

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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ON THE DEATH & RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

By St. Gregory the Theologian.

Come in with a Mystery, bringing with me the Day as a good defender of my cowardice and weakness; that He Who today rose again from the dead may renew me also by His Spirit; and, clothing me with the new Man, may give me to His New Creation, to those who are begotten after God, as a good modeller and teacher for Christ, willingly both dying with Him and rising again with Him.

Yesterday the Lamb was slain and the door-posts were anointed; Egypt bewailed her First-born; the Destroyer passed us over; the Seal was dreadful and reverend, and we were walled in with the Precious Blood. Today we have clean escaped from Egypt and from Pharaoh; and there is none to hinder us from keeping a Feast to the Lord our God—the Feast of our Departure; or from celebrating that Feast, *not in the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but in the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*, (1 Cor 5:8) carrying with us nothing of ungodly and Egyptian leaven.

Yesterday I was crucified with Him; today I am glorified with Him; yesterday I died with Him; today I am quickened with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him; today I rise with Him. But let us

offer to Him Who suffered and rose again for us—you will think perhaps that I am going to say gold, or silver, or woven work or transparent and costly stones, the mere passing material of earth, that remains here below, and is for the most part always possessed by bad men, slaves of the world and of the Prince of the world. Let us offer ourselves, the possession most precious to God, and most fitting; let us give back to the Image what is made after the Image. Let us recognize our Dignity; let us honour our Archetype; let us know the

power of the Mystery, and for what Christ died.

Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us. Let us become God's for His sake, since He for ours became Man. He assumed the worse that He might give us the better; *He became poor that we through His poverty might be rich* (2 Cor 8:9); He took upon Him the form of a servant

that we might receive back our liberty; He came down that we might be exalted; He was tempted that we might conquer; He was dishonored that He might glorify us; He died that He might save us; He ascended that He might draw to Himself us, who were lying low in the Fall of sin.

Let us give all, offer all, to Him Who gave Himself a Ransom and a Reconciliation for us. But one can give nothing like oneself, understanding the Mystery, and becoming for His sake all that He became for ours. Amen.



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THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

By St. Innocent (Borisov), Archbishop of Kherson.



One of the most significant liturgical actions of the Great Fast takes place when, between the Old Testament readings, the Royal Doors are suddenly opened, the serving clergyman appears with a candle and censer and, making the sign of the cross with them over those present, exclaims: *The light of Christ enlightens all!* It is not surprising that all those present bow their head to

the ground at this moment, for the opening of the Royal Doors represents the opening of the very heavens; the candle and censer signify the fullness of the Holy Spirit; and the appearance of the serving clergyman is like the appearance of an Angel from heaven. Who could be so arrogant as not to bow down before these signs of the grace of God?

The Holy Church, however, seeks from us at this instance not simply a bow of the head or a prostration before the light of Christ. No, in the spiritual sense, it wants the opposite: the bowing of our head before that light, the opening before it of our entire essence, so that in this way we might be illumined with that divine light from head to foot, be completely filled with it, and made light-bearing, just as were the first Christians, about whom the Apostle Paul writes that they *shine as lights in the world* (Phil 2:15).

In order better to enter the Holy Church's intention, let us look at the power and significance of the words pronounced by the serving clergyman.

The light of Christ enlightens all! These words suggest, firstly, the insufficiency in us all of the true light. For, if we were light-filled in and of ourselves, we would have no need for enlightenment. Truly, a person not illumined by the Gospel is darkness, deep darkness, as St. Paul teaches. Those who are illumined by the light of science and are called "enlightened" by people would not immediately agree with this. This is because these people who have studied the sciences, due to their hope in the scintillation that the sciences pour upon them, rarely and insufficiently turn their attention to the inner state of their spirit and heart, not seeing in what darkness their soul and conscience are. If, however, they were to look deeply into the quality of their knowledge and, on the other hand, would attentively delve into the true needs of their soul, then they would soon begin to see that the light borrowed from the sciences, no matter how great it might be, is hardly enough to satisfy them; and that, in relation to some of the most important things, the ignorance of which, one might say, makes one less than human, they are as ignorant as the lowest commoner; therefore, exactly like the commoner, they need to be enlightened from above.

The light of Christ enlightens all! These words, secondly, suggest the fullness and abundance for everyone of the light of Christ. Indeed, there is no deficiency of it for anyone. It enlightens both the wisest, revealing to them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God which no mind in and of itself can open; and the most foolish, opening in them, instead of a natural intellect, the eyes of the heart, with which they can see what is hidden from the wise and knowledgeable of this world. It enlightens both the richest, teaching them not to exalt in perishable goods, not to be rich in themselves but in God, and to hide their treasure where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, *and where thieves do not break through nor steal* (Mt 6:20); and the poorest, showing them their riches inside

themselves, which are more valuable than the whole world, and teaching them to be poor not only in body but also in spirit, in order to acquire the Kingdom. It enlightens also the very highest ruler, reminding him that there is a Master over him Who demands a strict accounting for every tear shed because of him; and the very lowest servant, comforting him in the knowledge that no one can take away from him his internal freedom of spirit and conscience, and that a virtuous man in bonds is higher than the happiest person in the world and closer to the Savior Who, being the Son of God, for our sake took on the appearance, not of a king, but of a slave and servant of all. It enlightens elders, revealing to them a life that does not age, calling them from earthly wandering to a place where there is rest from every labor. It enlightens youths, encouraging them to battle with the passions and lusts. It enlightens infants, opening their lips to praise the Lord.

The light of Christ enlightens all! Pronouncing these words through the mouth of its servant, the Holy Church says, as it were: "Perhaps there are those who, due to their lot at birth or the circumstances of life, being far from the light of the sciences and earthly wisdom, blame their supposedly miserable situation, thinking that they, having only their native wit, are not able, like enlightened men, to achieve the aims of their existence, and must forever remain behind them, not only in time, but even in eternity.

May they not vainly despair and lose courage! The One Who in the sensible world hung the sun and moon in the heavens so they would illumine all equally, the same One did not forget in the spiritual world also to pour out light for the enlightenment of all without exception. Attending church, hearing the Gospel, prophets, and apostles, no matter whether you are a farmer or soldier, a child or an elder, a servant or a laborer, you will learn everything that you need for your salvation, and to enter eternity, where we all must go, prepared for your great calling."

The light of Christ enlightens all! "Perhaps some," the Church says, as it were, "having been filled with the light from the lamp of science and earthly wisdom, imagine that they do not need any further enlightenment, that they know everything that they need, and can calmly rest with their reserve of knowledge. May they leave behind their dangerous prejudice until they have studied the Gospel and the Cross of Christ, until they have properly comprehended what the prophets and apostles say about man, until they know that which is most essential! Only in the light of Christ can one see God, oneself, and the world in their true appearance. Only according to the indica-

tion of heavenly revelation can one find the path leading to eternal life."

The light of Christ enlightens all! "Therefore," it is as if the Church says, "each and everyone needs to walk in the light and do deeds of the light. A pagan can say that he did not know how to behave in the world, for he did not have a Gospel in hand; but the Christian is without an excuse! The light of Christ illumined everything for him, showing him his own poverty, and the richness of God's mercy towards him; our past condition in paradise, and the future condition in the Heavenly Kingdom; the narrow path leading to eternal life, and the broad path leading to perdition; the power of the cross of Christ, and the necessity of bearing one's own cross. Everything has been illumined, opened, and shown to everyone forever! Therefore everyone must walk in the light, avoid deeds of darkness, and not give themselves up to sleep and carelessness."

This, my brothers, is the sense of the sacred words: *The light of Christ enlightens all!* The Church repeats them for both our instruction and our warning.

After this it is our task to examine ourselves and discover in which light we are in life: that of Christ or of someone else? Whatever light it is, if it is not of Christ, then for our eternal salvation it is as good as darkness, and even sometimes worse than darkness. For a man caught in the darkness at least either stops or goes slowly groping his way, taking care, if he can, to step into the light. But under a false light a person is calm,

goes along without stopping, allowing himself every kind of movement, changing paths and directions; and, inasmuch as he is led by a false light, like a swimmer at sea, he is exposed to inevitable dangers or goes somewhere from which there is no return. Is this not the same as happens with many intelligent people who, placing their hope in worldly wisdom, scorn the light of Christ? Where do they go, and where do they lead those who follow them? They go and lead others to such an abyss of impiety and vice that one glance into it fills with trembling the heart that has not lost its human feeling.

Beware, my brothers, of this false light, which in our times has especially begun to blind the eyes of many. Remember firmly that Christ alone is our true light, which enlightens every man coming into the world and going out of the world. If you meet a teacher, first try to learn of what light he is. If the light is not of Christ, then no matter who he is, block your ears and heart. For just as in the sensible world there is one sun and no other light besides it, so too in the spiritual world there is one true and life-giving light: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.



THE “PERFECT” CHRISTIAN...

A story by Fr. Stefanos Anagnostopoulos, translated from Greek by the staff of “Orthodox Heritage.”

Four to five years ago, I had told you a true story about one of our parish members; I do not know how many of you had heard it or remember it; I would like to go over it again as I believe it is directly related to much of what confronts us, or rather what we, at times, observe in our everyday parish life.

It was around this time of the year when I was visited by an Orthodox man of our parish. He came to speak with me, seeking a new spiritual father, as his priest confessor had passed away. He mentioned his name and his previous spiritual father’s name (a well known priest in our area) and immediately proceeded to describe his view of himself:

—Father, I know I’m a very good Christian; I am humble and a righteous man!

I responded by asking him where or how he had drawn this conclusion. And he answered:

—I have a large family, I’m a department head at a prestigious public sector ministry, I go to church every Sunday, I fast, I do my prayers morning and evening, give alms, and even up to the command that God gives, giving up the tenth from our salary, visit the sick in hospitals, bedridden in homes, fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and all Lent, confess regularly, commune, and I also...

All this reminded me immediately of the Pharisee, as he pretty much repeated everything that the Pharisee professed.

—I read the New Testament (indeed, the Pharisee also knew the law of God quite well). And I am also very well read, spending lots of time with many fine books. And I do so wherever I go, and wherever I dwell, I’m talking and warning others about the Antichrist and six hundred sixty-six. I cauterize evil, do strict observations in the name of God’s law, and refer to the Gospel to all: my wife, my children, my relatives, my subordinates, my neighbors, my workers, my apartment building’s residents, to all those in the street, everywhere...

I interrupted him from continuing with his self-characterization; I had understood enough. At that moment, God enlightened me, though I am a sinner; and in spite of my miserable, sinful state, I dared tell him the following:

—If you truly care to know yourself, truly comprehend how good of a person you are and the kind of Christian others see in you, and if you think God likes you and your deeds, I am asking you that, upon departing, go seek out there what others think of you. Go and solicit the views of your wife, your children, your apartment building’s residents, relatives, colleagues, etc., and ask them to tell you in all honesty, what

they truly think about you. And also ask them to reveal to you what others mutter behind your back, and what they think about the Christianity that you represent. And if they are reluctant to tell you directly, ask them to provide you with anonymous, typewritten responses. This is the rule that I place upon you. And after you gain responses from all, come back in a few days and see me. Until then, I ask you that you abstain from receiving Holy Communion. Furthermore, upon hearing what others have to tell you, I want you to go to church and stand in front of Christ’s icon and ask Him: “Lord, after all that has been revealed to me by others, if I die today, am I worthy to be an inhabitant of Your Kingdom?”

After my instruction, the man left insulted, in a furious, sad and troubled state. He returned however, after three weeks, a changed man! He fell to his knees and with tears in his eyes confessed, shouting:

—Dear father I am a sinner, worst of them all! I’m selfish, I lack compassion, and I am a malicious man who never displays any understanding towards others. I am an unfair person, gossip second to no one, glutton, prideful, greedy, avaricious, unfaithful, and my daily actions are worse than those of an atheist. And all of my family and friends and associates told me, without any

exception, that I am a hypocrite, a hypocrite of great proportions. And if I die today, there is truly no trace of repentance upon me whatsoever. Soon we will observe the Sunday of Last Judgment, and the content of that Gospel passage has me truly terrified. If I die where will I go? Surely though, I am not destined towards Paradise...



The gate into Paradise is not narrow. There is room for all those who bow humbly, and are not puffed up with pride, as long as they repent and give the burden of their sins to Christ. Then there is plenty of room to pass through the gate. ... The thief on the cross simply said, *Forgive me* and he was saved. Salvation depends on the second, not the minute. Man can be saved with a single, humble thought; or, with a proud one, lose everything.

Spiritual health equals pure thoughts, an enlightened mind, and a purified heart that unceasingly harbors Christ and Panaghia. Watchfulness over ourselves and prayer are a great help in acquiring spiritual health. Prayer is essential for the purification of the soul, and prudence is essential for the preservation of a healthy spiritual condition.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



THE FALL OF THE NOUS

By Anthony of the Desert, from his book “Spiritual Alchemy,” ch. 6 (available through “Church Father Theology,” <http://www.churchfathertheology.com/>).

Generally, the term *nous* speaks of the power of the soul but has also included essence (heart) and energy (thoughts and conceptual images). The Church Fathers mostly referred to the *nous* as the heart and/or the soul, without having excluded other designations. Moreover, the terms *nous* and soul—as well as *nous* and heart, *nous* and intelligence, and *nous* and reason (or attention, as a more subtle form of reason) —are often used interchangeably. However, the more accurate patristic definition of *nous*, as proffered by the early Church Fathers, is “the eye of the soul.” This means the soul’s power and purest part.

The natural state of the *nous* encompasses unification with the *nous* of Christ (which our *nous* pursues through constant remembrance of God) and dispassion, where the *nous* repels every thought that is contrary to God’s love. When sick, the *nous* becomes contaminated by the senses and withdraws from the heart. This demonstrates how the *nous* can be changed by any conceptual image that it accepts, an actuality that results in the defilement of and the leading astray of the entire soul. Thus, the *nous* determines our condition and when sickened the term “darkened” is used to describe its state.

There are three movements of the *nous*:

1. Natural: Where the *nous* gains awareness that it has been the cause of evil and confesses all sins to God.
2. Unnatural: When the *nous* forgets God and fights against others, a state in which the *nous* believes that it has been unjustly treated.
3. Supernatural: Where the *nous* rises and finds the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the *nous* can either be concerned with material things, or derailed by conceptual images of them, or it can identify with the divine and lose configuration and form altogether. That is, the *nous* is either moving toward illness or toward purification, it is never static.

Before the Fall, the *nous* was able to clearly perceive God and the intelligent aspect of the soul expressed these experiences of the *nous* in comprehensible terms. The intelligent power—as *logikillogistikon*, or as the Word (Christ, being the Word or *Logos*) —of the soul submits to the Logos, which occurs as the mind turns what the *nous* experiences into “thinkable” concepts (thoughts, or *logismoi*). This can

be envisioned as God revealing to the *nous* and mind, which then records the revelatory experience in intelligible forms.

Tragically, after the Fall, the *nous* became hidden by the passions, was overcome by darkness, and the intelligent aspect of the soul rose above the *nous* to usurp the *nous*’ position as the dominant inner force. The *nous* sickened, or darkened, and the soul’s intelligent power assumed the role as man’s source of existence. This corruption has manifested as pride, arrogance, and egoism, all of which culminate in judging the sins of others (cf. Mt 7:1-5) as a way by which to institute the intelligent power’s pseudo-superiority.

The need to return the *nous* to its pre-Fall state of purity and single preoccupation with God is readily visible when distinguishing between human and divine knowledge. Human knowledge, being confined to matter, is inferior and useless. Thus, we must exchange matter for spirit through an absolute reliance on God which, in part, requires shunning the temptation to pose scientific or philosophical questions such as “what is truth” and to instead ask “Who (God) is



the truth.” Consider how philosophy mis-believes that only what is uncreated can be immortal, a fallacious precept that aids in explaining philosophy’s errant view of the body as created (material) and mortal and the soul as uncreated (i.e., from the realm of ideas) and immortal. This misconception includes the Platonic

theory of the soul having fallen from the world of ideas and then becoming imprisoned in the human body. According to this incorrect belief the salvation of souls occurs when an “uncreated” soul gravitates back toward God after having been eternally freed from the prison of the body. Orthodoxy espouses the authentic state of reality: humans (a soul and a body) as immortal, from God’s grace rather than as a product of nature, and created yet living eternally either in unity with or separated from God.

Obviously, care must be taken to contrast philosophy, as a product of the mind and human action, with Eastern Orthodox Christianity (revelation from God). Orthodox theology is the Word of God, as opposed to the manufactured words of one’s mind that are unable to speak to the soul. Consequently, “theology” that is taught like a science is usually only understood externally and this kind of doctrine is fraught with uncertainty and questions (since the mind is unable to grasp the divine). Conversely, the most prevalent disease of the West, the spiritual malady of rationalism, merely trusts the conclusions of one’s fallen nature and logical mind; which can be summed up by Rene Decartes’ postulate of “I think,

therefore I am.” Modern rationalism results in the belief that our thoughts are who we are, that we are the sum total of our thoughts, and this compels placing an absolute trust in any and all of the mind’s imaginings—the misguided idea that since they “are us” we must take a stand for and defend them as if they were our own flesh and blood. Moreover, modern rationalism, and its devastating spiritual consequences, is the prime fallacy of today’s worldview in that it is precisely by placing absolute trust in the formulations of the fallen human nature—rather than in divine revelation—that the modern West has come to water down or abandon the once cherished Christian faith; western man has undermined the apostolic faith with his logic.

As has now been evidenced, eventually the corrupted intelligent aspect of the soul will reject God (being unable to any longer apprehend God) or will guide one into mistakenly believing he is a god. This unmasks the fatal danger of attempting to theologize via the fallen human intellect (i.e., by a philosophy and a darkened *nous*, see 1 Cor 2:14). To be ruled by reason exists as the very foundation of all internal and external anomalies, the soul’s intelligent power must be restored to its proper function as the interpreter of the *nous*. Only then can obedience to God’s will ensue, only then will the renouncing of one’s own life become possible, an occurrence that will then facilitate the cure of interior illness and transformation of the inner world.



A genuine friend is one who, when his neighbor is undergoing tribulation, imperturbably and calmly suffers with him: afflictions, needs, temptations and calamities—as if they were his own.

A faithful friend is a strong defense. (Eccl 6:14); for when one is faring well, he is a good counselor and wholehearted supporter, and when one is faring badly, he is a most genuine helper and a most sympathetic defender.

