

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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THE DEPARTURE OF THE SOUL

A FRIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE

By Elder Ephraim of Philotheou and Arizona, prologue to "The Departure of the Soul According to the Teaching of the Orthodox Church," by St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, first edition (2017), pp. 47-53 (www.thedepartureofthesoul.org).

Deliver me from the hands of demons, for many dogs have surrounded me.

[Canon for the Departure of the Soul]

† † †

When our brotherhood was first established, there was a frightful but also beneficial incident with an elder of the skete; the older fathers certainly would remember this. This elder, who was sick with a heart condition, called me one day to go and confess him. Indeed, we had confession, but the tempter intervened and convinced the elder to hide certain faults. Perhaps these faults occurred when he was still living in the world.¹ When his heart condition became serious and he realized that the time of his departure was approaching, he sent his brother to ask me to return again for confession. His brother, who was also a monk, told me that the elder was impatient and asked me to find out what was happening and to try to calm him down a little before he lost his soul. I was surprised with this because I knew that monks are somewhat patient with temptations and illness, and they do not easily become impatient due to some pain.

When we went there and I saw the elder, I realized that it was not impatience, but instead something new was happening to him, something relevant to his soul. I told his brother to leave us and that I would talk to the elder alone. I sat next to him and understood that he was surrounded by demons.

"Geronda, are you surrounded by evil spirits?" I said to him.

"Yes, holy father."

I saw that he was agitated, looking to his left and right as if he was trying to protect himself from mad dogs that had surrounded him and were attacking him. I also saw that he was very attentive, carried away by something the demons were telling him. Trying to help him, I changed the tone of my voice a little and said to him:

"Geronda, what are the demons telling you?"

"Oh! I can't say what they are telling me."

"No, no, pay very close attention because they know our sins better than we can remember them."

He started little by little to tell me what the demons were telling him. They were accusing him of various faults that he had not confessed, and they were exposing them to him in his despair. I was getting all the information through him, hoping that God would have mercy on this man in this difficult hour of his despair. I kept telling him to confess his sins to me as he was hearing them from the demons, which he did. However, when I saw that he continued to be in a miserable state, agitated, restless, and despairing, I said to him:

"Elder, I am going out for a little while, but I will come back."

"No, my dear spiritual father, stay next to me!"

"It's all right, I will only be gone for two or three minutes; it is not a big deal, I will be back."

I left and went to the fathers in our brotherhood and said to them:

"Fathers, the elder is in a difficult situation. Let us do a prayer rope for him." We all did a prayer rope and when I returned to the elder, I found him in a peaceful state.

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“What is going on, Geronda? Where are they?” I said to him.

“Here. The dogs are still around.”

“But are they saying anything to you?”

“They are quiet now.”

“Excellent!”

At night when I entered my cell for my personal vigil and started *the prayer*, I sensed that the demons which were at the elder’s place earlier were now in my own cell, causing me trouble. In all my years, this certainly was the first time that I encountered so many demons fighting me, so close, so perceptibly. I turned on the light to read, but I could not read. The demons were everywhere, left and right. However, I was not afraid at all because I knew that they were there to scare me out of going back to help the elder. I told them to do their job and I would do mine. Later I went to the Divine Liturgy, but they did not appear there. After the Divine Liturgy, I went back to the ill and nearly dead man with another spiritual father with whom I performed the mysteries of holy unction and confession. I asked the elder a specific question:

“Well, were the demons the only ones that came? Where is your guardian angel?”

“He is here also.”

“But why doesn’t he take you?”

“He is waiting for an order from above.”

“Well, you see your guardian angel, but do you also see our guardian angels?”



The Last Judgment (and Resurrection)
[11th century]
The Great Mosaic at the Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta, Torcello, Italy

“I see them. And your angels are wearing a kind of crown on their head. Furthermore, they have something special on them which indicate that they guard spiritual fathers.”

He continued to tell me that there would be a festival on Monday—it was Friday then—which certain people, who were presently absent, would attend. Of course, he meant his funeral, and these people were indeed there on Monday.

During his last days, the demons wanted to undermine him with something serious, because he had confessed everything else. Because they had lost on all the other issues, they were enraged and were trying to at least catch him in something at the end. The day before the elder’s death I had sent Father Joseph to keep vigil, pray on the prayer rope for him, and help him. When I went in the morning, the elder said

to me in the presence of others who were there:

“My good confessor, let me tell you how the demons almost caught me, and how I would have completely lost my soul.”

“What is it, Geronda?”

“Last night the demons were telling me that I would get well and everything would go away if I would drink this whole jug of water. Of course, I understood they meant that if I drank it I would burst and die, and I was overtaken by the thought of doing it to end my torment. And as I was asking a father to give me the jug of water, my brother prevented it by telling him that if I drank it I would burst. Thus, they didn’t give it to me and I was saved.”

In short, after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, I visited the elder again and found him very peaceful, sitting in an armchair. I said to him:

“How are you, Geronda?”

“I am very well, my dear confessor. May God reward you for what you did.”

“I am going to lie down for an hour,” I told him, “because I was in vigil last night, and I will come again afterwards to see you.”

“Yes, go rest, Geronda.”

Finally, I left. When I woke up after an hour, the fathers told me that the bells had rung half an hour earlier. Ah, I said, he must have departed from this world. And indeed, the elder had expired.

The above case reveals a man who was not well prepared for his exit from this world. Now I will tell you the case of a well-prepared spiritual man so that you can see the difference in these two cases.

The well-prepared man was my Elder, Joseph the Hesychast. When he was sitting in prayer, at some point he used to think through the events of his day to figure out which passion was still alive, which weakness still disturbed him, and he would make a new decision to fight them and obliterate them. This work took place every night during his prayers. So, all this labor had prepared him as perfectly as is humanly possible. I can say this because he used to tell me, “My child, the difficulty is how to cross the bridge of death. After that, by the grace of God, everything is taken care of.” Those were the words of a well-prepared man.

I have never seen such a brave man facing with so much courage that which every man fears. This was confirmed by various states preceding his death. One of those states was that he was weeping continuously out of great love for Christ and our dear Panagia. He had no regrets. He was awaiting death as a festival, as deliverance from the burdens of the

world. He was waiting for this hour in order to see God’s face, to enjoy and be filled with its beauty. He was waiting to enter the angelic order with which he continuously lived. This is why a little before his death he began to worry and say, “But why am I not leaving? The revelation from God was perfect and definite. God has made His decision; why then am I delayed?” I told him then that we would pray for his departure. Indeed, twenty minutes later while he was talking to the fathers, he looked up to the heavens and saw something that only he could see and could not find words to describe it to us. Then he bowed his head and said, “I am leaving, I am departing. Bless; all is finished.” He closed his eyes, received the sleep of a blessed man, and departed for the other world.

We must struggle to attain this precious salvation. The struggle is not a game. We did not come here simply to exist and live as it fell to our lot. The matter is more serious than anyone can imagine. God lives and therefore the salvation of man is something that is beyond seriousness, because if we lose our soul the misfortune is eternal. We must not take this matter lightly and let it escape us. The seriousness will become apparent to us in all its extent when we approach the hour of death. Then our mind grasps this reality and things become serious. Childish thinking is put aside. At that time, a man sees that everything he heard about death, everything he read, and everything he was admonished about is coming true.

Most of all, of course, he now has the sense of death, and he realizes that he is leaving. The mind begins to contemplate and question: “What is going to happen now? Where am I going?” The conscience becomes an eloquent mechanism that works unceasingly: “This happened, and that, and the other thing.” It seems to him that he is hearing all this for the first time: “But when did all this take place and yet never bothered me?” Of course, negligence and indolence and the darkening of the mind had covered all like an obscuring veil. And now the wind of the approaching death blows and things come to light. The soul, seeing the reality of what is happening, begins to lose courage: “Now what is going to happen? Can I go back?”

“No,” says the conscience, “now you will proceed towards the truth.”

Demons, the tax-collectors of our souls. All a myth to the wicked....

[St. Gregory the Theologian]



This article’s source is the newly published book depicted above, a unique treasure for all Orthodox to possess and study.

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The man sees the evil demons approaching. They continuously and invisibly follow the various signs. From experience they understand when the hour of death is approaching, and they anticipate it by getting a front-row seat. They want to be first to come and shock and mortify the soul with their terrible appearance. They present the documents containing the soul's sins in order to create despair and hopelessness. The soul trembles and sighs, and when it sees the guardian angel—or more angels—it turns its eyes in supplication and pleads for help. But the angels help according to the person's deeds. Afterwards the soul turns its eyes towards relatives, friends, and brothers; it raises its hands asking for help, but receives no assistance from the others. And then it turns its only hope to God's mercy.

All these things that we said are the reality and the truth. We have seen many people leave this life. We have heard many accounts of the various events which occur at the hour of death. All these correspond to what we read in the Patristic Tradition. These things will also happen to us, and for this reason we must keep them in mind and take the appropriate course of action. The memory of death must restrain us continuously and keep us above all worldly things that we see down here. Our thought must always revolve around death, the departure, the ascent towards God's court of justice, and the conditions in Paradise versus Hades. Our prayer must be as continuous as possible. We must struggle because the prayer of the soul that struggles is heard by God. It has boldness, especially during the hour of death, and it will face the situation differently.

Let us think about all these things continuously. It is the Patristic truth. It is from life. It is from the revelation of God. And may we be inspired to struggle accordingly in order to attain eternal salvation.²

† † †

[1] The monastic term "living in the world" here denotes the elder's life before he became a monk.

[2] From spoken homilies delivered to Elder Ephraim's brotherhood on January 6, 1977 and April 5, 1978 at Philotheou Monastery, Holy Mountain, Greece. For remarkably similar narrations, refer to the source book (i.e., *The Departure of the Soul*), and see the account of Stephen the Hermit from St. John Klimakos's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, p. 169; the account of Chrysaorios from St. Gregory, Pope of Rome's *Dialogues*, p. 161; and St. Tarasios's own experience from the *Life of St. Tarasios*, Patriarch of Constantinople, p. 368.

† † †

If when traveling in a foreign land or a strange city we are in need of a guide, how much more in need are we of guides and helpers to guide us past the invisible dignities and powers and world rulers of this air who are called persecutors, publicans, and tax-collectors by Holy Scripture.

[St. John Chrysostom, "On Patience and Gratitude"]

HOPE FOR DEPARTED NON-ORTHODOX

Source: "Blessed John the Wonderworker," an account of the life and miracles of Archbishop John Maximovitch (1998), pp. 256-258.

The following incident is from an American convert whose mother died without becoming Orthodox. He was in sorrow and uncertain how to pray for her when he received this answer from Vladika John (Maximovitch), which he also interpreted as a sign that we should be missionaries and show love and concern for the non-Orthodox around us.

† † †

I was reading in the afternoon from *The Orthodox Word* of May-June, 1974. First, I looked at the photo of Vladika John's sepulchre. As I did, I read again the *troparion* for him and upon finishing, I was moved to kiss his Sepulchre and said to him how sorry I was that I had not visited it more often in San Francisco when I had been there. I then glanced at a picture of my mother and asked him once again to pray for her, and I felt sure that he was praying for her. Then my eyes began to become heavy, and they closed and I entered into a kind of reverie, during which I saw my mother with her apron on, talking much as she did in the last years of her life.

Suddenly I sensed that Vladika was praying for her. I then saw her again, but this time down on her knees, crying and saying how sorry she was for her sins. She cried so loudly and so bitterly that I could almost hear her actual voice in the room. I was impressed to join Vladika in prayer and not to open my eyes. I began to pray simply but fervently for God to have mercy on her, and I was conscious of Vladika's presence very strongly, though I did not see him as I did my mother. She continued to cry with great sorrow and finally disappeared.

Soon I saw Vladika John, but only from the back. I could not see his face, only the veil of his *kamilavka* and the side of his beard, then the top of his episcopal staff and the sleeve of his *rasson*. He began to slowly walk away, and I noticed clearly that he wore a plain black monk's mantle rather than an episcopal one. He then slowly exited with dignity and I never saw his face, but I was sure it was he.

I opened my eyes, arose, and again recited his *troparion* aloud, facing East, and kissed the photo of his Sepulchre.

I do not know the full meaning of what I experienced... One thing I note is that Vladika said nothing and made no promises. I was simply assured of his prayers and of the need of my own and others. I also note that he wore a monk's mantle and staff, rather than episcopal mantle and staff. This would indicate to me that he did what he did in a private capacity rather than as a bishop in official capacity, which would mean that he affirms the Church's prohibition of offering public prayers for departed non-Orthodox, but also affirms the teaching that private prayers for them are of great value and should be encouraged.

Joseph McKean, Youngstown, OH (September 6, 1974)

THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC IN CAPERNAUM

GOSPEL OF THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THE HOLY AND GREAT LENT

A homily by St. Nikolai Velimirovic, bishop of Ochrid, from "Homilies, vol. One."

Today's Gospel speaks of the great efforts and struggles of men of real faith to come into the presence of Christ the Lord.

Four men were carrying one of their kinsmen, or friends, who was sick of the palsy—carrying him on his bed, he being so desperately weak and helpless. They tried in vain to push through the great crowd, to come near the Lord, and, failing in this, climbed up onto the roof of the house; tore away the roof and, with a great struggle, let down the bed on which the sick man lay, till it rested at the feet of the wonder-working Healer. This was the measure of their faith in Christ.

And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy:

"Son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

The Lord did not hear their faith expressed in words, but He saw it. His perception penetrated to the most secret depths of the human heart and, beholding these depths, the Lord saw their great faith. With His bodily eyes, He had seen and known their efforts and struggles to bring the sick man into His presence. Their faith, then, was clear to both the Lord's spiritual sight and His bodily eyes.

The unbelief of the Scribes who were present at this event was also clear to the Lord. They *reasoned in their hearts*: "Why does this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The Lord, *perceiving in His spirit the thoughts of their hearts, began gently to reprimand them for this*: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" The Lord, in His discernment, reads impure hearts as easily as He does pure ones. As He had immediately seen Nathanael's pure heart, in which there was no guile, so He here immediately and clearly sees the impure hearts of the Scribes, filled with guile. In order to show them that He has power over both the bodies and the souls of men, both to forgive sins and to heal the weakened body, the Lord says to the man sick of the palsy: "I say unto thee: Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thy house." At such a powerful command, the sick man *immediately arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying: "We never saw it on this fashion!"*

Look how many miraculous powers the Lord demonstrates all at once:

—He sees into the hearts of men, and discerns faith in some and guile in others.

—He forgives the soul its sin, making it healthy and clean from the source of its sickness and weakness.

—He restores health to the weak and palsied body by the power of His words.

Oh how great and fearsome, wondrous and health-giving is the presence of the living Lord!

But we must come and stand in the presence of the living Lord. This is the most important thing on the path of salvation: to come with faith into the Lord's presence, and to feel this presence. At times, the Lord Himself comes and reveals His gracious presence to us, as He came to Martha and Mary at Bethany, as He suddenly appeared to the Apostle Paul on the road, or to the other apostles on the Sea of Galilee and on the road to Emmaus, in the room with shut doors or to Mary Magdalene in the garden, or to many of the saints in dreams or visions. Sometimes, men were brought by the apostles into the Lord's presence, as Andrew brought Simon Peter and Philip brought Nathanael, and as the apostles' successors and the missionaries have brought thousands and millions of believers to the Lord, and as one believer has brought another. Finally, people themselves sometimes make the greatest efforts to come into the



Lord's presence, as was the case with these four men who tore open the roof of the house in order to let the sick man down in front of the Lord.

These are the three ways that men can feel themselves in the Lord's presence. It is for us to exert ourselves and strive to come into the Lord's presence, and for God to allow us into His presence and illumine us by it. We must therefore take these three ways in reverse order, which is to say that we must, with faith and longing, do all we can to come into God's presence; then we must follow the call and directions of the holy, apostolic Church and the Church's Fathers and Teachers; and lastly, only after fulfilling the first two conditions, we must, with prayer and hope, wait upon God to bring us to Himself and, by His presence, to illumine, strengthen, heal and save us.

How great our efforts to open the way to God's presence must be is most clearly shown in the example of these four men, who did not hold back from climbing onto the roof,

deterred by no shame or fear, in order to let their sick friend down from above into the presence of the living Lord. This example of zeal is similar to—if not greater than—that of the widow who importunately begged the unjust judge to deliver her from her adversary. (Lk 18:1-5). This means the fulfilling of the Lord's command to *cry day and night to God, until He hear them*. This is a proof of the truth of God's other command: *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you*. (Mt 7:7). This is, lastly, the explanation, of Christ's strange words: *The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force*. (Mt 11:12). The Lord, then, demands of His faithful followers that they do all they can, that they exert all their strength, work while they have light, pray without ceasing, beg, seek, knock, fast and perform innumerable works of mercy, and all this so that the Kingdom of heaven—the great, fearsome and life-giving presence of God—may be opened to them. *Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, says the Lord, that ye may be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of Man*. (Lk 21:36).

Be watchful and vigilant over your heart, that it cleave not to the earth; be watchful over your thoughts, that they do not lead you away from God; be vigilant over your works, to double your talent and not let it diminish and disappear altogether; be vigilant over your days, that death come not upon you unawares and seize upon you unrepentant in your sins. This is our Orthodox faith: active, prayerful and watchful, permeated through and through with tears and with striving. No other faith demands such striving on the part of its faithful to be worthy to stand before the Son of God. It proposes these efforts to the whole world, but our Lord and Saviour Himself demanded them of the faithful, and the Church constantly repeats them from age to age, from generation to generation, holding up to the faithful the ever-greater number of spiritual warriors who fulfilled the law of Christ and were vouchsafed glory and inexpressible power both in heaven and on earth.

But on the other hand, we must not deceive ourselves, thinking that all man's efforts and strivings bring salvation of themselves. We must not imagine that a man will, by his efforts and striving alone, be able to come into the presence of the living God. If God does not will it, no mortal can ever come to stand before His face. For the Lord Himself, who ordained all this effort and striving, says in another place: *When ye shall have done all these things, which are commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do*. (Lk 17:10). And in another place: *No man can come to Me except the Father... draw him*. (Jn 6:44). And again: *Without Me, ye can do nothing*. (Jn 15:5). And again, in another place: *By grace ye are saved*. (Eph 2:5).

What can we say after all this? Shall we say that all our striving for salvation is in vain? Shall we let our hands fall

and wait for the Lord Himself to place us, by His power, in His presence? Does not the Prophet Isaiah himself say: *All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags* (Isa 64:6)? Should we, then, leave aside all effort and striving? But would we not, then, become as that servant who dug, and hid his lord's talent in the ground, and at whom his lord, because of this, shouted: *Thou wicked and slothful servant!* (Mt 25:26). We must be sober, and exert ourselves to fulfil the Lord's clear commandments. We must exert ourselves to the full, but it is in God's power to bless our efforts and bring us into His presence. The Apostle Paul gave a wonderful explanation of this, when he said: *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*. (1 Cor 3:6-7). All, then, depends on God—on His power, wisdom and mercy. It is, though, for us to plant and to water, and we dare not abandon our duty without being in danger of eternal perdition.

It is a farmer's duty to plant and water, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the seed will make shoots, grow and bring forth fruit.

It is a scientist's duty to examine and seek, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not knowledge will be revealed to him.

It is a parent's duty to bring up and educate his child in the fear of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy how long this child will live.

It is a priest's duty to teach, inform, reprimand and guide the faithful, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not the priest's efforts will bring forth fruit.

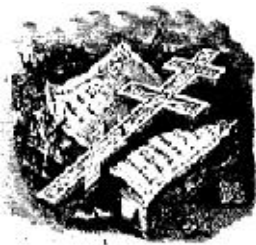
It is the duty of all of us to strive and endeavor to be made worthy to stand in the presence of the Son of God, but it depends on God's power, wisdom and mercy whether or not we will be allowed near to the Lord.

