τὸ Χριστό; Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκατάλυτο ἔθνος ποὺ ἔπρεπε νὰ... πληθύνει καὶ νὰ καπλαντίσει τὸν κόσμον, ἀπόμεινε ὀλιγάνθρωπο γιὰ τὸ ἀποδεκατίσθηκε ἐπὶ χίλια ὀχτακόσια χρόνια ἀπὸ φυλὲς Χριστιανομάχες.

Ἁγιασμένη Ἑλλάδα! Εἶσαι ἁγιασμένη, γιὰ τὴν εἶσαι βασανισμένη. Κι ἡ κάθε γιορτὴ σου μνημονεύει κ' ἓνα μαρτύριό σου. Τὰ πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὰ ἔκανες δικὰ σου πάθη, τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν ἁγίων εἶναι τὰ δικὰ σου μαρτύρια.

ON CONVERSION

By Dr. Eugene Zavarin (from a lecture delivered at the St. Herman Winter Pilgrimage, Feb. 1984).



A modern Russian novel may seem to be a rather strange choice as a topic for a lecture to a group of English-speaking Orthodox—especially on the eve of Great Lent. This particular book, however, an unquestionable masterpiece of Orthodox literature, perhaps the most “Orthodox” novel written in the last two centuries, even more Orthodox than the novels of Dostoevsky. And it is precisely for its spiritual value that I have chosen to speak about it today.

Translated into English, the title of the book is “Open to Me the Doors.” This does not make much sense. The original title, however, is not in Russian but in Church Slavonic, and here—to those familiar with the life and language of the Orthodox Church—it is immediately recognizable as the first words of the pre-Lenten prayer: *Open to me the doors of repentance, O Giver of life...* The whole theme of the book is linked with repentance and takes place in the space of some two weeks, just prior and into the period of Great Lent. It is the story of the conversion of a Jew to Orthodoxy—not from Judaism, but from a religion of nothingness, from that phony plasticity which characterizes much of the world today.

The book was smuggled out to the West some years ago where it was published in 1973 in Paris. The author, Felix Svetov and his wife are Russian-born ethnic Jews who converted to Orthodoxy under the difficult conditions of Soviet life. The book “Open to Me the Doors” is written with such penetrating psychological and spiritual perception that, even without knowing the background of the author, one cannot but assume that it must be at least partially autobiographical. The step by step analysis of the hero’s conversion reveals a discernment which could only have come through experience. The author conveys a spiritual reality which pulls at the heart of the Orthodox reader who, if he immerses himself in the novel, experiences together with the hero the wondrous rebirth of his soul.

For the Orthodox Christian the book is of unique educational value. Fully impregnated by the Orthodox mentality, it forces the reader to adopt this same point of view, without which he is easily lost. The setting of the story is utterly contemporary; there are scenes full of worldly conversation; the protagonist himself is a product of the contemporary non-religious Soviet Jewish society. The reader must, therefore, be careful to follow the action of the story where it takes place—in the internal workings of the hero’s mind and heart.

It is impossible to adequately examine a book of such length and depth in such a short space of time. I have, therefore,

selected certain passages to illustrate the more salient points, hoping they will convey at least a small part of the novel’s deeply Orthodox sentiment.

For ease of discussion, I have put events in chronological order. Approaching the narrative in this way, we come upon a dialogue which occurs in a dream of our protagonist Lev Ilyich. The dialogue takes place between God and Satan in which the latter is charged with an assignment to try and tempt Lev Ilyich who had been chosen for Holy Baptism.

Satan is scornful of such a task: “Me, worry over that Jew? He’s always been in my hands; why bother tempting someone who is running directly towards you? Some time ago You sent me to a Jew by the name of Job—he was pure, God-fearing, avoided evil; now that was work, pure tragedy I call it. Forgive me, Lord, but in this case I see only a joke...” Here we see that God does not call a soul on the basis of any rational justice or external moral worth, but from sheer love for His creation, and the desire that all men be saved.

The reader meets the protagonist as he is returning home to Moscow from a business trip. Lev Ilyich is a typical product of our century. His ideas are those of having fun; he likes parties, women; he likes to drink, to be merry. But underneath is a void, an abyss which he himself does not recognize. He had been out of town on business many times and always looked forward to his return home to the city, to his friends and family. But this time, something happens. He feels a certain indifference—quite unlike the elation which usually accompanies his return. He brushes this aside as a fleeting mood, perhaps the result of an oncoming cold. The real cause of the indifference never crosses his mind. How could he understand that a spark of God had fallen into his heart? From that moment he no longer belongs to the world; what he senses as indifference is nothing but that estrangement from the things of the earth, that otherworldliness which is the essential nature of Christianity. God had chosen him, had placed him in a different world. This vague feeling of indifference signaled a profound internal change which only much later he recognizes as the beginning for him of a new life. A ray of light has fallen into his heart which was gradually to illumine his darkened mind to the knowledge of the true light of Christ.

What happens next in this internal chain of events is that he becomes, as though suddenly, convinced that chance no longer exists in his life. The people he meets, where he goes, what happens to him... in all of this he feels he is somehow being guided. He has no understanding, no particular thought of where and by whom and why. Nevertheless, this feeling overwhelms him and persists. Again this is the result of the mysterious spark of God descending into the human soul.

A Spiritual Odyssey

Propelled by these feelings ordinarily so alien to him, Lev Ilyich begins his spiritual odyssey. It is a dangerous and dif-

ficult journey, full of many discouraging obstacles and times of intense struggle. God's grace, however, helps him to endure these trials and to get up after he falls. The further he progresses, the more clearly he understands the impossibility of turning back. The eyes of the blind were opened.

In terms of the external action of the novel, Lev Ilyich meets various people—both old friends and new acquaintances—with whom he invariably ends up discussing religion. The author skillfully introduces an assortment of characters representing different points of view widely held in contemporary society: we meet the convinced Marxist, the humanist, the Slavophile, the Zionist, the atheist-intellectual, and the small group of believers—the priest Fr. Kyrill in particular—who are a lifeline keeping Lev Ilyich from losing himself in the abyss of worldly arguments and rational reasonings with which Satan has baited his traps.

The women in the novel are generally sympathetic, though not very strong characters. Lev Ilyich is placed in the midst of three of these women: Vera, Nadia and Liuba—Faith, Hope, and Love. Obviously the choice of names is not fortuitous. The author, however, is not Dostoevsky, and the women do not exactly reflect the virtues which their names express. This may disappoint some who might expect the women to act as vehicles of salvation. As if deliberately refusing to conform to such an expectation, the author has created a much more realistic situation. It is in the midst of the characters' weaknesses that the reader recognizes himself. Furthermore, the weight of Lay's conversion is thus placed not on any rational process or human initiative, but on the mysterious spark of God's grace.

