

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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BROTHERHOOD OF ST. POIMEN

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## BE ALWAYS WITH ME AND IN ME

SPIRITUAL ADVICE FOR THE AGES!

Source: "My Life in Christ," extracts from the diary of St. John of Kronstadt, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY (1994), pp. 436-441.

Reverence in every way images of living men, in order that you may duly reverence the image of God. For the image of the Lord Jesus Christ is the human image. He who does not respect the human image will not respect the image of God!

Am I not everything to you—I am the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—your God, your life, your peace, your joy, and your blessedness? Your riches, your meat, and drink; your raiment, your all? To what, then, do you cling? Is it not to dust? What is that you grudge Me in the person of your neighbor? Is it not dust? Do you grudge it to Me Who has created all things, Who can turn earth and stones into bread, and can bring forth water from a rock? Be always with Me and in Me, and you shall be always at peace and joyful. Has your trust in Me ever been in vain? Have I not always given you tranquility and new life?

If you share your prosperity with your neighbor, if you have it in common with him, then all God's blessings will be in common with you. *Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you... All Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine.* (Jn 15:7, 17:10)

When you forbid the Devil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, then His name, the sweetest to us, and the most terrible and grievous to the demons, itself creates power, like a two-edged sword. Equally, if you ask anything of the Heavenly Father, or do anything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

then the heavenly Father, for the sake of the name of His beloved Son, shall give you all things in the Holy Ghost, in the sacraments, if you fulfill His commandments, and will in no wise consider your unworthiness; for wherever the name of God is made use of with faith, there it creates powers: **for the very name of God is power.**

Some persons ask: What is the use of mentioning the names of the departed or living in prayer for them? God being omniscient Himself, knows their names and the needs of each one. But those who speak thus forget, or do not know, the importance of prayer, do not know the importance of every word said from the whole heart; they forget that the justice and mercy of God are moved by our heartfelt prayer which the Lord, in His goodness, imputes to the merit of the living or the departed themselves, as to the members of the one body of the Church. They do not know that also the *Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven* (Heb 12:23), in her love continually prays to God for us, and expressly mentions before God the names of those who pray for them—equal for equal. We make mention of their names, and they of ours. Whilst he who does not lovingly remember his brethren in prayer, will not himself be remembered, and does not deserve to be mentioned. Even one word of faith and love means much in prayer. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (Jas 5:16).

When we pray for the living and for the departed, and mention them by name, we must pronounce these names lovingly, and from the whole heart, as though we carried in our souls the persons whose names we mention, *even as a nurse cherisheth her children* (1Thes 2:7), remembering that they are our members, and members of the Lord's

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body. (Eph 4:25; 30). It is not right to stand before God and merely run over their names with the tongue without the heart’s participation and love. We must remember that God sees into the heart; that the persons for whom we pray also require from us brotherly love and sympathy as a Christian duty.

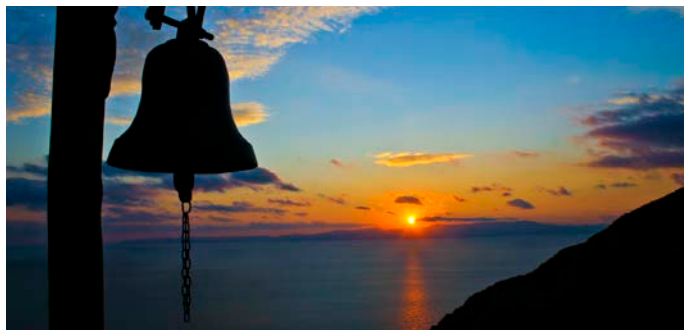
There is a great difference between the apathetic repetition of names and their hearty remembrance: the one is as far from the other as heaven from earth. However, above all, the name of the Lord Himself, that of His most pure Mother, and those of the holy angels and saints, must always be pronounced from a pure heart with burning faith and love. In general, the words of the prayer must not be merely run over with the tongue as if we were turning over the leaves of a book or counting money, the water must flow like a stream of living water from its source—they should be the sincere voice of the heart, not a strange, borrowed garment.

Have the same attention and respect for the Word as you have for the living man, and firmly believe that *the word of God is quick and powerful* as a living being, as an angel, and that, by reason of its spiritual fineness, it is *piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12). The word of God is God Himself; and therefore when you speak, believe that you have to do with living, and not with dead beings, with active, and not with inert and powerless ones. Know that you should pronounce every word with

faith and assurance. The words are living pearls. *Neither cast ye your pearls before swine.* (Mt 7:6).

During prayer, it is necessary, in the first place, that the object of the prayer should be definitely expressed, or at least, that there should be a clear sense of it and desire for it in the heart; in the second place, it is necessary that this desire should be expressed with feeling and lively trust in the mercy of the Lord or in that of the Mother of God ; in the third place, there must be a firm intention not to sin in the future, and to fulfill God’s will in everything. *Thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* (Jn 5:14).

When you pray for anything, either to the Lord or to the most-pure Mother of God, or to the angels and saints, asking their intercession before God for yourself or for others, then consider the words. Express your petitions, your needs, as the very things, the very matter, for which you ask the Lord, and believe that you have already a sure pledge of receiving the objects of your prayer, in the very words by which these objects are designated. For instance: when you pray for health for yourself or for someone else, look upon the word health as the very thing itself, as the very deed; believe that you already have it by the mercy and omnipotence of God, for the word itself, the name, may in an instant become deed with the Lord, and you will unfailingly receive that which you ask for in return for your unshaken faith. *Ask, and it shall be given you.* (Mt 7:7). *What things soever you*



*desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them; and ye shall have them.* (Mk 11:24).

Do not pay attention to the darkness, fire, and distress proceeding from the enemy during prayer, and steadfastly trust with all your heart in the very words of the prayer, being assured that the treasures of the Holy Ghost are concealed in them—that is, truth, light, life-giving fire, forgiveness of sins, expansion, peace and joy of the heart, and blessedness.

The great names: the Most Holy Trinity, or the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, called upon with lively, hearty faith and reverence, or thought of in the soul, are God Himself, and bring into our soul God Himself in Three Persons. But of God, *and through Him, and to Him, are all things.* (Rom 11:36): therefore, if you are united to God the Trinity by lively faith and virtue, especially by meekness, humility, and mercy, ask of Him whatever you desire, whatever the Holy Ghost teaches you to ask, and it shall be given unto you, either quickly, in a moment, in an hour, or after some time, according to the judgment of God's great wisdom.

*Desire of Me and I shall give thee.* (Pss 2:8). Everything that you ask for is certainly less, infinitely less, than the Giver Himself, as it derives its existence from Him. And, as the Giver Himself is an infinite, incomplex Being, and can in some manner be comprised in one single thought of ours, in one single word, then believe that one single

word of yours, one single petition concerning the fulfillment of anything, can at a sign from the Lord immediately become a thing or a deed. *He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.* (Pss 33:9). Remember the wonders that Moses worked, remember how that man of God was a god to Pharaoh, and how instantaneously at his word, or at a movement of his hand, or of his staff, everything either changed or appeared. O great God, most glorified God, God of wonders, God of unspeakable mercy, bountifulness, and love to man, glory to Thee always, both now and forever, and unto ages of ages!

Spiritual pride manifests itself by the fact that a proud man dares to make himself a judge of religion and of the Church, and says: "I do not believe in this, and I do not acknowledge this; this I find superfluous, that unnecessary, and this strange or absurd." Spiritual pride also manifests itself in boastfulness, in the proud man's pretended knowledge of everything, whilst in reality he knows very little or his spiritual eyes are entirely blind. "That is not worth reading," he says; "it is all well-known; these sermons are

not worth reading; they contain the one same thing which I already know." Human pride also manifests itself to a great extent when an ordinary mortal dares to compare himself with God's saints, and does not see their great and wonderful perfections acquired by their own exploits, with the assistance of the grace of God; perfections which God Himself has crowned and glorified in them. Such a man says: "Why should I reverence them, and especially why should I pray to them? They are men like me; I pray to God alone." And he does not consider that God Himself commanded us to ask the prayers of the righteous for ourselves. *For him will I accept.* (Job 42:8)

Spiritual pride also manifests itself by insensibility to our sins, by the Pharisee's self-justification and self-praise, by insensibility to God's mercies, by ingratitude to God for all that is good, by not feeling the need of praising God's greatness. All those who do not pray to the Almighty God, *to the God of all spirits and of all flesh* (prayer from the Burial Service), to their Life, do not pray by the reason of their secret pride.

If, when praying to the Mother of God you do not find due reverence for Her in your heart, and feel evil and blasphemous thoughts, then say the following words of praise worthily applied to Her: *Thou, our Lady, art all light, all holiness, all mercy, all wisdom; Thou, as the Mother of the Almighty, canst do all things; Thou art ever one and the same, all-perfect as the Mother of the all-perfect King of Glory!*

Unbelief betrays itself by the fact that it has nothing in common with truth; an unbelieving heart is restless, anxious, weak, inconsistent, whilst a believing one is, on the contrary, tranquil, blissful, great, and firm.

When you pray to the Lord, or to our Lady, or to the angels and saints, do not ascribe any difficulty to the Lord, to our Lady, to the angels and saints, in fulfilling your petitions, or the petitions of other believers; instead, believe that it is as easy and simple for the Lord to give any blessing to His people, and equally so by the prayers of His most pure Mother and of the angels and saints as it is for you to think of it. Besides this, as God is ever-flowing, infinite goodness, he desires and ever seeks to impart His goodness to His Creatures, if only they turn to Him with faith, hope, and love, like children to their father, recognizing their sinfulness, poverty, need, blindness, and infirmity without Him.

When you pray to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost—to the one God in the Trinity—do not seek Him



outside yourself, but contemplate Him within, as dwelling in you, entirely penetrating and knowing you. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.* (1Cor 3:16). *And I will walk among you, and will be your God.* (2Cor 6:16, 18). *I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and will be a Father unto you.* (Lev 26:12). *O Lord, Thou hast searched me out and known me* (Pss 139:1), says David.

When during prayer you doubt in the possibility of the fulfillment of any of your petitions, then remember that to God it is *possible* to give you *all things*, excepting direct evil, which is only proper to the Devil—that the word itself, or your petition itself concerning anything, is already a sure guarantee on your part that its fulfillment is possible; for if you can only think of something, either possible or impossible to yourself, then this “something” is absolutely possible to the Lord, to Whom the thought is already deed, if He pleases to fulfill it. Even for yourself the blessing already exists in the word, and only does not exist in the deed; but in order to fulfill a petition, God has the Son, the Creator, and the Holy Ghost the Accomplisher. To the possibility of accomplishing all things, add His infinite mercy, by which He is the ever-flowing source of being, as well as of all the gifts of being.

He is the God of gifts, the God of mercy and bounties. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* (Mt 7:7). Add to this God’s great wisdom, by which, in bestowing gifts upon us, He chooses that which is best for us, and which corresponds to our spiritual and bodily state. On your part is required only firm, undoubting assurance in the possibility of the Lord’s fulfillment of your petition, and also that your prayer should absolutely be good, for good, and not for anything evil. *Your Father, which is in heaven, it is said, shall give good things to them that ask Him.* (Mt 7:11).

When praying to God, we must have such firm, unshaken faith that doubt in anything would be difficult and even impossible, and therefore, we must have inscribed in our hearts the words: *With God all things are possible.* (Mk 10:27). We must also have the lively assurance that God fulfils everything; that His Being is love and mercy; that His business and, as though, His nature is to create, to give, to forgive, to be bountiful, to fulfill our requests. *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.* (Mt 21:22). Also, we must carefully watch our heart, that it should not lie, that every word should come out of its depths: *Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!* (Pss 130:1); that is, we must be most careful of the truth of the prayer, of that sincerity, which makes all the words of the prayer composed by others our own words, and which esteems every word as true.

***He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!***

## THE UNION OF HEART AND NOUS

*Source: From the translated book “My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-dweller,” pp. 558-562, St. Anthony’s Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, AZ.*

One year before the repose of Elder Joseph, while I was saying the prayer in sync with my breathing during vigil, something amazing happened. A state of prayer came to me that I cannot find words to describe. Suddenly, my *nous* entered my heart, and my *nous*, my heart, and the prayer became one! I could not tell where I was. All I can say is that the prayer was being said within my heart, and I felt sublime sweetness and an indescribable bliss. I do not know how long this lasted. When I regained my senses, I felt an inexpressible tranquility and sweetness, and I had many tears.

Afterwards, I went to Geronda and said:

“Something has happened to me, Geronda.”

“What happened to you?”

“While I was praying, suddenly my *nous* became enclosed within my heart. I became unaware if there was anything else in the world.” And I described that state of grace to him.

Then Geronda said to me:

“From this state of prayer, the *nous* will later ascend above. From this point on, the rapture of the *nous* begins. During and after this state, the *nous* leaves and goes to *theoria*. When I first experienced this state, I went and stayed in a cell so small that I could barely fit inside. It was so small that I nearly asphyxiated. I stayed in it for a year. Make sure that you hold on to what you felt and experienced; do not lose it!”

