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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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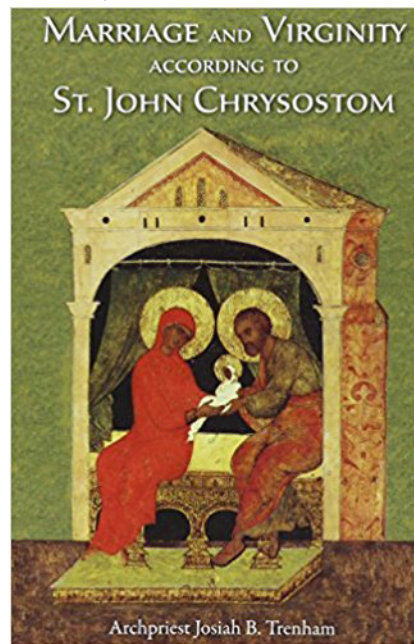
PARADISAL UNION AND POST-FALL MARRIAGE

Source: "Marriage and Virginity according to St. John Chrysostom," by Archbishop Josiah B. Trenham, St. Herman Alaska Brotherhood (2013), pp. 99-112, printed with permission by the author and publisher. NOTE: Footnotes' text and references hesitantly omitted to reduce the article's length, albeit they significantly add to the quality of the message; readers are encouraged to acquire the original book for a study of the subject in detail—it is a must for every Orthodox family's library.

Marriage, as we commonly understand it in our fallen condition, is a God-given concession to man's weakness. It is a divine indulgence to man in his fallen condition, and thus had no relevance in Paradise. Therefore, St. John is careful neither to exalt it unduly (since it is for fallen man) nor to denigrate it (since it has a divine origin). However, just as there exists a paradisal virginity, so there exists a paradisal union of man and woman; and just as the substance of paradisal virginity differs greatly from that which exists outside of Paradise, the same may be said of the union of man and woman. Chrysostom uses the word "marriage" with reference to "earthly marriage," and does not employ the word when he is describing the union of man and woman in Christ in Paradise, and in the coming Kingdom. The paradisal

condition of Adam and Eve is a mysterious union of the first man with his unique and co-equal helpmate, divinely provided to him for conversation, consolation, and to "share the same being." Eve was formed from the rib of "her man." Their union did not involve the many aspects of earthly marriage commonly associated with that state in the fallen age.

When God had completed creating the entire cosmos, He fashioned man, for whom He had made everything. When man lived in Paradise "there was no need for marriage." Chrysostom is clear that in Paradise mankind lived "as in heaven" and was without marriage.



In fact, all of the classical by-products of marriage extolled through the ages in all great civilizations, such as large populations, developed cities, crafts, homes, etc., did not exist in Paradise, and yet this in no way diminished the happiness of that original state. These extolled realities are superfluous and ought not to be greatly valued by man as in any way belonging to the es-

sence of true happiness.

What then is the origin of earthly marriage? Marriage itself is the offspring of death, and is a mortal and slavish garment (τὸ θνητὸν καὶ δουρικὸν ἱμάτιον). Since mortality and slavery did not exist in Paradise, marriage did not exist. St. John carries the thought of St. Paul further. St. Paul explained that where there is sin, there is death. St. John carries

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this further by stating, “Where death is, there is marriage” (Ὁπου γὰρ θάνατος, ἐκεῖ γάμος). The pattern is as follows: sin=>death=>marriage. Each of the main components of marriage—such as sexual intercourse (μίξεως), conception (σύλληψις), labor (ὠδίνες), and childbirth (τόκοι)—is a form of corruption (εἶδος φθορᾶς).

Besides the essential connection of marriage to corruption, if one is joined to a wicked spouse, marriage becomes a hindrance on the road to salvation. A wife and one’s attention to her can be a great impediment to virtue (ὅσον πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐμπόδιον). Woman was originally created to be a helper to man; but like Adam, Eve rejected God’s original intent, and she became a great source of temptation and treachery to man. To some degree, women in marriage provide help to men through child rearing and providing an outlet for men’s desire; but apart from that, a woman really provides no help. While many people foolishly rush into marriage as a lovely thing (ἐπέραστον πράγμα), it is really a prison. Marital problems are like thorns that stick to one’s clothes when climbing across a hedge. One turns to pick one out, and is caught by several more.

Despite such limitations, **marriage is honorable and blessed**. Marriage, is a good bestowed upon fallen mankind by God as a concession to human weakness. **It is in no way of equal honor with virginity**; for if one believed this, one might very well conclude that two wives were better than one. Rather, God gave marriage to man because his nature was totally out of control and unable to contain its violent passions.

Marriage was created as a harbor in the storm (λιμένα ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ζάλῃ) and to prevent unlawful unions (τῆς παρανόμου μίξεως). While married persons have this harbor,

the virgin “sails a harborless ocean” (πέλαγος πλεῖν ἀλίμενον). “Marriage is of much use to those who are still caught up in their passions, who desire to live the life of swine (χοίρων βίον), and ruin themselves in brothels (ἐν χαμαιτυποίοις φθείρεσθαι). It rescues them from that impure compulsion and keeps them holy and chaste.” Marriage provides one with the “freedom for intercourse” (τὴν τῆς μίξεως ἄδειαν). However, the virgin has no remedy to extinguish the flame. His only chance is to fight the fire so as not to be burnt. The virgin is called to walk on burning coals without being burnt. Marriage supports one who is about to fall. For those who are not tottering, it is no longer useful at all, but is actually an impediment to virtue. Sexual pleasure is an integral part of the consolation of marriage. For his time Chrysostom was bold in suggesting that the pleasure of sexual intercourse may actually solidify the marriage bond. This is as far as Chrysostom would go in “sanctifying” marital intercourse. In fact, in other places of his corpus, he explains away even the pleasure of sexual intercourse and suggests that the pleasure is really *no pleasure at all*.

Chrysostom is clear, however, that marriage is *not* the maintenance in itself of a small brothel, but is rather a means to remain in holiness and dignity (ἐν ἀγιασμῷ καὶ σεμνότητι). Marriage is not evil. The nobilities (τὰ σεμνὰ) of marriage must not be undermined. Marital intercourse itself presents “no hindrance” (μὴ κώλυμα) to the spiritual life. Marital intercourse may be a lawful union (νόμιμον συνοικέσιον) if it takes place according to God’s laws, with self-control and dignity, and in a context of marital harmony (ὁμονοία). The Chrysostomian corpus contains a large amount of positive material on marriage. For Chrysostom marriage is a “sweet ointment” (μύρον), and he is not ashamed to wax eloquent

on the beauty of marital intercourse. Chrysostom does not hesitate to assert that marital intercourse is a type of “spiritual intercourse” (συνουσία πνευματική) between Christ and the Church. Marital sex is a “mystery of love” (ἀγάπης μυστήριον): it demonstrates by procreation the immense power of union (πολλή τῆς ἐνώσεως ἢ ἰσχύς). Marriage is a perfect type of both an individual soul’s and the corporate Church’s union with Christ. Many are not able to endure the violence and the great battle of the passions entailed in the virginal state; marriage is the good that will save them. Marriage is preferable to fornication.

Marriage and sexual intercourse were also fashioned for procreation. Procreation through sexual intercourse became the “greatest consolation” to man following the Fall. In the generation of children, the “fearsome visage of death” (τοῦ θανάτου τὸ φοβερὸν προσωπεῖον) was reduced, and the Resurrection was foreshadowed. Marriage for the sake of raising a family was accepted as a legitimate desire by Chrysostom in his Old Testament commentaries. However, though this was an original divine intention for earthly marriage, it was always secondary to the “greater reason” of quenching the fiery passion of man’s nature.

This emphasis on quenching the passions is evident in St. Paul’s teaching that “in order to avoid immorality” each man should take a wife. This is St. Paul’s consistent theme in 1 Cor 7. Man and woman ought to come together not primarily for procreation, but so *that Satan may not tempt you* (1 Cor 7:5). Later St. Paul says that if the unmarried and widows cannot exercise self-control they should marry. According to Chrysostom this primary reason of marriage, to regulate man’s sexual passion (ὑπὲρ τοῦ σβέσαι τὴν τῆς φύσεως πύρωσιν), is the only one of the two original divine intentions that remains relevant in the New Covenant. Since the earth, sea, and the whole world have already been inhabited, there is no need to bear any more children. Procreation, the fruit of mortality and the quest for eternal memory, is, in fact, a reminder of human sin and the loss of the original glory of humanity. This is why St. Paul nowhere suggests procreation as a reason for marriage. In fact, for Chrysostom, procreation was “that specious and grand reason for marriage” (τῆς εὐπροσώπου καὶ σεμνῆς αἰτίας γάμου).

Thus man, the “terrestrial angel,” **was not originally designed for nor, oriented toward, sexual intercourse and**

procreation, as post-Fall man is. The sexual necessities of fallen nature and the tremendous sexual impulses, appetites, and drives of post-Fall man simply did not exist to trouble Adam and Eve. Sexual intercourse did not exist in the Garden. It was the result of the Fall, at which time mankind became “bestly” and “animal-like” and began to demonstrate this through copulation. St. John shared this fundamental assumption with virtually all of the Holy Fathers of the Christian Church.

Chrysostom drives home this understanding of the origin of sexual intercourse in several places. In answering detractors, who were even within the Church (which greatly offended the saint), Chrysostom argued that the original reproduction was not sexual in nature. “Tell me, what sort of marriage produced Adam? What kind of birth pains produced Eve? You could not say. Therefore why have groundless fears? Why tremble at the thought of the end of marriage, and thus the end of the human race?” He was not ignorant of the possible Scriptural objections to this view. He explained, for instance, that although Adam and Eve had received the commission from God to “be fruitful and multiply” this did not imply sexual intercourse, or, for that matter, marriage. The case of Abraham shows that even marriage is incapable of producing offspring if God is not willing; and if God is willing even virginity can produce children. Chrysostom utilizes this proposition to encourage infertile women, saying: “Let women not be distressed when they have no children; instead, let them give evidence of a thankful disposition and have recourse to the Creator and direct their request to Him, the Lord of nature, not attributing childbirth to the intercourse of the partners nor to any other source than the Creator of everything.”

Applying this perspective on God’s providence to the many examples of infertility among the pious women of the Old Covenant, Chrysostom poses and answers this question: “What is the meaning of this gallery of sterile people?” (Τι βούλεται τῶν στειρῶν τούτων ὁ χορός;). God’s providence so ordered these unusual turns of events involving long-sterile women who finally become mothers in order to prepare His people for the supreme “otherworldly” birth of Jesus Christ from His Virgin Mother. The unusual births of formerly infertile Sarah, Rebecca,



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etc., were Old Testament foreshadowings of the birth of Christ. In the same way it is not the propagation of virginity that decreases the human population, but sin and, particularly, illicit intercourse, that provokes God to wrath. This is evident from Noah's time.

How does Chrysostom interpret Adam's comments at the time when he first gazes upon Eve? In Adam's initial proclamation he asserts, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and will cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh." Chrysostom does not deny that Adam's statements refer both to marriage and sexual intercourse. Rather, St. John posits that these statements were prophetic in nature and demonstrate that Adam's understanding was inspired. This is a necessary conclusion to make since "the consummation of that intercourse occurred after the Fall (μετὰ γὰρ τὴν παράβασιν τὰ τῆς συνουσίας γέγονεν); up till that time they were living like angels in Paradise and so they were not burning with desire (οὐχ ὑπὸ ἐπιθυμίας φλεγόμενοι)."

St. John roots his teaching on the origin of sexual intercourse in his exegesis of Genesis 4:1. *Now, Adam had intercourse with his wife Eve.* Consider when this happened. After their disobedience, after their loss of the Garden, then it was that the practice of intercourse had its beginning. You see, before their disobedience they followed a life like that of the angels, and there was no mention of intercourse." According to Chrysostom the Scriptural text here clearly states that Adam did not "know" his wife sexually until following the Fall. Sexual intercourse is rooted in man's Fall and subsequent death. It is not that marital intercourse is defiling. Intercourse is not impurity (οὐκ εἰς ἀκαθαρσίαν); rather, it is simply a distraction or waste of time (εἰς ἀσχολίαν ἀγούσης). It is the fruit of being subject to the needs of the body. Those who are not in such a subjected state simply have no use or compulsion for sexual intercourse.

He suggests that, while because of the temporal intervention of the Fall we have no concrete examples of exactly how humans would have reproduced the image of God in Paradise, we have every reason to believe that they would have reproduced in a fashion consonant with their angelic being. God multiplied the angels without the aid of physical intercourse, and could have done so for mankind as well. "An infinite number of angels are at the service of

God, thousands upon thousands of archangels are beside Him, and none of them have come into being from the succession of generations, none from childbirth, labor pains, and conception. Could He not, then, have created many more men without marriage? Just as he created the first two from whom all men descend?" In this theory, Chrysostom hints at an explanation more fully developed and previously set forth by St. Gregory of Nyssa. **Those who assume sexual intercourse was a part of life in the Garden of delights are guilty of projecting back into the original creation what has become normative for fallen man, and of a failure to appreciate the massive chasm separating man's life in Paradise from his life following the Fall.**



Virginity works, as should truly a Christian marriage, to accomplish the divine task of reducing the baseness of our souls and leading them to perfect virtue. **God has called us to one ambition only: to regain Paradise lost.** Success in the battle against the devil and victory over evil is the path of return, and constitutes the re-acquisition of the virginal life of Paradise. Whether one travels there by virginity, which is the most direct route, or by the blessed state of earthly marriage is not God's main concern; it is the return to Paradise itself that is important.

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



Abstinence is for everyone, not just for monks. Husbands and wives for whom marriage means only the satisfaction of bodily passions will not be justified. They will answer before God for not having been abstinent. Of course, as the Apostle says, they are not to abstain from each other for a long time, lest the devil deceive them, but they should abstain according to mutual consent (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-6). Married people should abstain from corporeal relations during fasts and on great Feast days.

Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica (+2003)
"Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives"

AWAKENING THE SINNER FROM THE SLEEP OF SIN

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, translated by Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, published by the Holy Monastery of St. Paisius (Arizona, 2016), pp. 94-96.

The awakening of the sinner is that act of divine grace in his heart, the consequence of which he, as one awakened from sleep, sees his sinfulness, senses the danger of his situation, begins to fear for himself and to care about deliverance from his misfortune and salvation. Previously, he was like a blind man, unfeeling and uncaring with regard to salvation; now he sees, senses and cares.

However, this is still not change. It is only the opportunity for change and the call for it. Grace is only telling the sinner at this point, *See what you have gotten into; look then, take measures for salvation.* It merely removes him from his customary bonds and sets him beyond them, thereby giving him the opportunity to choose a completely new life and find his place in it. If he takes advantage of this, it is to his benefit; if he does not, he will be cast again into the very same sleep and the very same abyss of destruction.

This divine grace is achieved by exposing to the consciousness and feeling the insignificance and shame of that to which a person is devoted and values so highly. Just as the Word of God pierces even to the *dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow* (Heb 4:12.), so does grace pierce to the division of the heart and sin, and breaks down their unlawful alliance and relationship. We saw how the sinner with his entire being falls into a realm where there are principles, ideas, opinions, rules, customs, pleasures and ways that are completely incompatible with the true spiritual life for which man is intended.

Once he has fallen into this place, he is not there in isolation or detachment. Instead, he is permeated by everything, mingles with everything. He is completely immersed in it. Thus, it is only natural that he not know or think about its incompatibility with spiritual life, and he has no kind of sympathy toward spiritual life. The spiritual realm is completely closed off to him. It is obvious from this that the door to conversion may be opened only under the condition that **the spiritual way of life be revealed to the sinner's consciousness in its full light**, and not merely revealed, but that it touch the heart; that the sinful way of life be discredited, rejected, and destroyed. This also takes place in the presence of consciousness and feeling. Only then can the care arise to abandon the old ways and begin the new. All this is accomplished in the single act of the sinner's arousal by grace.

In its course of action, the arousing divine grace is always connected not only with the bonds in which the sinner is

held, but also with the overall condition of the sinner. In this latter regard, one must above all keep in mind the difference in the way the action of grace appears when it acts on those who have never been aroused, and when it acts on those who have previously experienced such arousal. For someone who has never experienced spiritual awakening before, it is given to him freely, like some all-encompassing, preliminary or summoning grace. Nothing is required from the person beforehand, because he has a completely different orientation.

However, grace is not freely given to the person who has already experienced spiritual arousal, who knows and senses what life in Christ is, and who has fallen into sin again. He must give something himself first. He must still be worthy and beseech. It is not enough merely to wish; he must work on himself in order to attract spiritual arousal by grace. Such a person, in recollecting his previous sojourn in the virtuous Christian way, often desires it again, but has no power over himself. He would like to turn over a new leaf, but is unable to gain self-mastery and conquer himself. He has abandoned himself to helpless despair because he previously abandoned the gift and reproached and *trodden underfoot the Son of God ... and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace.* (Heb 10:29). Now he is allowed to perceive that this power of grace is so great that it will not be granted immediately. Seek and labor, and learn to appreciate how difficult it is to acquire.

Such a person is in a somewhat agonizing condition: He thirsts but is not given drink, hungers but is not fed, seeks but does not find, exerts himself but does not receive. Sometimes a person is left in this condition for a very long time, to the point where he feels divine reproach, as if God has forgotten him, turned away and betrayed His promise. He feels *like the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, ... But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned..* (Heb 6:7-8). But this slow touching of grace to the heart of the seeker is only a trial. He goes through the period of trial, and thanks to his labors and agonizing search, the spirit of arousal once again descends on him as it descends on others as a gift. This course of action of salvific grace shows us two things: first, the special actions of divine grace in arousing the sinner; and second, the usual way of acquiring the gift of arousing grace.



For error does not show itself as it really is, that by appearing in its nakedness it would not expose itself for what it is. But cunningly dressing itself in alluring clothing, it achieves what seems outwardly to the inexperienced as truer than truth itself.

Hieromartyr Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyons (+202)

THE AROMA OF REVERENCE

Source: Excerpt from *Elder Paisios of Mount Athos* by Hieromonk Isaac.

Once a reclusive ascetic, who had heard a lot about Elder Paisios, came to visit him. They talked for a while, and he ascertained that Elder Paisios was an exceptionally reverent man. Indeed, the elder had a rare reverence, which he had learned from his parents, and mainly his mother.

While at the monastery, he benefited from many of the fathers, and especially from a particular hieromonk. He would say, “We can’t reach the reverence he had—impossible. He would celebrate liturgy every day, and he struggled greatly. Once, for half a year, he ate nothing but half of a small *prosporon* and a few tomatoes dried in the sun.”

When he would serve out in the chapels, this reverent priest, like other priests of the monastery, preferred to have as a chanter the young Father Averkios (as the elder was then called).

The elder had an innate reverence, but he also cultivated it a great deal. He placed such emphasis on it that he once said that “reverence is the greatest virtue, because it attracts the grace of God.” To the elder, reverence was the fear of God and spiritual sensitivity. Reverent people behave carefully and modestly, because they intensely feel the presence of God.

The elder wanted reverence to be unaffected and internal. He turned away from mere external forms. Regarding a group of monks who had great order and discipline in their liturgical life, he commented, “I respect that, if it’s something that comes from within.” The elder’s conduct was reverent, but with a freedom that was alien to dry forms. If he didn’t feel something, he wouldn’t do it. He distinguished reverence from piety—a word he even avoided saying. He would say that reverence is like incense, while piety is just perfume.⁽¹⁾

The elder’s reverence encompassed not only small and seemingly unimportant matters, but also spiritual and essential issues. “If someone neglects the little things,” he taught, “the danger is that he’ll start neglecting greater, holier things. And then, without realizing it, rationalizing it all to himself—‘This is nothing, that doesn’t matter’—he can end up, God forbid,

totally neglecting the things of God and becoming irreverent, arrogant, and atheistic.”

