

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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HE DIED THAT WE MAY LIVE...

By Inok Vsevolod (Filipiev), from "Orthodox America," Vol. 140, May-June 1996.

What storms, what disturbances, what sins, what tears there are in every dwelling, every town and every market place! And what good is there in the world? It is full of deception, fear and sickness. Our birth is strange, our death is frightful, and what is after death is inscrutable.

[St. Joseph of Volotsk, +1515]

† † †

The whirlwind of life, like falling leaves, spins around the people of this age in a frenzied dance. Vanity—this is the most accurate definition of all that occupies our minds and hearts; it is what moves us to sorrow and to rejoice. So pass the years and decades of our life. Sooner or later, however, there comes for each person the hour of awakening, the hour of realization that he is mortal. And this seemingly obvious truth strikes us in the depths of our souls, like a terrifying revelation.

This awakening comes in different ways, but most frequently it finds us when we are ill. Lying in bed, we suddenly realize that we are not eternal, that we are, in fact, going to die, possibly very soon. Then the sickness leaves us and again we become absorbed by new concerns, and we forget about death. But sickness and adversities are those messengers sent to us by the Lord, who call to our hearts: *People, come to your senses! Do not imagine that you are im-*

mortal gods. Take a good, hard look at yourselves, and you will see that death and decay reign over your bodies. See, your hair is getting gray, your skin is withering, and all this is irreversible. Think well. Are you prepared for death? What awaits you there in eternity, after the last clump of earth is thrown into your grave and a new life begins for you?

Only a few blessed souls, even before the coming of an illness or other dread messenger of death, come to realize, with God's help, all the vanity of this earthly life. Multitudes of holy fathers and mothers who in every age filled the deserts and monasteries, were motivated precisely by this soul-saving awareness. And we too are capable of the same realization. We have but to listen carefully to the voice of our conscience, when we are alone with ourselves, when we have no reason to be hypocritical or double-faced.

Here before us lies the path of the God-pleasers, who came to realize that however beautiful, however marvelous this temporal world is, there will come a time when it will no longer exist. The beauties of nature, which today delight our eyes, will disappear; the mountains, the flowers, the sun, the stars—all will disappear. The beauty of youth will wither, the canvasses of the old masters will fade, the books of renowned authors will decay. All will pass away. God will remain, but will we be with Him? According to our deeds, according to our sins we must conclude that it is not our lot to enjoy His eter-



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nal presence. But He alone is truly Existing, Who always is. And if our lot is not with Him, then what good to us is eternity? For it will be for us an eternity without God.

Unbelievers are often panic-stricken at the thought of leaving this temporal life. They want to live forever, although they know that they are destined to die. These foolish people do not understand that their awful tragedy lies precisely in the fact that after death their souls (and, at the General Resurrection, their bodies also) will receive that eternal existence without God, towards which they have been striving. And can one compare even the most dreadful torments and illnesses of this present life with those hellish torments that sinners will experience for all eternity?

True Christians, by contrast, do not fear the death of their mortal bodies. In the Symbol of Faith they confess, *I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come*. For them, the death of the flesh is a passage to that place *where there is neither sickness nor sorrow, nor sighing but life everlasting*. The only thing they fear is that they have not prepared themselves for eternal life by sincere repentance and good deeds.

Let us ask ourselves: We who call ourselves Christians today, what do we hope for? Do we keep in mind *the life of the age to come*, at least when we recite the Creed? Or are we captivated by the sparkle and the tawdry brilliance of Satan's carnival whirling around us with its mad fascination? That fallen angel has forever been trying to divert people from the soul-saving inclination to prepare for the coming passage into eternal life.

It is instructive in this regard to recall the story of Saint Ioasaph of India. His father, the prince Abenner, desiring to guard his son from any exposure to Christianity, had a

palace specially constructed for him, where he was constantly entertained by courtiers; he was deliberately kept from hearing anything about illness, old age or death. No sick or elderly people were allowed to visit him. When, however, he chanced to see two sick people and one old man, he came to understand the transitory nature of this temporal life, and he fell into despair. He was delivered from this state when the Lord sent to him His servant, the monk Barlaam, who revealed to Ioasaph the truth of Christianity. (Saints Barlaam, Ioasaph and Abenner are all commemorated on the same day, November 19th.)

Nowadays, the devil is setting new snares. We are surrounded by a sea of diversions, by unheard-of discoveries in science and technology, by ultra-modern medicine, and all this is designed to divert us from *the one thing needful*. And we, unfortunate and deceived little people, puffing ourselves up as though we were gods, try to catch eternity in our toy nets. We try to stay the passage of time, dinging onto it with cameras and video cameras, and then we look greedily at these shiny little squares of paper, which have captured irretrievably lost moments of life. Meanwhile, our God Jesus Christ stands invisibly over this frenzied world of ours, and waits: When will we repent, when will we come to our senses? He is merciful and long-suffering, *suffering for us, even unto death*, and today He again suffers, gazing into the soul of each of us. **Have we no shame before His all-pure gaze?**

We who call ourselves Christian have reason to be ashamed. A spiritual self-examination inevitably reveals that even if we maintain an outward semblance of piety, inwardly we are, alas, far from Christ. Where, for example, is the joy of the anticipation of meeting the Lord and His saints beyond the

grave, a joy which was common to all the early Christians? Nowadays this joy is known only to a few chosen righteous ones; to the majority it is unknown. We must admit that many of us, contemporary Christians, fear death and cling to this temporal life almost like the unbelievers. The holy fathers say that to be a Christian means to be daily crucified with Christ, to mortify our fallen nature. Daily! But we do not want to die with Christ even once in our life. Self-conceit, intellectual pride, vainglory—these are the “blind guides” of our souls. They whisper to each of us, “You are such a good Christian, so decent; you are doing such important work. You can’t possibly die now.” And we believe this lie, forgetting about death.

If tonight any one of us should be unexpectedly hauled off to our deaths by execution (as this often happened in the years of persecution in Russia or the days of early Christianity), many would doubtless murmur to themselves: “Why me? I am still young, I can still serve the Church.” The primordial fear of death, which possesses our whole being, would not allow us to recall that martyrdom and confession is the highest and most noble form of service to God and the Church. We have only to realize this or, better yet, to believe in this, and the murmuring will cease, and a divine consolation will settle in our souls, a joy shared by the inhabitants of the world above.

Let us bring to mind the Holy Royal Martyrs of Russia, especially the young and brutally murdered crown-prince and grand duchesses. Life held out to them such wonderful promises. And what did they get? Golgotha and the cross of martyrdom. And with what humility and meekness they drank this bitter cup. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was Himself crucified when He was only thirty-three years old.

What a striking contrast His path in life makes with the lot of so many false-prophets of Eastern religions. There we see venerable gurus surrounded by crowds of disciples, or, in extreme cases, a “prophet” who, at the end of his life, simply flies into the sky on a horse. In Christianity, the God-man Jesus spent three years tirelessly preaching the word of Truth, and in the end was abandoned by almost all His disciples and was crucified on the Cross. Truly, this was a stumbling block for the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. (*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness*—I Cor 1:23).

But let us—all of us who are called by the Saviour to renounce the pharisaism of the Jews and the paganism of the Greeks—take off from our souls’ hardness and despondency, and follow after Christ and the saints, so that we too might confess, not only with our lips but with our hearts, the Christian faith that makes no sense to the people “of this world”; *I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen*

THE THREE VISITS OF MARY MAGDALENE TO THE TOMB OF CHRIST

Blessed Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky (+1936).

We have read various discussions about the apparent lack of accord among the Gospel narrations of Christ’s Resurrection. There have been a number of attempts at demonstrating a concordance among the Evangelists in this regard, but not all have been successful. I wish to offer some considerations on the subject, and I wish to begin by mentioning the most obvious point of this seeming lack of accord.

In Matthew’s Gospel, we read that upon being greeted by the risen Lord with the word *rejoice*, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary immediately embraced His feet. Nevertheless, we read elsewhere (Jn 20:11-17) that, when Mary of Magdala was weeping at the empty tomb and did not recognize Christ, but thought that He was the caretaker of the garden. When she did finally recognize Him, she was forbidden to touch Him.

These narratives do not appear to conform with one another, and attempts of readers to reconcile them only produce strained interpretations and unconvincing contrivances.

The four Gospels do not describe the appearances of the Lord to the Myrrhbearing women in an identical manner. What most perplexes interpreters is the lack of accord between the accounts given by Matthew and John. It is evident that the Lord appeared to Mary of Magdala twice—once alone and the other time together with the other Mary—but the relationship of these two appearances perplexes interpreters.

The thesis by which we intend to resolve this question may be expressed as follows: The Evangelist Matthew speaks of the journey of the two Marys to the Lord’s tomb, already knowing that Christ had risen from the dead. What Matthew is describing took place after the appearance described by John when Mary of Magdala had gone to the tomb and mistaken Christ for the gardener. She had informed the apostles how she had seen the Lord and He had spoken to her, then she informed the other Mary, and both of them went to the tomb. They did not go at that time to anoint the body of Jesus, because they knew that He was risen, but they went *to see the tomb*, knowing it to be empty, but knowing also that the winding strips in which He had been buried were still there. It was not only them and the two apostles who rushed to the tomb to verify what Mary of Magdala had seen, but later, the other Myrrbearers and more than eleven others also went (Lk 24:9, 24). The Evangelist informs us that the two Marys were made worthy of a second appearance of the angel and then of the Lord Himself.

What other evidence do we have, besides Matthew's words that they went *to see the tomb*, that the events in that gospel took place after the events described in John's gospel? The second evidence is that John describes the events that occurred *while it was yet dark*, while Matthew clearly speaks of something that happened *at dawn on the first day of the week*.

The third point which requires our attention is the reaction of the Myrrhbearers to the angel's words, and to Christ Himself. In John's Gospel, Mary appears so unprepared for the event that she cannot assimilate it and takes Christ for a gardener; in Mark's account, the angel's words bring the Myrrhbearers to such terror that they *said nothing to anyone because they were afraid*. Luke writes that they were overcome with fear and prostrated themselves on the ground.

Matthew's narration, on the other hand, encounters the Myrrhbearers already prepared for the encounter, though the angel reassures them: *Do not be afraid. Go and see the place where the Lord lay*. In Mark's gospel, we read of the other myrrhbearing women that they "said nothing to anyone because they were afraid." Matthew, however, relates of the two Marys that they ran "with fear and joy to announce to His disciples" that He had risen. For Mary Magdalene, this was the second encounter, and the other Mary who knew about it from her receives the news again from the Saviour Himself, being already prepared for it. From whence is this evident?

The answer to this is our fourth proof that the two women had gone to see the tomb already knowing about the Resurrection. This answer will also tell us why the Lord did not allow Mary Magdalene to touch Him the first time, but shortly after allowed both Marys to embrace His feet.

In the *Pentecostarion*, on the feast of the Myrrhbearing women, we read in the ninth *stichera* that Mary Magdalene, *...is sent away without touching Christ...* What does it mean? Mary, who had earlier wept over her beloved teacher, seeing Him buried, is now seized with an overwhelming joy. Without comprehending His divinity or thinking about the meaning of His mysterious Resurrection, she forgets herself and wishes to embrace Him as one dear to her whom she thought to be dead and gone, but is now seen alive. She gives herself over to enthusiastic joy, without comprehension.

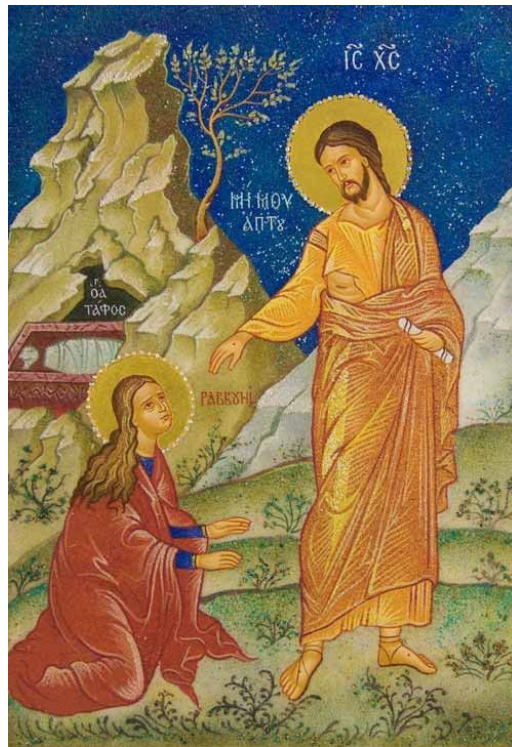
Moreover, something is not yet complete, for He must *ascend* to the Father. Later, the Lord behaves differently to the two Marys. This time, the two women are fully aware that the Lord is appearing to the faithful as the victor over death and Hades, as one ascending to the Father in the eternal kingdom, and with all authority, sending the Apostles to preach the victorious struggle with the world. Now, both women, encountering Him and hearing Him greeting, *re-joice*, no longer think in a worldly manner, but reverence Him as the living Son of God. Thus, He does not prevent their reverent adoration as they *embrace His feet and worship Him*. (Mt 28:9).

Very well, we have seen the accord between the gospels of Matthew and John, but how will we reconcile the narrative of the other two evangelists? At what point will we place the arrival of Mary of Magdala with spices and ointments, at the tomb, in the company of the other women mentioned in Mark and Luke?

The main point of our reply is that Mary Magdalene did not accompany the other women to the Lord's tomb with the spices, but the other women came after Mary had been there, and perhaps after the two Marys had seen the Lord at His second appearance, but they did not yet know about the Resurrection. These other women arrived completely unprepared for the revelation of the Resurrection, and there is no need to conclude that Mary Magdalene was with them; indeed, the evangelists leave open the possibility of the opposite conclusion. Both the other evangelists divide the narrative into three events:

1. The purchase of the Myrrh and spices (Mark) and the storing of them for later use (Luke);
2. The arrival at the tomb and conversation with an angel (Mark) or angels (Luke); and
3. The announcement to the apostles.

Let us begin with this last event. It is not necessary to conclude from Mark's narration that the women did not ever inform the apostles of the appearance of the angel. Mark only notes that they could not do so immediately, and that the apostles heard the news from Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord had *appeared first*. (Mk 16:9). You see, Mark singles her out from the group of other Myrrhbearers and, consequently, separates the informing of the apostles from the bringing of the spices and myrrh. Mark does not speak of her as participating in the bringing of the spices



to the tomb, but only of her participation in the purchase of them (16:1)—which took place on Saturday evening, after the end of the Sabbath restrictions, that is, after the sixth hour.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone *while it was still dark*, and without the spices and ointments. The other women came with the myrrh and spices *at sunrise*. (16:2). The Lord did not appear to all of them but only to Mary Magdalene who, therefore, was not with the others (16:9). Mark names those who purchased the spices and ointments, and those who had watched the Lord's burial, but does not repeat the names when he speaks about the bringing of the spices to the tomb.

Luke does not name the ones who prepared the myrrh, nor the ones who brought it to the tomb, but indicates that the two groups were not identical (*together with some others*, Lk 24:9). Evidently some of them had obtained myrrh and spices already on Friday after the Savior's death, but remained at rest on the Sabbath according to the law (Lk 23:55), while others purchased ointment and spices after the end of the prescribed Sabbath rest (Mk 16:1). Luke does not name the women who brought the spices, but only says of someone, *returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to the other disciples. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the Mother of James who told this to the apostles*. (Lk 24:10).

In fact, as John and Mark recall, it was Mary of Magdala who began the spreading of the good news. Since the news was spread to all the disciples in addition to the eleven, this did not happen all at once. The women had to go from house to house—not only the two Marys, but the other Myrrhbearers as well. The testimony of Mary relates to the words of the third gospel and the gospel of John that Peter and John ran to the tomb. Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen winding strips.

Thus, the four gospels are in perfect agreement on this succession of events:

(1) Some of the women purchased spices and ointment on Friday before the end of the day (Luke), while others, including Mary Magdalene, did so at the end of the Sabbath—after the sixth hour on Saturday (Mark).

(2) Mary Magdalene left the others and went to the tomb at night before the morning of Sunday. There, she does not find the body of Christ (John).

(3) She runs to tell Peter and John (Luke, John), and then stands alone outside the tomb weeping, when an angel appears to her, and then Jesus, whom she does not recognize. She rushes to Him, but is not allowed to touch Him.

(4) Obeying His command, she goes to announce the news to the apostles (John, Mark) and the other disciples (Luke).

(5) Not knowing about all this, the other Myrrhbearers come to the tomb and encounter the angels (Mark, Luke)

and return too tearful to speak at first (Mark), but later also proclaim the news to everyone (Luke).

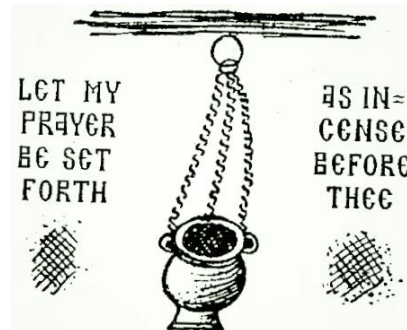
(6) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, already aware of the Resurrection, go to look at the tomb and the Lord's burial bandages, which Peter and John had seen (Luke, John), but which Mary herself had not seen for herself. Coming to the tomb, this time both Marys enter it, as the angel advises them to do (Matthew).

(7) The angel now instructs them to confirm the news of the Resurrection to the disciples and announce the coming of Christ's ascension.

(8) Now fully comprehending the events, both Marys hasten to find the apostles again, but meet the Saviour along the way, and this time, they are allowed to touch Him, embracing His feet (Matthew).

(9) By the end of the day, not only the whole company of the disciples, but even the Pharisees and scribes have heard the news. These latter begin to attempt to cover up the facts.

It is clear that the two Marys went to the tomb together after Mary Magdalene had already been there alone, and that both already knew of the Resurrection. In fact, in the *Menaion* for 22 July, Saint Nikiforos says the same: *Mary Magdalene came thrice to the tomb, twice seeing Christ. First, at night, and then telling Peter and John, with whom she returned. Then with another a third time, seeing the Lord again and hearing Him say "rejoice"*. (Matthew, Ch. 28).



The death of the soul through transgression and sin is, then, followed by the death of the body and by its dissolution in the earth and its conversion into dust; and this bodily death is followed in its turn by the soul's banishment to Hades. In the same way the resurrection of the soul—its return to God through obedience to the divine commandments—is followed by the body's resurrection and its reunion with the soul. And for those who experience it the consequence of this resurrection will be true incorruption and eternal life with God; they will become spiritual instead of non-spiritual, and will dwell in heaven as angels of God (cf. Mt. 22:30). As St. Paul says, *We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall be with the Lord forever*. (1 Thess 4:17).

St. Gregory Palamas

WHAT DID CHRIST PRAY ABOUT IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE?

By Saint John Maximovitch, "Living Orthodoxy," Vol. XV, No. 3, May-June 1993 issue, tr. Vladimir Moss, (pp.5-8).



When the Lord had finished the Mystical Supper with His disciples and given them His Instructions, He went with them to the Mount of Olives (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39). On the way He continued His final

teachings, after which He addressed the Heavenly Father with a prayer for His disciples and those who would believe their word (Jn 17).

On crossing the stream of the Cedron, the Lord and His disciples went into the garden of Gethsemane, where He had been accustomed to gather with them earlier (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32; Jn 18:1-2). Here He left His disciples, except for Peter, James and John, telling them to sit down for a time while He prayed. Then He Himself with Peter, James and John went on a little further. He wanted to be on His own as much as possible, but knowing all that was going to happen, He began to sorrow, to be distressed and horrified (Mt 26:37; Mk 1:27), and He said to those with Him: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.* And going a little further off, He fell face down on the earth and prayed.

Twice the Lord interrupted His prayer, and went up to Peter and the sons of Zebedee. Alas! They were there, but not watching; sleep had overcome them. In vain did their Divine Teacher exhort them to watch and pray, so as not to fall into temptation: *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38). The disciples again fell asleep and immediately the Savior departed from them in order to continue His prayer, which ended only when the hour of the betrayal of the Son of Man into the hands of sinners drew near. Jesus' intensity of prayer reached the highest degree—He came out in a bloody sweat which fell in drops on the earth: *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* (Lk 22:44).