But we must not strive without hope in God's mercy. May all our endeavors be illumined by the hope that the Lord is near us, and that He will receive us into the presence of the light of His countenance. There is no deeper and more inexhaustible fountain than the fountain of God's mercy. When the Prodigal Son repented after his terrible fall to the level of the swine, his merciful father went to meet him, embraced him and forgave him. God is tireless in going to meet His repentant children. He extends His hand to all who turn to face Him. *I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people* (Isa 65:2), the Lord said of the Jews. So, when the Lord holds out His hand to the rebellious, how would He not to the obedient? The obedient Prophet David says: *I have set God always before me; for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall*. (Pss 16:9). To those, then, who are striving for their salvation, the Lord does not deny His presence.

Let us therefore not consider our endeavors to be in vain, as do the godless and those in despair, but let us, while striving

and making the greatest possible efforts, hope in the mercy of the Lord God. Let us especially re-double our efforts during the Great Fast, as the Holy Church recommends. May our path in this be lighted by the example of those four who climbed up onto the roof and tore it open, and let down the fifth, their friend sick of the palsy, before the Lord. If one fifth of our soul is paralyzed or sick, let us hasten with the healthy four-fifths before the Lord, and He will give health to the part within us that is sick. If one of our senses has been scandalized by this world, and been made ill from the shock, let us hasten with the other four senses before the Lord, that He may have pity on our sick sense and heal it. When one part of the body is sick, the doctor recommends two sorts of nursing: care, and the feeding-up of the rest of the body, so that the healthy part may become even stronger and more healthy, and can thus resist the sickness in the part that is ill. So it is with our souls. If we have doubt in our minds, let us strive in heart and soul to strengthen our faith and, with the Lord's help, to heal and strengthen our sick mind. If we have sinned through forgetting prayer, let us hasten, with works of mercy, to restore our lost prayerfulness—and the other way round.

And the Lord will see our faith, and our efforts and striving, and will take pity on us. And He, in His endless mercy, will let us come into His presence, into that immortal and life-giving presence by which the countless angelic hosts and the armies of the saints are given life, receive their strength and are imbued with joy. To our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.



When we reflect on what is promised us in heaven, everything we have on earth comes to appear worthless. When we compare our earthly possessions with the happiness of heaven, they seem a burden and not a help. When we compare our life in time with eternal life, we have to call it death rather than life. What is our daily decline into decomposition and decay but a kind of extension of death? Whose mind can grasp them? There we will take part with the choirs of angels, we will share with the blessed spirits in our Creator's glory, we will see the face of God before us and behold infinite light, we will feel no fear of death but rejoice in the gift of everlasting life!

St. Gregory the Great

ON REMEMBRANCE OF DEATH

By St. John Climacus, *"The Ladder of Divine Ascent,"* revised edition (2001), Step 6, pp. 66-70.



Every word is preceded by thought. And the remembrance of death and sins precedes weeping and mourning. The remembrance of death is a daily death; and the remembrance of our departure is an hourly sighing or groaning.

Fear of death is a property of nature that comes from disobedience, but trembling at death is a sign of unrepented sins. Christ fears death, but does not tremble, in order to demonstrate clearly the properties of His two natures.

As of all foods, bread is the most essential, so the thought of death is the most necessary of all works. The remembrance of death amongst those in the midst of society gives birth to distress and meditation, and even more, to despondency. But amongst those who are free from noise, it produces the putting aside of cares and constant prayer and guarding of the mind. But these same virtues both produce the remembrance of death, and are also produced by it.

As tin is distinct from silver, although it resembles it in appearance, so for the discerning there is a clear and obvious difference between the natural and contra-natural fear of death. A true sign of those who are mindful of death in the depth of their being is a voluntary detachment from every creature and complete renunciation of their own will. He who with undoubting trust daily expects death is virtuous; but he who hourly yields himself to it is a saint.

Not every desire for death is good. Some, constantly sinning from force of habit, pray for death with humility. And some, who do not want to repent, invoke death out of despair. And some out of self-esteem consider themselves dispassionate, and for a while have no fear of death. And some (if such can now be found), through the action of the Holy Spirit, ask for their departure.

Some inquire and wonder: "Why, when the remembrance of death is so beneficial for us, has God hidden from us the knowledge of the hour of death?"—not knowing that in this way God wonderfully accomplishes our salvation. For no one who foreknew his death would at once proceed to baptism or the monastic life; but everyone would spend all his days in iniquities, and only on the day of his death would he approach baptism and repentance. From long habit, he

would become confirmed in vice, and would remain utterly incorrigible.

Never, when mourning for your sins, accept that cur which suggests to you that God is tender-hearted (this thought is useful only when you see yourself being dragged down to deep despair). For the aim of the enemy is to thrust from you your mourning and fearless fear.

Anyone who wishes to retain within him continually the remembrance of death and God's judgment, and at the same time yields to material cares and distractions, is like a man who is swimming and wants to clap his hands. A vivid remembrance of death cuts down food; and when in humility food is cut, the passions are cut out too. Insensibility of heart dulls the mind, and abundance of food dries the fountains of tears. Thirst and vigil afflict the heart, and when the heart is afflicted the waters flow. The things we have said will seem cruel to epicures and incredible to the indolent; but a man of action will readily test them and he who has found them out by experience will smile at them. But he who is still seeking will become more gloomy.

Just as the Fathers lay down that perfect love is free from falls, so I for my part declare that a perfect sense of death is free from fear.

There are many activities for an active mind. I mean, meditation on the love of God, on the remembrance of God, on the remembrance of the Kingdom, on the remembrance of the zeal of the holy martyrs, on the remembrance of God Himself present according to him who said: *I beheld the Lord ever before me.* (Pss 15:8); on remembrance of the holy and spiritual powers, on remembrance of one's departure, judgment, sentence and punishment. We began with the sublime, but have ended with things that never fail.

An Egyptian monk once told me: "After I had established in my heart the remembrance of death, whenever need arose and I wanted to comfort the clay a little, this remembrance prevented me like a judge. And the wonderful thing was that, even though I wanted to thrust it away, I was quite unable to do so." Another who lived here in the place called Thola, often went into ecstasy at the thought of death; and the brothers who found him would lift him and carry him off scarcely breathing, like one who had fainted or had an epileptic fit.

And I cannot be silent about the story of Hesychius the Horebite. He passed his life in complete negligence, without paying the least attention to his soul. Then he became extremely ill, and for an hour he expired. And when he came to himself, he begged us all to leave him immediately. And he built up the door of his cell, and he stayed in it for twelve years without ever uttering a word to anyone, and without eating anything but bread and water. And, always remaining motionless, he was so rapt in spirit at what he had seen in his ecstasy, that he never changed this manner of life but was always as if out of his mind, and silently shed hot tears. But

when he was about to die, we broke open the door and went in, and after many questions, this alone was all we heard from him: "Forgive me! No one who has acquired the remembrance of death will ever be able to sin." We were amazed to see that one who had before been so negligent was so suddenly transfigured by this blessed change and transformation. We reverently buried him in the cemetery, near the fort¹, and after some days we looked for his holy relics, but did not find them. So by Flesychius' true and praiseworthy repentance, the Lord showed us that He accepts those who desire to amend, even after long negligence.

Just as some declare that the abyss is infinite, for they call it a bottomless pit, so is the thought of death boundless, laying hold of chastity and activity. The above-mentioned saint confirms the truth of what has been said. For such men, unceasingly adding fear to fear, do not stop until the very strength of their bones is spent.

Let us rest assured that the remembrance of death, like all other blessings, is a gift of God; since how is it that often, when we are at the very tombs, we are left tearless and hard; and frequently when we have no such sight, we are full of compunction?

He who has died to all things remembers death, but whoever is still tied to the world does not cease plotting against himself. Do not wish to assure everyone in words of your love for them, but rather ask God to show them your love without words. Otherwise, time will not suffice you for both intimacies and compunction.

Do not deceive yourself, foolish worker, as if one time can make up for another. For the day is not sufficient to repay in full its own debt to the Lord. It is impossible, someone says, impossible to spend the present day devoutly unless we regard it as the last of our whole life. And it is truly astonishing how even the Greeks have said something of the sort, since they define philosophy as meditation death.

This is the sixth step. He who has mounted it will never sin again. *Remember thy last, and thou shall never sin unto eternity.* (Sir 7:36).

† † †

[1] Justinian built a fort on Mount Sinai as well as a church and monastery (Procopius, *De aedificiis*, V, viii). Today the fort is represented by the Monastery of Mount Sinai; cf. E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (1887), *Kastron*, Clim. P.G., 88, 79A, 812B.



It is truly astounding how the incorporeal mind can be defiled and darkened by the body. Equally astonishing is the fact that the immaterial spirit can be purified and refined by clay.

St. John Climacus

ORTHODOXY AND FAITH

By Protopresbyter Fr. George D. Metallinos, Professor Emeritus of the Athens University, from his book "Philokalian Distinction between Orthodoxy and Heresy," ch. 8.

It is understood that Orthodoxy is always closely linked to faith. Thus, we speak of the "right and true faith," in order to distinguish it from the "adulterated faith." Orthodoxy is the true glory and glorification of God—the genuine notion of God—while a heresy is a manufactured glory, a morbid glorification of God. Orthodoxy and heresy thus confront each other in the area of Faith, and that is exactly where they diversify. What, therefore, is "faith" and how is it perceived in the life of the Church as the Body of Christ?

First of all, "faith" in the language of theology signifies divine revelation; it is that which is revealed to man, by God—it is the content of the revealed, Divine Truth (*Fides quae creditur*). However, Divine Revelation is not an abstract thing, that is to say, a collection of intellectually conceived truths, ideas and basic positions that man is called upon to accept, in order to be saved. Such is the Scholastic view of faith, which has infiltrated our Dogmatics also. The Truth of the Church is a Person; it is the incarnated Son and Logos of God; it is the incarnate All-Truth. It is the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unknown and unapproachable God became (and continues to become) known, ever since the beginning of Creation, in Christ. In other words, God discloses Himself; He is self-revealed, *in multilateral and resourceful ways* (Heb 1:1), the culmination being His self-revelation *in the Son*—the incarnation of His Son—which was the prerequisite for the event of Pentecost, for the sake of which Creation (according to the Saints) was "composed." The Pentecost is God's supreme revelation in the Holy Spirit, and man's experience within history.

Christ, as a God-Human, is in a certain way the "objective" faith, which is offered *from above*, so that we may come to know God *in Himself* (see Jn 14:9—*whomsoever has seen Me, has seen the Father*). He is our "hypostatic" (=personal) faith, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor. We become *faithful* by participating in that personal and incarnated Faith (i.e., Christ). Only in Christ can there be a possibility to know the true God. And that is what establishes Orthodoxy's uniqueness and exclusivity, in the event known as *salvation*. (Acts 4:12)

To the revealed Faith, which is "accredited" to man for his salvation, man reciprocates with his own (subjective) Faith (*Fides qua creditur*). Man's faith is absolutely essential, in order for God's power to function inside man; to lead him to salvation. Its significance is stressed by Christ Himself: *Whosoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; whosoever disbelieves shall be reproached*. (Mk 16:16). The "objective" Faith must necessarily be transformed into man's "subjec-

tive" Faith, for his salvation. And that is effected, through the *indwelling* (Rom 8:9 ... *if the Spirit of God dwells within you ...*) of the "objective" Faith; in other words, the *indwelling* of the Uncreated inside the created; of God inside man. Man is invited by Christ to become "faithful", to be receptive of the revealed-in-Christ Truth as a "life in Christ", and to live that Truth, so that he too may become "true," just as Christ is *the true One* (1 Jn 5:20). Man's salvation is when he is rendered "true," and the prerequisite for this, is his union with the true God.

A faith that is Orthodox is the one that acts *soteriologically*. And that is the precise point where heresy differentiates itself from Orthodoxy. "Heresy" is the adulteration of the faith and its retraction at the same time, because it is adulterating the faith in two directions: on the one hand, with regard to the "believed" (Christ) and on the other, with regard to its manner of accepting Christ. In a heresy, Christ is segmented and is accepted, not in whole but segmentally, by a segmented—not whole—person, because He is approached only by man's intellect and his lips, while the heart and man's entire existence is *a long way off* from God (Mt 15:8). A heresy (every heresy) is not only a false teaching; it is literally a non-Orthodoxy and a non-Christianity. By approaching the matter in this way, we disentangle ourselves from the confessional disagreements of the past and their scholastic terminology. After all, what is of primary concern is not how false a teaching might be, but whether it is capable of healing man (as Fr. Romanides used to teach); whether it is capable of saving him.

Thus, one could say in conclusion—with regard to the process of the event called "faith"—that faith begins as a logical-intellectual process, in the sense of an external affirmation by man, progressing as an acceptance of God's offer and a loyalty towards Him, to be fulfilled however, with an internal certainty and cognizance of God, in Christ. These are the exact basic meanings—linguistically—contained in the term "faith" (*pistis*) in the Greek language, the language of the Gospels: *em-pisto-syni* (trust), *pisto-tita* (fidelity, faithfulness), *vevaiotita* (certainty, confidence).



All Truths of Orthodoxy emerge from one truth and converge in one truth, infinite and eternal. That truth is the God-man Christ. If you experience Orthodoxy to its limit, you will inevitably discover that its kernel is the God-man Christ. In fact, all the truths of Orthodoxy are nothing other than different aspects of the one Truth - the God-man Christ.

St. Justin Popovich

THE HOLY AND GREAT FAST

THE GREAT FAST'S HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Source: "The Lenten Triodion," *St. Tikhon's Seminary Press* (2001), pp. 28-34.

Lent, as it exists today in the Orthodox Church, is the result of a long historical development, of which no more than a brief summary is offered in this article. The portion of the Church's Year covered by the Lenten Triodion falls into three periods:

1. *The Pre-Lenten Period*: three preparatory Sundays (the Publican and the Pharisee; the Prodigal Son; the Last Judgment), followed by a preliminary week of partial fasting, ending with the Sunday of Forgiveness.

2. *The Forty Days of the Great Fast*: beginning on Monday in the first week (or, more exactly, at Sunday Vespers on the evening before), and ending with the Ninth Hour on Friday in the sixth week.

3. *Holy and Great Week*, preceded by the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday.

The third of these three periods, the Paschal fast of Holy Week, is the most ancient, for it was already in existence during the second and third centuries. The fast of forty days is mentioned in sources from the first half of the fourth century onwards. The pre-Lenten period developed latest of all: the earliest references to a preliminary week of partial fasting are in the sixth or seventh century, but the observance of the other three preparatory Sundays did not become universal in the Greek East until the tenth or eleventh century.

The Paschal Fast in the Second and Third Centuries

In the second century it was the custom for Christians in both East and West to observe, immediately before Easter Sunday, a short fast of one or two days, either on Saturday only or on Friday and Saturday together. This was specifically a Paschal fast in preparation for the service of Easter night. It was a fast of sorrow at the absence of the Bridegroom, in fulfillment of Christ's own words: *But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* (Mk 2:20). The fast, whether of one or two days, was in principle a total one, without any food or drink being taken at all.

By the middle of the third century, this Paschal fast had in many places been extended to embrace the entire week from Monday to Saturday. There was, however, no uniformity of practice, and some Christians fasted for less than the full six days. Only a few managed to keep a total fast throughout the whole period. In some places it was the practice to eat bread and salt, with water, at the ninth hour (3 p.m.) on the four days from Monday until Thursday, and then to keep, if possible, a total fast on Friday and Saturday; but not all the faithful were as strict as this.

In this six-day Paschal fast may be seen the distant origins of Holy Week; but the developed ritual to which we are accustomed, with special commemorations on each day of the week, is not found until the late fourth century. During the pre-Nicene period, there seems to have been a unitary celebration of Christ's death and rising, considered as a single mystery, at the Paschal vigil lasting from Saturday evening until Easter Sunday morning. Friday was kept as a fast in preparation for this vigil, but it had not yet become a distinct and specific commemoration of the Crucifixion; the Cross and the Resurrection were celebrated together during Easter night.

The Fast of Forty Days

There is no evidence of a forty-day fast in the pre-Nicene period. The first explicit reference to such a fast is in Canon 5 of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), where it is treated as something familiar and established, not as an innovation on the part of the Council. By the end of the fourth century the observance of a forty-day fast seems to have been the standard practice in most parts of Christendom, but in some places—possibly including Rome—a shorter fast may have been kept.

This forty-day fast, found in evidence from the fourth century onwards, differs somewhat in scope and character from the one-week fast of the pre-Nicene period, and the precise relationship between the two is not easy to determine. It has been suggested that the forty-day fast was originally connected with Epiphany rather than Easter; but the evidence for this seems inconclusive. It is, however, clear that whereas the pre-Nicene fast was specifically a Paschal observance in preparation for Easter, the forty-day fast was connected more particularly with the final preparation of the catechumens for the sacrament of Baptism or *illumination*. In the weeks before their baptismal initiation, the candidates underwent a period of intensive training, with daily instruction, special services and fasting. The existing members of the church community were encouraged to share with the catechumens in this prayer and abstinence, thus renewing year by year their baptismal dedication to Christ. Therefore, the forty-day fast came to involve the whole body of the faithful, and not just those preparing for Baptism.

Lent, as we know it, is thus the result of a convergence between these two elements—between the six-day pre-Nicene fast, which was directly in preparation for Easter, and the forty-day post-Nicene fast, which originally formed part of the training of candidates for Baptism. It was natural that these two elements should become fused into a single observance, for they both have the same endpoint—the night of Holy Saturday. The Paschal vigil on this night, in celebration of the death, burial and rising of Christ, was for obvious reasons chosen as the occasion for administering Baptism; for this sacrament is precisely an initiation into the Lord's Cross and His Resurrection. (see Rom 6:3-4).

Today in most parts of the Church there is no organized catechumenate, and it is customary to administer Baptism on many other occasions besides the night of Holy Saturday; yet the baptismal significance of Lent has still a living importance. For every member of the Christian community, Lent is a time of spiritual training and renewed *illumination*. It is a time to realize afresh that, by virtue of our baptismal initiation, we are crucified, buried and risen with Christ; it is a time to reapply to ourselves the words of St. Paul, *I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.* (Gal 2:20). It is a time for us to listen more closely to the voice of the Spirit in whom we were sealed at our Chrismation, immediately after our “burial” in the baptismal waters.

The choice of the number forty for the days of Lent has obvious Biblical precedents. The people of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness (Exod 16:35); Moses remained fasting for forty days on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:28); Elijah abstained from all food for forty days as he journeyed to Mount Horeb. (Kgs 19:8). Most important of all Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. (Mt 4:1).

However, how are the forty days to be computed? In the fourth and fifth centuries, the manner of reckoning varied. Some kept a fast of six weeks, some of seven or even eight. Three points arose:

- (a) Is Holy Week included in the forty days, or treated as a distinct and additional period?
- (b) Is Saturday regarded as a day of fasting?
- (c) Are the forty days reckoned continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays? Or, is Sunday excluded from the calculation, and Saturday also, if this is considered not to be a day of fasting?

Divergent answers to these three questions account for present-day differences between the Western and the Orthodox Lent. At Rome Holy Week was included as part of the forty days, Saturday was regarded as a day of fasting, but in calculating the number forty all Sundays were excluded from the reckoning. This produced a six-week fast of six days in each week, constituting a total of thirty-six days. To make up the full measure of forty days, four further days of fasting were then added at the beginning, with the result that Lent in the West commences on a Wednesday.