His reverence could be seen in the way he prayed, venerated icons, received *antidoron* and holy water, partook of Holy Communion, held icons during processions, chanted, and arranged and beautified the small chapel of his hermitage. He paid attention to details, but in a way that wasn’t ritualistic or fastidiously formal. This was his own attitude toward God, which wasn’t laid out in advance by any *typikon* of the Church: it was his personal disposition. He felt that his whole hermitage, not just his chapel, was sacred space. He arranged his cell, where he prayed, just like a little church. There was an *iconostasis* with many icons and a lamp that burned continuously, and he would cense and light many candles there. He had

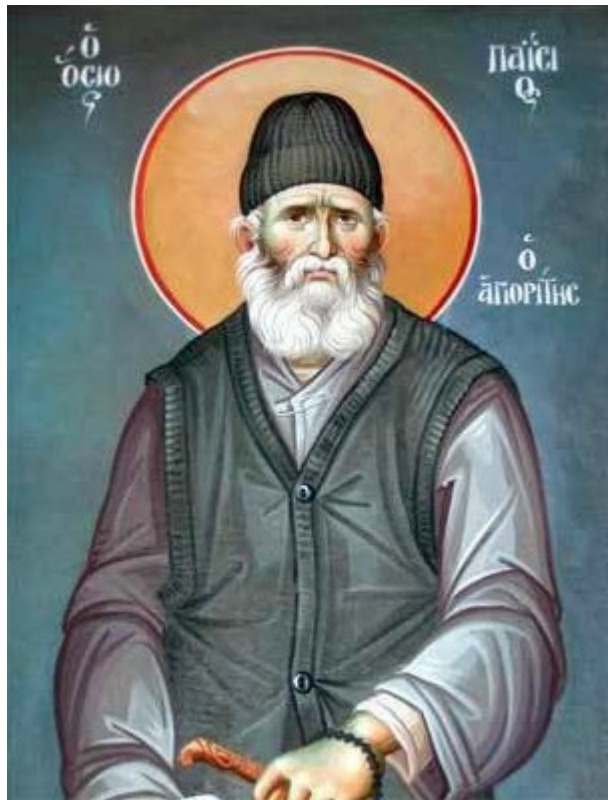
constructed his bed so that it was like a coffin, and he would say, “This is the altar of my cell.” Icons and holy books never touched his bed, with the exception of an icon at its head.

The icon was rather tattered and faded, and a brother once asked him why it was in this condition. The elder tried to hide the truth, but the monk finally realized that it was like that because of his many kisses and tears. The elder reluctantly admitted, “I can get through an entire vigil that way;” that is, weeping.

He also treated the other areas of his hermitage with reverence—the workshop where he made the little icons, the guesthouse where souls were reborn by God’s grace, the balcony, and even the yard. He thought that it

was irreverent to have a toilet inside the hermitage. It was partly for ascetic reasons that he kept it at such a distance, but mostly it was out of reverence.

Once, when he was away from the hermitage of the Holy Cross, the fathers of the monastery (out of love, so he wouldn’t be uncomfortable) made him a small outhouse, outside but sharing a wall with the hermitage. The elder never used it. At Panagouda, when his health had deteriorated toward the end of his life and he needed to go out frequently at night—in cold, rain, and snow—his spiritual children began to insist on building him an outhouse just clear of the balcony to make things easier for him. He refused. “That’s where the Panagia appeared,” he said. “How can I go to the toilet there?”



The elder's life was fragrant with deep and unaffected reverence, just as the angels in heaven worship God day and night "with great reverence." This was clear to see from his relationship with God and from the expressions on his face when coming into contact with sacred things. He reacted to sacred objects as though they were alive.

Once, when Elder Paisios was visiting the hermitage of another monk, his hernia was bothering him. The elder of the hermitage begged him to lie down and rest a little, but Elder Paisios declined. He was only able to lie on his left side, and, if he had done that there, his feet would have been pointing at some icons, which he thought of as irreverent.

Before entering the holy altar, he would make a prostration to the floor, remove his monastic cap, and kiss the cross on the altar-curtain; and then he would enter by the side door. During the Communion hymn at liturgy, if he intended to commune, he would make full prostrations. For a time, he had it as a rule to eat nothing for thirty-three hours before communing.

Because of his great reverence for the mystery of the priesthood, the elder never assented to ordination, even though, as he once said, "It's been revealed to me three different times that I could become a priest."⁽²⁾

Plainly, the elder saw reverence as a fundamental virtue for every Christian—although, rigorous as his criteria were, he considered it something rare. To the elder, reverence was greater than most of the other virtues.

He often used it as a criterion.

If a reverent person wrote or said or did something for which he was criticized, the elder, even before forming a clear opinion on the issue itself, would go out of his way to propose mitigating circumstances. He would say, "He's a reverent man—I don't believe he'd do something like that." The elder believed that this quality preserved a person from making errors, from deceptions and from falling—perhaps in the sense of the verse declaring that the Lord *will carefully guard the way of those who reverence Him.* (Prov 2:8.).

The elder considered reverence to be extremely important in all of a Christian's life and struggles, and especially those of a monk. A person's reverence, he believed, acts as a steady factor in his life, affecting everything and raising his spiritual level.

He advised monks to take care to acquire reverence. "A new monk, especially, has to be reverent through and through. It helps for him to always have the *Evergetinos* open⁽³⁾ and to spend time with other monks who are reverent." When a new monk asked the elder what it was that he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, "Reverence and attention to yourself."

A Russian bishop, presented with many candidates for the priesthood, once asked the elder whom he should ordain. "Those who are reverent and pure," the elder answered—he did not say educated or energetic men, or candidates with good voices.

In chanting and iconography also, reverence was more important to the elder than technique. He was able to discern its presence in chanting or in an icon, and he would say: "If



A young St Paisios in the hermitage of St. Epistimi above St. Catherine's Monastery, at Mt. Sinai

you pay attention to the meaning of a *troparion*, it'll change you, and you'll be able to chant in a reverent way. If you're reverent, you might make a mistake while you chant, but it'll come out sounding sweet. If you only pay attention to technique—I mean, going note-by-note, without a reverent spirit—then you'll end up like a lay chanter I once heard; he was chanting *Bless the Lord, O my soul* like a blacksmith striking an anvil. I heard it in a car, and it disturbed me—I told the driver to turn off the tape. When someone doesn't chant from the heart, it's like he's running you out of church. A sacred canon says that people who chant with improper voices should be given penances

because they drive people away from church."

Concerning iconography, he advised, "You should make an icon with reverence, like we were going to be giving it to Christ Himself. How would we like it if someone gave us a photograph where our face wasn't right? It's not right for the Panaghia to be depicted like Saint Anna—I mean, not to show her physical beauty. There has never been a woman as beautiful as the Panaghia was in soul and body. How she transformed people's souls with her grace!"

Of the icon of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God (*Glykofilousa*), at Philotheou Monastery, he remarked: "Technically, it's not quite perfect, because Christ's feet are wedge-shaped, but it works miracles and has such grace and sweetness. It's probably because God rewarded the iconographer's reverence."

“The grace of God,” observed the elder, “comes to reverent people, and it makes the soul beautiful.” But he observed with sadness that contemporary people pay little attention to such things. “If a person is not reverent,” he said, “if he scorns divine things, then divine grace abandons him and he’s overcome by temptations, and becomes like the demons. Divine grace won’t come to an irreverent person—it comes to people who honor it.” As examples of irreverence, he mentioned the sacrifice of Cain and the behavior of the sons of Eli related in the Old Testament. Their disdain provoked the wrath of God, and they were punished.

The elder considered it irreverent to place icons, ecclesiastical books, *antidoron*, and holy objects in general on the seats of church-stalls, and even more so on chairs or beds (except on a pillow). He suggested that people put the little icons that he would hand out in their chest pockets. Once, he related, a pilgrim came holding his head crooked from neck pain. Through divine enlightenment, the elder realized that the man had suffered this at the hands of demonic powers, because he had put a cross the elder had given him, which contained a piece of the Precious Cross of the Lord, in his back-pocket. The elder forbade anyone who lived carelessly to carry the Precious Cross.

He once told us about someone who had become possessed because he had spit in an unclean place on a day when he had communed. The same had happened to a woman who had thrown holy water onto excrement. Another time, he related, a young man who was engaged to be married visited a conjurer, who told him to urinate on the wedding rings. Upon following the conjurer’s instructions, the young man became possessed, because wedding rings are holy. The elder also gave other, similar examples of careless and irreverent people being abandoned by divine grace and becoming possessed.

He didn’t think it was right to refer to the holy fathers of the Church simply by their first names; for example, as “Basil” or “Gregory.” “We talk about ‘Father So-and-so’ and say ‘Father’ to monks and clergy,” he commented, “and this is how we’re going to talk about the holy fathers?”

He didn’t want people to offer God candles made from impure or artificial beeswax or to fill their lamps with olive oil of poor quality or with seed-oil. On the contrary, he emphasized, “[we should] offer our best to God in worship. We should offer up our best efforts and our pure prayer—not our yawning.” He considered it greatly irreverent to use *prospora* for the liturgy that was tainted with mold. “Christ gives us His Body and Blood,” he would say, “and we give Him moldy *prospora*?” He would walk miles to find *prospora* for the Divine Liturgy, and when he carried it, he would hold it by the side, taking care not to touch the seal.

The elder tried to show gratitude and be pleasing to the One whom he loved. Out of his great love, he offered to God the very best, and he conducted himself with refinement, with spiritual sensitivity and reverence. And God, being pleased, bestowed His grace on the elder in abundance.

† † †
NOTES:

(1): “Reverence,” in Greek *evlavia* (εὐλαβεία); and “piety,” *evsevia* (εὐσέβεια). The latter word is used in the Greek of the Scriptures and Church fathers to refer to Christian reverence and correct faith; and, especially in older translations, it has often been rendered as “piety.” By the elder’s time, the Greek word had taken on a negative meaning in a somewhat similar fashion as the word “piety” has come to do in English; to many, it was synonymous with pietism and formalism.

(2): Most likely these signs were not commands—rather, he was presented with the possibility of becoming a priest. When he was asked about this, he answered, “Christ gives us gifts. Do we have to accept all of them?”

(3): That is, to study it frequently. The *Evergetinos* is a collection of anecdotes and teachings from the early Egyptian desert fathers. Unlike the *Philokalia*, a more advanced spiritual text that treats the way in which “the intellect (*nous*) is purified, illumined, and made perfect” (vol. 1, p. 13), the *Evergetinos* focuses on the practice of Christian virtues, a necessary precursor to the exalted attainments described in the *Philokalia*.



Where is this world coming to? Once they sent me a picture of a bride, and asked me to pray that her marriage would be a good one. She was wearing an awful wedding gown. When they dress this way, they are showing an irreverence to the Mystery of Marriage and to the Church, whose space is sacred. These are supposedly spiritual people, and yet they do not seem to think twice about the dress. What will those who are not spiritual do, if they follow their example? That’s why I am saying: **If monasteries do not hold the line, no one else will put the brakes on people.** They are out of control.

St. Paisios the Athonite

GERO-ARSENIOS THE CAVE-DWELLER (1886-1983)

FELLOW ASCETIC OF ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST

Source: "My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-dweller," St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery (2013), pp. 563-568.



Gero-Arsenios was a living example of obedience for our brotherhood. He was obedient to Geronda his whole life. Not once did he disobey or grieve him. Gero-Arsenios was so humble that he was actually obedient to everyone.

One day my brother came to visit me. Since he was a carpenter and we were building our chapel, Geronda asked him:

-Niko, can you make the *iconostasis* for us?

-Yes, I can, Geronda, he replied.

As he worked, Gero-Arsenios helped him out and took orders from him as if he were a little child, even though he was forty years older than my brother.

Gero-Arsenios' life was extremely ascetical, beginning with his first years in Jerusalem and then in our brotherhood.

When he was seventy, he took care of his own garden. He did this not only to help provide for our needs but also because he wanted to please Geronda who liked having our own fresh vegetables. Even at that age, Gero-Arsenios worked along with us youngsters. He was even shorter than me, but he toiled and sweated and carried just as much as the rest of us. Whenever Fathers Athanasios and Joseph the Cypriot went working at the monasteries all day long to gather chestnuts or olives, he would tell them:

-Don't worry; I'll do your prayer rules for you.

He said this because they would be so tired from working all day that they wouldn't have the strength to do their prostrations. We youngsters were no match for this little old man!

Not only did he have endurance, but he also had tremendous strength. He would go down to the harbor and load up on his back whatever we needed; wheat, sand, rocks, wood, all types of provisions. Sometimes the load he carried was in excess of 150 pounds! When someone asked him how he was able to carry such a heavy load after such a tiresome vigil, he answered:

-I have a naturally strong constitution, but when a disciple has faith in the blessing of his elder, he can lift even a mountain. Many times when I had loaded up my back with things beyond my strength, my knees would be ready to buckle. But when I made the sign of the cross and called upon Geronda's prayers, and the load would lighten on its own. Then I felt as if someone were supporting me from

behind, and I flew up the mountainside like a bird, while ceaselessly saying the prayer.

Not only was Gero-Arsenios naturally strong and a hard worker who labored wholeheartedly, but he would also keep vigil every night, **doing thousands of prostrations** and saying the Jesus prayer with his prayer rope countless times. He said the Jesus prayer while making the sign of the cross for so long that one day he injured his shoulder. Geronda was forced to tell him to do fewer. I would see Gero-Arsenios stand upright from sunset till sunrise for his vigil, even after working hard all day with minimal sleep. He would sleep only two hours in the evening and one hour in the morning. He told me that sometimes when it was time for vigil, he would say to himself:

-How am I going to keep vigil now? I am so tired from working all day, how am I going to stand up for so many hours.

But then he added:

-As soon as I stand up and put my nous in my heart—my, oh, my! My heart opens up with prayer, and I feel such grace from God that I notice no exhaustion. Eight hours pass, ten hours pass, and there is zero exhaustion. I just hold on to the prayer. Only when I stop in the morning do I realize the exhaustion.

He continued keeping vigil like this until he died at the age of ninety-seven.

Sometimes he would remain standing for twelve hours straight! He would not even shift his weight from one foot to the other, nor would he lean against the wall or even pause to read a book. It was awe-inspiring. And to think that he was doing this in his sixties, while I was a nineteen-year-old kid, and I had to often lean against the wall. He would just tilt his head down towards his heart, hold his prayer rope, and keep saying, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. What prayer he had! His little cell was fragrant from all the prayers he said synchronized with his breathing. He had the name of Christ "carved" within his heart.

He himself admitted:

-When I pray with my prayer rope while standing, I perceive an intense divine fragrance. But when I say the prayer sitting down, I perceive very little fragrance.

When Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain met Gero-Arsenios, the holy Elder was amazed at his fragrance because he knew that it is not just a sign of dispassion but also of sanctity.

He was often so absorbed in the prayer that when it was time to begin work, he couldn't tear himself away from the prayer. We would go up to him and tell him:

-Geronda, it's time for work.

After coming to his senses, he would say with surprise

-It's daytime already?

Gero-Arsenios was an extremely simple and childlike person. You cannot imagine how simple he was. He was simple and

innocent like a small child. He was never upset with anyone. I never saw Gero-Arsenius get angry or behave inappropriately. This is why he never had temptations in his life. He passed his life like an infant. While other people were passing through the furnace of temptations, he passed his life with ease because he was always obedient to Geronda.

He was simple-minded because that is how he was born. All he knew was how to say the prayer; he did not have *theoria*. He did not experience the expansion of his nous (*) in prayer. Nevertheless, he felt grace intensely in his heart from noetic prayer. He did not have Geronda's sharpness of mind. Geronda was extremely sharp and had both noetic prayer and *theoria*. He had both *praxis* and *theoria*. Geronda was unsurpassed in his prayer of the heart and *theoria*, and from both springs he drew huge amounts of grace, which sanctified him.

Only once did Gero-Arsenius experience a "mini-*theoria*," if we can call it that. Once, when he was praying for the departed, he found himself in a beautiful place with groups of families, each in their own tent. The people inside the tents were very happy. Gero-Arsenius entered one of the tents and said with all of his characteristic simplicity:

-What are you people doing in here? Does anyone come and visit you?

-Yes, papa-Bartholomew visits us and brings us presents.

Papa-Bartholomew was the priest who served the Liturgy for them back at St. Basil's Skete. This goes to show the benefit of commemorating the departed in the Divine Liturgy.

Even though Gero-Arsenius did not experience *theoria*, he had an immense number of exceptional visitations of grace. Every year on the feast day of St. Savvas the Sanctified, Gero-Arsenius smelled an indescribable fragrance in his cell. Geronda knew that this was a visitation of grace. (It is significant that he used to live at the Monastery of St. Savvas and had labored very hard there.) But to protect Gero-Arsenius from vainglorious thoughts, Geronda said in front of everyone:

-Listen, fathers. Don't attach any importance to fragrances, because the enemy is also able to create them...

Geronda taught all his disciples these lessons of discernment:

-If, during prayer, you perceive an unusual phenomenon with one of your five senses but without your soul sensing anything, pay no attention to that phenomenon because God is beyond the five senses. But if joy or hope come to your soul when you see a vision, smell a fragrance, hear something, or have any other sensation, neither accept it nor reject it, but go tell it to your spiritual father immediately!

-If the triad of faith, hope, and love before you begin praying is—in a manner of speaking ten degrees Celsius—and afterwards your faith, hope, and love have increased to one hundred degrees, then this transformation is from God, because the evil one is incapable of inspiring you with either faith or hope or love, since he lacks all three of these.

-So if you find that these three have increased after you have prayed, know that your prayer has been acceptable to God. If these three qualities remain unchanged, know that you have prayed in a worldly manner. If these three have decreased in you, you have prayed in a deluded manner. And if, after prayer, you feel some kind of carnality, however slight, you have prayed wrongly.

Once during the Liturgy, Geronda spilled an oil-lamp. Gero-Arsenius said:

-Hey, you spilled the oil-lamp!

-Be quiet, Geronda replied. We're in church!

How charming the two of them were!

Gero-Arsenius was always healthy, which is why he lived to

be ninety-seven. He never got sick, except for catching a minor cold now and then. When he did, the only medicine he took was herbal tea with some raki. Then he would just stay in bed and keep warm until it passed. Never in his life did he take any medicine or pills or injections. He did not even bathe for seventy years. He only washed his feet and



head sometimes. Despite this, his body always had a pleasant scent of the wilderness, somewhat like basil.

After Elder Joseph's repose, Gero-Arsenius stayed with Papa-Haralambos. Gero-Arsenius missed Geronda's presence and said:

-Ah, Geronda, you forgot me! You didn't take me with you! But I said to him:

-No... he left you behind as a consolation for us.

Twenty-four years later, in 1983, he departed like a ripe fig. He did not even get sick; his soul departed out of ripeness. He was not afraid of death because he had been obedient to Elder Joseph until the age of seventy-three when Elder Joseph fell asleep in the Lord. Besides, he had the Jesus prayer constantly within him, he was overflowing with grace, he had worked hard his entire life in asceticism, and he had Geronda's intercessions. How could he not be at peace? How could he fear death? He had faith that Geronda would come and receive his soul...

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(*) Elder Joseph describes what is meant by expansion of the nous near the end of his tenth letter in *Monastic Wisdom*.

LET US FOLLOW HIM!

By the late Augoustinos N. Kantiotes, bishop of Florina, Greece (+2010), from "Follow Me," translated by Asterios Gerostergios, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, pp. 68-74.

They forsook all and followed Him.

[Lk 5:11]

† † †

We hear the voice of the Lord. He calls us, too, to leave everything and follow Him. Leave everything? Our homes, our work, our various businesses? Not quite. For we saw that those who, like the Apostles, are called to a special, extraordinary mission requiring absolute self-denial and consecration are expected to leave all these things. But then, what do we mean when we say that he who wants to follow the Lord must leave everything?

Listen! Besides the things that comprise one's material goods, which everyone—even the poorest person—has to some degree, there is another bounty—one that is not material or visible, a wealth that is not blessed but damnable, and which has collected in our secret coffers by the meddling of Satan. This bounty is vice, evil, and passion. With all the mental and physical corruption that passions cause, people still love them, tend to them, feed them, and would not think of separating themselves from them. There are cases, not rare, when people love the passions more than cherished persons and possessions. Whatever promises he makes, the alcoholic will not separate himself from his passion for drink, the gambler from his passion for card playing, the debauchee from his carnal passion. Above all else is the drink, the card, the delight. How many houses, stores, and factories—how many enormous fortunes—are used up to satisfy bottomless passions!

The passions are the possessions, the principal possessions, which we are called upon to leave, to separate ourselves from, in order to *follow Christ*. (Lk 14:33). For one to leave material goods and put them at Christ's disposal for the common good is a praiseworthy act, but it is not as difficult as cutting oneself from one's faults, evils, and passions. The Apostles easily left their boats and nets, but how difficult it was for them to leave behind their errors, faults, and vices! Passions stick to our beings like a turtle's shell adheres to its body. They compose a second nature, an evil nature. "To transform the evil nature is not a light undertaking," the ancient Greeks used to say.

A person who wishes to *follow Christ* is called upon to deny, renounce, and throw far away like an old garment all that comprises the worst fortune of his existence. In the sacred service of Baptism, we see that this is at the heart of renouncing. If he wants to *follow Christ*, the one to be baptized is asked to renounce his evil habits, vices, passions, and everything which constitutes service to Satan. Stripped of that which was formerly beloved, the one baptized can *follow Christ*.

But Christ, who wraps Himself in light as with a garment, does not leave him naked but clothes him in a garment, an imperishable garment. And this imperishable garment is comprised of the virtues of Christ, which should become the virtues of the Christian.

St. Clement of Alexandria, allegorically interpreting Matthew 19:21 (*sell what you have and give to the poor*) says that for someone to deny his wealth and give it to the poor or to his country is nothing new, as in the sense of Jesus' teaching, for many ancients like Anaxagoras, Democretes, and Cratetes did the same for a worldly cause. What is new in Jesus' teaching, however, is something "greater, more godlike, and more perfect, the stripping off of the passions from the soul itself and from the disposition" and eradicating them completely. This is the highest perfection.