What did Jesus pray about with such fiery intensity? What did He beseech the Heavenly Father, falling face down to the earth three times? *Abba, My Father! All is possible to Thee; O if only Thou wouldest grant that this cup be taken from Me. If it is possible, let this cup pass by Me; take this cup from Me.*

However, not as I will, but as Thou willest; not My will, but Thine be done. My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me, but I must drink of it, may Thy will be done.

The Lord Jesus Christ was the God-Man. The Divine and human natures, without merging into each other and without changing, *undivided and unseparated* (per the dogma of the Chalcedonian Council) were united in Him in one Person. In accordance with His two natures, the Lord also had two wills. As God, Jesus Christ was of one substance with God the Father and had one Will with Him and the Holy Spirit. But as perfect man, consisting of a soul and a body, the Lord also had human feelings and a human will. His human will was completely obedient to His Divine will. The Lord subjected His human will to the Divine will—He sought only to do the will of the Heavenly Father (Jn 5:30); His spiritual food was *to do the will of Him Who sent Me and to finish His work.* (Jn 4:34).

But the work which was set before Him to finish was greater than any other, and even unfeeling, soulless nature was bound to be amazed at it. It was necessary for Him to redeem man from sin and death, and reestablish the union of man with God. It was necessary that the sinless Savior should take upon Himself all human Sin, so that He, Who had no sins of His own, should feel **the weight of the sin of all humanity** and sorrow over it in such a way as was possible only for complete holiness, which clearly feels even the slightest deviation from the commandments and Will of God. It was necessary that He, in Whom Divinity and humanity were hypostatically united, should in His holy, sinless humanity experience the full horror of the distancing of man from his Creator, of the split between sinful humanity and the source of holiness and light—God.

The depth of the fall of mankind must have stood before His eyes at that moment; for man, who in Paradise did not want to obey God and who listened to the devil's slander against Him, would now rise up against his Divine Savior, slander Him, and, having declared Him unworthy to live upon the earth, would hang Him on a tree between heaven and earth, thereby subjecting Him to the curse of the God-given law (Deut 21:22-23). It was necessary that the sinless Righteous One, rejected by the sinful world for which and at the hands of which He was suffering, should forgive mankind this evil deed and turn to the Heavenly Father with a prayer that the Divine righteousness should forgive mankind, blinded by the devil, this rejection of its Creator and Savior. Such a holy prayer could not fail to be heard, such a power of love was bound to unite the source of love, God, with those who even now would feel this love, and, understanding how far the ways of men had departed from the ways of God, would manifest a strong determination to return to God the Father through the Creator's reception of human nature.

And now there came the time when all this was to come to pass. In a few hours the Son of Man, raised upon the cross, would draw all men to Himself by His own self-sacrifice. Before the force of His love the sinful hearts of men would not be able to stand. The love-of the God-man would break the stone of men's hearts. They would feel their own impurity and darkness, their insignificance; and only the stubborn haters of God would not want to be enlightened by the light of the Divine greatness and mercy. But all those who would not reject Him Who called them, irradiated by the light of the love of the God-Man, would feel their separation from the loving Creator and would thirst to be united with Him. And invisibly the greatest mystery would take place—mankind would turn to its Maker, and the merciful Lord would joyfully accept those who would return from the slander of the devil to their Archetype. *Mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace ardently kissed.* (Pss 84:10); righteousness has pressed close from heaven, for the incarnate Truth has shone out on the cross from the earth. The hour had come when all this was about to take place.

The world did not suspect the greatness of the coming day. Before the gaze of the God-Man all that was to happen was revealed. He voluntarily sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the



human race. And now He came for the last time to pray alone to His Heavenly Father. Here He would accomplish that sacrifice which would save the race of men. He would voluntarily give Himself up to sufferings, giving Himself over into the power of darkness.

However, this sacrifice would not be saving if He would experience only His personal sufferings—He had to be tormented by the wounds of sin from which mankind was suffering. The heart of the God-Man was filled with inexpressible sorrow. All the sins of men, beginning from the transgression of Adam and ending with those which would be done at the moment of the sounding of the last trumpet—all the great and small sins of all men stood before His mental gaze. They were always revealed to Him as God—*all things are manifest before Him*—but now their whole weight and iniquity was experienced also by His human nature.

His holy, sinless soul was filled with horror. He suffered as the sinners themselves do not suffer, whose coarse hearts do not feel how the sin of man defiles and how it separates

him from the Creator. His sufferings were the greater in that He saw this coarseness and embitteredness of heart, the fact that *men have blinded their eyes that they should not see, and do not want to hear with their ears and be converted, so that they should be healed.* He saw that the whole world was even now turning away from God Who had come to them in human form. The hour was coming and had already come (Jn 16:31) when even those who had only just declared their readiness to lay down their lives for Him would be scattered. The God-Man would hang in solitude upon the cross, showered with a hail of insults from the people who would come to see this spectacle. Only a few souls remained faithful to Him, but they, too, by their silent grief and helplessness would increase the sufferings of the heart of the Virgin's Son, overflowing with love. There would not be

help from anywhere...

True, even in these minutes He would not be alone, for the Father was always with Him (Jn 8:19; 10:30). But so as to feel the full weight of the consequences of sin, the Son of God would voluntarily allow His human nature to feel even the horror of separation from God. This terrible moment would be unendurable for His holy, sinless being. A powerful cry would break out from His lips: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*

And seeing this hour in advance, His holy soul was filled with horror and distress.

Still earlier, when some Hellenes came to see Jesus, He allowed His human nature to experience the approach of that dreadful hour. When these *sheep from another fold* came to Him, the God-Man saw that the hour when everyone would come to Him as He was raised upon the cross, was near. His human nature shuddered, His soul was in distress. But Jesus knew that without His sufferings the salvation of men was impossible, that without them His earthly activity would leave a trace as small as that of a grain which lies for a long time on the surface of the earth before being dried up by the sun. It was therefore at that time that He appealed to His Father not to allow human weakness to prevail over all the thoughts and feelings of His human nature: *Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? And yet for this purpose have I come to this hour.* (Jn 12:27). And as if heartened by the remembrance of why He had come to the earth, Christ prays that the Will of God

for the salvation of the human race be carried out: *Father, glorify Thy name* (Jn 12:28)—glorify it on earth, among men, show Thyself to be not only the Creator but also the Savior. (St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, book 4). *I have glorified it and will glorify it again* (Jn 12:28) came a voice from heaven announcing that the time for the fulfillment of the Mystery which had been hidden from the beginning of the age was coming. (Col 1:26; Eph 1:9; 3:9).

And now that time had already come. If before the human nature of Christ had shuddered and been troubled at the thought of what was to come, what did it experience now, when in expectation of the coming of His enemies and betrayer He for the last time prayed alone to God? The Lord knew that every prayer of His would be answered (Jn 11:42), He knew that if He would ask the Father to deliver Him from torments and death, more than twelve legions of angels would appear (Mt 26:53) to defend Him. But had He not come for this? So that at the last moment He should refuse to carry out that which He had fore-announced in the Scriptures?

However, *the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. The spirit of Jesus now burns (Rom. 12:11), wishing only one thing—the fulfillment of the Will of God. But by its nature, human nature abhors sufferings and death (St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book 3, chapters 18, 20, 23, 24; Blessed Theodoret; St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, word 6, *On the Remembrance of Death*). **The Son of God willingly accepted this weak nature. He gives Himself up to death for the salvation of the world.** And He conquers, although He feels the approaching fear of death and abhorrence of sufferings. Now these sufferings will be particularly terrible, terrible not so much in themselves, as from the fact that the soul of the God-Man was shaken to its depths. **The sin of man that He takes upon Himself is inexpressibly heavy.** This sin weighs Jesus down, making the sufferings that are to come unendurable.

Christ knows that when His sufferings reach their peak, He will be completely alone. No man will be able to relieve them —*and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.* (Pss 69:20). *I looked, but there was none to help; I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.* (Isa 63:5). But in order that He should feel the full weight of sins, He would also be allowed to feel the burden of separation from the Heavenly Father. And at this moment His human will can wish to avoid the sufferings. But it will not be so. Let His human will not diverge for one second from His Divine Will. It is about this that the God-Man beseeches His Heavenly Father. If it is possible for mankind to reestablish its unity with God without this new and terrible crime against the Son of God (cf. St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius* book 4), then it is better that this hour should not come to pass. But if it is only in this

way that mankind can be drawn to its Maker, let the good Will of God be accomplished in this case, too. May His Will be done, and may the human nature of Jesus, even at the most terrible moments, not wish anything other than the fulfillment of the will of God, the completion of God's economy. This is precisely what Christ prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane: *He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death.* (Heb 5:7).

He offered up prayers and supplications to Him Who was able to save Him from death, but He did not pray for deliverance from death. It is as if the Lord Jesus Christ spoke as follows to His Father: “Abba, My Father, the Father of Him Whom Thou has sent to gather into one the people of Israel and the scattered children of God—the people of the Gentiles, so as to make out of two one new man and by means of the cross reconcile them with Thee. All is possible to Thee, all is possible that is in accord with Thy boundless perfections. Thou knowest that it is natural for human nature to abhor sufferings, that man would always like *to see good days* (Pss 33:12)... But he Who loves Thee with all his heart, with all his soul and with all his mind wishes only that which is pleasing to Thy good and perfect will. I have come down to earth to fulfill Thy wise will and for this purpose I have communed with flesh and blood, assuming human nature with all its weaknesses, except the sinful ones. I also have wished to avoid sufferings, but only on one condition—that this is Thy holy will. If it is possible that the work of economy should be completed without a new and terrible crime on the part of men; if it is possible for Me not to experience these mental sufferings, to which in a few hours' time will be united the terrible sufferings of the human body; if this is possible—deliver Me then from the experiences and temptations which have already come upon Me and which are still to come. Deliver Me from the necessity of experiencing the consequences of the crime of Adam. However, this request is dictated to Me by the frailty of My human nature; but let it be as is pleasing to Thee, let not the will of frail human nature be fulfilled, but Our common, pre-eternal Council. My Father! If according to Thy wise economy it is necessary that I offer this sacrifice, I do not reject It. But I ask only one thing: May Thy will be done. May Thy will be done always and in all things. As in heaven with Me, Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thee there is one will, so may My human will here on earth not wish anything contrary to Our common will for one moment. May that which was decided by us before the creation of the world be fulfilled, may the salvation of the human race be accomplished. May the sons of men be redeemed from slavery to the devil, may they be redeemed at the high price of the sufferings and self-sacrifice of the God-Man. And may all the weight of men's sins, which I have accepted on Myself, and all my mental and physical sufferings, not be able to make

My human will waver in its thirst that Thy holy will be done. May I fulfill Thy will with joy. *Thy will be done.*"

The Lord prayed about the cup of His voluntary saving passion as if it was involuntary (Sunday service of the fifth tone, canon, eighth *heirmos*), showing by this the two wills of the two natures, and beseeching God the Father that His human will would not waver in its obedience to the Divine will (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, book 3, 24). An angel appeared to Him from the heavens and strengthened (Lk 22:43) His human nature, while Jesus Who was accomplishing the exploit of His self-sacrifice prayed still more earnestly, being covered in a bloody sweat. And for His reverence and constant obedience to the will of the Father, the Son of God was heard. Strengthened and reassured, Jesus rose from prayer (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, book 3, 24). He knew that His human nature would not waver any more, that soon the load of the sins of men would be taken away from Him, and that by His obedience to God the Father He would bring human nature that had gone astray to Him. He went up to His disciples and said: *You all sleep and rest. It is finished, the hour has come: Lo! the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us go, he who betrays Me is at hand. Pray that you do not fall into temptation.*

Coming out to meet those who had come for Him, the Lord voluntarily gave Himself into their hands. And when Peter, wishing to defend His Teacher, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, the Lord healed the servant, and reminded Peter that He was voluntarily giving Himself up: *Put your sword into its sheath: am I not to drink the cup which the Father has given Me? Or do you think that I cannot now ask My Father and He will send Me more than twelve legions of angels? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, that this must come to pass?* And willingly drinking the whole cup of mental and physical sufferings to the bottom, Christ glorified God on earth; He accomplished a work which was no less than the very creation of the world. He restored the fallen nature of man, reconciled Divinity and humanity, and made men partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Having accomplished the work which *the Father gave Him to do*, Christ was glorified also in His human nature with that glory which He as God had *before the world was* (Jn 17:5), and sat in His humanity at the right hand of God the Father, waiting until His enemies should be laid at the footstool of His feet (Heb 10:13).

Having been made for all those who obey Him the cause of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9), Christ remains even after His ascension *known in two natures without confusion* (Dogmatikon of the sixth tone), *bearing two wills according to each nature unto the ages* (Sunday canon of the fifth tone, *troparion* of the eighth *heirmos*), but His glorified body cannot now suffer and does not need anything, while in accordance with this His human will, too, cannot diverge from His Divine will

in anything. But with this flesh Christ will come again on the last day *to Judge the living and the dead*, after which, as King not only according to His Divinity, but also according to His humanity, He will be subject to God the Father together with the whole of His eternal kingdom, so that *God may be all in all*. (I Cor 15:28).



Let us believe in the power of our Jesus, and the tempter will surrender his weapons and there will be a great calm. For whose love do you bear afflictions? For whose sake did you jeopardize your very lives for the sisters? Out of love, whose command are you carrying out? You will answer: **For the love of our Christ, in Whom we hope that all things, through His power, will have a good ending.**

Good, very good—for He is the One Who numbers all the hairs of our head. How could we think that anything will happen without His willing it? And if we are protected by Divine Providence, what are we to fear? Should we not rather fear Him Who is able to put us into the fire of hell on account of our sins?

Instead of having courage and pride in our Christ unto His glory, Who counted you worthy to struggle in this way, you, on the contrary, are filled with grief and thoughts and murmuring. I repeat: You ought to be proud that God deemed you, the base and unworthy, worthy to become instruments of His Divine Providence for the salvation of select souls, for whom our Christ died. Do not grieve, for God's sake! Do not seek to lose your reward, which will be great in Heaven.

Preaching the divine word is the smallest virtue, but sacrificing ourselves for Him is **perfect love**; that is, to lay down our lives out of love for our neighbor. Certainly this virtue is laborious and dangerous, but are any high offices attained without labor and toil? Let us not forget the meaning of the divine Crucifixion, that we also ought to become small saviors, when the time calls for it, by the divine will.

Let us see God as our Father; let us rest in the warmth of His secure embrace, for He knows how to arrange everything for our benefit. As humans we—and first of all, I—lose courage in the beginning, so that our human weakness shows; but then the good Cyrenian, divine grace, comes and bears our cross and thus we ascend Golgotha more easily.

Wasn't our Christ afraid on Gethsemane? What were the great drops of holy sweat for? These and other things characterized the human weakness; but afterwards, as God, quiet and meek as an innocent lamb, He sacrificed His life for the sake of ungrateful man.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona
"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ST. GREGORY PALAMAS & HIS DISPUTE WITH BARLAAM

By Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, from his book "St. Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite."



It was with great difficulty that the saint began this "dispute," because he did not wish to abandon the stillness of his life on the Holy Mountain. But when he was asked by his spiritual brothers, and when he himself realized that the faith was in danger of being altered, which would also have resulted in altering the means of man's cure, of losing the way of salvation, then he began his struggle.

At first he did it with great humility and discretion. He finished one of his letters to Barlaam by saying that in spite of the reproach that he felt against Barlaam for his erroneous ideas on serious theological questions, he still maintained the same love for him. He called him a very wise man, the best of those who loved and were loved, and he emphasized that in spite of the dispute, the state of peace would be maintained. At the same time, he expressed the desire that they should meet to embrace with a holy kiss.

All these things imply a soul that has peace and stillness. Because of this hesychastic life he could criticize the erroneous belief and at the same time keep peace and love.

But also on the matters which were in dispute with Barlaam we can see the hesychastic life of St. Gregory Palamas. He expresses the whole Tradition of the Orthodox Church. At this point we would like to look at several characteristic views taken from the first triad of his well-known work *On the Holy Hesychasts*. Three topics are raised. The first one is the relationship between the two wisdoms, worldly and godly. The second is about noetic prayer, the return of the nous to abide in the heart, and the third is about vision of the uncreated Light.

In the first part he opposes Barlaam's view that human knowledge is a gift of God, and indeed of equal or higher value than the knowledge of the Apostles and the Prophets. This was why Barlaam had come to wrong conclusions. One of these incorrect conclusions was that the monks should pursue human education and human knowledge in order to be perfected.

In answer to this view, St. Gregory maintains that man's aim is to progress from the image to the likeness of God. In his fall man lost his direction toward the likeness, and the image was darkened. Therefore, he must now purify the image. But this does not come about through *carnal wisdom*.

Since the darkening of the image happens through sin, this means that when sin is removed, when man attains inner prayer, when his life is harmonized with Christ's commandments, and when he attains vision of God, then he is in fact in the image of God. Therefore, the philosophers' teaching is different from that of the Christians.

St. Gregory emphasizes particularly that man purifies the image through Christ's commandments and the power of the Cross of Christ. He refers to the cases of St. John the Forerunner and of Christ Himself. The Forerunner, he who is greater than the Prophets, lived from his early years in the desert, where, he points out, there was no education nor any of what Barlaam called saving philosophy. There were no books there, and no teachers of worldly wisdom.

And we find the same thing in the life of Christ. When a young man asked what he should do to attain salvation and eternal life, He did not say: "If you want to be perfect, take up outward education, hasten to assimilate the sciences, acquire for yourself the science of beings," but He said: *Sell your possessions and give to the poor, take up the cross and be willing to follow me*. Therefore, in order to shame the outwardly wise the Lord took on uneducated fishermen.

At this point St. Gregory refers to passages from the epistles of the Apostle Paul, mainly from the first letter to the Corinthians, where it says that Christ took unlettered men *in order to shame the outwardly wise*, that God made foolish the wisdom of the world, that *the world through its wisdom did not know God* and that *through the foolishness of what was preached He was pleased to save those who believe*.

Then, taking passages from Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, he makes the distinction between demonic human knowledge and knowledge from the Holy Spirit, and naturally he prevents the monks from acquiring that worldly wisdom and knowledge. He ends his first section by saying that outward wisdom, meaning philosophy, *appeared futile and contemptible to our holy Fathers and especially to those who had had experience of it*.

In the second part he refers to the vast subject of prayer, and especially to what is called noetic prayer, where the nous is centered in the heart. Barlaam and his followers had said that it was not right to take our nous into the body, particularly into the heart. They said that the right thing was to take the nous out of the body.

In reply to this view, which presupposes Plato's philosophical conceptions that the body is the prison of the soul and man's salvation is the soul's liberation from the body, he first uses the Apostle Paul's three passages: *Through Holy Baptism the body became the temple of the Holy Spirit in us*; the body is the *house of God*, and finally God gave his promise *I will live with them and walk with them, and I will be their God*.

He emphasizes that the body is not evil, but it is the carnal attitude that is evil. When a person purifies his body

through self-control, and the irascible and appetitive parts of the soul with self-control and love, and when he further makes his intelligence secure with prayer, then he sees divine Grace in his heart.

In what follows he makes excellent anthropological analyses. He analyzes just what man's nous is, that the heart is the place of the rational faculty, the first rational organ of the body, that the nous is in the bodily organ of the heart, not as in a receptacle, but as in an organ which directs the entire body. Thus we must struggle to bring the nous back into the heart, where its natural place is. Being a great and holy hesychast the saint brings into the soul that which also exists in God. Just as God has essence and energy, so also the soul has essence and energy. The soul's energy which finds itself in the rational part and is flowing out through the senses towards creation must return to the heart. Beginners in the spiritual life can succeed in this by controlling their breathing.

When Barlaam and those who agreed with him scoffed at this method used by beginners, St. Gregory made very correct and very theological observations. The circular motion of the nous, that is to say its return from the outside world to the heart and its ascent from there to God, is the unerring method and **the only way for man to acquire pure knowledge of God**. But St. Gregory also made Orthodox observations about the body's participation in prayer, as well as in the path to sanctity.

The circularity of the body too is essential for the return of the nous to the heart. He says all these things because the Barlaamites mock the hesychasts, who at the beginning of their spiritual life also make use of the circular pattern of the body (*omphalopsychoi*). The saint cites the case of the Prophet Elijah, who used the circularity of his body to bring his nous back into his heart and thus relieved the drought.