Another time when I told Geronda what I was experiencing, he ecstatically exclaimed:

“Oh, blessed obedience! Obedience—you are truly sovereign [among virtues]. My child, in order to taste these heavenly blessings, Gero-Arsenius and I shed much blood in *ascesis*. But you disciples, merely through diligent obedience, are enjoying the same grace we had. Hold on to obedience with all your soul; there is no path easier and higher than this.”

This state lasted about seven months. My *nous* enclosed itself for two or three hours. After I returned to my senses, this state would leave. But the following day in the daytime, I had very strong prayer. I had fallen in love so much with this prayer that I did not want to talk. I did not speak idly and I did not talk with anyone. That is how careful I was those months when I had that state. As soon as I woke up, I kept thinking about when night would come so that I could struggle in prayer and find that state. If I did not find it the first night, I would struggle and find it the second or third night. I would find it about twice a week.

Whenever I found this prayer, I would experience such a strong sweetness during the daytime that I did not care

if I was working hard all day. When we did have to work hard all day, everyone else would get tired and want to stop working, but I did not. I was flying! I did not have just twice as much strength as usual but five times as much—in both body and soul. I was not interested in what other people were doing. I would sit down for meals, and I would not look to see what they were eating or saying. I would eat my food while my *nous* was in prayer. I felt so much sweetness within myself that I cannot describe it.

In this state, my *nous* had been united with my heart, and the prayer was being said on its own inside my heart. My *nous*, my heart, and the words of the prayer were united, just as it says in “The Art of Prayer.” I had no perception of things around me: not my cell, not the walls—nothing. Awareness of the world would be extinguished.

I did not want to eat or drink, and I did not even get sleepy. For two days, I did not eat or drink anything and I did not even get thirsty, all because of this prayer! Prayer was dancing within me and would not let me sleep. I would say to myself, “It does not matter if I do not sleep, eat, or drink, as long as I have this!” It was the only thing I wanted because it brought me indescribable peace, sweetness, and bliss. When you are in this state, you sit down to eat and you cannot, so you eat just superficially. You lie down to sleep and you cannot. This would last not just for twenty-four or thirty-six hours, but even for forty-eight hours when I had found this prayer.

I told Geronda:

“The prayer won’t let me sleep!”

“Brace yourself,” Geronda replied. “It looks like I will depart, and God is preparing you so that you will bear it.”

After Geronda departed and I lived alone, the prayer still would not let me sleep—sometimes three or even six times a week, when I found it. Sometimes when I was thinking about this prayer, I was considering resigning from the priesthood and withdrawing to some hidden place where no one would see me. I would weep and say:

“Oh, Lord, why did I want the priesthood? If only I were somewhere where I could pray and not meet anyone.”

I was thinking about staying in the caves of the ascetics so that I could preserve that state of prayer. But I lost it due to the many cares I later had.

As papa-Haralambos said this, he wept hard. Later, he explained:

“Even though many times I had the thought of becoming a solitary ascetic, I rejected the idea. Since Geronda hadn’t recommended this to me before passing away, I was afraid to proceed any further without his blessing.”

On the day that Geronda departed, papa-Haralambos did a prostration to him before going to rest in his cell. Geronda said to him:

“Come close to me. Cut out the cares. Do you hear me?”

“May it be blessed,” papa-Haralambos answered and turned around to leave.

After taking only ten steps, Geronda called out to him, again:

“Papa!”

He came running back.

“What did I tell you? Did you hear me? I told you to cut out the cares.”

“May it be blessed, Geronda.”

After he turned around again and took fifteen steps, Geronda called out to him once more:

“Papa!”

He came running back again...

“What did I tell you? Did you hear me? Cut out the cares! I told you to cut out the cares!”

“May it be blessed, Geronda

“I told you not to forget to cut out the cares.”

Later, Papa-Haralambos would weep every time he remembered this. He recalled:

“He told me three times. When I started getting involved with cares, how many times his words came to mind! What can I say? What tears did I lose because of

cares! Because of the cares I got involved—planting a garden, building walls—I found my demise. I got involved in many cares. Whereas during Geronda’s final year, I had a state that cannot be described. I had many states of grace.”

Papa-Haralambos had indeed received much grace from God. This is why he said to me very naturally and as a matter of fact:

“I have prayer?”

“Yes, my dear papa,” I would reply. “Yes you do, you do have prayer.”

He could say this without pride because he was simple, straightforward, and innocent, yet a perfect disciple and a great fighter until his holy repose in 2001.



**Elder Joseph the Hesychast with two of his disciples: Elder Haralambos (of Dionysiou, left) and Elder Ephraim (of Filotheou and Arizona, right)**

## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SERVICE OF MY LIFE

Source: "Everyday Saints and Other Stories," by Archimandrite Tikhon (Shevkunov), translated by Julian Henry Lowefield, Pokrov Publications (2012), pp. 217-221.

During Soviet times there perhaps was no more horrific symbol of the devastation of the Russian Orthodox Church by Communist rule than the Diveyevo Monastery.

The monastery had been founded by St. Seraphim of Sarov, yet it had been turned into a frightful ruin. The gutted remains of what was left towered over the pathetic Soviet "regional center" into which the once glorious and flourishing town of Diveyevo had been transformed. The authorities did not bother destroying the monastery completely. Instead they deliberately left the ruins standing there as a memorial of their triumph, as a trophy of their perpetual enslavement of the Church. By the holy gates of the monastery, they put up a monument to the leader of the Revolution—Lenin—whose arm was raised to the sky in mocking greeting of anyone who came to the devastated monastery.

Everything about the scene said convincingly that there would never be any return to the past. The prophecies of St. Seraphim about the grand destiny of Diveyevo Monastery, which had

been so beloved in all of Russian Orthodoxy, seemed to have been forever profaned and destroyed.

Nowhere in Diveyevo, neither within the town, not in its surroundings, was there a single working church, not even the memory of a church—all had been utterly destroyed. And in the once renowned Monastery of Sarov, and in the towns around it, instead of a holy site, now one of the most top-secret and heavily guarded constructions of the Soviet Union was housed instead—a project known as Arzamas-16. Here nuclear weapons were made.

If any priests ever made a secret pilgrimage to Diveyevo, they carefully hid their intentions, always dressing in secular clothes. It was to no avail. The secret police would somehow find them out anyway. In the year when I first visited the devastated monastery, two monks who came to pray and express their reverence for the holy relics of Diveyevo were arrested, cruelly beaten by the police, and then kept imprisoned for over fifteen days in a jail cell, sleeping on a frozen floor.

That winter, Archimandrite Boniface, a wonderful and extremely kind monk from the famous Holy Trinity Monastery, asked me to accompany him on a trip to Diveyevo. According to our ecclesiastical rules, a priest who sets out on a journey with the Sacred Gifts of the Eucharist—the Body and Blood of Christ—must always be accompanied by someone, so as to help defend and protect the great Holy Gifts in the event of any emergency that might arise. And Father Boniface was on his way to Diveyevo in order to give Communion to a few old nuns still living in the area around the monastery—some of the last few still living in our time of the thousand who once inhabited the pre-Revolutionary convent.

To get there we had to take a train through Nizhny Novgorod, then called Gorky, and next drive by car to Diveyevo. In the train, all night long, Archimandrite Boniface could not sleep. Hung around his neck by a silken cord was a small sacred receptacle for the Holy Gifts. I was sleeping on a neighboring bunk, but from time to time would wake up at the sound of the wheels and see Father Boniface seated at table reading the New Testament in the dim night light of our train wagon.



We made it to Nizhny Novgorod, which was his hometown, and stayed in his parents' house. Father Boniface gave me a seriously transformative book to read—the first volume of the

works of Holy Hierarch Ignatius Brianchaninov—and all night long I could not sleep a wink, as I first discovered for myself that amazing Christian writer.

Next morning we set off for Diveyevo. We faced a drive of about eighty kilometers. Father Boniface tried to dress in a way so that no one would ever suspect him to be a priest: carefully tucking away the pleats and folds of his cassock beneath his coat, and hiding away his very long beard into his thick scarf and upturned collar.

It was already getting dark by the time we reached our destination. Looking out of our car window through the snowflakes whirling in a February storm, I was distressed to see the tall watchtower, wrecked dome and ruined shells of the desecrated churches. Despite this mournful scene, I was still struck by the unusual power and secret energy of this great monastery. What's more, I had a sense that the Monastery of Diveyevo was not yet dead, but still alive with some ineffable spiritual life, well past the comprehension of this uncaring material world.

And so it turned out to be! In a ramshackle little hut, on the outskirts of Diveyevo, I saw something that I could have never imagined even in my most radiant dreams. I saw alive the Church Radiant, invincible and indefatigable, youthful and joyful in the consciousness of Her God, our Shepherd and Savior. It was then that I was struck by a great verse of the apostle Paul: *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth!* (Phil 4:13).

And what's more, the most beautiful and unforgettable church service in my life took place then—not in some magnificent grand cathedral, not in some glorious ancient church hallowed with age, but in a nondescript building in the community center of Diveyevo, on Number 16, Lesnaya Street. It was not even a church at all, but an old bathhouse somehow vaguely converted into communal housing.

When I first arrived with Father Boniface, I saw a dingy little room crowded by about a dozen elderly women, the youngest of whom could not have been younger than eighty, while the oldest were definitely more than 100 years old. All of them were dressed in simple old country maids' clothes and wearing peasant kerchiefs. None of them was wearing a habit or any kind of monastic or ecclesiastical clothing. Of course, these weren't nuns—just simple old ladies; that's what anyone would have thought, including me, if I had not known that these old women were in fact some of the most courageous modern-day confessors of our faith, true heroines who had suffered tortures and decades in prisons and concentration camps for their beliefs. And yet despite all their ordeals, their spiritual loyalty and unshakable faith in God had only grown.

I was amazed to see how before my very eyes the venerable Father Boniface, an archimandrite and rector of the churches in the Patriarchal quarters of the Holy Trinity Monastery, a respected and well-known father confessor in Moscow, got down on his knees before blessing these old women, and bowed low to the floor! To be honest, I could not believe my eyes. However, after lifting himself up from the floor, this priest fervently began to bless those old women who were hobbling up awkwardly to him, each in their turn. It was clear how truly delighted they were by his visit.

As Father Boniface and the old women were exchanging greetings, I looked around. Icons in ancient ceremonial frames, dimly lit by flickering lamps, were hung on the walls. One of them particularly attracted my attention. It was a large and beautiful icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. The elder's face exuded such kindness and warmth that I could not tear my eyes away from him. As I found out later, that image had been painted right before the Revolution for the new Cathedral of Diveyevo, which they had never even had time to consecrate, and which only by miracle had been spared from complete desecration.

Meanwhile, I started to prepare myself for the Vigil service. It took my breath away as the nuns started to take out of their

secret hiding places and set down on the crudely put together wooden table genuine artifacts belonging to St. Seraphim himself. Here was the Stole of his ecclesiastical vestment; there was his heavy iron cross on thick chains, worn for the mortification of the flesh, a leather glove, and the old-fashioned cast iron pot in which the saint had cooked his food. After the Revolution, when the monastery was pillaged and destroyed, the nuns of the Monastery of Diveyevo had passed down these holy relics from sister to sister.

Having put on his vestments, Father Boniface gave the priest's pronouncement that begins the Vigil service. The nuns immediately perked up and began to chant. What a divine and utterly amazing choir they were!

*In the sixth tone! Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me!* sang out one of the voices quavering with age; it was the canonarch nun, who was now 102 years old. She had been imprisoned and exiled for over twenty years. And all those wonderful sisters sang out together with her: *Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me! Harken unto me, O Lord!*

There is no way to capture the sublimity of this service in words. Candles flickered, and the limitlessly kind and wise face of St. Seraphim looked down from his icon upon us... These incredible nuns chanted the entire service virtually by heart. Only very rarely did one of them glance at the thick old books, for which they needed to use not just eyeglasses but gigantic magnifying glasses with wooden handles. They had risked death or punishment saying this service in concentration camps and prisons and places of exile. They said it even now after all their sufferings, here in Diveyevo, settling into their wretched hovels on the outskirts of the town. For them it was nothing unusual, and yet for me, I could scarcely understand whether I was in Heaven or on Earth.

These aged nuns were possessed of such incredible spiritual strength, such prayer, such courage, such modesty, goodness, and love, and they were full of such faith! It was then, at that wonderful service, that I understood that they with their faith would triumph over everything—over our godless government despite all its power, over the faithlessness of this world, and over death itself, of which they had absolutely no fear...



No matter who you are, what kind of work you do, give an account of yourself as to how you have performed your work: as a Christian, or as a heathen (that is, motivated by self-love and worldly pleasure). A Christian must remember that every deed, even the smallest, has a moral principle. A Christian, who remembers the teaching of Jesus Christ, should perform every deed so that it will be of use toward the spreading of the grace of God and the Kingdom of Heaven among men.