Has anyone succeeded? "So," continues Clement, "let no man destroy wealth, rather than the passions of the soul, which are incompatible with the better use of wealth. So that, becoming virtuous and good, he may be able to make a good use of these riches," i.e., delivered from the passionate attachment to material things, one will be able to dispense in the best manner whatever material goods he has for the glory of God.

Therefore, O Christian, when you hear the Gospel say that the four fishermen *forsook all* and followed Christ, consider this and ask yourself: "The Apostles left material possessions for the Lord's sake. What have I left for the Lord's sake? What has my faith cost me up till now?"

Any sacrifice of material goods for Christ's sake is small, very small and unimportant, says Anthony the Great. And were we to suppose that we possessed not just a few earthly, household goods or money, but were lords of all the earth and denied all this for the spiritual good of the soul, even this sacrifice would have no value compared to the Kingdom of the heavens. This is what Anthony the Great taught, as related by St. Athanasios. Today's Christians, however, have such an attachment to material goods and are so worldly in their cares, that they wouldn't sacrifice a strip of land for righteousness' sake, for love or peace. Many would not even sacrifice a penny for Christ's sake! They sacrifice everything for matter, which they have deified, while **the true Christian sacrifices matter for the sake of the spirit**. This is the difference between the material and the spiritual person, and every Christian should be such a spiritual person.

The Gospel does not oblige me to forsake my job. It calls me, however, to make another kind of sacrifice—to forsake my bad habits. Have I left them all? Or have I maybe forsaken only a few bad habits which never bothered me much, and kept certain pet passions that I call "human weaknesses" to ease my conscience, but ones the Gospel of Christ condemns?

Every follower of Christ should ask these questions, for next to the Lord Himself, our salvation is the most serious responsibility of our lives, and woe to us if there is any weakness we

decide not to forsake. We will remain far from the Lord. Is there a greater calamity than this? Therefore, with His help, let us banish every sinful burden, and as well-girded soldiers follow the glorious path of the martyr.

If we think of “forsook all” in this spiritual sense, everyone could imitate the Apostles and follow the Lord. St. Chrysostom thunders: **Forsake only your evil habits, and remaining in your own homes, you can easily be saved.**

People who want to banish every evil habit must come to know and feel the infinite wretchedness which human passions create, and recognizing this, call on the Lord, Who alone can change this terrible state.

St. Chrysostom gives us an analogy of the misery of the passions. He tells us that our present life is not different from a jail. If we go into a jail, we see the unfortunate condemned, all bound with heavy chains, so that if we even partially leave the fantasy (the false image which this bounty gives to many, i.e., pleasure or glory) and psychologically interpret the reality—that is, if each of us would examine our mental lives—we would see that our souls are no different from prisoners. They also pull heavy bonds and tolerate them. For the soul, heavy bonds and chains are the passions possessing it. Do you want to see what misfortune these bonds create? Examine, if you will, the life of a greedy rich man who never rests, for the more riches he has, the heavier his bonds become. The greedy man has a fearsome jailor who does not even let him go a little distance from the prison door to breathe, but constantly thrusts him into the deeper and darker parts of the jail where the filth is unbearable and the bothersome insects do not let him rest at all. Who is this stern jailor? The evil love of money.

Bound souls! Poor people, although they seem free in body, they live as if in a jail under the watch of austere jailors who carry whips with which they mercilessly strike the ever-petulant criminals. And these criminals would most unwillingly wear physical bonds but gladly wear the ones with which sin binds the soul. Appropriate is this tale:

A tyrant of ancient times ordered a workman to prepare a chain of a certain length with the promise that he would reward him as he deserved. The workman carried out the tyrant’s desire. He prepared the chain. But as soon as he saw it, the tyrant ordered the workman to double its length. And when he did this, the tyrant ordered it doubled again. The chain became very long and heavy. And then the tyrant rewarded him, very deservedly. What was his reward? He ordered that the workman be bound hand and foot with the chain and be thrown into prison for life.

That great tyrant of humanity called the devil does something similar. He orders every person who blindly follows him to prepare a chain, to practice sin. And when the sin is done, he does not say, “Good enough,” but orders it to be repeated, to have its power doubled. And when through

constant repetition the chain of sin becomes “long and heavy,” it becomes a passion. Then wail and lament! The miserable person becomes a chained servant of Satan. Who is to blame? We are. The person who hears Satan’s voice and follows him descends into the fearful prisons of sin—his passions.

In this terrible state there is no other escape except that which St. Chrysostom points out. And that is, beg the Redeemer of souls to break the bonds, banish the jailor, and remove the burden of iron chains from us and show our spirit to be lighter than an eagle’s wings. But we must cooperate, “offering attention, thought and eagerness.” Working thus, we will quickly expel our vices, and, free of the evils which now possess and tyrannize our souls, we will realize in what a calamitous abyss we had once lived and what freedom we now enjoy following the Lord.

In his novel *Let Us Follow Him*, the Polish writer, Henryk Sienkiewicz, very artfully describes the terrible catastrophe of the human soul in the person of a noble girl named Antaia, who became the wife of a powerful figure of the Roman Empire, the Patrician Cenna, charged with governing Alexandria. The excellent position was full of worldly joy. But there appeared deep and inexplicable pain. Antaia was afflicted with a mysterious illness which fed on her physically and mentally. She withered like a flower in the bud and no medicine, physician, magician or sage was able to cure her. Finally Cenna, in despair, brought Antaia to Palestine. There was a leader whom they knew, Pontius Pilate. Then came the day when Jesus was to be crucified.

The sick girl’s ardent desire was to see the Condemned, and it was granted. Pilate saw to it that the litter carrying the sick girl was at a point on the way to Golgotha, from which she could watch the procession. ... And she saw Jesus carrying His Cross. Looking into His face, Antaia was moved by a most holy feeling. She got up her strength, sat up in her litter, looked at the King of Pain and Suffering and began showering Him with flowers. Her lips whispered, “You are the Truth...” Antaia was healed from that very moment, and her unbelieving husband believed. This is a synopsis of the story, certainly a creation of the novelist’s imagination, but two realities are vividly presented in it: The agony of the human soul and redemption in Christ!

Dear friends, innumerable examples are contained in the experience of centuries to certify that far from the Lord there is the slavery described, while near the Lord there is freedom which springs from His sacrifice on the Cross, from the blood of Christ. And after so many examples, after the experiences of the past centuries of those who found redemption in Christ, why, dear friend, do you still hesitate to follow the Lord? Banish all delay and make the decision.

Brothers, fellow sinners! Let’s listen to the mystical voice of the Lord who calls us and, forsaking everything, **let us follow Jesus wherever He leads.**

1^η Σεπτεμβρίου: Ἡ Ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου

Ἡ πρώτη τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου ἐορτάζεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ Ἐκκλησία ὡς ἡ πρώτη τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους.

Θεοδώρου Ρόκα, θεολόγου ἐρμηνευτικῆς θεολογίας.

Ἡ λέξη Ἰνδικτος («indictus») εἶναι λέξη Λατινικὴ ποὺ σημαίνει «ὄρισμός», «διάγγελμα», «ἐπαγγελία», «κήρυξη», «ἐπιβολὴ ποινῆς ἢ φόρου». Ἡ λέξη αὐτὴ χρησιμοποιεῖτο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ρωμαίους αὐτοκράτορες, μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ καθορίζουν τὸ ὕψος τῶν φόρων ἐπὶ τῆς παραγωγῆς τῆς γῆς, ποὺ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ πληρώσουν οἱ ὑπήκοοι τῆς Ρώμης γιὰ τὴ συντήρηση τοῦ στρατοῦ. Τὸ διάγγελμα αὐτὸ ἴσχυε γιὰ δεκαπέντε χρόνια καὶ τοῦτο, γιὰτὴν κάθε δεκαπέντε χρόνια ἀπολύονταν οἱ παλαιοὶ στρατιῶτες καὶ κατατάσσονταν οἱ νέοι. Νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι τὸ ὕψος τῶν σχετικῶν φόρων καθοριζόταν ἀπὸ τὴν νέα δύναμη τοῦ στρατοῦ γιὰ τὴν ἐπόμενη δεκαπενταετία.

Μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου ἡ λέξη Ἰνδικτος ἔπαυσε νὰ σημαίνει μόνον διάγγελμα καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἀνωτέρω, ἀλλὰ σήμαινε τὸ διάστημα τῶν δεκαπέντε ἐτῶν. Καὶ ἔτσι ἄρχισαν νὰ μετροῦν τὸ χρόνο σὲ Ἰνδίκτους (πρῶτη Ἰνδικτος, δευτέρη Ἰνδικτος, κ.ο.κ.). Ἦδη πρῶτος ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος ὄρισε

ὡς ἐπίσημη μέτρηση τοῦ χρόνου (τὸ 312 ἢ 313 μ.Χ.) τὴν Ἰνδικτο, ποὺ ἄρχιζε τὴν 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου, ἐποχὴ ποὺ εἶχε τελειώσει ἡ συγκομιδὴ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς. Ἡ μέτρηση αὐτὴ τοῦ χρόνου ὀνομάστηκε, ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου, «Κωνσταντίνειος Ἰνδικτιῶν» ἢ «Ἑλληνικὴ».

Ἡ Ἰνδικτιῶνα εἶναι ἕνας γενικότερος τρόπος μέτρησης τοῦ χρόνου ἀνὰ 15ετίες μὲ ἀφετηρία τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ γιὰ τὴν ἀκριβεία ἀπὸ τὸ 3 π.χ. Ἡ 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου καθορίστηκε ὡς ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς χρονιάς ὡς ἑξῆς: Στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Ἀνατολῆς τὰ περισσότερα ἡμερολόγια εἶχαν ὡς πρωτοχρονιά τὴν 24^η Σεπτεμβρίου. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως ἡ 23^η Σεπτεμβρίου ἦταν ἡ γενέθλιος ἡμέρα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα τῆς Ρώμης Ὀκταβιανοῦ, ἡ πρωτοχρονιά μετατέθηκε στὴν 24 Σεπτεμβρίου, ἡ ὁποία καὶ καθορίστηκε ὡς ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου, δηλαδὴ τῆς περιόδου τοῦ Ρωμαϊκοῦ διατάγματος γιὰ τὸν φόρο ποὺ ἴσχυε γιὰ 15 ἔτη. Ἔτσι Ἰνδικτος κατάντησε νὰ σημαίνει ἀργότερα τὸ ἔτος καὶ ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου τὴν Πρωτοχρονιά.

Σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν Πρωτοχρονιά βρῆκε ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀφορμὴ καὶ τῆς ἔδωσε Χριστιανικὸ περιεχόμενο, ἀφοῦ

τοποθέτησε σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ἐορτὴ τῆς συλλήψεως τοῦ Προδρόμου (24 Σεπτεμβρίου). Ἀργότερα, τὸ 462 μ.Χ., γιὰ πρακτικὸς λόγους καὶ γιὰ νὰ συμπίπτει ἡ πρώτη τοῦ ἔτους μὲ τὴν πρώτη τοῦ μηνός, ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πρωτοχρονιά μετατέθηκε τὴν 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου. Ἡ 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου, ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους, ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου. Τότε τελεῖται ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς Ἰνδίκτου σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὴ Θεία λειτουργία γιὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους.

Τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Λευτικοῦ ὀρίζει: «*Προσάξετε μετὰ τῶν ἄρτων ἑπτὰ ἀμνοὺς ἀμώμους ἐνιαυσίους καὶ μόσχον ἕνα ἐκ βουκολίου καὶ κριοὺς δύο ἀμώμους, καὶ ἔσονται ὀλοκαύτωμα τῷ Κυρίῳ καὶ αἱ θυσίαι αὐτῶν καὶ αἱ σπονδαὶ αὐτῶν θυσία ὁσμῆς εὐωδίας τῷ Κυρίῳ*» (Λευ. 23:18), ἐπιβάλλοντας μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο στοὺς Ἰουδαίους νὰ προσφέρουν θυσίες ὀλοκαυτωμάτων κατὰ τὴν ἐορτὴ τῆς Νουμηνίας ἢ τῶν Σαλπύγγων (τὴν

πρῶτη ἡμέρα τοῦ ἑβδόμου Ἰουδαϊκοῦ ἔτους) ἀποδίδοντας εὐχαριστίες πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ γιὰ τὴν εὐνοίαν Του πρὸς τὴν κτίση. Τὴν τακτικὴ αὐτὴ υἰοθέτησε καὶ ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ἐκκλησία ὡς ἐορτὴ προετοιμασίας γιὰ τὸ νέο ἔτος βλαστήσεως καὶ συγκομιδῆς—ἀρχὴ τῆς γεωργικῆς περιόδου, ποὺ ξεκινᾷ κάθε Σεπτέμβρη.

Μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ὀρίστηκαν δύο εἴδη Ἰνδίκτου, ἡ Καισαρικὴ,

δηλαδὴ ἡ παλαιὰ Ρωμαϊκὴ, ποὺ ἄρχιζε τὴν 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου καὶ τὴν ὁποία συνέχισε τὸ Βυζάντιο, καὶ ἡ Παπικὴ, ποὺ ἄρχιζε στὴν 25^η Δεκεμβρίου καὶ ἀργότερα τὴν 1^η Ἰανουαρίου. Ἡ πρωτοχρονιά τῆς 1^{ης} Ἰανουαρίου ἔχει Ρωμαϊκὴ προέλευση καὶ ἦρθε στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἀνατολὴ κατὰ τὰ νεότερα χρόνια.

Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἀκολουθία γιὰ τὸ νέο ἔτος τελεῖται τὴν 1^η Σεπτεμβρίου, μίαν ἀκολουθία ἀπαράμιλλου κάλλους ὡς πρὸς τὸ ὑμνογραφικὸ ὕλικό.



Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα ἡ «πλεονεξία» ἀπομακρύνει πιδὸ πολύ, ἀποξενώνει πιδὸ πολύ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὸ βασίλειον τοῦ Χριστοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ πλεονέκτης ἀπορρίπτεται ἀπὸ τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τί εἶναι πλεονεξία; Ἡ πλεονεξία εἶναι ἡ «ἀγαπητικὴ» διάθεση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὰ πράγματα τοῦ κόσμου, ἡ θεοποίηση τῶν πραγμάτων, ἡ τοποθέτησή τους στὴν θέση τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ.

Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς (+1979)

Ὁ Ἐγωισμὸς Ρεζιλεύει καὶ Θεατρίζει

Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ Ἀριζόνας, προηγουμένου τῆς Τερᾶς Μονῆς Φιλόθεου.



Σήμερα θὰ μιλήσουμε γιὰ τὴν μεγάλη πνευματικὴ ἀσθένεια ποὺ λέγεται ἐγωισμὸς. Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς εἶναι ἓνα παράλογο πάθος ποὺ μαστίζει κυριολεκτικὰ ὅλο το ἀνθρώπινο γένος· ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάσχουμε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ μεγάλη ἀσθένεια. Τὸν ἐγωιστὴ ἄνθρωπο ὁ ἐγωισμὸς τὸν ρεζιλεύει καὶ τὸν θεατρίζει. Αὐτὸν τὸν ἐγωισμὸ καλούμεθα ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ νὰ ἀγωνιστοῦμε, νὰ τὸν καταπολεμήσουμε, γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπ' αὐτόν.

Ὁ παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ ἐμπαθὴς κατάσταση τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ στὴν κυριολεξία εἶναι ἐγωισμὸς. Ὅλα τα πάθη, ὅλα τα ἁμαρτήματα, ὅλες οἱ πτώσεις, ἔχουν τὴν ἀρχὴ τους, τὴν ἀφετηρία τους στὸν ἐγωισμὸ. Μεγάλο κακό. Δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἡσυχά· τὸν τυραννᾷ νύχτα-μέρα. Ὅλοι γενικὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι πάσχουν ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ κακό, καὶ περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅλους ἐγὼ ὁ ἁμαρτωλός...

Στὸν πρῶτο καιρὸ ποὺ ἤμουν κοντὰ στὸν ἅγιο Γέροντά μου, ὅταν πρωτοπῆγα κοντὰ του ἐκεῖ σ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀπαράκλητο τόπο τῆς ἐρήμου, ἐκεῖ κοντὰ σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γνώρισα καὶ εἶδα στὴν πράξη τὸν ἐγωισμὸ μου. Ὅταν ἤμουν στὸν κόσμο, οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ νόμιζαν ὅτι ἤμουν ἓνα ἁγιασμένο παιδί. Ἐγὼ ἀντιδρούσα σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς χαρακτηρισμούς, πλὴν ὅμως σιγὰ-σιγὰ οἱ ἔπαινοι μου κἀνανε κακό. Καὶ τὸ κακό αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδα στὴν πράξη, ὅταν ἔβαλα τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν ἀρχὴ νὰ θεραπευθῶ ψυχικὰ ἀπὸ ὅλα μου τὰ πάθη.

Ὅταν πρωτοπῆγα στὸ Γέροντα Ἰωσήφ, ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη μέρα ἀμέσως ἄρχισε τὴν ἐπίβλεψή του, ἄρχισε τὴν θεραπεία του. Καὶ μὲ μεταχειριζόταν αὐστηρά· μὲ ἤλεγχε συνέχεια, μὲ μάλωνε, καὶ μὲ κούραζε ἀρκετά, διότι ἤμουν ἀδύνατος ψυχικὰ.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι, ὅταν μοῦ ἔκανε τοὺς ἐλέγχους, δηλαδὴ ὅταν ἔβαζε τὸ φάρμακο πάνω στὴν πληγὴ μου, ἐγὼ πονοῦσα. Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς μου κλωτσοῦσε μέσα μου καὶ μοῦ ἔλεγε· γιατί μόνο σὲ μένα ὁ Γέροντας ἐξασκεῖ αὐτὴ τὴν αὐστηρὴ παιδεία, γιατί νὰ μὲ μαλώνει, γιατί καὶ γιατί...; Ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ Γέροντά μου ἀντιδρούσα, ἀντέλεγα, ἄνοιγα μαζί του πόλεμο. Καὶ πολλές φορές, μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓναν κραταῖο ἀγώνα, πηγαινα μέσα στὸ κελάκι μου καὶ ἔπαιρνα

τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο καὶ ἔκλαιγα ἐπάνω του καὶ τοῦ ἔλεγα:

«Ἰησοῦ μου γλυκύτατε! Ἐσὺ ποὺ ἦσουν ὁ ἀναμάρτητος Θεός, ὑπέμεινες τόσα καὶ τόσα κακά, τόση ἀντιλογία, τόσες ὕβρεις καὶ χλευασμοὺς ἀπὸ ἓνα τόσο μεγάλο πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ποὺ σὲ μισοῦσαν καὶ εἶχαν μεγάλη κακία ἀπέναντί σου. Καὶ ἐσὺ μὲ ἀνεξικακία ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ὑπέμεινες γιὰ τὴ δική μου ἀγάπη καὶ σωτηρία. Καὶ ἐγὼ ἓνας ἁμαρτωλὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἓνας ἐμπαθὴς καὶ ἐλεεινὸς νὰ διαμαρτύρομαι καὶ νὰ λέω, γιατί μοῦ βάζει ὁ Γέροντας τὸ πικρὸ φάρμακο τῆς σωτηρίας μου; Ἄξια αὐτῶν ποὺ ἔπραξα ἀπολαμβάνω. Ἐπομένως δὲν ἔχω οὔτε μία δικαιολογία ἀλλὰ μόνο πρέπει νὰ κάνω ὑπομονὴ νὰ σηκώσω τὸ Σταυρὸ τὸν ὁποῖο μου χάρισε ἡ ἀγαθότητά Σου πρὸς σωτηρία μου».

Αὐτὰ τοῦ ἔλεγα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ πράγματι δεχόμουν μεγάλη ἀνακούφιση. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα τέτοιο κλάμα ἐνοιώθα μία δύναμη μέσα στὴν καρδιά μου, στὸ νὰ ὑπομείνω μέχρι τέλους, ἕως ὅτου νὰ σταυρωθῶ ψυχικὰ γιὰ νὰ δεχθῶ στὴ συνέχεια τὴν ἀνάσταση τῆς ψυχῆς μου.

Πολλὰ παραδείγματα ἁγίων ἀνθρώπων μᾶς δίνουν πολὺ κουράγιο γιὰ νὰ σηκώσουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς αὐτὸν τὸ σταυρὸ, αὐτὴ τὴ δυσκολία στὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τοῦ τρομεροῦ ἐγωισμοῦ. Κακὸ πάθος, δύσκολο. Τὴν καρδιά τὴν ἔχει περιπλέξει πολὺ δύσκολα. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ μέγας Πατέρας τῆς ἐρήμου, ὁ Ποιμὴν, λέει, ὅτι, ἐκεῖνος ποὺ θέλει νὰ ξεριζώνει τὰ πάθη του, πονάει καὶ αἰμορραγεῖ. Καὶ πράγματι ἔτσι ἔχει ἡ ἀλήθεια.