In the third part he refers to the fruits of prayer, which are the uncreated Light and divine Knowledge. Barlaam maintained that any light which is accessible to the senses is created and therefore is lower than thought, man's rational faculty. So, with his view that all external light is created and symbolic, he went so far as to consider the philosophers superior to the Prophets and Apostles, who saw the uncreated Light.

This part touches on many other topics as well that relate to this and other accusations by the Barlaamites. First he cites various patristic passages according to which at the beginning of the spiritual life the study of Holy Scripture is reduced, not in disparagement of it, but because we must first be purified through prayer, and then we will understand the spirit of the Scriptures.

He cites other patristic passages as well, in order to show how the body participates in noetic prayer, because often the heart itself leaps with joy at the coming of Grace, and

frequently a pleasant taste is created in the mouths of those who pray and sing, and this is the energy of divine Grace.

Then he makes the distinction between the light of natural knowledge and the Light of the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit. He concludes that natural knowledge is not the light of the soul. Thus when the saints see the uncreated Light, they see the garment of deification. He cites many patristic passages—and he surely interprets them within his own spiritual experience, which is the same as that of the holy Fathers—that say that man can attain vision of the uncreated Light.

This Light is not symbolic and created, but the shining of hypostatic light; it is divinity itself. The light on Mt. Tabor is not a third hidden nature in Christ, but divinity itself. And towards the end of the third section he refers to the great difference between the theologian and one who has seen God. A theologian can also be said to be one who speaks about God without even having his own personal experience, but a *theoptis* is one who sees God. Theology differs from the vision of God in the same way as the knowledge of a thing differs from the possession of it.

There are other places as well in the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas where he refers to the great subject of the knowledge of God. He affirms that vision of the uncreated Light is union with God. Union is communion, and this communion offers knowledge of God.

True knowledge of God is superior to human created knowledge. And the saint demonstrates that in the Orthodox Church we teach that the Prophets are incomparably higher than the philosophers, for the Prophets of both the Old and New Testaments attained the vision of God, while the philosophers were making conjectures about God.

In this analysis of the first triad of St. Gregory's work *On the Holy Hesychasts* he is clearly shown to be a hesychast father, expressing the genuine hesychasm which is experienced on the Holy Mountain.



A characteristic sign of the soul that feels the majesty of God, and loves God, is to seek always the glory of God, to apply all of the commandments of God, and to find humility and its own self-deprecation; since to God is due honor and majesty, while humility is appropriate to man, that we might—through it—become friends of God. If, indeed, we do this, then we too, like St. John the Baptist, will find joy through the glory of Christ; and shall say continuously, *He must increase, but I must decrease*. (Jn 3:30).

St. Diadochos of Photiki

THE SOCIAL AIMS OF ORTHODOXY

By Fr. John Romanides, Patristic Theology: The University Lectures.

Every human being, every person who lives in society must function as a healthy social entity.

Earlier we referred to the healing of the human soul's noetic energy. The completion of this course of treatment automatically results in the creation of a social human being, a person whose soul is healthy and who is prepared for all aspects of social activity. And such healed people, automatically and implicitly, are "ordained" doctors for others whose souls are sick. Here, the medical science called Orthodoxy differs from other sciences: once patients have been healed, they automatically become people who can heal others. For this reason, it is inconceivable for people who have been healed not to have spiritual children—that is to say, other people who depend on them spiritually, other people whom they advise and guide towards healing.

In the early Church, there was no special or official healer, because every Christian was a healer. Healing was the mission of the early Church. The missionary effort of the early Church was not like that of today's Orthodox Church, which sometimes consists of advertising our beautiful beliefs and traditional form of worship as though they were nothing but products for sale. For example, we talk like this: "Take a look, folks! We have the most beautiful doctrines, the most beautiful worship, the most beautiful chanting, and the most beautiful vestments. See what a beautiful robe the bishop is wearing today!" And that sort of thing. We try to dazzle them with our staffs, our robes, and our head coverings so that we can carry out our missionary work. Of course, there is some sense and some success in doing missionary work this way, but it is not genuine missionary work like that of the early Church.

Today's missionary work consists mainly of this: we enlighten superstitious people and make them Orthodox Christians, without trying to heal them. By doing this, however, we are just replacing or exchanging their former beliefs with a new set of beliefs. We are replacing one superstition with another. And I say this because when Orthodoxy is presented in this way and is offered in this way, how is it different from superstition? After all, when Orthodoxy is presented and offered as a Christianity that does not heal—despite the fact that healing is its primary task—how is it different from superstition?

There are Christians in the West who also have Christian dogmas and accept certain councils. On the basis of outward appearance, there does not seem to be such a great difference between the dogmas of the heretics and those of the Orthodox. The difference is not as huge as it is between Christians and idolaters. On the surface, Orthodox doctrine is not so strikingly different from that of heterodox Christians, espe-

cially given the fact that Orthodox doctrine, as taught today in Greece, is unrelated to the therapeutic treatment found in Orthodox tradition. So from the perspective of doctrine, how is Orthodox tradition different from the tradition of the heterodox? And why should someone who is not Orthodox believe in Orthodoxy and not in some other Christian dogma? After all, in the way that they are presented, neither one of them is offered as a treatment or pathway towards healing, but as superstition.

These days we talk about changing our way of thinking, about changing our beliefs, about changing our outlook on life, and this is the way we view repentance. In other words, for Orthodoxy today repentance is identified merely with the acceptance of Christ. That is to say, we accept Christ. And because we accept Him, we go to Church, we light a candle or two, and we become good little boys and girls. If we are young, we go to Sunday school. If we are adults, we go to a religious meeting now and then. And supposedly we are living in repentance; supposedly we are repentant. Or else, if we have done something bad in our life, we show some regret and ask forgiveness and call what we are doing repentance. However, this is not repentance. It is simply regret. Regret is the beginning of repentance, but the human soul is not purified by mere regret. In order for one's soul to be purified of the passions, the fear of God and repentance must first be present and continue throughout the stage of purification until it is completed with divine illumination, the illumination of our nous by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Since the modern Orthodox do not put this therapeutic treatment into practice, what makes them different from those who are not Orthodox? Is it doctrine? And what good are Orthodox doctrines if they are not used for the healing of the soul? When used in such a way, doctrine offers no benefit whatsoever.



When it concerns the body, in order to be delivered from sickness, it is exceedingly important for a sick man to find out the cause of his sickness. By discovering what it is, not only will he be released from the sickness which possesses him, but afterwards he will not fall into it again, knowing what caused him to fall into it once, and guarding against it. So let us also, first of all, show those who suffer such things, from where they got the disease of scandal. If they come to know this, and if they are willing to pay heed to it scrupulously, they will be delivered not only from this sickness, but from many others; not only for the present, but perpetually. For the nature of this remedy is such that it cures the illness at hand, and acts as a preventative against other diseases.

St. John Chrysostom

Ἡ Κάθοδος τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τὸν Ἄδη

Ἀγίου Ἐπιφανίου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντίας Κύπρου.

Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ χθές, μέσα στὴν ἄπειρη συγκατάβασί Του, δὲν ἐκαλοῦσε νὰ τὸν βοηθήσουν οἱ λεγεῶνες τῶν Ἀγγέλων, λέγοντας στὸν Πέτρο, ὅτι εἶναι στὸ χέρι μου νὰ παρατάξω τώρα ἀμέσως, περισσότερες ἀπὸ δώδεκα λεγεῶνες Ἀγγέλων (Ματθ. 26:53), σήμερα κατέρχεται μὲ τὸν θάνατό Του κατὰ τοῦ ἄδου καὶ τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦ τυράννου, ὅπως ταιριάζει σὲ Θεὸ καὶ Κυρίαρχο, ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τῶν ἀθανάτων καὶ ἀσωμάτων στρατευμάτων καὶ τῶν ἀοράτων ταγμάτων, ὄχι μὲ δώδεκα μόνο λεγεῶνες, ἀλλὰ μὲ μύριες μυριάδες καὶ χίλιες χιλιάδες Ἀγγέλων, Ἀρχαγγέλων, Ἐξουσιῶν, Θρόνων, Ἐξαπτερῶν, Πολυομιμάτων, οὐρανίων ταγμάτων, τὰ ὅποια, ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Κύριό τους, προπέμπουν, δορυφοροῦν καὶ τιμοῦν τὸν Χριστό. Ὅχι, ὅτι συμμαχοῦν καὶ συμπολεμοῦν μαζί Του. Ὅχι, ποτέ! Γιατί ἀπὸ ποῖα συμμαχία ἔχει ἀνάγκη ὁ παντοδύναμος Χριστός; τὸν συνοδεύουν γιατί χρωστοῦν πάντοτε καὶ ποθοῦν νὰ εἶναι κοντὰ στὸν Θεό τους.

Οἱ ἀγγελικὲς δυνάμεις ἔτρεχαν σὰν δορυφόροι ὀπλίτες, ὀπλισμένοι μὲ ξίφη καὶ σὰν ἀστραπόμορφοι κεραινοβόλοι, ὀπλισμένοι μὲ τοὺς θεϊκοὺς καὶ παντοδύναμους κεραινοὺς τοῦ Βασιλέως των, οἱ ὅποιοι πρόφθαιναν μὲ πολὺ ζήλο καὶ ξεπερνοῦσαν ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο στὴ γρηγοράδα, ὑπακούοντας στὸ θεϊκὸ μόνο νεῦμα καὶ κάνοντας ἔργο καὶ πράξι τῆ διαταγῆ καὶ στεφανωμένοι μὲ τὸ στέφανο τῆς νίκης κατὰ τῆς παρατάξεως τῶν ἐχθρῶν καὶ τυράννων. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ κατέρχονται στὰ ὑποχθόνια δεσμωτήρια τῶν πανάρχαιων νεκρῶν, ποῦ ἦταν μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ βαθύτερα ἀπ' ὅλη τὴ γῆ, γιὰ νὰ βγάλουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ μέσα τοὺς ἀλυσσοδεμένους καὶ ἀπὸ αἰῶνες τώρα... κεκοιμημένους.

Μόλις δὲ φάνηκε στὰ κλεισμένα ἀπ' ὄλες τὶς πόρτες, τὰ ἀνήλια καὶ κατασκότεινα δεσμωτήρια, στὰ ὑπόγεια καὶ τὰ σπήλαια τοῦ Ἄδη ἡ θεϊκὴ καὶ λαμπρὴ παρουσία τοῦ Κυρίου, προβαίνει ἐμπρὸς ἀπ' ὄλους ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος Γαβριήλ, ἐπειδὴ εἶχε συνηθίσει νὰ φέρνῃ χαρὰς εὐαγγέλια στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μὲ φωνὴ

δυνατὴ, ἀρχαγγελικώτατη, ἔντονη καὶ λιονταρίσια φωνάζει πρὸς τὶς ἀντίπαλες δυνάμεις: «Ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν». καὶ μαζί του φωνάζει ὁ Μιχαήλ: «Γκρεμισθῆτε προαιώνιες πύλες». Ἔπειτα οἱ Δυνάμεις συμπληρώνουν: «Κάνετε πέρα παράνομοι θυρωροί». Οἱ δὲ Ἐξουσίες διατάζουν μὲ ἐξουσία: «Σπάτε ἅλυτες ἀλυσίδες». Κι' ἓνας ἄλλος Ἀρχάγγελος προσθέτει: «Αἴσχος σὲ σὰς, ἀνάληγοι τύραννοι».

Καὶ καθὼς συμβαίνει ὅταν παρουσιασθῆ μιὰ φοβερὴ, ἀήτητη καὶ παντοδύναμη βασιλικὴ στρατιωτικὴ παράταξι, φρίκη μαζί καὶ τρόπος καὶ ταραχὴ καὶ ὀδυνηρὸς φόβος κυριεύει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ ἀκαταγώνιστου Στρατηγοῦ, τὸ ἴδιο ἔγινε ξαφνικά, μόλις παρουσιάσθηκε τόσο παράδοξα ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ καταχθόνια τοῦ Ἄδη. Ἀπὸ ἐπάνω μιὰ δυνατὴ ἀστραπὴ



ἐτύφλωνε τὰ πρόσωπα τῶν ἐχθρῶν δυνάμεων τοῦ Ἄδη καὶ ταυτόχρονα ἀκούονταν βροντερὲς στρατιωτικὲς φωνὲς ποῦ διέταζαν: «Ἄρατε πύλας, ὄχι ἀνοίξετε, ἀλλὰ ξεροζῶστε τὶς ἀπὸ τὰ θεμέλια, βγάλτε τὶς τελείως ἀπὸ τὸν τόπο τους, ὥστε νὰ μὴ μποροῦν πιά νὰ ξανακλείσουν. Ἄρατε πύλας οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν, ὄχι γιατί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὶς ἀνοίξῃ ὁ Κύριός μας, ποῦ ὅταν θέλῃ, διατάζει καὶ μπαίνει μὲ κλεισμένες τὶς πόρτες, ἀλλὰ σὰς διατάζει, σὰν δραπετὲς δούλους, νὰ σηκώσετε καὶ νὰ μεταφέρετε αὐτὲς

τὶς προαιώνιες πύλες. Γιὰ τοῦτο καὶ δὲν διατάζει τοὺς ὄχλους σας, ἀλλὰ σὰς ποῦ παρουσιάξεσθε σὰν ἀρχηγοὶ τους: Ἄρατε πύλας, οἱ ἄρχοντες ὑμῶν.» (Ψαλμ. 23:7-10).

Ἀπὸ τώρα καὶ ἔπειτα δὲν θὰ εἴσθε πιά ἄρχοντες κανενός, παρ' ὅλο ποῦ κάκιστα κυριαρχήσατε πάνω στοὺς μέχρι τώρα κεκοιμημένους. Οὔτε αὐτῶν θὰ εἴσθε πλέον ἄρχοντες, οὔτε ἄλλων, οὔτε τῶν ἐαυτῶν σας ἀκόμη. Ἄρατε πύλας, γιατί ἦρθε ὁ Χριστὸς, ἡ οὐράνια θύρα. Ἀνοίξετε δρόμο σ' Αὐτὸν ποῦ ἔβαλε τὸ πόδι Του στὴ φυλακὴ τοῦ Ἄδη. Τὸ ὄνομά του εἶναι Κύριος καὶ ὁ Κύριος ἔχει τὸ δικαίωμα καὶ τὴ δύναμι νὰ περάσῃ τὶς πύλες τοῦ θανάτου. Γιατὶ τὴ μὲν εἴσοδο τοῦ θανάτου τὴ φτιάξατε σεῖς, Αὐτὸς δὲ ἦρθε γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχῃ τὸ πέρασμά της. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀνοίξετε γρήγορα καὶ μὴν ἀργοπορήτε. Ἀνοίξετε καὶ κάνετε γρήγορα.

Ἀνοίξετε καὶ μὴν ἀναβάλλετε. Ἄν νομίζετε πῶς θὰ σᾶς περιμένουμε, κάνετε λάθος. Θὰ διατάξουμε τὶς ἴδιες τὶς πύλες νὰ ἀνοίξουν αὐτομάτως καὶ χωρὶς νὰ βάλουμε χέρι: Ἀνοίξτε πύλες αἰώνιες!

Καὶ μόλις οἱ ἀγγελικὲς δυνάμεις ἐβόησαν, τὴν ἴδια στιγμή ἀνοίξαν οἱ πύλες! Τὴν ἴδια στιγμή ἔσπασαν οἱ ἀλυσίδες καὶ οἱ μοχλοί. Ἐπεσαν τὰ κλειδιά καὶ συγκλονίσθηκαν τὰ θεμέλια τῆς φυλακῆς. Οἱ ἐχθρικὲς δυνάμεις ἐτράπησαν σὲ ἄτακτη φυγή, ὁ ἕνας ἔσπρωχνε τὸν ἄλλο, ἄλλος μπερδεύεται στὰ πόδια τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ καθένας φώναζε στὸ διπλανό του νὰ φεύγει γρήγορα. Ἐφριζαν, συγκλονίσθηκαν, τὰ ἔχασαν, ἐταράχθηκαν, ἄλλαξε τὸ χρῶμα τους, φοβήθηκαν, στάθηκαν καὶ ἀπόρησαν, ἀπόρησαν καὶ τρώμαξαν. Ὁ ἕνας ἔμεινε μὲ ἀνοιχτὸ στόμα. Ἄλλος ἔκρυψε τὸ πρόσωπο μέσα στὰ γόνατά του. Ἄλλος ἔπεσε κάτω, παγωμένος ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο. Ἄλλος στάθηκε ἀκίνητος, σὰν νεκρός. Ἄλλος κυριεύθηκε ἀπὸ δέος καὶ ἄλλος ἔτρεξε νὰ σωθῆ σὲ βαθύτερο μέρος.

Τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπεκεφάλισε τοὺς σαστισμένους τυράννους. Τότε χαλάρωσαν τὰ χαλινάρια τους καὶ ρωτοῦσαν: «Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἦρθε ἐδῶ, κάνοντας τόσα παράδοξα πράγματα; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης, ποὺ κατορθώνει τώρα στὸν Ἄδη, αὐτὰ ποὺ δὲν ἔγιναν ποτέ; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης, ποὺ βγάζει ἀπὸ ἐδῶ τοὺς προαιώνιους φυλακισμένους; Ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ διέλυσε καὶ κατέλυσε τὸ ἀήτητο κράτος καὶ τὸ θρόνος μας;»

Σ' αὐτοὺς ἀπαντοῦσαν οἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τοὺς ἔλεγον: «Θέλετε νὰ μάθετε ποιὸς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῆς δόξης; Εἶναι ὁ Κύριος, ὁ κραταῖος καὶ δυνατός, ὁ Κύριος, ὁ δυνατὸς καὶ πανίσχυρος στὸν πόλεμο. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, ἐλεεινοὶ καὶ παράνομοι τυράννοι, ποὺ σᾶς ἐξόρισε καὶ σᾶς ἔρριξε κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς οὐράνιες ἀψίδες. Εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ συνέτριψε μέσα στὰ νερὰ τοῦ Ἰορδάνη τὶς κεφαλὲς τῶν δρακόντων σας. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἐπάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ του σᾶς ἔκανε θέατρο, σᾶς διεπόμπευσε καὶ σᾶς ἀφαίρεσε κάθε δύναμη. Εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ σᾶς ἔδεσε καὶ σᾶς ἔρριξε στὸ ζόφο καὶ στὴν ἄβυσσο. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ θὰ σᾶς ἐξοντώσει τελειωτικὰ μέσα στὴν αἰώνια φωτιὰ καὶ τὴ γέεννα. Μὴν ἀργήτε, μὴν περιμένετε, ἀλλὰ τρέξετε γρήγορα καὶ βγάλτε τοὺς φυλακισμένους, τοὺς ὁποίους μέχρι τώρα κακῶς ἔχετε καταπιῆ. Ἀπὸ ἐδῶ κι' ἐμπρὸς καταλύεται τὸ κράτος σας. Καταργεῖται ἡ τυραννικὴ ἐξουσία σας. Ἡ ἀλαζονεὶα σας καταπατήθηκε οἰκτρά. Ἡ ὑπερήφανη καύχησί σας ξεκουρελιάσθηκε. ἡ δύναμί σας ἔσβησε καὶ χάθηκε γιὰ πάντα.»

Αὐτὰ φώναζαν οἱ νικητρίες δυνάμεις τοῦ Κυρίου σὲ τὶς δυνάμεις τοῦ Ἐχθροῦ καὶ συγχρόνως ἐνεργοῦσαν μὲ βιασύνη. Ἄλλοι γκρέμιζαν τὴν φυλακὴ ἀπὸ τὰ θεμέλια

τῆς. Ἄλλοι καταδίωκαν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ποὺ ἔφευγαν γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦν στὰ βαθύτερα μέρη. Ἄλλοι ἔτρεχαν καὶ ἐρευνοῦσαν τὰ ὑπόγεια, τὰ φρούρια καὶ τὰ σπήλαια. Καὶ ὅλοι, ἀπὸ διάφορες κατευθύνσεις καθένας, ἔφεραν τοὺς δεσμώτες ἐμπρὸς στὸν Κύριο. Ἄλλοι ἔδεναν τὸν τύραννο, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι ἀπελευθέρωναν τοὺς προαιώνιους δεσμώτες. Καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν ἔτρεχαν μπροστὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο, καθὼς προχωροῦσε βαθύτερα. Ἄλλοι δὲ τὸν ἀκουλουθοῦσαν νικηφόροι, ὡς Θεὸν καὶ Βασιλέα.

Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν αὐτὰ διεδραματίζοντο καὶ ἐλέγοντο στὸν Ἄδη καὶ ἐσεῖοντο τὰ πάντα, ὁ δὲ Κύριος ἐπλησίαζε νὰ φθάσῃ στὰ πιὸ ἐσχατα βάθη, ὁ Ἄδὰμ ὁ πρωτοδημιουργητὸς καὶ πρωτόπλαστος καὶ πρωτόθνητος ποὺ βρισκόταν δεμένος γερὰ καὶ βαθύτερα ἀπὸ ὅλους, ἄκουσε τὰ βήματα τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ ἐρχόταν στοὺς φυλακισμένους καὶ ἀμέσως ἀνεγνώρισε τὴν φωνή Του, καθὼς ἐπερπατοῦσε μέσα στὴ φυλακὴ. Στράφηκε τότε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες συγκρατούμενους του καὶ τοὺς φώναξε: «ὦ φίλοι μου! Ἀκούω νὰ πλησιάξῃ σ' ἐμᾶς ὁ ἦχος τῶν βημάτων Κάποιου. Ἐὰν πραγματικὰ μᾶς ἀξίωσε νὰ ἔρθῃ ἕως ἐδῶ, τότε εἴμαστε ἐλεύθεροι! Ἐὰν τὸν ἰδοῦμε ἀνάμεσά μας, σωθήκαμε ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄδη!»

Καὶ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Ἄδὰμ ἔλεγε αὐτὰ πρὸς τοὺς συγκαταδίκους του, εἰσέρχεται ὁ Κύριος, κρατῶντας τὸ νικηφόρο ὄπλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Μόλις τὸν ἀντίκρισε ὁ Ἄδὰμ, χτύπησε τὸ στήθος ἀπὸ τὴν χαρούμενη ἔκπληξι καὶ φώναξε πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐπὶ αἰῶνες κεκοιμημένους: «Ὁ Κύριός μου ἄς εἶναι μαζί μὲ ὅλους!» Καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπάντησε στὸν Ἄδὰμ: «Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου».

Ἦστερα τὸν πιάνει ἀπὸ τὸ χέρι, τὸν σηκώνει ἐπάνω καὶ τοῦ λέει: «Σήκω σὺ ποὺ κοιμᾶσαι καὶ ἀνάστα ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς, γιατί σὲ καταφωτίζει ὁ Χριστός! (Ἐφεσ. 5, 14). Ἐγὼ ὁ Θεός, ποὺ γιὰ χάρι σου ἔγινα υἱός σου, ἔχοντας δικούς μου πλέον καὶ σένα καὶ τοὺς ἀπογόνους σου, μὲ τὴν θεϊκὴ ἐξουσία μου δίνω ἐλευθερία καὶ λέω στοὺς φυλακισμένους: Ἐξέλθετε. Σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ κείτονται στὸ σκοτάδι: Ξεσκεπασθῆτε. Καὶ σ' ἐκείνους ποὺ εἶναι πεσμένοι κάτω: Σηκωθῆτε!»

Σένα, Ἄδὰμ, σὲ προστάζω: σήκω ἀπὸ τὸν αἰώνιο ὕπνο σου. Δὲν σὲ ἔπλασα, γιὰ νὰ μένης φυλακισμένος τὸν Ἄδη. Ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, γιατί ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἡ ζωὴ τῶν θνητῶν. Σήκω ἐπάνω, πλάσμα δικό μου, σήκω ἐπάνω σὺ ποὺ εἶσαι ἡ μορφὴ μου, ποὺ σὲ δημιούργησα κατ' εἰκόνα μου. Σήκω νὰ φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Γιατὶ σὺ εἶσαι μέσα σὲ μένα καὶ ἐγὼ μέσα σὲ σένα! Γιὰ σένα ὁ Κύριος ἔλαβε τὴ δική σου μορφὴ τοῦ δούλου. Γιὰ δική σου χάρι, ἐγὼ ποὺ βρίσκομαι ψηλότερα ἀπὸ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, κατέβηκα στὴ γῆ καὶ πιὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ. Γιὰ σένα τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἔγινα σὰν ἕνας ἀνυπεράσπιστος ἄνθρωπος, βρέθηκα χωρισμένος κι' ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ, ἀνάμεσα σ'

ὄλους τοὺς ἄλλους νεκροὺς. (Ψαλμ. 87:5). Γιὰ σένα ποὺ βγῆκες μέσα ἀπὸ τὸν κῆπο τοῦ παραδείσου, μέσα σὲ κῆπο παραδόθηκε στους Ἰουδαίους καὶ μέσα σὲ κῆπο ἐσταυρώθηκε. (Ἰωάν. 19:41).

Κύτταξε στὸ πρόσωπό μου τὰ φτυσίματα, ποὺ καταδέχθηκα πρὸς χάριν σου, γιὰ νὰ σὲ ἀποκαταστήσω στὴν παλαιὰ σου δόξα, ποὺ εἶχα δώσει μὲ τὸ ἐμφύσημά μου. (Γεν. 2:7). Κύτταξε στὰ μάγουλά μου τὰ ραπίσματα, ποὺ καταδέχθηκα, γιὰ νὰ ἐπανορθώσω τὴν διεστραμμένη μορφὴ σου καὶ νὰ τὴν φέρω στὴν ὄψι ποὺ εἶχε σὰν εἰκόνα μου. Κύτταξε στὴ ράχη μου τὴ μαστίγωσι ποὺ καταδέχθηκα, γιὰ νὰ διασκορπίσω τὸ φορτίο τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων σου. Κύτταξε τὰ καρφωμένα χέρια μου, ποὺ τὰ ἄπλωσα καλῶς ἀπάνω στὸ ξύλο τοῦ Σταυροῦ, γιὰ νὰ συχωρεθῆς σὺ ποὺ ἄπλωσες κακῶς τὸ χέρι σου στὸ ἀπαγορευμένο δένδρο. Κύτταξε τὰ πόδια μου ποὺ καρφώθηκαν καὶ τρυπήθηκαν στὸ Σταυρὸ, γιὰ νὰ ἐξαγισθοῦν τὰ δικά σου πόδια ποὺ ἔτρεξαν κακῶς στὸ δένδρο τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

Τὴν ἕκτη ἡμέρα βγῆκε εἰς βάρος σου τότε ἡ καταδικαστικὴ ἀπόφασις. Γι' αὐτὸ πάλι τὴν ἕκτη ἡμέρα σὲ ἀναπλάττω καὶ ἀνοίγω τὸν παράδεισο. Πρὸς χάριν σου γεύθηκα τὴν χολή, γιὰ νὰ σοῦ θεραπεύσω τὴν πικρὴ ἠδονὴ ποὺ γεύθηκες ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον τὸν γλυκὸ καρπὸ. Γεύθηκα τὸ ξύδι, γιὰ νὰ βγάλω ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ σου τὸ δρῦν καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴ φύσι σου ποτῆρι τοῦ θανάτου. Δέχθηκα τὸν σπύγγο, γιὰ νὰ σβῆσω τὸ κατάστιχο τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σου. Δέχθηκα τὸ καλάμι, γιὰ νὰ ὑπογράψω τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσι τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους. Ὑπνωσα στὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ τρυπήθηκα στὴν πλευρά μου, γιὰ σένα ποὺ ὑπνωσα στὸν παράδεισο καὶ ἔβγαλα ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρά σου τὴν Εὐα. Ἡ πληγωμένη πλευρά μου ἐθεράπευσε τὸν πόνο τῆς πλευρᾶς σου. Ὁ δικός μου ὕπνος θὰ σὲ βγάλῃ ἀπὸ τὸν ὕπνο σου μέσα στὸν Ἄδη. Ἡ ρομφαία ποὺ χτύπησε ἐμένα, σταμάτησε τὴ ρομφαία ποὺ στρεφόταν ἐναντίον σου. (Γεν. 3:24).

Σῆκω, λοιπόν. Ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Τότε σὲ ἐξώρισα ἀπὸ τὸν γήινο παράδεισο. Τώρα σὲ ἀποκαθιστῶ, ὄχι πλέον σ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν παράδεισο, ἀλλὰ σὲ οὐράνιο θρόνο. Τότε σ' ἐμπόδισα νὰ φᾶς ἀπὸ τὸ ξύλο τῆς ζωῆς. (Γεν. 3:22). Νὰ ὅμως τώρα ποὺ ἐνώθηκα πλήρως μὲ σένα, ἐγὼ ποὺ εἶμαι ἡ ἴδια ἡ ζωὴ. Ἔταξα τὰ Χερουβιμ νὰ σὲ φρουροῦν σὰν δοῦλο. Τώρα ὀδηγῶ τὰ Σεραφίμ νὰ σὲ προσκυνήσουν σὰ Θεό. Κρύφθηκες τότε μπροστὰ στὸν Θεό, ἐπειδὴ ἦσουν γυμνός. Νὰ ὅμως ποὺ ἀξιώθηκες νὰ κρύψῃς μέσα σου γυμνὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ σηκωθῆτε, ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατο στὴ ζωὴ. Ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰ στὴν ἀφθαρσία. Ἀπὸ τὸ σκοτάδι στὸ αἰώνιο φῶς. Ἀπὸ τὴν ὀδύνη στὴν ἐλευθερία. Ἀπὸ τὴ φυλακὴ τοῦ Ἄδη στὴν ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ. Ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ στὴν ἄνεσι. Ἀπὸ τὴ σκλαβιά στὴν τρυφὴ τοῦ Παραδείσου. Ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανό.

Γι' αὐτὸ τὸν σκοπὸ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανε καὶ ἀνέστη: Γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ Κύριος καὶ νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων. (Ρωμ. 14:9). Σηκωθῆτε, λοιπόν. Ἄς φύγουμε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ. Ὁ οὐράνιος Πατέρας περιμένει μὲ λαχτᾶρα τὸ χαμένο πρόβατο. Τὰ ἐνενηντα ἑννέα πρόβατα τῶν ἀγγέλων (Ματθ. 18:12) περιμένουν τὸν σύνδουλό τους Ἀδάμ, πότε θὰ ἀναστηθῆ, πότε θὰ ἀνέλθῃ καὶ θὰ ἐπανεέλθῃ πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Ὁ χερουβικὸς θρόνος εἶναι ἑτοιμος. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ σᾶς ἀνεβάσουν εἶναι γρήγοροι καὶ βιάζονται. Ὁ νυμφικὸς θάλαμος ἔχει προετοιμασθῆ. Τὸ μεγάλο ἑορταστικὸ δεῖπνο εἶναι στρωμένο. (Ἀποκ. 19:9, Λουκ. 14:16). Τὰ θησαυροφυλάκια τῶν αἰωνίων ἀγαθῶν ἄνοιξαν. Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν ἔχει ἑτοιμασθῆ «ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου» (Ματθ. 25:34). Ἀγαθὰ ποὺ μάτια δὲν τὰ εἶδαν καὶ αὐτιά δὲν τὰ ἄκουσαν περιμένουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο. (Α' Κορ 2:9).

Αὐτὰ καὶ ἄλλα παρόμοια εἶπεν ὁ Κύριος. Καὶ ἀμέσως ἀνασταίνεται μαζί Του ὁ ἐνωμένος σ' αὐτὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ μαζί τους καὶ ἡ Εὐα. Ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ «πολλὰ σώματα δικαίων, ποὺ εἶχαν πεθάνει πρὶν ἀπὸ αἰῶνες, ἀναστήθηκαν» (Ματθ. 27:52), διακηρύσσοντας τὴν τριήμερο Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Αὐτὴν ἄς τὴν ὑποδεχοῦμε καὶ ἄς τὴν ἀγκαλιάσουμε οἱ πιστοὶ μὲ πολλὴ χαρὰ, χορεύοντας μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ ἑορτάζοντας μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους καὶ δοξάζοντας τὸν Χριστό, ποὺ μᾶς ἀνέστησε ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰ. Εἰς Αὐτὸν ἀρμόζει ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις, μαζί μὲ τὸν ἀθάνατο Πατέρα καὶ τὸ πανάγιο καὶ ἀγαθὸ καὶ ζωοποιὸ καὶ ὁμοούσιο Πνεῦμα, εἰς ὄλους τοὺς αἰῶνες τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.



Ὁμολογούσαν οἱ Πατέρες τὴν ταπεινότητα τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένος σ' ὅλη του τὴ συμπεριφορὰ. Ὅταν αἴφνης συζητοῦσε μὲ τοὺς Γέροντας, ποτὲ δὲν ὑποστήριζε τὴ δική του γνώμη. Ὑποχωροῦσε καὶ ἐπαινοῦσε τὴν γνώμη τῶν ἄλλων. Τοὺς ἀδελφούς ποὺ πήγαιναν νὰ τὸν συμβουλευτοῦν, τοὺς ἔστελνε πρῶτα στὸν μεγαλύτερο ἀδελφὸ του, τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ἀνούβ. Ἐκεῖνος πάλι τοὺς ἔστελνε πίσω στὸν Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένα, λέγοντάς τους πῶς σ' ἐκεῖνον ἔχει δώσει ὁ Θεὸς τὸ χάρισμα νὰ ξεκουράζῃ τὶς ψυχές.

Μπροστὰ στὸ μεγαλύτερό του ἀδελφὸ δὲν ἄνοιγε ποτὲ τὸ στόμα του ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν νὰ μιλήσῃ σὲ ἄνθρωπο. Στεκόταν παράμερα μὲ σκυμμένο τὸ κεφάλι ἀπὸ συστολὴ καὶ σεβασμὸ.

Ἀποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

Δύο Ἀπαντήσεις γιὰ τὴν Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο ἀπὸ τὸ 1971

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης Ἀγιοστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Χριστιανικὴ Σπίθα» (φ. 344 / Ιουλ.-Σεπτ. 1971) καὶ τὸ βιβλίον Σφενδόνη Β' (ἀπόσπασμα β').



Δύο φοβερὲς, προφητικές ἀπαντήσεις τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Ἀγιοστίνου Καντιώτου γιὰ τὴν Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο τὶς ὁποῖες εἶχε γράψει ἀπὸ τὸ 1971. Συγκεκριμένα εἶχε ἀναφερθεῖ στὰ ἑξῆς:

(1) Τί χρειάζεται γιὰ νὰ ὀνομασθεῖ μία Σύνοδος Ὁρθόδοξη, καὶ

(2) Γιατί θὰ ὀνομάσουν οἱ Οἰκουμενιστὲς τὴ Σύνοδο Πανορθόδοξη καὶ ὄχι Οἰκουμενική.

Ἀπὸ ὅτι φαίνεται, ἄλλωστε, ἀπὸ τὰ παλιὰ χρόνια κάποιον προετοιμάζαν αὐτὴ τὴν Πανορθόδοξη Σύνοδο, γεγονὸς ποὺ γνώριζε πολὺ καλά ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς Ἱεράρχης Φλωρίνης π. Ἀγιοστίνο. Γι' αὐτὸ μιλοῦσε καὶ μὲ τόση ἀκρίβεια γιὰ τὰ σημερινὰ γεγονότα.

† † †

Τὶ ἀπαιτεῖται γιὰ νὰ χαρακτηρισθῇ Ὁρθόδοξη μία Σύνοδος; Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς ἑπτὰ Οἰκουμενικὲς καὶ τὶς ἀναγνωρισμένους Τοπικὲς, ἔγιναν καὶ ἄλλες σύνοδοι ποὺ ὅμως δὲν ἀναγνωρίσθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησι. Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησις εἶνε ἡ κρίσις καὶ ἐκτίμησις τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς πληρώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει ἐκ Θεοῦ τὸ πνευματικὸ αἰσθητήριον νὰ διακρίνῃ τὴν ἀλήθεια ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη, ὅπως τὰ πρόβατα ἔχουν ἐκ φύσεως τὸ αἰσθητήριον νὰ διακρίνουν τὰ ὠφέλιμα βότανα ἀπὸ τὰ βλαβερά (Μ. Βασίλειος). Ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος λαός, ποὺ ζῆ σὲ μυστηριακὴ ἐπαφὴ μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ἔχει Πνεῦμα ἅγιο, ὅταν ἀκούσῃ ἀπόφασι Συνόδου ποὺ εἶνε σύμφωνη μὲ τὴν πατροπαράδοτη πίστι, μὲ «ὅ,τι πάντοτε, πανταχοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων ἐπιστεύθη» (Βικέντιος Λεο.), αἰσθάνεται χαρὰ καὶ λέει: «Αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν ἀποστόλων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν πατέρων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐστήριξεν». Εἰ δ' ἄλλως, ἐκδηλώνει τὴ διαφωνία καὶ ἀποδοκιμασία του.

Ὡστε κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη ἀντίληψιν αἱ Σύνοδοι βρῖσκονται ὑπὸ τὸν ἔλεγχον τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς συνειδήσεως, ποὺ δὲν περιορίζεται μόνον στοὺς κληρικὸν ἀλλὰ ἐπεκτείνεται καὶ ἀποκορυφώνεται στὸν εὐσεβῆ λαό. Τοῦ λαοῦ ἡ ἐπιδοκιμασία ἢ ἡ

ἀποδοκιμασία κρίνει ἂν μία Σύνοδος εἶνε ἀληθινὴ ἢ μὴ. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία διαφέρει ἀπὸ τὸν παπισμὸ καὶ στὸ σημεῖο αὐτό: ἐδῶ τὸ ἀλάθητο δὲν τὸ διεκδικεῖ ἓνα πρόσωπο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔχει τὸ πλήρωμα, ὁ εὐσεβὴς λαὸς ποὺ ὀνομάζεται «Φύλαξ τῆς Πίστεως». Ὁ πιστός, ὅσο ἄσημος καὶ ἂν εἶνε, δὲν ἐκμηδενίζεται ἢ ἡγεσία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγνοῇ τὴ φωνὴν του. Ἔτσι ὑπάρχει ἁρμονία. Ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἀποφάσεις ἐρήμην τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς λαοῦ καὶ ἀντίθετες μὲ τὸ φρόνημά του δὲν μποροῦν νὰ σταθοῦν. Οἱ Πράξεις τῶν ἀποστόλων, ποὺ περιγράφουν τὴν πρώτη Σύνοδο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὴν Ἀποστολικὴ Σύνοδο, λένε γιὰ τὸν τρόπο λήψεως τῶν ἀποφάσεών της: «Ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ» (Πράξ. 15,22). Ἀκοῦτε, κύριοι, ὅσοι κεκλεισμένων τῶν θυρῶν παίρνετε ἀποφάσεις γιὰ λογαριασμὸ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων; Τί εἶστε σεῖς, ἀνώτεροι τῶν ἀποστόλων; Τόσο μεγάλη ἰδέα ἔχετε γιὰ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς σας;

Ἐνα παράδειγμα Συνόδου ποὺ δὲν ἀνεγνώρισε ἀλλ' ἀπεδοκίμασε ἢ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ συνείδησι, εἶνε ἡ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ συγκληθεῖσα τὸ 449 μ.Χ. πολυαριθμότητα Συνόδου.