Only the diligent keepers of the commandments and genuine initiates of Divine judgments do not abandon friends who are being tested by God’s consent.

Those who despise the commandments and are not initiates of the Divine judgments, when a friend is faring well, enjoy things along with him; but when a friend is tried and is having a hard time, they forsake him—sometimes even to side with his enemies.

St. Maximos the Confessor

REMEMBRANCE OF WRONGS

By St. John Climacus, from “*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*,” Step 9 “*On Remembrance of Wrongs*.”



The holy virtues are like Jacob’s ladder, and the unholy vices are like the chains that fell from the chief Apostle Peter. For the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another.

Remembrance of wrongs is the consummation of anger, the keeper of sins, hatred of righteousness, ruin of virtues, poison of the soul, worm of the mind. Remembrance of wrongs is shame of prayer, stopping of supplication, estrangement of love, a nail stuck in the soul. Remembrance of wrongs is pleasureless feeling beloved in the sweetness of bitterness, continuous sin, un-sleeping transgression, hourly malice.

This dark and hateful passion, I mean remembrance of wrongs, is one of those that are produced but have no offspring. He who has put a stop to anger has also destroyed remembrance of wrongs; because childbirth continues only while the father is alive.

He who has obtained love has banished revenge; but he who nurses enmities stores up for himself endless sufferings. A banquet of love dispels hatred, and sincere gifts soothe a soul. But an ill-regulated banquet is the mother of boldness, and through the window of love gluttony leaps in.

I have seen hatred break the bond of long-standing fornication, and afterwards remembrance of wrongs, in an amazing way, did not allow the severed union to be renewed. Wonderful sight—a demon curing a demon! But perhaps this is the work not of demons but of Divine Providence.

Remembrance of wrongs is far from strong natural love, but fornication easily comes near it, just as a hidden louse can sometimes be seen in a dove. Remembrance of wrongs is an interpreter of Scripture of the kind that adjusts the words of the Spirit to its own views. Let it be put to shame by the Prayer of Jesus.

The remembrance of Jesus’ sufferings cures remembrance of wrongs which is mightily shamed by His forbearance.

Worms grow in a rotten tree, and malice finds a place in falsely meek and silent people. He who has cast it out has found forgiveness, but he who sticks to it is deprived of mercy.

The forgetting of wrongs is a sign of true repentance. But he who dwells on them and thinks that he is repenting is like a man who thinks he is running while he is really asleep.

WATCHFULNESS, PRAYER AND CONFESSION

A Homily by Elder Ephraim of Philotheou, translated from Greek by Fr. Seraphim Bell.



My beloved children: Today we will say a few things about the great virtue of watchfulness.

As you know, watchfulness is a patristic teaching, it is the experience of the great *neptic* fathers of the Church and of the desert. The word *nepsis* comes from *nepho*, which means to be sleepless, to guard, to inspect, examine, watch over, and keep under surveillance. All these things the fathers sum up in one continuous attention to the nous.

Watchfulness is described as the axe which shatters the large trees, hitting their roots. And when the root is struck, it doesn't spring up again. Thus also when the nous of the man, of the Christian, has heed for the soul, it keeps watch over the heart and the five senses of the soul, the bodily as well as the spiritual. When the nous is awake, when it is attentive, when it keeps watch over the speculations, the thoughts, when it controls the imagination, then the whole man, body and soul, is kept pure. And when the man is rendered pure through watchfulness and spiritual works, his prayers have boldness before God, they cross the sky, they go beyond the stars, they pass through the heavens and draw near to the Divine Throne of Grace, where the blessings of God are granted. And this being the case, the man at prayer is enriched by the grace of God.

The *neptic* fathers tell us that one of our thoughts may rise to heaven and another may descend to hell: *By our thoughts we are improved or defiled.* In other words, a thought which may inattentively attack us, may pollute us, may pleasure us, and is able to render us worthy of hell. A heavenly thought, a thought of self-denial, a brave thought, a thought of prayer and the vision of God, makes us worthy to draw near the Divine throne and to taste of heavenly things. By the thoughts either we will become unclean or we will become better. The beginning of sins starts with our thoughts.

The thoughts come from the five senses, the spiritual as well as the physical. When we allow the sense of sight to be uncontrolled and it carelessly sees anything, this carelessness will become no end of dirty and sinful images. Since these images are placed in the imagination, afterwards they drip the poison of sinful pleasure inside the heart of man. This pleasure is the poison, by which the heart is polluted and then becomes unclean and guilty before the un-sleeping eye of God.

Just like the sense of sight, so it is also of touch, and also of taste and hearing and of smell. And so the five senses cre-

ate analogous sinful images, which render the man unclean before the face of God. Here rests the entire philosophy of the spirit.

All sermons are beneficial, exactly because when a tree which is diseased is pruned, it is cleansed, and thus the word of God helps in the reduction of a passion. However, the teaching of the Fathers concerning watchfulness radically effects the cleansing from the passions. When the axe strikes the root, the entire tree falls down, it withers and is finished. So also when watchfulness takes a place in the life of the Christian; a tree of passion falls, it withers and thus in time, the old man, the man of sin and of passion, the earthly Adam is freed and he becomes *a new man*. For this reason, *neptic* work frees us radically from evil. Here then we must give heed to our life. If we want to cleanse ourselves, we should make sure to enrich our nous by the application of watchfulness.

A part of watchfulness is also noetic prayer. The vision of God is another part of watchfulness. Spiritual warfare is also another part. All these parts, when they are united in an effort of man, in time bring about holiness.

Abba Paphnoutios, a great desert father, was going along one day on his way and there he saw two men committing some sin. The thought of his passion said: "Look what great evil they are doing!" The eye saw them and immediately the thought flared up, trying thereby to attack the purity of the Saint's soul by judging the brother or also by his being tempted. Having watchfulness, however, he was being vigilant, immediately his mind was enlightened and he said to his thought, "They are sinning today, I will sin tomorrow. They will repent, but I know myself to be a hard man, unrepentant, egotistical, and thus, I won't repent. I will be punished since I am worse than these two. And what do I have to do about these careless sinners, since I am a much greater sinner and more passionate?" And speaking in this manner and putting a lock on the provocation of sin, he was saved and didn't judge the brothers who were sinning.

He didn't go very far and an Angel of God appeared before him having a double-edged cutless dripping blood; in other words, a knife which had cut him from both sides, and he says to him:

—Paphnoutios, you see this knife? Do you see that it is dripping blood?

—I see it, Angel of God.

—With this knife I kill by taking the heads of the ones who judge their neighbors. And since you didn't judge, you didn't condemn those who were in fact sinning—not imagining or guessing that they were sinners, but seeing them sin with your own eyes—but you condemned yourself more, for this reason your name has been written in the book of eternal life.

Success. His name is written in eternal life, because he didn't judge the sinners, he didn't condemn the sin of his brother. He would have judged if he hadn't had watchfulness, if he

hadn't been noetically vigilant in guarding his soul. Do you see what his good attentiveness produced? And do you see what harm he would have suffered, if he had been inattentive to the thought and allowed it to work within him? His thought "informed" him that they were in fact sinning; he even saw them commit the sin. In spite of his observations, however, even though the thought had "spoken" to him, the correct thought triumphed and thereby he escaped the shipwreck of his soul.

All of the passions have their own images, their own fantasies and their own pleasures. Murder has one image and another pleasure, gluttony has another and so many other sinful passions have others. All of the pleasures are otherwise poisons which bring about the death of the soul. We must take as our view that, if we want to clean the "inside of the cup," the interior of the soul, our heart, this center of man, we must strive to keep watchful. We should take care to become better; that is, we should be vigilant to always have our hand on the trigger. With the first appearance of the enemy, we should shoot. As soon as an evil thought comes to us, immediately knock it down. A dirty image comes, immediately spoil it. We shouldn't allow it to become more vivid in colors and in appearance, because it will lead us to immediate difficulty. When evil is struck at its root, it is impossible for it to sprout and increase. When such spiritual struggle comes about with diligence, we will cleanse our soul and thereby we will be found clean and with boldness before God.

A pagan priest asked some monks:

—Does your God appear to you? Do you see Him? Does He speak to you?

The fathers said:

—No.

The pagan says:

—If He doesn't speak to you and doesn't appear to you, this means that you don't have pure thoughts. When I pray, my God answers me.

Naturally, God didn't answer the pagan, the demons answered him, but nevertheless the fathers took it as an occasion of benefit and said:

—Indeed, the impure thoughts prevent us sinful men from communicating with God.

Watchfulness does nothing less than cleanses the nous and the heart from every impurity. For this reason, with a little ascetical toil, watchfulness brings about the greatest spiritual

results. When we strive ascetically and aren't mindful of our thoughts, we accomplish nothing.

The Sacred Chrysostom wrote many chapters about prayer and about wakefulness. And in the midst of them he says something very beautiful: *Prayer, he says, is enlightenment of the soul, true consciousness of God, a mediator between God and man, a physician of the passions, an antidote against diseases, medicine against every illness, tranquility of the soul, a guide which carries us to heaven, which doesn't revolve around the earth, which marches towards the apse of heaven. It passes over the buildings, it passes mentally through the air, it walks above the air, it passes over the whole of the stars, it opens the gates of heaven, it surpasses the angels, it transcends the Thrones and Principalities, it passes over the Cherubim and when it has passed through all of the foundation of nature, it comes near to the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the Divinity. There it is made worthy to become an interlocutor in the Heavenly Kingdom. Through this (prayer), the soul, which is lifted up in the air*



to the heavens, embraces the Lord in an inexpressible manner, exactly as the baby embraces its mother and with tears cries loudly, desiring the enjoyment of divine milk. But it seeks the things which are necessary and receives a gift superior to all visible nature.

Prayer is our venerable representative. It gladdens the heart. It gives rest to the soul. It creates within

us the fear of the punishment of hell, the desire for the Kingdom of Heaven. It teaches humility, it grants awareness of sin and in general it adorns man with every good thing, like a robe adorned with all the virtues which enfolds the soul. It brought a gift to Anna, Samuel, and it made known that Prophet of the Lord. This prayer also made Elias a zealot of the Lord. And it became a guide for the descent of the heavenly fire for the sacrifice. For while the priest of Baal was calling all day long to the idol, he, after he lifted up his voice which came from his pure heart and cried out through his mouth and his soul, the fire came down from heaven as a sign of the righteousness of his prayer. Since he was standing like an eagle over the altar with his fierce nature, he offered everything as a sacrifice. But the great servant of God, the zealot Elias, did this, as all that happened then, teaching us by the spirit, that we also crying loudly from the depths of our soul to God, should move the ineffable fire of the Holy Spirit to come down to the altar of our heart and to offer ourselves fully as a sacrifice to God.

All of the great fathers of the Church, especially the desert fathers, succeeded in becoming worthy of great gifts exclusively

through watchfulness and vision of God [*theoria*]. Keeping vigil all night and coming to the vision of the Light of God.

We have St. Gregory Palamas, the instructor of the desert, the instructor of *neptic* activity, the teacher of noetic prayer. This saint would remain enclosed in his cell for the entire week. He didn't go outside at all. There, on his knees and with hands upraised, he was vigilant about his nous and his heart and he received heavenly theology [literally "theology from above"—*trans.*] by the Holy Spirit. This is the theology which made known to him the Uncreated Light of the Divine Glory, of the Divine Nature.

The Uncreated Light is the glory of the Divine Nature. There was the goal and the conclusion of asceticism and of prayer. When the saints received this Light, they became all Light. And since the light floods the nous and the heart, how could they know less than the mysteries of the secrets which are known only to the angels? Through watchfulness the fathers attained to the pinnacle of the virtues and of the graces. And we, if we are watchful, if we pray, even if we are in the world, and even if we don't attain to similar states, no matter what, we will attain to a condition of purity. When we succeed by watchfulness in not judging our brother, this is no small achievement. We put into practice the commandment of our Christ, which is as follows: *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.* (Mt 7:1-2).

This is the commandment of Christ. It is not the commandment of some saint. It is God's. And therefore, by not judging, we put into practice a Divine commandment. When we do not judge, we will not be judged. Judge, and we will be judged. Sin is widespread. Wherever we turn our eyes and our imagination, we recognize the errors of men. Therefore, if we are inattentive, without watchfulness, we will always be found in the error of violation of this evangelical commandment of not judging our neighbor.

There was a monk in a monastery. The tempter had conquered him in negligence. He didn't do his canon, he didn't go to church, he didn't do his rule of prayer, and thus the fathers, not knowing much about him other than what they observed, regarded him negligent. The hour of death came and the fathers drew near him to see something, which perhaps God would show, in order that they may be benefited. Drawing near to the dying negligent monk, the fathers saw that he was very joyful. They were perplexed and they said in their thoughts:

—Look, why is he peaceful? The negligence which he had in his life doesn't worry him? What happened to the debts

which have been gathered because of sloth? Does his conscience not rebel? Does it not make him worry? Why is it that he doesn't despair?

He continued to be joyful. They compelled him to answer their question:

—Forgive us, brother, we see you doing so-so. We know and you know that you lived in negligence and sloth in monastic duties. Now you are heading to the judgment of Christ, and you should be somewhat sorry, worried, etc. But we see you otherwise, joyful, peaceful, with hope and we question: What is it that supports this state of yours?

He answered them and said:

—You are right, my fathers, that's how it is. I was negligent and didn't do what you did, but one thing I guarded in my life: Not to judge my brother. I read in the Holy Gospel, where the Lord says that the one who does not judge, will not be judged. Thus I tried, at least, not to judge. And I hope in the mercy of God that I will not be judged. For this reason I am departing with faith that God will apply His word to me, in spite of my negligence and slothfulness.

The fathers looked at each other, thought about what they heard and concluded that in fact, this brother was very intelligent and that he masterfully gained his salvation.

If we are watchful, we will not criticize. For without falling into the offense of judging, immediately watchfulness will set up a barrier and the thought of judgment will be prevented from continuing. Then we will experience what Abba Paphnutios experienced. And so we will escape from the

sin of judging and of criticism of the tongue and our names will be written in eternal life. A man who keeps his tongue pure, both inner and outer, that is to say, the inner thought and the tongue, and does this in the knowledge of God, this becomes his guarantee that he is saved. This spiritual attentiveness becomes light and as light, illumines our path towards salvation.

Another illumined path of watchfulness is also our path to sacred confession. The attention illumines it, which urges the man to settle his account with God. And he is guided by the light of watchfulness to this great mystery and there he deposits his entire debt, all the uncleanness of sins. He enters into this mysterious bath and comes out entirely clean. And I say that we must have much joy in our souls when we are accounted worthy to come into this bath. We must celebrate and thank the Lord who allowed this bath on earth, who allowed this authority of *binding and loosening*. Whatever things your spiritual father loosens, God also loosens. Whatever the representative of God forgives, the Lord also forgives. And when the man has been judged



here below, he is not judged above in the great and fearful judgment.

It is a great occasion when one arrives at this bath of holy confession. For this reason, all those who have been accounted worthy of this sacrament and continuously cleanse every soiling of the soul with this spiritual holy mystery of God, should have very great joy; the door of Paradise will always be open for them. And even if death follows, there is no anxiety. *He is prepared and not disturbed.* When the man is prepared, he is not disturbed at the approach of death. He knows that it is not possible for the word of God, which gave this authority, to be wrong. We experience it as a mystery of the Church and we see it in action and in application. When the man makes sacred confession with ardent desire, with humility, and with awareness, he feels the happiness within his soul, the lightness and the elation. A vivid proof that his sins have been forgiven.

And when sins are forgiven, then every anxious and uncertain fear about the next life is removed.

Our thanks to God must be unceasing. Our thanksgiving must never stop, because we are made worthy every time we want to receive this cleansing, and every time we feel a sin, immediately turn the mind to God. *I have sinned Lord, forgive me.* With this *I have sinned Lord, forgive me*, God answers: *My child, you are forgiven; the power of the law is remitted. Proceed to the application of the law.* And the application is beneath the *petraheli* (stole). There, all the sinfulness of man is ended. Forgiveness is so easy! It is very wrong for any man, when such a forgiveness is so easy and so free, and his egotism prohibits him from receiving it; his actions are those of a man who does not want to open the doors of Paradise and walk eternally in the glory of God!

Many men say: "Man should call upon God because of one sin? But this thing is wrong. Where is the love of God? Isn't God a Father?" Yes, He is a Father, but when this opportunity comes for Him to forgive you, why do you turn your back? Why do you not receive His mercy? Why do you refuse His embrace and go far away? Why do you accept the embrace of the devil and not of God? Perhaps your god seeks money or possessions or favors and you don't have all these things and for this reason you don't come to let go of your debt? But this is certainly not so; it is a deception!

God is very rich, as we see also in the parable of the prodigal. The prodigal wanted to depart far away. He demanded that he assume part of the possessions which belonged to him. And God gave him what he was owed as physical gifts. He didn't deprive him of them. However, he squandered these

gifts, the spiritual possessions, living prodigally. And when he arrived at the wretched end, he came to his senses; he came to himself; for he was not himself when all the prodigality reigned. And when he came to himself he said: *How many serve my father and they enjoy the good things of His possessions, and I His child, par excellence His child, am in such misery that I graze pigs and am allotted husks! I will return; He is a Father, He will receive me. I will ask forgiveness and will say to him, do not receive me as Your child, neither restore me to the first adoption, but I will ask Him to become one of His servants. And this will be a great thing.*

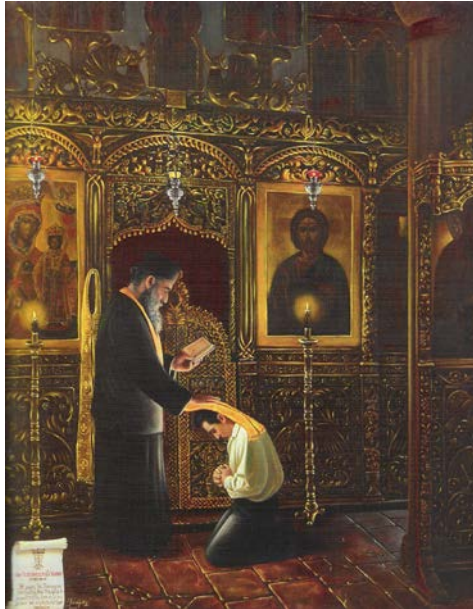
Once he thought these things and took on the journey of return, the Father had already come outside of His house and waited with open arms. He accepted him with all His heart and all His soul. He embraced him, He kissed him, He wept from joy, because he was dead and he was restored

to life, he was lost and was found. He made him His child again with all of the original wealth. He forgave everything. He cleansed him of every sin. He clothed him in the original garments. In the end, he gave him everything...