Ὅταν κάποιος μᾶς ἐλέγξει, μᾶς προσβάλλει, ἀμέσως μέσα μας γίνεται ἓνα κλώτσημα, μία δυσκολία ἐσωτερικὴ, μία στενοχώρια, ἓνας πνιγμός, μία πίεση ποὺ μᾶς σπρώχνει νὰ ἀντιμιλήσουμε, νὰ ἀνταποδώσουμε, νὰ θυμώσουμε σ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ μᾶς ἔκανε τὸν μεγάλο. Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα χρειάζεται σφίξιμο, χρειάζεται νὰ καταπιοῦμε μέσα βαθειὰ στὴ ψυχὴ μας, τὸ φαρμάκι αὐτὸ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ.

Νὰ πνίξουμε τὸ θηρίο ποὺ ἔρχεται νὰ βγεῖ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐνοχοποιήσει. Καὶ ὅταν στὴ συνέχεια, σὲ κάθε τέτοια περίπτωση, ἀντιμετωπίσουμε τὸ κακὸ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο, πνίγοντας τὸ θηρίο ὅταν πρόκειται νὰ βγεῖ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω, μὲ τὸ πέρασμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐσωτερικὰ θὰ ψοφήσει. Ὅταν ἓνα θηρίο τὸ κλείσει κανεὶς μέσα σ' ἓνα κλειστὸ χῶρο καὶ δὲν τὸ τροφοδοτεῖ, δὲν τοῦ ρίχνει τροφή, κατὰ φυσικὴ συνέπεια, μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα διάστημα χρόνου θὰ πεθάνει. Ἔτσι καὶ μὲ τὸ θηρίο αὐτὸ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ, ἐὰν δὲν τὸ τροφοδοτοῦμε μὲ ὑποχωρήσεις, μὲ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ σιγὰ-σιγὰ θὰ ἐκλείψει.

Μία παρθένος πηγὴ στὸν Ἀββᾶ Παμβῶ καὶ τοῦ λέγει: -Ἀββᾶ, ἐγὼ νηστεύω πολὺ καὶ τρώω ἀνά ἑπτὰ ἡμέρες. Κάνω καὶ διάφορες ἄλλες ἀσκήσεις. Ἐχω ἀποστηθίσει

τῆ Παλαιὰ καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη. Τὶ μοῦ ὑπολείπεται ἀκόμη νὰ πράξω, ὥστε νὰ φθάσω στὴν τελειότητα;

Ὁ σοφὸς γέροντας τῆς λέει:

-Παιδί μου, ὅταν κανεὶς σὲ βροῖσει, σὲ χλευάσει, σοῦ φαίνεται μέσα σου σὰν νὰ σὲ ἐπαινεῖ;

-Ὅχι.

-Ὅταν σὲ ἐπαινεῖ κάποιος, σοῦ φαίνεται μέσα σου σὰν νὰ σὲ βροῖζει;

-Ὅχι Ἀββᾶ.

-Ἄντε παιδάκι μου πήγαινε, λέει, καὶ τίποτα δὲν ἔχεις κάνει μέχρι τώρα.

Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν εἶχε ἄλλους ἕξι ἀδελφούς. Ὁ μεγαλύτερος ἦταν ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀνούβ. Καὶ κάποτε ὅλοι μαζί πήγαινε καὶ κατοικήσανε σὲ ἓνα κελί, σὲ ἓνα παλιὸ εἰδωλολατρικὸ ναὸ ποῦ ἔξω ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ἦταν στημένο ἓνα ἄγαλμα, μία θεότητα. Καὶ κάποια μέρα ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀνούβ, κατὰ παράδοξο τρόπο, πήγε καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ρίχνει πέτρες στὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ νὰ τὸ βροῖζει. Τὴν ἄλλη μέρα πήγε καὶ τὸ προσκυνοῦσε καὶ τοῦ ἔλεγε πολλὰ ἐπαινετικά λόγια.

Ὅταν εἶδαν τὸν Ἀββᾶ νὰ κάνει κάτι τέτοιο, οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τὸν ρώτησαν:

-Γέροντα μ' αὐτὸ ποῦ ἔκανες τί θέλεις νὰ μᾶς διδάξεις;

-Νά, λέγει, ὅταν μὲ εἶδατε ποῦ πήγα καὶ τὸ λιθοβολοῦσα καὶ τὸ βροῖζα τὸ εἶδωλο αὐτό, μοῦ ἀπαντοῦσε;

-Ὅχι.

-Ὅταν τὴν ἄλλη μέρα, εἶδατε νὰ τὸ προσκυνῶ καὶ νὰ τὸ ἐπαινῶ, εἶδατε πάλι νὰ μοῦ πεῖ τίποτα;

-Ὅχι, Ἀββᾶ.

-Ἄ, ἂν θέλετε κι ἐσεῖς νὰ μείνουμε ὅλοι μαζί καὶ νὰ βιώσουμε μὲ ἀγάπη, ἔτσι πρέπει νὰ κάνουμε. Νὰ ὑπομένουμε ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο.

Ὁ ἐγωισμὸς εἶναι μία κληρονομιά ποῦ δεχθήκαμε ἀπὸ τοὺς πρωτοπλάστους, ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀδὰμ καὶ τὴν Εὐά. Καὶ οἱ πρωτόπλαστοι νικήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ διάβολο, τὸν ἑωσφόρο. Ἐκεῖνος ξεκίνησε τὸ θέμα. Ὁ ἑωσφόρος εἶχε τὸ πρῶτο τάγμα τῶν ἀγγέλων. Ἦταν τὸ πλησιέστερο πρὸς τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπολάμβανε τὴν πρώτη χάρη. Δεχόταν τὶς πληροφορίες, τὶς ἀποκαλύψεις πρὸς μὲν ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα ἑννέα τάγματα. Γιὰ ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴ δόξα του καὶ τὴ χάρη του, σκέφτηκε πονηρὰ κατὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐλεγε στὸ λογισμό του: «Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς νὰ εἶναι τόσο ψηλά; Γιατί νὰ ἔχει αὐτὴ τὴ δόξα; Γιατί νὰ τὸν προσκυνοῦμε; Γιατί νὰ τοῦ ὑποτάσσονται τὰ πάντα; Καὶ ἐγὼ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ γίνω Θεός; Ὅ ἄνεβῶ κι' ἐγὼ ψηλὰ καὶ θὰ καθίσω δίπλα Του, θὰ γίνω καὶ ἐγὼ ὁμοίος Του. Καὶ θὰ μὲ προσκυνοῦν τὰ πάντα. Καὶ θὰ ἔχω καὶ ἐγὼ τὴν ἴδια δόξα!».

Ὅταν σκέφτηκε αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ πίστεψε, ἀμέσως ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἀπέρριψε ἀπὸ τὸ πρόσωπό Του, τὸν πέταξε κάτω. Ὅλο τὸ τάγμα χάθηκε στὴν ἄβυσσο. Ἔτσι

καὶ κάθε ὑπερήφανος καὶ ἐγωιστῆς ἀποβάλλεται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό.

Ὁ διάβολος, ὁ ἑωσφόρος, δὲν ἀρκέστηκε στὴ δική του μόνο πτώση. Φθόνησε καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸν ὁποῖον εἶχε πλάσει μὲ ἰδιαίτερο τρόπο ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὸν εἶχε κάνει βασιλέα μέσα στὸν παράδεισο, καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν κτίση. Σοῦ λέει: «Γιατί αὐτὸς νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τέτοια εὐτυχία; Ὅχι. Καὶ αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ προσβάλλει τὸ Θεὸ καὶ αὐτὸς δὲν πρέπει νὰ Τοῦ ὑποτάσσεται· καὶ αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ πλανηθεῖ...». Τὸν πλησιάζει καὶ τοῦ ψιθυρίζει τὰ ἴδια πράγματα, μὲ τὸ νὰ τοῦ πεῖ «γιατί ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σοῦ ἀπαγορεύσει νὰ φᾶς ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸν καρπὸ; Αὐτὸ εἶναι πονηριὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μὴ γίνεις κι ἐσὺ θεός, ὥστε νὰ γνωρίζεις τὸ καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακό, τὸ πονηρὸ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸ· φάε καὶ θὰ δεῖς ὅτι θὰ γίνεις θεός...».

Τὸν ἄκουσε ὁ πρωτόπλαστος καὶ στὴ συνέχεια ἔγινε τὸ παραπάτημα· γνώρισε στὴν πράξη ὅτι ἔπρεπε νὰ πειθαρχήσει στὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ ὁ ἐγωισμὸς ἔβγαλε τοὺς πρωτοπλάστους ἀπὸ τὸν παράδεισο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κληρονομήσαμε καὶ μεῖς σὰν μία περιουσία τὸν ἐγωισμὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τώρα ὑποφέρουμε καὶ ἀγωνιζόμαστε μέχρι αἵματος γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγούμε.

Ὁ μοναχισμὸς εἶναι τὸ ἄμισθο ἱατρεῖο· εἶναι ἡ κλινικὴ του Θεοῦ, ποῦ ἐρχεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ νὰ γίνεῖ καλά. Τὸν καλεῖ ὁ Θεὸς μὲ κλήση ἀγία καὶ τὸν φέρνει μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἱατρεῖο. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζητᾶ τὴ θεραπεία του καὶ φωνάζει:

-Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με.

-Ναί, θὰ σὲ ἐλεήσω, ἀπαντᾷ ὁ Θεός.

Καὶ ἀρχίζει ὁ ἱατρὸς τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων τὴ θεραπεία. Μᾶς στέλλει διάφορες θλίψεις, ἐπιτρέπει πειρασμούς. Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ φάρμακα, τὰ πικρὰ φάρμακα ποῦ θεραπεύουν τὴ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Βέβαια, κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πεῖ ὅτι στὸν καιρὸ τῆς ἐγχειρήσεως ἢ τῆς ἱατρικῆς ἐπεμβάσεως δὲν πονᾷ, δὲν ἀγωνίζεται νὰ ξεπεράσει τὸ πόνο καὶ τὴ θλίψη· ὡστόσο ὁμως στὸ τέλος τῆς θεραπείας γίνεται ψυχικῶς καλά.

Ὅταν ὁ Γέροντάς μου ἦταν ἀρχάριος στὴν ἔρημο, ἦταν στὴν ὑποταγὴ τοῦ γέροντα Ἐφραΐμ, ἐνὸς ἀπλοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἦταν ἓνα γεροντάκι εὐλογημένο. Κάποτε ἓνας γείτονας μοναχός, δὲν γνωρίζω τί εἶχε συμβεῖ, τὸ ἔθλιβε τὸ γεροντάκι. Ὁ παπποῦς φώναζε διότι δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τὰ βγάλει πέρα. Διαμαρτυρόταν, ἔβγαζε φωνές, τσίριξε...

Ὁ Γέροντας ὁ δικός μου, νέο παιδί, δυνατὸ ποῦ μποροῦσε νὰ τὰ βάλει μὲ δέκα ἀνθρώπους, ὅταν ἄκουγε τὸν Γέροντά του νὰ φωνάζει ἔξω καὶ ὁ ἄλλος νὰ σηκώνει τὸ ἀνάστημά του, μέσα του ἀρχίζε νὰ βράζει ὁ θυμὸς καὶ ἡ ὀργή. Μόλις εἶδε τὸν κίνδυνο ὅτι ἂν βγεῖ ἔξω δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ προβλέψει τί θὰ συνέβαινε, σὰν νέος ποῦ ἦταν, ἀμέσως τρέχει στὴν ἐκκλησία, γονατίζει κι' ἀρχίζει

νά φωνάζει: «Παναγία βοήθησέ με». Καί ἄρχισε νά κλαίει νά κλαίει, καί νά παρακαλεῖ, ὥστε νά ἐπέμβει ἡ Παναγία νά βοηθήσει μὴ τυχόν καί σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κατάσταση βγεῖ ἔξω. Καί ἀφοῦ ἔκλαψε πολὺ, καί ἔχυσε πολλὰ δάκρυα, τότε εἶδε τὸ θηρίο τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ καί τοῦ θυμοῦ νά μαλακώνει καί νά ὑποχωρεῖ. Ὅταν εἶδε ὅτι ἦρθε σὲ μία κατάσταση ποὺ μποροῦσε νά βγεῖ ἔξω καί νά μιλήσει μὲ πραότητα καί ἡρεμία, βγήκε καί ἀπάλλαξε, βέβαια μὲ ἥρεμο τρόπο καί μὲ εὐγένεια, τὸν Γέροντά του ἀπὸ τὸ γείτονα. Καί αὐτὸ μᾶς τὸ ἔλεγε σὰν παράδειγμα τοῦ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζεται ὁ ἐγωισμὸς στὴ πράξη.

Ἔρχεται καί στὸν μοναχὸ ὁ πειρασμὸς καί τοῦ ψιθυρίζει παραπλήσια πράγματα μὲ ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ψιθύριζε στὸν Ἀδάμ. Ἄν ὁ Γέροντας τὸν μαλώνει ἢ τοῦ κόβει τὸ θέλημα, διαμαρτύρεται μέσα ὁ ἐγωισμὸς καί ψιθυρίζει στὸ μοναχὸ νά ἀντιλογηθεῖ, νά φιλονικήσει, νά στήσει τὸ δικό του θέλημα· μ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο δὲν πρόκειται νά θεραπευθεῖ ποτέ.

Ὁ μοναχὸς πρέπει νά ἔχει συνεχῶς τὴν προσοχὴ γιὰ νά ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν κάθε περίπτωση, τὸν κάθε πειρασμὸ μὲ ἐπιτυχία, ὥστε μὲ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ νά ἀπαλλαγεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν παλαιὸ ἄνθρωπο. Στὴ θέση τοῦ παλαιοῦ νά μπεῖ ὁ νέος, ὁ κατὰ Χριστόν, ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀπάθειας καί τῆς ἀναστάσεως.

Ὁ ἀγώνας δὲν εἶναι μικρός, οὔτε καί σὲ λίγο χρόνο κατορθώνεται ἡ νίκη καί ὁ θρίαμβος κατὰ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ. Μεγάλο θηρίο. Πολυκέφαλο. Ὁ Ὅσιος Ἐφραίμ λέει: «Μὲ λιοντάρι καταπιάστηκες; Πρόσεξε μὴ σοῦ συντριβεῖ τὰ ὀστά!». Αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο εἶναι ὁ Ἐγωισμὸς. Σὰν λιοντάρι παραφυλάει καί μᾶς ἐπιτίθεται. Ἐμεῖς πρέπει νά ἔχουμε στὰ χέρια μας τὸ ὄπλο καί τὸ μαχαίρι τῆς ἀντιρροήσεως κατὰ τῶν λογισμῶν.

Οἱ τύραννοι τῶν Χριστιανῶν στοὺς χρόνους τῶν διωγμῶν προσπαθοῦσαν νά παρασύρουν τοὺς Μάρτυρες στὸ νά ἀρνηθοῦν τὴ Θεότητα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τοὺς ὑπόσχονταν πολλὰ: πλοῦτη, δόξες, τιμές. Οἱ Μάρτυρες ὅμως δὲν ὑποχωροῦσαν. Θριαμβευτικὰ ὁμολογοῦσαν τὴ πίστη στὸ Χριστὸ καί στὸ τέλος δέχονταν τὸ στεφάνι τοῦ μαρτυρίου, καί ἔτσι ὁ Χριστὸς δοξαζόταν.

Καί τώρα οἱ τύραννοι τῶν παθῶν μᾶς πιέζουν. Τὰ πάθη μᾶς ὑπόσχονται, ἀν ὑποχωρήσουμε, ἀπόλαυση καί ἱκανοποίηση. Δὲν πρέπει ὁ μοναχὸς νά ὑποχωρεῖ σὲ μία τέτοια βία, ἀλλὰ νά ἀντιστέκεται μὲ ὅλη τὴν ἀνδρεία τῆς ψυχῆς καί νά περιμένει μετὰ ἀπὸ μία νόμιμη πάλη τὸ στεφάνι τοῦ μαρτυρίου.

Οἱ Μάρτυρες μαρτύρησαν σὲ λίγο χρόνο. Πολλοὶ μάρτυρες σὲ λίγα λεπτὰ δεχθήκανε τὸ στεφάνι. Ὁ

μοναχὸς μαρτυρεῖ συνέχεια, σὲ ὅλη του τὴ ζωή. Ὅχι σὲ ἓνα τύραννο ἄλλα σὲ πολλοὺς. Κάθε πάθος καί ἓνας τύραννος. Γι' αὐτὸ ὄχι λιγότερο θὰ στεφανωθοῦν οἱ μοναχοὶ ποὺ θὰ ἀντισταθοῦν στὴ βία τῶν παθῶν καί θὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν καλὴ ὁμολογία τῆς ἀσκήσεως, τῆς μὴ ὑποχωρήσεως.

Μᾶς σπρώχνει τὸ πάθος τῆς ἀντιλογίας. Ἐμεῖς πρέπει νά βάλουμε ἐμπόδιο, φράγμα, νά ἀνοίξουμε ὄρυγμα, νά πέσει τὸ ἄρμα τῆς ἀντιλογίας μέσα μας.

Ὁ ἀγώνας πρέπει νά εἶναι συνεχῆς. Νὰ μὴν παρουσιάζουμε κενά· διότι τὰ κενὰ τὰ ἐκμεταλλεύεται ὁ διάβολος καί σφηνώνει μέσα στὰ κενὰ καί μᾶς δημιουργεῖ κατάσταση ἐπικίνδυνη. Ἡ προσευχὴ πρέπει νά εἶναι ἀκατάπαυστη. Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι τὸ ὄπλο μας. Καί μόνο νά προσεύχεται κανεὶς, ὁ διάβολος δὲν τὸν πλησιάζει εὐκόλα.

Ἄς ἀγωνισθοῦμε ἐναντίον κυρίως αὐτοῦ τοῦ πάθους, διότι ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ξεκινοῦν ὅλα. Καί τὸ κυρίως φάρμακο κατὰ τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ εἶναι ἡ ταπείνωση. Ὁ Κύριός

μας, μᾶς εἶπε: «Μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πρῶτος εἰμι καί ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καί εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν». Ἡ ταπείνωση καί ἡ πραότητα χαρίζουν μία πνευματικὴ ἀνάπαυση στὴ ψυχὴ. Τῆς χαρίζουν φῶς καί βλέπει καθαρότερα τὰ πράγματα. Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἰσαὰκ ὁ



Σύρος, τὴν ταπείνωση τὴν ἀποκαλεῖ «Θεοῦφαντον στολήν». Τὴν ταπείνωση, λέγει, φόρεσε ὁ Υἱὸς καί Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ καί μπόρεσε καί κατήλθε ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καί μπόρεσε ἡ γῆ νά τὸν δεχθεῖ χωρὶς νά καταφλεχθεῖ.

Ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη στολιζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὁ ταπεινὸς ἄνθρωπος ὅπου καί ἀν σταθεῖ, ὅπου καί ἀν βρεθεῖ, σκορπάει μία κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο μυστηριώδη χάρι καί γίνεται ἀγαπητὸς καί προσφιλῆς. Τὴν ταπείνωση οἱ δαίμονες τὴν τρέμουν, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς συνέβη καί μὲ ἓναν ὑποτακτικὸ.

Ἐνας Χριστιανὸς εἶχε μία κόρη δαμονισμένη καί τὴν πῆγε σὲ πολλοὺς γιατροὺς ἀλλὰ δὲν βρῆκε τὴ θεραπεία τῆς. Αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστιανὸς εἶχε ἓνα φίλο, πνευματικὸ ἄνθρωπο, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε σχέση μὲ τοὺς μοναχοὺς, καί λέγοντάς του τὸ παράπονο, τὸν πόνο του γιὰ τὸ κορίτσι του, τοῦ λέει ἐκεῖνος:

-Τὸ παιδί σου θὰ βρεῖ θεραπεία μόνον ὅταν καλέσεις ἓνα μοναχό, ὑποτακτικὸ, καί ἔλθει στὸ σπίτι σου καί κάνει μία εὐχούλα, θὰ δεῖς ἀμέσως τὸ παιδί σου θὰ γίνει καλά.

-Καί ποῦ θὰ τὸν βρῶ ἐγὼ αὐτὸν τὸν μοναχό;

-Νά! Κάτω στην άγορά κατεβαίνουν, λέει, από την ξρημο νεώτεροι ύποτακτικοί μοναχοί και πωλούν διάφορα έργόχειρα. Σ' ένα τέτοιο μοναχό πές του «Έλα στο σπίτι να σου πληρώσω τὰ έργόχειρα, διότι τώρα επάνω μου δεν έχω χρήματα». Και πές του να σου κάνει μία εϋχή και θα δεις ότι τὸ παιδί σου θα γίνει καλά.