The most bitter antagonist in the novella an old friend of Lev Ilyich by the name of Kostya, who may claim a certain kinship to the character of Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's "The Possessed." He is flamboyant, strong-willed and has brilliant ideas which can easily influence others. But like Stavrogin, his outward beauty and charm are only "the frozen tragic mask, under which hides a terrible spiritual wasteland, a loss of all norms and ethical principles" (G.M. Friedlaender). His ideas are contradictory, lacking direction. Satan enters this inner void and Kostya becomes a tempter, trying to seduce Lev Ilyich away from Christianity with his eloquence and scholarly knowledge. Fr. Kyril, however, whose authority Kostya tries to undermine, is planted firmly upon the unshakable foundation of Christianity, and helps Lev to see the emptiness of his friend's arguments. The clarity and absolute simplicity of his explanations contrast sharply with Kostya's delusion.

Among the positive group of characters are Lev's friend Masha, Fr. Kyril and his matushka Dusta. They meet "as if"

by accident. Taken to Fr. Kyrill's house, Lev is at once struck by the amount of greenery; there is even a tame pink parrot. This obviously symbolizes a sort of paradise which is set in clear juxtaposition to the cold, lifeless asphalt of the city streets. Although Lev Ilyich is rather perplexed at being found in the house of a young Orthodox priest, whose religion he had once so readily mocked, he feels a strong attraction to that genuine warmth, that knowledge of truth which emanates from Fr. Kyril, and thus his brief visit opens the door to his entry into the Church,

Returning to his own apartment, he finds a party in progress. This world, so familiar to him, now brings him into a state of depression. The mysterious spark of God which previously was so incomprehensible, so illogical, is now so powerful so as to cause him to feel an aversion to his old life, to see the emptiness of the party chatter; the scales have fallen from his eyes; he feels so estranged, as if he belongs to another world, not quite understanding what this "other world" is all about.

After a time he cannot bear it any longer and runs out into the streets. Wandering as if aimlessly, he comes again to the house of Fr. Kyril. He surprises himself as much as anyone when he suddenly asks Fr. Kyril "Can you baptize me?" Such an unpremeditated approach to this solemn Sacrament may appear to some as a dramatic device. It is, however, not so unusual in the context of the Soviet experience, as we see



in the writings of Fr. Dimitri Dudko and others. One might be tempted to see here a lack of seriousness, the whim of a passing moment. Lev Ilyich himself is almost embarrassed by such an illogical, impulsive decision; his mind argues against the promptings of his spirit. Fortunately, however, his genuine thirst for an entry into that "other world," this mysterious, almost magnetic attraction (which he still cannot fully articulate) overpowers his doubts with the help of Fr. Kyril's immediate consent and the joyful reaction of the women present: Matushka Dusia, Vera and Masha.

The scene at the Baptism is very touching; it is viewed through the eyes of Lev Ilyich who is initially plagued by various confusing and very secondary thoughts: he imagines his friends sitting around mocking as he stands there in a pair of shorts—black, too long and two sizes too large. "If he had known, he would have put on some nice ones, swim-shorts... Hm, he stopped himself, 'Where do you think you are, at a beach on the Black Sea?'"

He is puzzled by the bustling about of the three women and Fr. Kyril as they make the necessary preparations, although he accepts readily, like a child, whatever he is told to do or

say. Out of the fullness of his tradition, the Orthodox reader is able to fill in the gaps left by Lev Ilyich's bewilderment.

"Like thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of times before and many times in the future, the Sacrament, inexpressible and touching, was taking place. A small church composed of three women stood at his back, and he felt himself not as a spectator, but as a member of this church. And He was among them, Lev Ilyich knew this; he felt His breath ... 'Kiss the cross'—the priest put the chain on Lev Ilyich. 'Make the sign of the Cross.' He anointed his forehead, chest, hands, feet. 'The seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit.' They lit candles. He walked behind the priest, leaving wet marks on the floor; behind him were three women with candles, singing softly, with Lev Ilyich mumbling, repeating after them, guessing the words: 'As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia.'"

While sealing him as a member of the Church, his Baptism does not provide any kind of automatic protection from temptations which continue to assail him. He is tempted by old habits and falls into sin; he gets into arguments with his friends and becomes depressed. Outwardly there does not seem to be any manifest transformation of life. But a definite change has taken place. Sin, once a matter of indifference, now evokes a flood of repentance; he is keenly aware of having sinned, and desires to sin no more. He has become consumed with a purpose; his life has assumed a definite direction.

Distressed by his failure to keep spotless his baptismal robe, Lev Ilyich comes to Fr. Kyril who counsels him to prepare for Confession and Communion. Here we should say a few words about Fr. Kyril, a simple, young married priest of no particular outward charisma, but possessed of a strong faith and deep Orthodox consciousness which give him the key to unlock the mysteries of the human soul. He is, as it were, the voice of the Church, often quoting the Holy Fathers, and giving practical insightful advice which helps Lev Ilyich to keep afloat in the stormy waters of life.

There follows what is perhaps the most moving incident in the entire novel—Lev Ilyich's first Confession and Communion. And once more, it can be fully appreciated only in the context of life in the Orthodox Church. Lev Ilyich becomes totally absorbed in the service: the priest's every word penetrates his heart as if it were meant for him alone. He is overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness: "How can one forgive a man who has spent his entire life walking along that 'other' road, laughing at all of this, or rather, indifferently and rudely despising all of this, preoccupied with himself, his own nonsense, endlessly sinning? How is it that instead of being thrown out of the church he was allowed to partake in the communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ... Only if one denied all logic. 'I have no right, O Lord; I have only hope; anyway, let it be Thy will!' The Royal Doors opened again and the deacon proclaimed, 'With fear of God and faith draw near...'"

Lev Ilyich learns to set aside that logic, that reason to which he had always tried to be so faithful, and to accept God's forgiveness as a gift of His mercy, of His love which embraces even the most wretched sinner, here indeed is a great Mystery of the Christian faith.

Lev Ilyich continues to be plagued by temptations which center in his conversations with others: One after another, Lev Ilyich tries to convert his friends, to share the light of understanding which God's grace has shed upon his soul. While he is disappointed by his failure to do so, his faith is strengthened as he begins to see more and more clearly the fallacy of their arguments.