At Constantinople, on the other hand, Holy Week—together with the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday—was not regarded as part of the forty-day fast in the strict sense. At Vespers on Friday evening in the sixth week, immediately

preceding the Saturday of Lazarus, the distinction between the forty days and Holy Week is very clearly marked in the existing text of the Triodion:

*Having completed the forty days that bring profit to our soul,
We beseech Thee in Thy love for man,
Grant us to behold the Holy Week of Thy Passion...*

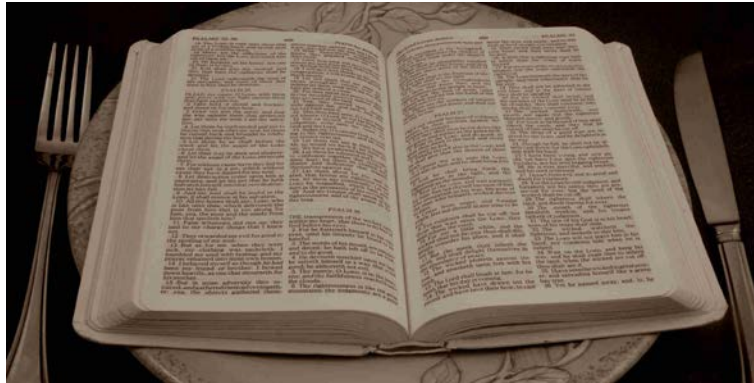
At Constantinople and in the East generally, Saturdays, with the one exception of Holy Saturday, were not considered days of fasting. However, in reckoning the number forty it was the custom to count continuously, including Saturdays and Sundays in the calculation. Thus the forty days began on the first Monday in Lent and ended on Friday in the sixth week; then came Lazarus Saturday, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, which, while distinct from the forty days, were treated as part of the Lenten Fast in the broader sense. In this way the forty days and Holy Week together constituted a fast of seven weeks. Therefore, it is that Lent begins on Ash Wednesday in Western Christendom, while commencing in the East two days earlier on Monday.

Christians in the Greek East, however, while as a rule counting the forty days continuously, have sometimes chosen to exclude Saturday and Sunday from the calculation. With Holy Week included in the reckoning, this resulted in a seven-week

fast of five days in each week, adding up to thirty-five days. But since Holy Saturday is a day of fasting, this also was included, bringing the total number of days to thirty-six. As we have seen, the West before the addition of the four preliminary days likewise had a thirty-six day fast, although computed in a somewhat different manner. In both East and West this number of thirty-six has been given a symbolical meaning. Just as the Israelites dedicated to God a tithe or tenth of their produce, so Christians dedicate the season of Lent to God as a tithe or tenth of the year. The part is offered in token of the whole by rendering back to God a tenth of what He has given to us, we call down His blessing upon the remainder and acknowledge that all material goods and all moments of time are a gift from His hand. This notion of Lent as a *tithe or first-fruits of the year* is not much emphasized in the existing text of the Triodion, but it is mentioned in the *Synaxarion* for the Sunday of Forgiveness.

The Completion of the Pattern

In Constantinople from the sixth or seventh century onwards, there arose the practice of adding, before the seven weeks of the fast, an eighth or preliminary week of modified fasting. In our translation of the Triodion, we have termed



this the “Week before Lent”; it is often styled *Cheese Week* or the *Week without Meat*, because during these days meat is forbidden but cheese and other dairy products are permitted. This preliminary week was added, among other reasons, from the same motive as led to the addition of four extra days at the start of Western Lent: so as to make up the full number forty. In the West, a six-week fast of six days in each week left four days missing from the requisite total. At Constantinople, on the other hand, the days of Lent were (as we have seen) reckoned continuously and so there was no need of a further preliminary period to produce the total of forty days. But Christians in Palestine calculated in terms of eight weeks, with five days of fasting in each week (no special account being taken of Holy Saturday for the purposes of this reckoning); and so they needed an additional week at the beginning of Lent. The observance of *Cheese Week* in the existing Triodion represents a compromise between the Constantinopolitan and the Palestinian practice: for *Cheese Week* is to be considered part of the fast, and yet it is not fully within Lent.

During the sixth-eleventh centuries, the season of pre-Lenten preparation was gradually expanded to include three other preliminary Sundays: the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, ten weeks before Easter; following it, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son; and then the Sunday of the Last Judgement immediately before the beginning of *Cheese Week*. Together with the Sunday of Forgiveness at the end of *Cheese Week*, this makes four preliminary Sundays in all. In this way, the full pattern of the Lenten season was completed. The Triodion, as we now have it, opens with the latest Sunday to be added, that of the Publican and the Pharisee.



Special services, special foods, continence, not going to dances and events, all this awakes one to piety and reflection on our present purpose, on the past and on eternity. Seeing in ourselves a falling away from the commandments of God, we try to reconcile ourselves to God through repentance and communion of the most pure and life-giving mysteries of Christ, which burn the thorns of our sins. You, when you have not fulfilled this duty during the year, of course will fulfill it during the Fast. The most merciful Lord loved us so much, that He gave us, through food and drink, His most pure Body and life-giving Blood, as a token of life eternal and the incorrupt future feast. Let us offer Him thanksgiving with pure hearts, lips and acts!

St. Macarius of Optina

SPIRITUAL COUNSEL

By Archbishop Theophan of Poltava (+1940).

On How to Keep the Great Lent



The general order and spirit of this time are beautifully expressed in the services and the Lenten *typicon*. You have only to immerse yourself in it and to follow the external discipline as much as your strength allows; in this way you will fulfill all that is necessary. Your main concern should be to concentrate your life on God. In order to do this, you must, as far as possible, withdraw from worldly distractions, worldly occupations.

You must keep in mind that life in God has several stages. It begins with a suffering awareness of one’s sinfulness; this is followed by a striving to rid oneself of this sinful state, until finally, one attains blessed communion with God. It is especially fitting to devote the first week of Great Lent to the realization of one’s sinfulness. The feeling of blessed communion with God comes to us naturally in the days of holy Pascha—we cannot force this ourselves. The strength of this feeling depends on the intensity of the initial experience—that is, our awareness of our sinful state. The rest of Great Lent is a time of gradual ascent from the first stage to the last.

Concerning Fatigue During Prayer and the Purpose of Eпитimia

You ask: “What should I do so that extreme fatigue does not affect my concentration during prayer?” As you do not specify whether you are asking about private or common prayer, I will answer concerning both.

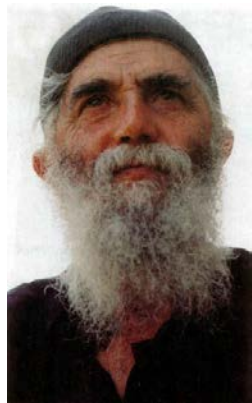
When fatigue begins to overcome you during a church service, you should mentally recite the Jesus Prayer. It will help you concentrate in prayer. If you feel yourself getting tired during prayer at home, then you should force yourself a bit. If the fatigue disappears, then it was a temptation from the evil one. If it remains, then you may shorten your prayer; it is better in such cases to pray a bit less but attentively and with feeling.

“At confession Fr. V. told me to do a few prostrations when I notice that I am sinning or am un-attentive. I wanted to ask you about this previously and now ask for your direction.”

This is beneficial with a proper understanding of the matter. An *epitimia* is not a punishment for a misdemeanor in the legalistic sense of the word. It is a spiritual method of healing, having as its purpose a person’s deliverance from a spiritual ailment.

Μὴ Φοβηθῆτε, θὰ Βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός!

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ νεοκυκλοφορηθέν βιβλίον «Λόγος Γέροντος Παΐσιου, Περί προσευχῆς».



- Γέροντα θὰ γίνῃ πόλεμος;
 - Ἔσεῖς κάνετε προσευχή; Ἐγὼ ἔχω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοιξὴ μέχρι τὸ φθινόπωρο ποὺ κάνω ἐπιστράτευση προσευχῆς—ἐντελῶς ἀθόρυβα—γιὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθῇ ὁ Θεός, νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὴν ἐπιστράτευση καὶ τὸν πόλεμο. Εἶχα πληροφορία: «Κάνετε πολλὴ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐμποδιστοῦν οἱ Τοῦρκοι, διότι τὴν Κυριακὴ 16ῆ Ὀκτωβρίου, ἔχουν σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς χτυπήσουν». (Αὐτὸ εἰπώθηκε τὸν Νοέμβριο τοῦ 1983. Ἡ πληροφορία δὲν ἦταν ἀνθρώπινη ἀλλὰ Θεϊκὴ.) Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, μέχρι στιγμῆς μᾶς φύλαξε ἡ Παναγία, ἧς εὐχηθοῦμε νὰ μᾶς προστατεύσει καὶ στὴ συνέχεια.

- Γέροντα, τώρα ποῦ πέρασε ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ὁ κίνδυνος, θὰ συνεχίσουμε νὰ προσευχώμαστε γι' αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα;

- Μήπως ὑπάρχει τόπος χωρὶς πόλεμο; Τί θὰ πῆ «ἐδῶ» καὶ «ἐκεῖ»; Καὶ ἐκεῖ ποὺ τώρα ἔχουν πόλεμο ἀδελφοί μας εἶναι. Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀδάμ καὶ τὴν Εὐά δὲν εἴμαστε ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Μοιράστηκε ὅμως ἡ οἰκογένειά μας, ἄλλοι εἶναι ἐδῶ, ἄλλοι ἐκεῖ. Μὲ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους εἴμαστε ἀδελφοὶ καὶ κατὰ σάρκα καὶ κατὰ πνεῦμα, ἐνῶ μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους εἴμαστε ἀδελφοὶ μόνον κατὰ σάρκα. Ἐπομένως, γιὰ ἕναν λόγο παραπάνω, πρέπει νὰ προσευχώμαστε μὲ περισσότερο πόνο γι' αὐτοὺς, γιατί αὐτοὶ εἶναι πιὸ ταλαιπώροι.

- Γέροντα, αὐτὸ τὸ διάστημα ποὺ τὰ πράγματα εἶναι δύσκολα γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, κάνω πολὺ κομποσχοῖνι, ἀλλὰ σκέφτομαι καὶ ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία τῆς Ἑλλάδας δὲν κρέμεται ἀπὸ τὸ κομποσχοῖνι μου.

- Δὲν εἶναι ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία τῆς Ἑλλάδας κρεμάστηκε ἀπὸ τὸ κομποσχοῖνι σου, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ σκέφτεσαι συνέχεια τὴν δυσκολία ποὺ περνάει ἡ Ἑλλάδα σημαίνει ὅτι πονᾷς τὴν πατρίδα καὶ ζητᾷς τὴν ἐπέμβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Ὅποιος εἶναι ὁ Μόνος ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει.

Νὰ προσεύχεσθε νὰ ἀναδειξῇ ὁ Θεὸς πνευματικὸς ἀνθρώπους, Μακκαβαίους, γιατί ὑπάρχει μεγάλη ἀνάγκη. Ἦρθε ὁ καιρὸς νὰ πολεμήσῃ τὸ καλὸ μὲ τὸ κακό, γιατί τὴν παρανομία τὴν ἔχουν κάνει νόμο καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία μόδα. Ὅταν ὅμως δεῖτε συμφορὲς στὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὸ κράτος νὰ βγάξῃ παλαβοὺς νόμους καὶ νὰ ὑπάρχῃ γενικὴ ἀστάθεια, μὴ φοβηθῆτε, θὰ βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός.

- Ἔτσι ὅπως τὰ λέτε, Γέροντα, πρέπει νὰ τὰ ἀφήσουμε ὅλα καὶ νὰ δώσουμε τὶς δυνάμεις μας στὴν προσευχή.

- Μά, χωράει συζήτηση γι' αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα; Ὅλος ὁ κόσμος βράζει σὰν σὲ καζάνι. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ πολιτεία, ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη εἶναι ἄνω-κάτω! Καὶ τί ἐξέλιξη θὰ ἔχουμε κάνεις δὲν τὸ ξέρει. Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ βάλει τὸ χέρι του! Πρέπει οἱ καλόγεροι νὰ κάνουν πολὺ προσευχή. Καὶ ἐπείγουσες δουλειὲς ἂν ἔχουν νὰ τὶς σταματήσουν ὅλες καὶ νὰ στραφοῦν στὴν προσευχή.

Ὅσο μπορεῖτε, νὰ εὐχεσθε ταπεινὰ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο ποὺ ἔδωσε πολλὰ δικαιώματα στὸν πονηρὸ καὶ ταλαιπωρεῖται. Νὰ μὴ ξεχνᾷτε ὅτι γίναμε μοναχοὶ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας καὶ γιὰ νὰ βοηθήσουμε τὸν κόσμο μὲ τὴν προσευχή. Νὰ προσπαθήσουμε νὰ γίνουμε καλοὶ μοναχοί, νὰ κάνουμε κομποσχοῖνι καὶ μετάνοιες γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ τὸν κόσμο, γιατί ὁ μοναχὸς μὲ αὐτὰ βοηθάει.



Ἀδελφοί μου συναμαρτωλοί! Ἄς τὸ ἐννοήσωμεν, αἱ ἡμέραι μας εἶναι ὡσπερ αἱ ἡμέραι Νῶε. Δὲν πηγαίνομεν καθόλου καλά. Τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν ηὐξήθησαν, ὁ διεθνὴς ὀρίζων θολοῦται, μαῦρα σύννεφα συμπυκνώνονται, κεραυνοὶ πίπτουν, ἀστραπταὶ φαίνονται, ἐκροαὶ πολέμων ἀκούονται, τὰ ἔθνη ἀνάστατα, νομίζεις ὅτι ἀπὸ στιγμὴν εἰς στιγμὴν θ' ἀνοιξοῦν οἱ καταρράκται τοῦ οὐρανοῦ διὰ νὰ ρίξουν ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν ἀνόμων, ὄλων μας, ὄχι πλέον ὕδωρ, ἀλλὰ πῦρ ποὺ θὰ καίῃ χιλιάκις τοῦ ἡλίου. Ὅλιγος καιρὸς μᾶς δίδεται ὡς προθεσμία.

Τι πρέπει νὰ κάμωμεν; Νὰ ἀκούσωμεν τὴν φωνὴν τῆς σωτηρίας. Ποία ἡ φωνή; Εἶνε ἡ φωνή, ἡ ὁποία εἶπε εἰς τὸν Νῶε: «**Εἴσελθε σὺ καὶ πᾶς ὁ οἶκος σου εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν**». Ἡ ἰδία φωνὴ λέγει τώρα καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς χριστιανούς Ἑλληνας: **Ἑλληνας! Εἰσελθετε τὸ ταχύτερον εἰς τὴν κιβωτόν**. Ἴδου ἔρχεται παγκόσμιος θύελλα διὰ νὰ σαρώσῃ τὸν κόσμον. **Κιβωτὸς δέ, ὅπως ἀπεδείχθη καὶ εἰς ἄλλας περιστάσεις τῆς φυλῆς μας, εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία**. Αὕτη εἶναι τὸ πλοῖον ποὺ ὅποιος εἰσέλθῃ ἐγκαίρως θὰ σωθῇ. Τὸ πλοῖον αὐτὸ ταξειδεύει εἴκοσι αἰῶνας. Δὲν φοβεῖται τρικυμίας καὶ θύελλας. Κατάρτι εἶναι ὁ Τίμιος Σταυρός. Ἄγκυρα ἡ ἐλπίς. Τιμόνι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, οἱ Κανόνες, ἡ διδασκαλία τῶν Πατέρων. Καὶ πλοίαρχος ὁ Χριστός, ποὺ ζεῖ καὶ βασιλεύει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Μητρο. Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνος Καντιώτης

Ἡ Ἀθλιότης τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου

Τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αὐγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010).



Διδάσκει, ἀγαπητοί μου, ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς σὲ μία συναγωγή τῆς Παλαιστίνης. Εἶνε ὁ Διδάσκαλος, ὁ μοναδικὸς διδάσκαλος τοῦ κόσμου.

Τὰ λόγια του δροσιά, σταλαζοῦν μύρο, σκορποῦν χαρά. Τὸν ἀκοῦνε, εὐφραίνονται καὶ δοξάζουν τὸ Θεό. «*Οὐδέποτε οὕτως ἐλάλησεν ἄνθρωπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος*». (Ἰω. 7:46).

Ἄλλ' ἐνῶ ὁ Χριστὸς διδάσκει, σὲ μιὰ γωνιὰ τῆς συναγωγῆς κάτι κινεῖται μὲ τὰ τέσσερα. Ζῶο εἶνε; Ὅχι, ἄνθρωπος. Καὶ τί ἔπαθε, ὥστε τὸ σῶμα του ἔγινε καμπύλη πού τὰ δύο ἄκρα τῆς ἀγγίξουν τὴ γῆ; Πῶς πήρε μορφή ζῶου; Ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς Λουκᾶς, πού ἦταν καὶ γιατρός, λέει: «*Καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ ἦν πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας ἔτη δέκα καὶ ὀκτώ, καὶ ἦν συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακῦσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές*». (Λουκ. 13:11).

Ἡ γυναίκα αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν κάποτε ὠραία, ὄρθια σὰν κυπαρίσσι. Ἄλλ' ὁ σατανᾶς τὴ φθόνησε. Εἰσχώρησε στὸν ὄργανισμό τῆς δαμονικῶ πνεῦμα, «*πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας*». Ὅπως ἐμεῖς λυγίζουμε ἓνα ἔλασμα, ἔτσι ὁ κακοῦργος τῆς ἔκαμψε τὴ σπονδυλικὴ στήλη, κι ἀπὸ τὴ μέρα ἐκείνη δὲν ὕψωσε πλέον τὸ κεφάλι τῆς.

Σπανίως βέβαια παρουσιάζεται τὸ φαινόμενο ἄντρας ἢ γυναίκα νὰ περπατοῦν σὰν τετράποδα. Ἄλλ' ἐὰν τὸ φαινόμενο τέτοιων ἀσθενῶν στὸ σῶμα εἶναι σπάνιο, δὲν εἶναι ὅμως σπάνιοι ἐκεῖνοι πού ἡ ψυχικὴ τους κατάστασι μοιάζει μὲ τὴν κατάστασι τῆς γυναίκας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. Ἄλλοίμονο, πόσοι καὶ πόσες εἶναι μὲν ὄρθιοι στὸ σῶμα, ἀλλ' ἔχουν τὴν ψυχὴ συγκύπτουσα, νὰ σέρνεται πρὸς τὴ γῆ! Οἱ δύστυχοι ἔχουν τσακίσει τὴν ἠθικὴ καὶ θρησκευτικὴ στήλη τους· δὲ ζοῦν σὰν ἄνθρωποι, ζοῦν σὰν ἄλογα ζῶα, πολλὰ φορὲς χειρότερα κι ἀπ' αὐτά.

Γιὰ τὴν ἀθλιότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅπως αὐτὴ εἰκονίζεται στὸ παραδειγμα τῆς συγκυπτούσης γυναίκας, ἄς ποῦμε λίγες λέξεις.

Ἡ λέξι ἄνθρωπος, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἔχει σπουδαία σημασία. Ἡ ἀρχαία Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, πού διακρίνεται γιὰ τὴν ἀκρίβειά της, ἔδωσε τὸ ὄνομα αὐτὸ στὸ τελειότερο ἀπὸ τὰ δημιουργήματα. Ἀπὸ δύο λέξεις, *ἄνω + θρώσκειν* (=ἄνω τρέχειν), σχηματίσθηκε ἡ λέξι ἄνθρωπος, πού φανερώνει ἔτσι τὴν εὐγένεια, τὴν ὑψηλὴ καταγωγή καὶ τὸν προορισμό του. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ ζῶα, πού περπατοῦν μὲ τὰ τέσσερα

κ' ἔχουν τὸ κεφάλι πρὸς τὴ γῆ ψάχνοντας γιὰ ὑλικὴ τροφή, μόνο ὁ ἄνθρωπος πλάστηκε νὰ στέκη καὶ νὰ περπατᾷ ὄρθιος. Βλέπει ψηλά, στὸν οὐρανό, κι ἀπὸ τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς φύσεως πού ἀπλώνεται ἐμπρὸς του παρακινεῖται νὰ δοξολογῇ τὸν Πλάστη του. Γίνεται ὑπιπέτης.

Ἄλλὰ τί συμφορά! Ἡ εὐγενὴς αὐτὴ ῥοπή ἀνακόπτεται. Μία μυστηριώδης δύναμις σταματᾷ τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὰ ἄνω, λυγίζει τὸ αὐτεξούσιο, τὴ θέλησί του, καὶ ὑποχρεώνει τὶς δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς ν' ἀλλάξουν κατεύθυνσι, νὰ στραφοῦν πρὸς τὰ κάτω. Καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, πού διέγραφε φωτεινοὺς κύκλους γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θρόνο τοῦ Ὑψίστου καὶ τρεφόταν μὲ ἀμβροσία καὶ νέκταρ καὶ ἔψαλλε τὸ «*ὡσαννὰ*» καὶ τὸ «*ἀλληλουῖα*», δὲν μπορεῖ πιά νὰ σταθῇ στὸ ὕψος, ἀλλὰ γκρεμίζεται· σὰ νὰ τῆς ἔδεσαν μολύβδινη σφαῖρα, πέφτει μὲ ὀρμή, ἀγγίζει τὴ γῆ, τρώει χῶμα, κυλιέται στὸ βόρβορο, γίνεται συγκύπτουσα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, μὴ «*δυναμένη ἀνακῦσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές*».