St. Gabriel of Imereti

## CONCERNING FASTING,

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, from "Orthodox Life," vol.2, number 2 – March/April 1951.

The head or chief of the virtues is prayer; their foundation is fasting. Fasting is constant moderation in food with prudent discernment in its use.

Proud man! You think so much and so highly of your mind, while all the time it is in complete and constant dependence on your stomach.

The law of fasting, though outwardly a law for the stomach, is essentially a law for the mind. The mind, that sovereign ruler in man, if it wishes to enter into its rights of autocracy and retain them, must first submit to the law of fasting. Only then will it be constantly alert and bright; only then can it rule over the desires of the heart and body. Only with constant vigilance and temperance can the mind learn the commandments of the Gospel and follow them. The foundation of the virtues is fasting.

Newly-made man when placed in Paradise was given a single commandment, a commandment concerning fasting. Of course, only one commandment was given because that was sufficient to have kept primitive man in his innocence. The commandment did not speak of the quantity of food, but only prohibited a kind or quality. Let those who recognize a fast in quantity of food only and not in quality be silent. By devoting themselves to a practical study of fasting, they will see the significance of the quality of the food.

So important was the law of fasting declared by God to man in Paradise that with the commandment was pronounced a threat of punishment for breaking it. The punishment consisted in the striking of men with eternal death.

And now a sinful death continues to strike the breakers of the holy commandment of fasting. He who does not observe moderation and due discernment in food cannot preserve virginity or chastity, cannot control anger, yields to sloth, despondency and sorrow, becomes a slave of vainglory and an abode of pride which gets into a man through his carnal state, which is caused most of all by luxurious and nourishing food.

The commandment to fast was renewed or confirmed by the Gospel. *Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with excessive eating and drinking* (Lk 21:34), said the Lord. Overeating and drinking impart corpulence or grossness not only to the body, but to the mind and heart as well; that is,

they reduce a person to a carnal state of soul and body. Fasting, on the contrary, leads a Christian to a spiritual state. A person who is purified by fasting is humble in spirit, chaste, modest, silent, refined in the feelings of his heart and mind, light in body, fit for spiritual labors and contemplation, apt to receive divine grace.

The carnal man is completely immersed in sinful pleasures. He is sensual in body, in heart and in mind. He is incapable not only of spiritual joy and of receiving divine grace, but even of spiritual occupations. He is nailed to the earth, wallowing in materiality, spiritually dead while alive.

*Woe to you who are full now, for you shall hunger!* (Lk 6:25). Such is the message of the Word of God to breakers of the commandment of holy fasting. How will you nourish yourself in eternity when you have learnt here only to glut yourself with material foods and material pleasures which do not exist in heaven? What will you feed on in eternity when you have not tasted one of the good things of heaven? How can you

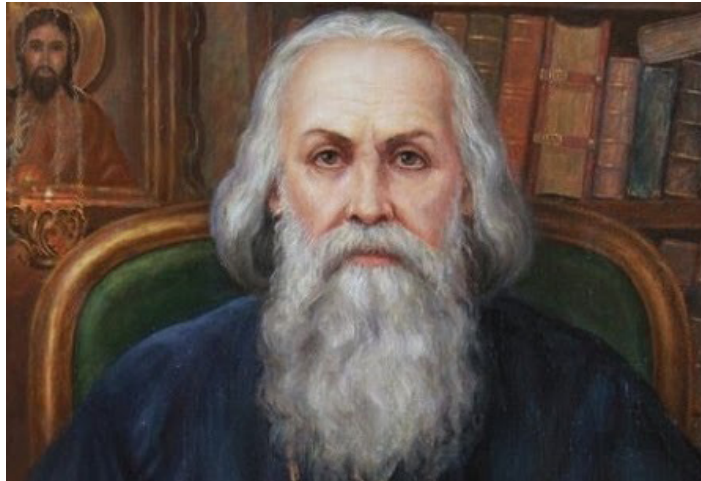
eat and enjoy the good things of heaven when you have acquired no taste or sympathy for them, in fact have only acquired aversion for them?

The daily bread of Christians is Christ. Uncloying repletion with this bread is the saving satiety and delight to which all Christians are invited. Be insatiably filled with the Word of God; be insatiably filled with the doing of Christ's commandments; be insatiably filled with the table *prepared against those who*

*trouble you, and be inebriated with the strong chalice.* (Pss 22:5). *Where are we to begin, says St. Macarius the Great, we who have never engaged in searching our hearts? Let us stand outside and knock with prayer and fasting, as the Lord commanded: Knock and it will be opened to you.* (Mt 7:7).

This work which is proposed to us by one of the greatest teachers of monasticism was a work of the Holy Apostles. From the midst of it, they were granted to hear the Spirit's messages. *While they were serving the Lord and fasting, says the writer of their acts, the Holy Spirit said: Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.* (Acts 13:2). From the midst of their effort in which fasting was combined with prayer the Spirit's command concerning the call of the Gentiles to Christianity was heard.

Wonderful union of fasting with prayer! Prayer is powerless unless it is based on fasting, and fasting is fruitless unless prayer is built upon it. Fasting frees a person from fleshly



St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)



passions, while prayer wrestles with the passions of the soul and, having conquered them, it penetrates and permeates the person's whole constitution, and purifies it. Into the purified spiritual temple it introduces God.

He who sows his land without working it wastes his seed and instead of wheat reaps thorns. So too if we sow seeds of prayer without refining our flesh, instead of righteousness we shall produce sin. Our prayer will be ruined and robbed by various thoughts and fantasies, it will be defiled by sensual feelings. Our flesh came from the earth and unless it is cultivated like the earth it can never produce the fruit of righteousness.

On the other hand if anyone works his land with great care and at great expense but leaves it unsown, it will be covered with a thick crop of weeds. So if the body is refined by fasting but the soul is not cultivated by prayer, reading and humility, then fasting becomes the parent of numerous weeds—passions of the soul: pride, vainglory, scorn.

What is the passion of gluttony and drunkenness? Having lost regularity (that is, a sense of what is right and lawful), the natural craving for food and drink demands a much greater quantity and more varied quality than is needed for the maintenance of life and the bodily powers, and becomes a passion. Excessive food acts on the bodily powers in a way that is the reverse of its natural purpose; it acts harmfully, weakening and destroying them.

The craving for food is satisfied by a simple table and by refraining from excess and delight in food. First, excess and delight must be abandoned; in this way, the desire for food is refined and reduced to order. However, when desire becomes normal, it is satisfied with simple food. On the other hand, when the craving for food is satisfied with excess and delight, it is coarsened. To arouse it we resort to a variety of tasty foods and drinks. At first, our desire seems satisfied; then it becomes capricious, and finally it turns into a morbid passion constantly seeking repletion and pleasure, and never satisfied.

Having resolved to consecrate ourselves to the service of God, let us make fasting the foundation of our effort. The essential quality of every foundation should be an unshakable firmness; otherwise it will be impossible to construct a building on it, however solid the building itself may be. So let us never on any account, on any pretext whatever, allow ourselves to break our fast by overeating, and especially by drunkenness.

The use of food once a day not to repletion is regarded by the Holy Fathers as the best fast. Such a fast does not weaken the body by prolonged abstinence or overload it with excessive food, but keeps it fit for soul-saving activity. Such a fast presents no glaring peculiarity, and therefore the person fasting has no cause for boasting, to which people are so prone on account of virtue itself, especially when it stands out sharply.

Those engaged in physical labors or who are so weak in body that they cannot content themselves with the use of food

once a day should eat twice. Fasting is for man, not man for fasting. But however often food is used, whether frequently or infrequently, satiety is strictly forbidden; it makes a person unfit for spiritual labors, and opens the door to other carnal passions.

Immoderate fasting—that is, prolonged excessive abstinence from food—is not approved by the Holy Fathers. From inordinate fasting and the exhaustion which results from it, a person becomes unfit for spiritual labors, frequently turns to gluttony, and often falls into the passion of boasting and pride.

Very important is the quality of food. The forbidden fruit of Paradise, although it was beautiful in appearance and tasted delicious, had a fatal effect on the soul. It imparted to it a knowledge of good and evil, and thereby ruined the innocence in which our first parents were created. And now food continues to have a powerful effect on the soul, which is particularly noticeable in the use of wine. This effect of food is due to its diverse action on the flesh and blood, and to the fact that the vapors and gases produced by it rise from the stomach into the brain and affect the mind. For this reason all intoxicating drinks are forbidden to the ascetic, since they deprive the mind of soberness and vigilance, and so of victory in the war of thought. The defeated mind, especially when it has been defeated by sensual thoughts in which it has taken pleasure, is deprived of spiritual grace. What was acquired by many protracted labors is lost in a few hours, in a few minutes.

*A monk should not use wine at all*, said Saint Pimen the Great. This rule ought to be followed by every pious Christian who wishes to preserve his chastity and virginity. The Holy Fathers followed this rule, and if they did use wine, it was extremely seldom and with the greatest moderation. Heating foods should be banished from the table of the abstinent since they arouse bodily passions. Such are pepper, ginger and other spices.

The most natural food is that which was assigned to man by the Creator immediately after his creation—food of the vegetable kingdom. God said to our first parents: *Behold I have given you every seed-bearing plant, the sowing seed which is on the whole earth; and every tree which has within it the fruit of seminal seed shall be to you for food.* (Gen 1:29). It was only after the flood that *the use of meat* was allowed. (Gen 9:3).

Vegetable food is the best for an ascetic. It is less heating for the blood and less fattening for the flesh. The vapors and gases it produces and which rise to the brain affect it less. Finally, it is the most wholesome because it produces less mucus in the stomach. For these reasons, when vegetable food is used, it is particularly easy to preserve purity and mental alertness, and the power of the mind over the whole man; also the passions act more feebly, and the person is more capable of engaging in the labors of piety.

Fish foods, especially those prepared from large sea fish, are of quite another kind. They act more perceptibly on the brain, fatten the body, heat the blood, and fill the stomach with harmful mucus, especially when they are frequently or constantly used.

These effects are incomparably more violent in the case of meat. It has an extremely fattening effect on the flesh, it causes a special corpulence, and heats the blood. The vapors and gases it produces are very oppressive to the brain. For this reason, it is not used at all by monks. It is the prerogative of people living in the world who are always engaged in hard physical labor. But even for them the constant use of meat is harmful.

“What!” at this point would-be wiseacres exclaim, “Meat is allowed man by God, and do you forbid its use?” To this we reply in the words of the Apostle, *All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.* (1Cor 10:23). We decline from the use of meat not because we regard it as unclean but because it produces a special corpulence in our whole constitution and hinders spiritual progress.

Our Holy Church, by her wise rules and regulations, has allowed Christians living in the world to use meat. Yet she does not allow its constant use, but has divided the year into seasons of meat-eating and seasons of abstinence from meat in which the Christian is detached from his meat-eating. This fruit of the fasts can be discovered by experience by everyone who keeps them.

For those living the monastic life the use of meat is forbidden. In its place, the use of milk foods and eggs is permitted during the seasons of meat-eating. At certain times and on certain days the use of fish is permitted them. But mostly they can use only vegetable food.

Vegetable food is used almost exclusively by the most zealous ascetics and exponents of piety, especially those who have felt within them the movement of the Spirit of God, on account of the convenience mentioned above and the cheapness of this food. For drink, they use only water and avoid not only heating and intoxicating beverages but also even nourishing ones like all the drinks made from bread.

The rules of fasting are appointed by the Church with the object of helping her children and to supply direction for the whole of Christian society. At the same time, it is prescribed for everyone to examine himself with the help of an experienced and discerning spiritual father and not to impose upon himself a fast which is beyond his strength. We repeat—**fasting is for man, and not man for fasting.** Food given for the support of the body should not be used to destroy it.

*If you control your stomach, said Saint Basil the Great, you will mount to Paradise; but if you do not control it, you will be a victim of death.* Here by the name Paradise should be understood a state of grace and prayer, and by death a pas-

sionate condition. A state of grace during our life on earth serves as a pledge of our eternal beatitude in the heavenly Eden. A fall into the power of sin and into a state of spiritual deadness serves as a pledge of our fall into the abyss of hell for eternal torment.

Amen.



## FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov.

There is no such thing as blind happenstance! God rules the world, and all that happens in heaven and under the heavens happens according to the wise and omnipotent God, unfathomable in His wisdom and omnipotence, and unfathomable in His governance.

If there is not a single event that is secret from God, then we must glorify God for everything that happens. God watches over the times, events in society, and personal fates.

It is necessary to assure ourselves that God governs the fate of the world and of each person. Life experiences are not long to prove and confirm this Gospel teaching.

All things pass—both the bad and the good—and neither men, nor demons can do anything if God does not allow it.

Why does our soul rebel against God's will and allowances? Because we have not revered God as God...