Our Heavenly Father does exactly the same things to anyone of us, who as sinners return to Him. He cleanses us, washes us, gives us the original garments of baptism, gives us son-ship and makes us worthy of His Kingdom. Everything is free. When the prodigal returned, He didn't seek an account, neither did He rebuke him nor did He seek to blame him. He begins at the point of the prodigal son's return; this was sufficient for the Father. Only to say "sinner," to leave

his sins with humility, to understand his mistakes and from then on everything is loosened. But the sinful man doesn't do this. He doesn't return, he isn't humbled. He holds on to his egotism. The most important step is the one that guides man to the confessional! And from then on the sinful ways of past life are finished. However, the tears of egotism hold back the sinful man. And when this comes to his hour of death and the reality of it hits him, then he will repent and he will be remorseful, but he may be too late. In this, God maintains little tolerance and has no respect for the person who refuses to humble his spirit.

As for Lucifer, this great battalion commander, who was once in the first place among all angelic hosts, what was the cause of his fall? What was the cause of the collapse, of the transformation from angels to demons? It was pride and egotism. The error came from these two passions. And as with the angels, so was also with our forbearers. The fall of our forbearers came about from pride and egotism. Because,



before God accomplished the verdict of guilt, he approached the man, Adam, and said to him: *Adam, why did you do this?* Adam didn't seek forgiveness, he didn't say: *God forbid this, I was wrong.* If he had done this, he wouldn't have been evicted out of Paradise and neither would we have all this banishment and suffering today. By not saying *God forbid this, I was wrong* all this plethora of evil came about. And thus now man doesn't say *God forbid this—I was wrong* and remains in his evil. But all this same has to do is to just say it: *God forbid this—I was wrong!* And God will stretch out His arms of forgiveness, and He takes him back in Paradise.

We, as Orthodox Christians, have been made worthy to know this great mystery of sacred confession. We should thus have very great joy; because whenever we fall down upon a sin, into something evil, we can run immediately to correct it and to preserve the health of our souls. And when death comes, we will go to meet the Lord, cleansed, repentant, and returned as prodigal sons. And our Heavenly Father will accept us and will place us within Paradise, the place of eternal bliss, where there is no end to Divine joy and sees no conclusion to that spiritual bliss, which cannot be compared to anything earthly.

And even the holy Apostle Paul, he that went up to the third heaven and saw the eternal good things, in spite of his apostolic and graceful tongue, he remained unable to express with human words the things of Paradise and the life above! Indeed, such is the inexpressible gift of happiness that is attained through sacred confession.

Therefore, my brethren, with much yearning, love, and awareness we must all run to be cleansed, to be made ready and when death follows, to depart in peace. Amen.



Let us love the humble disposition, my child, and if the Lord pities our nakedness and sends us some ability to pray and clothes our soul with some divine garment, we must be cautious lest we soil it out of carelessness: that is, through pride, criticism, negligence, disobedience, etc. But let us make a greater effort to whiten it through good works, especially through humble-mindedness and self-reproach. God is pleased more with these than with great works done with vainglory.

Always have perfect obedience. Obedience is the offspring of humility. Whereas back talk, quarrels, and disobedience are the offspring of pride, which a monk must hate as the cause of his soul's defilement.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou

SIMPLIFYING OUR LIFE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite.

Once, when I was staying with a friend in Athens, he asked me to receive a family man, who could only see me in the morning—at dawn—because that was the only time he had available. He arrived in a cheerful mood, praising God in every other word. He was full of humility and simplicity, and begged me to pray for his family. This brother, who was about 38 years old, had seven children. At home, they were eleven souls; because his parents lived with them, and they all shared the same room. He spoke with great simplicity: — The room fits us all if we stand up, but it is a bit tight if we lie down. Thank God, we are now constructing a shed to use as a kitchen; and we are doing fine. Father, at least we have a roof over our head, while other people live in the open air.

The man was an ironer. He lived in Athens and had to leave everyday before dawn, [in order] to arrive in Peiraeus in time for work in a dry-cleaning shop. He was suffering from varicose veins, as a result of having to stand up all that time, and his legs bothered him a lot; but his love for his family made him forget his pain and discomfort. In fact, he pitied himself constantly for not having, as he said, any love in his heart, because he did not do any acts of Christian charity; and praised his wife for being charitable. Apparently, besides taking care of her children and her parents-in-law, she would wash the clothes of some elderly men in the neighborhood, tidy up their homes, and even cook a little something, like soup, for them.

You could see divine Grace depicted on the face of this good family man. He had Christ in his heart and was full of joy, just like his one-room house was filled with heavenly bliss. Compare this man with people who do not have Christ in their heart: they are filled with anxiety. Take two of them and try to fit them in a house large enough for eleven people: they will not find a way to fit.



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

A PASCHAL EPISTLE

By Saint John Maximovitch, to his Western European and East Asian flock and to all his spiritual children, 1956.

Let us cleanse our senses and see through the gleaming, unapproachable light of Christ's Resurrection.

Now is everything filled—full with light—the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. All is presently bathed in light: Christ is risen from the dead. The heavens make merry, the earth rejoiceth, the underworld exulteth.

The Angels in Heaven hymn Thy Resurrection, O Christ-Saviour. Do Thou make us, on earth, also worthy to glorify Thee with a pure heart.

The Angelic Choir, horrified at seeing Its Creator and Master dead, doth now, in joyous song, glorify Him resurrected. Today doth Adam exult, and Eve rejoiceth; and with them do the Prophets and Patriarchs sing worthy songs to the Creator of all and to our Deliverer, Who did descend into the underworld for our sake.

The Giver of Life doth lead men out of hell this day, and up-lifteth them to Heaven; He layeth low the powers of the enemy and breaketh down the gates of hell by the Divine power of His authority.

On earth, the Angels announce the gladsome tidings to men and declare Christ's Resurrection. Attired in gleaming white robes, the Angels ask the Myrrh-bearing Women: *Why seek ye the Living One amongst the dead? He is risen; He is not here! Come, see the place where the Lord did lie.*

The myrrh-bearing women rush to the Apostles, bearing to them the joyous news. And through the Apostles the Gospel is Christ's Resurrection preached unto the entire world today.

Not all the Apostles immediately saw the risen Christ through spiritual eyes. Two disciples travelling to Emmaus did see Jesus walking with them, but did not recognize Him till such time as He had warmed their saddened hearts; and then were their spiritual eyes opened. Mary Magdalene conversed with Christ in the garden, but neither recognized Him nor was cognizant of the mystery of the Resurrection, until the voice of her beloved Teacher touched her heart and illumined her soul, which had been given to thinking in worldly fashion.

It was the Beloved Disciple John, whose heart was pure and undimmed by timidity, who before all others exalted the light of the risen Christ through spiritual eyes; and with his bodily eyes did he behold the manifested Lord.

Scattering and dispersing the dark and gloomy tempest of sin, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, shone forth, gleaming not in the hearts and souls of the Apostles only, but in those of all who draw near to Him with faith seeking salvation.

Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed, Christ proclaimed; Blessed are those who have perceived Me not with bodily eyes, but with the eyes of the heart.

It was with his spiritual eyes that Archdeacon Stephen, the proto-martyr, saw the heavens opened and the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God the Father. It was with eyes of faith that the risen Lord was beheld by Great-martyr George the Trophy-bearer and by all the other martyrs who laid down their earthly lives for Christ, in order that they might receive from Him life eternal. It was upon Him that *podvizhniki* ["athletes"-of-the-spirit] did fix their spiritual gaze; despising earthly pleasures, they were crowned in the heavens with glory unfading.

But neither the Scribes nor the Pharisees, His enemies, saw the resurrected Christ. Nor did the tormentors of the martyrs see Him, strengthening the martyrs. Neither did, nor do, all those whose spiritual gaze is dimmed by unbelief, whose heart is befouled with sins and vices, whose will is directed only toward the earthly, ever see the light of the glory of the risen Christ.

Let us cleanse our hearts from all filth and foulness,

and our spiritual eyes will be enlightened.

The light of Christ's Resurrection will flood and fill our souls, in like manner as the Church of the Resurrection, yearly, throughout the centuries, on Great Saturday, is illumined with light when the Orthodox—and only the Orthodox—Patriarch receives the Heavenly Fire.

Let us lift up our hearts! Let us forsake everything worldly; let us rejoice in this day and be exceeding glad! Christ is risen from the dead, having trampled death by death.

Christ is risen!

Archbishop John, The Pascha of Christ, 1956, Paris



Do not be anxious about unclean thoughts. Consider a basket full of wet clothes. If we leave the clothes in the basket for a long time, they will surely rot; the same will happen to our thoughts. If we do not put them into action, they will disappear by themselves in the course of time.

Abba Poimen the Great



Οἱ Ἐπτά Φράσεις τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν Σταυρό

Ἀγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς (+1956).



Θέλετε νὰ μάθετε τὴ σημασία ἐκείνων τῶν ἑπτὰ φράσεων τὶς ὁποῖες εἶπε ὁ Κύριος πάνω στὸν σταυρό. Δὲν εἶναι σαφεῖς;

Πρώτη φράση: «**Πάτερ, ἄφες αὐτοῖς ὡς γὰρ οἶδας τί ποιοῦσι.**» (Λουκ. 23:34). Μὲ

αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ὁ Χριστὸς ἔδειξε τὸ ἔλεός Του ἀπέναντι στοὺς ἐκτελεστές Του, τῶν ὁποίων ἡ μοχθηρία δὲν ὑποχώρησε οὔτε ὅταν ὑπέφερε στὸν σταυρό. Τὸ δεύτερο εἶναι ὅτι βροντοφώνησε ἀπὸ τὴν κορυφὴ τοῦ βράχου τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ μία ἀποδεδειγμένη ἀλλὰ ποτὲ καλὰ συνειδητοποιημένη ἀλήθεια, δηλαδὴ ὅτι αὐτοὶ ποὺ πράττουν τὸ κακὸ ποτὲ δὲν ξέρουν τί κάνουν. Σκοτώνοντας τὸν Δίκαιο στὴν πραγματικότητα σκοτώνουν τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους καὶ ταυτόχρονα δοξάζουν τὸν Δίκαιο. Καταπατώντας τὸν νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν βλέπουν τὴ μυλόπετρα, ἡ ὁποία ἀόρατα κατεβαίνει πρὸς αὐτοὺς γιὰ νὰ τοὺς συνθλίψει. Ἐμπαίζοντας τὸν Θεὸ δὲν βλέπουν τὰ πρόσωπά τους νὰ μεταμορφώνονται σὲ θηριώδη ρύγχη. Διαποτισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸ ποτὲ δὲν ξέρουν τί κάνουν.

Δεύτερη φράση: «**Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἔσῃ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ.**» (Λουκ. 23:43). Αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος ἀπευθύνεται στὸν μετανιωμένο ληστή στὸν σταυρό. Πολὺ παρήγορος λόγος γιὰ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, οἱ ὁποῖοι τουλάχιστον τὴν τελευταία στιγμὴ μετανοοῦν. Τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἀπερίγραπτα μεγάλο. Ὁ Κύριος ἐκπληρώνει τὴν ἀποστολὴ Του ἀκόμα καὶ στὸν σταυρό. Ἔως τὴν τελευταία Του πνοὴ ὁ Κύριος σώζει ἐκείνους ποὺ δείχνουν καὶ τὴν παραμικρὴ ἐπιθυμία νὰ σωθοῦν.

Τρίτη φράση: «**Γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου.**» (Ἰωάν. 19:26). Ἔτσι εἶπε ὁ Κύριος στὴν Ἁγία Μητέρα Του ποὺ στεκόταν κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν σταυρὸ μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ σταυρωμένη. Καὶ στὸν ἀπόστολο Ἰωάννη λέγει: «**Ἴδὸν ἢ μήτηρ σου.**» (Ἰωάν. 19:27). Αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος δείχνει τὴ φροντίδα, ποὺ ὁ καθένας χρωστᾷ στοὺς γονεῖς του. Γιὰ δὲς, Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔδωσε ἐντολὴ στοὺς ἀνθρώπους: «**Τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα σου**» (Ἐξ. 20:12) ἐκπληρώνει τὴν ἐντολὴ Του τὴν ὑστατη στιγμὴ.

Τέταρτη φράση: «**Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου, ἵνατί μὲ ἐγκατέλιπες**» (Ματθ. 27:46). Αὐτὲς οἱ λέξεις δείχνουν, τόσο τὴν ἀδύναμη ἀνθρώπινη φύση, ὅσο καὶ τὴν προορατικότητα τοῦ Κυρίου. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πάσχει, ἀλλὰ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ἀνθρώπινο πόνο ὑπάρχει ἓνα μυστήριον. Δὲς, μόνον αὐτὲς οἱ λέξεις μπορούσαν νὰ διαλύσουν τὴν αἴρεση, ἡ ὁποία ἀργότερα τράνταζε

τὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ ὁποία λανθασμένα κήρυττε ὅτι ἡ Θεία φύση ὑπέφερε στὸν σταυρό. Ὅμως, ἐν τῷ μεταξύ, ὁ αἰώνιος Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἐνσαρκώθηκε ὡς ἄνθρωπος, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ὡς ἄνθρωπος στὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσει ὅταν ἔλθει ἡ στιγμὴ νὰ πάσχει γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ νὰ πεθάνει γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Γιατί ἂν ἡ Θεία φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔπασχε στὸν σταυρό, θὰ σήμαινε ὅτι ἡ Θεία φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ πέθαινε. Καὶ αὐτὸ οὔτε κἄν ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ διανοηθοῦμε. Ἐντρυφήστε ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ μπορεῖτε σ' αὐτὲς τὶς μεγάλες καὶ φοβερὲς λέξεις: «Θεέ μου, Θεέ μου, ἵνατί μὲ ἐγκατέλιπες».

Ἡ πέμπτη φράση: «**Διψῶ!**» (Ἰωάν. 19:28). Τὸ αἷμα Του ἔρρεε. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ διψοῦσε. Ὁ ἥλιος ἦταν κατὰ τὴ δύση του, ἤδη τοῦ χτυποῦσε τὸ πρόσωπο καὶ μαζὶ μὲ τὰ ἄλλα βασανιστήρια καιγόταν πολὺ. Φυσικὸ ἦταν νὰ διψᾷ. Ἀλλὰ, Κύριε, διψοῦσες ὄντως γιὰ νερὸ ἢ γιὰ ἀγάπη; Μήπως διψοῦσες ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἢ ὡς Θεός, ἢ καὶ τὸ ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἄλλο; Ἴδου ὁ Ρωμαῖος λεγεωνάριος Σοῦ πρόσφερε ἓνα σπόγγον βρεγμένο στὸ ξύδι. Μιὰ σταγόνα ἐλέους, τὴν ὁποία δὲν αἰσθάνθηκες ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τρεῖς ὀλόκληρες ὥρες κρεμασμένος στὸν σταυρό! Αὐτὸς ὁ Ρωμαῖος στρατιώτης ἀπαλύνει κάπως τὴν ἁμαρτία τοῦ Πιλάτου—τὴν ἁμαρτία τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας—ἀπέναντί Σου, ἔστω καὶ μὲ ξύδι. Γι' αὐτὸ θὰ ἀφανίσαις τὴ Ρωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία, ἀλλὰ στὴ θέση της θὰ οἰκοδομήσεις νέα.

Ἡ ἕκτη φράση: «**Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖρας σου παρατίθεται τὸ πνεῦμά μου.**» (Λουκ. 23:46). Πού σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ Υἱὸς παραδίδει τὸ πνεῦμα Του στὰ χεῖρα τοῦ Πατρὸς Του. Γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ γνωστὸ, ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸν Πατέρα ἦρθε καὶ ὄχι αὐτεξουσίως, ὅπως τὸν κατηγοροῦσαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Ἀλλὰ ἀκόμα οἱ λέξεις αὐτὲς ἐλέγχθησαν γιὰ νὰ τὶς ἀκούσουν οἱ βουδιστές, οἱ πυθαγόρειοι, οἱ ἀποκρυφιστές, καὶ ὅλοι ἐκεῖνοι οἱ φιλόσοφοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι φλυαροῦσαν περὶ μετοίκησης τῆς ψυχῆς τῶν νεκρῶν ἀνθρώπων σὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ἢ ζῶα, ἢ φυτὰ, ἢ ἀστέρια, ἢ μεταλλικὰ στοιχεῖα. Πεταξέτε ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς φαντασίες καὶ δεῖτε ποῦ κατευθύνεται τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ νεκροῦ Δικαίου: «Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεται τὸ πνεῦμά μου!»

Ἡ ἕβδομη φράση: «**Τετέλεσται...**» (Ἰωάν. 19:30). Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι τελειώνει ἡ ζωὴ. Ὅχι! Ἀλλὰ ὅτι τελειώνει ἡ ἀποστολὴ ἢ ἐπικεντρωμένη στὴ σωτηρία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους. Τελείωσε, καὶ ἐπισφραγίσθηκε μὲ τὸ αἷμα καὶ τὸν ἐπίγειο θάνατο, τὸ θεῖο ἔργον τοῦ μοναδικοῦ ἀληθινοῦ Μεσσία τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Τελείωσαν τὰ βασανιστήρια, ἀλλὰ ἡ ζωὴ μόλις ἀρχίζει. Τελείωσε ἡ τραγωδία ἀλλὰ ὄχι καὶ τὸ δράμα. Στὴ σειρὰ ἔπεται, τὸ μεγαλειώδες ἀξίωμα: νίκη πάνω στὸν θάνατο, ἀνάσταση, δόξα.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

Ἡ Ἁγιασμένη Ἐπανάσταση

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη», Ἐκδόσεις Ἀστήρ.



Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση εἶναι ἡ πιὸ πνευματικὴ ἐπανάσταση ποὺ ἔγινε στὸν κόσμο. Εἶναι ἁγιασμένη!