Ὅποιος ἔχει ψυχὴ πού ἔρπει πρὸς ὅ,τι ἀμαρτωλὸ καὶ χυδαῖο, δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ λέγεται ἄνθρωπος. Ἀπ' ἔξω βέβαια ἔχει μορφή ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλ' ἐσωτερικὰ μοιάζει μὲ κτῆνος. Ἐάν, ὅπως λέει ὁ ἱατροφιλόσοφος Καρρῆλ, οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἔπαιρναν καὶ ἐξωτερικὰ σχῆμα σύμφωνο μὲ τὴν ψυχικὴ τους κατάστασι, θὰ εἴχαμε ἓνα φρικτὸ θέαμα· θὰ παρουσιαζόταν ὁ συκοφάντης σὰν ὄχιά, ὁ ἄρπαγας σὰν γεράκι, ὁ πονηρὸς σὰν ἄλεπού, ὁ μνησίκακος σὰν καμήλα, ὁ αἰμοβόρος σὰν λύκος, ὁ ὀργίλος καὶ ἐπιθετικὸς σὰν τίγρις, ὁ ἄπληστος σὰν χοῖρος, ὁ θηλυμανὴς σὰν ἄλογο πού χρεμετίζει...

Γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους αὐτοὺς ὁ Δαυὶδ λέει: «*ἄνθρωπος ἐν τιμῇ ὦν οὐ συνῆκε, παρασυνεβλήθη τοῖς κτήνεσι τοῖς ἀνοήτοις καὶ ὡμοιώθη αὐτοῖς*». (Ψαλμ. 48:13). Καὶ ὁ προφήτης Ἡσαΐας, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἔστειλε νὰ κηρύξῃ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, εἶπε: «*Ἦλθον καὶ οὐκ ἦν ἄνθρωπος, ἐκάλεσα καὶ οὐκ ἦν ὁ ὑπακούων*». (Ἠσ. 50:2). Δηλαδή· Κύριε, ἐξετέλεσα τὴ διαταγὴ σου· πήγα, κήρυξα, κάλεσα σὲ μετάνοια. Ἄλλὰ ποῦ μ' ἔστειλες; Ἐκεῖ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἄνθρωπος· κανεῖς ἀπ' αὐτοὺς δὲ θέλησε νὰ προσέξῃ στὴ φωνή σου. Ὁ νοῦς, ἡ καρδιά, ἡ θέλησί τους εἶναι ἀλλοῦ... «*Οὐκ ἦν*» ἐκεῖ «*ἄνθρωπος*». Φανταστῆτε· μέσα σὲ μιὰ πρωτεύουσα κράτους, ὁ προφήτης δὲ βρῖσκει ἄνθρωπο νὰ συνομιλήσῃ περὶ ἀρετῆς, δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἄλλὰ μήπως καὶ ὁ ἀρχαῖος φιλόσοφος τῆς πατρίδος μας ὁ Διογένης; Δὲν εὗρισκε κι αὐτὸς ἀνθρώπους εἰλικρινεῖς, τιμίους, δικαίους. Ὅλοι ἔρρεπαν πρὸς τὴν ὕλη, τὸ συμφέρον, τὴν ἰδιοτέλεια. Γι' αὐτὸ ἓνα μεσημέρι, ἐνῶ ὁ ἥλιος ἔκαιγε, ἀναψε τὸ φανάρι του καὶ περιφερόταν λέγοντας «*Ἀνθρωπον ζητῶ*».

Πόσο σπάνιο πράγμα είναι ο άνθρωπος, ο ιδεώδης άνθρωπος! Ἐνώ συγγενεύει με τοὺς ἀγγέλους, αὐτὸς ἐκφυλίζεται, πέφτει πιὸ χαμηλά κι ἀπὸ τὰ κτήνη. Καὶ ἡ γῆ ἀναστενάζει καὶ διαμαρτύρεται. Ἄνθρωπε, μετὰ ἐγκλήματά σου μοῦ ἔγινες βαρὺς, δὲ σὲ σηκώνω πλέον· θ' ἀνοίξω τὰ ἡφαίστεια, θὰ σὲ θάψω στὴ λάβα. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἔγινε βάρος τῆς γῆς, «ἄχθος ἀρούρης», ὅπως ἔλεγαν οἱ πρόγονοί μας. Κι ὅπως κηρύττει ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, «τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν βαραινέει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ὅπως ἡ ἁμαρτία». Αὐτὴ εἶναι σὰν μολύβδινη σφαῖρα, ὅπως τὴν εἶδε ὁ προφήτης Ζαχαρίας (Ζαχ. 5:7), εἶναι φορτίο, εἶναι βουνὸ πὸν σηκώνει στοὺς ὤμους του ὁ ταλαίπωρος ἄνθρωπος, καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ βάρος της σκύβει. Καὶ ἂν κάποτε ἔρθῃ σὲ συναισθησι τῆς καταστάσεώς του, λέει στὸ Θεὸ μετὰ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Δαυὶδ: «Αἱ ἀνομίαι μου ὑπερῆραν τὴν κεφαλὴν μου, ὡσεὶ φορτίον βαρὺν ἐβαρύνθησαν ἐπ' ἐμέ. ...ἐταλαιπώρησα καὶ κατεκάμφθην ἕως τέλους...» (Ψαλμ. 37:5-7).

Νὰ γιατί ἡ συγκύπτουσα γυναίκα εἶναι κατὰ τοὺς πατέρας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡ εἰκόνα τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ πὸν ἀναστενάζει κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ βάρος τῆς ἐνοχῆς. Καὶ ἐκείνης μὲν εἶχε καμφθῆ ἡ σπονδυλικὴ στήλη, τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ ὁμως κάμπτεται κάτι πολὺ σπουδαιότερο, ἡ θέλησις, πὸν τοῦ δόθηκε γιὰ νὰ τὸν κρατᾷ ἠθικῶς ὄρθιο, ὥστε ν' ἀντιστέκεται στὸν ἐχθρὸ καὶ νὰ τοῦ λέῃ: Σατανᾶ, ὄχι! δὲ θὰ σὲ προσκυνήσω, δὲ θὰ σ' ἀφήνω νὰ με ὑποτάσῃς. Αὐτὴ ἡ θέλησις δυστυχῶς κάμπτεται, καταντᾷ ἐλεεινὸ ὑποζύγιο, καὶ δέχεται ἀναβάτη τὴν ἀνομία, πὸν σέρνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ κάθε εἶδος διαφθορᾶς. Πίθηκος πὸν καβαλλικεύει ἄγγελος, αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὑπὸ τὸ κράτος τῆς ἁμαρτίας. «Καὶ ἦν—ὄχι πλέον γυνὴ ἀλλὰ—ψυχὴ συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακῦσαι εἰς τὸ παντελές».

Ποιὸς λοιπὸν θὰ τινάξῃ μακριὰ τὴν ἀνομία; Ἄς ἀκούσουμε τί ἀπαντᾷ ἡ συγκύπτουσα: Ὑπέφερα 18 ὀλόκληρα χρόνια, περπατοῦσα μετὰ τὰ τέσσερα, δὲν ἔβλεπα παρὰ μόνον χῶμα καὶ πέτρες. Ἄλλ' ἦρθε καὶ γιὰ μένα ἡ στιγμὴ, πὸν ποτὲ δὲν θὰ τὴν ξεχάσω. Μετὰ εἶδε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, μετὰ σπλαχνίστηκε. Ἄρθρωσε τέσσερις μόνον λέξεις, μετὰ ἄγγιξε μετὰ τὰ πανάχραντα χέρια του, κι ἀμέσως ἡ δύναμις τοῦ πονηροῦ πὸν με κρατοῦσε δέσμια διώχθηκε· σὰ νὰ δέχθηκα ῥεῦμα νέας ζωῆς, τὸ σῶμα μου ἀνωρθώθηκε, τὸ κεφάλι μου ὑψώθηκε, ἀναστηλώθηκα, ἀνέλαβα τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, καὶ τώρα ὄρθια βαδίζω καὶ φωνάζω, ὅτι τὸ θαῦμα αὐτὸ τὸ ἔκανε ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ!

Ἀκούσατε τὴ μαρτυρία τῆς γυναίκας. Ἀμφιβάλλετε ἀκόμη γιὰ τὴ δύναμι τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Τότε πειραματισθῆτε, δοκιμάστε. Ἀφῆστε τὴ δύναμι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ν' ἀγγίξῃ τὴ θέλησί σας, καὶ τότε θὰ γίνῃ ἡ ἀνόρθωσις, ἡ ἀναστήλωσις τῶν ἀξιῶν ἐκείνων

τῆς ζωῆς πὸν τώρα κοιτώνται σὲ ἐρείπια, ὅπως οἱ σπόνδυλοι ἐκείνης τῆς πεσμένης στήλης τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου Διός.

Ὅταν, ἀγαπητοί μου, οἱ σύντροφοι τοῦ Ὀδυσσεῶς ἐμφανίσθησαν ἐμπρὸς τὴ μάγισσα Κίρκη, αὐτὴ τοὺς προσέφερε ἡδύποτα, τοὺς χτύπησε μ' ἓνα ῥαβδί, κι ἀμέσως—οἱ ἦρωες ἐκείνοι πὸν εἶχαν ἐκπορθῆσει τὴν Τροία—ἔχασαν τὴν ὄψι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἔγιναν ζῶα, μιὰ ἀγέλη χοίρων, καὶ κλείστηκαν στοὺς σταύλους. Μετὰ καταλάβατε;

Κίρκη δὲν ὑπάρχει. Κίρκη ὁμως πραγματικὴ εἶναι ἡ ἁμαρτία. Αὐτὴ προσφέρει ποτά, κρατᾷ ῥαβδί ἡδονῆς καὶ χτυπάει μαλακά... Ὅποιος πιῇ τὰ ἡδύποτά της καὶ δεχθῇ τὰ ἡδονικὰ χτυπήματά της, ζαλίζεται, χάνει τὴν ἀξιοπρέπεια, ἐξομοιώνεται μετὰ κτήνος, καὶ φορτώνεται φορτίο βαρὺ, δυσβάστακτο. Καὶ δὲν θὰ μπορέσῃ ποτὲ πλέον νὰ τὸ ἀποτινάξῃ παρὰ μόνον ὅταν πιστέψῃ στὸ Θεὸ πὸν ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος καὶ γεννήθηκε μέσα σὲ σταῦλο, γιὰ ν' ἀνορθώσῃ τὸν ἀποκτηνωμένο ἄνθρωπο, νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποκτῆνωσι στὴ δόξα, καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀναδείξῃ ἔνδοξο κληρονόμο τῆς βασιλείας του, τῆς ὁποίας «οὐκ ἔσται τέλος» (Λουκ. 1:33).

(†) Ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστῖνος



Ἡ Ἐκκλησία λοιπὸν, ὀνομάζεται καθολικὴ, διότι βρίσκεται σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα ἄκρον τῆς γῆς ἕως τὸ ἄλλο. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ καὶ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι διδάσκει ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου καὶ ἀνελλιπῶς ὅλα τὰ δόγματα, πὸν πρέπει νὰ μάθουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι γιὰ τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατὰ πράγματα, γιὰ τὰ ἐπουράνια καὶ τὰ ἐπίγεια. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι ἐπιδιώκει νὰ ὀδηγήσῃ στὴν εὐσέβειαν ὅλον τὸν ἀνθρώπινον γένος, καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων, καὶ τῶν μορφωμένων καὶ τῶν ἀπλοϊκῶν. Ἐπίσης λέγεται καθολικὴ, καὶ γιὰ τὸ ὅτι δίνει ἀφ' ἑνὸς καὶ ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου τὴν ὑγείαν καὶ θεραπεύει κάθε εἶδος ἁμαρτίας, πὸν πράττεται μετὰ τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μετὰ τὸ σῶμα, καὶ ἀφ' ἑτέρου, διότι ἀποκτᾶται μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν κάθε εἶδος ἀναφερομένης ἀρετῆς, πὸν παρατηρεῖται καὶ στὰ ἔργα καὶ στὰ λόγια καὶ σὲ ὅλατὰ πνευματικὰ χαρίσματα. Ἐκκλησία δὲ ὀνομάζεται σύμφωνα μετὰ τὸ ὄνομά της, διότι καλεῖ ὅλους καὶ τοὺς συναθροίζει μαζί.

«Κατηχήσεις»

Ἁγίου Κυρίλλου Ἱεροσολύμων

Μαρτυρίες Πίστεως Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821

Ἀρχιμ. Χρυσοστόμου Παπαθανασίου Τεροκλήρυκος Καθεδρικοῦ Ναοῦ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν.

Ἐν ὄψει τῆς Ἐθνικῆς ἐπετείου ἀξίζει νὰ φέρομε στὸ προσκήνιο μαρτυρίες πίστεως ἀγωνιστῶν καὶ ἡρώων τοῦ 1821. Ἐπικεφαλῆς τῶν ἡρωικῶν κληρικῶν μαρτύρων τοῦ 1821 στέκεται ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Γρηγόριος Ε΄.

Τραγικὴ ἦταν ἡ θέση του ὅταν ἐπαναστάτησε ἡ Ἑλλάδα. Ἔβλεπε ὅτι τὸν περιέμενε τὸ μαρτύριο. Πολλοὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὸν πείσουν νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ. Ἀλλὰ ὁ «καλὸς ποιμὴν» ἀρνήθηκε, ἀκολουθώντας τὰ ἴχνη τῶν γενναίων προκατόχων του. Τοὺς εἶπε:

—Μὲ προτρέπετε εἰς φυγὴν; Μάχαιρα θὰ διέλθῃ τὰς ρύμας τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ λοιπῶν πόλεων

τῶν Χριστιανικῶν ἐπαρχιῶν. Ὑμεῖς ἐπιθυμεῖτε ὅπως ἐγὼ μεταμφιεζόμενος καταφύγω εἰς πλοῖον ἢ κλεισθῶ ἐν οἰκείᾳ οἰουδήποτε εὐεργετικοῦ ὑμῶν Πρεσβευτοῦ, ν' ἀκούω δὲ ἐκεῖθεν πῶς οἱ δῆμιοι κατακρεουργοῦσι τὸν χηρεύοντα Λαόν. Οὐχί! Καὶ πρὸς ἄλλους πιστοὺς τοῦ ποιμνίου του:

—Ἐγὼ διὰ τοῦτο εἶμαι Πατριάρχης, ὅπως σώσω τὸ Ἔθνος μου, οὐχὶ δὲ ὅπως ἀπολεσθῇ τοῦτο διὰ τῆς χειρὸς τῶν Γενιτσάρων. Ὁ θάνατός μου ἴσως ἐπιφέρῃ μεγαλυτέραν ὠφέλειαν παρὰ ἡ ζωὴ μου. Σήμερον (*Κυριακὴ τῶν Βαΐων*) θὰ φάγωμεν ἰχθύς, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τινὰς ἡμέρας καὶ ἴσως καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐβδομάδα οἱ ἰχθύες θὰ μᾶς φάγωσιν... Ναί, ἄς μὴ γίνω γλεύασμα τῶν ζώντων. Δὲν θὰ ἀνεχθῶ ὥστε εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς τῆς Ὁδησοῦ, τῆς Κερκύρας καὶ τῆς Ἀγκῶνος διερχόμενον ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀγνιῶν νὰ μὲ δακτυλοδεικτῶσι λέγοντες: «Ἴδου ἔρχεται ὁ φονεὺς Πατριάρχης». Ἄν τὸ Ἔθνος μου σωθῇ καὶ θριαμβεύσῃ, τότε πέποιθα θὰ μοῦ ἀποδώσῃ θυμίαμα ἐπαίνου καὶ τιμῶν, διότι ἐξέπληρωσα τὸ χρέος μου... Ὑπάγω ὅπου μὲ καλεῖ ὁ μέγας κληρὸς τοῦ Ἔθνους καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ὁ Οὐράνιος, ὁ μάρτυς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πράξεων.

Τι παράδειγμα διὰ τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας...

Ὁ ἀρχιμανδρίτης Γρηγόριος Δικαῖος, ποὺ εἶναι γνωστὸς μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Παπαφλέσσας εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἀναψε τὴν φλόγα τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως στὸ Μωρηά.

Φλογερὸς στὴν πίστη, ἔκανε νὰ ὠρμάσῃ ὁ ἄγουρος καρπὸς, ἡ μεγάλη ἀπόφασις τοῦ ἀγῶνος καὶ ἔλεγε:

—Ἕλληνες, ποτὲ μὴν ξεχνάτε τὸ χρέος σὲ Θεὸ καὶ σὲ πατρίδα! Σ' αὐτὰ τὰ δύο σας ἐξορκίζω ἢ νὰ νικήσουμε ἢ νὰ πεθάνουμε κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ!

Ἄλλος, ὁ Ναύαρχος Ἀνδρέας Μιαούλης ἔγραφε στὸν Γεώργιον Κουντουριώτην τὶς παρακάτω ὑπέροχες γραμμές:

—Ἄς μὴ λείψῃ, παρακαλῶ, καὶ ἡ Ὑμετέρα Ἐκλαμπρότης ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ συνεργήσῃ εἰς τὸ νὰ γίνωσιν αἱ ἀνήκουσαι πρὸς Κύριον πρὸς ἐξιλέωσιν τῆς Θείας Αὐτοῦ δικαιοσύνης ἰκεσία διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ ἐμοῦ τοῦ ἀναξίου καὶ ὄλου του Χριστεπωνύμου λαοῦ... ὅπως συνοδευούσης τῆς Θείας Αὐτοῦ Ἀγαθότητος, ἐνισχυθῶσιν ἀπὸ τὴν παντοδύναμον χάριν Του οἱ βραχίονες τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ οὕτω κατατροπώσαντες διὰ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς σημαίας τιμίου Σταυροῦ

καὶ τοὺς αἰσθητοὺς ἐχθροὺς τούτους, αὐτοὺς μὲν ὑποχρεώσωμεν καὶ ἅπαντας νὰ ὁμολογῶσι καὶ νὰ κηρύττωσι **Μέγας ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν Χριστιανῶν**, ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ δοξολογοῦντες νὰ ψάλλωμεν τὸ τοῦ προφητάνακτος ἢ **δεξιᾶ σου Κύριε δεδόξασται**.

Ὁ δὲ Κωνσταντῖνος Κανάρης μὲ προσευχὴν ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὸ κατόρθωμα στὸ λιμάνι τῆς Χίου. Ὅσο ἔλειπαν ἀπὸ τὸ νησί, ὅλος ὁ κόσμος γονατιστὸς προσευχό-

ταν γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τους. Καὶ ἡ ἐπιστροφή τους στὰ Ψαρὰ μὲ προσευχὴ εὐχαριστήριον κατέληξε. Οἱ ἱερεῖς μὲ τὰ ἐξαπτέρυγα, οἱ προύχοντες καὶ ὅλος ὁ λαὸς τὸν συνόδευσαν στὸν ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἐκεῖνη ἡ πομπὴ πάνω στὸ μικρὸ ἀλλὰ τρισένδοξο νησάκι, μᾶς θυμίζει τὰ χρόνια, ποὺ οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ αὐτοκράτορες καὶ οἱ χιλιотραγουδισμένοι νικηταὶ ἡρωικῶν ἀγῶνων ἀνέβαιναν ταπεινοὶ προσκυνηταὶ στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, γιὰ νὰ ψάλουν **«Τῇ ὑπερμάχῳ στρατηγῷ τὰ νικητήρια»**. Τότε παρομοίως, ὁ θρυλικὸς μπουρλοτιέρης κατέθεσε στὰ πόδια τῆς εἰκόνης τῆς Θεοτόκου τὸ στεφάνι του καὶ ἔπεσε μὲ τὸ μέτωπο κατὰ γῆς προσκυνώντας προσευχόμενος καὶ εὐχαριστώντας ἀπὸ βάθους καρδιάς τὸ Θεό. Κατόπιν ἐξομολογήθηκε, μετέλαβε τῶν ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων καὶ μὲ ταπεινῶσι καὶ σεμνότητι ἀπεσύρθη στὸ ἥσυχο σπιτάκι του.