As a Jewish convert to Christianity, Lev Ilyich becomes preoccupied with the question of "chosenness." His conversion opens up to him an entirely new understanding of the Old Testament and its meaning for the Jews. His religious—and even more, Christian—perspective is entirely rejected by his Jewish acquaintances who accuse him of being a traitor to the Jewish tradition: "You don't hear the call of your Jewish blood!" Lev Ilyich is disgusted by the hollowness of contemporary Soviet Jewish society whose Jewishness consists only in some kind of ethnic snobbishness and a worldly attachment to a political state. The accusation makes him explode:

"It is not the call of blood that you are hearing, it is only petty bourgeois conceit that is shouting in you ... Yes, I am hearing the call of my blood and because of that I am an Orthodox Christian. Moreover, I am an Orthodox Christian because I hear the call of my Jewish blood ... To hear the call of his blood for a Jew born in Russia is to become an Orthodox Christian, because only then does one obtain the opportunity to repent."

Lev Ilyich continues in this way, becoming increasingly estranged from his former way of life, his old self. Outwardly he becomes a rather pitiable figure: he loses his job, his wife is thinking of leaving him; in the final scene he sits on a bench outside the church, his mouth still bloody from a beating—and a passing stranger throws him a coin.

What, asks the reader, can this be the picture of a hero? From a logical worldly perspective the conclusion is indeed very disappointing. But the reader who is careful to keep himself within an Orthodox Christian perspective sees very clearly that the novel has a very happy ending. Lev Ilyich himself, in spite of his outwardly miserable condition, is extremely happy: he has entered that "other world" and is finally welded to the Church—symbolized by an old woman who, in that last scene, gives him a piece of prosphora.

What hope is contained here, what joy in witnessing the resurrection of a soul from the abyss of nothingness, to a life full of machine and purpose. Truly, our God is a God of the living, trampling down death and "upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

RELIGION IS A NEURO-BIOLOGICAL SICKNESS, BUT ORTHODOXY IS ITS CURE

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion."

The Sickness of Religion

The Patriarchs and the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles and Prophets of the New Testament, as well as their successors, are perfectly cognizant of the *sickness of religion* and of the Physician Who treats it; that is, the Lord (Yahweh) of Glory. He is the Physician of our souls and bodies. He cured this *sickness* in His friends and faithful ones before His Incarnation and continues, as God-Man, to cure it.

The *sickness* in question consists of a short circuit between the spirit in man's *heart* (that is, according to the Fathers, his *noetic energy*) and his brain.

In its normal state, *noetic energy* moves cyclically, like a crank, praying within the *heart*.

In its diseased state, *noetic energy* does not "crank" cyclically. Instead, unfurled and rooted in the *heart*, it gets stuck in the brain and causes a *short circuit* between the brain and the *heart*. Thus, the concepts of the brain, which all derive from the environment, become concepts of *noetic energy*, which is at all times rooted in the heart.

In this way, the sufferer becomes a slave of his surroundings. As such, he confuses certain concepts that come from his surroundings with his God or gods.

By the term *religion*, we mean every "equation" of the Uncreated with the created, and especially every "equation of representations" of the Uncreated with concepts and words of human thought, which is the basis for idol worship.

These concepts and words may be simple concepts and words, or they may also include representations with statues and images, within and without a putative Divinely-inspired text.

In other words, the equating of concepts of God and words of Holy Scripture with the Uncreated also belongs to the world of idolatry, and is the foundation of all heresies to date.

In the **Therapeutic Tradition** of the Old and New Testament, appropriate concepts and words are used as means during the *purification* and *illumination* of our hearts; these are dispensed with during *glorification*, when the indescribable, incomprehensible, and uncreated Glory of God, which fills all created things, is revealed in the Body of Christ.

Following *glorification*, the concepts and words of noetic prayer in the heart return. From his *glorification*, the person ascertains that there is no similitude between the created and the Uncreated, and that it is *impossible to express God and even more impossible to comprehend Him*.

The foundation of the heresies of the Vatican and of the Protestants is that they follow [St.] Augustine, who took the revealed Glory of God in the Old and New Testament for something that is "created," which comes and goes, at that.

Not only that, but, what is worse, he also took, among other things, the Angel of Great Counsel and His Glory for creations *that have a beginning and an end*, which God brought from nothing into existence, so as to be seen and heard, and which will return again to non-existence when their missions have been accomplished.

But for a person to have correct direction in the *treatment of noetic energy*, he must have as his guide the experience of one who has been deified, who testifies to certain *axioms*: that between the Uncreated God and His Uncreated Energies, on the one hand, and His creation, on the other hand, there is no similitude, and that "it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to comprehend Him." (St. Gregory the Theologian).

Only on the basis of these *tenets* can one escape the plight of acquiring the Devil as a guide, by means of self-styled theologians who speculate about God and Divine things.

In its natural state, *noetic energy* regulates the passions—that is, of hunger, thirst, sleep, the instinct of self-preservation (i.e., the fear of death)—so that they are irreplaceable.

In an unhealthy state of *noetic energy*, the passions become reprehensible. These, in combination with an unbridled *imagination*, create a magical religion for the bridling of the elements of nature or for the additional salvation of the soul from matter in a state of happiness and bliss of body and soul.

Faith, according to Holy Scripture, is cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Who initiates the *treatment* of the sickness of selfish love in the heart and its transformation into love that "seeketh not its own."

This *treatment* culminates in *glorification (deification)* and constitutes the quintessence of the Orthodox Catholic Church, which thereby replaced idolatry as the nucleus of the Hellenic civilization of the Roman Empire.

We ought to have a clear picture of the context within which both Church and State saw the contribution of those who have been deified to the *cure of the sickness of religion*—which destroys human personality through the quest for bliss here and beyond the grave—in order to understand the reason why the Roman Empire incorporated the Orthodox Church into its code of law.

Neither the Church nor the State saw the Church's mission as a mere *remission of the sins* of the faithful for their entry into Paradise after death. This would be equivalent to doctors forgiving sick people for being ill so that they might be cured after death.

Both Church and State knew well that *remission of sins* was only the beginning of the treatment of the sickness of humankind: the pursuit of happiness.

This *treatment* began with *purification of the heart*, and arrived at the restoration of the *heart* to its natural state of *illumination*; and the entire person was brought to perfection in the preternatural state of *glorification*; that is, *deification*.

The result of this *treatment* and perfection was not only suitable preparation for life after bodily death, but also the transformation of society, *here and now*, from a group of egotistical and egocentric individuals into a community of people with selfless love, "which seeketh not its own."



BOUNDLESS IS THE WILL OF GOD

From the Greek Orthodox magazine "Theodromia" (Θεοδρομία).