From living faith in God, is born complete submission to God, and from submission to God is born peace in our thoughts and calm in our hearts.

From seeing God's Providence, in the soul develops profound meekness and unflinching love of neighbor, which no winds can disturb or agitate.

The vision of God's Providence preserves and grows our faith in God.

The Christian who keeps his gaze fixed upon God's Providence preserves constant courage and unshakable steadfastness, even amidst terrible misfortunes.

Before the sight of God's Providence, not only can temporary sorrows not stand, but also those that await a person when he crosses the threshold into eternity beyond the grave.

A Christian should never and for no reason worry, for God's Providence carries him in its arms. Our only care should be that we would ever remain faithful to the Lord.

That one soldier has fallen does not mean the entire army is defeated.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SALVIFIC CONFESSION

Source: "The Path to Salvation," by St. Theophan the Recluse, 4th edition, published by St. Paisius Monastery, Safford, AZ (2016), pp. 168-172.



For a salvific confession, one must prepare himself sufficiently. Whoever has read this narrative thus far is ready. Proceed with reverence and faith!

[1] Firmly convinced of the necessity of this Sacrament, go to it—not as though it were some new part of your life or just a simple custom, but with complete faith that for you as a sinner, this is the

only possible way to be saved. By skipping it, you will be numbered among the condemned, and, consequently, you will be outside of any mercy. By not entering this clinic, your spirit will not regain its health and you will remain as you were, sick and disturbed. You will not see the kingdom if you do not enter it through the door of repentance.

[2] By these convictions engender the desire for this Sacrament. Go to it not as to the slaughter, but as to a fountain of blessings. Whoever vividly represents to himself the fruit born in us through the holy Sacrament of Confession could not but long for it. A man goes to it all in wounds from head to toe, and he returns from it healthy in all his members, alive, strong, and with a feeling of safety from future infection. He goes there weighed down by a heavy yoke—the whole sum of past sins on him. It torments him and deprives him of all peace. He returns light, joyful, and with a consoling disposition of spirit that he has received a charter of complete forgiveness.

[3] Shame and fear will come up—let them! That is why this Sacrament was created, to bring shame and fear upon us—and the more shame and fear, the more it will save us. Desire this Sacrament, desire great shame and great trembling. If someone wants to be healed, does he not know how painful the treatment is? He knows, but resolving to be healed, he also determines to endure the attendant pain in the hope of recovering. And you, when you were tormented by the feelings of regret that came upon you and you rushed to come closer to God, did you not say: "I am ready to endure anything, only have mercy on me and forgive me!" Well, now it is happening according your wish.

Do not be upset over this shame and fear; they are bound up with this Sacrament for your own good. By having burned again in them, you will become morally stronger. You burned already more than once in the fire of repentance—burn some more. Then you burned alone before God and your conscience, but now burn before a witness appointed by God, in witness of the sincerity of that solitary burning, and perhaps to complete its lack.

There will be a judgment, and at it will be shame and fear without hope. Shame and fear at confession pay for the shame and fear then. If you do not want the latter, go through with the former. Besides, it always happens that, according to the measure of the trembling that the penitent goes through, he overflows with consolation at the confession. This is where the Saviour truly shows Himself to be the Comforter of the laboring and heavy laden! By sincerely repenting and confessing the heart learns this truth by experience, rather than by faith alone.

[4] Then, again recalling all the sins you have committed and renewing the now ripened, inner commitment not to repeat them, rise up in the living faith that you stand before the Lord Himself Who receives your confession; and tell everything that burdens your conscience, without holding anything back. If you have approached it with the desire to shame yourself, you will not cover yourself, but will express as fully as possible your disgraceful weakness for sins. This will serve to satiate your humbled heart. You must be sure that every sin you have told is torn from the heart, for every hidden sin remains there even more to your condemnation, because the sinner stood with his wound near the Doctor that heals all things. By hiding the sin, he closed the wound without regretting that he torments and disrupts his soul.

In the story of Blessed Theodora, who passed through the toll-houses, it is written that her evil accusers did not find in their scrolls those sins that she had confessed. The angels later explained to her that Confession wipes away sin from every place that it had been recorded. Neither in the book of the conscience, nor in the book of the living, nor with the evil destroyer is it attributed to that person—Confession wiped away these lines. Tear out all that burdens you without hiding anything.

The point to which you need to bring the revelation of your sins is so that the spiritual father has a precise understanding of you; so that he sees you as you are, and, in giving absolution he absolves you and not someone else; so that when he says: *Forgive and absolve this penitent for the sins he has committed*, nothing remains in you that would come under this category. He does well who, having prepared for Confession for the first time after a long period of residing in sins, finds some opportunity to have a preliminary discussion with the spiritual father, and tells him the entire history of his sinful life. This will remove the danger of forgetting or omitting

anything in confusion during the confession. Everyone must concern himself with a complete revelation of his sins. The Lord gave the authority to absolve sins not automatically, but under the condition that they be repented of and confessed. If something is left incomplete, then it could happen that when the spiritual father pronounces: *I forgive and absolve you*, the Lord will say: *I condemn you*.

[5] Now the confession is over. The spiritual father lifts his *epitrachelion*, covers the head of the penitent with it, and keeping it in his hand, pronounces the absolution of all sins, making the sign of the Cross on the head. What occurs at this moment in the soul is well-known to everyone who sincerely repents. Streams of grace pour from the head into the heart and fill it with joy. This is not from human beings, not from the penitent, not from the absolver—this is the mystery of the Lord Healer and Comforter of souls.

Sometimes it happens at this time that some hear clearly in their hearts a divine word to strengthen and inspire them for future works. This is a sort of spiritual weapon entrusted by Christ the Saviour to the man who now enters the ranks of those warring in His name. Whoever has heard such a word, let him treasure it later, to comfort and inspire him—comfort, because it is clear that the confession has been received when it has pleased the Lord to enter into a sort of discussion with the penitent; inspire, because in the hour of temptation all he has to do is remember it, and strength comes from somewhere to resist! With what do warriors in battle inspire themselves? With a word spoken by the commander that affected them powerfully. It is the same here.

[6] With this everything is done. All that remains is to fall at God's feet with feelings of thankfulness for His unspeakable mercy, and kiss the Cross and Gospels as a sign of your vow. Go unwaveringly along the path shown to you in the Gospels, with the commitment to follow Christ the Saviour, as described in the Gospels, under His blessed yoke, only now taken upon yourself. Having completed this, go in peace, with the intention to intently act according to what you have promised, remembering that the judgment over you from now on will be from your own words. You have made a promise—keep it. It has been sealed by the Sacrament, and therefore you must be ever more faithful to it, so that you do not fall again into the ranks of those who have wasted grace.

[7] If the spiritual father gives you a penance, accept it with joy. If the spiritual father does not give you one, then ask him to. This will be not only a send-off to you as you depart on your good path, but also a shield and protection from outside enemy attacks on your new way of life.

Here is what the Patriarch of Constantinople wrote in answer to the Lutherans: “We accompany the absolution of sins with penances for many respectable reasons. First of all, so that through voluntary suffering the sinner will be freed here from onerous involuntary punishment there, in the next

life, for the Lord grants mercy to nothing more than He does suffering, especially voluntary suffering. Therefore St. Gregory also says that God's love is granted for tears. Secondly, it is in order to destroy in the sinner those passionate desires of the flesh which give birth to sin, for we know that opposites cure. Thirdly, it is so that the penance would serve as a bond or bridle for the soul, and not allow it to again take up those same vices from which it is still being cleansed. Fourthly, in order to accustom it to labor and patience, for virtue is a matter of labor. Fifthly, it is so that we will see and know whether or not the penitent has truly come to hate sin.”

Whoever finishes this course of spiritual treatment as given and, most importantly, confesses his sins without hiding anything, returns from the house of God the way criminals return from court who have received mercy and acquittal of their crimes instead of a death sentence. He returns with a deep feeling of thankfulness to the Saviour of our souls, with the firm resolve to dedicate himself to Him and to the fulfillment of His commandments all the rest of his life, with extreme disgust for all of his former sins, and with an unrestrainable desire to wipe away all traces of his former error. The one who has received absolution feels within himself that he is not useless, that he has been visited by a special power. Divine grace, which has thus far only acted on him from without in helping him conquer himself, now with the words: *I forgive and absolve* has entered into him, mingled with his spirit and filled it with a burning and longing, with which he now proceeds into action until the evening of his life.



No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our “wise men,” they will not escape passing through them.

Whoever enters on the true path of pleasing God, or who begins with the aid of grace to strive toward God on the path of Christ's law, will inevitably be threatened by the danger of losing his way at the crossroads, of going astray and perishing, imagining himself saved. These crossroads are unavoidable because of the sinful inclinations and disorder of one's faculties which are capable of presenting things in a false light—to deceive and destroy a man. To this is joined the flattery of Satan, who is reluctant to be separated from his victims and, when someone from his domain goes to the light of Christ, pursues him and sets every manner of net in order to catch him again—and quite often he indeed catches him.

St. Theophan the Recluse

## Γιὰ τὸν Μέγα Ἀγιασμό

Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Νέας Σμύρνης.



Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἀγιασμός τελεῖται κάθε χρόνο τὴν 5<sup>η</sup> καὶ 6<sup>η</sup> Ἰανουαρίου. Πολλοὶ εἶναι αὐτοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι ρωτοῦν ἂν ὁ Ἀγιασμός αὐτὸς πίνεται, χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ ραντισμό, φυλάσσεται στὰ σπίτια καὶ ἂν «ἀντικαθιστᾶ» τὴ Θεία Κοινωνία. Τὸ κείμενο ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ, μεταγλωττισμένο στὴ νεοελληνική, ἀποτελεῖ «εἰδικὴ γνωμοδότηση περὶ τοῦ θέματος

τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀγιασμοῦ», δηλ. πῶς λαμβάνεται αὐτὸς παρὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ἂν φυλάσσεται καὶ ἂν ἀπ' αὐτὸν μεταλαμβάνουν» οἱ πιστοί, συνταχθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Μητροπολίτου Πατρῶν κυροῦ Νικοδήμου. Ἀρχικῶς αὐτὴ δημοσιεύθηκε στὰ Δίπτυχα τοῦ ἔτους 1999 (.α.β.θ), πρὸς ἐνημέρωση τῶν εὐλαβέστατων Ἐφημερίων καὶ πληροφόρηση τῶν πιστῶν.

**Ἐπάρχει διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὸ Μεγάλο Ἀγιασμό ποὺ τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων καὶ ἐκεῖνον τῆς κύριας ἡμέρας τῆς ἑορτῆς;**

Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἀγιασμός ποὺ τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων καὶ ἀνήμερα τῆς ἑορτῆς εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ὁ ἴδιος. Ἐσφαλμένα κάποιοι θεωροῦν ὅτι δῆθεν τελεῖται τὴν παραμονὴ ὁ «μικρὸς Ἀγιασμός» καὶ τὴν ἐπόμενη ὁ «Μέγας». Καὶ στὶς δύο περιπτώσεις τελεῖται ὁ Μεγάλος Ἀγιασμός. «Μικρὸς» Ἀγιασμός τελεῖται τὴν πρώτη μέρα κάθε μήνα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκτάκτως, ὅπως ὅταν τὸ ζητοῦν οἱ Χριστιανοὶ σὲ διάφορες περιστάσεις (ἐγκαινία οἰκιῶν, καταστημάτων καὶ ἰδρυμάτων, σὲ θεμελίωση κτισμάτων, κ.λπ.). Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἀγιασμός τελεῖται μόνο δύο φορές τὸ χρόνο (τὴν 5<sup>η</sup> καὶ 6<sup>η</sup> Ἰανουαρίου) στὸ Ναό.

**Ποῦ φυλάσσεται ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός καὶ γιὰ ποῖο λόγο;**

Ὁ Μεγάλος Ἀγιασμός φυλάσσεται ὅλο τὸ χρόνο στὸ Ναό. Φυλάσσεται ὄχι ἄνευ λόγου. Καὶ ὁ λόγος δὲν εἶναι ἄλλος, παρὰ γιὰ νὰ «μεταλαμβάνεται» ἀπὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς ὑπὸ ὀρισμένες συνθήκες καὶ προϋποθέσεις. Συνηθισμένη εἶναι ἡ περίπτωση ποὺ ἀφορᾶ στοὺς διατελοῦντες ὑπὸ ἐπιτίμιο τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ, ποὺ ἐμποδίζει τὴ συμμετοχὴ τους στὴ Θεία Κοινωνία, γιὰ ὀρισμένο καιρὸ, καὶ εἴθισται νὰ δίδεται σὲ αὐτοὺς Μέγας Ἀγιασμός, γιὰ εὐλογία καὶ παρηγοριά τους. Κανένα κώλυμα δὲν ὑφίσταται πρὸς τοῦτο, ἐφ' ὅσον

μάλιστα βρίσκονται «ἐν μετανοίᾳ καὶ ἐξομολογήσει». Ἀπαραίτητα ὅμως πρέπει νὰ συνειδητοποιοῦν ὅτι ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός δὲν ὑποκαθιστᾶ οὔτε ἀντικαθιστᾶ τὴ Θεία Κοινωνία τοῦ Σώματος καὶ τοῦ Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ὀφείλουν μὲ τὴ μετάνοια νὰ προετοιμάζονται, γιὰ νὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ κωλύματα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, ὥστε νὰ ἀξιωθοῦν νὰ κοινωνήσουν τὸ ταχύτερο.