Κατὰ τὸν ἱστορικὸ Βασίλειον Στεφανίδην, ἡ Σύνοδος αὐτὴ συνήλθε ὑπὸ τὸ κράτος βίας καὶ τρομοκρατίας, ποὺ ἀσκοῦσαν σκληροὶ στρατιῶτες, φανατικοὶ μοναχοὶ φερμένοι ἀπὸ ἄλλοῦ, χερσὶ δύναμοι ναῦτες καὶ κακότροποι «παραβολάνοι» (νοσοκόμοι καὶ νεκροθάφτες). Ὄταν ὁ πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Φλαβιανὸς σηκώθηκε νὰ ὑπερασπίσῃ τὸ δόγμα περὶ τῶν δύο φύσεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀκούστηκαν κραυγές, ὑψώθηκαν ῥαβδίδια καὶ σφιγμένες γροθιές, ἔπεσαν χαστούκια καὶ κλωτσιές. Ὁ Φλαβιανὸς ζήτησε νὰ καταφύγῃ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγία τράπεζα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ κεῖ σπρώχοντα καὶ χτυπώντας τὸν πέταξαν ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ ναό, τὸν καθαίρεσαν καὶ τὸν ἐξώρισαν. Τὰ ἔκτροπα βεβαίωσαν κατόπιν παριστάμενοι ἱεράρχες, ποὺ ἐνώπιον τῆς Δ' Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου ὡμολόγησαν: «Οὐδεὶς (ἐξ ἡμῶν) συνήνεσε· βία ἐγένετο· βία μετὰ πληγῶν· εἰς ἄγραφον χάρτην ὑπεγράψαμεν... ὅπου ξίφη καὶ βάκλα (=ῥαβδίδια), ποῖα σύνοδος;» (Mansi, Πρακτ. Δ' Οἰκ. Συν.). Γιὰ τὰ ἔκτροπα αὐτὰ ὁ λαὸς ὠνόμασε τὴν Σύνοδο αὐτὴ ληστρικὴ.

Ἡ τελευταία Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος, ἡ Ἐβδόμη (Ζ'), συνήλθε τὸ 787 μ.Χ.. Ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμερον ἔχουν περάσει 12 αἰῶνες. Κάποιος εἶπε, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἦσαν αἰῶνες συνοδικῆς ἀπραξίας. Ἀλλὰ κάνει λάθος.

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ἦταν καὶ εἶνε ἡ ἐμπροσθοφυλακὴ τῆς ἀγωνιζομένης χριστιανοσύνης. Ἄν ῥίξῃ κανεὶς ἓνα βλέμμα στὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία τῶν 12 αὐτῶν αἰώνων, θὰ δῆ ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν ἔπαψε νὰ ὑπερασπίζεται τὴν πίστιν της ἀπέναντι σὲ

μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα θηρία. Πρῶτο ἀπ' αὐτὰ εἶνε τὸ ἰσλάμ, ποὺ ἀπ' τὴν Ἀραβία μὲ φωτιά καὶ σίδερο ἐρείπωσε περιοχὲς τῆς Βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἄλλο θηρίο εἶνε ὁ παπισμός, ποὺ ἀπ' τὴ Δύσι μὲ προπέτασμα τῆς σταυροφορίας ἐξασθένησε τὴν αὐτοκρατορία, ὥστε αὐτὴ νὰ πέση στὸ στόμα τοῦ πρώτου θηρίου καὶ ἦταν τόση ἢ φρικὴ τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων ἀπὸ τοὺς σταυροφόρους τοῦ πάπα, ὥστε μεταξὺ τῶν δύο κακῶν, ἰσλάμ καὶ παπισμοῦ, οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι νὰ προτιμοῦν τὸ πρῶτο, ὡς λιγώτερο ἐπικίνδυνο γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξο πίστι, ποὺ τὴν ἔθεταν πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα. Τέλος παρουσιάστηκε τρίτο μεγάλο θηρίο, κόκκινο, ὁ ἄθεος κομμουνισμός, ποὺ κατεσπάρραξε μυριάδες ἀγίων πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ σιδηροῦν παραπέτασμα.

Κατὰ τὸ μακρὸ αὐτὸ διάστημα στὸν Ὁρθόδοξο χῶρο ἔγιναν πάνω ἀπὸ 30 Σύνοδοι, μικρὲς καὶ μεγάλες· τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιο δὲν ἔπαυε νὰ λαλῆ μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Μερικὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς ἔχουν ὅλα τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου. Ἄκου το ἐσύ, ποὺ λὲς ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία βρισκόταν σὲ συνοδικὴ ἀπραξία.

Οἰκουμενικὴ π.χ. εἶνε ἡ Σύνοδος ποὺ συνήλθε τὸ 879-880 στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι ἐπὶ Μ. Φωτίου. Ἡ Σύνοδος αὐτὴ, στὴν ὁποία μετεῖχαν 383 ἐπίσκοποι, μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ ἀντιπρόσωποι τῶν πατριαρχείων τῆς Ἀνατολῆς ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πάπα, κατεδίκασε ὁμοφώνως τὸ Filioque, δηλαδὴ τὸ παπικὸ δόγμα, καὶ ἀποφάσισε ὅτι, ὅποιος ἀλλοιώσῃ τὸ Σύμβολο τῆς πίστεως, προσθέσῃ ἢ ἀφαιρέσῃ κάτι, ἂν εἶνε κληρικὸς νὰ καθαιρῆται καὶ ἂν εἶνε λαϊκὸς νὰ ἀναθεματίζεται. Αὐτὴ ἡ Σύνοδος στὴ συνείδησι τοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου πληρώματος θεωρεῖται ὡς ἡ Ὁ Οἰκουμενικὴ. Ἔτσι τὴ χαρακτηρίζουν διαπρεπεῖς κανονολόγοι καὶ ἱεράρχες, ὁ δὲ ἱστορικὸς Στεφανίδης λέει ὅτι ἡ μέλλουσα νὰ συνέλθῃ Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος πρέπει ν' ἀσχοληθῇ μὲ τὸ ζήτημα τῆς ἀναγνωρίσεώς της.

Καὶ μερικὲς ἄλλες ἐπίσης Σύνοδοι μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς. Τέτοιες εἶνε ἐκεῖνες ποὺ συνήλθαν στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι τὰ ἔτη 1341, 1347 καὶ 1351 ἐναντίον τῶν κακοδοξιῶν τῶν Βαρλαάμ καὶ Ἀκινδύνου καὶ τοῦ πατριάρχου Ἰωάννου Καλέκα. Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς αὐτὲς δικαίωσαν τὸν πρόμαχο τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἅγιο Γρηγόριο τὸν Παλαμᾶ. Ἀλλὰ μήπως καὶ ἐκεῖνες ποὺ συνήλθαν τὰ ἔτη 1482, 1593 καὶ 1642 καὶ κατεδίκασαν κακοδοξίες παπικῶν καὶ διαμαρτυρομένων-προτεσταντῶν δὲν μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς;

Μερικοὶ θὰ προβάλλουν τὴν ἔνστασι: Ἀφοῦ μετὰ τὸ σχίσμα ὁ χριστιανισμὸς διασπάθηκε, οἱ Σύνοδοι αὐτὲς δὲν μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηρισθοῦν Οἰκουμενικὲς, ἐφ' ὅσον σ' αὐτὲς δὲν μετεῖχαν οἱ παπικοὶ καὶ οἱ διαμαρτυρόμενοι· πανορθόδοξες ναί, οἰκουμενικὲς ὄχι. Ἀπαντώντας σ' αὐτὸ λέμε ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἔλεγε ὁ κορυφαῖος

θεολόγος Χρῆστος Ἀνδροῦτσος: Ἐμεῖς ὡς Ἐκκλησία ἀναγνωρίζουμε καὶ ὁμολογοῦμε μόνο τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία· οἱ ἐκτὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας λεγόμενες Ἐκκλησίες δὲν εἶνε παρὰ σχίσματα καὶ αἱρέσεις. Συνεπῶς μία Σύνοδος, στὴν ὁποία ἀντιπροσωπεύεται ὅλη ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, μπορεῖ νὰ χαρακτηρισθῇ Οἰκουμενικὴ.



Μὴ Φοβηθεῖτε Μὴ Δειλιάσετε... Θὰ Νικήσετε!

Προφητικὰ λόγια τοῦ Γέροντα ἐπισκόπου, ποὺ βρισκόταν στὸ τέλος τῆς ἐπιγείου ζωῆς του ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολυπλαγκτὸν καὶ περιπετειώδη δράσιν σαράντα ἐτῶν στὴν πατρίδα μας.

Σὰς συνιστῶ, παιδιά μου: Ἄν ἔρθῃ ἐποχὴ ποὺ θὰ ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς ὄχι στὸ θέατρο ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα, «διωγμός» καὶ θὰ ἀκουστεῖ ἡ λέξι «διωγμός» ἐναντίον τῶν πιστῶν Χριστιανῶν, μὴ φοβηθεῖτε, μὴ δειλιάσετε. Ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ ζῶ πλέον, θὰ βρισκομαι ὑπὸ τὸν τάφο, θὰ βρισκομαι στὴν ἄλλη ζωή. Ἔσεῖς θ' ἀκούσετε νὰ φωνάζουν, ἀπ' ἄκρου εἰς ἄκρου, «διωγμός». Καὶ οἱ ἐκκλησίες καὶ οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι θὰ ἐξαλείψουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, γιὰ νὰ κηρυχθεῖ νέον «εὐαγγέλιο».

Καὶ ὅτι γίνεται στὴν Ἀλβανία καὶ ὅτι γίνεται σὲ χῶρες μακριά, θὰ γίνῃ καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα—προφητεύω. Ἀλλὰ ἓνα πράγμα νὰ ξέρετε πολὺ καλά: Ὅτι δὲν θὰ νικήσουν οἱ ἄθεοι, ἀλλὰ οἱ πιστοί.

Προσευχὴ λοιπόν. Στὰ ὄπλα καὶ στὰ γόνατα. Γιατὶ θὰ ἔρθῃ ἡ ὥρα ποὺ θὰ γίνῃ ἐρείπωσις. Τότε ἐσεῖς, ποὺ θὰ μαζεύεστε γιὰ νὰ ἀκοῦτε λόγον Χριστιανικόν; Εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸ ἓνα χάρισμα.

Ἐρώτηση: Τί πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε γέροντα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ μᾶς πιάσει ὁ φόβος καὶ πανικός, ἐκεῖνες τῆς δύσκολης ἡμέρας;

Ἀπάντηση: Ὅχι, ὄχι, δὲν θὰ μᾶς πιάσει πανικός. Νὰ ἔχουμε θάρρος, ὅμως νὰ μὴν τὸ ἐπιδεικνύουμε, ἀλλὰ νὰ περμιένουμε τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή γιὰ νὰ τὸ δεῖξουμε. Γιατὶ ὅταν ἐκδηλώνῃ κανεὶς τὸ θάρρος του τὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή, ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία.

Ἀγωνίζεσθε λοιπόν τὸν καλὸν ἀγώνα καὶ μία μέρα θὰ συναντηθοῦμε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Ἐκεῖ θὰ γίνῃ ἡ συνάντησι ὅλων τῶν πιστῶν. Πᾶτε στὸ καλὸ τῶρα καὶ νὰ προσεύχεσθε.

Μητροπολίτου Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου

Μαρτυρία Ἁγίων Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου καὶ Ἀρσενίου τοῦ Καππαδόκου γιὰ τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο

Στέλιος Κοῦκος.

Τὶ ξέρουν οἱ Κορεάτες ποὺ ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀγνοοῦμε; Ὁ Νίκος Γαβριήλ Πεντζίκης θεωροῦσε ὡς τὸ καλύτερο θρησκευτικὸ βιβλίο ποὺ γράφτηκε μετὰ τὸ 1821 τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Ἀγιορείτη μοναχοῦ πατρὸς Παΐσιου (1924-1974)—πλέον Ἁγίου Παΐσιου—ποὺ πρωτοκυκλοφόρησε μὲ τὸν τίτλο «Ὁ πατὴρ Ἀρσένιος ὁ Καππαδόκης». (Μετὰ καὶ τὴ δική του ἀγιοκατάταξη (1986), ποὺ βεβαίως προηγήθηκε τοῦ Ἁγίου Παΐσιου, κυκλοφορεῖ μὲ τὸν τίτλο «Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος ὁ Καππαδόκης»). Τὸ βιβλίο, ποὺ κυκλοφόρησε στὰ μέσα τῆς δεκαετίας τοῦ '70, ἀποτελεῖ ἔκδοση τοῦ Ἡσυχαστήριου Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴ Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης. Ἐχει κάνει πάρα πολλές ἐπανεκδόσεις, ἐνῶ ἔχει μεταφραστεῖ σὲ 11 ξένες γλώσσες· ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτὲς καὶ στὴν Κορεατικὴ!

Ὁ Πεντζίκης τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦσε τὸ βιβλίο, ποὺ πάρα πολὺ συχνὰ ἀναφερόταν σ' αὐτό. Πολλὲς φορὲς μάλιστα τὸ χάριζε σὲ συνομιλητὲς του διανοούμενους, καλλιτέχνες, φοιτητές. Ἐνας πολὺ γνωστὸς σκηνοθέτης μάλιστα ἐνδιαφέρθηκε νὰ τὸ μεταφέρει καὶ στὴν ὀθόνη.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀρσένιος, ὁ Χατζηφεφντής ὅπως τὸν ἀποκαλοῦσαν στὸ χωριὸ του, τὰ Φάρασα τῆς Καππαδοκίας, πολλὰ χρόνια πρὶν ξεριζωθοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ μέρη τους τοὺς εἶχε... προειδοποιήσει γιὰ τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτό. Ὁ ἴδιος ἦταν ὁ ἱερέας, ὁ δάσκαλος ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ γιατρὸς τῆς περιοχῆς. Γιατρὸς γιατί μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ του γινόταν ἀμέσως καλὰ ὁ ἀσθενής. Καὶ μάλιστα δὲν ρωτοῦσε νὰ μάθει ἂν ὁ ἄρρωστος ἦταν Τούρκος ἢ Ἕλληνας. Ἡ φήμη του ἔμεινε στοὺς πληθυσμοὺς τῆς Τουρκίας πολλὰ χρόνια καὶ μετὰ τὸν ξεριζωμὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Ἀλλὰ ἂς ἔλθουμε στὴν ιδιότητά του ὡς δασκάλου. Ὁ ὀρφανὸς Θεόδωρος, αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ βαπτιστικὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀρσενίου, ἔμαθε τὰ πρῶτα γράμματα στὴ Νίγη καὶ στὴ συνέχεια, ὅταν εἶδαν ὅτι ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα ἔξυπνος, τὸν ἔστειλαν στὴ Σμύρνη. Ὅταν μάλιστα ἐπέστρεφε τὰ καλοκαίρια στὰ Φάρασα γιὰ διακοπές, μάζευε τὰ παιδιά τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ τοὺς μάθαινε γράμματα. Μετὰ τὶς σπουδές του στὴ Σμύρνη, σὲ ἡλικία

26 χρονῶν ἔγινε μοναχὸς στὴν ἱερὰ μονὴ Φλαβιανῶν. Πολὺ σύντομα ὅμως ὁ μητροπολίτης Παΐσιος ὁ Β', ἕνας ἱερωμένος μὲ ἰδιαίτερη κοινωνικὴ δράση, τὸν ἔστειλε πίσω στὸ χωριὸ του γιὰ νὰ μάθει γράμματα στὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα.

Ὅπως ἀναφέρει στὸ βιβλίο του ὁ συγγραφέας, ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος, ὁ διακο-Ἀρσένιος «προχωροῦσε τὸ ἔργο του μὲ διάκριση μεγάλη, παρ' ὅλο ποὺ ἦταν νέος. Εἶχε ἐτοιμάσει αἶθουσα γιὰ σχολεῖο καὶ ἀντὶ γιὰ θρανία, δέρματα ἀπὸ κατσίκες ἢ ἀπὸ πρόβατα μὲ τὸ τρίχωμά τους, καὶ ἐπάνω στὰ δέρματα γονατισμένα τὰ παιδιά παρακολουθοῦσαν τὰ μαθήματα. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν σοφὸ τρόπο δὲν ἐρέθιζε τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμη τύχαινε νὰ τὰ βλέπουν τὰ παιδιά, διότι νόμιζαν πὼς προσεύχονται. Τὶς περισσότερες δὲ φορὲς συγκέντρωνε ὁ Πατὴρ τὰ παιδιά στὸ ἐξωκλήσι τῆς Παναγίας (στὸ Κάντσι) ποὺ ἦταν ψηλὰ στὸν Βράχο μέσα σὲ σπηλιὰ καὶ τὸ εἶχε γιὰ κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο».



Ὅποτε κάποιος μπορεῖ νὰ διαλέξει καὶ νὰ πάρει. Κρυφὸ σχολεῖο μέσα στὸ κέντρο τοῦ χωριοῦ καὶ ἀπόκρυφο ἐν ὄρει, ἐν σπηλαίοις καὶ ταῖς ὀπαῖς τῆς γῆς. Νὰ λοιπὸν ποὺ ὄχι μόνον κρυφὸ σχολεῖο ὑπῆρχε ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπόκρυφο, γιατί δὲν ὑπῆρχε περίπτωση κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας νὰ μὴν ὑπῆρχε κρυφὸ σχολεῖο.

Ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἀναπαγωγὴ τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ «συναφιοῦ» θὰ ἔπρεπε κάποιον νὰ ἐκπαιδεύουν τοὺς ἄλλους, ἱερεῖς, διακόνους,

ψάλτες, ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ κάποιους γραμματικούς. Ἡ ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ προσωπικὸ μεράκι. Γιὰ νὰ μάθει καὶ νὰ διδαχτεῖ ἢ καὶ νὰ διδάξει κάποιος. Νὰ δώσει καὶ σὲ ἄλλους τὶς γνώσεις του. Ἄς μὴν ἀναφερόμαστε λοιπὸν μόνον στὰ μεγάλα ἀστικά κέντρα, στὰ ὁποῖα λειτουργοῦσαν σχολεῖα. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε καὶ τὶς δυσκολίες τῆς μετακίνησης τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκείνης.

Καὶ ἂν κάποιον πιστεύουν ὅτι μὲ τὴν «κατάρριψη τοῦ μύθου» τοῦ κρυφοῦ σχολεῖου καταρρίπτεται καὶ ἡ συμβολὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὴν ἀναγέννηση τοῦ Ἔθνους, τότε θὰ φέρουμε ὡς παράδειγμα τὸν Ἀγιορείτη ἱερομάρτυρα Κοσμᾶ τὸν Αἰτωλό. Ἡ δράση του δὲν ἀμφισβητεῖται ἀπὸ κανέναν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὰ σχολεῖα τῶν ἀστικῶν περιοχῶν σχολάρχες καὶ καθηγητὲς ἦταν συνήθως ἄνθρωποι τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Γι' αὐτὸ ἂς μὴν προσπαθοῦμε νὰ κάνουμε σκορδαλιὰ χωρὶς σκορδο. Ἄλλωστε τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ εἴθισται νὰ τρώμε μπακαλιάρο μὲ σκορδαλιὰ. Χρόνια πολλὰ λοιπόν...

Τὸ Συλλεΐουργο στὴν Ἱ. Μ. Μεγίστης Λαύρας καὶ τὰ Φοβερά Γεγονότα ποὺ Ἀκολούθησαν...

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Περιστατικά γιὰ τὴν Ἀλήθεια τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεώς μας καὶ τὴν Πλάνη τῆς Παπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας» (Ι. Μ. Γρηγορίου, Ἅγιον Ὅρος).

Ἀπὸ τὸν Μέγα Συναξαριστὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς 4^{ης} Ἰανουαρίου (Ἀθῆναι 1978, ἔκδοσις ἕκτη) διαβάζουμε κατὰ λέξιν τὰ ἑξῆς: «Οὗτοι οἱ λατινόφρονες ἐλθόντες εἰς τὴν Λαύραν ἐγένοντο διὰ τὸν φόβον τῆς καταδίκης τοῦ θανάτου δεκτοὶ ὑπὸ τινων Μοναχῶν αὐτῆς, εἰς τοὺς ὁποίους καὶ ἔδωσαν πολλὰ ἱερά σκευή, δηλαδὴ Ἅγια Ποτήρια, Εὐαγγέλια, θυμιατήρια καὶ λοιπά, ἅτινα ἐξ ἄλλων ἱερῶν Μονῶν ὡς ληστὰι ἐσύλησαν. Ἐκείνοι δὲ οἵτινες συνεκοινώνησαν μετὰ τῶν ἀνωτέρω λατινοφρόνων μετὰ θάνατον ἔμειναν τυμπανιαῖοι καὶ τὰ ἄθλια αὐτῶν σώματα, μαῦρα ὄντα καὶ ἀποπνέοντα ὀσμὴν δυσώδη, δὲν ἐτάφησαν ἐν τῷ κοινῷ κοιμητηρίῳ, ἀλλ' ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ εἰς ἓν ὑπόγειον σπήλαιον τὸ ὁποῖον περιέφραξαν, ὡς ἀλλότρια καὶ ξένα τῆς Ἁγίας Ἀνατολικῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ὀρθῶν δογμάτων αὐτῆς».