Ἡ σκλαβιά ποὺ ἔσπρωξε τοὺς Ἕλληνες νὰ ξεσηκωθοῦνε καταπάνω στὸν Τούρκο δὲν ἦταν μονάχα ἡ στέρηση κι ἡ κακοπάθεια τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ἀλλά, ἀπάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, τὸ ὅτι ὁ τύραννος ἤθελε νὰ χαλάσει τὴν πίστη τους, μὴν ἀποδέχονται τοὺς ἀπὸ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ χρέη τους, ἀλλαξοπιστίζοντας τους καὶ σφάζοντας ἢ κρεμάζοντας τους, ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἀρنيότανε τὴν πίστη τους γιὰ νὰ γίνουνε μωχαμετάνοι.

Γιὰ τοῦτο πίστη καὶ πατρίδα εἶχανε γίνεῖ ἓνα καὶ τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, κ' ἡ λευτεριά ποὺ ποθοῦσαν δὲν ἦτανε μοναχὰ ἡ λευτεριά ποὺ ποθοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ ἐπαναστάτες, ἀλλά ἡ λευτεριά νὰ φυλάξουνε τὴν ἁγιασμένη πίστη τους, ποὺ μ' αὐτὴν ἐλπίζανε νὰ σώσουνε τὴν ψυχὴ τους. Γιατί, γι' αὐτοὺς, κοντὰ στὸ κορμί, ποὺ ἔχει τόσες ἀνάγκες καὶ ποὺ μὲ τόσα βάσανα γίνεται ἡ συντήρησή του, ὑπῆρχε κ' ἡ ψυχὴ, ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς πὼς ἀξίζει περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ὅσο περισσότερο ἀξίζει τὸ ροῦχο ἀπ' αὐτό.

Ἐκεῖνες οἱ ἀπλὲς ψυχές, ποὺ ζούσανε στὰ βουνὰ καὶ στὰ ρημοτόπια, ἦτανε διδαγμένες ἀπὸ τοὺς πατεράδες τους στὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ γνωρίζανε, μ' ὅλο ποὺ ἦτανε ἀγράμματα, κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια του, ὅπως εἶναι τοῦτα: «*Τί θὰ ὠφελήσει ἄραγε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἂν κερδίσει τὸν κόσμο ὅλο, καὶ ζημιωθεῖ τὴν ψυχὴ του;*» «*Ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι πιὸ πολύτιμη ἀπὸ τὴ θροφή, ὅπως τὸ κορμὶ ἀπὸ τὸ φόρεμα!*», κ.ἄ.

Γιὰ τοῦτο, κατὰ τὰ χρόνια τῆς σκλαβιάς, χιλιάδες παλληκάρια σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμαστήκανε καὶ παλουκωθήκανε γιὰ τὴν πίστη τους, ἀψηφώντας τὴ νεότητά τους, καὶ μὴ δίνοντας σημασία στὸ κορμὶ τους καὶ σὲ τούτη τὴν πρόσκαιρη ζωὴ. Στράτευμα ὀλάκερο εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι νεομάρτυρες, ποὺ δὲ θανατωθήκανε γιὰ τὰ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ τούτης τῆς ζωῆς, ἀλλά γιὰ τὴν πολύτιμη ψυχὴ τους, ποὺ γνωρίζανε πὼς δὲ θὰ πεθάνει μαζί μὲ τὸ κορμὶ, ἀλλά θὰ ζήσει αἰώνια. Ἀκούγανε καὶ πιστεύανε ἀτρέπταχα τὰ λόγια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ εἶπε: «*Μὴ φοβηθῆτε ἐκεῖνον ποὺ σκοτώνει τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει τίποτα παραπάνω. Ἀλλά*

νὰ φοβηθεῖτε ἐκεῖνον ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ θανατώσει καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ.»

Ἡ ἐλευθερία, ποὺ γι' αὐτὴ θυσιαζόντανε, δὲν ἦτανε κάποια ἀκαθόριστη θεότητα, ἀλλά ἦτανε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς, ποὺ γι' αὐτὸν εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: «*Ὅπου τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ἐκεῖ εἶναι κ' ἡ ἐλευθερία.*». Κι ἄλλοῦ λέγει: «*Σταθεῖτε στερεὰ στὴν ἐλευθερία ποὺ σὰς χάρισε ὁ Χριστὸς, σταθεῖτε καὶ μὴν πέσετε πάλι στὸ ζυγὸ τῆς δουλείας. Γιατὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία σας κάλεσε. Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μὴν τὴν παίρνετε μονάχα σὰν ἀφορμὴ γιὰ τὴ σάρκα σας.*»



Ὅσοι ἀπομείναμε πιστοὶ στὴν παράδοση, ὅσοι δὲν ἀρνηθήκαμε τὸ γάλα ποὺ βυζάξαμε, ἀγωνιζόμαστε, ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ, καταπάνω στὴν ψευτιά. Καταπάνω σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ θέλουνε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἓνα κουφάρι χωρὶς ψυχὴ, ἓνα λουλουῖδι χωρὶς μυρουδιά. Κουράγιο, ὁ καιρὸς θὰ δεῖξει ποῖος ἔχει δίκιο, ἂν καὶ δὲ χρειάζεται ὀλότελα αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπόδειξη.

Φώτης Κόντογλου (+1965)



Γέροντα, βλέποντας κανεὶς τὶς ἐφημερίδες, τὶς εἰδήσεις, τὸ τί συμβαίνει στὴ γειτονιά μας, στὸν κόσμον ὀλόκληρο, διαπιστώνει ὅτι εἶναι διάχυτος ὁ πόνος. Ὁ πόλεμος, ἡ ἀρρώστια, ὁ καρκίνος, οἱ δοκιμασίες. Γιατὶ τὰ ἐπιτρέπει ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἀγάπης αὐτά;

—Νὰ ξέρετε ὅτι ὁ καλὸς Θεὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ἐκδικηθεῖ κανέναν. Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ γίνεῖ δῆμιος μὲ κανέναν. Ὁ Θεὸς πολλὲς φορὲς συλλαμβάνει καὶ παίρνει τὴν ἀσθένεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸν βοηθᾷ νὰ ἔρθει πιὸ κοντὰ του. Νὰ μαλακώσει ἡ καρδιά του. Θυμᾶμαι τὸν Γερο-Παῖσιο ποὺ ἔλεγε: «*Πολλὲς φορὲς οἱ δοκιμασίες εἶναι ὅπως τὴ λάσπη καὶ τὸ κερί. Ὅταν ὁ ἥλιος δώσει πάνω στὴ λάσπη, ἡ λάσπη γίνεται πιὸ σκληρὴ. Ὅταν ὁ ἥλιος δώσει εἰς τὸ κερί, τὸ κερί λιώνει. Δὲν γίνεται σκληρό.*» Ἐξαργάται ὁ ἄνθρωπος σὲ ποιὰν ὁμάδα εἶναι καὶ πὼς φτιάχνει τὴ ζωὴ του γιὰ νὰ μπορέσει ἢ δοκιμασία νὰ μὴν τὸν σκληρύνει, ἀλλά νὰ τὸ μαλακώσει, νὰ τὸν ταπεινώσει. Νὰ τὸν φέρει πιὸ κοντὰ στὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ καταλάβει τὶς δοκιμασίες, ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει ὀρισμένους δυνατότητες καὶ μόνο. Βλέπετε ἓνας ἄνθρωπος, μιὰ στάλα αἵματος νὰ μπεῖ στὸ μυαλό του, ἀχρηστεύτηκε ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Γέρων Ἐφραίμ Βατοπαιδινὸς
Καθηγούμενος Ι.Μ.Μ.Βατοπαιδίου Ἁγίου Ὁρους

Τὸ Ἅγιον Φῶς Μαρτυρεῖ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία

Συνοπτικὴ Παρουσίαση ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς «Ρομφαίας».

Συμβολίζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποδεικνύει περιτρανῶς τὸ Μέγα Μυστήριον τῆς ἐκ νεκρῶν Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Μᾶς γεμίζει αἰσθήματα πνευματικῆς, ψυχικῆς καὶ θρησκευτικῆς ἀνατάσεως. Αἱ καρδίαι ὄλων χτυποῦν ἀπὸ πίστιν, θαυμασμόν καὶ ἐλπίδα διὰ τὸ Μέγα μυστήριον τῆς Ζωῆς. Πρόκειται διὰ ἀληθινὸν θαῦμα, τὸ ὁποῖον δὲν χωρᾶ καμὴν ἀμφισβήτησιν.

Ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶτὸ τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου χιλιάδες πιστοὶ τῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ προσκυνηταὶ ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ μέρη τοῦ κόσμου κατακλύζουσι τὸν Ναὸν τῆς Ἀναστάσεως διὰ νὰ παρακολουθήσουν τὴν Τελετὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Φωτός.

Τὴν 12^{ην} μεσημβρινὴν ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Πατριάρχης τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων συνοδεῖα Ἀρχιερέων καὶ ἄλλων Κληρικῶν φθάνει εἰς τὸ Πατριαρχεῖον. Εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα τοῦ Καθολικοῦ καὶ οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι παίρνουν τὴν ἄδειαν διὰ νὰ λάβουν μέρος εἰς τὴν Τελετὴν. Κατόπιν οἱ Ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ Κληρικοὶ ντύνονται μὲ ἄμφια καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης μὲ τὴν πλήρη Ἀρχιερατικὴν στολὴν. Ὁ Πατριάρχης ἠγεῖται τῆς πομπῆς, ἡ ὁποία ξεκινᾶ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα τοῦ Καθολικοῦ καὶ βαδίζει τρεῖς φορὰς πέριξ τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κουβουκλίου ὑπὸ τῶν ἤχων τῶν ψαλμωδῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι ψάλλουν τὸ «Τὴν Ἀνάστασίν σου Χριστέ Σωτήρ...»

Εἶναι ἀναγκαῖον νὰ τονίσουμε ὅτι οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι ἔχουν προκαταβολικῶς ἐρευνήσει ὅλον τὸ ἐσωτερικὸν τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κουβουκλίου, διὰ νὰ πιστοποιήσουν... ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀναμμένον κανδήλιον ἢ ἄλλη πηγὴ φωτός. Μετὰ τὴν λιτανεῖαν ὁ Πατριάρχης ἵσταται ἔμπροσθεν τῆς θύρας τοῦ Ἁγίου Κουβουκλίου, ἀφαιρεῖ τὰ ἄμφια καὶ περιμένει μὲ τὸ στοιχάρι, πετραχήλι καὶ τὴν ζώνην. Οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι κάνουν ἔρευνα διὰ νὰ βεβαιωθοῦν ὅτι ἐπάνω του δὲν ἔχει κάτι, τὸ ὁποῖον θὰ ἠδύνατο νὰ δημιουργήσῃ ὑπονοίας, ἢ νὰ κινήσῃ ὑποψίας. Ὅταν ὀλοκληρωθῇ ἡ ἔρευνα, οἱ φύλακες ἀφαιροῦν τὰς σφραγίδας ἀπὸ τὴν θύραν καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸ Ἱερὸν Κουβούκλιον μὲ δυὸ δεσμίδας ἐσβησμένα κεριά. Μαζί του εἰσέρχονται εἰς τὸν προθάλαμον ὁ Ἀρμένιος Πατριάρχης καὶ ὁ Δραγομάνος, οἵτινες παραμένουν εἰς τὸν προθάλαμον. Εἰς ὅλον τὸν Ναὸν ἐπικρατεῖ συγκίνησις καὶ ἀγωνία.

Ὁ Πατριάρχης γονατιστὸς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Ἁγίου Τάφου τοῦ Χριστοῦ προσεύχεται πρὸς τὸν Σταυρωθέντα, κρατῶν δυὸ σβηστὰς λαμπάδας καὶ μὲ ταπεινώσιν καὶ εὐλάβειαν ἀναπέμπων τὴν ἀκόλουθην εὐχήν:

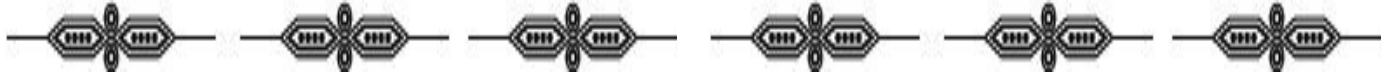
«Δέσποτα Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἡ ἀρχίφωτος σοφία τοῦ ἀνάρχου Πατρός. Ὁ φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον, ὁ εἰπὼν ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμπαι, ὁ εἰπὼν γεννηθῆτω

φῶς καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς. Κύριε, ὁ τοῦ φωτὸς χορηγός, ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ σκότους τῆς πλάνης καὶ εἰσαγαγὼν εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν φῶς τῆς σῆς ἐπιγνώσεως, ὁ τὴν γῆν μὲν πᾶσαν διὰ τῆς ἐν αὐτῇ ἐνσάρκου παρουσίας σου, τὰ καταχθόνια δὲ διὰ τῆς εἰς Ἄδην καταβάσεώς σου φωτὸς πληρώσας καὶ χαρᾶς, μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα διὰ τῶν ἁγίων σου Ἀποστόλων φῶς καταγγείλας πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. Εὐχαριστοῦμεν σοί, ὅτι διὰ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πίστεως μετήγαγες ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ σκότους εἰς φῶς καὶ γεγόναμεν υἱοὶ διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, θεασάμενοι τὴν δόξαν σου πλήρη οὐσαν χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ἀλλ' ὃ φωτοπάροχε Κύριε, ὁ τὸ μέγα φῶς ὢν, ὁ εἰπὼν, ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει. Δέσποτα Κύριε, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινόν, ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον. Τὸ μόνο φῶς τοῦ κόσμου καὶ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οὗ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης ἐπληρώθη τὰ σύμπαντα, ὅτι φῶς εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐλήλυθας διὰ τῆς ἐνσάρκου σου οἰκονομίας, εἰ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἠγάπησαν μᾶλλον τὸ σκότος ἢ τὸ φῶς. Σὺ Κύριε φωτοδότα, ἐπάκουσον ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν καὶ ἀναξίων δούλων σου τῶν τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ παρισταμένων τῷ παναγίῳ σου καὶ φωτοφόρῳ τούτῳ τάφῳ καὶ πρόσδεξαι ἡμᾶς τιμώντας τὰ ἄχραντα πάθη σου, τὴν παναγίαν σου σταύρωσιν, τὸν ἐκούσιον θάνατον καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ πανσεβάστῳ τούτῳ μνήματι τοῦ τεθεωμένου σου σώματος κατάθεσιν καὶ ταφήν καὶ τριήμερον ἐξανάστασιν, ἣν χαρμονικῶς ἤδη ἀρξάμενοι ἐορτάζεις, μνεῖαν ποιούμεθα καὶ τῆς ἐν Ἄδου καθόδου σου, δι' ἣς τὰς ἐκεῖσε τῶν δικαίων κατεχομένης ψυχᾶς δεσποτικῶς ἠλευθέρωσας τῇ ἀστραπῇ τῆς σῆς θεότητος φωτὸς πληρώσας τὰ καταχθόνια. Ὅθεν δὴ ἀγαλλομένη καρδία καὶ χαρᾶ πνευματικῇ κατὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὑπερευλογημένον Σάββατον τὸ ἐν γῆ καὶ ὑπὸ γῆν θεοπρεπῶς τελεσθέντα σοὶ σωτηριωδέστατα μυστήρια σου ἐορτάζοντες καὶ σὲ τὸ ὄντως ἰλαρὸν καὶ ἐφετὸν φῶς ἐν τοῖς καταχθονίοις θεϊκῶς ἐπιλάμπαν ἀναμνησκόμενοι, φωτοφάνειαν ποιούμεθα, σοὺ τὴν πρὸς ἡμᾶς συμπαθῶς γενομένην θεοφανείαν, εἰκονίζοντες. Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τῇ σωτηρίῳ καὶ φωταυγείᾳ νυκτὶ πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτὸς οὐρανὸς τὸ καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ καταχθόνια διὰ τὸ ὑπερφυῆς μυστήριον τῆς ἐν Ἄδου καθόδου σου καὶ τῆς ἐκ Τάφου σου τριήμερου ἀναστάσεως. Διὰ τοῦτο, ἐκ τοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦτον τὸν φωτοφόρον σου Τάφον εὐλαβῶς λαμβάνοντες, διαδίδομεν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς σὲ τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν καὶ δεόμεθα σου, Πανάγιε Δέσποτα, ὅπως ἀναδείξῃς αὐτὸ ἀγιασμοῦ δῶρον καὶ πάσης θεϊκῆς σου χάριτος πεπληρωμένον, διὰ τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Παναγίου καὶ φωτοφόρου Τάφου σου. Καὶ τοὺς ἀπτομένους εὐλαβῶς αὐτοῦ εὐλογήσῃς καὶ ἀγιάσῃς, τοῦ σκότους τῶν παθῶν ἐλευθεριῶν καὶ τῶν φωτεινοτάτων σου σκηνῶν καταξιώσῃς, ὅπου φῶς τὸ

ἀνέσπερόν της σῆς θεότητος λάμπει. Χάρισαι αὐτοῖς, Κύριε, ὑγείαν καὶ εὐζωίαν καὶ τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ πλήρωσον.