A certain Abba who practiced asceticism with candor to God, begged Him with tears to reveal to him the way He judges and decides in certain cases where people do not understand Him, but believe they concern strange things. God however, for a long time did not wish to reveal anything to him because man can never know and understand the mysteries of God. The ascetic never ceased asking, night and day, for that particular revelation. One day therefore, God, wishing to inform him, set in his heart the thought to go and meet an elder ascetic, who was at another location that required a few days walk to reach him.

When the ascetic started his walk, God sent him an angel in the form of a young monk, who greeted him by saying "Father bless." The elder ascetic responded "God forgive you, my son." The angel then asked the elder, "where are you going abba?" and the elder replied, "I am going to so and so ascetic to meet him." And the angel then said, "I too am going there, so let us walk together."

Having walked together the first day, they arrived in the evening at a village and were put up at the house of a pious and hospitable man, who looked after them. In fact he brought a silver platter in the dining room. When it was time for them to leave, the angel took the platter secretly, and tossed it up in the air and the platter disappeared. The elder when he saw this was saddened but said nothing.

The second day they reached another village, where they were looked after by a hospitable pious Christian. He had a single son and he brought him to be blessed and receive their blessing. The angel though, when he was about to leave with the ascetic, grabbed the child by the neck and choked him to death. Witnessing such a view, the elder suffered a great surprise and fear but again said nothing.

Having walked the third day, they reached another place, but because they could not find anybody to receive them, they sat in a courtyard that had an unstable wall that was close to collapsing. The angel stood up, rolled up his sleeves, brought down the wall and immediately rebuilt it from the foundations up.

Witnessing this last event, the elder could no more keep quiet, and said, "I invoke the name of God, the Most High, for you to tell me the truth. What were these things you did? Are you an angel or a demon? What you did are not human deeds." When the angel asked "what did I do?" the elder replied, "yesterday and before yesterday when we were received by those Christian men who looked after us, you took from the former the silver platter and you tossed it in the air and it disappeared, while you choked to death the son of the latter. And here where we came, they did not offer us hospitality, yet you toiled in building and you were beneficial to them."

The angel then responded, "Listen Abba, I will reveal to you the truth of these situations. The first one who received us was a God loving and just man, and deals with his subordinates according to God's commandments. That silver platter though came from an unjust inheritance, so that he may not lose his reward for his good deeds, due to the platter, God ordered me to make it disappear, so that his hospitality be pure and free from injustice. The latter who gave us hospitality is a pious and virtuous man and if his son continued living he would have become the devil's tool, and would have done many evils, rendering the good deeds of the father to be forgiven."

The elder then said, "OK you have done well, but what do you have to tell me about the last case?" The angel then answered him: "learn father this too, that the owner of the courtyard is an evil and unjust man and wishes to hurt many but is unable because of his poverty. His grandfather when he was building the wall, he hid in it a great sum of money and if I let it collapse, the evil owner needing to rebuild it, would have discovered the money in the ruins and would have used it to do the evil deeds he wished. That is why God ordered me to stabilize it, so that the evil man may not find the money he intended to use for his evil wishes to hurt people. And God knows when to reveal it to a worthy person who will use it for good deeds. Have you seen therefore how God judges in certain cases you asked to learn? Go to your cell therefore and don't let the things of this world bother you, asking why and how they are done. For the judgments of God are an immeasurable abyss as the prophet said and His energies are unfathomable and incomprehensible and man cannot know everything accurately. Believe therefore, father, God is just and He commits no injustice. Whatever is needed to be done, it is done justly. When the ascetic heard these things from the angel, he glorified God, retiring to his cell and never again questioned anything.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

By Elder Aimilianos of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra, Holy Mountain; this is a Sermon delivered in the Church of St. Nicholas, Trikala, Greece, January 17, 1971.

Nobody would dispute that the most important day in a person's life, after his birth and baptism, is that of his marriage. It is no surprise, then, that the aim of contemporary worldly and institutional upheavals is precisely to crush the most honorable and sacred mystery of marriage. For many people, marriage is an opportunity for pleasures and amusements. Life, however, is a serious affair. It is a spiritual struggle, a progression toward a goal—heaven. The most crucial juncture, and the most important means, of this progression is marriage. It is not permissible for anyone to avoid the bonds of marriage, whether he concludes a mystical marriage by devoting himself to God, or whether he concludes a sacramental one with a spouse.

Today we will concern ourselves primarily with sacramental marriage. We will consider how marriage can contribute to our spiritual life. We know that marriage is an institution established by God. It is *honorable* (Heb 13:4). It is a *great mystery* (Eph 5:32). An unmarried person passes through life and leaves it; but a married person lives and experiences life to the full.

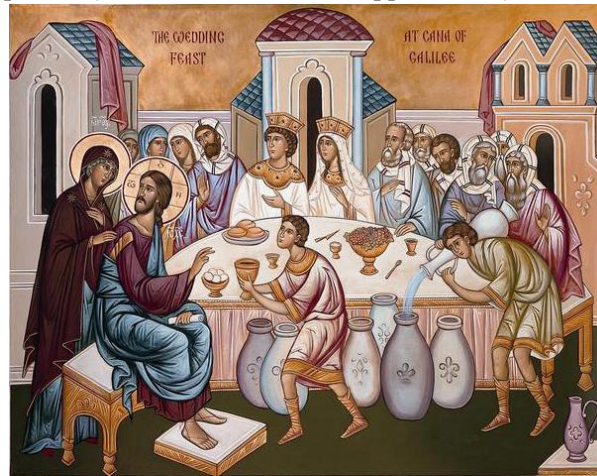
One wonders what people today think about the sacred institution of marriage, this *great mystery*, blessed by our Church. They marry, and it's as if two checking accounts or two business interests were being merged. Two people are united without ideals, two zeros, you could say. Because people without ideals, without quests, are nothing more than zeros. "I married in order to live my life," you hear people say, "and not to be shut inside four walls." "I married to enjoy my life," they say, and then they hand over their children—if they have children—to some strange woman so they can run off to the theater, the movies, or to some other worldly gathering. And so their houses become hotels to which they return in the evening, or, rather, after midnight, after they've had their fun and need to rest. Such people are empty inside, and so in their homes they feel a real void. They find no gratification there, and thus they rush and slide from here to there, in order to find their happiness.