Σύμφωνα μὲ χειρόγραφο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ μοναχοῦ Λαζάρου Διονυσιάτου (+1974) ποὺ ὑπάρχει στὴν Μονὴ Διονυσίου στὴν Λαύρα συλλειτούργησαν ἱερομόναχοι καὶ διάκονοι μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους κληρικούς, συνολικὰ ἑπτὰ ἄτομα. **Μετὰ τὴν κοίμησίν τους τὰ πτώματά τους παρέμειναν τυμπανιαῖα.** Τὸ 1937, σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ μνημονευθὲν χειρόγραφο, συνέβη τὸ ἑξῆς περιστατικό: τὰ πτώματα τῶν τυμπανιαίων πατέρων τὰ εἶχαν τοποθετήσει στὸν νάρθηκα τοῦ κοιμητηρίου τῆς Μονῆς, σὲ κοινὴ θέα πρὸς διδασκαλία καὶ σωφρονισμὸ τῶν ἀπογόνων τους.

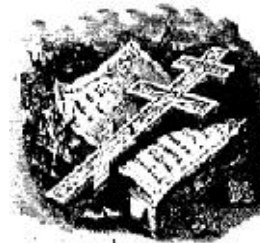
Ἐνα βράδυ μία ομάδα ἐργατῶν, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ἔτρωγαν καὶ ἀστειεύοντο εἶπε ἓνας στοὺς ἄλλους: «Ὅποιος θὰ μπορέσει νὰ πάη αὐτὴ τὴν νύκτα στὰ ἀφωρισμένα πτώματα, χωρὶς νὰ φοβηθῆ, θὰ πάρη αὐτὸ τό στοίχημα. καὶ κανόνισαν τὴ χρηματικὴ ποσὸ θὰ πάρη. Σηκώθηκε ἓνας καὶ εἶπε ὅτι δὲν φοβᾶται καὶ θὰ πάη νὰ σταθῆ δίπλα στὰ πτώματα. Ἐπήγε λοιπὸν ἐκείνη τὴν νύκτα, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸν φόβο του ἔπαθε συγκοπὴ καρδίας καὶ ἀπέθανε.

Τὸ θλιβερὸ αὐτὸ γεγονὸς εἶχε σάν ἀποτέλεσμα ἡ Σύναξις τῆς Μονῆς νὰ μεταφέρει τὰ πτώματα σ' ἓνα ἀπόκρημνο παραθαλάσσιο σπήλαιο μετὰ τὴν Λαύρα καὶ Ρουμανικῆς Σκήτης καὶ ἀφοῦ τὰ τοποθέτησε ἐκεῖ, ἔδωσε διαταγὴ καὶ κτίσθηκε τὸ στόμιο τοῦ σπηλαίου. Ἐκτοτε ἀπὸ τότε τείνει νὰ ξεχασθῆ αὐτὸ τὸ περιστατικό. Εὐτυχῶς ποὺ τὸ διέσωσε ὁ μακαριστὸς π. Λάζαρος Διονυσιάτης, ὁ ὁποῖος, ὅσο ζοῦσε, συγκέντρωνε διάφορα περιστατικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ τῶν

Μονῶν καὶ τῶν Πατέρων τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους καὶ ἄφησε στὴν Μονὴ του τέσσερα μεγάλα χειρόγραφα βιβλία.

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Παπισμὸς» τῆς κ. Οὐρανίας Λαμπάκη, ἔκδοσις 1964, σελ.154-157 διαβάζουμε: «Ἄς ἴδωμεν καὶ εἰς τὴν Μεγίστην Λαύρα, ὅπου τοὺς ὑπεδέχθησαν μετὰ κωδωνοκρουσιῶν. καὶ ἐκεῖ βλέπομεν ὅτι ἐπηκολούθησαν φοβερῶτερα, φρίκης καὶ τρόμου γέμοντα, καθὼς ἡ ἀψευδὴς παράδοσις διέσωσεν... Ὁ μὲν ἱεροδιάκονος Λαυριώτης, ὁ συλλειτουργήσας ἐν τῇ θεῖα Λειτουργίᾳ, ὑπὸ θεηλάτου ὀργῆς καταληφθεὶς, τὸ ζῆν ἐξεμέτρησεν, ἀναλύσας ὡς κηρὸς φλεγόμενος ὑπὸ πυρὸς, οἱ δὲ συλλειτουργήσαντες ἱερομόναχοι ἑπτὰ (κατ' ἄλλους 11) μετὰ θάνατον εὐρέθησαν ἄλυτοι, τυμπανιαῖοι, τῶν ὁποίων τὰ λείψανα μέχρι τέλους τοῦ 19^{ου} αἰῶνος εἶχον εἰς τὸν νάρθηκα τοῦ κοιμητηρίου...εἰς κοινὴν θέαν..., πρὸς διδασκαλίαν καὶ σωφρονισμὸν τῶν ἐπιγενομένων...». Ἐν συνεχείᾳ ἐξιστορεῖται ὅτι, «λόγω ἐπισυμβάντων θλιβερῶν γεγονότων ἐκ τῆς ἀπαισίας θέας τῶν ἀλύτων τούτων λειψάνων οἱ μοναχοὶ τὰ μετέφερον εἰς ἓν σπήλαιον δυσανάβατον καὶ ἀπόκρημνον εἰς τὰ παράλια τῆς Ρουμανικῆς Σκήτης, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἐκεῖ οἱ περίεργοι μετέβαινον, ἐνέφραξαν ἐσχάτως διὰ κτιστῶν λίθων τὴν θύραν τοῦ σπηλαίου, καὶ οὕτως ἔγινε τοῦτο ἀγνώριστον...».

Μία ἄλλη παρόμοια προφορικὴ μαρτυρία ἔχουμε ἀπὸ τοὺς παλαιοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς τοῦ Ὁσίου Γρηγορίου. Συγκεκριμένα ὁ μοναχὸς Ἡσύχιος, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἔλθει νὰ μονάσῃ στὴν Μονὴ μας τὸ 1924 μᾶς ἔλεγε: «Ἐχουν περάσει ἀπὸ τὴν Μονὴ μας μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ καὶ εἶδαν τὰ πτώματα τῶν ἀφωρισμένων. Ἦθελα κι ἐγὼ νὰ πάω στὴν Λαύρα νὰ τὰ ἰδῶ, ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγα χρόνια ἔμαθα ὅτι τὰ ἐξαφάνισαν. Δὲν ξέρουμε ποὺ τὰ ἔβαλαν».



Ὁ καλύτερος ὁρος καὶ κανόνας τῆς ἐγκρατείας, ὅς εἶναι ὁ ἀκόλουθος: Νὰ μὴ ἀποβλέπουμε στὴν σαρκικὴ ἀπόλαυση, οὔτε στὴν κακοπάθεια τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ νὰ ἀποφεύγουμε καὶ στίς δυὸ περιπτώσεις τὴν ἀμετρία, δηλ. τὴν ἔλλειψη μέτρου, ὥστε νὰ ταράζεται ἡ σὰρκα μὲ τὴν πολυσαρκία, οὔτε νὰ ἀρρωσταίνει καὶ νὰ μὴ μπορῆ νὰ ἐπιτελέσῃ τὴν ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν.

Μέγας Βασίλειος

Τὸ Νόημα τῆς Ζωῆς

Γέρ. Μωυσῆς Ἀγιορείτης (+2014), Ἐφημερίς «ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ», 28 Αὐγούστου, 2011.

Μερικοὶ λένε πὼς ἡ ζωὴ μᾶς εἶναι ἀρκετὰ σύντομη. Νομίζουμε ὅμως πὼς ἀπὸ μόνοι μας συντομεύουμε τὸ χρόνο τῆς ζωῆς μας ἀπὸ τὴν κατάχρηση, τὴν παράχρηση καὶ τὴν ἠθοφθορία.

Ἄν τὴ ζωὴ τὴ χρησιμοποιήσουμε μὲ σεβασμὸ, περίσκεψη καὶ φειδῶ εἶναι σίγουρα ἀρκετὰ μεγάλη. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος γενικὰ δὲν ἐκτιμᾷ τὸν χρόνο, τὸν ἀφήνει νὰ κυλᾷ ἀνεκμετάλλευτα, τὸν σπαταλᾷ εὐκόλα, δὲν τὸν ἀξιοποιεῖ, δὲν τὸν χρησιμοποιεῖ χρήσιμα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζοῦν συχνὰ ὡς ἐπιγείως ἀθάνατοι. Δὲν ἐξαγοράζουν τὸν καιρὸ, παρὰ τὸ ὅτι οἱ ἡμέρες εἶναι ἀρκετὰ πονηρές. Ὁ χρόνος μακραίνει ὅσο ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐξάνεται πνευματικά, ὅσο πλησιάζει τὸ βάθος καὶ τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ νοήματος τῆς ζωῆς.

Μερικοὶ γέρασαν χωρὶς νὰ ζήσουν ὄντας γέροι καὶ νέοι γέρασαν προτοῦ νὰ μεγαλώσουν. Φοβοῦνται τὸν θάνατο, παρότι δὲ γνωρίζουν νὰ ζήσουν. Χάνουν τὴ ζωὴ μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τους δίχως νὰ τὴ ζήσουν. Δὲν ξέρουν οὔτε τί εἶναι ζωὴ, οὔτε τί εἶναι θάνατος, οὔτε πιδ εἶναι τὸ οὐσιαστικὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Τὸν θάνατο πιδ πολὺ τὸν φοβοῦνται ὅσοι ἐλέγχονται ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή τους, ὅσοι δὲν βελτίωσαν τὴν πνευματικὴ τους ταυτότητα, ὅσοι παρασύρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὶς ἡδονὲς τοῦ βίου. Ἡ πνευματικότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀντιστέκεται ἰσχυρὰ στὴ φθορὰ καὶ στὴ βλαπτικότητα ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ προκαλέσει ὁ χρόνος. Ἡ γαλήνη στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μπορεῖ νὰ σκηνώσει μόνιμα μόνον κατόπιν σκληροῦ διωγμοῦ τῆς κακίας. Ἡ ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴ Θεία πρόνοια θὰ συνδράμει σημαντικὰ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπίτευξη.

Ὁ φιλόσοφος Σενέκας λέγει πὼς «τὸ θέμα ὅμως δὲν εἶναι ὅτι ἔχουμε λίγο χρόνο ζωῆς, ἀλλὰ ὅτι σπαταλᾷμε μεγάλο μέρος του». Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος παρασυρθεῖ στὸ κυνηγητὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς, τῆς πολυτέλειας, τῆς δόξας καὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας δὲν θὰ καταλάβει πὼς πέρασε μία ὀλόκληρη ζωὴ. Ἡ ἀκόρεστη φιλοχρηματία, ἡ μέθη, ἡ ὀκηρία, ἡ φιλοδοξία, ἡ ἀπληστία, ἡ ραδιουργία ταλαιπωροῦν πολὺ τὸν ἐραστή τους. Τὰ πάθη δὲν ἀφήνουν τὸν ἐργάτη τους νὰ δεῖ τὴν ἀλήθεια.

Οἱ ἀπολαύσεις καθηλώνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο χαμηλὰ καὶ δὲν τὸν ἀφήνουν νὰ ἀνυψωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ γήινα. Πολλοὶ θαυμάζουν τοὺς πλούσιους, δὲν γνωρίζουν ὅμως τί φουρτουνιασμένες θάλασσες κουβαλοῦν μέσα τους. Πολλοὶ λίγοι θὰ μπορούσαν ἄνετα νὰ ποῦν πὼς εἶναι εὐχαριστημένοι μὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ τοὺς ἀρκετά. Δὲν τοῦ ἔδωσαν τὸν χρόνο ποὺ δίκαια ἤθελε, δὲν τὸν ἄκουσαν προσεκτικά, δὲν τὸν εἶδαν κατάματα, δὲν τὸν ἀνέκριναν αὐστηρά, δὲν τὸν γνώρισαν ποτὲ καλά.

Γιὰ αὐτὸ δὲν ἦσαν ἥρεμος, ἀτάραχος, ἄφοβος καὶ ὑπομονετικός. Δησιμονήσαμε γιὰ τὰ καλά ὅτι εἴμαστε θνητοὶ καὶ περαστικοὶ ἀπὸ ἐδῶ.

Ὅσο καὶ ἂν ξεγελᾷ μὲ διάφορους τρόπους ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἑαυτὸ του, πάντα κατὰ βάθος θὰ ζητᾷ τὴν πραγματικὴ ἀνάπαυση. Ἐνας σοφὸς Ρωμαῖος αὐτοκράτορας χαιρόταν καὶ μόνο στὴ σκέψη τοῦ πότε θὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ τοῦ μεγαλείου τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἀναπαυθεῖ ἀληθινὰ. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀσχολεῖται μὲ πολλὰ, μεριμνᾷ καὶ τυρβάξει, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ συγκεντρωθεῖ κάπου καὶ νὰ ἀποδώσει, δὲν ἔχει καιρὸ νὰ ζήσει ἐλεύθερα. Πολὺ συχνὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι κουρασμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ παρελθὸν καὶ τὸ παρόν. Προσπαθοῦν νὰ ζήσουν ἕνα καλύτερο μέλλον, δίχως νὰ κάνουν ὅμως τίποτε τὸ σημαντικὸ γι' αὐτό. Ἡ ζωὴ κυλᾷ καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος βυθισμένος στὶς πολλὰ ἀσχολίες του δὲν τὸν παρατηρεῖ. Ἀπορεῖ πὼς πέρασαν τόσο γρήγορα τόσα χρόνια. Πιδ σύντομη βρίσκουν τὴ ζωὴ σίγουρα οἱ πολυάσχολοι ἄνθρωποι.

Στὴ ζωὴ δίνουμε ἐξετάσεις. Ἄν νικήσαμε τὰ πάθη μας, ἂν ἀγαπήσαμε τὴν ἀγάπη, ἂν μισήσαμε τὴν κακία, ἂν γνωρίσαμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, ἂν συναντήσαμε τὸν Θεό. Τότε ἔχουμε βρεῖ τὸν σκοπὸ, τὸν στόχο, τὸ νόημα τῆς ζωῆς. Ἐχουμε κερδίσει τὶς ἐξετάσεις. Αἰσθανόμεθα μύρο αἰωνιότητος. Δὲ φοβόμαστε τὸν θάνατο. Δὲ μᾶς κουράζει ἡ ζωὴ. Μετανοοῦμε. Ἐλπίζουμε. Χαιρόμαστε.



Ὁ φυσικὸς σαρκικὸς πόλεμος ὑποχωρεῖ μὲ τὴν νηστεία, ἀγρυπνία, προσευχή, ὅταν δὲν ὑπάρχει ὑπερηφάνεια. Οἱ βλάσφημοι λογισμοὶ εἶναι ὅλοι τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ὄχι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Μὲ βλάσφημους λογισμοὺς βασανίζει ὁ διάβολος συνήθως τοὺς εὐαίσθητους ἀνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς θλίβει καὶ νὰ τοὺς φέρνει σὲ ἀπόγνωση.

Μετὰ τὴ νηστεία τὸ ψωμὶ εἶναι γλυκό. Μετὰ τὴν ἀγρυπνία ὁ ὕπνος εἶναι γλυκός. Καὶ μετὰ τὴν κούραση καὶ ἡ σκληρὴ πέτρα μᾶς ξεκουράζει καλύτερα καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν πολυθρόνα.

Ὅταν ἀδικεῖσαι νὰ μὴ λές «Νὰ τὸ βρεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό», γιατί τότε καταριέσαι μὲ εὐγένεια.

Ἡ κάθε καλὴ ἰδέα ποὺ ἔρχεται στὸν ἀνθρώπινο νοῦ εἶναι ἀπὸ ἄνω ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μόνον ὅτι κατεβάξει ἡ μύτη μας μὲ τὸ συνάχι εἶναι δικό μας.

Ὁ σωστὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ λείει σωστὲς κουβέντες, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ζεῖ καὶ σωστά, Εὐαγγελικά.

Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS ARE DUTY-BOUND TO HAVE ORTHODOX BISHOPS!

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What can we do? These are our bishops. We know that they have betrayed Orthodoxy and that they are breaking the Holy Canons that tell us that we must avoid all prayers with the heterodox. We know that they believe in the Anglican Branch Theory and practice "eucharistic hospitality," and that they preach "Marxist Christianity," and that their joys and sorrows are one with their theistic overlords. We know that they are wolves in sheep's clothing, that they are traitors to Orthodoxy, and disdainers of the writings of the holy Apostles and the holy fathers of the Church. But what can we do? Willingly or unwillingly one is forced to remain with the hierarchy that has been given us, for without a bishop there is no Church. We have to obey our bishops, don't we?

† † †

Orthodox Christians are duty bound to have Orthodox bishops. They are obliged to obey their bishops only if their bishops obey Holy Tradition, as it is embodied in the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Canons and the teachings of the Church Fathers. If the bishops are not obedient to the Church, we are not obliged to be obedient to them. Indeed, how can one demand obedience to disobedience? Why should one show reverence to irreverence?

The Orthodox Church has criteria by which the Orthodoxy of all—bishops, clergy and lay people alike—is evaluated. These criteria are the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Tradition, as it is expressed in the Holy Canons and writings of the saints of God and the holy Church Fathers. As a result, there is no room here either for anarchy or for despotism. There is no danger of slipping into dictatorial Papism or into free-for-all Protestantism. On many occasions, when discussing such matters with Roman Catholic priests or monks, we have made it abundantly clear to them

that, "All Orthodox bishops are infallible—until they make a mistake..."

Our Orthodox bishops know exactly where they stand and they know they must stand there correctly or they will have to answer to God and to the people of God. At their ordination to the episcopacy, they make three solemn declarations and vows before God and the Orthodox faithful. In the first declaration, the candidate recites the Creed wherein, among other things, he declares his belief not in the Anglican Branch Theory, but in the Undivided Church which is *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*. He professes that the Holy Spirit proceeds *from the Father*—not "from the Father and the Son" as the heretical denominations aver. In the second declaration he pronounces the Orthodox Catholic faith regarding the Person of the Son of God, and here he denounces the doctrines of Sables, Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus and all the other Monophysites and Monothelites. In the third declaration, the

candidate professes the Orthodox Faith concerning the Holy Trinity, adding also the words, *I believe also in the One, Catholic and Apostolic Church's traditions and interpretations concerning God and things divine*. Furthermore, he denounces those who do not accept the holy icons as the Church has accepted them. And at the end of the declaration, he states, *I anathematize and openly proclaim with a great voice: To every heretic anathema. To all heretics, anathema!* [*Great Euchologion* (Venice, 1862), pp. 166-76].

These are indeed very strong and frightful words. The candidate for the episcopacy is here proclaiming before God and the people of God that he will uphold and defend every aspect of the Orthodox Faith, and he calls the Church's anathema and excommunication upon

those who refuse to obey the voice of Christ Who has spoken in His holy Church: *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* (Mt 18:18).

Of course, like every other mortal, bishops too have failings—for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23). But, like all other mortals, they too struggle with their weaknesses and try as best as they can to overcome them. Like everyone else, they are not always successful. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they too have human flaws, as long as



The Three Pillars of Orthodoxy
Sts. Gregory Palamas (+1359), Photios the Great (+891)
and Mark of Ephesus (+1444)

they uphold and defend and teach the Orthodox faith, they are being faithful to the confession of faith and the vows that they made at their ordination. We do not revere our bishops; they too are mortal, and therefore have failings like the rest of us. We revere and love them because, though mortals and, therefore, possessing human failings, they have taken upon themselves the heavy task of: (1) Defending and propagating the Holy Orthodox and Catholic Faith, (2) striving to cultivate an increase in the piety and fervor for God of the flock with which they have been entrusted, and (3) seeking by all means to increase that flock.