Ναί, Δέσποτα φωτοπάροχε, ἐπάκουσόν μου τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ καὶ δὸς ἡμῖν τέ καὶ αὐτοῖς περιπατεῖν ἐν τῷ φωτί σου καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ μένειν, ἕως τὸ φῶς τῆς προσκαιροῦ ζωῆς ταύτης ἔχωμεν. Δὸς ἡμῖν Κύριε, ἵνα τὸ φῶς τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἡμῶν λάμπῃ ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δοξάζωσι σὲ σὺν τῷ ἀνάρχῳ σου Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ Παναγίῳ Πνεύματι. Εἰς φῶς γὰρ ἔθνῶν ἡμᾶς τέθηκας, ἵνα αὐτοῖς τῇ σκοτίᾳ περιπατοῦσι φαίνωμεν. Ἄλλ' ἡμεῖς ἠγαπήσαμεν τὸ σκότος μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ φῶς, φαῦλα πράσσοντες. Πᾶς γὰρ ὁ φαῦλα πράσων μισεῖ τὸ φῶς κατὰ τὸν ἀψευδῆ λόγον σου. Διὰ τοῦτο ὀσημέραι προσκόπτομεν ἁμαρτάνοντες, ἐπειδὴ περιπατοῦμεν ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ. Ἄλλ' ἀξίωσον ἡμᾶς τὸ ὑπόλοιπόν τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν βιωτεῦσαι πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς διανοίας ἡμῶν. Δὸς ἡμῖν, ἵνα ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατήσωμεν ἐν τῷ φωτί τῶν ἐντολῶν σου. Τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος φωτεινὸν ἔνδυμα, ὅπερ διὰ τῶν ἔργων ἡμαυρώσαμεν, λεύκανον, ὡς τὸ φῶς, ὁ ἀναβαλλόμενος τὸ φῶς ὡσπερ ἱμάτιον. Δὸς ἡμῖν ἐνδύσασθαι τὰ ὄπλα τοῦ φωτός, ἵνα δι' αὐτῶν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ σκότους τροποῦμεθα, ὃς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός. Ναί, Κύριε, καὶ ὡς ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένοις φῶς ἔλαμψας οὕτω σήμερον λάμπσον ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν τὸ σὸν ἀκήρατον φῶς ἵνα τούτου φωτιζόμενοι καὶ θερμαινόμενοι ἐν τῇ πίστει, δοξάζωμεν Σὲ τὸ μόνον ἐκ μόνου τοῦ ἀρχιφώτου φωτός, ἰλαρὸν φῶς εἰς τοὺς ἀτελευτήτους αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν».

Μετὰ τὸ πέρας τῆς εὐχῆς τοποθετεῖ τὸ βαμβάκιον εἰς τὸν Πανάγιον Τάφον καὶ μεθ' αὐτοῦ θανασιὸν τρόπον ἀνάβει. Μετὰ αὐτὸ ἀνάβει τὰ κεριὰ καὶ ἐξέρχεται ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἱερῶν Κουβούκλιον. Τὸ σπουδαῖον εἶναι ὅτι τὸ ἅγιον φῶς διὰ ὀλίγα λεπτὰ δὲν ἔχει πυράδα. Δηλαδή ἐὰν εἰς ἀκουμπήσῃ τὸ ἅγιον φῶς εἰς τὰ χέρια του δὲν θὰ καῖ. Πραγματικῶς εἶναι ἐν ἐκ τῶν μεγαλυτέρων Θαυμάτων τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, τὸ ὁποῖον ἐπαναλαμβάνεται κάθε χρόνον τὸ Μέγα Σάββατον.



Ὅποιος κυνηγᾷ τὸν πλοῦτον, ἔχει πάντοτε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ χρήματα. Ὅποιος ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ τὸν πλοῦτον, εἶναι πάντοτε πλούσιος. Γιατὶ ἀληθινὸς πλοῦτος δὲν εἶναι τὸ νὰ πλουτίζεις, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ μὴ θέλεις νὰ πλουτίζεις. Καὶ νὰ τί ἐννοῶ: Ὑπάρχει πλούσιος ποὺ ἀπ' ὅλους ἀρπάζει, καὶ ὑπάρχει πλούσιος ποὺ σ' ὅλους δίνει. Ὁ ἕνας πλουτίζει μετὰ τὸ νὰ συνάξει, ὁ ἄλλος μετὰ τὸ νὰ προσφέρει. Ὁ πρῶτος σπέρνει στὴ γῆ, ὁ δεῦτερος στὸν οὐρανόν. Καὶ ὅσο καλύτερος εἶναι ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, τόσο καὶ ἡ εὐφορία του εἶναι μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν εὐφορία τῆς γῆς. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Κύριος μᾶς παραγγέλλει: «Μὴ μαζεύετε θησαυροὺς πάνω στὴ γῆ. Νὰ μαζεύετε θησαυροὺς στὸν οὐρανόν». Πουλήστε τὰ ὑπάρχοντά σας καὶ δώστε τὰ χρήματα στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Ἀποκτήστε πορτοφόλια ποὺ δὲν παλιώνουν, πλούτη μόνιμα στὸν κόσμον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ Ἀποδοχὴ μετὰ Εὐχαριστίᾳ τοῦ Θελήματος τοῦ Θεοῦ

Ἐαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ παραθώμεθα.

Στὸ βιβλίον τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Μαξίμοβιτς ὑπάρχει ἕνας διάλογος ἐνὸς ζητιάνου μετὰ ἕνα διασημὸν θεολόγον. Ὁ θεολόγος ἐπὶ ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἀκατάπαυστα παρακαλοῦσε τὸ Θεὸ νὰ τοῦ φανερώσῃ κάποιον ἀνθρώπον, ποῦ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ τοῦ δείξῃ τὸν πιὸ σίγουρον δρόμον γιὰ τὴ Βασιλείαν τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Κάποια μέρα ποῦ ἔφθασε στὸ ἀποκορύφωμα τῆς προσευχῆς ἄκουσε μιὰ φωνή:

—Πήγαινε καὶ στὴν ἔξοδο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θὰ βρεῖς τὸν ἀνθρώπον ποῦ ζητᾷς.

Πηγαίνει βιαστικὰ στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ὅπου βρίσκει ἕνα γέροντα ζητιάνον μετὰ κουρελιασμένα ῥούχα καὶ πληγωμένα γόνατα καὶ τὸν χαιρετᾷ:

—Καλὸ καὶ εὐτυχισμένο πρωῖνόν, γέροντα.

—Ποτὲ δὲν εἶχα κακὸ καὶ δυστυχισμένο πρωῖνόν.

Ὁ ἄλλος ἐν ἀμηχανίᾳ διορθώνει:

—Εἶθε νὰ σοῦ στείλῃ ὁ Θεὸς κάθε ἀγαθόν!

—Οὐδέποτε μοῦ ἐστάλη κάτι μὴ ἀγαθόν!

Ὁ θεολόγος παραξενεύεται καὶ τοῦ λέει:

—Τί συμβαίνει μετὰ σένα, γέροντα; Ἐγὼ σοῦ εὐχομαι κάθε εὐτυχία.

—Μὰ ποτὲ δὲν εἶμαι δυστυχής. Ζῶ σύμφωνα μετὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γιὰ τὸ ζυγὸν ποῦ μοῦ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεός ποτὲ δὲν δυσανασχέτησα καὶ εἶμαι πάντοτε εὐχαριστημένος.

—Ἀπὸ ποῦ ἦλθες ἐσύ, γέροντα, ἔδω;

—Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν.

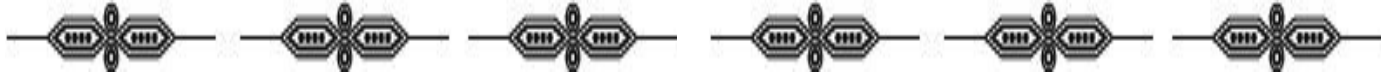
—Καὶ ποῦ τὸν βρήκες;

—Ἐκεῖ ποῦ τὸν ἄφησα, στὴν ἀγαθὴ θέληση.

—Ποιὸς εἶσαι, γέροντα, καὶ σὲ ποῖα τάξι ἀνηκεῖς;

—Ὅποιος κι ἂν εἶμαι, εἶμαι ἱκανοποιημένος μετὰ τὴν καταστάσῃ μου, γιατί βασιλεὺς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποῦ κυβερνᾷ καὶ διευθύνει τὸν ἑαυτό του.

Ὁ θεολόγος ἀποδέχθηκε τελικὰ πῶς ὁ δρόμος τοῦ ζητιάνου ἦταν ὁ μόνος σίγουρος γιὰ τὸν Οὐρανόν, δηλ. ἡ τελεία παραδοσὴ στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ.



Ἀτενίζοντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἐν Σιωπῇ

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

Κάθε χρόνο, ὅταν φτάνει ἡ Μεγάλη Ἑβδομάδα, ὁ πιστὸς προσκαλεῖται γιὰ μία ἐπανατοποθέτηση τῆς ζωῆς του μπρὸς στὸ μυστήριο τοῦ πάθους τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀτενίζει καθηλωμένος ἐκεῖ στὰ μεσοῦρανα, στὸ Σταυρὸ Του, προσκαλώντας μας καὶ προκαλώντας ταυτόχρονα πιστοὺς καὶ λιγότερο πιστοὺς. Καὶ ποιὸς ἄραγε θὰ μπορούσε νὰ διαβεβαιώσει ὅτι προσπέρασε τὸ Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ αἰώνιο αὐτὸ σκάνδαλο τῆς λογικῆς ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀγγέλων, χωρὶς κλυδωνισμοὺς ἀμφιβολιῶν, χωρὶς κραδασμοὺς στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν αὐτονόητων ἐνδοκοσμικῶν βεβαιότητων;

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

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

Νὰ μᾶς κοιτᾷ μὲ μίαν ἀπέραντα μεγαλόπρεπη Σιωπὴ—ὄση κι ἡ ἀγάπη Του—ποὺ θεραπεύει τὴν κούφια καὶ ὕβριστική πολυλογία τῶν «ἐκπροσώπων» Του, κάθε μεγαλόστομη καὶ ὑπερφίαλη καπηλεία τῆς Σιωπῆς καὶ τοῦ Πάθους. Μία ἁγιασμένη, πονεμένη Σιωπὴ γιὰ τοὺς πόνους καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, μυστικὴ φωνὴ στὰ μύχια τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Μία μεγαλειώδης, εὐγλωττη, κατανυκτικὴ Σιωπὴ Ἀγάπης.

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

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

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

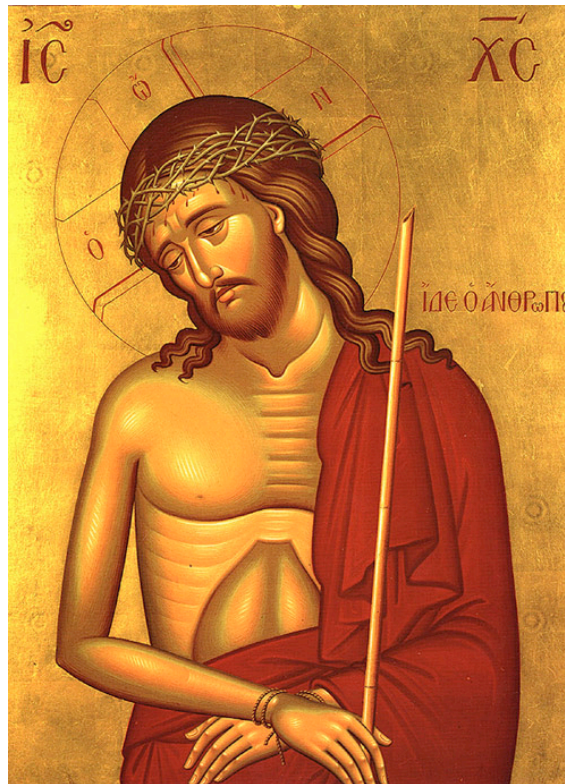
Σιωπᾷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς μπροστὰ στὴν μισαλλοδοξία ἐχθρῶν, στὴν ἀλαζονεία καὶ τὴν ὑποκρισία τῶν «φίλων», γιὰτί οἱ λέξεις δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ποῦν τίποτα περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσα πολυσήμαντα μαρτυροῦν τὰ πάθη, ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ ἡ Ἀνάστασή Του.

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

Συνομιλεῖ καὶ τότε «ἐν τῇ σιωπῇ» ὁ Χριστὸς μαζί μας, γιὰτί ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποτὲ δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι Εἰκόνα τοῦ

Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν χάνει τὴν ικανότητα νὰ διαισθάνεται, νὰ ξέρει, νὰ «καταλαβαίνει πολὺ περισσότερα πράγματα ἀπ' ὅσα μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφράσει», ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀκούσει. Ὁ Σιωπῶν Χριστὸς τοῦ Πάθους, μᾶς ἔχει ἐξασφαλίσει τὸ προνόμιο, ὥστε «νῦν καὶ αἰεὶ» νὰ μπορούμε νὰ ψιθυρίζουμε τὸ «μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε» τοῦ ληστοῦ, ἀκόμα καὶ πάνω στὸ σταυρὸ τῆς πιὸ μεγάλης ντροπῆς, τῆς πιὸ μεγάλης ἀπελπισίας.

Ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς Σιωπῆς, εἶναι ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἀναμονῆς, δηλαδὴ ὁ Χριστὸς τῆς ἐλευθερίας: κανένα δὲν ἐξαναγκάζει, μὰ ἀγαπᾷ, σιωπᾷ καὶ περιμένει τὴν μετάνοιά μας. Ἡ σιωπὴ εἶναι ὁ ἐσχατολογικὸς τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖον μιλεῖ



καὶ πράττει ὁ Θεός... Ὅποιος ἀγαπᾷ δὲν φλυαρεῖ...μὰ ὑποφέρει καὶ ὑπομένει.

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

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

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

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



Οἱ Συνέπειες τῆς Μαγείας

Γέρων Κλεόπας, «Γεροντικό Ρουμάνων Πατέρων Ἐκδόσεις», Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη.



Ὅσοι ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὰ μάγια ἢ τρέχουν στὶς μαγεῖες, διαπράττουν μεγάλη ἁμαρτία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐναντίον τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, διότι ἀφήνουν τὸ Θεὸ καὶ ζητοῦν βοήθεια ἀπὸ τὸ διαβολο.

Ἀρνοῦνται τὶς προσευχὲς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ μπαίνουν στὰ σπίτια τῶν μάγων. Ἐγκαταλείπουν

τοὺς λειτουργοὺς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ πηγαίνουν στοὺς ὑπηρέτες τοῦ σατανᾶ. Δηλαδή, ἀφήνουν τὸ ζῶν ὕδωρ, τὸν ἱερέα καὶ τὴ σωτηρία χάρι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ γιὰ τὰ ἐμπαθῆ καὶ ἀνθρώπινα ἐνδιαφέροντά τους ζητοῦν τὴ συμπαράσταση τῶν μάγων, ποὺ εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀρνοῦνται τὴν ἀλήθεια καὶ δέχονται τὸ ψεῦδος, διότι ὅλα τὰ μαγικά λόγια καὶ ἐπικλήσεις εἶναι ψεύδη καὶ δαιμονικὲς ἀπάτες.

Μία τέτοια μεγάλη ἁμαρτία δὲ συγχωρεῖται στοὺς ἐνόχους οὔτε στὸν παρόντα αἰῶνα οὔτε στὸ μέλλοντα, ὅπως λέγει ὁ Χριστός, ἐὰν δὲν μετανοήσουν σ' ὅλη τους τὴ ζωὴ. Ἐναντίον αὐτῶν τῶν μάγων ξεσποῦν κάθε εἶδους κακίες καὶ κίνδυνοι. Πρῶτα πρῶτα τοὺς ἐλέγχει ἡ συνείδηση, διότι ἄφησαν τὸ Θεὸ καὶ ἀκολούθησαν τὸ διαβολο.

Κατόπιν κανονίζονται νὰ ἀπέχουν ἀπὸ τῆς Θεῆς Κοινωνίας πολλὰ ἔτη, ἀπὸ 7 ἕως 15, καὶ ἀκόμη μέχρι 20. Ἐκτὸς ἐὰν τοὺς οἰκονομήσει διαφορετικὰ ὁ πνευματικὸς, ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν εἰλικρίνεια τῆς μετανοίας τους. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ τρέχουν στοὺς μάγους, ἀποβάλλουν ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ τους τὴ χάρι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ βάζουν στὸ σπῆτι τῆς καρδίας τους τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ σατανᾶ. Ἀρνοῦνται τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ἐνώνονται μὲ τὸ διάβολο. Ὅλοι αὐτοὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ ὀνομάζονται Χριστιανοί, ἀλλὰ ἀποστάτες.

Τιμωροῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ μὲ ἀσθένειες, καὶ μάλιστα ἀνιάτες, μὲ οἰκογενειακὰ προβλήματα, μὲ ζημιὲς καὶ διενέξεις, μὲ πτωχεῖα καὶ φοβερὸ θάνατο. Καὶ ἐὰν δὲν ἐξομολογηθοῦν μὲ δάκρυα, δὲ θὰ σωθοῦν. Ἐνῶ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία ἀποβάλλονται τελείως, δηλαδή χωρίζονται ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ παραδίνονται μὲ τὴ θελήσῃ τους στὰ χέρια τοῦ νοητοῦ ἐχθροῦ.

Ἐὰν πεθάνουν στὴν ἁμαρτία τους αὐτῆ, δὲν κηδεύονται ἀπὸ Ὁρθόδοξο ἱερέα, ἀλλὰ ὅπως οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες καὶ οἱ ἀρνητὲς τῆς πίστεως, ὀδηγοῦνται στὴν αἰώνια τιμωρία τους, στὰ βάσανα τῆς κολάσεως. Αὐτὲς λοιπὸν εἶναι ὁ φοβερὲς συνέπειες τῆς μαγείας.

Να μὴ κάνεις κανένα ἔργο, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ σφραγίζεις με τὸν Τίμιο Σταυρὸ!

Ὅταν ἀναχωρεῖς γιὰ ταξίδι, ὅταν ἀρχίζεις τὸ ἔργο σου, ὅταν πηγαίνεις νὰ διδάξεις στὸ σχολεῖο σου, ὅταν εἶσαι μόνος σου ἢ καὶ μὲ ἄλλους μαζί, σφράγισε μὲ τὸν παντοδύναμο Σταυρὸ τὸ μέτωπό σου, τὸ σῶμα σου, τὴν καρδιά σου, τὰ χεῖλη σου, τὰ μάτια σου, τὰ αὐτιά σου καὶ ὅλα τὰ μέλη σου νὰ τὰ σφραγίζεις μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τῆς νίκης τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἄδου. Καὶ τότε μὴ φοβᾶσαι ἀπὸ τὰ μαγικά ἢ τὰ ξόρκια καὶ τοὺς μάγους.

Διότι ὅλα αὐτὰ λύνονται ἀπὸ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ὅπως τὸ κερί λιώνει μπροστὰ στὴ φλόγα τῆς φωτιᾶς καὶ ὅπως φεύγει ἡ σκόνη στὸν ἄνεμο!