They marry without knowledge, without a sense of responsibility, or simply because they wish to get married, or because they think they must in order to be good members of society. But what is the result? We see it every day. The shipwrecks

of marriage are familiar to all of us. A worldly marriage, as it is understood today, can only have one characteristic—the murder of a person's spiritual life. Thus we must feel that, if we fail in our marriage, we have more or less failed in our spiritual life. If we succeed in our marriage, we have also succeeded in our spiritual life. **Success or failure, progress or ruin, in our spiritual life, begins with our marriage.** Because this is such a serious matter, let us consider some of the conditions necessary for a happy, truly Christian marriage.

In order to have a successful marriage, one must have the appropriate upbringing from an early age. A child must be prepared in order to be able to have a successful marriage. But in the age in which we live, no one is interested in preparing their children for this great mystery that will play the foremost role in their lives.

The child, from an early age, must learn to love, to give, to suffer deprivation, to obey. He must learn to feel that the purity of his soul and body is a valuable treasure to be cherished as the apple of his eye. The character of the child must be shaped



properly, so that he becomes an honest, brave, decisive, sincere, cheerful person, and not a half, self-pitying creature, who constantly bemoans his fate, a weak-willed thing without any power of thought or strength. From an early age, the child should learn to take an interest in a particular subject or occupation, so that tomorrow he will be in a position to support his family, or, in the case of a girl, also to help, if this is necessary. A woman must learn to be a house-

wife, even if she has an education. She should learn to cook, to sew, to embroider. Ask married couples, however, and you'll see how many women who are about to marry know nothing about running a household.

Once we reach a certain age, moreover, the choice of one's life partner is a matter which should not be put off. Neither should one be in a hurry, because, as the saying goes, "quick to marry, quick to despair." But one should also not delay, because delay is a mortal danger to the soul. As a rule, the normal rhythm of the spiritual life begins with marriage. An unmarried person is like someone trying to live permanently in a hallway: he doesn't seem to know what the rooms are for. Parents should take an interest in the child's social life, but also in his prayer life, so that the blessed hour will come as a gift sent by God.

Naturally, when he comes to choose a partner, he will take to account his parents' opinion. How often have parents felt knives piercing their hearts when their children don't ask them about the person who will be their companion in life?

A mother's heart is sensitive, and can't endure such a blow. The child should discuss matters with his parents, because they have a special intuition enabling them to be aware of the things which concern them. But this doesn't mean that the father and mother should pressure the child. Ultimately he should be free to make his own decision.

If you pressure your child to marry, he will consider you responsible if things don't go well. Nothing good comes from pressure. You must help him, but you must also allow him to choose the person he prefers or loves—but not someone he pities or feels sorry for. If your child, after getting to know someone, tells you, "I feel sorry for the poor soul, I'll marry him," then you know that you're on the threshold of a failed marriage. Only a person whom he or she prefers or loves can stand by the side of your child. Both the man and the woman should be attracted to each other, and they should truly want to live together, in an inward way, unhurriedly. On this matter, however, it is not possible to pressure our children. Sometimes, out of our love, we feel that they are our possessions, that they are our property, and that we can do what we want with them. And thus our child becomes a creature incapable of living life either married or unmarried.

Of course, the process of getting acquainted, which is such a delicate issue—but of which we are often heedless—should take place before marriage. We should never be complacent about getting to know each other, especially if we're not sure of our feelings. Love shouldn't blind us. It should open our eyes, to see the other person as he is, with his faults. "Better to take a shoe from your own house, even if it's cobbled," says the folk proverb. That is, it's better to take someone you've gotten to know. And acquaintanceship must always be linked with engagement, which is an equally difficult matter.

When I suggested to a young woman that she should think seriously about whether she should continue her engagement she replied: "If I break it off, my mother will kill me." But what sort of engagement is it, if there's no possibility of breaking it off? To get engaged doesn't mean that I'll necessarily get married. It means that I'm testing to see whether I should marry the person I'm engaged to. If a woman isn't in a position to break off her engagement, she shouldn't get engaged, or, rather, she shouldn't go ahead with the marriage. During the engagement, we must be especially careful. If we are, we will have fewer problems and fewer disappointments after the wedding. Someone once said that, during the period of getting to know one another, you should hold on to your heart firmly with both hands, as if it were a wild animal. You know how dangerous the heart is: instead of leading you to marriage, it can lead you into sin. There is the possibility that the person you've chosen sees you as a mere toy, or a toothbrush to be tried out. Afterwards you'll be depressed and shed many tears. But then it will be too late, because your angel will have turned out to be made of clay.

Don't choose a person who wastes his time at clubs, having good time, and throwing away his money on traveling and luxuries. Neither should you choose someone who, as you'll find out, conceals his self-centeredness beneath words of love. Don't choose a woman as your wife who is like gun powder, so that as soon as you say something to her, she bursts to flames. She's no good as a wife.

Moreover, if you want to have a truly successful marriage, don't approach that young woman or man who is unable to leave his or her parents. The commandment of Christ is clear: *Man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife.* (Mk 10:7). But when you see the other person tied to his mother or father, when you see that he obeys them with his mouth hanging open, and is prepared to do whatever they tell him, keep far away. He is emotionally sick, a psychologically immature person, and you won't be able to create a family with him.

The man you will make your husband should be spirited. But how can he be spirited when he hasn't realized, hasn't understood, hasn't digested the fact that his parents' house is simply a flower-pot in which he was put, to be taken out later, and transplanted somewhere else?

Also, when you're going to choose a husband, make sure that he's not an uncommunicative type—in which case he'll have no friends. And if today he has no friends, tomorrow he'll find it difficult to have you as a friend and partner. Be on your guard against grumblers, moaners, and gloomy people who are like dejected birds. Be on your guard against those who complain all the time: "You don't love me, you don't understand me," and all that sort of thing. Something about these creatures of God isn't right. Also, be on your guard against religious fanatics and the overly pious. Those, that is, who get upset over trivial things, who are critical of everything and hypersensitive. How are you going to live with such a person? It will be like sitting on thorns. And look out for those who regard marriage as something bad, as a form of imprisonment; those who say "I've never in my whole life thought about getting married."

Watch out for certain pseudo-Christians, who see marriage as something sordid, as a sin, who immediately cast their eyes down when they hear anything said about it. If you marry someone like this, he will be a thorn in your flesh, and a burden for his monastery if he becomes a monk. Watch out for those who think that they're perfect, and find no defect in themselves, while constantly finding faults in others. Watch out for those who think they've been chosen by God to correct everyone else.