They are the living icons of Christ our Savior. It is by their authority that all the Holy Mysteries are performed in the Church. Furthermore, since they are the true icons of Christ our Lord and Teacher, it is their duty to rightly divide the Word of Truth and to observe and uphold the Holy Canons, to maintain and extend that Truth of which they are icons, and to see to it that their flock does the same. The English word “bishop” comes from the Greek word *episcopos*, which means “overseer,” and this term describes their duties and obligations well; if they fulfill these obligations, we revere and honor them as our fathers and tutors in Christ. Such holy bishops, **faithful to their commitment towards observing and upholding the Holy Canons**, came together in the Ecumenical and Local Councils in defense of the Orthodox Catholic Faith. As Chrysostom Stratman expressed it:

These authentic shepherds of the Lord’s flock had but one concern, the welfare and safety of those entrusted to them. Guiding, nourishing, and protecting their sheep was their one earthly occupation and preoccupation. They lived for Christ’s flock and many died for it, as did the great and holy St. John Chrysostomos... [The Ecumenists (Oak Park, Ill.), p.7]

Granted that not all bishops are saints, and perhaps a few are totally unworthy of their calling; what does Our Savior teach us in regard to this point? Our Lord and God taught us that those religious leaders who do not observe the laws of God stand convicted of hypocrisy, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old. Nevertheless, as long as they continue to teach us the law of God—even though they themselves do not observe it—we are to obey them. Our Savior said:

The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

ren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. [Mt 23:2-10].

Here too, in our Savior’s words, we find the key to understanding the difference between human sin and blasphemous heresy: Sin is a transgression of the Gospel’s precepts. Heresy, on the other hand, is an **alteration** of those precepts.

So, as long as our hierarchs sit in the seat of Moses, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and Saints—that is to say, as long as they continue to teach the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration—we are to obey them, even though they themselves, perhaps, are not in order personally. On the other hand, if they openly and without shame teach heresy—that is, change the teachings that have been delivered unto us by the Saints of God—then we are not under any obligation whatsoever to listen to them or to obey them. They no longer sit in the seat of Moses.

What, then, should one do if one is faced with the possibility that one’s bishop has gone astray in matters of the faith?

“We are just simply, Orthodox Christians. What do we know about theological matters anyway?”

This is a typical statement, heard too often. The answer, of course, is that **we are the rational flock of Christ**. As conscientious Orthodox Christians, we are expected to know our Orthodox Faith well and to live it. This means that we have been attending and listening carefully to the Divine Services. We have been reading the Holy Scriptures together with the commentaries of the Holy Fathers. We have been studying the Lives of the Saints, the Holy Canons and Church History. We have been keeping the holy fasts and cultivating the life of prayer. We have been trying to keep the commandments, struggling with our passions, and striving to grow in true love for God and man. If we have not been doing these things, we are not conscientious, practicing Orthodox Christians. We are not a rational flock.

This is what the *Apostolic Constitutions* say about what kind of flock we are supposed to be:

The sheep and rams are rational, and not irrational, so that no layman may ever say that. “I am a sheep, and not a shepherd, and I give no account of myself, but the shepherd shall see to it, and he alone shall pay the penalty for me.” For even as the sheep which follows not the good shepherd shall fall to the wolves unto its own destruction, so too it is evident that that which follows the evil shepherd shall acquire death, for he shall utterly devour it. [Apostolic Constitutions, 2:19 (PG 1.633)]

Nor should we forget what the Orthodox Patriarchs of the East wrote in their *Answer to Pope Pius the IX* in 1848, “...the guardians and defenders of the faith is the very body of the Church, that is, the people...” (J.Karmiris, ed., *Ta Dogmatica kai Symbolica Mnemeia* [Athens, 1953], vol.2, p. 920).

Let us return now to the question we mentioned above. What does an Orthodox Christian do when he ascertains

beyond a shadow of a doubt that his bishop is openly and stubbornly preaching heresy? Fortunately, we have an abundance of examples that tell exactly how we must proceed should such a dire and grievous situation ever arise. Church History, the Lives of the Saints, the writings of the Church Fathers and the Holy canons all provide guidance for us.

To begin with, the first thing an Orthodox Christian must do—once he is sure his bishop no longer preaches Orthodoxy—is to find the nearest bishop who does preach Orthodoxy.

Although this is the first, and easiest, solution to the problem, things do not always work out so simply. There have been occasions when the entire hierarchy of an area fell into heresy, as occurred in all North Africa during the Arian controversy in the fourth century, and in the Polish occupied territories with the so-called Union of Brest during the seventeenth century. There have been other occasions in the Church's history when the Orthodox Christians did not know who the nearest Orthodox bishop was. Such was the plight of the Orthodox Christians during the iconoclast period. What did they do when all the bishops known to them were iconoclast? There simply were no Orthodox bishops at the head of the dioceses in the Byzantine Empire at that time. The Orthodox bishops who had not died at the hands of their tormentors were languishing in prisons and exile, and the Orthodox Christians hardly knew where they were or if they were alive or dead.

What did the Christians do then? They simply commemorated "our Archbishop" or "Metropolitan" or "Bishop" without mentioning any name, and by this they meant the nearest true and faithful Orthodox bishop whose name, at the moment, was unknown to them (the bishop who still teaches the Orthodox faith correctly and without alteration.) This practice is used to this day by the zealot fathers of the Holy Mountain who refuse to commemorate the Patriarch Bartholomew (and Demetrius before him) of Constantinople, and who instead use the formula "for every episcopate of the Orthodox which rightly divideth the word of truth."

The life of Saint Maximus is also instructive for us. Saint Maximus, though only a simple monk, resisted and cut off communion with every patriarch, metropolitan, archbishop and bishop in the East because of their having been infected with the heresy of Monothelism. During the first imprisonment of the Saint, the messengers from the Ecumenical Patriarch asked him:

"To which church do you belong? To that of Byzantium, of Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, or Jerusalem? For all these churches, together with the provinces in subjection to them, are in unity. Therefore, if you also belong to the Catholic Church, enter into communion with us at once, lest fashioning for yourself some new and strange pathway, you fall into that which you do not even expect!"

To this the righteous man wisely replied "Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the Faith. It was for this confession that He called Peter blessed, and He declared that He would found His Church upon this confession. However, I wish to know the contents of your confession, on the basis of which all churches, as you say, have entered into communion. If it is not opposed to the truth, then neither will I be separated from it."

The confession which they were proposing to the Saint was not Orthodox, of course, and so he refused to comply with their coercions. Furthermore, they were lying about the See of Rome which, in fact, had remained Orthodox. Sometime later, at his last interrogation by the Byzantine authorities, the following dialogue took place:

The Saint said, "They [the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria and all the other heretical bishops of the East] have been deposed and deprived of the priesthood at the local council which took place recently in Rome. What Mysteries, then, can they perform? Or what spirit will descend upon those who are ordained by them?"

"Then you alone will be saved, and all others will perish?" they objected.

To this the Saint replied: "When all the people in Babylon were worshipping the golden idol, the Three Holy Children did not condemn anyone to perdition. They did not concern themselves with the doings of others, but took care only for themselves, lest they should fall away from true piety. In precisely the same way, when Daniel was cast into the lion's den, he did not condemn any of those who, fulfilling the law of Darius, did not wish to pray to God, but he kept in mind his own duty, and desired rather to die than to sin against his conscience by transgressing the Law of God. God forbid that I should condemn anyone or say that I alone am being saved! However, I shall sooner agree to die than to apostatize in any way from the true faith and thereby suffer torments of conscience."

"But what will you do," inquired the envoys, "when the Romans are united to the Byzantines? Yesterday, indeed, two delegates arrived from Rome and tomorrow, the Lord's day, they will communicate the Holy Mysteries with the Patriarch."

The Saint replied, "Even if the whole universe holds communion with the Patriarch, I will not communicate with him. For I know from the writings of the holy Apostle Paul: **The Holy Spirit declares that even the angels would be anathema if they should begin to preach another Gospel, introducing some new teaching.**"

As history had demonstrated, Saint Maximus—who was only a simple monk and not even ordained—and his two

disciples were the ones who were Orthodox, and all those illustrious, famous and influential Patriarchs and Metropolitans whom the Saint had written against were the ones who were in heresy. When the Sixth Ecumenical Council was finally convened, among those condemned for heresy were four patriarchs of Constantinople, one Pope of Rome, one Patriarch of Alexandria, two Patriarchs of Antioch and a multitude of other Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops. **During all those years, that one simple monk was right, and all those notable bishops were wrong.**

In the Life of Saint Hypatius of Rufinianus (commemorated on June 18th), we find the following account:

When Nestorius came from Antioch in order to become Patriarch of the illustrious Imperial City of Constantinople (he was brought there by Dionysius, who had become *magister militum per orientem*—a Roman honorary military title of significance), Saint Hypatius saw a vision, at the very moment in the holy Church of the Capital that some laymen installed him (Nestorius) upon the throne; and immediately a voice announced, “In three and a half years this tare will be uprooted.” Thus Saint Hypatius began to say to certain persons and particularly to the brethren of his monastery, “I have great anxiety over this man who has come, my children, for I have seen that he will turn aside from the faith; but he will reign only three and a half years.”

Thus, when he passed by the Saint’s monastery, Nestorius did not wish to go to meet him—he had accidentally learned what the Saint had said—although he had hitherto visited everywhere, including all the monasteries and Church dignitaries and abbots, as he made his way to the Capital. When he had entered the Capital and had become Patriarch, he immediately sent clergymen to Saint Hypatius with the message, “Go say to that dreamer: ‘I shall reign for twenty years in the City and where are your dreams?’”

Saint Hypatius replied to them, “Tell the Patriarch that if it comes to pass as I discerned it, it was a revelation; if not, it was a dream and I, as a man, imagined it.” Thus embarrassed by the answer which they brought back to him, Nestorius sometime after sent other people in order to ensnare him in certain of his words. But after having tempted him with troublesome and useless questions, they were not only unable to trap him in his words, but they left his presence filled with admiration for him, having understood that the Saint possessed great intelligence. It was for this reason that Nestorius left him in peace and did not send anyone else to him.

The three years having passed, little by little the evil treasure of his heart began to show itself. For in his sermons he said abominable things about the Lord which were to fall again upon his own head, and which are not permitted for us to repeat. This evil man did not know

the Holy Scriptures, which say, “Who shall declare his generation?”, and, “Search not into things too deep for thee.” When he understood that Nestorius held opinions contrary to those which should be acknowledged, Saint Hypatius immediately, in the church of the Apostles, erased his name from the *diptychs*, so that it should no longer be at the Oblation (the Eucharist offering).

When the most pious Bishop Eulalis learned of this, he was anxious about the outcome of the affair. And seeing that it had been noised abroad, Nestorius also ordered him to reprimand Hypatius. For Nestorius was still powerful in the city. Bishop Eulalius spoke this to Hypatius: “Why have you erased his name without understanding what the consequence of it would be?” Saint Hypatius replied, “From the time that I learned that he said unrighteous things about the Lord, I have no longer been in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; for he is not a bishop.” Then the bishop, in anger, said, “Be off with you! Make amends for what you have done, for I shall take measures against you.” Saint Hypatius replied: “Do as you wish. As for me, I have decided to suffer anything, and it is with this in mind that I have done this.”

Now when Nestorius had left for Ephesus, and the Council had assembled, on the day when he should be deposed, Saint Hypatius saw in a vision that an angel of the Lord took hold of Saint John the Apostle, and led him to the most pious Emperor and said to him, “Say to the Emperor: ‘Pronounce your sentence against Nestorius.’” And he, having heard this, pronounced it. Saint Hypatius made note of the day, and it was verified that Nestorius was deposed on that very day, the three and a half years having passed, as the Lord had foretold the Saint. And some days later the decree of the deposition was brought. It was read in the presence of all the clergy and people, Bishop Eulalius and Saint Hypatius being present together in Church.

The significant point in this account is that the Saint ceased commemorating Nestorius even **before** any Synodal decision had been made against the latter. Furthermore, the Saint declared, “I am no longer in communion with him and I do not commemorate his name; **for he is not a bishop.**” All this was said and done **before** any Church Council had condemned Nestorius’ heresy. And indeed, heresy is heresy whether or not a Council condemns it. It is not, after all, the decision of the Council that makes the heresy a heresy. Rather, following in the path of the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, the Church Councils openly proclaimed the true Orthodox doctrine, while at the same time demonstrating in what points heresy had deviated from that doctrine.

The Holy Canons are not silent in this regard either. Here is what the 15th Canon of the First and Second Council sets forth:

If any presbyter or bishop or metropolitan dares to secede from communion with his own patriarch and does not mention his name as is ordered and appointed in the divine mystagogy, but before a synodical arraignment and his [the patriarch's] full condemnation, he creates a schism, the Holy Synod has decreed that this person be alienated from every priestly function, if only he be proved to have transgressed in this. These rules, therefore, have been sealed and ordered concerning those who on the pretext of some accusations against their own presidents [i.e., prelates] stand apart, creating a schism and severing the unity of the Church. **But as for those who on account of some heresy condemned by Holy Synods or Fathers sever themselves from communion with their president, that is, because he publicly preaches heresy and with bared head teaches it in the Church, such persons as these not only are not subject to canonical penalty for walling themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification, but they shall be deemed worthy of due honor among the Orthodox.** For not bishops, but false bishops and false teachers have they condemned, and they have not fragmented the Church's unity with schism, but from schisms and divisions have they earnestly sought to deliver the Church.

Regarding this matter, the following is noted in the book *Against False Union*:

The communion with and respect of one church on the part of the other churches remains and continues only as long as that local church remains in the Church, that is as long as it lives and proceeds in Spirit and Truth. When a patriarchate ceases to be a church, admitting communion with heretics, then its recognition on the part of the other churches ceases also.

The Orthodox people must become conscious of the fact that they owe no obedience to a bishop, no matter how high a title he holds, when that bishop ceases being Orthodox and openly follows heretics with pretenses of union "on equal terms." On the contrary, they are obliged to depart from him and confess their Faith, because a bishop, even if he be patriarch or pope, ceases from being a bishop the moment he ceases being Orthodox. The bishop is a consecrated person, and even if he is openly sinful, respect and honor is due him until synodically censured. But if he becomes openly heretical or is in communion with heretics, then the Christians should not await any synodical decision, but should draw away from him immediately.

As we saw from the few examples cited above—and there are countless others—the Orthodox faithful did not mince words, nor were they afraid to take immediate action when they ascertained that their bishop had strayed from Orthodoxy. Inevitably, there were those who found fault with this

“extreme” course of action. The latter were not so much disturbed by the heresy of their bishop as they were by the words and actions of the “zealots,” as they usually labeled the conscientious flock. These “super-correct” extremists were disturbing the peace of the Church and fomenting schism, said they. How did those “unhealthy elements” dare to rebuke the bishop and cut off communion with him **before** any Synodal clarification? As we have seen, Saint Hypatius and Saint Maximus the Confessor gave us two concrete examples of how they dared. Saint Theodore the Studite and Saint Mark of Ephesus also dared, and today the church honors and reveres them for doing so.

The Church—which had just weathered the century long onslaught of iconoclasm—saw that there were often occasions when, for one reason or another, there was no possibility of calling an Orthodox Council. Precisely for this very reason, therefore, the First and Second Council which convened in Constantinople in 861 formulated the Fifteenth Canon, which merely articulated and gave canonical expression to the ancient practice of the Church, to wit, that the Orthodox Christians should **“wall themselves off from communion with the so-called bishop before synodical clarification.”** Thus, should the Orthodox faithful ever find themselves in an extreme situation—doctrinally speaking—they were encouraged and protected by this canon—no matter what they were called by others, and no matter what sanctions and actions the erring bishop threatened to take against them. Actually, church History has demonstrated repeatedly that the believers who were the first to react against heresy were wholly justified in their course of action on every occasion.

This, then, is the Orthodox understanding and the ancient practice of the Church in this matter. As we mentioned in the beginning, there is room here neither for anarchy, nor for despotism. We have criteria, and these criteria are the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, Church History, and the Holy Canons.

This witness, this Faith is sealed with the blood of the martyrs and confessors of the Church. And truly, since the Church is built upon this rock, how is it possible for the gates of Hades to prevail against Her?

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear! (Mt 11:15).



We observe, however, that nobody in a higher position than our own is raising his voice; and this fact constrains us to speak out, lest at the Last Judgment we should be responsible for having seen the danger of Ecumenism threaten the Church, and yet not having warned her Bishops.

Metropolitan Philaret of New York (+1985)

HOLY PASCHA!

By Melito of Sardis. The author was the bishop of Sardis near Smyrna in western Anatolia, and a great authority in early Christianity. Melito held a foremost place in terms of Bishops in Asia due to his personal influence on Christianity and his literary works, most of which have been lost but of what has been recovered has provided a great insight into Christianity during the second century.

Christ rose up from the dead, and cried aloud with this voice: *Who is he who contends with me? Let him stand in opposition to me. I set the condemned man free; I gave the dead man life; I raised up the one who had been entombed. Who is my opponent?*

I, He says, am the Christ. I am the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot, and bound the strong one, and carried off man to the heights of heaven.

I, he says, am the Christ.

Therefore, come, all families of men, you who have been befouled with sins, and receive forgiveness for your sins. I am your forgiveness. I am the Passover of your salvation. I am the lamb which was sacrificed for you. I am your ransom. I am your light. I am your Saviour. I am your resurrection. I am your king. I am leading you up to the heights of heaven. I will show you the eternal Father. I will raise you up by my right hand.

This is the one who made the heavens and the earth, and who in the beginning created man, who was proclaimed through the law and prophets, Who became human through the virgin, Who was hanged upon a tree, Who was buried in the earth, Who was resurrected from the dead, and Who ascended to the heights of heaven, Who sits at the right hand of the Father, who has authority to judge and to save everything, through whom the Father created everything from the beginning of the world to the end of the age.

This is the Alpha and the Omega. This is the beginning and the end—an indescribable beginning and an incomprehensible end. This is the Christ. This is the King. This is Jesus. This is the General. This is the Lord. This is the One who rose up from the dead. This is the One who sits at the right hand of the Father. He bears the Father and is borne by the Father, to Whom be the glory and the power forever.

Amen.

CHRIST IS RISEN, TRULY HE IS RISEN!

By St. Gregory the Theologian

It is the day of the Resurrection and my beginning has good Lauspices.¹ Let us then keep the Festival with splendor, and let us embrace one another. Let us say “Brethren” even to those who hate us; much more to those who have done or suffered aught out of love for us. Let us forgive all offences for the Resurrection’s sake: let us give one another pardon; that He Who today rose again from the dead may renew (us) also by His Spirit; and clothing (us) with the New Man, may give me to His New Creation, to those who are begotten after God, as a good modeler 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, and Egypt bewailed her firstborn, and the Destroyer passed up over, and the Seal was dreadful and reverend,² 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), and carrying with us nothing of ungodly and Egyptian leaven.

Yesterday I was crucified 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 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 honor 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 gods for His sake, since He for our sake 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...

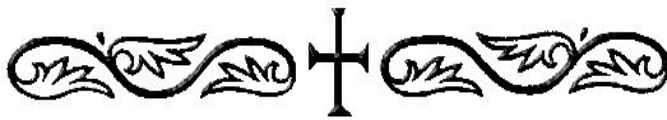
Christ Is Risen!

Truly, He Is Risen!

† † †

[1] This homily by St. Gregory was shortly after he was ordained. The omitted parts of the sermon are references to his ordination—omitted for the sake of space.

[2] This introduces us to the theme of the sermon: The Israelites were delivered from death by the sign of the blood of the sacrifice and redeemed from bondage in Egypt. This is a type of the Crucifixion of Christ and the Resurrection; Christ did not die to fulfill some sort of vengeance of God (as the sectarians teach in their pagan “Doctrine of Atonement”), but He died as a sacrifice of love to deliver man from death and free him from bondage of Satan (cf. Heb 2:15). Christ did not redeem man from God’s anger but from Satan’s power: death. From this sermon, the clear dogmatical essence of our Orthodox Christian expression *Pascha* is seen. The word *Pascha* itself reveals the true meaning of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.