Αὐτὸς ἀμέσως τὸ πρωὶ κατεβαίνει στην άγορά, βλέπει ένα νέο μοναχό να πουλά διάφορα, ἐκεῖ, ἐργόχειρα. Τοῦ λέει:

-Πάτερ, πόσο τὰ δίνεις αὐτά;

-Τόσο. Εἶπε ὁ μοναχός.

-Μπορεῖς να ἔλθεις μέχρι τὸ σπίτι να σὲ πληρώσω, γιατί επάνω μου δεν έχω χρήματα;

-Έρχομαι, λέει.

Καὶ ἀφοῦ προχωροῦσαν πρὸς τὸ σπίτι και πλησίαζαν, ὁ διάβολος μυρίστηκε τὸ πράγμα, ὅτι ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα του να πάρει τὸ ἐξιτήριο του και να φύγει ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἐτοιμάστηκε και αὐτός. Και μπαίνοντας ὁ μοναχὸς μέσα στο σπίτι, τὸν συναντᾷ ἡ κόρη και σηκώνει τὸ χέρι και τοῦ δίνει ένα ράπισμα, τοῦ μονάχου. Αὐτός, ὁ μοναχός, γύρισε και τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ τοῦ προσώπου και τοῦ δίνει και ἀπ' ἐκεῖ ένα ράπισμα, και ἀμέσως ἡ κόρη ἔπεσε κάτω κι' ἔβγαξε ἀφρούς. Και στο τέλος, φεύγοντας τὸ δαιμόνιο εἶπε, ὅτι ἡ ἐντολή τοῦ Χριστοῦ με βγάζει και με διώχνει. Και ἀμέσως τὸ παιδί ἔγινε καλά.

Ὁ ὑποτακτικὸς αὐτός, ἀπὸ τὴν πράξη αὐτὴ φαίνεται ὅτι ἦταν ἕνας προοδευμένος, ἕνας πετυχημένος μοναχός ὁ ὁποῖος θα εἶχε ἐξασκηθεῖ στην παιδεία και τὴ θεραπεία τῆς ψυχῆς του.

Στὴν προσευχή μας πάντοτε να παρακαλοῦμε και να δεόμεθα τοῦ Θεοῦ να μᾶς ἀπαλλάσσει ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο, τὸν ἐγωισμό, και να μᾶς χαρίζει τὴν ἁγία ταπεινώση τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἀμήν.



Δὲν μπορούμε να μετανοήσουμε, ἂν ὁ Κύριος δὲν μᾶς δώσει μετάνοια. Και αὐτὸ ἰσχύει για τὰ πάντα. Δηλαδή ἰσχύει τὸ γραφικό: «**Χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποιεῖν οὐδέν**». Ἄν δὲν ὑπάρχουν προϋποθέσεις, για να ἐγκύψη μέσα μας ὁ Χριστός, μετάνοια δὲν ἔρχεται. Οἱ προϋποθέσεις εἶναι ἡ ταπεινώση, ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ προσευχή, οἱ μετάνοιες, ὁ κόπος για τὸν Χριστό. Ἄν δὲν εἶναι τὸ συναίσθημα ἀγνό, ἂν δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀπλότητα, ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ ἔχει ἰδιοτέλεια, δὲν ἔρχεται ἡ θεῖα χάρις. Συμβαίνει τότε να πηγαίνουμε να ἐξομολογούμεσθε, ἀλλὰ να μὴ αισθανώμαστε ἀνακούφιση. Ἡ μετάνοια εἶναι πολὺ λεπτὸ πράγμα. Ἡ μετάνοια ἡ ἀληθινὴ θα φέρη τὸν ἁγιασμό. Ἡ μετάνοια μᾶς ἀγιάζει.

Ἅγιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Καλογερομαχισμός

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἐπιστολές», (Ἀγίου) Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου.

Ὁ ἰ περισσότεροι Πνευματικοὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας εἶναι καλογερομάχοι και ποικιλοτρόπως βάλλουν κατὰ τοῦ Μοναχισμοῦ και μάλιστα χρησιμοποιοῦν και Μεγάλους Βασιλείους και κοινωνικὴ δράση, κ.λ.π.

Δὲν θέλω να ἀναφέρω τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, πρὶν ἀρχίσῃ τις Βασιλειάδες, ἀλλὰ ἀπλῶς να πῶ τὸν λογισμό μου, τί θα ἔκανε ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, ἐὰν ζοῦσε στην ἐποχὴ μας. Ἔχω τὴν γνώμη ὅτι θα ἔπιανε ξανά τὴν σπηλιὰ και τὸ κομποσχοῖνι, βλέποντας τὴν φλόγα τῆς ἀγάπης (ἀπὸ τις Βασιλειάδες και ἄλλων Ἁγίων Πατέρων) να ἔχη ἀπλώσει παντοῦ, ὄχι μόνο στοὺς πιστοὺς ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη και στοὺς ἀπίστους, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὅλοι μαζί ἀποτελοῦν τὴν Κοινωνικὴ Πρόνοια, ποὺ περιθάλλει ἀκόμη και μέλη τῶν Πνευματικῶν Φιλανθρωπικῶν Συλλόγων (με χαρτὶ μόνον ἀπορίας). Μὲ λίλα λόγια, ἡ Κοινωνικὴ Πρόνοια καθημερινῶς φωνάζει: «Ἅγιοι Πατέρες τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ἀφήστε τὴν φιλανθρωπία σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς λαϊκοὺς, ποὺ δὲν μπορούμε να κάνουμε και κάτι ἄλλο, και ἐσεῖς κοιτάξτε να ἀσχοληθῆτε με κάτι τὸ πνευματικώτερο».

Δυστυχῶς ὅμως, ὄχι μόνον αὐτὸ δὲν κάνουν μερικοὶ Κληρικοὶ, διότι δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνουν, ἀλλὰ τὸ κακὸ εἶναι ποὺ ἐμποδίζουν και αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὸ καταλαβαίνουν και θέλουν να δοθοῦν ὀλόκληροι στὸν Χριστό και αισθάνονται ἔντονα τὴν κλίση τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως. Δὲν φτάνουν... δηλαδή τὰ ὅσα ἀκούει ἕνας ἀρχάριος Μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς, ἀκούει και ἕνα σωρὸ ἀπὸ τοὺς Κληρικοὺς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔχουν ἀκόμη και τὴν παράλογη ἀπαίτηση ἀπὸ τοὺς Μοναχοὺς να ἀφήσουν τὴν ξρημο και να ἔλθουν στὸν κόσμο, να ἀσχοληθοῦν με τὴν κοινωνικὴ δράση τῆς φιλανθρωπίας. Καλὸ εἶναι να ἀναφέρω και μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ στεφάνια ποὺ τοὺς πλέκουν: «τεμπέληδες, ἀτομιστές, ἄνανδρους, κ.λ.π.», ἐπειδὴ θεωροῦν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τοὺς ἥρωες, ποὺ ἀγωνίζονται μέσα στην ἀμαρτωλὴ κοινωνία, και τοὺς Μοναχοὺς δειλοὺς, ποὺ φεύγουν, για να σώσουν μόνον τὴν ψυχὴ τους.

Ἀπορῶ πῶς δὲν καταλαβαίνουν τὴν μεγάλη ἀποστολὴ τοῦ Μοναχοῦ! Ὁ Μοναχὸς φεύγει μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο, ὄχι γιατί μισεῖ τὸν κόσμο, ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἀγαπάει τὸν κόσμο και κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο θα τὸν βοηθήσῃ περισσότερο διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς του σὲ πράγματα ποὺ δὲν γίνονται ἀνθρωπίνως παρὰ μόνο με Θεϊκὴ ἐπέμβαση. Ἔτσι σώζει ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμο. Ὁ Μοναχὸς δὲν λέει ποτέ: «να σώσω τὸν κόσμο», ἀλλὰ προσεύχεται για τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου, παράλληλα με τὴν δικὴ του. Ὅταν ὁ καλὸς Θεὸς ἀκούσῃ τὴν προσευχὴ του και βοηθήσῃ τὸν κόσμο, πάλι δὲν λέει «ἔσωσα ἔγω κόσμο», ἀλλὰ «ὁ Θεός»...

Τὸ Θεμέλιο τῆς Νέας Ζωῆς

Ἀπό τό βιβλίον «Ἐρμηνεία τῆς πρὸς Φιλιππησίους Ἐπιστολῆς», Ὁσίον Ἰουστίνου Πόποβιτς, ἐκδ. Ἐν Πλῶ.

Πολλοὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦσιν οὗς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ

[Φιλ. 3:18]

† † †

Ἀντίθετα στὴ ζωὴ ἐν Χριστῷ στέκει ἡ ζωὴ χωρὶς τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἐναντία στὸν Χριστό. Αὐτὴ ζοῦν οἱ ἀντίπαλοι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, «οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ». Μποροῦν καὶ ὑπάρχουν τέτοιοι; Μὰ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο, ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ τὸ διάβολο, ἀπὸ τὴν κόλαση. Ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι ἡ «δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ» καὶ ἡ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι καὶ ἀνθρώπινη δύναμη καὶ ἀνθρώπινη δόξα. Ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι θεμέλιο τῆς νέας ζωῆς, τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς, θεμέλιο τῶν Ἀποστόλων, θεμέλιο τῶν Μαρτύρων, θεμέλιο τῶν Ὁμολογητῶν, θεμέλιο τοῦ ἀσκητισμοῦ, θεμέλιο τῆς ἁγιοσύνης, μὲ μία λέξη, θεμέλιο ὅλου τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐλπίδας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῆς νηστείας καὶ τῆς πραότητος καὶ τῆς ἀνοχῆς καὶ τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ τῆς ἀπάθειας καὶ τῆς θεοποίησης. Ναί, εἶναι «ἡ δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ», μὲ τὴν ὁποία οἱ ἄνθρωποι νικοῦν ὅλους τοὺς θανάτους, ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες, ὅλα τὰ κακά. Καὶ τὸ ὅτι ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ἐναντίοι στὸ σταυρό, τοῦτο εἶναι πράγματι ἀξιοθρήνητο.

Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος κλαίγοντας μιλάει περὶ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι πρωτίτως ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ τους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν... ἄλλων, ἀφοῦ σκοτώνουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ὄχι μ' ἓνα θάνατο ἀλλὰ μ' ἑκατοντάδες, καὶ ρίχνουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ὄχι σὲ μία κόλαση ἀλλὰ σὲ χιλιάδες. Ὁφθαλμοφανῶς, ἐκεῖνοι εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας τους, τοῦ παραδείσου τους, τῆς σωτηρίας τους, τοῦ θείκου τους προορισμοῦ, καὶ μ' αὐτὸ εἶναι ἐχθροὶ καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ἀλλήλων καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας ἀλλήλων, ἀφοῦ μποροῦν νὰ τοὺς σκανδαλίσουν καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀποτρέψουν ἀπὸ τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς σωτηρίας καὶ νὰ τοὺς σπρώξουν στὸν γκρεμὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ θανάτου.

Συνειδητὰ ἢ ἀσυνειδητὰ, οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι πάντα μαθητὲς τοῦ διαβόλου, ἀφοῦ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ κύριος ἐχθρὸς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς παρακινεῖ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐχθρα καὶ μέσῳ τούτου τοὺς σκλαβώνει γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του. Ἔτσι τοὺς κρατᾶ στὴ σκλαβιά τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ. Αὐτὸς, ὁ «ἀνθρωποκτόνος» (Ἰωάν. 7:44), μέσῳ τῶν ἐχθρῶν τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ κάνει τὴν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς

ἐργασία του, δηλαδή μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες σκοτώνει τὸν ἓναν ἄνθρωπο μετὰ τὸν ἄλλο. Μόνο τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σκοτώσει, γιὰτὶ ἀμύνονται σ' αὐτὸν μὲ τὸ σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸν νικοῦν σ' ὅλες τὶς μάχες, καὶ ἔτσι σώζουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους ἀπὸ κάθε ἁμαρτία, ἀπὸ κάθε κακό, ἀπὸ κάθε πειρασμό.

Ὁ Ἀντιόχειος Χρυσόστομος εὐαγγελίζεται: «Τίποτα δὲν εἶναι ἔτσι ἀνάρμοστο καὶ ξένο στὸν Χριστιανὸ ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἐπιζητεῖ τὴν ἄνεση καὶ τὴν ἀνάπαυση. Τίποτε δὲν εἶναι τόσο ξένο ἀπὸ τὴν προσήλωση σ' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ. Ὁ Κύριός σου σταυρώθηκε καὶ ἐσὺ ἀναζητᾶς τὴν ἄνεση; Ὁ Κύριός σου καρφώθηκε στὸ σταυρὸ καὶ ἐσὺ ζεῖς στὴν πολυτέλεια; Καὶ ταιριάζουν αὐτὰ σ' ἓνα γενναῖο στρατιώτη; Γιὰ αὐτὸ λέει ὁ Παῦλος: «Πολλοὶ ἔχουν ἀνάρμοστη συμπεριφορά, γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους πολλὰς φορὰς σὰς εἶπα καὶ τώρα κλαίγοντας σὰς λέω! Ἀναφέρομαι στοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.» Τὰ λέει αὐτὰ ἐπειδὴ κάποιοι ὑποκρίνονταν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς, ζώντας μὲ ἀνέσεις καὶ πολυτέλεια, πράγμα ποῦ εἶναι ἐναντία στὸ σταυρό, ἐπειδὴ ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι γνώρισμα τῆς ψυχῆς ποῦ ἀγωνίζεται ἔτοιμη γιὰ τὸ θάνατο καὶ δὲν ψάχνει τὴν ἄνεση. Αὐτοὶ ὅμως συμπεριφέρονται ἀντίθετα.

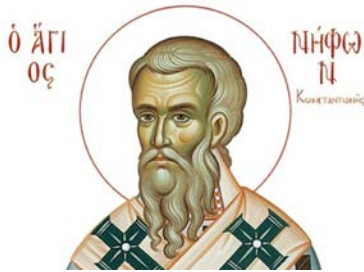
Ἔτσι, ἂν καὶ λένε ὅτι εἶναι τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ, γιὰτὶ, ἐὰν ἀγαποῦσαν τὸν σταυρό, θὰ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ ζοῦν τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου. Δὲν σταυρώθηκε ὁ Κύριός σου; Ἐὰν δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ σταυρωθεῖς μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, μιμήσου Τον μὲ ἄλλο τρόπο· σταύρωσε τὸν ἑαυτό σου, ἔστω καὶ ἂν δὲν σὲ σταυρώσει κανεὶς· δὲν ἐννοῶ νὰ καταστρέψεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου (μακάρι κάτι τέτοιο νὰ μὴν γίνε, γιὰτὶ εἶναι ἀσέβεια), ἀλλὰ ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Παῦλος: «Ὁ κόσμος νεκρώθηκε γιὰ μένα καὶ ἐγὼ γι' αὐτόν.»

Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Κύριό σου, πέθανε ὅπως ἐκεῖνος. Μάθε πόση εἶναι ἡ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ, πόσα κατόρθωσε, πόσα κατορθώνει· μάθε ὅτι εἶναι ἡ ἀσφάλεια τῆς ζωῆς. Μέσῳ αὐτοῦ γίνονται τὰ πάντα, διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ βάπτισμα (γιὰ νὰ λάβουμε τὴ σφραγίδα), διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ ἡ χειροτονία. Εἴτε εἴμαστε στοὺς δρόμους, εἴτε στὸ σπίτι, εἴτε ὁπουδήποτε, ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι μέγα ἀγαθό, ἀνίκητο ὄπλο, ἀκατανίκητη ἀσπίδα, ἀντίπαλος τοῦ διαβόλου. Πότε;

Ὅταν πολεμᾶς τὸ διάβολο κρατώντας τὸ σταυρό σου, ὄχι κάνοντάς τον ἀπλὰ σὰν σημεῖο, ἀλλὰ ὑποφέροντας τὶς συνέπειές του. Γνώριζε πὼς ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκαλεῖ τὰ πάθη σταυροῦ, ὅταν λέει: «Ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν σηκώσῃ τὸν σταυρό του καὶ μὲ ἀκολουθήσῃ», δηλαδή ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν εἶναι ἔτοιμος γιὰ τὸ θάνατο. Αὐτοὶ ποῦ ἀγαποῦν τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα τους ὄντας ἐλεεινοί, εἶναι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ. Καὶ καθέννας ποῦ ἀρέσκειται στὶς ἀπολαύσεις καὶ τὴν ἐνταῦθα βεβαιότητα εἶναι ἐχθρὸς τοῦ σταυροῦ».

Ἡ Ἀνταμοιβὴ τῆς Εὐσπλαχνίας...

Πηγή: Ὁ Ἅγιος Νήφων Κωνσταντιανῆς, «Ἐνας Ἀσκητῆς Ἐπίσκοπος».



Κάποτε ἦρθε στὸ κελὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Νήφωνα ἕνας Χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συμβουλευθεῖ. Μετὰ τὸν συνηθὴ χαιρετισμό, ρώτησε τὸν Ὅσιο:

–Σὲ παρακαλῶ, πάτερ, πές μου τί ὠφέλεια

ἔχουν αὐτοὶ ποὺ μοιράζονται τὴν περιουσίαν τους στοὺς φτωχοὺς;

–Δὲν ἄκουσες τί λέει τὸ εὐαγγέλιο; τοῦ ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος.

–Πολλὰ ἄκουσα καὶ διάβασα, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἤθελα ν’ ἀκούσω κάτι καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα σου.

Τότε ὁ Νήφων τοῦ εἶπε:

–Ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς Γῆς νὰ σὲ διδάξει κατὰ τὴν πίστη σου. Γιατί ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἀδύνατος καὶ ἀνάξιος. Ἀφοῦ ὅμως ἦρθες γιὰ ν’ ἀκούσεις κάτι, πρόσεξε, καὶ ὁ Θεός, καθὼς εἶπα, θὰ σὲ φωτίσει. Σώπασε λίγο κι ἔπειτα ἄρχισε:

–Στὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ ἐπισκόπου των Ἱεροσολύμων Κυριακοῦ ζοῦσε ἕνας πολὺ ἐλεήμων ἄνθρωπος, ὀνόματι Σώζων. Περνώντας κάποια μέρα ἀπ’ τὴν πλατεία τῆς πόλεως, βλέπει ἕνα φτωχὸ ποῦ ἦταν γυμνὸς καὶ τουρτουρίζε ἀπὸ τὸ κρύο. Τὸν πόνεσε ἡ ψυχὴ του. Ἐβγαλε λοιπὸν τὸ ἱμάτιό του καὶ τὸ ἔδωσε στὸ φτωχό. Σὲ λίγο ἐπέστρεψε σπῆτι του. Ἦταν σούρουπο καὶ ξάπλωσε νὰ κοιμηθεῖ.

Βλέπει τότε στὸ ὄνειρό του ὅτι βρέθηκε σ’ ἕνα θαυμαστὸ κῆπο ποῦ φωτιζόταν μὲ καθαρὸ ἄυλο φῶς. Πλήθος λουλουθῶν—ρόδα καὶ κρίνα—καὶ ψηλόκορμα δένδρα τὸν στόλιζαν, ποῦ ξέχυναν ἀπ’ τὴν κορφή ὡς τὶς ρίζες μία ὑπέροχη εὐωδία, ἐνῶ τὰ δένδρα ἦταν κατάφορτα μὲ ὠραιότατους καρπούς, ὥστε τὰ κλαδιά τους ἔγερναν ὡς τὴ γῆ. Τὸ καθένα εἶχε ξεχωριστὴ ὁμορφιά. Ἀνάμεσά τους ὑπῆρχαν πολυάριθμα πουλιὰ ἀπ’ ὅλα τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰ χρώματα καὶ κελαηδοῦσαν μελωδικά. Τὸ κελῆδημά τους ἦταν τόσο θεϊκό, ὥστε νόμιζες ὅτι ἐρχόταν ἀπ’ τὸν οὐρανό. Ὅλα τα δένδρα, τὰ φυτὰ καὶ τὰ λουλουθῶν κυμάτιζαν μὲ πολλὴ χάρη. Βλέποντας καὶ ἀκούγοντάς τα, δοκίμαζε ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ἀπερίγραπτη γλυκύτητα καὶ ἀνέκφραστη ἠδονή. Καθὼς παρατηροῦσε ἐκστατικός, ἔρχεται ἕνας νέος καὶ τοῦ λέει, «ἀκολούθησέ με».