There is another serious matter to which you should also pay attention: heredity. Get to know well the father, the mother, the grandfather, the grandmother, the uncle. Also, the basic material prerequisites should be there. Above all, pay attention to the person's faith. Does he or she have faith? Has the person whom you're thinking of making the companion of

your life have ideals? If Christ means nothing to him, how are you going to be able to enter his heart? If he has not been able to value Christ, do you think he will value you? Holy Scripture says to the husband that the wife should be *of your testament* (Mal 2:14), that is, of your faith, your religion, so that she can join you to God. It is only then that you can have, as the Church Fathers say, a marriage *with the consent of the bishop*, that is, with the approval of the Church, and not simply a formal license.

Discuss things in advance with your spiritual father. Examine every detail with him, and he will stand by your side as a true friend, and, when you reach the desired goal and your marriage will be a gift from God. God gives his own gift to each one of us. He leads one person to marriage and another to virginity. Not that God makes the choice by saying “you go here,” and “you go there,” but He gives us the nerve to choose what our heart desires, and the courage and the strength to carry it out.

If you choose your spouse in this way, then thank God. Bring him into touch with your spiritual father. If you don't have one, the two of you should **choose a spiritual father together**, who will be your Elder, your father, the one who will remind you of, and show you God.

You will have many difficulties in life. There will be a storm of issues. Worries will surround you, and maintaining your Christian life will not be easy. But don't worry. God will help you. Do what is within your power. Can you read a spiritual book for five minutes a day? Then read. Can you pray for five minutes a day? Pray. And if you can't manage five minutes, pray for two. The rest is God's affair.

When you see difficulties in your marriage, when you see that you're making no progress in your spiritual life, don't despair. But neither should you be content with whatever progress you may have already made. Lift up your heart to God. Imitate those who have given everything to God, and do what you can to be like them, even if all you can do is to desire in your heart to be like them. Leave the action to Christ. And when you advance in this way, you will truly sense what is the purpose of marriage. Otherwise, as a blind person wanders about, so too will you wander in life.

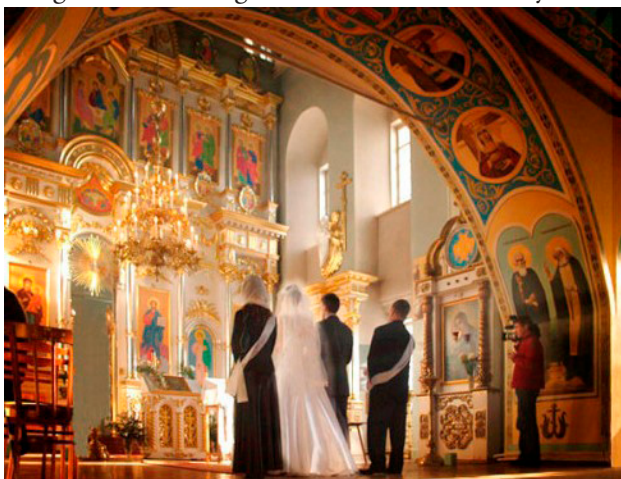
What then is the purpose of marriage? I will tell you its three main aims. First of all, marriage is a path of pain. The companionship of man and wife is called a “yoking together,” that is, the two of them labor under a shared burden. Marriage is a journeying together, a shared portion of pain, and, of course, shared joy. But usually it comprise of “six chords” of our life

that sound a sorrowful note, and only one which is joyous. Man and wife will drink from the same cup of upheaval, sadness, and failure. During the marriage ceremony, the priest gives the newly-weds to drink from the same cup, called the *common cup*, because together they will bear the burdens of marriage. The cup is also called *union*, because they are joined together to share life's joys and sorrows.

When two people get married, it's as if they're saying: “Together we will go forward, hand in hand, through good times and bad. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow filled with burdens, monotonous hours. But in the depths of the night, we continue to believe in the sun and the light.” Oh, my dear friends, who can say that his life has not been marked by difficult moments? But it is no small thing to know that, in your difficult moments, in your worries, in your temptations, you will be holding in your hand the hand of your beloved. The New Testament says that every man will have pain, especially

those who enter into marriage.

*Are you free from a wife?—*which means, are you unmarried?—asks St. Paul. *Then do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you are not doing anything wrong, it is not a sin. And if a girl marries, she does not sin, but those who marry will have hardships to endure, and my aim is to spare you.* (1 Cor 7:27-28). Remember: from the moment you marry, he says, you will have much pain, you will suffer, and your life will



be a cross, but a cross blossoming with flowers. Your marriage will have its joys, its smiles, and its beautiful things. But during the days of sunshine, remember that all the lovely flowers conceal a cross, which can emerge into your sunshine at any moment.

Life is not a party, as some people think, and after they get married take a fall from heaven to earth. Marriage is a vast ocean, and you don't know where it will wash you up. You take the person whom you've chosen with fear and trembling, and with great care, and after a year, two years, five years, you discover that he's fooled you.

It is an adulteration of marriage for us to think that it is a road to happiness, as if it were a denial of the cross. The joy of marriage is for husband and wife to put their shoulders to the wheel and together go forward on the uphill road of life. “You haven't suffered? Then you haven't loved,” says a certain poet. Only those who suffer can really love. And that's why sadness is a necessary feature of marriage. “Marriage,” in the words of an ancient philosopher, “is a world made beautiful by hope, and strengthened by misfortune.” Just as steel is formed to shape in a furnace, just so is a person proved in marriage, in the fire

of difficulties. When you see your marriage from a distance, everything seems wonderful. But when you get closer, you'll see just how many difficult moments it has.

God says that *it is not good for the man to be alone* (Gen 2:18), and so he placed a companion at his side, someone to help him throughout his life, especially in his struggles of faith, because in order to keep your faith, you must suffer and endure much pain. God sends his grace to all of us. He sends it, however, when he sees that we are willing to suffer. Some people, as soon as they see obstacles, run away. They forget God and the Church. But faith, God, and the Church, are not a shirt that you take off as soon as you start to sweat.

Marriage, then, is a journey through sorrows and joys. When the sorrows seem overwhelming, then you should remember that God is with you. He will take up your cross. It was he who placed the crown of marriage on your head. But when we ask God about something, he doesn't always supply the solution right away. He leads us forward very slowly. Sometimes he takes years. We have to experience pain, otherwise life would have no meaning. But be of good cheer, for Christ is suffering with you, and the Holy Spirit, *through your groanings is pleading on your behalf*. (Rom 8:26).

Second, marriage is a journey of love. It is the creation of a new human being, a new person, for, as the Gospel says, *the two will be as one flesh*. (Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7). God unites two people, and makes them one. From this union of two people, who agree to synchronize their footsteps and harmonize the beating of their hearts, a new human being emerges. Through such profound and spontaneous love, the one becomes a presence, a living reality, in the heart of the other. "I am married" means that I cannot live a single day, even a few moments, without the companion of my life. My husband, my wife, is a part of my being, of my flesh, of my soul. He or she complements me. He or she is the thought of my mind. He or she is the reason for which my heart beats.