Οἱ Δώδεκα Ἀναχωρητές

Πηγή: *Οἱ Ἀόρατοι Ἐρημίτες τοῦ Ἄθωνα, Βλασίου μοναχοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, Ἐκδόσεις ΤΕΡΤΙΟΣ.*

Ὅπωςδήποτε πολλοὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀναγνωστῶν τοῦ παρόντος πονήματος θὰ ἔχουν ἀκούσει ἢ διαβάσει ἔστω καὶ μία διηγήσιμ για τοὺς ἀόρατους ἐρημίτες τοῦ Ἄθωνα. Ἄλλοι τοὺς ὀνομάσαν «ἀοράτους ἀσκητές», ἄλλοι «γυμνοὺς ἀσκητές», ἄλλοι «μυστικὸν γέροντες», ἄλλοι πάλι «ἀφανεῖς ἀναχωρητές». Πρόκειται για ὀμάδα ἀσκητῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἶναι ἐφτά, κατ' ἄλλους δώδεκα καὶ κατ' ἄλλους δέκα, οἱ ὁποῖοι διατρίβουν στὶς ἐρημικότερες περιοχὲς τῆς ἀθωνικῆς ἐρήμου, καὶ εἶναι ἀόρατοι ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἐμφανίζονται μόνο σὲ ὅποιον αὐτοὶ θέλουν, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον ἀπλὸ καὶ ἀπονήρευτο μοναχὸ ἢ καὶ σὲ εὐσεβῆ καὶ εὐλαβῆ προσκυνητῆ πὸν ἔχει καθαρὸ καὶ Χριστιανικὸ βίον.

† † †

Δώδεκα ἀναχωρητὲς ἅγιοι, σοφοὶ καὶ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι, συγκεντρώθηκαν κάποτε καὶ ζήτησαν νὰ ὀμολογήσει ὁ καθένας ὅσα κατόρθωσε στὸ κελί του καὶ ποιά ἦταν ἡ πνευματικὴ του ἄσκηση.

Ὁ πρῶτος, ὁ μεγαλύτερος στὴν ἡλικία, εἶπε:

«Ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τῆ στιγμῆ πὸν ἄρχισα νὰ ζῶ ἡσυχαστικὴ ζωὴ, σταύρωσα ὄλο τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀπέναντι στὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πράγματα, ἔχοντας



στὸν νοῦ μου αὐτὸ πὸν εἶναι γραμμένο: *Νὰ σπάσουμε τοὺς δεσμοὺς πὸν μᾶς συνδέουν μαζί τους καὶ νὰ ρίξουμε ἀπὸ πάνω μας τὸν ζυγὸ τους.* Ἔτσι, ἔκανα ἕνα τεῖχος ἀνάμεσα στὴν ψυχὴ μου καὶ στὰ σωματικὰ πράγματα καὶ ἀναλογίσθηκα ὅτι, ὅπως αὐτὸς πὸν εἶναι μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ τεῖχος δὲν βλέπει αὐτὸν πὸν στέκεται ἔξω, με τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ σὺ μὴ θελήσεις νὰ βλέπεις τὰ πράγματα πὸν ἔχουν σχέση με τὰ ἔξω. Ἀλλὰ νὰ ἔχεις στραμμένη τὴν προσοχὴ σου στὸν ἑαυτό σου, ἀναμένοντας κάθε μέρα με ἐλπίδα τὸν Θεό.

Ἔτσι θεωρῶ τὶς πονηρὲς ἐπιθυμίες φίδια καὶ ἀπόγονους ἀπὸ ὀχιές, καὶ ὅταν τὶς αἰσθάνομαι νὰ ξεφυτρώνουν στὸ νοῦ μου, τὶς ξηραίνω με φοβέρες καὶ ὀργή. Ἀκόμη, δὲν σταμάτησα ποτὲ νὰ τὰ βάζω με τὸ σῶμα μου καὶ με τὴν ψυχὴ μου, για νὰ μὴν ἐκτραποῦν σὲ τίποτε ἀνάρμοστο».

Ὁ δεῦτερος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τότε πὸν ἀρνήθηκα τὸν κόσμον, εἶπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Σήμερα ἀναγεννήθηκες, σήμερα ἄρχισες νὰ

δουλεύεις στὸν Θεό, σήμερα ἄρχισες νὰ κατοικεῖς ἐδῶ σὰν ξένος. Ἔτσι κάθε μέρα νὰ αἰσθάνεσαι, σὰν ἕνας ξένος καὶ ὅτι αὔριο θὰ φύγεις».

Ὁ τρίτος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶν ἀνεβαίνω στὸν Κύριό μου, καὶ ἀφοῦ τὸν προσκυνήσω, πέφτω με τὸ πρόσωπο κάτω καὶ ἐξομολογοῦμαι τὰ ἁμαρτήματά μου. Ἔπειτα κατεβαίνοντας προσκυνῶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους του καὶ τοὺς παρακαλῶ νὰ ἱκετέψουν τὸν Θεὸ για μένα καὶ για ὀλόκληρη τὴν κτίσιμ. Ἀφοῦ τὸ κάνω αὐτό, κατεβαίνω στὴν ἄβυσσο καὶ ὅ,τι κάνουν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὅταν πηγαίνουν στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, πὸν σχίζουν τὰ ἐνδύματά τους καὶ κλαῖνε καὶ πενθοῦν για τὴ συμφορὰ πὸν βρῆκε τοὺς πατέρες τους, αὐτὸ κάνω κι ἐγὼ. Περιπλανιέμαι στοὺς τόπους τῆς κόλασιμ, βλέπω τὰ δικὰ μου μέλη (δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἐκεῖ ἄλλους Χριστιανούς) νὰ βασανίζονται καὶ κλαῖνε μ' αὐτοὺς

πὸν κλαῖνε».

Ὁ τέταρτος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ἔτσι νιώθω, σὰν νὰ κάθομαι με τὸν Κύριο καὶ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους του στὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν. Εἶπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ πέρα κανέναν συγγενὴ νὰ μὴν ξέρεις, ἀλλὰ πάντοτε νὰ βρίσκεσαι μ' αὐτούς, νὰ τοὺς ἀναζητᾶς καὶ νὰ μιμνεῖσαι τὸν καλὸ τρόπο τῆς ζωῆς τους, ὅπως ἡ Μαρία πὸν καθόταν κοντὰ στὰ πόδια τοῦ

Κυρίου καὶ ἄκουγε τὰ λόγια του: *Νὰ γίνετε ἅγιοι, γιατὶ ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἅγιος. Νὰ γίνετε σπλαχνικοὶ καὶ τέλειοι, ὅπως ὁ Πατέρας σας εἶναι τέλειος. Νὰ διδασχεῖτε ἀπὸ μένα ὅτι εἶμαι πρῶτος καὶ ταπεινὸς στὴν καρδιά».*

Ὁ πέμπτος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ κάθε φορὰ βλέπω ἀγγέλους νὰ ἀνεβαίνουν καὶ νὰ κατεβαίνουν για τὴν πρόσκλησιμ τῶν ψυχῶν. Καὶ πάντοτε, περιμένοντας τὸ τέλος μου, λέω: Εἶναι ἔτοιμη ἡ καρδιά μου, Θεέ μου».

Ὁ ἕκτος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ καθὼς κάνω τὴν πνευματικὴ μου ἐργασία στὸ κελί, νομίζω ὅτι ἀκούω ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια: *Νὰ κοπιᾶστε για μένα κι ἐγὼ θὰ σᾶς ἀναπαύσω, ἀκόμη λίγο νὰ ἀγωνιστεῖτε καὶ θὰ σᾶς δείξω τὴ σωτηρία καὶ τὴ δόξα μου. Ἄν με ἀγαπᾶτε, ἂν εἴσατε παιδιὰ μου, σὰν Πατέρα πὸν παρακαλάει, νὰ αἰσθανθεῖτε για μένα σεβασμό, ἂν εἴστε ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ με σεβαστεῖτε ὅπως ἐκεῖνον πὸν ὑπέμεινε πολλὰ για σᾶς. Ἄν εἴσατε πρόβατά μου, νὰ ἀκοῦστε τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ποιμένα, ἂν*

εἶστε δοῦλοι μου, νὰ ἀκολουθήσετε τὰ παθήματα τοῦ δεσπότη σας».

Ὁ ἕβδομος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ αὐτὰ τὰ τρία μελετῶ συνεχῶς καὶ λέω ἀδιάκοπα στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Πίστη, ἐλπίδα, ἀγάπη, γιὰ νὰ χαίρομαι μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα, νὰ στηρίζομαι μὲ τὴν πίστη, καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη νὰ μὴ λυπήσω ποτὲ κανένα».

Ὁ ὄγδοος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ βλέπω τὸν διάβολο νὰ πετάει ζητώντας ποιὸν νὰ καταπιεῖ. Ὅπου κι ἂν πάει, βλέπω μὲ τὰ ἐσωτερικὰ μάτια, καὶ ἀναφέρομαι ἱκετευτικὰ στὸν Δεσπότη μου Χριστὸ ἐναντίον του, ὥστε νὰ μείνει ἄπρακτος καὶ νὰ μὴν μπορέσει νὰ κάνει τίποτε σὲ κανένα, ἰδίως σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ φοβοῦνται τὸν Θεό».

Ὁ ἔνατος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ ὅταν κάνω τὴν πνευματικὴ μου ἐργασία, βλέπω τὴν ἐκκλησία τῶν νοερῶν δυνάμεων κι ἀνάμεσά τους τὸν Κύριο τῆς δόξας νὰ λάμπει περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους. Ὅταν μὲ βρεῖ ἀκηδία, ἀνεβαίνω στοὺς οὐρανοὺς καὶ βλέπω τὴν ἔξοχη ὠραιότητα τῶν ἀγγέλων κι ἀκούω τοὺς ὕμνους ποὺ ἀνυψώνουν ἀκατάπανστα στὸν Θεό, καθὼς καὶ τὴ μελωδία τους. Ὑψώνομαι μὲ τοὺς ἤχους καὶ τὴ φωνὴ καὶ τὴ μουσικότητά τους, ὥστε νὰ νιώσω αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι γραμμένο: «Οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγοῦνται τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ» καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἐπίγεια τὰ θεωρῶ στάχτη καὶ σκουπίδια».

Ὁ δέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ πάντοτε βλέπω κοντά μου τὸν φύλακα ἄγγελό μου καὶ προσέχω τὸν ἑαυτό μου, ἔχοντας στὸ μυαλό μου αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔχει γραφεῖ: Ἔβλεπα μπροστά μου τὸν Κύριο πάντοτε, ὅτι στέκεται στὰ δεξιὰ μου, γιὰ νὰ μὴν κλονισθῶ ἀπὸ τὴ θέση μου.

Φοβοῦμαι λοιπὸν αὐτὸν ποὺ παρακολουθεῖ τὴν πορεία μου. Διότι τὸν βλέπω κάθε μέρα νὰ ἀνεβαίνει στὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ παρουσιάζει τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὰ λόγια μου».

Ὁ ἐνδέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐγὼ προσωποποίησα τὶς ἀρετές, ὅπως π.χ. τὴν ἐγκράτεια, τὴ σωφροσύνη, τὴ μακροθυμία, τὴν ἀγάπη κι ἔστησα τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀνάμεσά τους ὥστε νὰ μὲ περικυκλώσουν αὐτές. Κι ὅπου κι ἂν πάω, λέω στὸν ἑαυτό μου: Ποῦ εἶναι οἱ παιδαγωγοί σου; Μὴν ἀδιαφορήσεις, μὴν ἀκηδιάσεις, ἀφοῦ παντοτινὰ αὐτές τὶς ἔχεις δίπλα σου, ὅποια ἀρετὴ θέλεις κοντά σου εἶναι, καὶ καλὰ λόγια θὰ ποῦν στὸν Θεὸ γιὰ σένα, ὅτι δηλαδὴ βρῆκαν σὲ σένα ἀνάπαυση».

Ὁ δωδέκατος εἶπε:

«Ἐσεῖς, Πατέρες, ἔχοντας φτεροῦγες ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ, ἀποκτήσατε οὐράνια ζωὴ. Κι αὐτὸ καθόλου παράξενο δὲν εἶναι, σὰς βλέπω νὰ στέκεστε ψηλὰ λόγῳ τῶν ἔργων σας καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκετε τὰ οὐράνια. Μὲ δύναμη μάλιστα μετακινεῖστε ἀπ' τὴ γῆ ἐσεῖς ποὺ ἀποξενωθήκατε ἐντελῶς ἀπ' αὐτήν. Πῶς νὰ

σὰς ὀνομάσω; Ἐπίγειους ἀγγέλους ἢ οὐράνιους ἀνθρώπους; Ἐγὼ κρίνοντας τὸν ἑαυτό μου τόσο ἀνάξιο ἀκόμη καὶ νὰ ζεῖ, βλέπω μπροστά μου τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου. Ὅπου κι ἂν πάω, ὅπου κι ἂν στραφῶ τὶς βλέπω νὰ προχωροῦν πρὶν ἀπὸ μένα.

Στὰ καταχθόνια καταδίκασα τὸν ἑαυτό μου. Λέω: Θὰ εἶμαι μαζί μ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ μοῦ ἀξίζει. Μ' αὐτοὺς ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο θὰ μὲ κατατάξουν.

Βλέπω ἐκεῖ θρηνητικὲς κραυγὲς καὶ δάκρυα, ποὺ δὲν σταματοῦν ποτὲ καὶ εἶναι ἀνεκδιήγητα. Βλέπω κάποιους νὰ τρίζουν τὰ δόντια καὶ νὰ πηδοῦν μ' ὄλο τους τὸ σῶμα καὶ νὰ τρέμουν ἀπ' τὸ κεφάλι μέχρι τὰ πόδια. Πέφτω μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο κάτω καὶ ρίχνοντας στάχτη στὸ κεφάλι μου ἱκετεύω τὸν Θεὸ νὰ μὴ δοκιμάσω ἐκεῖνες τὶς συμφορές. Βλέπω καὶ μία θάλασσα ἀπὸ φωτιὰ νὰ παφλάζει καὶ νὰ φυσομανάει ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ καὶ νὰ βρυχιέται, σὲ σημεῖο ποὺ νὰ νομίζει κανεὶς ὅτι τὰ κύματα τῆς φωτιᾶς φτάνουν μέχρι τὸν οὐρανὸ. Καὶ μέσ' τῆ φοβερῆ αὐτῆ θάλασσα ἀμέτρητους ἀνθρώπους ριγμένους ἀπὸ ἄγριους ἀγγέλους, καὶ ὅλοι μαζί ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ μιὰ φωνὴ νὰ βγάζουν δυνατὲς κραυγὲς καὶ νὰ κράζουν μὲ ἰσχυροὺς θρήνους καὶ φωνὲς τέτοιες, ποὺ κανεὶς δὲν ἔχει ἀκούσει. Σὰν ξερὰ χόρτα ὅλοι νὰ καίγονται, καὶ οἱ οἰκτιρμοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ φεύγουν μακριὰ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς, γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους.

Τότε θρηνῶ τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, πῶς τολμᾷ νὰ μιλήσει ἢ νὰ δίνει τὴν προσοχή του σὲ κάτι ἐφήμερο, ἀφοῦ τόσο μεγάλα κακὰ περιμένουν τὸν κόσμο. Μὲ τέτοιους λογισμοὺς κρατῶ τὸ πένθος στὴν καρδιά μου, κρίνοντας τὸν ἑαυτό μου ἀνάξιο γιὰ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ τὴ γῆ, καὶ πραγματοποιεῖται σὲ μένα ὁ λόγος τῆς Γραφῆς: Τὰ δάκρυά μου ἔγιναν γιὰ μένα ψωμὶ μέρα καὶ νύχτα».

Αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ κατορθώματα τῶν σοφῶν καὶ πνευματικῶν Πατέρων. Μακάρι κι ἐμεῖς νὰ δεῖξουμε στοὺς ἄλλους μιὰ ζωὴ ἄξια νὰ τὴν θυμῶνται, γιὰ νὰ εὐχαριστήσουμε τὸν Δεσπότη μας Χριστὸ, ἀφοῦ γίνουμε τέλειοι καὶ ἀψεγάδιαστοι.



Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο δὲν συμβιβάζεται μὲ τὴν κοσμικὴ λογική. Ὅταν διαβάξεις τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ δὲν καταλαβαίνεις, μὴν φοβάσαι ὅτι σου χρειάζεται θὰ σὲ φωτίσει ὁ Θεός. Ἐφάρμοσε αὐτὰ ποὺ καταλαβαίνεις.

Ἡ σωματικὴ κούραση—χωρὶς μέτρο—ἀγριεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Καὶ τὸ πιὸ ἥρεμο ἄλογο, ἂν τὸ κουράσεις ὑπέρβαρα κλωτσάει.

Ὅσο ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀδειάζει ἀπὸ ἐγωισμό, τόσο γεμίζει ἀπὸ τὴ θεία χάρη.

Γέρων Παΐσιος Ἀθωνίτης

SECULARISM IN CHURCH, THEOLOGY, AND PASTORAL CARE

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

Secularism is the loss of the true life of the Church, the alienation of Church members from the genuine Church spirit. Secularism is the rejection of the ecclesiastic ethos and the permeation of our life by the so-called “worldly spirit.”

It should be stressed that secularization of the Church members is a grave danger. The Church has several enemies; the worst and most dangerous one is secularization, which eats up the marrow of the Church. The Church itself, of course, is under no real danger, since it is the blessed Body of Christ, but the threat exists for the members of the Church. To be accurate, we would say that secularism, which consists of the adulteration of the way of life and of true faith, is related to the passions and, naturally, has been lurking in the Church since the beginning of its existence. In Paradise, Adam attempted to interpret God’s commandments rationally. Even after Pentecost there were cases of some Christians adopting an anthropocentric way of thinking and living. Gnostics and others are the obvious proofs of this.

For the most part, secularism started after the cessation of the persecutions. During the persecutions, Christians believed and lived in truth. When Christianity became the official state religion, an adulteration of the Christian faith and way of living began. Anachoreticism (withdrawal from the world, *Ed.*), and later monasticism, developed as a reaction to this secularization. As the Holy Scripture illustrates, especially in the Epistles of the holy Apostles, all Christians lived monastically in the ancient Church. Secularism developed as a consequence of people being attracted to Christianity out of expediency, and the development of monasticism came as a response to that. Monasticism is not something alien to the Church but rather life according to the Gospel, which some Christians wanted to live in perfection and thus elected this way of living. It can be argued that even the most eccentric monk constitutes a healthy reaction to the secular spirit that plagues Christians of our age.