Ἄρχισε νὰ βαδίζει πίσω του καὶ σὲ λίγο ἔφτασαν σ’ ἕνα χρυσοκάγκελο φράχτη. Ἐβίβησε τὸ βλέμμα του πέρα, ἀνάμεσα ἀπ’ τὰ κενὰ ποῦ σχηματίζαν τὰ χρυσὰ κάγκελα καὶ εἶδε μίαν αὐλὴν καὶ στὸ βάθος

ἕνα θαυμάσιο παλάτι, ποῦ ἄστραφτε. Καθὼς κοιτοῦσε ὁ Σώζων, βγαίνουν ἀπ’ τὸ ἀνάκτορο δέκα ἔξι ἄνθρωποι φτερωτοί, ποῦ ἔλαμπαν σὰν τὸν ἥλιο. Μετέφεραν ἀνὰ τέσσερις ἀπὸ ἕνα χρυσοστόλιστο κιβώτιο. Καθὼς διέσχισαν τὸ παραμυθένιο ἐκεῖνο προαύλιο οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Σώζων κατάλαβε ὅτι κατευθύνονταν πρὸς αὐτόν. Μόλις πλησίασαν στὰ χρυσὰ κάγκελα, ἀκριβῶς ἀπέναντί του, στάθηκαν, κατέβασαν τὰ κιβώτια ἀπ’ τοὺς ὤμους καὶ τὰ ἀκούμπησαν στὴ γῆ. Φαίνονταν τώρα σὰν νὰ περιμέναν κάποιον Μεγάλον νὰ ἔρθει. Καὶ πράγματι, σὲ λίγο βλέπει ὁ Σώζων νὰ κατεβαίνει ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνάκτορα ἕνας Πανέμορφος Ἄνδρας καὶ νὰ ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸ μέρος τῶν ἀγγέλων.

«Ἀνοιξτε τὰ κιβώτια», τοὺς διέταξε, «καὶ δεῖξτε σ’ αὐτὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπο τί τοῦ φυλάω γιὰ τὸ ἱμάτιο ποῦ μοῦ δάνεισε πρὸ ὀλίγου διὰ μέσου του φτωχοῦ». Ἀμέσως ἀνοιξαν τὸ ἕνα χρυσὸ κιβώτιο καὶ ἄρχισαν νὰ βγάζουν χιτῶνες καὶ ἱμάτια βασιλικά, ἄλλα κατάλευκα κι ἄλλα πλουμιστά, ὅλα πανέμορφα. Τὰ ἄπλωναν μπροστά του ρωτώντας τον: «Σοῦ ἀρέσουν, Σώζων;» Καὶ ἐκεῖνος εἶπε μὲ δέος: «Δὲν εἶμαι ἄξιος νὰ δῶ οὔτε τὴ σκιά τους!»...

Συνέχιζαν ὡστόσο νὰ τοῦ δείχνουν λαμπροὺς, καταστόλιστους καὶ ὀλόχρυσους χιτῶνες, ὥσπου ἀνέβηκε ὁ ἀριθμὸς τους στοὺς χίλιους. Ὅταν πιά μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο ὁ Κύριος τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ καταλάβει τί σημαίνει τὸ «ἐκατονταπλασίονα λήψεται καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσει», τοῦ εἶπε: «Βλέπεις, Σώζων, πόσα ἀγαθὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμάσα, ἐπειδὴ μὲ εἶδες γυμνὸ καὶ μὲ σπλαγγνίσθηκες καὶ μ’ ἔντυσες; Πήγαινε λοιπὸν καὶ συνέχισε νὰ κάνεις τὸ ἴδιο. Ἄν δώσεις στὸ φτωχὸ ἕνα ἱμάτιο, ἐγὼ θὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμάσω ἐκατονταπλάσια».

Ἀκούγοντας αὐτὰ ὁ Σώζων ρώτησε μὲ δέος ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ χαρὰ τὸν Κύριον: «Κυριέ μου, τὸ ἴδιο θὰ κάνεις καὶ σ’ ὅλους ὅσους βοηθοῦν τοὺς φτωχοὺς; Τοὺς φυλάς ἐκατονταπλάσια ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὴν αἰώνια ζωή;» Κι Ἐκεῖνος τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε:

«Ὅποιοι θὰ θυσιάσει σπῆτι ἢ χωράφια ἢ πλοῦτη ἢ δόξα ἢ πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ἢ ἀδελφοὺς ἢ ἀδελφές ἢ γυναῖκα ἢ παιδιὰ ἢ ὅποιοδήποτε ἀγαθὸ τῆς γῆς, **ἐκατονταπλασίονα λήψεται καὶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσει.** Γιὰ αὐτό, ποτὲ μὴ μετανώσεις γιὰ μία σου ἐλεημοσύνη ἐξευτελιζόντας τὸν φτωχὸ ποῦ τοῦ ἔδωσες κάτι. Μὴ τυχὸν ἀντὶ γιὰ ἀνταμοιβὴ πάθεις διπλὴ ζημιὰ. Διότι αὐτὸς ποῦ κάνει ἕνα καλὸ κι ἔπειτα μετανιώνει ἢ ἐξευτελίζει τὸν φτωχό, χάνει καὶ τὸν μισθό του, ἀλλὰ βρίσκεται καὶ ἔνοχος τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Κρίσεως».

Ἐπὶ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ὁ Σώζων ξύπνησε γεμάτος θαυμασμὸ γιὰ τὸ ὄραμα. Σηκώθηκε ἀμέσως

ἀπ' τὸ κρεβάτι του καὶ ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ ἄλλο τοῦ ἱμάτιο σὲ κάποιον ποὺ ἤξερε πὼς τὸ εἶχε ἀνάγκη. Τὴ νύχτα βλέπει πάλι τὸ ἴδιο ὄραμα καὶ τὸ πρῶι, χωρὶς καθυστέρηση μοίρασε ὅλη του τὴν περιουσία, ἀπαρνήθηκε τὸν κόσμο καὶ ἔγινε ἓνας θαυμασίος μοναχός.

Καὶ μὲ τὰ μάτια του πάνω στὸ βλέμμα τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ποὺ τὸν ἐπισκέφτηκε, ὁ Ἅγιος Νήφων τέλειωσε τὸ «μάθημά» του μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια:

– Αὐτὸ νὰ τὸ ἔχεις κι ἐσύ, παιδί μου, στὸ νοῦ σου ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ μπρός, συμβούλευσε τὸν ἐπισκέπτη του ὁ ἅγιος Νήφων, καὶ νὰ κάνεις ὅτι μπορεῖς γιὰ νὰ θησαυρίσεις ἑκατονταπλάσια στὸν Οὐρανό!



Γι' αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο, ἐπειδὴ εἶχαμε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους σὲ ὅλη τὴν Τουρκοκρατία, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ δὲν ἔσβησε ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἐὰν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι τότε στὴν Τουρκοκρατία ἦταν αὐτοὶ ποὺ εἶναι σήμερα, θὰ εἶχε σβῆσει ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἱστορικὸ πιკρὸ γεγονός.

Λοιπόν, ἐλεύθερος κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ὁποῖος βρῖσκεται σὲ κατάσταση φωτισμοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ λέμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία «*Εἰρήνη πάσι*», διότι ἔτσι ἔχει τὴν εἰρήνη.

Εἰρήνην τὴν ἐμὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν. (Ἰωάν. 14:27). Καὶ ὅταν λέει ὅτι σὰς δίδω εἰρήνη, σημαίνει ὅτι σὰς δίδω Πνεῦμα ἅγιον, προσευχὴ στὴν καρδιά, καὶ ἔτσι ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰρηνεύει, ἔχει τὴν δικαίωση. Ἐχει τὴν καταλλαγὴ μὲ τὸν Θεό. Ἀρχίζει νὰ γίνεται φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὸν φωτισμὸ καὶ μετὰ, στὴν θέωση εἶναι 100% πλέον φίλος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐλεύθερος.

Αὕτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· ὅταν φθάνει στὸ νὰ ἀπαλλαγεῖ, ὄχι μόνο ἀπὸ τὴν συμφεροντολογία, ὅπως στὴν κατάσταση τοῦ φωτισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν κατάσταση τῆς θεώσεως ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὴν δουλεία καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσεως, διότι τρέφεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Θεὸ καὶ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση ἐὰν συνεχίσει μπορεῖ νὰ πάει καὶ χρόνια καὶ μῆνες κ.ο.κ. Ὅποτε ἡ καλύτερη μελέτη εἶναι νὰ ἐπανέλθουμε στοὺς βίους τῶν Ἁγίων νὰ τὰ δοῦμε ἐκεῖ καὶ νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅτι ἁμαρτία εἶναι ἔλλειψη φωτισμοῦ, ἐλευθερία εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν φωτισμὸ στὴν θέωση.

Αὐτὰ εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλὰ τὰ πράγματα καὶ εἶναι ἡ θεραπεία τῆς προσωπικότητος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω ὅτι, ἐὰν ἐμφανίζοταν σήμερα ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία στὴν ἀκμὴ τῆς καὶ ὄχι στὴν κατάπτωσή της, ὅπως σήμερα, θὰ θεωρεῖτο κατὰ πάντα θετικὴ ἐπιστήμη καὶ θὰ ἦτο κάτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ ψυχολογία καὶ ψυχιατρική...

Πρ. Ἰωάννης Ρωμανίδης

Δυτικά «Πνευματικά Μικρόβια»

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἅγιος Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης».

Ὁ πατὴρ Παῖσιος δὲν συμφωνοῦσε νὰ σπουδάζουν οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι θεολόγοι στὴ Δύση, διότι ἔβλεπε τὸν κίνδυνο νὰ μεταφέρουν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ «πνευματικὰ μικρόβια» καὶ νὰ μολύνουν τὴν ἀμώμητη Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας. «Τί θὰ πάτε νὰ πάρετε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ; Ἔλεγε. Αὐτοὶ δὲν ἔχουν τίποτε, τὰ ἔχουν γκρεμίσει ὅλα».

Σὲ ἓναν Ὁρθόδοξο Γάλλο ιερομόναχο ποὺ τὸν ρώτησε σὲ τί διαφέρουν οἱ καθολικοὶ καὶ οἱ προτεστάντες ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους, εἶπε χαρακτηριστικά: «Ἄς ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι σὰν αὐτὸ τὸ καλύβι ποὺ βλέπεις, φτιαγμένο ἀπὸ πέτρες, λάσπη καὶ ζωνάρια. Οἱ καθολικοὶ ἀφαίρεσαν τὴν λάσπη, οἱ προτεστάντες ἀφαίρεσαν καὶ τὰ ζωνάρια. Μποροῦν τώρα νὰ σταθοῦν οἱ πέτρες μόνες τους;»

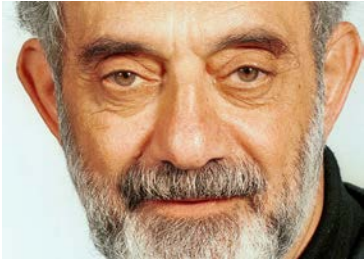
Οὔτε καὶ μὲ τοὺς «διαλόγους» ποὺ γίνονταν μὲ ἑτερόδοξους συμφωνοῦσε ὁ ὄσιος. Διότι ἔβλεπε ὅτι οἱ μὲν Ὁρθόδοξοι ποὺ ἀσχολοῦντο μὲ «διαλόγους» καὶ «συνέδρια» καὶ «προσπάθειες γιὰ ἔνωση» δὲν εἶχαν προηγουμένως ἐνωθεῖ οἱ ἴδιοι μὲ τὸν Θεό, καὶ ἐπομένως δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ πληροφορήσουν τοὺς ἄλλους μὲ Ὁρθόδοξα πατερικὰ βιώματα, οἱ δὲ ἑτερόδοξοι ποὺ συμμετεῖχαν σὲ αὐτὰ δὲν εἶχαν εἰλικρινὴ διάθεση.

Σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του τὸ 1978 ἔγραψε: «Τὸ εὐρωπαϊκὸ πνεῦμα νομίζει ὅτι καὶ τὰ θέματα τὰ πνευματικὰ μποροῦν καὶ αὐτὰ νὰ μποῦν στὴν Κοινὴ Ἀγορά. Ὅλα νὰ ἰσοπεδωθοῦν. Οἱ μὲν Ὁρθόδοξοι ποὺ ἔχουν ἐλαφρότητα καὶ θέλουν νὰ κάνουν προβολή, «ἱεραποστολή», συγκαλοῦν δήθεν συνέδρια, γιὰ νὰ γίνεται ντόρος, νὰ γράφουν οἱ ἐφημερίδες, καὶ νομίζουν ὅτι ἔτσι προβάλλουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, μὲ τὸ νὰ γίνουν ταρामοσαλάτα μὲ τοὺς κακοδόξους. Ἀρχίζουν μετὰ οἱ ὑπερ-ζηλωτὲς καὶ πιάνουν τὸ ἄλλο ἄκρο, νὰ λένε καὶ βλασφημίες γιὰ τὰ μυστήρια τῶν νεοημερολογιτῶν κ.λπ. Καὶ κατασκανδαλίζουν ψυχὲς ποὺ ἔχουν εὐλάβεια καὶ Ὁρθόδοξη εὐαισθησία. Οἱ δὲ ἑτερόδοξοι, ἔρχονται στὰ συνέδρια, κάνουν τὸν δάσκαλο, παίρνουν ὅ,τι καλὸ ὑλικὸ πνευματικὸ βρῖσκουν στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους, τὸ περνᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸ δικό τους ἐργαστήρι, βάζουν δικό τους χρῶμα καὶ φίρμα, καὶ τὸ παρουσιάζουν σὰν πρωτότυπο· καὶ ὁ παράξενος σημερινὸς κόσμος ἀπὸ κάτι τέτοια παράξενα συγκινεῖται καὶ καταστρέφεται πνευματικά».

Ὁ πατὴρ Παῖσιος εἶχε ἓναν δικό του τρόπο νὰ λέει καὶ στοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς ἑτερόδοξους τὴν ἀλήθεια, χωρὶς νὰ προκαλεῖ. Ὅταν τὸ 1978 θὰ γινόταν ἡ ἐκλογή νέου Πάπα, ἓνας Ρωμαιοκαθολικὸς μοναχὸς τοῦ ζήτησε νὰ προσευχηθεῖ, ὥστε ὁ Πάπας ποὺ θὰ ἐκλέξουν νὰ εἶναι καλός. Ὁ ὄσιος τὸν χτύπησε μὲ συμπάθεια στὴν πλάτη καὶ τοῦ εἶπε χαμογελώντας: «**Μὴ στενοχωριέσαι, παιδί μου, ὅποιοι καὶ ἂν εἶναι, ἀλάθητος θὰ εἶναι...**».

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Source: "Empirical Dogmatics of the Orthodox Catholic Church According to the Spoken Teaching of Protopresbyter John S. Romanides, Vol. 1: Dogma-Ethics-Revelation," by Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos. Quoted text is from Fr. Romanides' lectures.



Holy Scripture is divided into two main parts: the books of the Old Testament, before the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, and the books of the New Testament, after the incarnation of the Word. Both the Old and the New Testaments were given by revelation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, to the Prophets of the Old Testament by the unincarnate Word, as the Angel of Great Counsel, and to the Apostles of the New Testament by the incarnate Word—Christ.

In its worship and calendar of feasts, the Church uses passages from the Old and New Testaments as readings. The readings for Vespers, which interpret the feasts of the Lord and the saints, come from the Old Testament, and the readings for the Divine Liturgy come from the New Testament.

The word *Testament* denotes someone's will, which is recorded and confirmed by his signature. In both Testaments the Second Person of the Holy Trinity appeared to the Prophets and Apostles. The revelation was granted to them. An *agreement* was made and it was sealed with the blood of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and the blood of Christ in the New Testament. We therefore study the Old and New Testaments using the interpretative keys given by the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, as preserved within the Church.

The Value of the Old Testament

In the West, the Old Testament has been noticeably underrated and disregarded in comparison with the New Testament. This is explained by the fact that Christ, and everything He said, is held in greater honor than the words of the Prophets of the Old Testament.

"The Westerners' preconception is that we also have the Old Testament, which they rate at a very low level. The Old Testament is almost nothing for many of the Protestants and the Latins. Afterwards Christ comes and then the true faith begins. Then we have the era of the Apostles, from the public teaching of Christ until the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension and so on. After that we have the Church."

"Western theologians read the Old Testament and do not find much in the Old Testament that relates to the New Testament. Thus, from the point of view of Protestant and Papal research, one part of Scripture has been cut off from

the other. This separation is almost complete in the view of non-Orthodox, whereas for the Orthodox there is no difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Whatever is in the New Testament is also in the Old Testament. The only difference is the incarnation and the work of redemption: *By death He trampled down death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.* The redeeming acts and the incarnation are the new elements, as is the verification, through the experience of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit is a distinct and particular hypostasis, Who is neither a hypostasis of the Word nor of the Father, nor is He an energy, but a particular hypostasis."

The Fathers of the Church did not see the Old and New Testaments divided into *Law* and *Grace*, but from the perspective of the stages of perfection. Another serious issue is that Western theologians supported the view, as we see in Barlaam, that divine manifestations in the Old Testament are transitory. They are different from the *theophanies* of the New Testament. The Fathers of the Church did not hold such views. It is characteristic that St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, whose teaching is the same as the Eastern Fathers', guided blessed Augustine to prepare himself prior to Baptism by reading the Old Testament.

"Augustine tells us that in the beginning he paid attention to the form of the words. Because he was a teacher of rhetoric, he noted the form, the layout of the speech, not so much the content. However, gradually, as time passed, he began to notice the content as well. Then he realized that Christians have an interpretation of the Old Testament that differs a great deal from the Manichaeans. The Manichaean perception of the Old Testament is that the Old Testament belongs to the god of darkness. The Old Testament is a work of darkness, whereas the New Testament and their own writings belong to the Light.

Be that as it may, he tells us that Ambrose opened his eyes to subjects relating to the Old Testament, and he began to see things differently, in combination now with his Platonism. Then he decided to be baptized. He sent a letter to Ambrose from the place where he was on holiday, announcing his decision to be baptized the following Easter and asking what he ought to do in preparation.

Ambrose wrote him a letter telling him to read Isaiah and study him well in preparation for Baptism. Augustine confesses to us in his *Philosophical Dialogues* that he took up Isaiah to study him, read a few chapters, understood nothing and therefore took refuge in philosophical discussions with certain pupils and with his friends who were there, in a house lent to him by an acquaintance for the holidays. He was also slightly unwell; he had a bad cough and needed to recover.

It is clear that when he was preparing for Baptism he thought that there was no difference between Christianity

and Platonism. For someone with the slightest knowledge of the differences between the two, this is a very strange conviction, to say the least, which he took with him to Baptism.”

Links between the Old and New Testaments

From the Orthodox viewpoint there is a close relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The difference that will be identified below is that “the God” revealed in the Old Testament is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity *unincarnate*, the Angel of Great Counsel, whereas the God revealed in the New Testament is the *incarnate* Word. It follows that the difference is the incarnation and the existence of the Church as the Body of Christ. *Everything else is common to both.*

First of all, in both the Old and New Testaments there are created words and concepts by which uncreated reality is communicated. Then the anthropology is common to both the Old and New Testaments, namely, that man, who went far away from God and lost communion with Him, is spiritually ill. This is the single interpretative key for interpreting the whole of Holy Scripture.

“In the Old Testament there are men called Prophets and these Prophets had a specific experience. This experience is described, as far as this is possible, within the Old Testament. We find something similar in the New Testament. Afterwards, linked with this experience of the Prophets and Apostles, there is also their preaching and the entire method that they use to try and introduce the faithful to the exact same experience.

Therefore, we have the phenomenon that in both the Old and New Testaments, if someone wants to find, in my opinion, the key to Holy Scripture and patristic tradition, there is one thing he must understand: in both the Old and New Testaments there is a specific anthropology.

When I say *anthropology* I do not mean it from a philosophical point of view. I mean more from a theological point of view, that there is a being who is called man. This human being has a tendency to weakness and sickness. Man is sick. Why is he sick? Because he is not in the state of glorification. Glorification is regarded as man’s natural state. As he is neither in the state of glorification nor in the state of illumination, man is spiritually and socially sick. He has an unhealthy personality, he has lost what we would nowadays call personality and has become self-centered, selfish and timid. He does not function correctly as a human being. There are different people at different levels, from cannibal to refined philosopher, but none of them lives correctly. Why not? Because their system does not work as it should.”

Sick and fallen man has selfish love and cares only for himself. He does not love God and other people. He has to be cured, to attain to unselfish love. This is achieved only through Christ, Who alone is healthy and sinless.

“From the point of view of Orthodox tradition and Jewish tradition—ancient Jewish tradition, that is, the Old Testament—the human being who does not have unselfish love is ill, that is why he does not have it. He may want to have it, but he does not know how to acquire it. He is unable to acquire it and he ought to know how to obtain it. He is like someone who is sick and knows he is sick, but does not know how to be cured. I know that someone else is healthy. I know that I am ill. But how will I be cured if I do not know how to be cured and to become like the other one who is not sick?