The couple exchanges rings to show that, in life's changes, they will remain united. Each wears a ring with the name of the other written on it, which is placed on the finger from which a vein runs directly to the heart. That is, the name of the other is written on his own heart. The one, we could say, gives the blood of his heart to the other. He or she encloses the other within the core of his being.

"What do you do?" a novelist was once asked. He was taken aback. "What do I do? What a strange question! I love Olga, my wife." The husband lives to love his wife, and the wife lives to love her husband.

The most fundamental thing in marriage is love, and love is about uniting two into one. God abhors separation and divorce. He wants unbroken unity. The priest takes the rings off the left finger, puts them on the right, and then again on the left, and finally he puts them back on the right hand. He begins and ends with the right hand, because this is the hand

with which we chiefly act. It also means that the other now has my hand. I don't do anything that my spouse doesn't want. I am bound up with the other. I live for the other, and for that reason I tolerate his faults. A person who can't put up with another can't marry.

What does my partner want? What interests him? What gives him pleasure? That should also interest and please me as well. I also look for opportunities to give him little delights. How will I please my husband today? How will I please my wife today? This is the question which a married person must ask every day. She is concerned about his worries, his interests, his job, his friends, so that they can have everything in common. He gladly gives way to her. Because he loves her, he goes to bed last and gets up first in the morning. He regards her parents as his own, and loves them and is devoted to them, because he knows that marriage is difficult for parents. It always makes them cry, because it separates them from their child.

The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is *obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ*. (Eph 5:22-24). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband. Attitude, obstinacy, and complaining are the axes which chop down the tree of conjugal happiness. The woman is the heart. The man is the head. The woman is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side, as the empress Theodora stood by the emperor Justinian. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility.

The husband should remember that his wife has been entrusted to him by God. His wife is a soul which God has given to him, and one day he must return it. He *loves his wife as Christ loves the Church*. (Eph 5:25). He protects her, takes care of her, gives her security, particularly when she is distressed, or when she is ill. We know how sensitive a woman's soul can be, which is why the Apostle Peter urges *husbands to honor their wives* (1 Pet 3:7). A woman's soul gets wounded, changeable, and can suddenly fall into despair. Thus the husband should be full of love and tenderness, and make himself her greatest treasure. Marriage, my dear friends, is a little boat which sails through waves and among rocks. If you lose your attention even for a moment, it will be wrecked.

As we have seen, marriage is first of all a journey of pain; second a journey of love; and, third, a journey to heaven, a call from God. It is, as Holy Scripture says, a *great mystery*. We often speak of seven "mysteries," or sacraments. In this regard, a "mystery" is the sign of the mystical presence of some true person or event.

An icon, for instance, is a mystery. When we venerate it, we are not venerating wood or paint, but Christ, or the Theotokos, or the saint who is mystically depicted. The Holy Cross is a symbol of Christ, containing his mystical presence. Marriage, too, is a mystery, a mystical presence, not unlike these.

Christ says, *wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them.* (Mt 18:20). And whenever two people are married in the name of Christ, they become the sign which contains and expresses Christ himself. When you see a couple who are conscious of this, it is as if you are seeing Christ. Together they are a “theophany.”

This is also why crowns are placed on their heads during the wedding ceremony, because the bride and groom are an image of Christ and the Church. And not just this, but everything in marriage is symbolic. The lit candles symbolize the wise virgins. When the priest places these candles into the hands of the newly-weds, it is as if he is saying to them: Wait for Christ like the wise virgins. Or they symbolize the tongues of fire which descended at Pentecost, and which were in essence the presence of the Holy Spirit. The wedding rings are kept on the altar, until they are taken from there by the priest, which shows that marriage has its beginning in Christ, and will end in Christ. The priest also joins their hands, in order to show that it is Christ himself who unites them. It is Christ who is at the heart of the mystery and at the center of their lives.

All the elements of the marriage ceremony are shadows and symbols which indicate the presence of Christ. When you're sitting somewhere and suddenly you see a shadow, you know that someone's coming. You don't see him, but you know he's there.

You get up early in the morning, and you see the red horizon in the east. You know that, in a little while, the sun will come up. And indeed, there behind the mountain, the sun starts to appear.

When you see your marriage, your husband, your wife, your partner's physical presence, when you see your troubles, everything in your home, know that they are all signs of Christ's presence. It is as if you're hearing Christ's footsteps, as if He was coming, as if you are now about to hear His voice. All these things are the shadows of Christ, revealing that He is together with us. It is true, though, that, because of our cares and worries, we feel that He is absent. But we can see Him in the shadows, and we are sure that He is with us. This is why there was no separate marriage service in the early Church. The man and woman simply went to church and received Communion together. What does this mean? That henceforth their life is one life in Christ.

The wreaths, or wedding crowns, are also symbols of Christ's presence. More specifically, they are symbols of martyrdom. Husband and wife wear crowns to show that they are ready to become martyrs for Christ. To say that “I am married” means that I live and die for Christ. “I am married” means that I desire and thirst for Christ. Crowns are also signs of royalty,

and thus husband and wife are king and queen, and their home is a kingdom, a kingdom of the Church, an extension of the Church.

When did marriage begin? When man sinned. Before that, there was no marriage, not in the present-day sense. It was only after the Fall, after Adam and Eve had been expelled from paradise, that Adam *knew* Eve (Gen 4:1) and thus marriage began. Why then? So that they might remember their fall and expulsion from paradise, and seek to return there. Marriage is thus a return to the spiritual paradise, the Church of Christ. “I am married” means, then, that I am a king, a true and faithful member of the Church.

The wreaths also symbolize the final victory which will be attained in the kingdom of heaven. When the priest takes the wreaths, he says to Christ: *Take their crowns to Your kingdom; take them and keep them there, until the final victory.* And so marriage is a road: its starts out from the earth and ends in heaven. It is a joining together, a bond with Christ, who assures us that He will lead us to heaven, to be with Him always.

In our living together we are one another's hands, ears, and feet. Marriage redoubles our strength, rejoices our friends, causes grief to our enemies. A common concern makes trials bearable. Common joys are all the happier, and accord makes riches more pleasant; it is even more delightful than riches for those without wealth. Marriage is the key of moderation and the harmony of the desires, the seal of a deep friendship.