ΚΟΛΟΚΟΤΡΩΝΗΣ ΠΡΟΣΕΥΧΟΜΕΝΟΣ

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μωρηᾶ, ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης εὐλαβεῖτο πολὺ τὴν Παναγία. Στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 1821 ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ τὴν Καλαμάτα γιὰ τὴν Τρίπολι. Στὰ χωριὰ ποὺ περνοῦσε, χτυποῦσαν οἱ καμπάνες, οἱ ἱερεῖς ἔβγαιναν μὲ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα, ἄνδρες, γυναῖκες, παιδὰ γονάτιζαν καὶ ἔκαναν δεήσεις. Γρήγορα ὅμως ὁ πρῶτος ἐνθουσιασμὸς ἔσβησε. Ὁ Ἀναγνωσταρᾶς, ὁ Μαυρομιχάλης, ὁ Παπαφλέσσας τράβηξαν γι' ἄλλοῦ. Ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης ἀπέμεινε κατάμονος μὲ τὸ ἄλογό του στὴν Καρύταινα. Τί θὰ ἔκαμνε; Τί θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ κἀνῃ ἕνας μονάχος, ὀλομόναχος; Τὸ πᾶν! Ὅταν φλογίζη τὴν καρδιά του, ἡ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Ἄλλ' ἄς ἀφήσουμε τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Γέρο τοῦ Μωρηᾶ νὰ μᾶς διηγηθῇ τί ἔκανε:

—Ἐκατσα ποὺ ἔσκαπέτισαν μὲ τὰ μπαιράκια τους, ἀπὲ ἑκατέβηκα κάτου· ἦτον μία ἐκκλησιὰ εἰς τὸν δρόμον, ἡ Παναγία στὸ Χρυσοβίτσι, καὶ τὸ καθησιό μου ἦτο ὅπου ἔκλαιγα τὴν Ἑλλάς.

Σίμωσε, ἔδεσε τὸ ἄλογό του σ' ἕνα δέντρο, μπῆκε μέσα, γονάτισε:

—Παναγιά μου, εἶπε, ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῆς καρδιάς του, καὶ τὰ μάτια τοῦ δάκρυσαν. Παναγιά μου, βοήθησε καὶ τούτη τῆ φορὰ τοὺς Ἕλληνας νὰ ψυχωθοῦν.

Ἐκανε τὸ σταυρό του. Ἀσπᾶσθηκε τὴν εἰκόνα της, βγῆκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἐκκλησιάκι, πήδησε στ' ἄλογό του καὶ ἔφυγε.

Λίγο πρὶν ἀρχίσει τὸν ἀγῶνα στὰ Δεσφενάκια εἶπε:

—Ἕλληνας, ἀπόψε ἦλθε ἡ Παναγία καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: **«Ἡ Παναγία, σκέπη, βοηθὸς καὶ προστασία!»** Μακάρι καὶ σήμερα στὴν Παναγία νὰ προσβλέπουμε καὶ τούτη τῆ δέηση νὰ λέμε: **«Παναγιά μου ψύχωσε τοὺς Ἕλληνας!»**.

Ἀκόμη, ἡ Καπετάνισσα Μπουμπουλίνα εἶπε στοὺς Προκρίτους καὶ στοὺς Δημογέροντες:

—Ἐχασα τὸν σύζυγό μου. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὁ πρεσβύτερος υἱός μου ἔπεσε μὲ τὰ ὄπλα ἀνὰ χεῖρας. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὁ δεύτερος καὶ μόνος υἱός μου, 14ετής τὴν ἡλικίαν, μάχεται μετὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ πιθανῶς νὰ εὕρῃ ἐνδοξὸν θάνατον. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ὑπὸ τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ Σταυροῦ θὰ ρεῦσῃ ἐπίσης τὸ αἷμα μου. **Ἐὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεός!** Ἀλλὰ θὰ νικήσωμεν ἢ θὰ παύσωμεν μὲν ζῶντες, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἔχωμεν τὴν παρήγορον ἰδέαν, ὅτι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ δὲν ἀφήσαμεν ὀπισθεν ἡμῶν δούλους τοὺς Ἕλληνας.

Ἴδου καὶ τὰ ἐπιβεβαιωτικὰ λόγια του στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη:

—Οἱ ἀγωνισταὶ βάστηξαν τὴν θρησκείαν τους τόσοι αἰῶνες μὲ τοὺς Τούρκους, καὶ τοὺς κἀναν τόσα μαρτύρια καὶ τὴν βᾶσταξαν! Καὶ λευτέρωσαν καὶ τὴν Πατρίδα τους, αὐτεῖνοι μὲ τὴν θρησκεία τους, ὅπου ἦταν πεντακόσιοι Τούρκοι εἰς τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ αὐτεῖνοι ἕνας καὶ χωρὶς τ' ἀναγκαῖα τοῦ πολέμου

καὶ τὴν μάθησιν οἱ περισσότεροι· καὶ τ' ἄρματα τους δεμένα μὲ σκοινιά. Καὶ ἡ πίστι εἰς τὸν Θεὸν—λευτέρωσαν τὴν Πατρίδα τους.

Διήλθον 196 χρόνια ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ οἱ πρόγονοί μας εἶπαν τὸ **Ἐλευθερία ἢ Θάνατος** καὶ θυσιάστηκαν γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία μας. Στὰ ἱερά τους κόκκαλα θεμελιώθηκε τὸ κράτος τοῦ Νέου Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ἀλήθεια, δύο ἐρωτήματα προβάλλουν ἐπιτακτικά:

(1) Πῶς ἐκδηλώνουμε τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνη καὶ τιμὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἥρωες τοῦ 1821;

(2) Πόσο ἀκλόνητη καὶ δυνατὴ εἶναι ἡ πίστη μας στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ στὴν προστασία τῆς Παναγίας;

Ὁ καθένας ἄς σκεφθεῖ...



Ἄς ἔλθωμεν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην, τὴν ὁποῖαν μὲ ἀπερίγραπτον λαχτᾶρα ἐπὶ τέσσερις αἰῶνας ἐπερίμενε τὸ ἔθνος τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Μὲ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὰς εὐχὰς ἀρχίζει ὁ ἀγὼν. Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς εὐλογεῖ τὸ Λάβαρον εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Λαύραν.

Ἐμπροσθέν του γονατίζουν οἱ ὄπλαρχηγοὶ καὶ δακρυσμένοι ὀρκίζονται. Ὁ Παλαιῶν Πατρῶν Γερμανὸς (1771-1826) διεκρίθη εἰς τὸν πολιτικὸν καὶ εἰς τὸν διπλωματικὸν τομέα. Ὁ ἴδιος εἶχε συντάξει τὴν Ἐπαναστατικὴν διακήρυξιν τῶν Ἑλλήνων πρὸς τὰς Εὐρωπαϊκὰς δυνάμεις. Εἰς αὐτὴν μεταξὺ ἄλλων ἐτόνιζε:

«Ἡμεῖς, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθνος τῶν Χριστιανῶν, βλέποντας ὅτι μᾶς καταφρονεῖ τὸ Ὄθωμανικὸν γένος καὶ σκοπεύει τὸν ὄλεθρον ἐναντίον μας, πότε μὲ ἕνα καὶ πότε μὲ ἄλλον τρόπον, ἀπεφασίσαμεν σταθερῶς ἢ νὰ ἀποθάνωμεν ὅλοι ἢ νὰ ἐλευθερωθῶμεν. Καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα βαστοῦμε τὰ ὄπλα εἰς χεῖρας, ζητοῦντες τὰ δικαιώματά μας. Εἴμεθα λοιπὸν βέβαιοι ὅτι ὅλα τὰ χριστιανικὰ βασίλεια γνωρίζουν τὰ δίκαιά μας καὶ ὄχι μόνον δὲν θέλουν μᾶς ἐναντιωθεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ θέλουν μᾶς συνδράμει καὶ ὅτι ἔχουν εἰς μνήμην ὅτι οἱ ἐνδοξοὶ πρόγονοί μας ἐφάνησάν ποτε ὠφέλιμοι εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα».

Διονυσίου Κοκκίνου
«Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάστασις»
Ἔκδοσις Ε' τόμ. Α', σελ. 179.

Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος

Κατὰ τὴν Β΄ Πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολὴν τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου

Τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Γόρτυνος κ. Τερεμίου.

Πρέπει ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί νὰ μελετοῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, γιατί σ' αὐτὴν μιλάει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ θέλημά Του. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεύουμε σωστά, γιατί ἂν τὴν ἐρμηνεύσουμε λαθασμένα, πέφτουμε σὲ αἵρεση καὶ ἡ αἵρεση εἶναι χαμός!

Ἔτσι, ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔγραψε στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων μία ἐπιστολή, στὴν ὁποία, μαζί μὲ ἄλλα θέματα, τοὺς μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ τοὺς ἔλεγε ὅτι ἡ ἡμέρα αὐτὴ τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ ἔλθει ξαφνικά, «ὅπως ὁ κλέφτης τὴ νύχτα!» Γι' αὐτὸ τοὺς ἔλεγε «νὰ εἶναι γρήγοροι καὶ νηφάλιοι». (Α΄ Θεσ. 5:1-6).

Αὐτὸν ὅμως τὸν λόγο τοῦ Ἀποστόλου μερικοὶ Χριστιανοὶ τὸν παρεξήγησαν καὶ σταμάτησαν τίς δουλειές τους. Γιατὶ σκέπτονταν ὅτι δὲν ἀξίζει νὰ δουλεύουμε, ἀφοῦ καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν στιγμή μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἡ Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ τελειώσῃ ἔτσι ἡ ζωὴ μας. Τὰ ἔμαθε αὐτὰ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος βρισκόμενος στὴν Κόρινθο καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη τὸ ἐπέβαλε νὰ γράψῃ καὶ δεύτερο γράμμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐξηγήσῃ καλύτερα τὸ θέμα.

Στὴ δεύτερη αὐτὴ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος τοὺς λέει ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἔρθῃ ἡ Δεύτερη Παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἂν δὲν γίνονταν πρῶτα δύο γεγονότα. Τὸ ἓνα εἶναι ἡ «ἀποστασία» καὶ τὸ ἄλλο εἶναι ὁ ἐρχομὸς τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου (2:3).

«Ἀποστασία» σημαίνει τὸ νὰ ἀποστατοῦν, τὸ νὰ φεύγουν δηλαδὴ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ νὰ ζητοῦν τὴν εὐτυχία τους σὲ ἁμαρτωλές ἡδονές καὶ σὲ παράνομα ἔργα. Πραγματικά, ὅπως τὸ εἶπε καὶ ὁ Ἰδιὸς ὁ Κύριός μας, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Δεύτερη Παρουσία Του οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ εἶναι ἀσεβεῖς καὶ ἀνίητικοι, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν κατακλισμὸ τοῦ Νῶε. (Βλ. Ματθ. 24:37-39). Λίγοι θὰ μείνουν στερεοὶ καὶ σταθεροὶ στὸ βράχο τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ, ἐκεῖ ὅπου μᾶς θέλει ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ στεκόμαστε. Ἀλλὰ καὶ γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λίγους θὰ ἔλθῃ ὁ ἀντίχριστος, γιὰ νὰ παραπλανήσῃ καὶ αὐτούς.

Τι εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος Χριστιανοί μου; Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἐπιστολὴ του μᾶς δίνει μερικὰ χαρακτηριστικά, γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα θέλω νὰ σᾶς μιλήσω σήμερα:

(α) Κατὰ πρῶτον μᾶς λέει ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι «ἄνθρωπος» (2:3). Ἄνθρωπος κανονικὸς, γεννημένος ἀπὸ μάνα καὶ πατέρα. Δὲν θὰ εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος διάβολος ποὺ θὰ σαρκωθεῖ, γιατί αὐτὸ τὸ θαῦμα τῆς σαρκώσεως μόνο ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ μποροῦσε νὰ τὸ κάνει. Τέτοια δύναμη δὲν τὴν ἔχει ὁ διάβολος. Ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος. Σ' αὐτὸν ὅμως τὸν ἄνθρωπο θὰ μπεῖ μέσα τὸν ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ὁποῖος καὶ θὰ τὸν κυριεύει καὶ θὰ τὸν παρακινεῖ νὰ κάνει πολλές ἁμαρτίες, γιὰ νὰ παρακινεῖ ἔπειτα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀντίχριστος τὸν κόσμον σὲ ἁμαρτίες. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν ἐπιστολὴ του ἐδῶ ποὺ μελετᾶμε τὸν λέει «ἄνθρωπο τῆς ἁμαρτίας» (2:3). Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ ἀντίχριστος, μὲ τὸ νὰ παρακινεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὴν ἁμαρτία θὰ φέρει

μεγάλῃ καταστροφῇ στὸν κόσμον, ὁ Ἀπόστολος τὸν λέει παρακάτω καὶ «νιδ τῆς ἀπωλείας» (2:3).

(β) Ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ μοιάζει πολὺ μὲ τὸν διάβολο. Ὁ διάβολος, ὅπως ξέρετε, πρῶτα ἦταν ἄγγελος, ἀλλὰ ὑπερηφανεύθηκε, εἶπε ὅτι θὰ στήσῃ τὸ θρόνον του παραπάνω ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ (βλ. Ἦσ. 14:13), καὶ ἔτσι ἔπεσε ἀπὸ τὴν

ὑψηλὴ του θέση καὶ ἔγινε διάβολος. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια λοιπὸν χαρακτηρίζει τὸν διάβολο. Καὶ ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια θὰ εἶναι τὸ κύριο χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου. Γιατὶ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἐδῶ στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἐπιστολὴ του, ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος «θὰ ἐναντιωθεῖ καὶ θὰ σηκώσῃ τὸ κεφάλι του ἐναντίον κάθε ἄλλου ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Θεός, ὥστε ὁ ἴδιος νὰ ἐνθρονισθεῖ στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς Θεός, προσπαθώντας νὰ ἀποδείξῃ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ὅτι εἶναι Θεός». (2:4).

(γ) Ὁ ἀντίχριστος, λέγεται ἀντίχριστος ἐπειδὴ θὰ θέλει νὰ μιμηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ παραπλανήσει ἔτσι εὐκολώτερα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς ἔκανε θαύματα, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ κάνει καὶ αὐτὸς θαύματα, ψευδοθαύματα, «σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ψεύδους», ὅπως τὰ λέει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν ἐπιστολὴ ποὺ μελετᾶμε. (2:9). Καὶ ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς ἔχει τὸ «μυστήριό» Του, τὸ ὁποῖο γευόμαστε μὲ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία καὶ ὑποσχόμαστε ὅτι δὲν θὰ τὸ προδώσουμε στοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς πίστεως—«οὐ μὴ γάρ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς σου



Καθολικὸ Ἱεράς Μητρίας Ἀγίων Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἰππώνος & Σεραφεῖμ τοῦ Σαρώφ Τρικέρφου Φωκίος

τὸ μυστήριον εἶπω», λέμε—ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος ἔχει τὸ δικό του μυστήριο.

Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στὴν Β΄ πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἐπιστολή του ὁμιλεῖ γιὰ «μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας», γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μάλιστα λέγει ὅτι «ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται». (2:7). Ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μᾶς ἀποκαλύφθηκε στὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ δικοῦ Του μυστηρίου, ἐνῶ ὁ ἀντίχριστος θὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ στὸ τέλος τοῦ μυστηρίου τῆς ἀνομίας του. Καὶ ὅταν ἔλθει ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ἀδελφοί μου, τότε θὰ ἔλθει ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τὴν Δεύτερή Του Παρουσία, γιὰ νὰ τὸν συντρίψει καὶ γιὰ νὰ παραλάβει τὰ τέκνα Του στὴ Βασιλεία Του τὴν ἐπουράνιο. Ὡστε λοιπὸν ἔχει χαροποὶδὸ χαρακτήρα ἡ Δεύτερη τοῦ Χριστοῦ Παρουσία, ὅπως χαροποὶδὸς πάλι εἶναι καὶ ἡ πρώτη Του Παρουσία. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε στὸ τροπάριο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία «...ἵνα τὰς δύο σκιρτῶν μεγαλύνω Ἀγαθὴ Παρουσίας Σου»!

Μὲ τὸν ἐρχομὸ Του λοιπὸν ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ συντρίψει τὸν ἀντίχριστο, αὐτόν, πὸν μὲ τὰ ψευδοθαύματά του παρίστανε τὸν Θεὸ καὶ παραπλανοῦσε πολλοὺς. Καὶ πῶς θὰ τὸν συντρίψει; Μὲ ἓνα «φύσημα τοῦ στόματός Του», μᾶς λέγει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Β΄ Θεσ. 2:8)! Ἔνα τίποτα λοιπὸν ἦταν ἡ δύναμή του.

Ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ἀγαπητοί μου Χριστιανοί; Δὲν ξέρω νὰ σᾶς πῶ. Ξέρω μόνο νὰ πῶ ὅτι κάθε ἐποχὴ ἔχει τὸν δικό της ἀντίχριστο, πρόδρομο τοῦ μεγάλου ἀντιχρίστου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέγει ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ του ἀκόμη ὅτι «ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασι» (Α΄ Ἰωαν. 2:18). Τὸ ἐρώτημα, ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ ἀντίχριστος, τὸ ἔκαναν στὸν ἅγιο Κοσμᾶ τὸν Αἰτωλό. Καὶ ἐκεῖνος, φωτισμένος ἅγιος ὅπως ἦταν, ἀπάντησε: «Ἀντίχριστος εἶναι ὁ πάπας»!

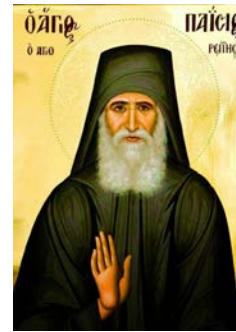
Δεχόμαστε καὶ παραδεχόμαστε τὴν ἐρμηνεία αὐτῆ, γιὰ τὴν εἶπε ἅγιος καὶ γιὰ τὴν βλέπουμε κοινὰ γνωρίσματα τοῦ πάπα καὶ τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου, ὅπως μᾶς τὸν παρέστησε σήμερα ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: Ὁ ἀντίχριστος μάθαμε σήμερα ὅτι θὰ εἶναι λίαν ὑπερήφανος, θὰ «υπεραίρεται» καὶ θὰ παριστάνει τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ Θεό. Τέτοιος εἶναι καὶ ὁ πάπας: «Υπεραίρεται» καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ἀνακήρυξε τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ «θεό», γιὰ ἀλάθητο. Οἱ ὑπήκοοί του ἔχουν ὡς δόγμα πίστεως τους τὸ ἀλάθητο τοῦ πάπα!

Ὁ ἀντίχριστος πάλι, μᾶς εἶπε σήμερα ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, θὰ κάνει ἀπόπειρα νὰ μπεῖ στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναὸ καὶ νὰ λάβει σ' αὐτὸν λατρευτικὴ τιμὴ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ πάπας θέλει νὰ ἐνωθεῖ μαζί μας, γιὰ νὰ ἔρχεται στοὺς Ναοὺς μας καὶ νὰ τὸν προσκυνᾶμε ὡς ἀλάθητο.