Μπορεῖ ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός νὰ φυλάσσεται στὸ σπίτι καὶ νὰ πίνουν ἀπ' αὐτὸν σὲ καιρὸ ἀσθένειας ἢ γιὰ ἀποτροπὴ βασκανίας καὶ κάθε σατανικῆς ἐνέργειας; Ἡ ἀπάντηση εἶναι θετική. Παρέχεται ἀπ' αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ ἱερὸ κείμενο τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀγιασμοῦ, ποὺ προβλέπει «ἵνα πάντες οἱ ἀρνούμενοι καὶ μεταλαμβάνοντες ἔχοιεν αὐτὸ (τὸ ἡγιασμένον ὕδωρ...) πρὸς ἰατρειάν παθῶν, πρὸς ἁγιασμόν οἴκων, πρὸς πᾶσαν ὠφέλειαν ἐπιτήδειον», καὶ δὴ καὶ «δαίμοσιν ὀλέθριον, ταῖς ἐναντίαις δυνάμεσιν ἀπρόσιτον» (πρβλ. καὶ τὴ συναφὴ εὐχὴ σὲ βασκανία: «φυγάδευσαν καὶ ἀπέλασαν πᾶσαν διαβολικὴν ἐνέργειαν, πᾶσαν σατανικὴν ἔφοδον καὶ πᾶσαν ἐπιβουλήν... καὶ ὀφθαλμῶν βασκανίαν τῶν κακοποιῶν ἀνθρώπων»).

Ἀναντίρρητα χειραγωγεῖται μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ὁ πιστὸς νὰ ἀποφεύγει ἄλλες διεξόδους («ξόρκια», μαγεῖες καὶ ἄλλες μεθοδεῖες τοῦ πονηροῦ), καὶ νὰ καταφεύγει στὰ ἔγκυρα «ἀγιάσματα» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὅπως εἶναι ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ «Μικρὸς» λεγόμενος Ἀγιασμός, ὡς συνειδητὸ μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῆς ταμειούχου τῆς Θείας Χάριτος, καὶ μέτοχος τῶν ἁγιαστικῶν της μέσων. Προϋποτίθεται βέβαια ὅτι στὶς οἰκίες ὅπου φυλάσσεται ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός, καὶ τὸ καντήλι θὰ ἀνάβει καὶ θὰ καιεὶ ἐπιμελῶς, καὶ ἡ εὐλάβεια θὰ ὑπάρχει στὰ μέλη τῆς οἰκογενείας, τοὺς συζύγους καὶ τὰ παιδιά, καὶ θὰ ἀποφεύγεται κάθε αἰτία ποὺ ἀποδιώχνει τὴ Θεία Χάρη (ὅπως βλασφημίες ἢ ἄλλες ἀσχημοσύνες).

**Ποιὰ ἡ σχέση νηστείας καὶ Μεγάλου Ἀγιασμοῦ;**

Ἡ ἱστορικὴ ἀρχὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀγιασμοῦ εἶναι ἡ ἐξῆς: Στὴν ἀρχαία Ἐκκλησία τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων—ὅπως τὴν παραμονὴ τοῦ Πάσχα καὶ τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς—γινόταν ἡ βάπτισμα τῶν Κατηχουμένων, δηλ. τῶν νέων Χριστιανῶν. Τὰ μεσάνυχτα τελοῦνταν ὁ ἁγιασμός τοῦ ὕδατος γιὰ τὴν τελετὴ τοῦ Βαπτίσματος· τότε εἰσήχθη ἡ συνήθεια—ὅπως μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος—οἱ Χριστιανοὶ νὰ παίρνουν ἀπὸ τὸ ἡγιασμένο νερὸ καὶ νὰ πίνουν ἢ νὰ τὸ μεταφέρουν στὰ σπίτια τους γιὰ εὐλογία καὶ νὰ τὸ διατηροῦν ὀλόκληρο τὸ χρόνο· «Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐν μεσονυκτίῳ κατὰ τὴν ἑορτὴν ταύτην ἅπαντες ὕδρευσάμενοι, οἴκαδε τὰ νάματα ἀποτίθενται, καὶ εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν ὀλόκληρον φυλάττουσιν». (Λόγος εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Βάπτισμα τοῦ Σωτῆρος, PG 49:366).

Ἀργότερα ὁμως, σὲ καιροὺς λειτουργικῆς παρακμῆς, ἡ ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἁγιασμοῦ ἀπομονώθηκε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τοῦ Βαπτίσματος, παρόλο ποὺ διατήρησε πολλὰ στοιχεῖα του. Παρέμεινε ἡ συνήθεια ὥστε οἱ πιστοὶ νὰ παίρνουν ἀπὸ τὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ «πρὸς ἁγιασμὸν οἴκων», ὅπως ἀναφέρει ἡ καθαγιαστικὴ εὐχὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἁγιασμοῦ.

Νωρὶς ἐπίσης ἐπικράτησε ἡ συνήθεια τῆς νηστείας πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων, γιὰ κυρίως δύο λόγους:

[1] Οἱ δύο μεγάλες ἑορτές τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τῶν Θεοφανείων στὴν ἀρχαία Ἐκκλησία ἦταν ἐνωμένες σὲ μία, αὐτὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων ἢ Ἐπιφανείων, ποὺ τελοῦταν τὴν 6<sup>η</sup> Ἰανουαρίου (συνήθεια ποὺ διατηρεῖται στὴν Ἀρμενικὴ Ἐκκλησία μέχρι σήμερα): ὁμως ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος (4<sup>ος</sup> αἰ.) χώρισε τὶς δύο γιορτές καὶ ὄρισε ἡ μὲν Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ γιορτάζεται τὴν 25<sup>η</sup> Δεκεμβρίου, ἡ δὲ Βάπτιση καὶ φανέρωση τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας τὴν 6<sup>η</sup> Ἰανουαρίου. Πρὶν ἀπὸ κάθε Δεσποτικὴ ἑορτὴ προηγοῦνταν νηστεία γιὰ τὴν ψυχικὴ καὶ σωματικὴ κάθαρση τῶν πιστῶν. Ἄς θυμηθοῦμε πὼς ἡ νηστεία ἔχει μέσα της τὸ στοιχεῖο τοῦ πένθους γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες. Ἔτσι, ὅταν χώρισαν οἱ δύο ἑορτές, ἡ νηστεία ποὺ προηγοῦνταν ἀκολούθησε τὴν ἑορτὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων· γι' αὐτὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὄρισε νὰ νηστεύουμε μόνο τὴν παραμονὴ τῶν Θεοφανείων σάν προετοιμασία γιὰ τὴν ἑορτὴ, καὶ ὄχι περισσότερες ἡμέρες, γιὰτὶ βρισκόμαστε σὲ ἑορταστικὴ περίοδο, τὸ ἅγιο Δωδεκαήμερο.

[2] Ἀρχαία συνήθεια ἦταν ἐπίσης αὐτοὶ ποὺ θὰ βαπτίζονταν νὰ νηστεύουν καὶ μαζὶ μὲ αὐτοὺς οἱ Ἀνάδοχοι, οἱ συγγενεῖς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι τηροῦσαν ἐθελοντικὰ νηστεία «ὑπὲρ τῶν βαπτιζομένων». Δὲν ἦταν λοιπὸν καθόλου δύσκολο στὴ συνείδηση τῶν ἀρχαίων Χριστιανῶν νὰ συνδεθοῦν ἡ πόση τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ ἡ νηστεία, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει αἰτιώδης σχέση μετὰξὺ αὐτῶν.

Ἔτσι λοιπὸν, μεταφέροντας τὸ ζήτημα στὴ σημερινὴ ἐποχὴ μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι οἱ τακτικῶς μεταλαμβάνοντες τῶν ἁγίων Μυστηρίων καὶ τηροῦντες τὶς νηστείες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅπως καὶ τῆς 5<sup>ης</sup> Ἰανουαρίου, εἶναι ἤδη ἔτοιμοι ὥστε νὰ πιοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ Μεγάλο Ἁγιασμὸ τῆς 5<sup>ης</sup> καὶ 6<sup>ης</sup> Ἰανουαρίου. Σὲ ἄλλη περίπτωση, ἐνδείκνυται νὰ τελοῦν σχετικὴ νηστεία, ὅπως ὀρίζει σ' αὐτοὺς ὁ Πνευματικὸς τους.

Τέλος ὅσοι ἐκτάκτως πίνουν ἀπὸ τὸ Μεγάλο Ἁγιασμὸ ποὺ φυλάσσουν στὸ σπίτι τους, σὲ ὄρες ἀσθενειῶν καὶ κινδύνων κ.λπ., μετὰ ἢ ἄνευ νηστείας, ἂς μὴν ὑστεροῦν στὴν πνευματικὴ νηστεία ἀπέχοντες «ἀπὸ παντὸς μολυσμοῦ σαρκὸς τε καὶ πνεύματος, ἐπιτελοῦντες ἀγιοσύνην ἐν φόβῳ Θεοῦ». (Β' Κορ. 7:1).

## Νύχτα Τσικνοπέμπτης

*Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τῆς Ἱ. Μητροπόλεως Θηβῶν καὶ Λεβαδείας.*

Πὼς ἀγριεύουν ἔτσι οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Πὼς μεμιᾶς ἀφήνονται ἔρμαια στὶς ροπές καὶ στὶς τάσεις τῆς φθαρτῆς ἀνθρώπινης τους φύσης; Πὼς κατάντησε ἀπόψε αὐτὴ ἡ ἡσυχία ἐπαρχιακῆ πόλη; Θαρρεῖς καὶ δὲν τὴν κατοικοῦν ἄνθρωποι ἀλλὰ ἀνθρωπόμορφα τέρατα ποὺ ἄλλος μὲ κεφάλι γαιδάρου, ἄλλος λιονταριοῦ, ἄλλος πιθήκου τρέχουν νὰ προλάβουν, νὰ γλεντήσουν, νὰ μεθύσουν, νὰ ἁμαρτήσουν ὅσο γίνεται περισσότερο. Γιατὶ ἀπόψε εἶναι Τσικνοπέμπτη καὶ γέμισε ἡ πόλη μασκαράδες. Ἀπόψε κάθε λογικὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν ξεμυτίζει ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι του.

Αὐτὰ σκεφτότανε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, καθὼς ἔμπαινε στὸ σπίτι του γυρνώντας ἀπὸ τὸν Ναό.

- Ἔ, παπαδιά μου, τὸ κακὸ παράγινε! Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς συγχωρέσει, εἶπε στὴ γυναῖκα του, μόλις μπῆκε μέσα. Ἐκεῖνη τὸν κοίταξε μὲ κατανόηση.

- Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς φυλάει, εἶπε καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἐτοιμάζει τὸ βραδινὸ φαγητό.

Στὸ σπίτι τοῦ παπα-Θανάση, περασμένα πιά τὰ μεσάνυχτα, ἐπικρατεῖ ἡσυχία. Τὰ παιδιὰ καὶ ἡ παπαδιά εἶχαν ἤδη κοιμηθεῖ κι ὁ παπα-Θανάσης ἐτοιμαζότανε καὶ κείνος νὰ πάει γιὰ ὕπνο, ὅταν ἀκούστηκε τὸ κουδοῦνι τῆς πόρτας. Τινάχτηκε μέσα στὸν ὕπνο τῆς ἡ παπαδιά καὶ βρέθηκε δίπλα στὸν παπα-Θανάση.

- Μὴν ἀνοίγεις τέτοια νύχτα, πάτερ μου! Τὸν παρακάλεσε φοβισμένη.

- Γιατὶ φοβᾶσαι; Εἶναι ἡ πρώτη φορὰ ποὺ μᾶς κτυποῦν τέτοια ὦρα τὴν πόρτα; Ἀφοῦ τὸ ξέρεις τὸ σπίτι τοῦ Ἱερέα διανυκτερεῖει κάθε βράδυ.

- Ναί, μὰ ἀπόψε...

Τῆς χαμογέλασε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης κι ἄνοιξε τὴν πόρτα.

- Πάτερ μου, μὲ συγχωρεῖτε ποὺ ἦρθα τέτοια ὦρα, ὁμως ἡ μάνα μου πεθαίνει καὶ ζητᾶ νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσει.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ στεκόταν μπροστά του, παρόλο ποὺ ἦταν ἄντρας, ἔτρεμε ὀλόκληρος κι ἄφηνε τὰ δάκρυά του δίχως ντροπὴ νὰ τρέχουν.