St. Gregory the Theologian

Marriage is a bridge leading us from earth to heaven. It is as if the sacrament is saying: Above and beyond love, above and beyond your husband, your wife, above the everyday events, remember that you are destined for heaven, that you have set out on a road which will take you there

without fail. The bride and the bridegroom give their hands to one another, and the priest takes hold of them both, and leads them round the table dancing and singing. Marriage is a movement, a progression, a journey which will end in heaven, in eternity.

In marriage, it seems that two people come together. However it's not two but three. The man marries the woman, and the woman marries the man, but the two together also marry Christ. So three take part in the mystery, and three remain together in life.

In the dance around the table, the couple are led by the priest, who is a type of Christ. This means that Christ has seized us, rescued us, redeemed us, and made us His. And this is the *great mystery* of marriage (Gal 3:13).

In Latin, the word “mystery” was rendered by the word “sacramentum,” which means an oath. And marriage is an oath, a pact, a joining together, a bond, as we have said. It is a permanent bond with Christ. “I am married,” then, means that I enslave my heart to Christ. If you wish, you can get married. If you wish, don't get married. But if you marry, this is the meaning that marriage has in the Orthodox Church, which brought you into being. “I am married” means I am the slave of Christ.

WORLDLY LIFE

A letter by St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It."



I got all caught up in speculating as to what could have happened, and it turns out that your grandmother was a little sick. Grandmother... There is a victorious and wonderful word. For grandchildren, there is no warmer place than at grandmother's, and for grandmother, there is no one dearer than good grandchildren. For this we must thank God.

You should comfort your grandmother more often and listen attentively to what she says. Old women have a wisdom acquired through life's experiences and labors. Often they unknowingly express in simple words such wise lessons as you could never find in books, even if you searched entire libraries.

Although you have given a very satisfactory explanation as to why you have not written for so long, it would be all the same proper to impose upon you with a minor correction. I think, however, that you would perhaps be better disposed to such a correction if I thanked you for writing to me in the first place, as well as the content of your letter. And so I thank you.

You promise to be open. Good! Openness is the most important thing in correspondence; otherwise there would be no reason to even begin it. Always write straight from the heart. Write what is on your mind, and take care to state fully the questions which are stirring in your head and beg for an answer. Only then will solutions be determined, just as the dried out ground receives water. This is the simplest method by which we not only acquire but also resolve various concepts in our mind, clarifying subjects and matters that are considered essential in establishing a clear vision for our soul. What would be the use if I were to write you about one thing, and your mind was occupied with something else? It would be empty words, as if two people were having a conversation with their backs turned to each other, and each person was simply discussing what was in front of his own eyes. It seems that we have already established that we will not concern ourselves with absent-minded matters, or simply draw up plans and theories; instead, our conversation will be on life's everyday occurrences. And so we will proceed step by step.

You write that you are "dazzled." You say, "For about two days I have been making the usual social rounds. First I went to the theater, then I went merry-making, then I went to a

party. What kind of crowd is this, with the kinds of things they talk about, the kinds of abstruse opinions they have about everything, the kinds of manners they have? All this is barbarous to me, and I will never be able to collect my thoughts in this mob."

This is the first time you have been exposed to this; you will get used to it. The impression you have received, after your quiet and simple family life in the village, is entirely in the order of things. That is where your judgment was formed as to what is true and false in life, although I am not exactly sure just what it is that has lodged itself in your mind from the past. It is also possible that, while on the surface there seems to be disapproval of such things, deeper down there is sympathy for them and a desire to repeat them. The life of which you have seen a small part has astonishing characteristics. Those who participate in it also see that everything is not what it seems, but all the same they are drawn to it, like an opium addict, who knows what is in store for him: He is like a madman, who, in spite of everything, takes his drug, or perhaps for that very reason he takes it.

How are you doing? Are you still attracted to that place? Would you find it desirable to live your life in this way? I ask you to sketch me a little picture... and be truthful.



What can I say to those people who, in the Church, neither stand in silence, nor join in the singing, but instead meet one another and mix our reasonable worship of God with worldly chatter? They do not listen themselves to the divinely inspired words and prevent others who want to listen from doing so. And as Elijah the Tishbite would say *How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.* (1 Kgs 18:21). You want simultaneously to come together for prayer and for worldly, ill-timed words. Of course you succeed in neither purpose, because you destroy the one with the other, or rather, they destroy each other. How long before you stop talking idly in this place? You make this house of prayer into a place of business or impassioned speech (*My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves—Lk 19:46*). In this house the words of eternal life are both spoken and heard, on the one hand by us, as we beseech God for eternal life with unashamed hope, and on the other hand by God, as He gives eternal life to those who ask with their whole heart and mind. But He will not give it to those who do not even apply their whole tongue, as it were, to asking.

St. Gregory Palamas

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ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ!

CHRIST IS RISEN!

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

PASCHAL GREETINGS

By Metropolitan Laurus (+2008).

In these Paschal days of spring, when nature is awakening from the snows of winter, these words of the Paschal canon become particularly meaningful. *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord*, God says through the mouth of King David. (Pss 150:6). And, *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork*. (Pss 18:1).

During these days, we sense with new strength that even inanimate, unconscious creation unceasingly offers up praise to its Creator.

But what of man, the reason-endowed crown of creation? The overwhelming majority of men have rejected their Creator, have perverted the divine gift of reason, turning it into something to advance their own glorification, and not the name of God.

We have been created to love and glorify the Lord willingly and consciously, as the Apostle Paul says: *Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*. (1 Thess 5:17-18). Extending His great love toward us, to set aright what had been trampled underfoot, the Lord sent His only-begotten Son, Who has shown us that

only through the voluntary bearing of our cross are we able to restore within ourselves the fallen image of man.

He came to adopt us, that we might become Christians, people of Christ, not only in name, but in deed, in our manner of life.

Water mingles with water, and oil with oil; and for us to become one with Christ we must become like unto Him.



And for this it is essential that we constantly uplift ourselves to Him in spirit, that we pray to Him, that we always remember Him, not only during Great Lent and Pascha, but continually.

And for this we must, from one year to the next, connect this Paschal joy to the next Paschal joy, until, by the mercy of God, we reach the eternal Pascha and enter into the never-ending joy of our Lord.

One may reduce the meaning of any given prayer of ours to the words of the Paschal canon: *Grant that we may truly partake of Thee in the never-waning day of Thy kingdom*.

It is my earnest desire that the risen Lord grant this to all of us and to our whole God-loving flock on these great and saving days of the radiant Resurrection of Christ.

Truly Christ is risen!

+Metropolitan Laurus