Before proceeding to see how we experience secularism in Church, theology, and pastoral care, I would like to examine more closely the secular spirit and the meaning of the world (*cosmos*) in the biblical-patristic tradition, since the word *cosmos* constitutes the main concept of the term *secularism*.

The Double Meaning of the Word *Cosmos*

The word *cosmos* (world) has two meanings in the Bible and in the works of the Holy Fathers. The first is that *cosmos* is the creation of God, the entire creation; the second meaning is that of the passions and everything that characterizes the spirit of the flesh that lacks the Holy Spirit.

To begin with, *cosmos* (world) is the creation. It is called such because it is an ornament, a jewel (*cosmema* in Greek). In the Orthodox tradition, we say that the world is a positive

work of God. It is not a copy of some other real world, the world of ideas; nor is it a downfall from the true world or a creation of a lesser God. The phrase in the Creed—*I believe in one God, Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of everything visible and invisible*—was articulated to counter a teaching of certain ancient heretics that claimed that the world is a creature of a lesser God. So the world is a creation of God, an ornament, a jewel. God created the world with His uncreated energy, for God is creator by energy and not by substance. It is characteristic that at the end of creation, the Bible notes . . . *and God saw that it was good*.

The second meaning of the word *cosmos* (world) is sin, passions of the flesh, the spirit of the flesh, the spirit that is deprived of the Holy Spirit’s life and energy. We encounter the word *cosmos* in this sense several times in the Bible. Saint John frequently uses the word *cosmos* to denote God’s creation, the entire creation. In other cases, he uses it to denote the passions of the flesh, everything that keeps man away from God, or man’s life outside of God. A typical passage is the following: *For all that is in the world . . . but is of the world*. (1 Jn 2:16). John does not ask us not to love the creation, God’s creation, but rather the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the arrogance of life, which constitute in reality what is called the world. Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that the *cosmos* as a creature of God is neither to be held in contempt nor to be hated. In this meaning, the world has to be used by man for his maintenance. There is a danger, however, when someone views the world as a creature of God also to view it as the devil’s deception; for the devil truly knows how to utilize the world to deceive man.

In the Holy Scripture, it is said that the devil is king of the world. Interpreting this term, Saint Gregory Palamas points out that God, who created the world, is the real king of the world. The devil is called such because he dominates the world of injustice and sin. In discussing man’s departure from the world, St. Basil the Great says that it is not an escape from the world or the soul’s exit from the body, as argued by the ancient philosophers; but rather it is the absence of attachment by the soul to the body. Naturally, when the Fathers refer to the body, they do not mean the body as such but rather the carnal spirit, the passions of the flesh and the adoration of the body.

It is in this context that the Fathers discuss the world. Theophrastus of Philadelphia says, *I call “world” the love of material objects and of the flesh*. He who is liberated from these becomes akin to Christ and acquires His love. More generally, to quote Saint Isaac the Syrian, *when we want to name all passions, we call them world*. It is exactly this meaning of the word *world* that is used in the term *secularism* and that we will employ hereafter. Secularism is man’s distortion by the spirit of the flesh and the passions. When our life is permeated by passions, by the world of injustice, and when we pursue such a life within the Church and try to be theologians in such a manner, this is secularism. Secularism is life’s estrangement

from God, our not pursuing communion and unity with Him, our attachment to earthly matters, and our viewing of all things and issues in our life away from God's will. One could claim that secularism is a synonym for anthropocentrism.

In what follows, we will analyze the term *secularism* in the above framework, obviously extending its dimensions.

Secularism in the Church Life

It should be emphasized that when we talk about secularism in the Church, in theology, and in pastoral care, we do not imply that the Church, theology, and pastoral care become secular and are destroyed. That would imply that the true life and man's true way of therapy are lost. Instead, it is the members of the Church that become secular and, therefore, view the Church, theology, and pastoral care differently. However, throughout the centuries, there are Church members who preserve the truth regarding the Church, theology, and Orthodox pastoral care.

Secularism in Church

The Church is Christ's body. It is not a human organization but the God-man body of Christ. The Church's purpose is to guide its members to *deification*, the principal objective of man's creation.

An important excerpt illustrating the objective of the shepherds of the Church can be found in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Christians of Ephesus. The Apostle says: *And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* (Eph 4:11–13). According to Saint Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, in the phrase *the knowledge of the Son of God* Saint Paul does not mean the knowledge of God which is achieved through the viewing of created things and the divine Scriptures; the impure can also possess such knowledge; instead he refers to the supernatural knowledge of the Son of God, arrived at through divine illumination and glorification, and granted solely to the perfect ones, those purified from the passions of the flesh and of the soul. It is this knowledge that he wishes all Christians to arrive at. Also, the phrase *to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* conveys the concept of deification.

The true Church's existence is demonstrated by its success in curing man. We know from the teaching of the holy Fathers that the Church is the spiritual health center, the spiritual hospital that cures man. When we refer to illness and cure, we mean that the *nous* (in Orthodoxy, *nous* is not intellect

but is best described as "is the eye of the soul," *Ed.*) is ill and is cured. The *nous'* cure is not independent of purification, illumination, and deification. The Church's goal is to cure this gnostic center so that man can acquire the knowledge of God that constitutes his salvation. Therefore, the existence of the true Church can be seen in the degree of success, in the results of the therapy. If it cures man, if it makes a correct diagnosis of the disease, and if it knows the way and method of therapy, then it is the true, not the secular, Church.

An example revealing a church's degree of success in curing is the presence and existence of holy relics. The holy relics are a proof of man's cure. When the *nous* is purified and illumined and when man attains deification, then he is entirely divinized, because God's Grace is transported from the soul to the body. The relics of the saints, which are everlasting, fragrant, and miraculous, are proof that the method and way of therapy are preserved, that



the Church leads man to deification. That is why it has been pointedly argued that the aim of the Church is to create relics, in the sense that it seeks to guide man to deification. A church that does not produce relics demonstrates that it does not lead man to deification and, hence, it does not possess the true method for man's therapy.

Secularism in the Church is directly related to the loss of the Church's true objective. A church not inspired by what has been said above, that is a Church that does not cure man but is concerned with other matters, is a secularized church. It is in this sense

that we refer to secularism in the Church.

We can say that the Church becomes secular when it is considered to be a *religious organization*. There is an enormous difference between the Church and religion. Religion speaks about an impersonal God who inhabits the heavens and manages the world from up there. Man, through various rituals, has to appease God and establish communication with Him. But the Church is the Body of Christ who assumed human nature, and in this way there exists a communion between man and God in the Person of Christ. Of course, it cannot be precluded that some Christians within the Church are experiencing God from a religious perspective. This, however, occurs in the lower stages of spiritual life; it constitutes spiritual immaturity, and there is definitely a willingness and tendency for man to go on maturing spiritually so that he arrives at communion and unity with God. A secularized Church, however, simply satisfies the so-called religious feelings of man and nothing more. It is noted for its beautiful ceremonies, and it neglects the entire *neptic* and therapeutic wealth owned by the Church.

Further, the Church is secularized when it is viewed as an *ideological field* and ideological system, unrelated to life. Ideological systems are inspired by abstract ideas and are imbued with idealism, which has the characteristics of all anthropocentric systems that are based on philosophy and are against materialism. Ideas do not have much of a relation to life, to man's transformation. Idealism is created by man's rationality and is presented in the form of arguments and ideas. The Church does not function as an ideological field. It does not simply have some ideas, be it the best and most perfect ones, which it uses to counter other ideas. The Church has the life, indeed the true life, which is a fruit of man's communion with God and the transcendence of death.

The secularized Church is occupied with human thought and abstract ideas. The real and true Church, however, is like true medicine, and in particular surgery. A surgeon can never engage in philosophy and culture, can never meditate while performing a surgical operation. In front of him he has a patient he wants to cure, to bring back to full health. Likewise the Church, having in front of her a patient, can never meditate or philosophize. The Church itself experiences the mystery of Christ's Cross and assists man in experiencing the same in his personal life. The experience of the Cross mystery is the deepest repentance through which the *nous* is transformed. From the contrary-to-nature motion it acquires movement according to nature and above nature.

Furthermore, the Church becomes secular when it is downgraded to a *social organization*, like so many other organizations in society. It is often claimed that the Church is a **supreme institution**. But the Church cannot be considered the institution of any nation, even its supreme institution. When a revolution ends up in a bureaucracy, it loses its value, and this brings about its downfall. The same is true of the Church. Being the spiritual hospital that cures man, the Church cannot be considered an institution in support of society, appropriate for citizen taming.

Unfortunately, today some view the Church as a necessary organization, useful for society, its role valued according to its social usefulness. For many the Church is viewed as Prometheus, with police in the role of Epimetheus; that is, the Church is good enough as society's assistant in order to avoid police intervention. When the Church fails, the police step in. Certainly one cannot dismiss Church benefaction in such matters. A cured Christian causes no troubles to the police. But we should not see the Church presence only in this field because then we refer to a secularized Church.

Others, unfortunately, accept the Church as a mere decorative element. They need it to decorate various ceremonies and to brighten them with its presence; or they may believe that the Church's presence is required to demonstrate a wide social consensus. Not even the atheists reject such a church. However, such a secularized church causes despair to the atheists as well. They may need it for the time being, because

it serves them well, but they will face a grave disappointment when they, too, need the true presence of the Church.

Today there is a general tendency to view a secular Church as more useful for modern social needs. There is also a growing tendency to adjust sermons and Church teaching to these social needs, the needs of a society functioning in anthropocentric ways, because we fear society's rejection. Protestants and, generally, the western "churches" have succumbed to this temptation, and that is why they have spread much despair to those seeking therapy, to those seeking the true Church for a cure.

Overall, a Church that crucifies instead of being crucified, that experiences worldly glory instead of the glory of the Cross, a Church that falls to, instead of overcoming Christ's three temptations in the desert, is a secularized church. Such a Church is destined to accommodate a fallen society and to encourage it to **remain in its fallen state; it spreads disappointment and despair to those who seek something deeper and more substantive.**

Secularism in Theology

Theology is the voice and faith of the Church, the *logos* of God (*theo-logia* in Greek). It is assumed that someone who talks about God must know God. In the Orthodox Church, the knowledge of God is not intellectual but spiritual, that is, it is connected to man's communion with God. In Saint Gregory Palamas' teaching, the vision of the Uncreated Light is closely connected to man's deification, to man's communion with God and the knowledge of God. That is why theology is identical to the vision of God and the theologian is identical to the God-seer. Someone who talks about God, even reflectively, can be called a theologian and this is why the Fathers attribute the term *theologian* to the philosophers as well. However, from an Orthodox standpoint a theologian is someone who witnessed the glory of God or, at least, accepts the experience of those who reached deification.

In this sense, theologians are the God-seers, those who achieved deification and received the Revelation of God. Saint Paul is one such theologian. He went up to the third heaven, and on several occasions he describes and reveals his apocalyptic experiences. This occurs to such an extent that Saint John Chrysostom, talking about Saint Paul and about the fact that in his Epistles there are greater mysteries than in the Gospels, argues that "Christ declared more important and unspoken things through St. Paul than through Himself."

Saint Paul, as he himself says in the third person, was captured *up to the third heaven*. (2 Cor 12:2). Saint Maximos the Confessor's interprets that the three heavens are in reality the three stages of spiritual life. The first heaven is the end of practical philosophy, which is the purification of the heart, the expulsion of all thoughts from the heart. The second heaven is natural *theoria*, that is, the knowledge of the inner essences of beings, when man through God's Grace becomes worthy of knowing the inner essences of beings: ceaseless

inner prayer. The third heaven is *theoria*, theology, through which, and by divine Grace and the capture of the *nous*, one reaches, as is possible, the knowledge of God’s mysteries and knows all the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, theology is the third heaven, which is a fruit, an outcome of the purification of the heart and the illumination of the *nous*.

All these are related to another teaching by Saint Maximos the Confessor. According to this teaching, all that is seen needs to be crucified and all the thoughts need to be buried, and then the *logos* rises within ourselves and man ascends to *theoria* and becomes a true theologian. This means that Orthodox theology is closely tied to Orthodox asceticism; it cannot be conceived of outside Orthodox *ascesis*. The heretics, on the other hand, tried and still try to make theology in other ways, with impure heart and reflection, not through natural *theoria*, and mystical theology. For this reason, they failed and were expelled from the Church of Christ.

When theology is not a part of this framework, as presented by all the holy Fathers, then it is not Orthodox but secular. This secular theology is encountered in the west, where they analyze and interpret Holy Scripture through their own human and impure intellect, outside of the correct prerequisites presented by the holy Fathers.

A typical example of secular theology, functioning outside the traditional patristic framework, is so-called “scholastic theology,” which was developed in the west between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries. It was termed “scholastic” from the various schools cultivating it. Its main feature was that it relied heavily on philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle, and it attempted to rationally explain everything related to God.

Scholastic theology tried to rationally comprehend God’s Revelation and to harmonize theology and philosophy. In the Orthodox Church, as expressed by the holy Fathers, we state that faith is God’s Revelation to man. We accept faith from hearsay not to comprehend it later, but to purify the heart, achieve faith through *theoria*, and experience Revelation. Scholastic theology, on the other hand, accepted something *a priori* (based on theoretical deduction rather than empirical observation, *Ed.*) and then struggled to comprehend it by means of rational arguments. It is characteristic what Anselm of Canterbury, the founder of scholasticism, has said: “I believe in order to comprehend.” The scholastics started by *a priori* accepting God and then trying to prove His existence by rational arguments and logical categories.

Secular theology, which is a function of scholasticism, manifests itself in several ways today. One is the way we base the entire mode of theology on reason and thought. We think about Orthodox faith, we rationalize about the truths of faith, or we simply form a history of theology. We have almost reached the point of viewing theology as a philosophy about God, ignoring the whole therapeutic method of our Church.

Another way of experiencing Barlaamism and scholasticism is the fact that we have limited theology to aesthetics. We might write several books and undertake long analyses on Orthodox art, study the schools of iconography, and accept the great value of Byzantine art, while simultaneously treating with contempt and overlooking *ascesis*, the hesychastic method, that is the foundation of every Orthodox art. **Purification, illumination, and deification are the basis of all the Orthodox Church’s arts, acts and mysteries.**



Another way we manifest secular theology is that we seek the rebirth of the Church’s liturgical life without simultaneously discovering and living the ascetic life of the Church. We discuss the continual communion of the Sacraments without simultaneously relating this effort to the stages of spiritual perfection, which are purification, illumination, and deification. We make a

great effort so that people can logically comprehend the Divine Liturgy, without making a parallel effort to experience the spirit of Orthodox worship. We seek to abolish the iconostasis so that laymen can peer into the altar, without asking the reason why the Church instituted the iconostasis and the secret reading of prayers.

Overall, when our theology is not tied to the so-called hesychastic life, when it is not ascetic, then it is secular, it is scholastic theology, it is Barlaamist theology—even if we seem to be fighting western theology and struggle to be Orthodox.

Secularism in Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is not unrelated to and independent of the Church and theology. Pastoral care is the work of the Church that aims at admitting man to Her Body, at making him Her true member; it is the Church’s method of guiding man to deification, which is the Church’s deeper objective. Further, pastoral care is not unrelated to theology, for the true theologians are true shepherds, and those who shepherd in an Orthodox way do so theologically. Therefore, what we have said so far about the Church and theology applies to pastoral care as well. The true Shepherds of the Church are the dei-

fied, those who partake, to various degrees, in the deifying energy of God or those who accept the deified and follow their teaching. Thus, we either are deified or accept those who are and exercise pastoral care with their aid.

Moses reached deification by Grace; he saw God in His glory and then undertook the heavy task of the pastoral guidance of the people. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, before seeing God, Moses was unable to separate two Hebrews fighting with each other; after the vision of God, Moses was able to guide a difficult and uncompromising people. It is indicative that Moses passed the experience of deification on to the people through his guidance and the laws.

The same can be observed in all church life. Saint Gregory the Theologian views pastoral care as the most difficult science, and he definitely ties it to man's deification. For this reason, he desired that the shepherds be previously cured in order to be able to guide their spiritual children to therapy and deification.

The Sacred Canons of the Church present the pastoral method and are medicine to cure man. If we view the Canons as legal schemes and structures, we fail to recognize their true place within the Church. The Canons presuppose man's illness, which is the darkening of the *nous*, and they aim at man's health, which is the illumination of the *nous* and deification. According to Saint Basil the Great, there are five stages for those who repent: those who stay outside the Church, crying and asking to be forgiven by the Christians; those who attend and listen to the Divine Word but leave the Church at the time the catechumens do; those who stay at the narthex of the Church and attend the Divine Liturgy on their knees; those who stay within the main Church, remain there and pray with the rest of the faithful without, however, partaking in the holy Communion; and finally, those who partake in the Body and Blood of Christ. These stages illustrate that every sin, which constitutes the darkening of the *nous*, is a repetition of Adam's sin and degradation from true life. In this sense, repentance is the struggle for man to become a member of the Church.

The existence of the iconostasis should be viewed within this perspective. In older times, there were no iconostases—everyone had a visual communion with the goings-on **because the entire holy Temple was a place for believers, for true Church members**. There was a substantial separation between the narthex and the main Temple. When someone sinned, he could not attend the Temple or pray with the believers. Thus, a class of repenters existed who were essentially in the catechumen state. Later, however, as a consequence of secularism in faith, those in repentance were allowed in the Temple, but iconostases were erected. Of course, we should not pay too much attention to external manifestations such as the iconostasis. The Church's true pastoral care does not consist of external activities, of psychological rest and relaxation, but rather of an effort to purify the heart and illumine the *nous*.

Unfortunately, today we can talk about secularism in pastoral care also. There is an attempt to use modern psychology, among other methods, in the pastoral guidance of people. There are some who employ the results of psychology to help people. It is not such a bad thing for someone to know psychological methods. However, someone who knows himself and by God's Grace monitors the way his inner passions act, who studies the Holy Scriptures and the holy Fathers, and who is guided by a deified Spiritual Father can obtain real knowledge about other people, for in essence the problems of all men are the same. Employing modern psychology to guide people is a secularized view of pastoral care, and it is harmful for the following reasons.

It is harmful when, at the same time, our Church's entire ascetic and hesychastic method is ignored. We ignore the hesychastic tradition as expressed in ascetic writings, such as the Ladder of Saint John the Sinaite. It is a pity for us to ignore a healthy tradition possessed by our Church that aims not at psychoanalysis but at psychosynthesis, when our psyche, through fragmentation caused by the passions, experiences schizophrenia.