The one who is supremely well and sinless in the whole history of humanity is Christ. How can man become like Christ, Who is the only one Who was not only free from sickness, but was also born free from sickness, whereas all the rest of us were born sick, and everyone in the Old Testament and everyone in the New Testament was born sick? Only Christ was born sinless and not sick. Can we become like Christ because we want to be? Well, we may want to be, but how will we achieve it?”

The question of how we will achieve unselfish love, which constitutes the cure of our being and spiritual health, is what concerns the Prophets, Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. It is connected with the activation of the noetic faculty in the heart.

Throughout Holy Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, we encounter the fact that the noetic faculty (energy) functions in the heart, and through it, someone acquires knowledge of God. Meanwhile the rational faculty (energy) acts in the reason through thoughts (*logismoi*) and by means of it man relates to his surroundings. In order to be cured, man has to pass through the stages of the spiritual life, which are *purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and glorification*. These stages of perfection are identified in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

This is the perspective in which the Law should be viewed in the Old Testament, together with the rites of purification and all the commandments in general. The Mosaic Law is clearly ascetic in character and consists of purification of the heart and progress towards illumination and glorification. Thus, there are not only words and concepts in the Old Testament, but also the experience of glorification which goes beyond words and concepts.

“We have a very basic problem in contemporary Orthodox theology. What is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament? In the Old Testament, do we have the revelation of the truth? Do we have the experience of glorification, which transcends words and concepts? Or do we only have words and concepts in the Old Testament?”

The Augustinian tradition tells us that we have words and concepts, things that come and go, but we have nothing in the way of experiences that compares with the New Testa-

ment. Therefore, neither the Protestants nor the Latins understand the Old Testament as we Orthodox do. According to the Fathers of the Church, all the Prophets had reached glorification.”

Difference between the Old and New Testaments

As has been pointed out already, the experiences of the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, of the Old and New Testaments, are identical. The spiritual life is common to both, the stages of perfection are the same, glorification is lived by the glorified saints. There are, however, differences as well.

The first difference is that the unincarnate Word appears in the Old Testament, whereas in the New the incarnate Word appears. This has been emphasized in detail elsewhere.

The second difference is that the glorification of the Prophets in the Old Testament had a temporary character, as death had not been abolished. The glorification of the Apostles in the New Testament, by contrast, is stable because of the existence of Christ’s glorified human nature and the victory over death.

“The second great difference between the Old and New Testaments is between temporariness and permanence of participation in the glory of God. In the Old Testament participation is temporary. The experience of glorification is short-lived. Those who beheld the uncreated glory of the Word nevertheless died, both in body and soul. Now, however, through the incarnation, all who have seen the glory of the Word participate permanently in the glory of the Holy Trinity, because when the body dies, the soul does not undergo death. The death of the soul is the absence of glorification, that is to say, the vision of God.

When someone in this life, now, attains to glorification, death no longer dominates him and the experience of glorification continues even after death. A very powerful sign and testimony regarding this fact is the holy relics. Holy relics exist because those who have left relics have left them as testimony to the resurrection of their bodies. That is why all together they make up the communion of the saints.”

Generally speaking, the links between the Old and New Testaments and the differences between them can be set out in three basic questions.

“I pose certain questions. I do not offer any solution to these issues. I simply think that they ought to be examined and subjected to further research: (1) What has been revealed in the Old Testament? Was the truth revealed or is it lies?

(2) How does the Old Testament differ from the New? And, (3) What does Christ mean when He says, *He will guide you into all truth*? What is *all truth* and when was this *all truth* revealed? And if *all truth* has been revealed, this means that it ought to be regarded now as the highest pinnacle. Moreover, if we have a highest point after that pinnacle, we need to measure whether or not we still have that state. For *all truth* to be revealed there has to be a certain state. What was revealed as *all truth*? The dogma of the Holy Trinity? The dogma of the incarnation? What has been revealed as *all truth*? In addition, when? Was it revealed gradually? As time passed, down through the ages? Or was it revealed all at once, in a revelational experience? And so on.

Our contemporary perceptions on these issues are not usually within the framework of the patristic tradition. One professor of ours has caught onto the word *revelation* and says that even after Pentecost there is revelation. What revelation can there be after Pentecost? What does revelation

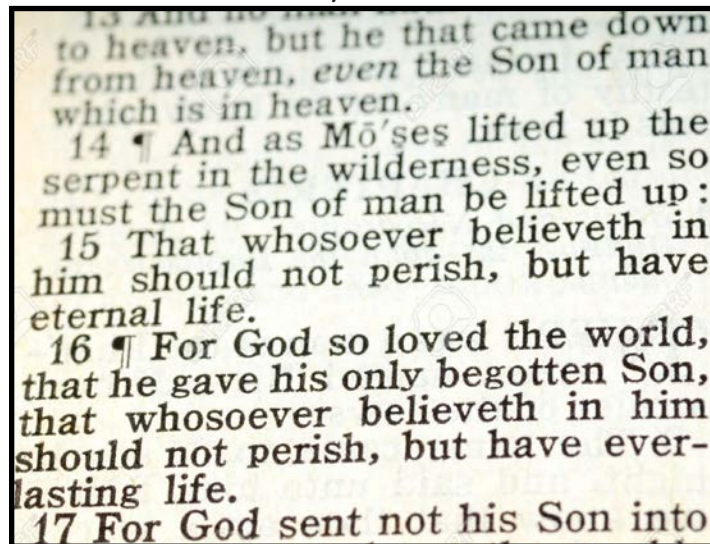
mean to the Fathers of the Church? And how is revelation after Pentecost different from the revelation at Pentecost or the revelation before Pentecost or the revelation after the Resurrection, from the revelation before the Ascension, from the revelation before the Resurrection, from the revelation before the incarnation?

We have revelations before the incarnation throughout the Old Testament. After the incarnation we have revelations.

Before the Resurrection we have revelations. At the Resurrection and after the Resurrection we have revelations. Before the Ascension, during the event of the Ascension, there is the experience of the Ascension. Afterwards we also have Pentecost. Then the Fathers speak again about revelations. When the Fathers speak of revelation, what do they mean by the word? And what is the connection between revelation and divine inspiration?”

The answer to these questions is that in the Old Testament there is revelation of the unincarnate Word. This is truth not falsehood, but *all truth*, which was revealed on the day of Pentecost, is that **the Church is the Body of Christ**. The unincarnate Word is now incarnate. This is *all truth*.

“The basic difference between the Old and New Testaments is the incarnation. First of all the Word appears unincarnate to the Prophets. The first great difference: there is no incarnation in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, however, there is the Holy Trinity, Which appears to the



Prophets, because the Word, Christ Himself, is manifested to the Prophets. For that reason, for us Orthodox Christians, the Old Testament is clearly Christo-centric. The things that some people say about monotheism having been revealed in the Old Testament and so on, are incorrect.”

This means that the difference between the Old and New Testaments is not the dogma of the Holy Trinity, but the incarnation.

“The Word, Who is unincarnate in the Old Testament, appeared without flesh. Now, however, the Word is incarnate and when He is revealed to man He is always revealed in the body. In the New Testament, the revelation concentrates on the human nature of Christ.

Since this is the case, even before Pentecost we have examples of glorification. We know from the Tradition about the glorification of the All-Holy Virgin, who entered the Temple at three years old. She reached the Holy of Holies, which means that the All-Holy Virgin at three years of age had attained to the experience of glorification. She lived in the glory of God. She also beheld God from at least the age of three, and in this way she was made ready to be the Mother of God. That is one example.

Afterwards we have the example of the Baptism of Christ. We have the example of the two disciples of John. Later we have the Transfiguration, and then Pentecost. From the Transfiguration until Pentecost, however, Christ says that *He will guide you into all truth*. (Jn 16:13). What is meant by these words, *He will guide you into all truth*? We have an experience of glorification in the Old Testament. The Holy Trinity has already been revealed to the Prophets: the Father in the Word and the Holy Spirit has been revealed to the Prophets.

We have the same revelation in the New Testament, but now the human nature of Christ is added. In the Transfiguration we have a revelation of the glory of Christ, by means of the human nature of Christ, but also in the cloud that overshadowed the Apostles. Afterwards we have Pentecost. Why is Pentecost the revelation of all truth and why is the Transfiguration not the revelation of all truth?”

The light which the Prophets of the Old Testament saw was the divine and uncreated Light, but there was no body. At the time of the Transfiguration of Christ, the Disciples saw Light issuing from the Body of Christ, which, however, was outside them, as they had not yet become members of the Body of Christ. From the day of Pentecost onwards, the holy Apostles and the saints see the Light through the Body of Christ, as they are members of this risen and glorified Body of Christ.

“That someone reaches glorification and has Light from within, means that the source of the Light is, of course, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but that it is also the human nature of Christ. Because of the hypostatic union,

that is to say, on account of the fact that it is the body of the Word, not only the Word but also the flesh is a source of life. The vision of God, glorification, is a source of life.

This is the basic difference between the Old and New Testaments. This now, from the point of view of reality, is what is called the Church, historical ecclesiastical reality.”

The visions of God in the New Testament are different from visions of God in the Old Testament, because now the human nature of the Word is a source of the uncreated energy of God and because the God-seers are members of the Body of Christ. Also because death has been abolished and glorification does not have a temporary character. Now the Church is the Body of Christ and there is no other truth beyond the Church. This is *all truth* that was revealed on the day of Pentecost and is experienced through the centuries by the faithful. **After Pentecost there is no additional truth.**



Although it is not clear in the Old Testament Who the Holy Spirit is, the Apostles discovered Who He is by experience. Their experience repeats the experience of the prophets, but there is a difference because the Apostles were glorified after the Incarnation: *Yahweh* of the Old Testament now has the human nature of Christ. Although three of the Apostles were partially glorified during the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, all of the Apostles were fully glorified at Pentecost, during which they reached the highest state of glorification that **any human being can ever reach in this life.**

After the experiences of the Apostles come the experiences of the glorified who include the Church Fathers and those saints who reached *theosis*. The experience of *theosis* continues to appear in each generation up to the present. This experience of *theosis* is the core of the Orthodox tradition, the foundation of the local and ecumenical councils, and the basis for the Church's canon law and liturgical life today.

If the contemporary Orthodox theologian is to acquire objectivity, he must rely on the experience of *theosis*. In other words, we can positively state that a student of Patristic tradition has acquired objectivity in his theological method **only when he has personally undergone purification and illumination, and reached theosis.** Only in this way will the researcher not only understand the Patristic tradition, but also verify for himself the truth of this tradition through the Holy Spirit.

Fr. John Romanides (+2001)

A SERMON ON FAITH

A SERMON GIVEN DURING A SERVICE FOR THE TAKING OF MONASTIC VOWS IN SRETENSKY MONASTERY

Source: "Everyday Saints and Other Stories," by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), translated by Julina Henry Lowenfeld, Pokrov Publications (2012), pp. 327-329.



Our Lord expects faith from us. Faith, and nothing more. Faith in the spirit of God. Faith in our faith. Faith in Him, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today in our monastery we have a special occasion—a new monk has appeared in this world. In detail we heard from the Scriptures today; the Lord has placed a child before him and has said: *Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and*

become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt 18:3).

Everyone after taking his vows appears before the Lord like a child, innocent—with a new life opening before him. And now it all depends on the monk himself: will he remain as pure of heart as a child standing before his Savior? From our teachings we know that the innocent boy set before the Lord was the future St. Ignatius, who suffered martyrdom for Christ, and yet remained true to Him in spite of everything. Or will he choose a different path, and be true only to his own desires that he will hold up as a law for himself and the entire world? Will he try to deceive everyone, and in the end deceive only himself?

Our Lord expects faithfulness from us. And from you, our new brother monk! Faithfulness above all. To your monastic vows. To obedience. Faithfulness in humility. Faithfulness to your commitment to love above all else in this world our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ, and to prefer nothing and no one else in this world to Him.

If you can remain true to this, your new covenant with God, which you have made today upon taking your vows, then many people will come through you to salvation and eternal life. Yet if, God forbid, the human heart and the heart of the monk are focused on himself and not upon the Almighty, if we do not keep faith with God, then the very worst possible thing that could happen to us will occur—the senseless life of a monk. And there is absolutely nothing worse than that! But you have been given all the weapons you need to help you to victory.

The Lord has encouraged you with the remarkable words that you have heard upon taking your vows. We have all prayed for you. A remarkable and beautiful path is opening before you. It is full of struggle and of temptation, but it is also full of incomparable meaning, joy, and happiness that the rest of the world simply cannot comprehend.

May God help all of us, brothers and sisters, to be faithful to our calling: After all, **the vow of faithfulness is not just for us monks alone.** As St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote, the Lord does not seek the monk or the layperson, the scholar or the simpleton, the rich man or the pauper, but only the heart that thirsts for God, full of a sincere desire to be true to Him and His commandments!

May God give us understanding of this faith, for it gives our lives meaning. In exchange for our faith in Him, Christ gives His disciples and students everlasting joy and strength and courage to surmount all temptations we will face as we go through life. Amen.

† † †

Postscript: The monk for whom the sermon was given left the monastery within five years. There are no mechanisms within our Church to compel anyone to remain in the monastery. Here in the Sretensky Monastery over the past roughly twenty years we have had three such cases. When we are told that this is not very much in comparison with the other monasteries, we do not believe it. Even one such occurrence is truly a tragedy for the monastery, first of all for the monk himself who has betrayed his own vows.

One cannot help feeling terribly sorry for these people. Church canons prohibit them from being buried in a Christian cemetery, and they are treated the same as those who commit suicide. Their marriages are not recognized by the Church. I have had occasion to explain these theological rules and canons to others, and often it seemed that they were just too cruel.

But once I heard not a theological commentary, and not a paragraph from the ancient canons, but just one small quatrain, from which I understood that the laws of the Church merely confirmed the sorry state into which a monk who has recanted from his chosen path plunges himself. Of course, the Lord is merciful, and repentance is available to all.

And yet listen to how Arseny Chanyshev, a professor in the philosophy department of Moscow State University and the author of several books of commentary about classical philosophy, summed up his life. He was not a monk. He had no cause to repent for having violated vows that he had given to God. But he was the son of a monk who had abandoned his faith. And here is his quatrain:

I'm a monk's son, a child of sin.

I am the breaking of a vow

And cursed by God for this somehow:

My life is naught but dust and din...

ON KNEELING AND SUNDAY CHURCH PRAYERS

WHY ARE PRAYERS SAID IN CHURCH WITHOUT KNEELING ON ALL SUNDAYS AND FROM PASCHA UNTIL PENTECOST?

From Orthodox Life, Vol. 27, No. 3 (May-June, 1977), pp. 47-50.

As is evident from the Holy Scriptures, bows, kneeling and prostrations were employed during prayer even in the Old Testament. The holy Prophet King David refers to bowing down to God or to His temple in many of the psalms, for example: *Bow down to the Lord in His holy court* (Pss 28:2); *I shall bow down toward Thy holy temple in fear of Thee* (Pss 5:8); *O come, let us worship and fall down before Him* (Pss 94:6); *Let us go forth into His tabernacles, let us bow down at the place where His feet have stood* (Pss 131:7), etc.

About kneeling, it is known that the holy Prophet Daniel, for example, thrice daily *knelt upon his knees, and prayed and gave thanks before his God.*

(Dan 6:10). Full prostrations are also mentioned in the books of the Old Testament. For example: the Prophets Moses and Aaron besought God, *having fallen on their faces* (Num 16:22), to be merciful to the children of Israel who had grievously sinned. In the New Testament also, the custom of performing kneelings, prostrations and, of course, bows had been preserved and still had a place at the time of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who sanctified this Old Testament custom by His own example, praying on bent knees and falling down upon His face. Thus, we know from the Holy Gospels that before His passion, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He *kneeled down, and prayed* (Mt 26:39), *fell on the ground and prayed.* (Mk 14:35).

After the Lord's ascension, during the time of the holy apostles, this custom, of which the Holy Scriptures also speak, existed unchanged. For example, the holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen *knelt down, and prayed* for his enemies who were stoning him (Acts 7:60); the Apostle Peter, before raising Tabitha from the dead, *knelt down, and prayed* (Acts 9:40), etc. It is an indisputable fact that, as under the first successors of the apostles, so even in much later periods of the existence of the Church of Christ, kneelings, bows and prostrations upon the ground were always employed by true believers at domestic prayers and at the divine services. In antiquity, among the other bodily activities, kneeling was considered the outward manifestation of prayer most pleasing

to God. Thus, St. Ambrose of Milan says: *Beyond the rest of the ascetic labors, kneeling has the power to assuage the wrath of God and to evoke His mercy.* (Book VI on the Six Days of Creation, ch. 9).

The canons concerning bows and kneelings now accepted by the Orthodox Church and set forth in the books of the divine services, and particularly in the Church *Typicon*, are observed in monasteries. But in general, Orthodox Christian laymen who have zeal are, of course, permitted to pray on their knees in church and to make full prostrations whenever they wish, excepting only those times when the Gospel, Epistle, Old Testament readings, six psalms and sermon are read. The Holy Church lovingly regards such people, and does not constrain their devout feelings. However, the exceptions with regard to Sundays and the days between Pascha and Pentecost apply generally to everyone. According to ancient tradition and a clear church law, kneeling must not be performed on these days. The brilliant solemnity of the events which the Church commemorates throughout the period of Pentecost and on



Sundays precludes, in and of itself, any external manifestation of sorrow or lamentation over one's sins: for ever since Jesus Christ, *blotting out the handwriting of the ordinances that was against us, ... nailing it to His Cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it*" (Col 2:14-15)—ever

since then *there is, therefore, no condemnation to them who are in Jesus Christ.* (Rom 8:1). For this reason, the practice was observed in the Church from the earliest times, beyond a doubt handed down by the apostles, whereby on all these days, in that they are consecrated to the commemoration of the glorious victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death, it was required to perform the public divine service brightly and with solemnity, and in particular without kneeling, which is a sign of repentant grief for one's sins.

The second century writer Tertullian gives testimony concerning this practice: *On the Lord's Day* (i.e., Sunday) *we consider it improper to fast or to kneel; and we also enjoy this freedom from Pascha until Pentecost.* (*On the Crown*, ch. 3). St. Peter of Alexandria (third cent.—cf. his Canon XV in the *Rudder*), and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Book II, Ch. 59), also say the same thing.

Subsequently, the First Ecumenical Council found it necessary to make this legally binding by a special canon obligatory for the entire Church. The canon of this council states: *Since there are some persons who kneel in church on Sundays and on the days of Pentecost, with a view to preserving uniformity in*

all parishes, it has seemed best to the holy council for prayers to be offered to God while standing. (Canon XX).

Pointing out this canon, St. Basil the Great explains the rationale and meaning of the practice established by it thus: *We stand up when praying on the first of the week, though not all of us know the reason. For it is not only that it serves to remind us that when we have risen from the dead together with Christ we ought to seek the things above, in the day of resurrection of the grace given us, by standing at prayer, but that it also seems to serve in a way as a picture of the expected age. Wherefore, being also the starting point of days, though not the first with Moses, yet it has been called the first. For it says: "The evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen 1:5), on the ground that it returns again and again. The eighth, therefore, is also the first, especially as respects that really first and true eighth day, which the Psalmist too has mentioned in some of the superscriptions of his psalms, serving to exhibit the state which is to succeed this period of time, the unceasing day, the day without a night that follows, the day without successor, the never-ending and unaging age. Of necessity, therefore, the Church teaches her children to fulfill their obligations to pray therein while standing up, in order by constantly reminding them of the deathless life to prevent them from neglecting the provisions for the journey thither. And every Pentecost is a reminder of the expected resurrection in the age to come. For that one first day, being multiplied seven times over, constitutes the seven weeks of the holy Pentecost. For by starting from the first day of the week, one arrives on the same day... The laws of the Church have taught us to prefer the upright posture at prayer, thus transporting our mind, so to speak, as a result of vivid and clear suggestions, from the present age to the things come in the future. And during each kneeling and standing up again we are in fact showing by our actions that is was through sin that we fell to earth, and that through the kindness of the One Who created us we have been called back to Heaven...* (Canon XCI of St. Basil the Great). The three well-known kneeling prayers of Pentecost composed by this great Father of the Church are thus not read at third hour, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, nor at Liturgy on Pentecost, but at Vespers, which is already part of the following day, after the Entrance. The holy Father was determined not to break the ancient custom of the Church.