We too, beloved brothers, even if we do not put up with chains, beatings, prison, other bodily punishments, persecution at the hands of our fellow human beings for righteousness’ sake, nevertheless we are capable of receiving the Savior’s chalice and obtaining the palm of martyrdom if we take care to chastise our bodies and subdue them; if we accustom ourselves to supplicating the Lord in the spirit of humility and with a contrite heart, if we attempt to accept with a calm mind insults inflicted by our neighbor; if we rejoice in loving even those who hate us, who inflict injustice upon us, and in doing good to them and praying earnestly for their lives and safety; if we exert ourselves to be adorned with the virtue of patience and also with the fruits of good works. Indeed, if we live our lives in this way and, according to the Apostle’s words, display our bodies as a living sacrificial offering, holy [and] pleasing to God, He will with heavenly condescension deign to see to it that we are rewarded with the same glory as those who have given their bodies up to death for the Lord’s sake. Just as their death is precious in the sight of the Lord, so will our lives become precious [in His sight].

The Venerable Bede (+735)

PREACHER OF DIVINE LOVE

By Elena Konstantinovna Hellige, from “Orthodox America,” issue no. 154, Feb. 1998, originally translated from “Pravoslavnaya Rus,” 1976, issue no. 4.

Saint John, the beloved disciple of Christ, called *the Theologian* because of his lofty teaching concerning the Son of God, God the Word, was the son of the Galilean fisherman Zebedee and his wife, Salome, and the brother of the Apostle James. The Lord Jesus Christ loved all His disciples, but He had a particular love for John, who was the youngest of the apostles, and who was an innocent and pure youth, aflame with boundless love for his Divine Teacher. John was that apostle of whom the Gospel says, *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. It was the Lord’s will that he shine longer than all the other apostles on the horizon of the apostolic age; he reposed at the beginning of the second Christian century.

The Lord expressed His particular love and trust in John especially powerfully and clearly in the final moments of His earthly life, when, from the Cross, He entrusted him with the care of His Most Pure Mother, and gave him to His mother to be adopted as a son. In so doing, the Lord confirms His profound love and special trust in John. He says, as it were, *Only to thy love, My beloved disciple, do I entrust My most precious treasure. Care for her as a son, for you are worthy of that kinship*. In taking upon himself the great and holy task of a son’s care for the Most Holy Virgin Mary, John wholly devoted himself to the fulfillment of this lofty responsibility.

Very little is actually known concerning the life and activity of this holy apostle. It is certain only that after the Dormition of the Theotokos (c. AD 47), Saint John left Palestine. According to the tradition of the Church, he preached the Gospel in Rome, for which he was subject to torture. Afterwards he settled in the city of Ephesus, and this capital of Asia Minor became the center of his apostolic activity. From Ephesus the Apostle oversaw the life of many surrounding church communities, making frequent personal visits.

Ephesus was at that time the center of intellectual life for the whole of Asia Minor and western Asia, and was in close contact with Alexandria, famed for its philosophical schools. The latter attracted many who, not satisfied with a simple and straightforward understanding of Christianity, began to analyze and expound it from a philosophical perspective, thereby distorting the Gospel truth, falling into error, and even denying Christianity altogether. Such persons Saint John called “antichrists,” and he directed much of his inspired preaching against them. At the head of these false teachers stood a certain Cerinth, who combined elements of Christianity with elements of Judaism and paganism—to the extent that he formed a new, thoroughly heretical teaching that was a complete repudiation of Christianity. In refuting

the false teaching of this antichrist, Saint John clearly set forth the evangelical teaching, saying, *Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is an antichrist.*

The bishop of the Church at Ephesus was Timothy, a disciple of the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, it was Saint John who had principal oversight over the church and to whom all the Christians—pastors and flock—were devotedly submitted.

In the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (AD 81-96), a cruel persecutor of Christians, Saint John was slandered as an enemy of the regnant polytheist religion, an especially dangerous and pernicious enemy, and the saintly man was taken for trial to Rome, where he was subjected to harsh beatings, forced to drink poison, and, finally, thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. But the Lord preserved His chosen servant, and even the most frightful tortures left him unharmed. Unable to comprehend God's wonderworking power, the outraged pagan emperor exiled the holy Apostle to the deserted island of Patmos. Saint John, however, did not remain long in exile. In AD 96 Domitian was murdered and all his decrees were rescinded by his successor on the imperial throne, the Emperor Nero. Saint John returned to Ephesus, where he remained until his blessed repose.

Having experienced in himself the extraordinary effect of the all-illuminating Divine love, John zealously taught other Christians how to assimilate this Divine feeling. He himself was wholly penetrated and was aflame with self-sacrificing love towards his spiritual children.

Greater Love Hath no Man!

During one of his rounds of visits to the surrounding churches, in the city of Smyrna, the holy Apostle noticed among his listeners a youth of fair countenance and an evidently lively intelligence. Turning to the local bishop, Saint John said to him: "I am entrusting you with this youth in the presence of the entire church, and I call to witness Jesus Christ." The bishop accepted this charge and promised diligently to look after the youth's welfare.

The Apostle returned to Ephesus, and the youth was instructed in the law of God and was baptized. The bishop, thinking that he was thereby relieved of any further concern for the youth, slackened his attention, and soon lost track of the boy. Meanwhile, some corrupt peers drew the youth into their company. He began attending their revelries and taking part in their nocturnal raids. Eventually he became the ring-leader of his own band of thieves.

Some time passed and the affairs of the Church brought Saint John again to Smyrna. When these were settled, the Apostle turned to the bishop: "Return to me the pledge with which Jesus Christ and I entrusted you in the presence of your church." The disconcerted bishop did not straightway understand just what the Apostle meant by this, but then he tearfully confessed that the youth had died to God; he had given himself over to sin, and had become the leader

of a band of outlaws, with whom he was hiding in the mountains. On hearing these words, the Apostle rent his garments and groaned. "Indeed, I thought I left the soul of my brother with a good watchman. Give me a horse and a guide."

Without losing any time, he headed for the mountains, where he was soon seized by some of the band's lookouts. "Take me to your leader," insisted the Saint. "I have come here purposely to see him." When John was brought into the presence of the ataman, the latter recognized him immediately. He was so taken aback that he turned to run away in shame. The Apostle, disregarding his advanced years, took after him, shouting, "My son! Why are you running away from your father? I am old and unarmed. Have pity on me! My son! Do not be afraid of me. You can still hope in salvation. I would willingly die for you, just as Christ died for us. I would give my soul for you. Believe me. I am sent by Christ!"

The young man stopped. He hung his head, threw aside his weapon, and with tears threw himself into the Apostle's embrace, trembling with emotion. He asked his forgiveness, weeping bitterly and trying to find in his tears a second baptism. The Apostle fell with love to the feet of the brigand, kissed his right hand, a hand defiled with many murders and crimes, and promised to plead on his behalf that the Lord would forgive him. Together with the repentant criminal, the holy Apostle prayed and fasted, and he instructed, encouraged and consoled him with citations from Holy Scripture. Together they returned to the city, where Saint John led the brigand chief into the church as a remarkable example of repentance and of the quickening triumph of his apostolic love.

This apostle was wholly permeated by love for his neighbor. His zeal for the salvation of those who were perishing knew no obstacles. And the meekness, humility, and kindness of this great apostle were so amazing and touching, that he seemed to be not a man but an angel incarnate. His entire life was a life of love. In deep old age, when his physical strength had spent itself so that he could move about only with difficulty, he continued nevertheless, with the assistance of his disciples, to attend the Christian gatherings, teaching and edifying the flock.

At the end of his life, the holy Apostle limited his preaching to the brief exhortation: Children, love one another! When asked why he repeated one and the same thing over and over, the holy Apostle replied, "This is the command of the Lord, and if you fulfill it, it is sufficient."

The holy Apostle and Evangelist John reposed in the year AD 105, having surpassed ninety years of age. He was buried in Ephesus, where his grave became a place of pilgrimage for Christians desiring to bow down before the holy remains of *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."*

THE SUFFERING OF INFANTS

By Blessed Augustine, from a letter of Blessed Augustine (+430) to St. Jerome, reprinted from "A Treasury of Early Christianity," edited by Anne Fremantle.

When we come to the penal sufferings of infants, I am embarrassed, believe me, by great difficulties, and am wholly at a loss to find an answer by which they are solved; and I do not only speak here of those punishments in the life to come, which are involved in that perdition to which they must be drawn down if they depart from the body without the sacrament of Christian grace. I also speak of the sufferings which are to our sorrow endured by infants before our eyes in this present life, and which are so various that time rather than examples would fail me if I were to attempt to enumerate them. They are liable to wasting disease, to racking pain, to the agonies of thirst and hunger, to feebleness of limbs, to privation of bodily senses, and to vexing assaults of unclean spirits.

Surely it is incumbent on us to show how it is compatible with justice that infants suffer all these things without any evil of their own as the procuring cause. For it would be impious to say, either that these things take place without God's knowledge, or that He cannot resist those who cause them, or that He unrighteously does these things, or permits them to be done. We are warranted in saying that irrational animals are given by God to serve creatures possessing a higher nature, even though they be wicked, as we see most plainly in the Gospel that the swine of the Gadarenes were given to the legion of devils at their request; but could we ever be warranted in saying this of men? Certainly not.

Man is, indeed, an animal, but an animal endowed with reason, though mortal. In his members dwells a reasonable soul, which in these severe afflictions is enduring a penalty.

Now God is good, God is just, God is omnipotent; only a madman would doubt that He is so. Let us then believe that the great sufferings which infant children experience be accounted for by some reason compatible with justice. When older people suffer such trials, we are accustomed, certainly, to say, either that their worth is being proved, as in Job's case, or that their wickedness is being punished, as in Herod's. And, from some examples, which it has pleased

God to make perfectly clear, men are enabled to conjecture the nature of others which are more obscure; but this is in regard to persons of mature age.

Tell me, therefore, what must we answer in regard to infant children; is it true that, although they suffer so great punishments, there are no sins in them deserving to be punished? For, of course, there is not in them at that age any righteousness requiring to be put to the proof. What shall I say, moreover, as to the difficulty which besets the theory of the creation of each soul separately at the birth of the individual in connection with the diversity of talent in different souls, and especially the absolute privation of reason in some? This is, indeed, not apparent in the first stages of infancy, but being developed continuously from the beginning of life, it becomes manifest in children, of whom some are so slow and defective in memory that they cannot learn even the letters of the alphabet, and some (commonly called idiots) so imbecile that they differ

very little from the beasts of the field.

Perhaps I am told, in answer to this, that the bodies are the cause of these imperfections. But surely the opinion which we wish to see vindicated from objection does not require us to affirm that the soul chose for itself the body which so impairs it, and, being deceived in the choice, committed a blunder; or that the soul, when it was compelled, as a necessary consequence of being born, to enter into some body, was hindered from find-

ing another by crowds of souls occupying the other bodies before it came, so that, like a man who takes whatever seat may remain vacant for him in a theater, the soul was guided in taking possession of the imperfect body not by its own choice but by its circumstances. We, of course, cannot say and ought not to believe such things. Tell us, therefore, what we ought to believe and to say in order to vindicate from this difficulty the theory that for each individual body a new soul is specially created.

In my discussions on "Free Will," I have said something, not in regard to the variety of capacities in different souls, but, at least in regard to the pains which infant children suffer in this life. The nature of the opinion which I there expressed, and the reason why it is insufficient for the purposes of our present inquiry, I will now submit to you, and will put into this letter a copy of the passage in the discussion to which I refer. It is as follows:



“In connection with the bodily sufferings experienced by the little children who, by reason of their tender age, have no sins—if the souls which animate them did not exist before they were born into the human family—a more grievous and, as it were, compassionate complaint is very commonly made in the remark, ‘What evil have they done that they should suffer these things?’ as if there could be a meritorious innocence in anyone before the time at which it is possible for him to do anything wrong!

“Moreover, if God accomplishes, in any measure, the correction of the parents when they are chastised by the sufferings or by the death of the children that are dear to them, is there any reason why these things should not take place, seeing that, after they are past, they will be, to those who experienced them, as if they had never been, while the persons on whose account they were inflicted will either become better, being moved by the rod of temporal afflictions to choose a better mode of life, or be left without excuse under the punishment awarded at the coming judgment, if, notwithstanding the sorrows of this life, they have refused to turn their desires towards eternal life?

“Moreover, who knows what may be given to the little children by means of whose sufferings the parents have their obdurate hearts subdued, or their faith exercised, or their compassion proved? Who knows what good recompense God may, in the secret of His judgments, reserve for these little ones? For although they have done no righteous action, nevertheless, being free from any transgression of their own, they have suffered these trials. It is certainly not without reason that the Church exalts to the honorable rank of martyrs those children who were slain when Herod sought our Lord Jesus Christ to put Him to death.”



One elder passed seventy weeks in fasting, eating food only twice a week, as he begged the Lord to reveal to him the meaning of a passage in Holy Scripture. But God would not reveal it to him. Seeing this, the elder said to himself, “I have labored long and hard, and I have accomplished nothing. I will go to my brother and ask him.”

When he had left his cell and locked the door behind him, an angel from the Lord appeared and said to him: “Seventy weeks of fasting did not bring you nearer to God. Now, however, when you have humbled yourself and resolved to go to your brother with your question, I have been sent to you to explain the meaning of this passage.” And fulfilling this, the angel departed.

From the “*Paterikon*” of Bishop Ignatius

CANONICAL VS. NON-CANONICAL?

An excerpt from “*Christian Union? An Orthodox Christian’s Guide to Ecumenism: Past, Present and Future*,” by the Saint Edward Orthodox Brotherhood.

In the sense that this question uses it, “canonical” means “official” or “in communion with world Orthodoxy.” Churches that are not in communion with official Orthodoxy are therefore accused by these “official” churches of being “non-canonical.” However, the word “canonical” actually means “obeying the canons of the Church Councils,” so the words “canonical” and “ecumenical” are not mutually exclusive.

It is not the decision of a Patriarch or his synod that creates and guarantees “canonicity,” but, on the contrary, it is the canonicity of the decision that gives it its true authority and power. Truth, and not power, is the criterion, and the canons, not different in this from the dogmas, express the truth of the Church. And just as no power, no authority can transform heresy into orthodoxy and make white what is black, no power can make canonical a situation which is not canonical.

It is not power or official recognition that defines Orthodoxy, but the exact keeping of the saving Orthodox Faith. St. Mark of Ephesus, in rejecting the false union of the Council of Ferrara-Florence, found himself outside official Orthodoxy as the only Orthodox bishop left at the Council who did not sign the agreement of union between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Papacy. Denounced as a heretic by the Pope, Saint Mark answered:

“I express not my opinions, I introduce nothing new into the Church, neither do I defend any errors. I keep the doctrine which the Church, having received from Christ our Saviour, has kept and still keeps. This doctrine was also held by the Church of Rome, unanimously with the Eastern Church, until the start of the Schism. Even during this present synod, you have praised this exact pious worship of the past. No one can censure or condemn this pious teaching. Therefore if I remain firm in this doctrine, and do not wish to reject it, how is it possible to accuse me of being a heretic?”

Orthodox Christians who wish to remain faithful to traditional Orthodoxy do not need to explain or justify their position because the faith they hold is not a modern innovation, but the Orthodox Faith.

† † †

[*] **Ecumenical is not the same as being an Ecumenist.** Ecumenical is the saving Truth of Orthodoxy expressed throughout Her universality as only known and experienced by the Self-Revelation by the God-Man, the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whereas, being an Ecumenist denies the exclusivity of The Orthodox Church and Her saving efficacy, as revealed historically and therapeutically (applied) by the Lord Jesus Christ, and transmitted to His holy Apostles, Hierarchs, Saints, Martyrs and all the Faith children of the Lord!

THE END OF OUR LENTEN JOURNEY

From the Lenten Triodion, supplementary texts, Monastery of the Veil of the Mother of God, Bussy-en-Othe, France, 1979.

With grateful souls let us accept the Fast: for by the power of the Spirit it makes the stubborn passions to wither, and gives us strength to do the works of God; it makes our mind ascend to heaven, and gains for us the forgiveness of our sins from the God of all mercy.

As Christ has taught us in the Scriptures, a pure fast means the putting away of sin, the rejection of the passions, love for God, attentiveness in prayer, tears of compunction, and acts of mercy to the poor.

Let us kill the passions by abstinence, and through fasting let us make our spirit mount on wings to heaven; and let us cry with contrite hearts: We have sinned against Thee, O God; in Thy compassion forgive us.

O my soul, because of fasting Moses beheld God: because of fasting Elijah rode in the chariot of fire, and Paul was taken up to heaven. Therefore, let us fast from evil and we also shall be taken up on high, gaining freedom from passions.

Restraining the passions with the bridle of pure fasting, let us all strive to raise our mind in perfect faith to holy contemplation. Let us despise the pleasures of this earthly life, that we may gain the heavenly life and divine illumination.

The holy Fast enriches our heart, and makes it by the power of God increase in virtue, like a full ear of wheat. Let us therefore fast with gladness in these holy days, and so receive sanctification.

In thine idleness, my soul, why art thou become a slave of sin? And in thy sickness why dost thou not run to the Physician? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the true day of salvation. Rise up and wash thy face with tears of repentance, and make thy lamp burn brightly with the oil of good deeds, so that Christ our God may grant thee cleansing and great mercy.

The grace of the Fast shines upon us, driving out the darkness of sinful self-indulgence. Behold, now is the accepted time and the day of salvation. Let us bring forth fruits of repentance and we shall live.

Elisha, so it is written, after fasting brought the dead child back to life: let us also fast, killing all our carnal thoughts, that in the Age to Come we may receive eternal life. Keeping a spiritual fast, O brethren, let us speak no lies with our tongue, not giving our brother cause for scandal; but through repentance let us make the lamp of our soul burn brightly, and let us cry with tears to Christ: Forgive us our trespasses in Thy love for mankind.

O miserable soul, abstain from the passions and be saved. For abstinence from food is not acceptable as a fast, unless we also correct our faults. In this season of repentance, let us stretch out our hands in works of mercy; and then the ascetic struggles of the Fast will bring us to eternal life. For nothing saves the soul so much as generosity to those in need, and almsgiving combined with fasting will deliver a man from death. Let us do all this with gladness, for there is no better way, and it will bring salvation to our souls.

The judgment is at hand: give heed, my soul. Be attentive to thy conscience, doing what is right, and it will always keep thee uncondemned. For if we have ourselves exercised judgment in this present life, we shall not lack witnesses to plead on our behalf at the Judgment in the Age to Come, when the guilty are condemned.

Come, ye people, and strengthened like Samson by fasting, let us destroy the demon of gluttony as he destroyed the lion; but let us take care lest the Delilah of our passions deceive us and laugh us to scorn.

As David armed himself with faith, so let us arm ourselves with humility; and as he overthrew Goliath, so let us overthrow our arrogant mind, and cut down the hosts of passions.

Putting off the loathsome garment of self-indulgence, let us put on the shining robe of abstinence, and so in joy and glory let us come to the brightness of the Redeemer's Resurrection.

By fasting Elisha gave back to the Shunammite her child alive. From this let us learn, O brethren, how great a blessing is the Fast, and how it is a grace given by God.

Moses, having found in fasting a means of purification, spoke with God who alone is pure. O my soul, be purified by fasting, and so draw near to the God of love.

O brethren, let not one of us be sunk in idleness and sloth. This is the time for work, the hour of solemn festival. Who, then, is wise and in one day will gain eternal life?

Keeping in mind the fearful judgment seat, my wretched soul, always guide thy steps to the accomplishment of the Redeemer's will.

Once in Babylon fasting made the Children stronger than the fire. Be not fainthearted, O my soul, but follow their example, and thou shalt quench the fire of sensual pleasure with the dew of the Spirit.

Roll back from my humble soul, O Christ the Word, the heavy stone of grievous slothfulness, and raise me from the tomb of insensitivity, that I may glorify Thee.

Having completed the forty days that bring profit to our soul, we beseech Thee in Thy love for man: Grant us also to behold the Holy Week of Thy Passion, that in it we may glorify Thy mighty acts and Thine ineffable dispensation for our sakes, singing with one mind: O Lord, glory to Thee.

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

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THE MYSTERY OF BAPTISM

By St Cyprian of Carthage, from a Letter written to a new convert, 246 A.D.

I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously? How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown

accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man. And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible.

I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life. You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.