It is also harmful when we maintain an anthropocentric position and believe that man's health can be brought about by the method of listening and talking. Man's soul, created by God in order to attain deification, does not find rest with moralistic advice and humane external support. As we have said, the illness lies deeper, in the *nous*. It does not consist of certain suppressed and traumatic experiences of the past, but in the darkening and mortification of the *nous*. Therapy and illumination of the *nous* cannot be achieved by anthropocentric methods, advice, and psychoanalysis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that secularism is the Church's gravest danger. It is what adulterates her true spirit, her true atmosphere. Of course, we must repeat that it adulterates not the Church, for the Church is the real and blessed Body of Christ, but the members of the church. Therefore, we should more properly refer to the secularization of the members of the Church.

The Church is the jewel of the world, the charity of mankind. When, however, this jewel of the world is permeated by the so-called secular spirit, when Christians, the members of the church, instead of belonging to this jewel, instead of becoming the light of the world, are inspired by the world in the sense of the passions and become the world, and then they experience secularism. This secularism does not lead to deification. It is an anthropocentric view of our life. The Church should enter the world to transform it rather than the world entering the Church to secularize it.

A secularized Church is completely weak and unable to transform the world, and secularized Christians have failed at all levels.

ON THE TRADITION OF LONG HAIR AND BEARDS

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Anyone looking at photographs and portraits of clergy in Greece, Russia, Rumania, and other Orthodox countries taken in the early twentieth century will notice that almost without exception both the monastic and married clergy, priests and deacons, wore untrimmed beards and hair. Only after the First World War do we observe a new, modern look, cropped hair and beardless clergy. This fashion has been continued among some of the clergy to our own day. If one were to investigate this phenomenon in terms of a single clergyman whose life spanned the greater part of our century one would probably notice his style modernize from the first photographs up through the last.

There are two reasons given as an explanation for this change: it is said, "One must conform to fashion, and we cannot look like peasants!" Or even more absurd, "My wife will not allow it!" Such reasoning is the "dogmatic" line of modernists who either desire to imitate contemporary fashion (if beards are "in," they wear beards, if beards are "out," they shave), or are ecumenically minded, not wanting to offend clergy in denominations outside the Orthodox Church. The other reason is based on a passage of Holy Scripture where Saint Paul states, *Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?* (I Cor 11:14). In answer to the first justification, true Orthodox tradition directly condemns modernism and ecumenism. It is necessary however to deal in more detail with the argument that bases its premise on Holy Scripture.

Orthodox Christian piety begins in the Holy Tradition of the Old Testament. Our relationship to the Lord God, holiness, worship, and morality was formed in the ancient times of the Bible. At the time of the foundation of the priesthood the Lord gave the following commandments to the priests during periods of mourning, *They shall not make baldness upon their head* (a pagan practice), *neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh* (Lev 21: 5), and to all men in general, *Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.* (Lev 19:27). The significance of these commandments is to illustrate that the clergy are to devote themselves completely to serving the Lord. Laymen as well are called to a similar service though without the priestly

functions. This outward appearance as a commandment was repeated in the law given to the Nazarene, *All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.* (Num 6:5).

The significance of the Nazarene vow was a sign of God's power resting on the person who made it. To cut off the hair meant to cut off God's power as in the example of Samson [*There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarene unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.* (Judg 16:17)]. The strength of these pious observances, transmitted to the New Testament Church, were observed without question till our present times of willfulness and the apostasy resulting from it. Why, one might ask, do



those Orthodox clergymen, while rejecting the above pious ordinances about hair, continue to observe the custom of granting various head coverings to clergy, a practice which also has its roots in the ancient ordinances of the Old Testament (cf. Exod 24:4-6) and the tradition of the early Church (see Eusebius and Epiphanius of Cyprus concerning the miters worn by the Apostles John and James)?

The Apostle Paul himself wore his hair long as we can conclude from the following passage where it is mentioned that "head bands," in Slavonic, and "towels" touched to his body were placed on the sick to heal them. The "head bands" indicate the length of his hair (in accordance with pious custom) which had to be tied back in order to keep it in place (cf. Acts 19:12). The historian Egezit writes that the Apostle James, the head of the church in Jerusalem, never cut his hair (*Christian Reading*, Feb. 1898, p.142, in Russian).

If the pious practice among clergy and laity in the Christian community was to follow the example of the Old Testament, how then are we to understand the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians cited earlier (I Cor 11:14)? Saint Paul in the cited passage is addressing men and woman who are praying (cf. I Cor 11:3-4). His words in the above passages, as well as in other passages concerning head coverings (cf. I Cor. 11: 4-7), are directed to laymen, not clergy. In other passages Saint Paul makes an obvious distinction between the clerical and lay rank (cf. I Cor. 4:1, I Tim. 4:6, Col. 1:7, and others). He did not oppose the Old Testament ordinance in regard to hair and beards since, as we have noted above, he himself observed it, as did Our Lord Himself, Who is depicted on all

occasions with long hair and beard as the Great High Priest of the new Christian priest hood.

In our passage noted previously, *Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?* (I Cor 11:14), Saint Paul uses the Greek word for “hair.” This particular word for hair (κομᾶ) designates hair as an ornament (the notion of length being only secondary and suggested), differing from the anatomical or physical term for hair. Saint Paul’s selection of words emphasizes his criticism of laymen wearing their hair in a stylized fashion, which was contrary to pious Jewish and Christian love of modesty. We note the same approach to hair as that of Saint Paul in the 96th canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council where it states: *Those who arrange and dress the hair of their head by contriving to plait or wave it in a fashion which has disastrous effects on beholders, and hence offers a lure to unbolstered souls, we undertake to treat them in a fatherly fashion with a suitable penance.*

In another source, “The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary,” we read the following concerning the Old Testament practice: “To an extent, hair style was a matter of fashion, at least among the upper classes, who were particularly open to foreign [pagan] influence. Nevertheless, long hair appears to have been the rule among the Hebrews (cf. Ezek. 8:3), both men and women” (cf. Cant 4:1; 7:5). Thus we observe that cropped or stylized hair was the fashion among the pagans and not acceptable, especially among the Christian clergy from most ancient times up to our contemporary break with Holy Tradition. It is interesting to note that the fashion of cropped or stylized hair and shaved beards found its way into the Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds. So important had this pagan custom become for Roman clergy by the 11th Century that it was listed among the reasons for the Anathema (!) pronounced by Cardinal Humbert on July 15, 1054 against Patriarch Michael in Constantinople which precipitated the Western Church’s final falling away from the Orthodox Church: “While wearing beards and long hair you [Eastern Orthodox] reject the bond of brotherhood with the Roman clerov. since they shave and cut their hair.”



I am proud of the cassock I wear and consider it more valuable and seemly than every other kind of garment, even than the royal purple robes of kings. I consider myself unworthy to dress in such a modest, honorable and holy garb, which was honored by numberless monastic Saints, monk martyrs, confessors and Saints. I am saddened by and pity those clerics who reject the cassock and who shave their beards.

Elder Philotheos (Zervakos) of Paros

RAISING CHILDREN

By St. Porphyrios the Kapsokalyvite (+1991).

What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children. Generally the parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they don’t engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but at bottom it does not change. This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you don’t eat you’ll feel faint and you’ll start to tremble. You’re afraid you’ll lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed by way of reflex as a weakness of the body.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause hurt to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you don’t scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother doesn’t love it and asks, ‘Do you love me, Mummy?’ The mother answers, ‘Yes, dear,’ but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she’ll caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

THIS WAS FROM ME (A LETTER FROM GOD)

By St. Seraphim of Viritsa.



Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for this reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there, I placed you precisely in the "school" where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, "Do not believe in your Lord and God." Have you ever spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort. Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the "contradiction of the nations." I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist. Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know That this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply, through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people's souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, that whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn, in all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul. All these things were from Me.



We should not think it strange that Christians endure affliction and various forms of sorrow, patiently awaiting through many trials and temptations whatever their Master gives. For they have heard Him say: *Truly I tell you, that you who are near Me shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. Yet after a little while I will visit you through the Paraclete and drive away your despondency; I will renew you with thoughts of heavenly life and peace with sweet tears, of which you were deprived for a short time when you were being tested. I will give you the breast of My grace, as a mother feeds her baby when it cries. When your strength fails in battle I will fortify you with power from on high, and I will sweeten you in your bitterness. I will look upon you, and your hearts will rejoice at My secret visitation; your affliction will be turned to joy, and no one shall take that joy from you.* (cf. Jn. 16:20-22).

St. John of Karpathos

ON NOETIC PRAYER

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides from "The University Lectures."

If you are ever present at a Roman Catholic or Protestant gathering, you will notice that as a rule they are accustomed to saying extemporaneous prayers. This practice mainly stems from a very careful reading of the Old and New Testament that took place when the Protestants revolted against the papacy. Protestants of that time read the passages in the New Testament that describe the Holy Spirit coming and praying within the believer, and concluded that the believer is gently prompted how to pray by the Holy Spirit Who has come to dwell in him. Protestants believe that the act of prayer proves that the Holy Spirit has touched someone, since the Holy Spirit Who dwells within that person gently prompts him and inspires him to pray. This interpretation was common among Protestants during the age of their Reformation and they have preserved it until the present day. In other words, they believe that when someone wants to pray, the Holy Spirit will come to gently prompt that person and to inspire him, so that he will pray correctly.

But in Orthodox tradition something else happens. Every time Scripture mentions the Holy Spirit praying within someone, every time it says that the Holy Spirit prays within a prophet or within an apostle, it is not talking about prayer using the rational faculty (*logiki proseuchi*), but about prayer using the nous (*noera proseuchi*). This worship is not reasonable worship, but noetic worship.

So on the one hand, there is reasonable worship that is offered to God when we use our rational faculty (*logiki*) to read or chant the Church services. The Divine Liturgy is an example of reasonable worship, as are all the Church services with printed texts. On the other hand, there is noetic worship, which is a qualitatively higher form of worship. Man does not offer God noetic worship on his own initiative. He offers noetic worship to God, because at a certain stage in his spiritual development the Holy Spirit came to him, and to his heart in particular, and transferred the worship of God from his brain to the place of the heart. From now on, this person's worship of God becomes noetic worship in the region of the heart. The mind (*dianoia*) keeps an eye on the prayer of the heart, but it does not participate in it using the forms of rational thought. It

simply eavesdrops on the Holy Spirit's prayer in the heart. This is what is meant by the Holy Spirit praying in the human heart.

As we said earlier, man becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, and his heart in particular becomes the place for this temple's sacrificial altar, when the Holy Spirit begins to pray noetically within him. And man can sense this happening. He is then able to listen to the Holy Spirit saying the prayer and his heart is then able to serve like a priest and respond like a chanter. And so he experiences an inner mystical priesthood. This is when he becomes a member of the royal priesthood. This is when he becomes an active member of the Body of Christ and an active member of the Church. After all, the Holy Spirit is the One Who has introduced him to the Mystical Body of Christ, which is in fact the Church. When

a Christian received Chrismation in the Early Church, Chrismation was the very confirmation that sealed the fact that this Christian had become a member of the Body of Christ.

Now when someone who has the prayer of the Holy Spirit active in his heart desires to pray using his ability to reason, he can do so and pray using words that are different from what he alone hears in the chamber of his heart. But he can also allow himself to repeat or

articulate what he hears being said in his heart.

But it is not within Orthodox tradition to make up extemporaneous prayers, (especially during the Divine Services! We are never allowed to "make up" prayers during the Divine Services!) unless you are in this spiritual state. If you do not have noetic prayer, you should pray with your mind using prayers from the Church services (alone!), because extemporaneous prayer is quite dangerous spiritually for those who have not reached the spiritual stage that corresponds to praying extemporaneously. The Comforter, that is, the Holy Spirit, is the One Who knows how to pray correctly and Who teaches man how to pray correctly. Someone who has been taught by the Holy Spirit how to pray correctly is also able to teach others to do the same.

Christ spoke about this state when He said, *The Holy Spirit will come and dwell in you. And I will also come with the Holy Spirit and with My Father, and We will dwell in you.* Christ clearly says this and tells us how this will take place. He tells us: *Ask and it shall be given you.* He speaks about prayer. He speaks about love. And if you put this all together, what



conclusion do you come to? Christ is talking about a state in which He and the Holy Spirit come and dwell in the believer. Will the believer recognize it when this is taking place within him? Or perhaps he will not recognize it or be aware of it while it is happening? In other words, when the Holy Spirit enters a human being, does He come without being observed, or *with observation*? Or perhaps the Holy Spirit will come because some bishop or priest said so?

I remember when I was a newly ordained priest, I also used to repeat what St. Paul says: *We are the temple of the Holy Spirit*, and *if you destroy this temple*, and so forth. We used to discuss this and talk about it over and over again, moralizing on St. Paul's words. But when the Apostle Paul said, *we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, we are the Body of Christ*, and *you have the Holy Spirit within you*, and the rest, he intended his words for the parish of Corinth. If you carefully read this entire passage, you will see to what kind of believer he is referring. Since he says, *I want all of you to speak in tongues*, he is referring to those believers who speak in tongues. In other words, St. Paul is referring to those who possess various forms of noetic prayer.

In their sermons, priests often say, "dearly beloved Christians, you know you really should not get upset. Look at what St. Paul says: The Holy Spirit is within us and guides us and the Spirit knows our needs and how to pray, and so on and so forth." In other words, they give a sermon and talk about some kind of prayer of the Holy Spirit within the believer, but the believer cannot sense this prayer. He is unaware of its activity within him. He cannot detect it inwardly. He does not hear it being said from within.

But when St. Paul talks about this prayer of the Holy Spirit, is he talking about prayer that can be perceived, or about prayer that cannot be perceived? Does the Apostle Paul really speak in such a vague way about some ill-defined prayer of the Holy Spirit? Is he really so vague about our participation in the Body of Christ? Or does he give us the basic concrete facts taken from experience that explain how this all comes about? In other words, when St. Paul talks about prayer and participation in the Body of Christ, is he talking about something that is sensed noetically and perceived inwardly in a palpable way? Or is he talking about something that is neither noetically sensed nor inwardly perceived?

Let us also examine this same topic through the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian. He tells us: Here I am again, writing against those who say they have the Spirit of God unconsciously, who think that they have Him in themselves as a result of divine Baptism and who, while they believe they have this treasure, yet recognize themselves as wholly deaf to Him. I am writing against those who, even while confessing they felt nothing whatever in their baptism, still imagine that the gift of God has indwelt and existed within their soul, unconsciously and insensibly, from that

moment up to the present time. Nor are they the only ones, but I am also against those who say they have never had any perception of that gift in contemplation or in revelation, but that they still receive it by faith and thought alone, not by experience, and hold it within themselves as a result of (merely) hearing the scriptures.

When we read the Church Fathers, we learn that it is impossible for someone to be a temple of the Holy Spirit and unaware of it. It is out of the question that such a person would be unable to sense that he is a temple of the Holy Spirit, because *the Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God*. But what does it mean for the Spirit to bear witness to our spirit? Isn't this noetic prayer? Because if it is not noetic prayer, what is it? Is it just the imagination of someone with a high opinion of himself?

There is one and only one interpretation for St. Paul's statement *The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God*. It refers to noetic prayer. This noetic sensation, this state and this experience that the Holy Spirit awakens in the Christian, is what makes up the Patristic tradition handed down from generation to generation. On the basis of this tradition, a (true) spiritual father can tell when his spiritual child has passed from a state of purification to a state of illumination. Isn't this something that a spiritual father is able to know? And how does he know it? How does a (true) spiritual father know that his spiritual child has reached the stage of illumination? He knows it from what we have just described. So when we talk about theology based on experience, we are talking about piety based on experience, but not pietism. *Theology is experiential piety. It is not just talk. It is really something quite concrete.*



Keep careful watch, to ensure that the enemy does not make off with any who are off guard or remiss; and that no heretic may pervert part of what you have been given. Accepting the faith is like putting into the bank the money we have given you; God will ask you for an account of this deposit.

For the method of godliness consists of these two things, pious doctrines, and virtuous practice: and neither are the doctrines acceptable to God apart from good works, nor does God accept the works which are not perfected with pious doctrines. For what profit is it, to know well the doctrines concerning God, and yet to be a vile fornicator? And again, what profit is it, to be nobly temperate, and an impious blasphemer?

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (+386)

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YOUR SINS ARE MY SINS, MY SINS ARE YOUR SINS...

St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

Love the sinner as well! Do not fly away from the sinners, but go to them without fear.

After all—whoever you may be—you are not much better than they are. Try to love the sinners; you will see that it is easier to love those whom you despise than those whom you envy.

The old Zosim (from the “Brothers Karamazov”) said, “Brothers, don’t be afraid of the sins of a sinner; but love a sinner also—that is the record of love upon earth.”

I know you love St. Peter and St. John, but could you love the sinner Zacchaeus? You can love the good Samaritan but love, please, the prodigal son also!

You love Christ, I am sure; but what about Judas, the seller of Christ? He repented, poor human creature. Why don’t you love him?

Dostojevsky—like Tolstoi and Gogol—emphasized two things: first, there is no great man; secondly, there is no worthless man. He described the blackest crimes and the deepest fall and showed that the authors of such crimes are men just as other men, with much good hidden under their sins.



Servants and vagabonds, idiots and drunkards, the dirty convicts from the Serbian prisons—all those people are God’s sons and daughters, with souls full of fears and hopes, of repentance and longings after good and justice. Between saintliness and vice there is a bridge, not an abyss. The saintliest and the meanest men have still common ground for brotherhood. Your sins are my sins, my sins are your sins.

That is the starting-point for a practical and lucid Christianity. I cannot be clean as long as you are not clean. I cannot be happy as long as you are unhappy. I cannot enter Heaven as long as you are not. What does that mean? It means that you and I are blended together for eternity, and that your effort to separate yourselves from me is disastrous for you and for me.

As long as you look to the greatest sinner in the world and say: “God, I thank thee that I am not as that man,” you are far from Christ and the Kingdom of God. God wants not one good man only; He wants a Kingdom of good men.

If ninety-nine of us are good and saintly but one of our brothers is far from our solace and support, in sin and darkness, be sure God is not among us ninety-nine, but He has gone to find our brother whom we have lost and forgotten. Will you follow him or will you stand self-sufficient?