In Canon XC of the Council of Trullo, held in conjunction with the Sixth Ecumenical Council, we read: *We have received it canonical from our God-bearing Fathers not to bend the knee on Sundays when honoring the resurrection of Christ. Since this observation may not be clear to some of us, we are making it plain to the faithful, that after the entrance of those in holy orders into the sacrificial altar on the evening of the Saturday in question, let none of them bend the knee until the evening of the following Sunday, when, following the entrance after the lamps have been lit, again bending knees, we thus begin to offer our prayers to the Lord. For, inasmuch as we have received it that the night*

succeeding Saturday was the precursor of our Savior's rising, we commence our hymns at this point in a spiritual manner, ending the festival by passing out of darkness into light, in order that we may hence celebrate the resurrection together for a whole day and a whole night.

John Zonaras, explaining the canon, says: "Various canons have made it a law not to kneel on Sundays or during the fifty days of Pentecost, and Basil the Great also supplied the reasons for which this was forbidden. This canon decrees only with regard to Sunday, clearly indicates from what hour and until hour to kneel, and says: 'On Saturday, after the entrance of the celebrants into the altar at vespers, no one may bend the knee until vespers on Sunday itself, when, i.e., again the entrance of the celebrants takes place: for we do not transgress by bending the knee and praying in such a manner from that time on. For Saturday night is considered the night of the day of resurrection, which, according to the words of this canon, we must pass in the chanting of psalms, carrying the feast over from darkness to light, and in such manner celebrate the resurrection for the entire night and day.'" (*Book of the Canons With Interpretations*, p. 729).

There appears in the Church *Typicon* a direction concerning how the priest must approach and kiss the Gospel after reading it during the all-night vigil for the resurrection: "*Do not make prostrations to the ground, but small bows, until the hand touches the ground. For on Sunday and feasts of the Lord and during the entire fifty days between Pascha and Pentecost the knee is not bent.* (*Typicon*, ch. 2).

Nevertheless, standing at the divine services on Sunday and on the days between Pascha and Pentecost was the privilege of those who were in full communion with the Church; but the so-called "penitents" were not dispensed from kneeling even on those days.

We will close with these words from the famous interpreter of the Church canons, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch: **Preserve the canonical decrees, wherever and however they should be phrased; and say not that there are contradictions among them, for the All-holy Spirit has worded them all.** (Interpretation of Canon XC of the Council of Trullo).



Saints are people who live on earth by holy, eternal Divine truths. That is why the Lives of the Saints are actually applied dogmatics, for in them all the holy eternal dogmatic truths are experienced in all their life-creating and creative energies. In *The Lives of the Saints* it is most evidently shown that dogmas are not only ontological truths in themselves and for themselves, but that each one of them is a wellspring of eternal life and a source of holy spirituality.

St. Justin Popovich

ON GRATITUDE TOWARDS OUR LORD AND CREATOR

A homily on the Gospel on the Healing of the Ten Lepers by St. Nikolai Velimirovic, bishop of Ochrid, from "Homilies, vol. Two: Sundays after Pentecost," Lazarica Press, Birmingham (1998), pp. 299-306.

As Jesus entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and said: "Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!" And when He saw them, He said unto them: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said: "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." And He said unto him: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

[Lk 17:12-19]

† † †

We are taught through small things, not always being able to grasp big ones. If we are unable to grasp how God sees all men, let us see how the sun shines and sheds its light on all things on earth. If we are unable to grasp how a man's soul cannot live for an instant without God, let us see how a man's body cannot live for a moment without air.

If we do not know why God seeks obedience from men, let us understand why the head of a family seeks obedience from its members, a king from his subjects, a commander from his soldiers and an architect from his builders. If we do not know why God seeks gratitude from men, let us reflect and understand why a father seeks gratitude from his children. Let us pause for a moment on this subject: why does a father seek obedience from his children? Why does a father insist that his son take off his cap and make a reverence to him, and say "thank you" for everything, large or small, that he receives from his parents? Why do parents have to do this? Are they enriched by their children's thanks, or made more powerful or more eminent, or do they have more influence in society? No; nothing of all this. So, when parents gain nothing personally from their children's gratitude, is it not strange that they constantly teach their children to be grateful, and make them practice gratitude—and this not just on the part of devout parents, but also that of unbelievers?

This is not in the least strange, but is, rather, sublime. It is the parents' selfless love that drives them to teach their children gratitude. Why? That it should be for the child's good. That the child should grow up as a cultivated fruit tree and not as a wild thistle; so that it should go well with the child in this transitory life among men, among friends

and enemies, in villages and towns, in authority and in commerce. A grateful man is everywhere valued, liked, invited and assisted. He who learns gratitude learns mercy, and a merciful man walks more freely in this world.

Let us now ask ourselves why God seeks men's thanks. Why did He seek of Noah, Moses, Abraham and other of our forefathers that they offer Him sacrifices of thanksgiving (Gen 8:20-21; 12:7-8; 35:1; Lev Ch. 3)? Why did the Lord Jesus every day give an example to the world of how we must give thanks to God (Mt 11:25; 14:19; 26:26-7)? Why did the apostles do the same (Acts 2:47; 27:35), commanding all the faithful to give thanks to God in and for all things (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17)? Do we find great Isaiah's words incomprehensible: *I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness!* (Isa 63:7)? Or what the gentle Psalmist advises his own soul: *Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.* (Pss 102/103:2)? Why, then, does God seek men's thanks, and why do men give Him thanks?

It is out of His endless love for mankind that God seeks that men give Him thanks. The thanks of men will not make God greater, more powerful, more glorious, richer or more alive, but they will make men all of these things. Man's gratitude will not add anything to God's peace and contentment, but it will add greatly to man's. Thanksgiving to God will in no way change God's state and being, but it will change these in a grateful man. God has no need of our gratitude, nor are our prayers necessary to Him. But it is this same Lord who said: *Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of; before ye ask Him* (Mt 6:8) who at the same time recommended *that men ought always to pray, and not to faint* (Lk 18:1). God may not feel the need of our prayers, but He nevertheless tells us to pray. He may not feel the need of our gratitude, but nevertheless demands it of us—the thanksgiving that is nothing other than a form of prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving to God raises us mortals out of the corruption of mortality, releases us from that from which we must all at some time be released, whether we will or not, and binds us to God the living and immortal; if we are not bound to Him in this life, then we shall never be in His presence in eternity. Thanksgiving ennobles the thankful and nourishes good works. Thanksgiving inspires benevolence in the world, and gives freshness to every virtue. The mortal tongue of man is far from being able to represent either the beauty of gratitude or the ugliness of ingratitude as graphically as both are presented in today's Gospel.

At that time, As Jesus entered into a certain village, there met Him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, and said: "Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!" There were ten lepers. It is terrible to see one, let alone ten at once. A body covered from head to foot firstly with

white spots and then white, festering scabs, that first itch and then burn like fire. A body that is decaying and falling apart. A body in which there is more pus than blood. A body that stinks without and within. This is a leprous man. When the leprosy strikes at the nose, the mouth, the eyes, imagine what sort of air is breathed through the pus, what the food is like that is eaten with it and what the world is like when seen through it!

According to the Law of Moses, lepers were forbidden to come into any sort of contact with other people. This is still the case today in areas where leprosy exists. To stop anyone approaching a leprous man, the leper had to cry from a distance: “Unclean! Unclean!” This is spelled out word for word in the Law: *And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry: “Unclean! Unclean!”* (Lev 13:45). His clothes rent—that the leprosy on him may be seen; bareheaded—again that it be known that he is leprous, as leprosy makes the hair fall out; with his mouth covered—again as a sign for recognition by passers-by; and over and above all this, being forced to cry out: “Unclean! Unclean!” They were driven out of the cities and villages and lived a life lower than that of the beasts, driven off, despised and forgotten. *He is unclean, it is written in the Law, he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be.* (Lev 13:46). They were considered as dead, although their fate was more terrible than death.

One day the Lord Jesus, the Source of health, beauty and strength, passed by these ten ragged and stinking remnants of life. When the lepers discovered that it was He, they, from afar off, lifted up their voices, and said: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* How were these wretches able to know of Jesus and His power to help them, when they had no contact with other men? Someone must, throwing bread to them on the road, have given them the news. The fame of this one new thing in the world that could be of interest to them must have come to their ears from afar. All else that happens in the world: changes of ruler and wars among nations, the building and destroying of cities, festivals, fires and earthquakes—all this was meaningless to them. Clad in suppuration, they could only think of their miserable clothing and, perhaps, of

Him who was able to strip this clothing off them and clothe them in the raiment of health. Hearing of the Lord Jesus as an almighty healer, they had also certainly heard of specific cases of Christ’s healing of lepers like themselves (Lk 5:12-13). They must therefore have longed for the happy chance that they might meet the Lord. Somewhere on the edge of the Galilean plain, where the road begins to climb into the hills of Samaria, they were awaiting Him. He was passing that way on the road to Jerusalem. And lo, the happy chance had now come, not by chance but by God’s dispensation. They saw Christ passing with His disciples and, seeing Him, they cried out with one voice: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* Why did they call Him “Master”? Because it is a more dignified and meaningful word than “Teacher,” for a Mas-

ter is one who is not just a teacher but a spiritual guide, who by his words, example and care leads men onto the path of salvation. Why, then, do they not call Him “Lord”, which is an even more dignified and meaningful word than “Master”? Because they had not yet come to know of this dignity of Christ’s.

Have mercy on us, they cried aloud. And when He saw them, He said unto them: *Go shew yourselves unto the priests.* And it came to pass that, as they went, they were cleansed. In an earlier instance of the healing of lepers, the Lord stretched out His hand and touched the

leper, saying to him: *Be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.* (Lk 5:13). In this instance, though, He not only did not touch the lepers, but was not even close to them, for they stood afar off and cried out to Him. He had, then, to call to them from a distance.

Why did the Lord send them to the priests? Because it was the priests’ duty to pronounce lepers unclean and exclude them from society, and also to pronounce the healed clean and healthy and permit them to return to the society of men (Lev 13:34,44). The Lord will not break the law, especially as the law does not hinder His work, but rather endorses it in this case, because the priests themselves would be in a position to be convinced that the ten lepers were healed, and themselves confirm this and testify to it. Hearing, then, what the Lord said to them and whither He was sending them, the ten lepers set off to their village to do this. But lo, as they went, they looked at themselves and their leprosy



had disappeared: As they went, they were cleansed. They looked at their bodies, and their bodies were healthy and clean. They looked at each other, and were convinced of their health and cleanness. The scabs and pus and stench had all disappeared, leaving no trace of the horrific leprosy that had covered them.

Who could say that this miracle of Christ's was not greater than the raising of the dead? Go a little deeper into the fact that, at one mighty word, ten leprous human bodies, eaten up by the disease, suddenly became healthy and clean. When you go deeper into it, you will easily acknowledge that this word could not have come from a mortal man; that it must have been spoken by God through the physical lips of a man. A human tongue, it is true, pronounced this word, but the word came forth from those same depths from which there came the word of command that the world be created, *and it was so*. There are words and words. There are pure and sinless words that are therefore words of power. These words come from the primal Fount of eternal Love. The doors of all creation open before them; all things, men, sicknesses and spirits submit to them. And there are words that are fragmented, blunted, deadened by sin, that have no greater effect than the whistling of the wind through a reed-bed; and however many of these dead words are pronounced, they remain as weak as the buffeting of smoke on an iron door.

Think, moreover, what an indescribable comfort it is to us when we know in what a powerful and loving Lord we believe. *Whatever the Lord pleased, that did He in heaven and in earth.* (Pss 134/135:6). He is the Lord of life, the Ruler of sickness, the Lawgiver of nature, the Conqueror of death. We are not created by mindless and irrational nature, but by Him, the Most Wise. We are not slaves of natural law, but servants of the living God who loves mankind. We are not playthings of chance but creatures of Him Who created all our elder brethren, the angels and archangels and all the immortal hosts of heaven. If we suffer in this life, He knows the meaning and goal of our suffering; if we are made leprous by sin, His word is mightier than leprosy, whether physical or spiritual; if we drown, His saving hand is near; if we die, He awaits us on the other side of the grave.

Let us now return to the Gospel story of the healing of the lepers, and take a look at this clear illustration of gratitude and ingratitude. What did these lepers do when they noticed that they were healed of their leprosy? This is what they did: only one of them turned back to thank Christ, while the other nine went on their way with no further thought for their Benefactor and Saviour:

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. This one grateful man, on seeing that this terrible disease

had fallen from him, took breath in his soul as though a writhing mass of vicious snakes had fallen away from him, and his first thought was to thank the One who had saved him from his inexpressible wretchedness. As he had so short a time before raised his suffering voice and cried through suppurating lips: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!*, so he once again raised his voice, a strong voice from a healthy breast through clean and healthy lips, and thanked God with a great cry. Even this was not enough for him, and he ran back after his Benefactor, to express his thanks to Him. When he came to Christ, he fell right down before Him, no longer on painful knees with open wounds but on healthy ones, and thanked Him. A body full of health, a heart full of joy and eyes full of tears! That is a true man. Moments before, a heap of suppurating flesh, but now a man once more. Moments before, refuse cast out from the life of men, and now once more a worthy member of human society. Moments before, a sorrowful trumpet that sounded forth only one note: "Unclean! Unclean!", but now a joyful trumpet of thanks and praise to God.

This one and only grateful man was not a Jew but a Samaritan. The Samaritans were not Jews, but were either pure-blooded Assyrians or of mixed Assyrian and Jewish stock. They were those Assyrians whom King Shalmaneser at one time settled in parts of Syria, having first re-settled the Jews from there in Assyria (2 Kings 17:3-6, 24). That this grateful man was a pure-blooded Assyrian is clear from the Lord's calling him a stranger.

And Jesus answering said: "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." Do you see how gently the Lord rebukes ingratitude? He only asked whether they were not healed, and why they had not come back to say "thank you." He did not ask because He did not know that they were all healed; no, He knew that they would be healed before He saw and met them. But He put this question as the gentlest of reprimands. How every one of us, when he gives a penny to a beggar, explodes and yells if the beggar does not thank him! And just think how every one of us would furiously denounce nine sick men were we, let us say, capable of restoring their health and they did not even say; "thank you" for such an unrepayable debt.

How full all our days are with men's fury against the ungrateful! How laden is all the air on earth with hatreds and cursings that pour forth every day from men's lips from dawn to dusk against the ungrateful! How small, however, is that which man does for man compared with the great things that God untiringly and unceasingly does for men from the cradle to the grave. And God never yells or scolds, or curses the ungrateful, but reprimands them gently, asking those who worship Him at home or in church: "Where are My other children? Have I not

given health to thousands of them, and here are only you ten at prayer? Have I not given the sun's light to millions, and only you hundred are grateful? Have I not beautified the fields with harvest and filled every man's sheepfolds, and there are just a few of you who kneel before Me in thankfulness? Where are My other children? Where are the mighty and powerful who rule over nations by My power and might? Where are the rich and successful, who have enriched themselves with My riches and come to success through My mercy? Where are the healthy and the merry, who are filled with their health and merriment from My fount? Where are the parents whose children I help to grow and become strong? Where are the teachers to whom I give wisdom and knowledge? Where are all the sick whom I have healed? Where are all the sinners whose souls I have washed from sin as if from leprosy?

See, only this stranger! He alone has returned to give thanks. But is anyone a stranger to Christ? Did He not come to save all men, and not just the Jews? The Jews were proud of being chosen by God, and of their knowledge of God, that surpassed that of all other nations on earth. But here is an example that shows their darkened minds and hardness of heart. An Assyrian, a pagan, had a more enlightened mind and a nobler heart than the self-congratulatory Jews. Sadly, this history is repeated in our day with the chosen and the non-chosen. Today, some pagans have a more open mind and grateful heart towards God than very many Christians. Many Muslims, Buddhists or Parsees can put many Christians to shame by their heartfelt prayers to God and the ardor of their thankfulness to Him.

The parable ends with the Savior's words to the grateful Samaritan: *And He said unto him: "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."* See the greatness of the Lord's humility, and also His gentleness. It is a joy to Him to call men fellow-workers in His great and good works. He desires by this to raise the dignity of the humiliated and subjugated human race. High above human pride and vanity, He desires to share His merit with others, His riches with the poor, His glory with the needy and the sorrowing. *Thy faith hath Made thee whole.* This Samaritan had indeed believed, as had the other nine lepers; had they not believed in the Lord's power, they would not have cried out: *Jesus, Master; have mercy on us!* But of what use was their faith?

They could, with the same faith, have cried out to thousands of the world's most famous doctors: "Have mercy on us, and heal us!" but all would have been in vain. If any of these thousands of earthly, mortal doctors had healed them, do you think that he would have ascribed the healing to the sick man's faith and not to his own skill? Is it not the custom with earthly, mortal doctors that each of them deliberately passes over in silence any merit on the sick man's part in his restoration to health, in order thereby to emphasize, as

strongly and exclusively as possible, himself and his own merit? This is the behavior of man to man.

But Christ the Lord deals with men very differently. Christ has provided His wagon-load of wheat, and the leprous Samaritan has thrown one grain of wheat onto the load. Christ's load of wheat is His divine power and authority, and the leper's one grain is his faith in Christ. Christ, the true Lover of mankind, will not belittle that one grain, but will, on the contrary, give it more honor than His own whole load of grain. He therefore does not say, as all mortal men would say in this instance: "My load of wheat will feed you." He does not say: "I have made you whole," but *Thy faith hath made thee whole.* What greatness of soul there is in these words! What great teaching to us all! And what a great reprimand to human selfishness and pride!

Let all who conceal another's grain of merit and lay emphasis on their own wagon-load draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Righteous One. They are no less robbers and thieves than the rich man who adds the poor man's tiny field to his own vast acres. Let all the generals who conceal the part their soldiers have played in the victory, and spread abroad the fame of their own merit, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the True One. Let all engaged in commerce and industry, who play down the merit for their success that belongs to their workers and helpers, and ascribe this entirely to their own zeal, wisdom and luck, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Humble One. Finally: let the whole human race, who in their proud blindness ascribe all good, all skill, all success to themselves alone, and conceal or forget God's enormous share in it all, draw near in shame and learn from Christ the Lover of mankind. Let them draw near and learn how the true God does not conceal a single grain of man's merit in the great wagon-load of His merit but, on the contrary, conceals and keeps quiet about His own, emphasizing that of men.

Can there be a greater blow and a more terrible reprimand to men for their thieving, brigandry, roughness, pride and lack of love towards man and God? Truly, he who has a sense of shame will be ashamed before this humility of Christ's. He who has one spark of unextinguished conscience will repent of his vulgar and stupid self-congratulation and self-display, and will become grateful to God and men. And gratitude will teach him truthfulness, righteousness and humility.

Oh, if we Christians knew the variety and number of the spiritual diseases from which Christ the Lord heals us every day, we would quickly turn to Him, fall at His feet and thank Him from this moment to the hour of our death—which hour is not far from any one of us. 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.

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ON CHURCH DOGMAS

By Fr. John Romanides (+November 1, 2001).

The dogmas of the Church are the axioms that originate from this experience of purification, illumination and glorification. Dogmas are not the outcome of conjectures, as Western theologians, historians of dogma and our own people—who follow them—believe.

Dogmas did not result from the speculative endeavor of clever theologians indulging in philosophy. Dogmas are the formulations of the teachings of the Church produced by the Fathers of the Church to protect it from heresies. Because every time a dogma was formulated, it was done in order to counter a specific heresy.

The Church never gathered to formulate dogma for the sake of the conjectural expertise of theologians, who sit in their university chairs speculating on the basis of philosophy, sociology and so on. No such thing has ever happened. All the Ecumenical and Local Councils, whenever they were engaged in drawing up dogma, were always opposing a particular heresy.

This is the precise historical reality. From the point of view of Patristic tradition, the formulation of dogma against heresy was an expression of the mystical experience of the Church. Because heresy was opposed to the life of the Church and contrary to the experience of the Church. What is this experience? It is purification, illumination and glorification. Orthodoxy is anything that accords with this experience.

Now the therapeutic part [of the formulation of dogma] is the most important of all. Because, according to the Fathers, if someone does not pass through the treatment, the fact that he accepts dogmas is of no significance. The purpose of the dogmas is to be used as medicines for man's cure. Dogma is a medicine.

Dogma is not to be believed. Dogma is to be experienced. Because dogma without experience is heresy. The worst heresy is for people to sit at their desks and assume that they can reflect deeply and think great thoughts about dogmatic issues. That is the greatest stupidity.

The assertion by many historians that the Fathers of the Church used philosophy to understand dogmas, and that the conflict between the Orthodox and the heretics was about who had the correct rational understanding of dogma, is a myth. The Fathers of the Church never had this perception. The heretics had this perception.

The Fathers of the Church do not accept metaphysics, because metaphysics is human thought about *the immutable*. By means of concepts and words, man thinks about and expresses *the immutable*. That is the foundation of metaphysics.

In patristic theology, however, we have the famous saying of St. Gregory the Theologian, the compass for every Orthodox theologian, which tells us: *It is impossible to express God, and even more impossible to conceive Him.* We can neither describe God in words nor understand Him. For that reason, words and concepts about God do not *express* God. They are simply part of the ascetic means by which man attains—if he ever does attain—to glorification.