- Πήγαινε ἐσὺ κοντά της, παιδί μου, καὶ γὼ πάω ὡς τὴν ἐκκλησία νὰ πάρω τὴ Θεῖα Κοινωνία καὶ ἔρχομαι ἀμέσως.

Ἔφυγε ὁ ἄντρας ἀφήνοντας στὸν παπα-Θανάση τὴ διεύθυνσή του.

- Ποῦ θὰ πᾶς, πάτερ μου, μόνος σου τέτοια ὦρα, μιὰ τέτοια νύχτα; Δὲ φοβᾶσαι; Γιατὶ δὲν τὸν κρατοῦσες νὰ πᾶτε συντροφιὰ;

Ἡ παπαδιά μιλοῦσε καὶ κείνος τὴν κοίταξε ἀυστηρά.

- Μόνος εἶπες, παπαδιά, μόνος; Κι ὁ Κύριος ποὺ θὰ κουβαλᾶω στὰ χέρια μου; Ἔ παπαδιά μου, κάτι σ' ἔχει πιάσει ἀπόψε καὶ δὲ μιᾶς γνωστικά.

Ντύθηκε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ βγήκε στὸ δρόμο. Ξέχασε πὼς ἦταν νύχτα Τσιγκοπέμπτης. Δὲν τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσαν καθόλου οἱ μασκαράδες ποὺ ἔβλεπε γύρω του. Ἐνα μόνον τὸν ἀπασχολοῦσε, νὰ προλάβει νὰ δώσει τὸ «Φάρμακο τῆς ἀθανασίας» στὴν ἑτοιμοθάνατη. Πῆρε μὲ δέος στὰ χέρια του τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ξαναβγήκε στὸ δρόμο. Δὲν κοιτοῦσε οὔτε δεξιά οὔτε ἀριστερά. Μόνον ἔτρεχε νὰ προλάβει. Σὲ μιὰ στροφή τοῦ δρόμου ἀκοῦσε γέλια καὶ φωνές. Κάποιος φώναξε κοροϊδευτικά: «Τὴν εὐχή σου Δέσποτα!», μὰ δὲν γύρισε νὰ κοιτάξει. Καὶ τότε, δὲν κατάλαβε πὼς, βρέθηκε κυκλωμένος ἀπὸ μιὰ παρέα μασκαράδων, ποὺ προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ τὸν σταματήσουν.

- Συνάδελφε, ποῦ πᾶμε;

Ἐνας νεαρὸς μασκαρεμένος σὲ παπᾶ, μὲ χνώτο ποὺ μύριζε ποτό, στεκόταν μπροστά του κρατώντας στὸ χέρι ἕνα Σταυρό. Τᾶ ἔχασε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ πρὶν προλάβει νὰ πει τίποτα, δέχτηκε τὴν ἐπίθεση ὄλου τοῦ τσοῦρμου. Ἄλλος τὸν τραβοῦσε ἀπὸ τα ρᾶσα κι ἄλλος τοῦ ἔβγαζε τὸ καλυμμαῦχι.

Ὁ παπα-Θανάσης ἔσφιξε στὸ στήθος του τ' Ἄχραντα Μυστήρια καὶ προσπάθησε νὰ τοὺς μιλήσει, μὰ κανένας δὲν ἄκουγε. Κάποιος τότε τοῦ τράβηξε τὴ γενειάδα καὶ—σὰν νὰ τὸν κτύπησε ἠλεκτρικὸ ρεῦμα—ἄρχισε νὰ φωνάζει:

- Εἶναι ἀληθινός, ρέ, εἶναι ἀληθινός!

Ἡ παρέα κοκκάλωσε στὴ θέση της κι ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο μουσκεμένο ἀπὸ τὸν ἰδρώτα τῆς ἀγωνίας καὶ τὰ δάκρμά του, τοὺς κοίταξε χωρὶς νὰ μιλά.

- Συγγνώμη, πάτερ! Εἶπε ἐκεῖνος ποὺ τοῦ τράβηξε τὴ γενειάδα. Νομίζαμε πὼς ἦσασταν ψεύτικος σὰν κι αὐτὸν καί...

- Σᾶς εἶδαμε καὶ τέτοια ὥρα ἔξω καὶ ἡμᾶσταν σίγουροι πὼς ἦσασταν μασκαρεμένος. Συγχωρέστε μας! Εἶπε ἕνας ἄλλος.

- Πᾶω νὰ κοινωνήσω μιὰ ἑτοιμοθάνατη, παιδιά μου. Ὁ θάνατος δὲν ἔχει ὥρες κατάλληλες καὶ ἀκατάλληλες κι ἐγὼ τρέχω νὰ τὸν προλάβω. Καὶ σύ, παιδί μου, βγάλε τὰ ρᾶσα τὰ τιμημένα. Μὴν ἀμαρτάνεις ἄλλο ρεζίλευντάς τα. Εἶναι πολὺ ἱερὸ τὸ ρᾶσο, γιὰ νὰ μασκαρεῖσαι μ' αὐτό. Τραβάτε στὰ σπίτια σας, παιδιά μου, κι ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σᾶς συγχωρέσει.

Ἄνοιξε τὸ βῆμα τοῦ ὁ παπα-Θανάσης, γιὰ νὰ κερδίσει τὸ χαμένο χρόνο. Ἦταν πικραμένος ὡς τὰ κατάβαθά του. Τόσο πολὺ, λοιπόν, χάλασαν σὶ ἄνθρωποι, ὥστε μασκαρεύονται καὶ ἱερεῖς;

- Πάτερ, Πάτερ!

Ἡ φωνὴ ποὺ ἔφτασε στὰ αὐτιά του ἦταν γεμάτη ἀγωνία. Σταμάτησε καὶ περιμένε. Ἐνας νεαρὸς κατακόκκινος ἀπὸ τὴν τρεχάλα καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ ἔφτασε κοντά του λαχανιασμένος.

- Πάτερ! Εἶμαι κείνος ποὺ ντύθηκε παπᾶς. Τὸ ἔκανα ἐντελῶς ἀπερίσκεπτα, πάτερ καί... καὶ θέλω νᾶ ῥθω

μαζί σας στὸ σπῖτι τῆς ἑτοιμοθάνατης. Δέν... δὲν θέλω νὰ σᾶς πάρουν κι ἄλλοι γιὰ ψεύτικο...

Ὁ παπα-Θανάσης τοῦ ἔκανε νόημα νὰ τὸν ἀκολουθήσει. Στὰ χέρια του ὁ νεαρὸς κρατοῦσε τὸ σταυρὸ ποὺ εἶχε μαζί του. Μπήκαν στὸ σπῖτι τῆς ἑτοιμοθάνατης σιωπηλοί.

- Χαίρομαι, πάτερ, ποὺ βρήκατε καὶ παπαδάκι καὶ δὲν ἤρθατε μόνος, εἶπε ὁ ἄντρας ποὺ τὸν εἶχε καλέσει.

Ὁ νεαρὸς ξανακοκκίνησε καὶ κοίταξε μὲ ἀγωνία τὸν παπα-Θανάση.

- Ναί, ὁ Θεὸς μοῦ τὸν ἔστειλε, εἶπε ἐκεῖνος, καὶ τὰ λόγια του καρφώθηκαν στὴν καρδιὰ τοῦ νεαροῦ.

- Πάτερ, δὲν θὰ σᾶς ἐγκαταλείψω ποτέ, ἔλεγε ὁ νεαρὸς λίγη ὥρα ἀργότερα, ὅταν ὁ παπα-Θανάσης κλείδωνε τὸ ναό, ἀφήνοντας ξανὰ μέσα τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ γίνω ὁ βοηθός σας, τὸ παπαδάκι σας. Ἴσως ἔτσι μὲ συγχωρήσει ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὴν ἱεροσυλία ποὺ ἔκανα.

- Ἄμποτε, παιδί μου, νὰ τὸ φορέσεις τὸ ρᾶσο κι ἀληθινά, εἶπε ὁ παπα-Θανάσης καὶ τὸν εὐλόγησε μὲ τὰ δυὸ του χέρια, ἐκεῖνα ποὺ πρὶν ἀπὸ λίγο κρατοῦσαν τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Κύριο. Καὶ παράξενο—ὁ παπα-Θανάσης εἶχε τὴ σιγουριά πὼς αὐτὸ θὰ γινόταν κάποια μέρα! Καὶ ἀκόμα πιὸ παράξενο—τὴν ἴδια σιγουριά ἔνωθε μέσα του κι ὁ νεαρὸς...



## Οἱ Ἄγγελοι κατὰ τὴν διδασκαλία τοῦ π. Ἰωάννη Ρωμανίδη

«Εμπειρικὴ Δογματικὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας—κατὰ τὶς Προφορικὲς Παραδόσεις τοῦ π. Ἰ. Ρωμανίδη», Τόμος Β'.

Οἱ θεόπτες, μετέχοντας τῆς φωτιστικῆς καὶ θεοποιῦ ἐνεργείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλέπουν τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους Ἁγίους μέσα στὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ διακρίνουν μιὰ ἄλλη διάσταση χρόνου. Αὐτό, τὸ ὑψηλότερο ἐπίπεδο τοῦ χρόνου, τὸ ἀποκάλεσαν «αἰώνας» καὶ τὸ διέκριναν ἀπὸ τὸν αἰσθητὸ χρόνο τῆς δημιουργίας ποὺ ζοῦσαν, πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν θεοπτικὴ ἐμπειρία, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ἀπρόσιτο Φῶς, στὸ ὁποῖο κατοικεῖ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ τὸ ὁποῖο ἀποκάλεσαν «αἰδιον». Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος λέγει ὅτι **αἰώνας εἶναι ὁ χρόνος ποὺ θὰ σταματήσει νὰ κινῆται, καὶ χρόνος εἶναι ὁ αἰώνας ποὺ μετρᾶται κινούμενος**.

Μέσα στοὺς αἰῶνες ζοῦν καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι, τὰ νοερὰ πνεύματα ποὺ δημιουργήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι καλοῦνται καὶ αὐτοὶ αἰῶνες. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τὸ χωρίο τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου: «Ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκε κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνας ἐποίησεν». (Ἐβρ. 1:2).

Εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνες εἶναι καὶ ὁ χρόνος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὁ Ἄγγελος πὸν δὲν εἶναι περιορισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν ὕλη, κινεῖται μέσα σὲ χρονικὰ διαστήματα, τὰ ὁποῖα δὲν ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὰ δικά μας. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος κάτι ὀλίγον συλλαμβάνει ἀπὸ τὸν χρόνον. Ἀπὸ τὸν αἰῶνα τίποτε περὶπου, ἐκτὸς ἂν φθάνη στὴν θέωση καὶ ἔχη διορατικότητα.

Ἐφ' ὅσον οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἦλθαν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος στὸ εἶναι, σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουν ἀρχὴ καὶ εἶναι κτιστοί. Παράλληλα, στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὸν ἄκτιστο Ἄγγελο, τὸν Μεγάλης Βουλῆς Ἄγγελο. Ὑπάρχει ἕνας ἐρμηνευτικὸς κανόνας, πὸν τὸν ἐκφράζει ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος σαφέστατα, ὅπου ὁ Ἄγγελος στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη λέγεται Θεός. Ὁ Ἄγγελος πὸν ἐμφανίζεται στοὺς Προφῆτες λέγεται Θεός, αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος παρουσιάζει τὴν διαφορὰ μεταξὺ ἄκτιστου Λόγου καὶ κτιστῶν ἀγγέλων: «*Τίνι γὰρ εἶπε ποτὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων Υἱός μου εἰ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε, καὶ πάλιν ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν, ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν Οἰκουμένην, λέγει καὶ προσκνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες Ἄγγελοι Θεοῦ, καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα, καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱὸν ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ Θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος ράβδος εὐθύτητος, ἡ ράβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέ σε ὁ Θεός, ὁ Θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου».* (Ἐβρ. 1:5-9).

Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ κάθετα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ Πατρός, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι λειτουργικὰ καὶ διακονικὰ πνεύματα: «*Πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἶρηκὲ ποτε κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου; οὐχὶ πάντες εἰσὶ λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν;*» (Ἐβρ. 1:13-14).

Ὡς δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὕλικοί, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν λεπτότερη ὕλη ἀπὸ τὴν δική μας. Γι' αὐτὸ δὲν λέγονται ἄϋλα ὄντα, γιατί ἄϋλος-Πνεῦμα εἶναι ὁ Θεός, ἀλλὰ χαρακτηρίζονται «αἰθέρια ὄντα». Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς μάς λέει ὅτι, ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὰ ὄρατά, οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ἀσώματα, διότι εἶναι ἀόρατοι, δηλαδή ἐν συγκρίσει μὲ τὸν Θεὸ εἶναι παχειὰ ὕλη. Λοιπόν, δὲν δέχονται οἱ Πατέρες ὅτι ὑπάρχουν ἄϋλα πράγματα· ὁ μόνος Ἄυλος καὶ φύσει Ἀθάνατος εἶναι ὁ Θεός· οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι οὔτε ἡ ψυχὴ.