Ὅχι, δὲν θέλουμε τὴν ἔνωση μαζί του. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε μαθητὲς τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔλεγε στοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὄχι μόνον νὰ μὴν ἐνωθοῦν μετὰ τὸν πάπα, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ τὸν καταριῶνται. «**Τὸν πάπα νὰ καταρᾶσθε**», ἔλεγε στὸ κήρυγμά του...

Ὁ Ἅγιος Παῖσιος γιὰ τὸν Ἀγώνα τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγορείτου, Λόγοι ΣΤ΄, «Περὶ Προσευχῆς», ἐκδόσεις Ἱερὸν Ἠσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος», Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης 2012, σελ. 199-200.



Γέροντα, πῶς θὰ μπορέσω τὴν Σαρακοστὴ νὰ ἀγωνισθῶ περισσότερο στὴν ἐγκράτεια;

-Οἱ κοσμικοὶ τώρα τὴν Σαρακοστὴ προσέχουν κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο τὴν ἐγκράτεια, ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μοναχοὶ πάντα πρέπει νὰ προσέχουμε. Τὸ κυριώτερο ὅμως πὸν πρέπει νὰ προσέξει κανεὶς εἶναι τὰ ψυχικὰ πάθη καὶ μετὰ τὰ σωματικά. Γιατί, ἂν δώσει προτεραιότητα στὴ σωματικὴ ἄσκηση καὶ δὲν κάνει ἀγώνα, γιὰ νὰ ξεριζωθοῦν τὰ ψυχικὰ πάθη, τίποτε δὲν κάνει. Πῆγε μία φορὰ σὲ ἓνα μοναστήρι ἓνας λαϊκὸς στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Σαρακοστῆς καὶ κάποιος μοναχὸς τοῦ φέρθηκε ἀπότομα, σκληρά. Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ὁ καημένος εἶχε καλὸ λογισμὸ καὶ τὸν δικαιολόγησε. Ἦρθε μετὰ καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Δὲν τὸν παρεξηγῶ, πάτερ. Ἦταν βλέπεις ἀπὸ τὸ τριήμερι!». Ἄν τὸ τριήμερι πὸν ἔκανε ἦταν πνευματικὸ θὰ εἶχε μία γλυκύτητα πνευματικὴ καὶ θὰ μιλοῦσε στὸν ἄλλο μετὰ λίγη καλοσύνη. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς ζόριζε ἐγωϊστικὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του νὰ κάνει Τριήμερο, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τοῦ ἔφταιγαν.

Γέροντα, τί νὰ σκέφτομαι τὴν Σαρακοστή;

-Τὸ Πάθος, τὴν θυσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ σκέφτεσαι. Ἄν καὶ ἐμεῖς οἱ μοναχοὶ πρέπει συνέχεια νὰ ζοῦμε τὸ Πάθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὸ μᾶς βοηθοῦν σ' αὐτὸ κάθε μέρα τὰ διάφορα τροπάρια, ὅλες οἱ Ἀκολουθίες.

Τὴν Μεγάλη Σαρακοστὴ μᾶς δίνεται ἡ μεγαλύτερη εὐκαιρία γιὰ νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε καὶ νὰ συμμετέχουμε ἐντονότερα στὸ σωτήριο Πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου μας, μετάνοια καὶ μετάνοιες, μετ' ἐκκοπὴ τῶν παθῶν καὶ μετ' ἐλάτωση τῶν τροφῶν, ἀπὸ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Χριστό.

Ἄν ἀξιοποιήσουμε, ὅσο μποροῦμε, τὸ πνευματικὸ αὐτὸ στάδιο μετὰ τὶς πολλὰς προϋποθέσεις καὶ δυνατότητες πὸν μᾶς δίνονται, γιὰ νὰ πλησιάσουμε περισσότερο στὸν Ἐσταυρωμένον Χριστό, γιὰ νὰ βοηθηθοῦμε ἀπὸ Αὐτὸν καὶ νὰ χαροῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Ἀνάσταση ἀλλοιωμένοι πνευματικά, ἀφοῦ θὰ ἔχουμε ζήσει πνευματικότερα τὴν Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή.

Εὔχομαι καλὴ δύναμη τὴν Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστὴ, γιὰ νὰ ἀνεβεῖτε στὸν Γολγοθᾶν κοντὰ στὸν Χριστό, μαζί μετὰ τὴν Παναγία καὶ τὸν Προστάτη σας Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Θεολόγο, γιὰ νὰ συμμετάσχετε στὸ φρικτὸ Πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου μας. Ἀμήν.

Οἱ Παρακαταθήκες τῶν Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ '21

Τοῦ Γιώργου Ν. Παπαθανασόπουλου.

Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἔχουμε πάθει ἓνα γερὸ στραπάτσο τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια. Αὐτὸ ἔχει ἐπηρεάσει κυρίως τὶς εὐαίσθητες ψυχὲς τῶν νέων μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὑφίστανται τὶς βαρύτερες συνέπειες ἀπὸ τὰ λάθη τῶν μεγαλύτερων τους. Τὰ παιδιά καὶ τοὺς νέους μας χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλουν καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ξέρουν, τοὺς κάναμε σὰν ἓνα ζαλισμένο κοπάδι, ποὺ δὲν ξέρει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ πηγαίνει... Δὲν μαθαίνουν νὰ ἐκτιμῶν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἔχουν, δὲν βοηθοῦνται νὰ ἔχουν ταυτότητα, ἰδιοπροσωπία, ὄραμα ζωῆς.

Ἡ μεγάλη εὐθύνη μας εἶναι ὅτι ἔχουμε ξεχάσει κι ἐπομένως δὲν μεταδίδουμε τὶς ὑποθήκες τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821, ποὺ μᾶς ἔδωσαν ὄχι μόνον τὴν ἐλευθερία ποὺ ἀπολαμβάνουμε, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἦθος, ἀρχές, ἰδανικά. Νὰ θυμίσουμε κάποιες ἀπὸ τὶς ὑποθήκες τους. Ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μωριά, ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τῆς ἀπελευθέρωσής μας ἀπὸ τὸν τουρκικὸ ζυγὸ, ὁ Θεόδωρος Κολοκοτρώνης, μιλώντας στοὺς νέους τοῦ Α΄ Γυμνασίου Ἀθηνῶν, στὴν Πνύκα, εἶπε, μεταξύ των ἄλλων:

—Ἐγὼ παιδιά μου... σὰς εἶπα ὅσα ὁ ἴδιος εἶδα, ἤκουσα, καὶ ἐγνώρισα, διὰ νὰ ὠφεληθῆτε ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπερασμένα, καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ κακὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς διχονοίας, τὴν ὁποία νὰ ἀποστρέφεσθε, καὶ νὰ ἔχετε ὁμόνοια. Ἐμᾶς μὴ μᾶς τηρᾶτε πλέον. Τὸ ἔργο μας καὶ ὁ καιρὸς μας ἐπέρασε. Καὶ αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς γενεᾶς, ἡ ὁποία σὰς ἀνοιξε τὸ δρόμο, θέλουν μετ' ὀλίγον περάσει. Τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς ζωῆς μας θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα τοῦ θανάτου μας, καθὼς τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀσωμάτων θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα καὶ ἡ αὐριανὴ ἡμέρα. Εἰς ἐσᾶς μένει νὰ ἰσάσετε καὶ νὰ στολίσετε τὸν τόπο, ὁποῦ ἡμεῖς ἐλευθερώσαμε· καὶ γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ τοῦτο, **πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε ὡς θεμέλια τῆς πολιτείας τὴν ὁμόνοια, τὴν θρησκεία... καὶ τὴν φρόνιμον ἐλευθερία.**

Ὁ ἄλλος μέγας ἀγωνιστῆς τοῦ 1821, ὁ Γιάννης Μακρυγιάννης, γράφει στὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του:

—Κι ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς θέλησε νὰ κάμει νεκρανάστασιν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα μου, νὰ τὴν λευτερώσει ἀπὸ τὴν τυραγνίαν τῶν Τούρκων, ἀξίωσε κι ἐμένα νὰ δουλέψω κατὰ δύναμη λιγότερον ἀπὸ τὸν χειρότερον πατριώτη μου Ἕλληνα... Τὸ λοιπὸν δουλέψαμεν ὅλοι μαζί, νὰ τὴν φυλάμε... Καὶ εἰς τὸ ἐξῆς νὰ μάθομεν γνώση, ἂν θέλομεν νὰ φκιάσομεν χωριόν, νὰ ζήσομε ὅλοι μαζί. Ἐγραψα γυμνὴ τὴν ἀλήθεια, νὰ ἰδοῦνε ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες νὰ

ἀγωνίζονται διὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους, διὰ τὴν θρησκεία τους, νὰ ἰδοῦνε καὶ τὰ παιδιά μου καὶ νὰ λένε: «Ἐχομεν ἀγῶνες πατρικούς, ἔχομεν θυσίες», ἂν εἶναι ἀγῶνες καὶ θυσίες. Καὶ νὰ μπαίνουν σὲ φιλοτιμίαν καὶ **νὰ ἐργάζονται εἰς τὸ καλὸ τῆς πατρίδας τους, τῆς θρησκείας τους καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας...**

Τὶς ὑπηρεσίες ποὺ πρόσφεραν στὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Ἔθνος οἱ ἀγωνιστῆς τοῦ 1821 ἐκτίμησε ὁ σπουδαῖος ἄνθρωπος καὶ δικαστῆς Γεώργιος Τερτσέτης, ποὺ ἀρνήθηκε νὰ καταδικάσει σὲ θάνατο τὸν Θεόδωρο Κολοκοτρώνη, ἐκτίμησε τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὴ γενναϊότητά του, τὸν ἀγάπησε σὰν πατέρα του καὶ τὸν ἔπεισε νὰ τοῦ ὑπαγορεύσει τὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του. Ὁ Τερτσέτης σὲ λόγῳ του γιὰ τὴν 25^{ην} Μαρτίου, τὸ 1869, τονίζει:

—Ἐγὼ, κύριοι ἀκροαταί, σκεπτόμενος καὶ ἀναλογιζόμενος τοὺς καιροὺς καὶ τὰ πράγματα τί πρέπει καὶ οἱ νέες γενεές τῆς Ἑλλάδος νὰ προσφέρουν στὴν

οἰκουμένην, εὐρίσκω καὶ λέγω, νὰ προσφέρουν πρέπει παραδείγματα ἀθάνατα ἀρετῆς. Μὴν κλείσωμεν, φίλοι καὶ ἀδελφοί, τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μας εἰς τὴν λάμπιν τοῦ καθήκοντος καὶ τῆς ἀποστολῆς μας.

Σήμερα καὶ μετὰ τὴν εὐκαιρία τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς 25^{ης} Μαρτίου καὶ μπρὸς στὸν γκρεμὸ ποὺ βρισκόμαστε ὀφείλομε νὰ ἀφυπνιστοῦμε καὶ νὰ δώσουμε τὸ παράδειγμα στὴ νεολαία ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὸ Ἔθνος δὲν ὑπάρχουν χωρὶς ἐλευθερία. Καὶ ἐλευθερία δὲν εἶναι μόνον νὰ ἀποτινάξουμε τὸ ζυγὸ μας ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους τυράννους, εἶναι

κύριως νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη μας, νὰ ζήσομε ὡς ὄντα μετὰ ῥίζες καὶ βάθος καὶ νὰ δεῖξουμε τὴν ἐμπρακτὴ εὐγνωμοσύνη μας πρὸς ὅσους μᾶς ἔδωσαν τὴν ἐλευθερία καὶ μᾶς δίδαξαν ἀξιοπρέπεια καὶ ἦθος.



Οἱ φτωχοὶ εἶναι γιατροὶ τῶν ψυχῶν μας, εὐεργέτες καὶ προστάτες μας. Διότι δὲν δίνεις τόσα, ὅσα παίρνεις. Δίνεις χρήματα καὶ παίρνεις τὴν Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Ἀνακουφίζεις τὴν φτώχεια καὶ συμφιλιώνεις τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου μετὰ τὸν Κύριον. Βλέπεις ὅτι δὲν εἶναι ἴση ἡ ἀνταπόδοση μετὰ ὅσα δίνεις. Γιατὶ τὰ δικά σου μένουν στὴν γῆ, ἐνῶ τὰ κέρδη σου στὸν οὐρανὸν. Αὐτὰ, ποὺ δίνεις χάνονται, ἐνῶ αὐτὰ ποὺ παίρνεις παραμένουν αἰώνια. Τὰ πρῶτα καταστρέφονται, τὰ δευτέρα δένφθειρονται.

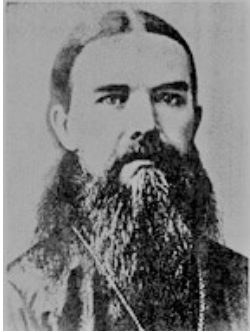
Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος



RAISING CHILDREN

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, 4th edition, published by St. Paisius Monastery, Safford, AZ (2016), pp. 37-42.

Christian Upbringing



The aim towards which everything in this process should be directed is this: that this new man, when he comes to awareness, might recognize himself not only as a rational and free man, but at the same time as a person who has entered into an obligation with the Lord, with Whom his eternal lot is joined inseparably; and that he might not only

acknowledge himself to be such, but might also find himself capable of acting according to this obligation and might see that his preeminent attraction is to this.

The question arises, how can this be attained? How should one act with regard to a baptized child so that when he comes to age he might not desire anything else than to be a true Christian? In other words, how does one raise him in a Christian way?

To answer this we will not undertake to examine everything in detail. We will limit ourselves to a general survey of the whole topic of Christian upbringing, having in mind to show how, in every circumstance, to support and strengthen the good side in children, and how to make powerless and crush what is bad.

Here, first of all, our attention should be directed to the infant in the cradle, before any kind of capabilities have awakened in him. The child is alive; consequently one can influence his life. Here we should think of the influence of the Holy Mysteries, and with them the whole churchly way of life, and at the same time the faith and piety of the parents. All this together constitutes a saving atmosphere around the infant. By all of this the life of grace which has been conceived in the infant is instilled mystically.

The frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (one should add, as frequently as possible) joins His new member to the Lord in the most lively and active way through His most pure Body and Blood. It sanctifies him, gives him peace within himself, and makes him inaccessible to the dark powers. People who follow this advice notice that on the day when a child is given Communion, he is immersed in a deep calm without the powerful movements of all his natural needs, even those which are most powerfully felt in children. Sometimes the child is filled with joy and a playfulness of spirit in which he is ready to embrace everyone as his own.

Often Holy Communion is accompanied also by miracles. St. Andrew of Crete in his childhood did not speak for a long time, but when his grieved parents turned to prayer

and the reception of grace, during the time of Communion the Lord by His grace loosed the bonds of his tongue, which afterwards gave the Church to drink of torrents of eloquence and wisdom. One doctor, from his own observation, testifies that for the most part when there are illnesses in children, the children should be taken to Holy Communion, and very rarely does he have need to use later any kind of medical help.

A great influence is exercised on the child by frequently taking him to church, by having him kiss the Holy Cross, the Gospel, the icons, and by covering him with the veils. Likewise, at home frequently placing him under the icons, frequently signing him with the sign of the Cross, sprinkling him with holy water, the burning of incense, making the sign of the Cross over his cradle, his food, and everything connected with him, the blessing of a priest, the bringing into the house of icons from church—the service of *molebens*—and in general everything from the church, in a wondrous way warms and nourishes the life of grace in the child and is always the most safe and impenetrable protection against the attacks of the invisible dark powers who everywhere are ready to penetrate into the developing soul so as to infect it by their activity.

Behind this visible protection there is an invisible one: the guardian angel placed by the Lord to protect the child from the very minute of his baptism. He watches over him and by his presence invisibly influences him, and when necessary inspires the parents to know what they should for a child who is in danger.

But all these strong protections and these powerful and active inspirations can be dissolved and made fruitless by unbelief, carelessness, impiety, and the bad life of the parents. This is because the means mentioned here are either not used, or are used not in the proper way; here the inward influence of the parents on the child is especially important. It is true that the Lord is merciful to the innocent; but there is a tie which we cannot understand between the souls of the parents and the soul of the child, and we cannot define the extent of the influence of the former on the latter. At the same time, when the parents exert a bad influence, to some extent the mercy and condescension of God are still given to the child. But it sometimes happens that this divine aid ceases, and then the causes which have been prepared bring forth their fruit. Therefore, the spirit of faith and piety of the parents should be regarded as the most powerful means for the preservation, upbringing and strengthening of the life of grace in children.

The Influence of the Parents upon the Child

The spirit of the infant has, as it were, no movement as yet in the first days, months, and even years. It is impossible to communicate anything for him to assimilate by the usual means of communication, but one may influence him in another way. There is a certain special way of communica-

tion between souls through the heart. One spirit influences another by means of the feelings. The ease of exerting such an influence upon the soul of an infant is in direct proportion to the fullness and depth of the parents' feeling for the child. The father and mother, as it were, disappear into the child and put their whole soul into his welfare. And if their spirit is penetrated with piety, it cannot be that in some way this will not influence the soul of the child.

The best outward conductor in this respect is the eyes. Whereas in the other senses the soul remains hidden, the eyes open their gaze to others. This is the meeting place of one soul with another. Let the openings be used for the passage of holy feelings from the souls of the mother and father to the soul of the child. Their souls cannot help but anoint the soul of the child with this holy oil. It is necessary that in the gaze of the parents there should be not only love, which is so natural, but also the faith that in their arms there is something more than a simple child. The parents must have the hope that He Who gave them this treasure under their watch as a vessel of grace might furnish them also with sufficient means to preserve him. And finally, there should be ceaseless prayer performed in the Spirit, aroused by hope according to faith.

When in this way the parents protect the cradle of their child with this spirit of sincere piety, and when at the same time, on the one hand the guardian angel, and on the other the Holy Mysteries and all of Church life, act upon him from without and from within—by this there is formed around the newly begun life a spiritual atmosphere akin to it which will pour into it its own character, just as blood, the principle of animal life, derives many of its characteristics from the surrounding atmosphere. It is said that a newly made vessel will preserve for a long time, perhaps permanently, the odor of whatever was poured into it at that time. This can also be said about the atmosphere surrounding children. It penetrates in a grace-giving and saving way into the forms of life just being established in the child and places its seal upon him. Here also there is a protection that cannot be penetrated by the influence of evil spirits.

Having begun in such a way from the cradle, one must continue it later, and during the whole time of upbringing: in childhood, in adolescence, and in young manhood. The Church, its life, and the Holy Mysteries are like a tabernacle (tent) for the children, and they should be under it without leaving it. Examples indicate how saving and fruitful this is (such as the life of the Prophet Samuel; the life of St. Theodore Sykeote (April 22), and others). These alone can even replace all the means of upbringing, as indeed has been done in many cases successfully. The ancient method of upbringing consisted primarily in precisely this.

When a child's powers begin to awaken, one after another, parents and those who are raising children should double

their attention. For when, under the influence of the means which have been indicated, the longing for God will grow and increase in them and draw the powers of the child after it, at this same time the sin which dwells in them also does not sleep, but strives to take possession of these same powers. The inevitable consequence of this is inward warfare. Since children are incapable of conducting it themselves, their place is understandably taken by the parents. But since this warfare must be conducted through the powers of the children, the parents must strictly watch over the first beginnings of their awakening, so that from the first minute they may give these powers a direction in harmony with the chief aim towards which they must be directed.

Thus begins the warfare of the parents with the sin that dwells in the child. Although this sin is deprived of points of support, still it acts, and so as to find a good resting place for itself it tries to take possession of the powers of the body and soul. One must not allow it to do this, but must, as it were, uproot these powers from the hand of sin and give them over to God.

But so that this might be done with a good foundation and with a rational knowledge of the reliability of the means that have been chosen, one must make clear for oneself what it is that sin desires, what nourishes it, and precisely how it takes possession of us. The fundamental things which arouse and draw one towards sin are: arbitrariness of mind (or curiosity) in the mental faculty, self-will in the faculty of will, and pleasures in the faculty of feeling.

Therefore one must so conduct and direct the developing powers of the soul and body so as not to give them over into captivity to enjoyments of the flesh, to curiosity, to self-will and self-centered pleasures—for this would be a sinful captivity—but on the contrary, one must train the child how to separate himself from them and master them, and thus as much as possible to render them powerless and harmless. This is the chief thing in the beginning. The whole of the upbringing can later be brought into harmony with this beginning. Let us look again, with this aim, at the chief activities of the body, soul, and spirit.



Concern for spiritual things will unite the family. Do you want your child to be obedient? Then from the beginning bring him up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Don't think that it isn't necessary for a child to listen to the Scriptures; the first thing he will hear from them will be *Honor your father and mother*, and immediately you will begin to reap your reward.

St. John Chrysostom

ON SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

By the Righteous Elder Cleopa, from "The Counsels of Elder Cleopa."



Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ said: *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not, might see; and that they which see might be made blind.* (Jn 9:39). There is much that we can learn from these words if we examine them attentively. One aspect that we can observe is the spiritual blindness of a person enslaved to sin.

The Scribes and Pharisees were spiritually blind. They not only did not believe in the miracles wrought by the Lord Christ, but they blasphemed against Him, saying *He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils he casteth out devils.* (Mk 3:22). They were so blind that they had eyes but did not see; they had ears but would not hear. That is why the Lord called them *blind Pharisees*.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet David spoke about this spiritual blindness of the scribes and Pharisees, the Judaic priests and lawgivers and the punishment which awaited them, saying: *Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake* (Pss 68:23). The great prophet Isaiah also prophesied about the spiritual blindness of the Israelite people, saying: *The Lord hath poured upon you the spirit of deep sleep and hath closed your eyes* (Isa 29:10), adding that neither could their ears hear until that day. Then he said: *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.* (Isa 6:10).

How is spiritual blindness born in man's mind? It comes from numerous sources. First, it follows on the heels of sin. The Savior attested to that saying: *Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.* (Jn 3:19-20).

Spiritual blindness also comes from lack of faith and hard-heartedness regarding God. The Prophet Isaiah referred to this, saying, *I have spread out my hands all the day toward rebellious people ... that have provoked me.* (Isa 65:2). That is why God hardened their hearts so they would not see with their eyes nor hear with their ears; until this present day. (cf Deut 29:4). Spiritual blindness comes from lack of faith and a hardened heart, as Holy Scripture says: *The Lord said to me, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat,*

and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. (Isa 6:9-10).

I said that one of the sources of spiritual blindness is sin. Now let us see why sin brings such spiritual blindness and darkens the mind of man. According to Holy Scripture, sin is called the *work of darkness*, (Isa 29:15; Rom 11:12; Eph 5:11). As a work of darkness, every kind of sin darkens the mind of man and brings confusion as well as spiritual sickness and blindness. How can we drive the darkness of sin from our minds? Only through abandoning sin. This is accomplished by obeying the words of God, through fasting, prayer, tearful repentance, sincere confession to one's spiritual father, and fulfilling the commandments of God. In these good deeds, everyone—regardless of how sinful he is—comes to the light of knowledge and draws near to God, thus leaving behind a man darkened by sin and becoming a chosen vessel of God and son of the Kingdom of heaven.

At times spiritual blindness comes to a person through the consent of God. This has happened to many who were truly chosen by God. One very clear example of this is seen in the calling of the great Apostle Paul who had formerly been called Saul and who had been a fierce persecutor of the Church.

Now let us take a look at spiritual blindness in our own times. We have all seen people who are physically blind, either from their birth, or as the result of an accident or sickness. Whenever we see a blind person we are filled with mercy for him, sometimes even being moved to tears. He cannot walk about independently. He cannot see the sky, the sun, or the beauty of flowers. He cannot see icons or the cross that he venerates, nor even the face of his mother or children or friends. The blind man cannot read a holy book, he is limited in the work he can do and often feels like a burden to his family and society¹. Such a person suffering from blindness is deserving of our compassion.

God comforts a person who cannot see with other gifts: deeper wisdom, greater expression of speech, humility, the gift of tears, and often a beautiful singing voice. The Creator of all, in His divine care, has mercy on His creation. That is why the Holy Spirit says, through the mouth of the Psalmist: *The Lord maketh wise the blind.* (Pss 145:8).

Blindness of the mind, the heart, the will and the conscience is much more serious and deserving of pity, for the soul is of such greater value than the body. That is why the Savior says, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mk 8:36-37). God created the soul to be eternal, and thus blindness of soul is one of the most serious sickness, which leads to the soul's loss and eternal condemnation. That is why healing such an illness is so much more difficult and so much more important than healing physical blindness.

What do we mean by spiritual blindness or blindness of the soul? This is a darkening and enslavement of the soul to all kinds of spiritual and physical sins: arrogant attitudes, hard-heartedness, a weak will and conscience, disbelief, doubting the Faith, sectarianism, hopelessness, pride, suicide, physical and spiritual murder, abortion, hatred and anger toward others, fornication, lying, avarice, miserliness, gluttony, drunkenness, laziness, and so on. Every kind of sin is a sickness of the soul which hurls a person into noetic blindness and numbness and brings physical sickness to the body. If we do not turn to repentance, confession and spiritual rejuvenation to abandon the sins which enslave us, then spiritual blindness—like any other sickness—leads to spiritual death and the condemnation of the soul to the torments of hell.

How is an Orthodox Christian anything but spiritually blind when he abandons his faith in God and leaves the Church founded by our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles, going rather to every other kind of religious sect? How is one not spiritually blind and ill when he does not come to church for years, does not pray, does not read holy books, and puts off repentance and confession until the hour of his death? How is a person not spiritually blind and wretched when he calls himself a Christian but spends his time, resources and health in passing cares and sins that lead to death? How is a Christian not wretched and lacking the light of knowledge and spiritual joy when he hasn't read Holy Scriptures especially the New Testament—at least once, as well as other Orthodox books that illumine and guide the mind and soul toward Christ? What is the Christian who wastes his life in drunkenness, fornication, arguing, judging, full of hate but a man who is weak in faith and deceived by the devil? He is blind and spiritually sick, walking along a path of perdition and unable to raise himself up from sin so that he can repent and save his soul.

How blind and lacking in faith are those husbands and wives who marry only for physical pleasure and who avoid giving birth to children; or if they do bear children, they scandalize them by their sinful lives and do not give them a healthy Christian education. How many disputes, needless divorces, abortions, drunkenness, lack of religious education, destroy family unity which is the very vine of life and society. All of these sins enslave us because of our spiritual blindness. They come upon us through lack of compassion, lack of faith in God, lack of Christian education and knowledge of the Gospel, lack of life in the Church, postponing confession, not having a good spiritual father and through lack of remembrance of death and the judgment that awaits us.

Now you see what spiritual blindness is and how it enslaves so many. Some through physical sins and others through spiritual sins and hardness of heart, lack of prayer, ignoring God and through worldly cares. In the eyes of the Savior who

will judge us, no one is good, no one is righteous, pure and worthy of the life to come.

So what are we to do? How can we be healed of this terrifying hardness of heart, enslavement to the passions and blindness in our souls? Such healing can only be wrought through abandoning the sins which enslave us, through returning again to Christ, to the Church, to prayer, to humility and repentance. We have to do what the blind man in the Gospel did when Christ asked him *Dost thou believe in the Son of God?* He answered with his entire heart, “*Lord, I believe.*” *And he worshipped Him.* (Jn. 9:35, 38).

The Lord likewise asks us: *Christians, do you firmly believe in Christ, the Savior of the world? Do you obey His commandments? Do you believe the words of the Holy Gospel that you will have eternal life? Do you believe that God created the world, that He is merciful toward it and that He alone can save it from destruction and death?*

The answer that each of us will give to these questions will determine either our salvation or condemnation.

If we firmly believe in the Son of God, then we will fulfill His commandments and do as the blind man in the Gospel. After the Lord placed the earth mixed with spittle on eyes of the blind man and sent him to wash in the nearby pool of Siloam, the man immediately was healed and able to see. The mud that covers our spiritual eyes is the filth of our sins which we can cleanse away through the laver of tears and confession. Let us listen to Christ and do as He commands us. Let us wash the eyes of our souls, of our minds, of our hearts and of our will through constant prayer, true repentance and acts of mercy. Only then we will be healed spiritually, like the blind man in the Holy Gospel account.

Beloved faithful, our earthly life is short, full of sufferings, and often deceptive. The heavenly life is so blessed and full of eternal joy. Let us abandon the sins which blind us and bring death to the soul for only then can we return to Christ. It is not enough to simply make the sign of the cross and say, *Lord, Lord!* What we need is a complete spiritual change of life. We are called to cast from the eyes of our souls the stain and mire of the passions from this day forth. We must wash them with the water of Siloam—the laver of confession—and then submit in complete obedience to Christ, to the Church which He established upon on this earth. We must humble ourselves, pray constantly, be at peace with all, attend church services regularly, offer alms as much as possible. Raise your children in the True Faith and in the love for God so that they will become good Christians, true sons of the Orthodox Church and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven.

Amen!



[1] Handicapped people in Romania during Fr. Cleopa's time did not have the advantages, training and help that are available to people in western countries.

LONGING FOR PARADISE

Source: "The Veil," a publication by the Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Monastery, Lake George, CO, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 16-18.

God created us to be eternal. He placed our forefathers Adam and Eve in a most glorious garden—the Garden of Eden—Paradise. This was meant to be our eternal home where we were provided with all things needful and where we were to be in constant communion with God.

We know what happened. Adam and Eve did not keep their eyes on God. They listened to the serpent and transgressed the one commandment they had been given, even though the Lord had told them that the consequence of such an action would be death.

We must understand that God is not the God of death, but the God of eternal life. It is our sinfulness that brought death into the world. We cannot simply blame this on Adam and Eve who sinned, for we continue to sin every day. God's love for us is so great that He still wants us to dwell in Paradise. The fathers tell us that after the fall of Adam and Eve, that beautiful garden was lifted up from the earth and still awaits us.

Why do we not long for it?

Actually, we do, but we seek it in all the wrong places. We go through our lives seeking fulfillment, contentment, joy, beauty, peace. Often we find bits of those things, but they are transitory, passing with our earthly life. We are seeking that Paradise which we have lost, but we are very misguided.

The holy fathers tell us that when Adam fell, his nous was darkened. It is the *nous* that beholds paradise. Now, with that nous darkened, we tend to see only with our physical eyes, to experience everything with only our physical senses. That cloud which covers our spiritual senses has been lifted from time to time for some people so that they can behold what exists outside of our physical realm. These individuals have had brief glimpses of Paradise. Most notable of those who have had such experiences is St. Paul. He tells us this when he speaks of himself in the third person: *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.* (2 Cor 12:2-4).

The fathers of the Church later described what happened to St. Paul as a striking form of *purification*, *illumination*, and *theosis*. There have been volumes of books on this topic. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos is a modern day theologian/writer who examines this in nearly every one of the many books he has written and which are readily available in English and many other languages.

Briefly, our lives must be purified through constant repentance. Some, having attained such *purification* will experience *illumination*. The scales covering the eyes of his soul will fall away. Only then can such a person return to the original state of Adam in Paradise of being not only the image, but also the "likeness" of God—*theosis*.

St. Paul was not alone in having had such an experience. There are quite a number of saints who also had glimpses, visions of Paradise and also of the torments awaiting sinners. When faced with the threat or nearness of death, we have countless accounts of saints. Some were made aware of their overwhelming sinfulness and asked the Lord to grant them more time so that they could repent, fast and pray for forgiveness. This was granted to them and they indeed changed their lives and even became an example for many others seeking salvation. There are also numerous accounts of saints who, on seeing others confessing their faith, enduring torments and martyrdom rather than deny Christ, ran forward to the scaffold and torments themselves, proclaiming, "I am a Christian." They did not fear death, but rather saw such a death as a path to life with Christ. They hastened toward it and embraced it.

Many, in our own times, who have sat at the bed of a loved one who is dying have seen the dying person suddenly have a change of countenance, even converse with a departed family member. They have not necessarily attained *theosis*, but they are seeing what our physical eyes do not behold.

Over the past few decades there has been no lack of recorded experiences of people who have had out-of-body "death experiences." Several of them speak of peace, light, colors never seen before, sweet singing, and beautiful gardens. In addition, they usually say that they did not want to come back to this life.

So why, when the Lord indicates that He will take us soon, usually through the onset of a disease, do we insist on fighting to remain in this life? It is rarely for the sake of repentance, the only real purpose of our life and only valid reason to remain in it. We pray that we do not die, and often the Lord grants that request. Or, we should say, he grants it for a time. Eventually, no matter what, we will all die. It seems that when He wants to take us to Himself and we ask Him not to, we later come down with an even more devastating disease.

Yes, we want to remain in this life to be with our loved ones, to enjoy life's sweetness—passing as they are. When we are ill we are more cognizant of our mortality and the fact that we have spent the majority of our lives in vain, chasing after things that are transitory instead of repenting of our sins and drawing closer to God. Unlike the very vocal Evangelicals, Pentecostals and others that surround us in a non-Orthodox country, we do not claim to be "saved." We are aware that the Lord Jesus Christ has this precious gift

of salvation which He wants to give us. We know that He has prepared a glorious wedding banquet for us, but we are also aware that we lack the proper *wedding garment*. (Mt 22:11). That garment is repentance and longing for God.

There is a longing for the beauty of Paradise, for being bathed in the light of Christ, and there is that awareness that we are unworthy. Still, the Lord, in His love for mankind, desires to bestow this upon us. He calls us to this eternal life. So why do we want to cling to this one?

The soul has only known life in the body and it is fearful to leave. While the soul glimpses the eternal beauty that exists and is waiting for it in Paradise, and even knows that it will be re-united with the body at the Second Coming of Christ, it is often still fearful. However, for the person who has repented and longs to be with the Lord, this separation can be peaceful. The soul of such a person can often cry out in the words of St. John the Evangelist, *Come, Lord Jesus!* (Rev. 22:20).

We do not know when we will die. That is something that the Lord does not reveal to most until the time is very near. Sometimes, He does not reveal it at all and death comes suddenly—something that we pray will not happen to us. While we prepare for so many things in this life: education, career, family, vacations, retirement, even the distribution of our belongings after death, we still postpone preparing for our meeting with the Lord. We put off praying until “tomorrow.” We put off fasting until the next fasting period. We put off simply being quiet and near the Lord until another day. We put off truly repenting until we have done all the things we want to do—and perhaps should not be doing at all!

However, without fail, our earthly lives will end. For some it may be in old age, for others it could be suddenly, at a much younger age when worldly wisdom would be saying “he/she had so much to live for...”

The Lord is patient. He wants us to be “ripe” for the beauty He has prepared for us in Paradise. Let us long for it and not fight against it.



The immaterial Word of God saw that corruption held us because it was the penalty for the Transgression...He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the unsurpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw their universal liability to death. Moved with compassion ...He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own...He took *our* body.

St. Athanasios the Great

THE MIRACLE AT THE PROPHET ELIJAH CHURCH IN CHERNOBYL THE ONLY CHURCH OPEN IN THE CHERNOBYL ZONE SHOWS THE MINIMUM RADIATION LEVEL

Interfax, April 20, 2011.



Over the entire twenty-five years since the Chernobyl nuclear plant accident, radiation levels in the area of St. Elijah Church, the only church operating in the exclusion zone, were well below levels across the zone, Chernobyl disaster liquidators state.

“Even during the most difficult days of 1986, the area around the St. Elijah Church was clean from radiation, not to mention that the church itself was also clean,” president of the Ukrainian Chernobyl Union Yury Andreyev said in a Kiev-Moscow video conference on Wednesday.

Now, the territory adjacent to the church has a background level of 6 microroentgen per hour compared with 18 in Kiev. Andreyev also said many disaster liquidators are former atheists. “We came to believe later, after observing such developments which could be explained only by God’s will,” he says. In particular, according to him, a few seconds after the explosion in the fourth unit of the Chernobyl Power Plant, the cloud containing uranium particles started moving in the direction of Pripjat, a city located about 1,800 meters from the plant. There was a pine-tree on its way (it is featured on a well-known icon, Chernobyl’s Savior.)

“The cloud stopped short of this pine, divided into two parts by some unknown cause, and continued moving to the left and right sides of the city, instead of covering its residential areas. The radiation level in contamination areas was four or five roentgen per hour, and the city showed only half a miliroentgen,” Andreyev said.

† † †

The icon above was painted in the early 21st century in remembrance of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. It depicts Jesus Christ the Savior in Heaven, surrounded by a *mandorla* (a pointed oval figure, *Ed.*), with His hand raised in a blessing. Flanking Christ is the Mother of God to His right, supplicating her Son, and the Archangel Michael to His left. A star falls on Chernobyl, reminiscent of the Book of Revelation’s reference to “wormwood”, which in Ukrainian is translated as “chernobyl.” The pine tree that saved the city is depicted in the middle.

THE THREE STAGES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

The First Coming of Grace

In the texts of the Old and the New Testament we see clearly that God manifests Himself to the prophets in various ways. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.* (Heb 1:1).

God contracts with each person a personal covenant. He does not want us to have knowledge about Him through the testimonies of others; He Himself appears and gives His knowledge, and man acquires his own personal testimony about God. This first personal contact with God occurs at a time unanticipated by man or even after a painful search. It might also happen to a man fighting against Him. This is the case of St. Paul to whom Christ Himself appears and contracts a personal covenant with him, as he was traveling to fight against Him. This personal coming of the Grace is a holy state. Man's soul gets to know God as a "person," albeit dimly. He understands with his heart, his *nous* as the Fathers say, that God is not an abstract state nor an impersonal power or a great value, but a Person.

This first coming of God's Grace, which is tasted differently by each one, is a life full of inner experiences of the heart and of mystical spree. St. Diadochos of Fotiki writes: *In the beginning Grace is accustomed to illuminate the mind in much [spiritual] perception in Grace's own light.* At another point he writes: *In the beginning of our progress, if indeed we warmly and ardently desire the virtue of God, the Holy Spirit makes the nous taste in every [spiritual] perception and inner spiritual assurance the sweetness of God, so that the nous be able to know in exact knowledge the perfect reward of the God-loving ascetical practices.*

With this first period of the coming of God we receive one chapter of a new life, one chapter of Grace. God attracts us to Him, so that after a lot of struggle and sacrifices we become acquainted with Him. This new period of God's calling is a period of sweetness, spiritual joy, of inner experiences of the heart. A lot of people live this paschal atmosphere. It suffices to mention a written testimony about the state in which St. Silouan lived after Christ's appearance to him:

At the moment of God's Epiphany his whole existence was informed that his sins had been absolved. The flames of Hades that roared around him disappeared, the hell he experienced for half a year stopped. He was now granted to live the special joy and great rest of appeasement with God. In his soul a new sweet feeling of love for God and people, each one person, dominated. The prayer of repentance ceased, that unbearable fiery search for absolution which did not allow sleep to come to his eyelids

went away. Did this mean that he could now quietly give over to sleeping? Of course not.

The first period after Epiphany, Symeon's soul (Symeon was St. Silouan's worldly name, Ed.), who got to know its resurrection and saw the light of true and eternal existence, lived in a paschal feast. Everything was beautiful: the world was magnificent, people were congenial, nature was unspeakably beautiful, the body changed and became lighter, strength was added, God's words gave joy to the soul, all-night vigils in the church and, above all, prayers in the cell became sweet. Overflowing by joy the soul felt compassion for people and prayed for the whole world.

It is impossible to describe this state in words. The experience of uncreated Grace cannot be contained in created words. Only a reborn person, a person initiated by experience, is able to perceive this reality. Everything is new during this period. He feels the presence of God as a personal experience, he views the essence of beings in all creation. Everything is clear. Birds, trees acquire a new dimension. He sees everything in the perspective of eternity, under the energy of uncreated Grace and uncreated Light. Mankind's common problems no longer occupy him. He does not care for others' opinion about him. He is indifferent to any hardship. His sole preoccupation is prayer and communion with God. It is a life centered on love. Passions are not activated. Man "suffers" *deification*.

The first coming of Grace to man's heart is a shocking experience. Man feels a whole life inside him. When St. Symeon was asked how one can know that he has the holy Grace in him, he said that this is most natural. He realizes that he has become a temple of the Holy Spirit and that the Grace of God camps in him the same way a pregnant woman realizes the existence of an embryo in her womb. It is not a sentimental excitement and elation, but rather a sense of life.

In this state, man finds what the Holy Scripture and the holy Fathers call *deep heart*. The *nous*, returning to the heart from its previous dispersion through the senses in the surrounding world, initially locates the bodily organ of the heart and then enters the so-called spiritual heart, that is, the center of man's existence. We can say, according to the teaching of the so-called neptic fathers, that the heart is the place which is discovered by asceticism in Grace, and where God Himself is revealed. In reality, when we speak about the person in the Church we mean this place of the heart. A person's *heart*, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. (1 Pet 3:4). Finding this blessed place is essential, because this constitutes man's salvation. When asked on this, Abbot Pambo replied: *If you have heart, you can be saved.* Inside the heart, which in patristic theology is identified with the *nous*, man is united with God, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, *God united with gods and becoming known in the heart.* Then the heart becomes a temple where an unceasing Divine Liturgy is celebrated, and in this

case man becomes a true priest of the holy Grace, *spiritual clergy*, according to St. Gregory the Sinaite.

The union of the *nous* with the heart is evident, that is, man has proofs of this union. There are three such proofs:

The **first** is that there is a pain in the bodily organ of the heart. A pain which seems like a wound, but causes a spiritual pleasure, tranquility and inner peace. This pain holds the *nous* to the prayer done in the heart and brings together man's existence on this point. In this state, man thinks and acts through the heart. A faith is developed which, according to St. Gregory Palamas, is a *comprehension of the heart*.

A **second** indication is that tears of compunction start flowing. The holy Fathers teach that when there is a sweetest state of compunction, this is a clear indication that the *nous* has been united with the heart. This compunction is associated with joyful tears.

A **third** indication is that prayer is done by itself. This unceasing prayer is not simply a movement of reason, it is something deeper. Man hears clearly the bodily heartbeat, and simultaneously under this beat at a long distance, as he feels it, another beat is heard, faster than the natural heartbeat. This is the beat of spiritual heart, a fact which means that the spiritual heart has been discovered and then man becomes a person. For the person is revealed from above, it is the coming of the Rule of God in the heart. The Jesus prayer is said unceasingly with this spiritual beat. Man does not try to pray, prayer is done by itself. It is self-activated, both during the work of daytime and even during sleep-time. That is, while he sleeps a few hours so that the body gets a rest, during that state he feels very well that the heart is sleepless and prays, in accordance with the saying of St. John of the Ladder who comments on a passage in the Song of Songs *I am asleep and my heart is awake. I sleep due to the need of nature and my heart is alert due to the multitude of love. When he wakes up he senses very well that the body has slept, but he also senses very clearly that the heart has not stopped praying.*

A few more states experienced by man, when he becomes a temple of the All-Holy Spirit and the holy Grace dwells in his heart, are worthy of further discussion:

A communion of love with God is established. It is not simply a psychological state or even simply a spiritual experience of the element of physical love. It is a purely spiritual experience. Then man comprehends St. Maximus' words that God *is love and beloved* or what St. Ignatius the God-bearer's term for Christ as love ("eros"): *my love has been crucified*. This is not physical eros, because it has been preceded by the purification of the heart. In fact, **when this spiritual eros operates, the passions become inoperative** and man lives in a state of impassion, experiencing God in the desert as well as in the crowds.

The spiritual senses are also developed, namely, *noetic sense, noetic vision and noetic hearing*. The whole *nous* is concen-

trated inside the heart. This way it achieves the unification of man's entire existence. He realizes very well that he is reborn. He senses warmth in the heart, both the physical and the spiritual one. This warmth rejuvenates man's entire existence. It feeds him and gives life to him.

This causes a deep peace of thoughts. In the process of purification, the *nous* discards continuously all foreign elements which like scales covered it before. It thus becomes lighter and always finds shelter in the heart. There it hears the voice of God several times. God speaks to him and reveals His will inside the heart. There is a personal acquaintance with God and thus he acquires the spiritual knowledge of God.

However, this is not a course of emotional joy. Spiritual joy is closely associated with spiritual mourning. The holy Fathers use a word to express this well. It is the word *harmolype* (joy-sadness). Despite the certainty of God's existence, despite the feeling of God's presence and of His love, he feels simultaneously deep repentance. This is how we realize that this joy is genuine and true. The *nous*, entering the heart, sees on the one hand God's love and on the other his own impurity. Therefore, he often immerses in lamentation. This may be expressed physically, but, mostly, it is done inside the heart. He feels his heart shedding tears, weeping, and these tears cleanse the heart from sin and the passions.

At that point the passions no longer act. Man experiences his rebirth. At the same time other people around him have an irrepressible thirst for contempt. He is not saddened by this contempt, in fact he loves it and seeks it even more.

St. Basil the Great analyzing this severe and unbearable desire felt by those who have the Grace of God says characteristically: *Blessed are those who love to see the true beauty; having attached themselves to it through love, and being in love with the heavenly and blessed love, they neglect their family and friends and their houses and all their possessions; and neglecting even their physical need for food and water they cling only to the divine and pure love.*

The Lifting of the Grace

However, this state is not going to last for long. The duration of the Grace after the first coming is different for each person. It depends on various factors. On his zeal, on God's economy, on his way of life, etc. Nevertheless, after a certain period Grace is lowered.

In the works of the holy Fathers this state is well known. There are differences in the terminology. Lowering, lifting, abandonment, abandonment by God, etc. Nevertheless, it refers to the same thing which is due to various reasons.

What is the lifting of the Grace? Is it a real lifting and abandonment? How is it possible for God to completely abandon man? The Fathers are expressive on this point: *Of course it is not an objective full withdrawal of Grace, rather the soul subjectively experiences the reduction of the power of Grace as abandonment by God.* The "vision" of God is reduced by

various degrees and man experiences this reduction as abandonment by God.

St. Diadochos of Fotiki refers to an educational concession and a concession by aversion. The first occurs for reasons God knows, they contribute to our salvation and our education, the second for our sins.

These show clearly that the Grace is not completely removed from man, but rather hides itself, or better, lowers itself, to give man the opportunity to grapple with sin, to fight against passions, and to seek fiercely its new return. This fight, as will be shown below, is painful and has a different duration for each person. Nevertheless, man is in a desert for several years... He feels as if walking in a spiritual desert, in a land without the life-giving breath of the holy Grace.

What is the purpose of the lowering of the holy Grace? St. Diadochos writes: *Being true infants of the Grace of God, we believe that we are nurtured by it by small concessions and abundant invocation, so that by its goodness we manage to become a perfect man, to attain to the whole measure.* This way we grow up spiritually and from "breast-fed" infants we attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, that is, we reach communion with Christ. This communion is man's salvation.

Besides, we are impassioned men, and thus we are unable to hold the Grace of God. Grace indicates the road and the goal to us and then leaves us to cleanse ourselves in order to achieve this "goal." Several times in our spiritual life we feel that the body is unable to follow the soul's progression to Deification. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Mt 26:41). Through education in God the body acquires a certain ability to follow the course of the soul.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite referring to the journey of the Magi, to the adoration of Christ, and specifically to the fact that they lost the star guiding them, writes: *Like the bright star that guided and consoled the Magi in their journey hid itself, in order to test their patience and their bravery and then reappeared and caused them greater joy than before; when they saw the star, they were overjoyed* (Mt 2:10), *the grace of God usually does the same to its servants and friends, as the so-called neptic Fathers say, and especially St. Diadochos. Sometimes, like a child-loving mother, she consoles and gladdens her children with her noetic illumination and divine energy and gifts, illuminating their nous, bringing contrition most sweetly to their heart and warming it and stimulating it towards the love of God; and sometimes it hides itself from them and allows temptations to go to them, like a mother often hides from her children to test their patience and brave heart, so that through temptations and grief they become grown-ups and not remain infants forever, to cry and ask strongly for the holy grace they have lost. And thus, after they enjoy it again, they rejoice even more, like a child who loses his mother and searches for her weeping and crying, and when he sees her somewhere runs in unspeakable joy and crying and laughing at the same time falls into her lap.*

This period is a period of assimilation of the Grace which man had tasted in his first contact with it. Doctrinal consciousness is born out of this assimilation. And this assimilation lasts many years for an ascetic and athlete of this spiritual course. However, this par excellence blessed period is not so easy. Man goes through pain and great sorrow. The Holy Fathers stress this side as well in their works, speaking out of personal experience.

St. Isaac the Syrian describes part of this pain: *And at some point our soul is drowned and becomes like being in the waves. Even if one reads the scripture, or celebrates the Liturgy, or does anything, whatever he approaches he receives darkness upon darkness. And he goes out and often is not even allowed to approach. And he does not believe that he undergoes a transformation and this is done in peace. That hour is full of despair and fear, and the hope in God and consolation by his faith have been completely ejected out of his soul; and it is throughout filled with hesitation and fear.*

The pain is great. The soul has known God and now has lost this communion. Before it got to know God, everything was agreeable. Human life with its details and its pleasant moments gladdened it. Now they no longer do. At the same time it has lost God's Grace and is inconsolable. It falls to a despair in God. Crying becomes a way of life and repentance is insatiable. God's Grace, which lies secretly in man's heart, helps him not despair. Thus he starts concentrated prayer, undeterred sigh, an inexhaustible source of tears. He cries out for God and his life is imbued in pain.

Thus we attain the ability to speak about Adam's lament within the confines of our personal life and are able to understand Adam's grief after he committed the sin. This is how Elder Silouan felt it. He felt the loss of Grace or the lowering of Grace as Forefather Adam did. This is why he writes in a doleful and supplicatory way: *The silence of the desert does not delight me. The mountaintops do not attract me. The beauty of forests and meadows does not bring me rest. The singing of the birds does not sooth my pain. Nothing, nothing gives me joy now. My soul has cracked of too much sorrow. I have insulted my beloved God. Even if the Lord would take me to paradise again I would lament there sadly, sorely; for I have embittered my beloved God.*

Expelled from Paradise springs of tears gushed out of Adam's wounded heart. Similarly, every soul that has known the Lord laments for Him and says: *Where are you Lord? Why do you hide Your face? My soul has not seen your Light for long and seeks You full of sorrow. Where is my Lord? Why don't I see Him in my soul? What hinders Him from dwelling in me? So, Christ-like humility and love for my enemies are not in me. For God is love infinite, love impossible to explain.*

Then, the athlete experiences death existentially. Because man's separation from God is true death. God is life. Departure from life inevitably brings death. During this period man

may experience the memory of death as a gift. We repeat, this is not human despair, it is in-God despair. It is not a human fear of God, it is a fear of God by Grace. We realize this because in the second case there is inspiration, prayer! According to the Fathers, the memory of death is not a remembrance of death, because this is something anyone can have by viewing the corruptibility of the world. It is that too, but mostly the memory of death is a gift.

God has died for him. Essentially he himself has died for God. The athlete of this spiritual life sees death in his depths, throughout his existence. And, as he lives a Paschal experience and everything outside is bright when he feels the Grace inside him, the opposite happens with the feeling of death dominating his existence. Everything is dead. Nothing satisfies him. He sees death everywhere. He sees that all humans are mortal. For this reason he does not ask for power from mortals.

This is man's self-emptying in the model of Christ's self-emptying. The saints definitely pass through this state. It is Hades, an experience of hell. The flames of hell burn everything. Inner disposition, desire, even the body itself.

It is important to mention and try to explain this period of spiritual life, because there are many who go through it but do not know what exactly it is. They reach complete despair, ignoring the character of spiritual life, ignoring education in God. Thus, they feel lost, they despair. There are cases where monks abandoned monastic life and went to the world violating the promises they gave to God during their tonsure. Others run to psychiatrists to obtain an explanation of these states, and others still go mad.

To all these we say that this is a natural state. All those fighting the good fight pass through this temptation. This way they acquire spiritual experience. For this reason there is need for a lot of patience, intense and concentrated prayer. St. Paul the Apostle writes: *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?* (Heb 12:7-9)

It must be said that even a little prayer during this period is equivalent with many hours of prayer of the previous period. Man learns to pray noetically during this period. He learns many ways of noetic prayer. Because of severe pain, of great repentance, the athlete's *nous* concentrates on the heart. He cries. Like a ship throwing an anchor to the bottom of the sea, similarly the *nous* is thrown to the heart. It stays there and this constitutes noetic prayer.

After learning that this is a natural state, we have to learn the ways of dealing with it. Patristic teaching recommends patience, prayer, and resorting to teachers who know these truly blessed states by experience. Obviously we need persons

who have passed through these stages. These are true and proper spiritual fathers who can guide the people of God. This is the great value of the monks for our times. They comfort, they guide, they inspire and calm people.

St. Diadochos stresses that it is impossible to acquire the perfection of divine Grace. This is why the soul aches, this is why it has to struggle, so that it receives Grace bit by bit, until man acquires life, and the resulting immortality devours mortality.

The New Coming of the Grace

After many years of struggle, the Grace comes again to man and fills him with inner joy. It also brings the knowledge of God and everything divine to him. St. Symeon the New Theologian is a bearer of this tradition and life. He writes in a poem:

But when I begin to weep, as desperate, then He shows Himself and He looks at me, He who contemplates all creatures.

In amazement, I admire the splendor of His beauty. And how, having opened the heavens, the Creator inclined and showed me His glory, indescribable, marvellous. And so who could draw nearer to Him? Or how would he be carried away towards measureless heights? While I reflect on this, He Himself is discovered within myself, resplendent in the interior of my miserable heart, illuminating me on all sides with His immortal splendor, shining upon all my members with His rays, completely intertwined with me, He embraces me totally.

He gives Himself to me, the unworthy one, and I am filled with His love and His beauty, and I am sated with divine delight and sweetness. I share in the light, I participate also in the glory, and my face shines like my Beloved's, and all my members become bearers of light.

Then I finally become more beautiful than those who are beautiful, wealthier than those who are wealthy and more than all the mighty. I am mighty and greater than kings, and much more precious than all that is visible. Not only more than the world or the men of the world, but also more than Heaven and all the angels of Heaven, for I possess the Creator of the whole universe. To whom is due glory and honour, now and forever. Amen.

And in another poem the same Father writes:

Again the light illumines me, again it is distinctly seen, again it opens the heavens, again it cuts through the night, again it brings all things into being, again it alone is seen, again it takes me out of all visible things.

The new coming of God's Grace takes man out of the spiritual desert in which he lived before and moreover liberates him from the spiritual Hades in which he was. The Hades is a place where the rays of uncreated Grace do not enter or rather where they are experienced as fire. Hades of personal life is filled with light with the coming of Christ's Grace. Christ liberated the just ones of the Old Testament with His descent to Hades and likewise He Himself takes man out of the peculiar spiritual mortification. The fire of hell and

despair, which burned him before, is now transformed to the light of eternal life. He comprehends very well the distinction between cerebral knowledge and empirical knowledge of God, because the knowledge of God is offered through the illumination of the *nous* and the vision of God.

He then acquires an inner tranquility which is not shaken, not affected by anything external. Everything psychological is transformed to spiritual experience. The Grace of God is united with man's nature and makes it light.

In his previous states man experienced intense fluctuations and changes, sometimes fire sometimes light, but now he lives a spiritual balance. Man's existence has been cured. The struggle with God has ceased. The soul knows God well. Although he feels that he is the biggest sinner, he also feels that he is reborn and is certain that some other body sinned, some other person committed sins. And, indeed, he is another person, because now there is a new, reborn man. The body is transformed and is able to withstand the new life. In general, he feels a deep tranquility and spiritual balance. Christ becomes his life and his delight. Despite his unworthiness he feels a member of the risen body of Christ.

In this state, man becomes a theologian or rather a spring of theology. Theology springs, emanates from all his existence. St. John of the Ladder writes: *The growth of fear is the beginning of love, but a complete state of purity is the foundation of theology. He who has perfectly united his feeling to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words. But without this union it is difficult to speak about God. The engrafted Word perfects purity, and slays death by His presence; and after the slaying of death, the disciple of theology is illumined. The Word of the Lord which is from God the Father is pure, and remains so eternally. But he who has not come to know God merely speculates. Purity makes its disciple a theologian, who of himself grasps the dogmas of the Trinity.*

He who has passed through this course becomes a *God-inspired book for others* according to the words of St. Symeon the New Theologian.

As previously mentioned and according to the words of St. Makarios, if man does not go through these stages, he cannot be considered a Christian. It is only then that he *becomes a Christian*. Moreover, one cannot be considered to be a priest, a spiritual father, if he has not known the coming, the hiding and the new coming of the divine Grace. Because then he will have a mutilated spiritual experience. Of course, it is possible for man to leave this world while being in the desert of spiritual life, that is, during the period of the lifting of Grace. This is what happens with most Christians. Nevertheless, if he has patience and if he perseveres, he will also enter the Rule of God, as happened with Moses. He did not enter the land of promise, but he is Moses the Great who has so much glory that he appeared during Christ's Transfiguration.

This is education in God. It is neither a rational knowledge nor a memorization of scriptural and patristic passages; it is a personal knowledge of the coming and lifting of Grace. This education has no relation with Schools and books; it is related to our staying within the whole atmosphere of Orthodox Tradition.

We must pray to God to open for us the way of His knowledge, to acquire this education, even if we pass through a lot of spiritual pain. At the same time, we must ask him not to abandon us completely, but give us consolation and comfort during that period, so that we manage to withstand the great burden of sorrows.

The road to the Rule of God passes through mysterious paths. Education in God is incomprehensible to human reason and to the criteria of this world, but is the only secure way to attain communion with God.



Repentance does not consist only of kneeling, like a divining rod that indicates water by going up and down, but is like a wise goldsmith who wishes to craft a chain; with a link of gold and a link of silver, even with iron and lead, he lengthens the chain until he completes his work. This too is the form that repentance takes. All the virtues depend on it.

St. Macarios of Egypt

The depths of life in Christ are bottomless, to be assimilated by a long process demanding all our strength. The content and meaning of the Divine Name are revealed only gradually. Occasional repetition of it may also rejoice and be dear to the heart. But we must not stop halfway. Our time here is brief and every hour must be made use of that our knowledge of God may grow.

Elder Sophrony of Essex



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ON PASSIONS

By Elder Ephraim of Philotheou and Arizona, from "Counsels from the Holy Mountain—Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim."



Struggle, my child, for God's road is narrow and thorny; not inherently, but because of our passions. Since we want to eradicate from our heart the passions, which are like thorny roots, so that we may plant useful plants, naturally we shall toil greatly and our hands will bleed and our face will sweat. Sometimes even despair will overcome us, seeing roots and passions everywhere!

But with our hope in Christ, the Repairer of our souls, let us diligently work at clearing the earth of our heart. Patience, mourning, humility, obedience, cutting off one's will—all these virtues help cultivate it. We must apply all our strength, and then God, seeing our labor, comes and blesses it, and thus we make progress.

Take courage, for the toil is temporary and ephemeral, whereas the reward is great in heaven. Struggle and be vigilant with your thoughts. Keep a firm hold on hope, for this

shows that your house is founded on the rock and the rock is our Christ.

Do not feed your passions by yielding to them, so that you do not suffer pain and affliction later! Labor now, as much as you can, because otherwise, if the passions are not tended to, in time they become second nature, and then try and deal with them! Whereas now, if you fight against them lawfully, as we advise you, you will be freed and will have happiness by the grace of God.

The thing that should preoccupy us above all is how to cleanse our heart from the passions and how to abate some passion or vice! The visitations of grace that God sends us from time to time for consolation do not play an important role, because they come and go. Ah, those passions! They are like roots with thorns. How much toil, how much pain, what tears, what prayers are necessary for a person to find slight relief—it is a real martyrdom!

I pray to the merciful God that He will show you the path of salvation and guide you as a hart to the springs of the living water of refreshment. Man is full of passions, shortcomings, etc., and in order to be freed of them, he must engage in a bloody battle. Once he wins, with God's help, he will receive here in this life the promise of the future marriage with the Lamb, Who was ruthlessly slaughtered by cruel hands accursed by God.