Οἱ Πατέρες ἐπίσης ἐξηγοῦν ὅτι φύσει ἀθάνατος εἶναι μόνον ὁ Θεός, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι δὲν εἶναι φύσει ἀθάνατοι. Ὅποτε, στοὺς Πατέρες τῆς

Ἐκκλησίας ὑπάρχει ἡ διδασκαλία ὅτι οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι ὕλικά ὄντα, καὶ «συγκρινόμενοι» μὲ τὸν Θεό, δὲν εἶναι καθαρὰ ἄϋλα πνεύματα. Καὶ αὐτὸ βέβαια βασίζεται στὴν πατερικὴ διάκριση μεταξὺ κτιστοῦ καὶ ἄκτιστου. Τὸ μόνον φύσει ἀθάνατον εἶναι τὸ ἄκτιστο, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός πὸν εἶναι Ἄκτιστος.

Ἔτσι, οἱ Ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι «*φύσει θνητοὶ ἀλλὰ χάριτι ἀθάνατοι*». Γιατί κάθε τί πὸν ἔχει ἀρχὴ ἔχει καὶ τέλος. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι κάποτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ παύσουν νὰ ὑπάρχουν, ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεός θέλησε νὰ παραμένουν ἀθάνατοι. Ἀκόμη, οἱ Ἄγγελοι λέγονται «νόες», γιατί ἔχουν νοερὰ ἐνέργεια, ὄχι ὅμως λογικὴ. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει καὶ νοερὰ καὶ λογικὴ ἐνέργεια, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι μόνον νοερὰ ἐνέργεια. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ περίληψη τῆς δημιουργίας καὶ τὸ τελειότερο δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ προκειμένου νὰ σώσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ νὰ ἀγιάσῃ τὴν κτίση, προσέλαβε τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φύση καὶ ὄχι τὴν ἀγγελικὴ.

Ἄν θέλετε νὰ διητε, ἔτσι ἀπὸ κοντά, τὸ θέμα αὐτό, θὰ πρέπει νὰ διαβάσετε τὸν Διονύσιο τὸν Ἀρεοπαγίτη, ὁ ὁποῖος, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κάθε φορὰ πὸν λέει «λόγο», λέει καὶ «νοῦ» καὶ κάθε φορὰ πὸν λέει «νοῦ» λέει καὶ «λόγο». Βλέπει κανεὶς λόγο καὶ νοῦ νὰ συμβαδίζουν, ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅταν μιλάει γιὰ τοὺς Ἄγγελους, τοὺς ὀνομάζει συνήθως νόες. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ νόες, νοερὲς δυνάμεις κ.ο.κ. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε λογικά ὄντα, ἀλλὰ εἴμεθα καὶ νοερὰ ὄντα, γιατί ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ δύο ἐμεῖς, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶναι μονοκόμματοι νόες. Ἐπειτα, βασικὴ ἀρχὴ τῆς πατερικῆς διδασκαλίας εἶναι ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἀμετάβλητα ὄντα, γι' αὐτὸ ὅλα τα ὄντα βρίσκονται σὲ μιὰ κίνηση. Οὔτε στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ θὰ ὑπάρξῃ στασιμότητα.

Ὁ ἅγιος Διονύσιος πιστεύει στὴν αἰώνια κίνηση, ὅτι ἡ τελειότητα εἶναι ἡ αἰώνια κίνηση. Τὴν στασιμότητα τὴν ἀποβάλλει. Πιστεύει στὴν τελειότητα, πὸν ἀκόμα καὶ τὰ Χερουβεὶμ καὶ τὰ Σεραφεὶμ καὶ οἱ Κυριότητες καὶ ὅλοι οἱ Ἄγγελοι, πάντα ἀπὸ δόξα σὲ δόξα καὶ διαρκῶς εὐρίσκονται σὲ διαρκὴ ἀνοδικὴ πορεία, παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι εἶναι Θεοῦμενοι καὶ βλέπουν τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐνῶ γιὰ τὴν πλατωνικὴ παράδοση ἡ τελείωση εἶναι ἡ ἀκίνησις καὶ τὸ ἀμετάβλητο. Ὅποτε, ἔχουμε τὸ ἀμετάβλητο στοὺς Ἕλληνες φιλοσόφους, ὡς τὸ τέλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τελειότητος. Ἐνῶ, στὸν κατ' ἐξοχὴν Ἕλληνίζοντα, διηθεν, φιλόσοφο Πατέρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔχουμε τὴν ἀεικίνησις, ὡς τὸ θεμέλιό τῆς Θεώσεως.

Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ Ἄγγελοι, παρὰ τὴν συνεχὴ κίνηση, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ φθάσουν στὴν γνώση τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποτὲ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ γίνουν ἄκτιστοι. Τὴν οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ «*οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι γνωρίζουν*».



## Οὐ Κλέψεις

ΠΗΓΗ: «*Ορθόδοξος Τύπος*», τεύχος 2098, 25 Δεκεμβρίου, 2015.

**Μ**ᾶς λέγει ὁ Ἄπ. Παῦλος «Ὁ κλέπτων μηκέτι κλεπτέτω, μᾶλλον δὲ κοπιᾶτω ἐργαζόμενος τὸ ἀγαθὸν ταῖς χερσίν, ἵνα ἔχη μεταδιδόναι τῷ χρεῖαν ἔχοντι». (Ἐφ. 4:28) Δηλαδή: Αὐτὸς ποὺ κλεβει νὰ μὴ ξανακλέψῃ. Εἶναι καλύτερα νὰ ἐργάζεται μὲ κόπο γιὰ τὸ ἀγαθὸ καὶ νὰ τὸ βγάξῃ μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ χέρια, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ νὰ δίνη καὶ σὲ ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Διότι εἶναι ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου: «Μὴ κλέψῃς». (Μᾶρκ. 10:19). Εἶσαι βέβαια ἐλεύθερος νὰ κλέψῃς, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ἔχῃς ὑπόψῃ σου τὶς συνέπειες, ποὺ θὰ ὑποστῆς ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπινους ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς Θεῖους νόμους. Διότι ἡ κλεψιὰ εἶναι ἀδικία.

Κάποτε, βαδίζοντας ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ζήνωνας στὴν Παλαιστίνη καὶ ἔχοντας κουρασθῆ, κάθισε κοντὰ σὲ ἓνα λαχανόκηπο, γιὰ νὰ φάῃ. Καὶ τοῦ λέγει ὁ λογισμὸς: «Κόψε ἓνα ἀγγουράκι καὶ φάγε. Γιατί, εἶναι κακό;». Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ἀπάντησε καὶ εἶπε στὸν λογισμὸ του: «Ὅσοι κλέβουν, πάνε στὴν Κόλαση. Δοκίμασε λοιπὸν τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου ἀπὸ ἐδῶ, ἂν μπορεῖς νὰ βαστάξῃς τὴν κόλαση». Σηκώθηκε λοιπὸν καὶ στάθηκε στὸ λιοπύρι ἐπὶ πέντε μέρες καὶ ἀφοῦ, ἔτσι ξεροψήθηκε, εἶπε: «Δὲν μπορῶ τὴν κόλαση νὰ βαστάξω». Καὶ λέγει στὸν λογισμὸ: «Ἄν δὲν μπορῆς, μὴ κλέβεις».

Διαβάζουμε στὸν Εὐεργετινὸ: «Εἰς τὸ Μοναστήρι τοῦ Ἁγ. Εὐθυμίου ἐξοῦσεν ἓνας Μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τὴν Γαλατίαν, ὁ Θεόδοτος, κανονικὸν μέλος τῆς Ἀδελφότητος. Εἰς αὐτόν, κάποτε συνέβη τὸ ἐξῆς, ἀπὸ φθόνον τοῦ πονηροῦ. Ὁ Στέφανος, ὁ ὁποῖος διετέλεσεν Ἡγούμενος τοῦ ἰδίου Μοναστηρίου πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Θωμᾶν, προσέφερεν εἰς τὸ Μοναστήρι ἑξακόσια χρυσᾶ νομίσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα προήρχοντο ἀπὸ τὴν περιουσίαν τοῦ ἀποθανόντος ἀδελφοῦ του. Αὐτά, λοιπόν, τὰ ἑξακόσια χρυσᾶ νομίσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶχαν τοποθετηθῆ εἰς τὸ διακονικόν, τὰ ἔκλεψεν ὁ Θεόδοτος τὴν ἐπομένην ἡμέραν ἐπῆρε τὸν δρόμον διὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν καὶ ἐβάδιζε πρὸς αὐτήν.

Ὅταν ἔφθασεν ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τὴν Μονὴν τοῦ Μαρτυρίου, ἐκάθησε μὲ τὴν ἡσυχίαν του καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔβγαλε τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα ἐκράτησε πενήντα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τὰ ἔβαλε κάτω ἀπὸ μίαν μεγάλην πέτραν. Ἐβαλε σημάδια, διὰ νὰ ἀναγνωρίσῃ τὸν τόπον καὶ ἀμέσως προχώρησε διὰ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἐνοικίασεν ἄλογα, διὰ νὰ μεταβῆ εἰς τὴν Ἰόππην καὶ ἀφοῦ ἔδωκε προκαταβολήν, ἐπιστρέφει εἰς τὴν πέτρα, ὅπου εἶχε κρύψει τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα. Ὅταν ὅμως ἔφθασε κοντὰ—ᾠ! Ὁφθαλμοὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ τὰ βλέπετε ὅλα... ᾠ! Δικαιότατα κρῖματα τοῦ Θεοῦ—βλέπει νὰ ξετροπῶνῃ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πέτραν ἓνας τεράστιος καὶ φοβερὸς τὴν θεῶν ὄφιν. Ὁ ὄφιν ἐκεῖνος ἐφαίνετο ὡσὰν νὰ εἶχε διαταχθῆ νὰ φυλάσῃ τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα καὶ νὰ ἐμποδίσῃ τὸν Θεόδοτον νὰ πλησιάσῃ τὸ ξένον πρᾶγμα.

Τὴν ἐπομένην ἡμέραν ἔρχεται καὶ πάλιν εἰς ἐκεῖνον τὸν τόπον ἀμέσως τότε ὡς ἂν κάποια ἐναέριος δύναμις νὰ ἐπέπεσεν ἀπὸ ὑψηλὰ καὶ, ὡσὰν μὲ ρόπαλον, ἐκτύπησε τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Θεόδοτου μὲ τόσην δύναμιν, ὥστε τὸν ἀνέτρεψε καὶ τὸν ἔρριψεν εἰς τὴν γῆν ὡς νεκρόν. Μερικοὶ ὅμως νοσοκόμοι, ἀπὸ τὸ πλησίον Νοσοκομεῖον, ὅταν ἦλθαν καὶ τὸν εὗρηκαν εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ἀθλίαν κατάστασιν, τὸν ἐσήκωσαν εἰς τὰ χεῖρας των καὶ τὸν μετέφεραν εἰς τὸ Νοσοκομεῖον, ποὺ εὕρισκετο εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν. Ἐκεῖ, ἀφοῦ παρέμεινε νοσηλευόμενος ἀρκετὰς ἡμέρας, βλέπει ἓνα βράδυ εἰς τὸ ὄνειρό του κάποιον Γέροντα, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐφαίνετο πάρα πολὺ θυμωμένος ἐναντίον του.

—Δὲν θὰ ἠμπορέσῃς νὰ σηκωθῆς ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ κρεβάτι, τοῦ λέγει, κατ' ἄλλον τρόπον, ἂν προηγουμένως δὲν ἐπιστρέψῃς εἰς τὴν Μονὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐθυμίου τὰ χρήματα ποὺ ἔκλεψες.

Ἀμέσως ἔστειλε καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἀπ' ἐκεῖ τὸν ξενοδόχον, εἰς τὸν ὁποῖον ἐφανερώσε λεπτομερῶς τὴν κλοπὴν καὶ ὅλα ὅσα ἐπηκολούθησαν. Τὸ στέλλει δὲ νὰ τὰ ἐκθέσῃ ὅλα λεπτομερῶς εἰς τὸ Μοναστήριον. Μόλις ἔμαθαν αὐτὰ οἱ Γέροντες, ποὺ ἦσαν κοντὰ εἰς τὸν ἡγούμενον Θωμᾶν καὶ τὸν Λεόντιον, πορεύονται ἀμέσως πρὸς τὴν τὴν Ἁγίαν Πόλιν. Ἀφοῦ ἐτοποθέτησαν τὸν Θεόδοτον ἐπάνω εἰς ἓνα φορεῖον, τὸν μεταφέρουν, διὰ νὰ τοὺς ὑποδείξῃ τὸν τόπον, ὅπου εἶχε κρύψει τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα. Πράγματι εὕρισκουν τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πέτραν.

Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ὁ φοβερὸς φύλαξ, ὃ τοῦ θαύματος..., εἶχε φύγει, ὡς νὰ ὑπεχώρησεν ἐμπρὸς εἰς τοὺς πραγματικοὺς ἰδιοκτητὰς τοῦ θησαυροῦ. Ἀμέσως τότε παραλαμβάνουν τὰ χρυσᾶ νομίσματα καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἐθεώρησαν ἀσήμαντα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐδαπάνησεν ὁ Θεόδοτος, τὸν συνεχώρησαν καὶ ἐπέστρεψαν. Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμὴν ἐκείνην ἀπηλλάγη τελειῶς ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸν καὶ ἀνέκτησε τὴν σωματικὴν του ὑγείαν».



**Ε**ἶναι πολλοὶ ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ ἐπέτυχαν τὴν σωτηρία τους χωρὶς προφητικὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἐλλάμψεις καὶ θαυματουργίες. Χωρὶς τὴν ταπεινώσιν ὅμως κανεὶς δὲν πρόκειται νὰ εἰσέλθῃ στὸν νυμφῶνα. Διότι τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τὰ διαφυλάσσει ἢ δευτέρα, ἐνῶ ἀντιθέτως τὰ πρῶτα σὲ ἐπιπολαίους ἀνθρώπους ἐξαφάνισαν τὴν ταπεινώσιν. Γιὰ νὰ ταπεινούμεθα, ἔστω καὶ χωρὶς τὴν θέλησὴ μας, ὁ Κύριος οἰκονόμησε τοῦτο: Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ βλέπῃ τὰ τραύματά του, ὅπως τὰ βλέπει ὁ πλησίον του. Ἔτσι εἴμαστε ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ χρεωστοῦμε τὴν θεραπεία μας ὄχι στὸν ἑαυτὸν μας, ἀλλὰ στὸν πλησίον καὶ στὸν Θεόν.

**Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου**

## Ὁ Διωγμὸς τῶν Εὐσεβῶν

Ἀπομαγνητοφωνημένη ὁμιλία τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αυγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἡ ὁποία ἐγινε στὸν Ἱ. Ναὸ Ἀγ. Γεωργίου πόλεως Φλωρίνης τὴν 12<sup>η</sup> Φεβρουαρίου, 1984.

**Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται.**

[Β΄ Τιμ. 3:12]



Σήμερα, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἀρχίζει τὸ Τριῶδιο. Τί εἶνε Τριῶδιο; Ἄν ρωτήσουμε τοὺς κοσμικοὺς ἀνθρώπους, θὰ μᾶς ποῦν· Τριῶδιο ἴσον χοροί, διασκεδάσεις, γλέντια, μάσκες, καρναβάλια. Αὐτὸ ὅμως εἶνε πλάνη. Αὐτὸ δὲν εἶνε Τριῶδιο· εἶνε ἀντιτριῶδιο, ἀντίθετο μὲ τὸ Τριῶδιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Τριῶδιο εἶνε μία ἱερὰ περίοδος τοῦ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἔτους, περίοδος ἐντατικωτέρας ἀσκήσεως. Ὅπως ὁ στρατὸς ἔχει περίοδο ἀσκήσεων, γιὰ νὰ εἶνε οἱ στρατιῶτες πανέτοιμοι διὰ πᾶν ἐνδεχόμενον, ἔτσι καὶ τὸ Τριῶδιο εἶνε περίοδος ἱερῶν ἀσκήσεων τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Τὸ Τριῶδιο εἶνε δέκα ἐβδομάδες πρώτη ἡμέρα εἶνε σήμερα, καὶ τελευταία ἡμέρα εἶνε τὸ Μέγα Σάββατο, ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς γεμᾶτος ἐνθουσιασμῷ σκορπάει μέσ' στὸ ναὸ δεξιά - ἀριστερά, πάνω - κάτω, φύλλα δάφνης καὶ ψάλλει «Ἀνάστα, ὁ Θεός, κρῖνον τὴν γῆν». (Ψαλμ. 81:8).

Τὸ Τριῶδιο, γιὰ νὰ ἐκφρασθῶ ἀπλουστερα, εἶνε μία σκάλα, ποὺ μᾶς ὑψώνει ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ στὸν οὐρανό. Μοιάζει μὲ τὴ σκάλα ποὺ εἶδε ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ τὸ κάτω ἄκρο τῆς πατοῦσε στὴ γῆ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἔφτανε στὸν οὐρανό. Μιὰ σκάλα λοιπὸν βλέπουμε μπροστά μας, καὶ σήμερα εἶνε τὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι. Ἐμπρός, πλησιάστε καὶ πατήστε τὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι.

Στὸ πρῶτο σκαλοπάτι στέκεται ὁ τελώνης, ποὺ λέει· «Ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ» (Λουκ. 18:13). Καὶ κοντὰ στὸν τελώνη τοῦ εὐαγγελίου στέκεται ὁ ἀπόστολος. Θὰ μοῦ ἐπιτρέψεται νὰ μὴ ἀσχοληθῶ μὲ τὸν πρῶτον, τὸν ἀναστεναγμὸν τοῦ Τελώνου, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἶπω ὀλίγας λέξεις ἐπάνω στὸ ἀποστολικὸ ἀνάγνωσμα ποὺ λέει, ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ εἶνε ἀγώνας, καὶ μᾶς προειδοποιεῖ· «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται.» (Β΄ Τιμ. 3,12).

Ἄς προσέξουμε, ἀγαπητοί μου. «Οἱ θέλοντες», λέει. Τί σημαίνει αὐτό; Ὅτι ὁ χριστιανισμὸς εἶνε ἐλευθερία, δὲν βιάζει κανένα. Εἶσαι ἐλεύθερος νὰ ἐκλέξης ἢ τὸν ἀνήφορο—ἀνήφορος καὶ Γολγοθᾶς εἶνε ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ καθήκοντος, ἢ τὸν κατήφορο τῆς κακίας καὶ τῆς διαφθορᾶς· ἐλεύθερος νὰ ἐκλέξης ἢ τὴν στενὴ καὶ τεθλιμμένη, ἢ τὴν πλατειὰ καὶ εὐρύχωρη ὁδὸ. (Ματθ.

7:13-14)· ἐλεύθερος ν' ἀκολουθήσης ἢ τὸ φῶς ἢ τὸ σκότος, ἢ τὸν Χριστὸ ἢ τὸν διάβολο.

Ἐλεύθερος εἶσαι· ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ θὰ ἐκλέξης τὴν ὁδὸ τοῦ καθήκοντος, τῆς ἀρετῆς, τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας, τότε πλέον πρέπει νὰ εἶσαι προετοιμασμένος· διότι στὸ δρόμο αὐτὸν θὰ συναντήσης πολλὰ ἐμπόδια. Ποιὰ εἶνε τὰ ἐμπόδια; Ἐμπόδια πρῶτα ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Ναί, ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Διότι ἐχθρὸς χειρότερος ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας δὲν ὑπάρχει. Θὰ συναντήσης δηλαδὴ ἐμπόδια ἀπὸ κακίαι καὶ πάθη, ἀπὸ τὸν «παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον» ποὺ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Ῥωμ. 6:6, Ἐφ. 4:22, Κολ. 3:9). Θὰ συναντήσης ἀκόμη ἐμπόδια ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο, ποὺ μέρα - νύχτα δὲν παύει νὰ μᾶς πειράξῃ μὲ λογισμοὺς καὶ ἐπιθυμίες. Θὰ συναντήσης τέλος ἐμπόδια καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον, ἀπὸ τὰ ὄργανα τοῦ διαβόλου, κακοὺς καὶ ἀπίστους καὶ διεφθαρμένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ μὲ μυρίους τρόπους ζητοῦν νὰ ἐμποδίσουν τὴν πορεία σου.

«Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται». Ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου ἀποδεικνύεται ἀληθινὸς διὰ μέσου ὄλων τῶν αἰώνων. Θέλετε παραδείγματα; Ἀνοίξτε λοιπὸν τὴν ἀγία Γραφή νὰ δῆτε.

Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἄβελ, ὁ ἀγνὸς καὶ δίκαιος ἐκεῖνος ἄνθρωπος, ἀπὸ τὸν Κάϊν τὸν δολοφόνον ἀδελφὸ του. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἰακώβ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἡσαῦ καὶ ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ ἐκπατρισθῇ μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ τῶν πατέρων του. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ πάγκαλος Ἰωσήφ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς του, ποὺ τὸν φθόνησαν καὶ τὸν πούλησαν στοὺς Αἰγυπτίους καὶ φυλακίστηκε συκοφαντημένος. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Δαυὶδ ἀπὸ τὸν ἀχάριστο Σαοὺλ καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ παιδί του τὸν Ἄβεσσαλώμ. Ἐδιώχθησαν οἱ προφῆται, ὁ Ἰερεμίας καὶ ὁ Ἡσαΐας· τὸν μὲν Ἰερεμίας τὸν ἐξόριζαν σὲ βόθρο, ὁ δὲ Ἡσαΐας πριονίστηκε μὲ πριόνι. Ἐδιώχθησαν οἱ Τρεῖς Παῖδες, ἐπειδὴ δὲν προσκύνησαν τὸ εἶδωλο, καὶ τοὺς ἐξόριζαν μέσα στὸ καμίνι. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ προφήτης Δανιήλ, ποὺ τὸν ἐξόριζαν στὸ λάκκο τῶν λεόντων. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος ἀπὸ τὴν αἰσχρὰ Ἡρωδιάδα, καὶ τὸν ἀποκεφάλισαν.

Ἄλλὰ περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους ἐδιώχθη ἓνας· κανεὶς ἄλλος δὲν ἐδιώχθη τόσο ὅσο ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Διότι οἱ ἄλλοι κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον ἢ ἥττον ὑπῆρξαν ἁμαρτωλοί, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνος ἦταν ὁ ἀναμάρτητος, ὁ Ἅγιος τῶν ἁγίων. Ἐδιώχθη· Νήπιον ἀκόμη ἦταν, καὶ ὁ Ἡρώδης τρόχισε τὰ μαχαίρια του γιὰ νὰ τὸ σφάξῃ. Ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους, τοὺς διαστρεβλωτὰς τῶν ἀληθειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄννα καὶ τὸν Καϊάφα, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ τὸν Πιλάτο, ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ ἓναν ἀχάριστο λαὸ ποὺ φώναζε «Σταύρωσον, σταύρωσον αὐτόν.» (Λουκ. 23:21).

Τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ μιμήθηκαν ἔπειτα οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Ὅλοι εἶχαν μαρτυρικὸ τέλος. Κ' ἐκεῖνος

πού ἐδιώχθη περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅλους εἶνε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ὅπως λέει σήμερα. Τὸν ἐῤῥίξαν στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Ῥώμης καὶ ἀπὸ 'κεῖ ἔστειλε τὸ μήνυμα αὐτό, «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν... διωχθήσονται».

Ἐδιώχθησαν καὶ οἱ διάδοχοι τῶν ἀποστόλων. Ἐδιώχθη ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἀπὸ μία μαφία, πού ἐσχεδιάζε τὴν ἐκθρόνισί του· ἐδιώχθη ὁ Γρηγόριος, τὸν ὁποῖο πετροβόλησαν οἱ ὄπαδοὶ τοῦ Ἀρείου· ἐδιώχθη πρὸ παντὸς ὁ Χρυσόστομος, πού πέθανε στὴν ἐξορία λέγοντας «Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ πάντων ἔνεκεν».

Ὅλοι οἱ πιστοὶ διώκονται. Καὶ διὰ μέσου τῶν αἰῶνων φθάνουμε στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Καὶ σήμερα διώκονται οἱ Χριστιανοί. Θέλετε παράδειγμα; Κάνετε τὸν κόπο—ἂν τολμάτε—νὰ περάσετε τὰ σύνορα καὶ νὰ μπῆτε στὴν Ἀλβανία, ἐκεῖ ὅπου ὑπάρχουν ἑλληνικὲς πόλεις (τὸ Ἀργυρόκαστρο, ἡ Κορυτσά, ἡ Χειμάρρα...), εὐλογημένα μέρη, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀγιάσαμε μὲ ποταμοὺς αἱμάτων οἱ Ἕλληνες. Ἐκεῖ μέχρι πρὸ τινος δὲν χτυποῦσε καμπάνα, δὲν λειτουργοῦσε παπᾶς, δὲν ἐβαπτίζοντο παιδιά, δὲν ἐνταφιάζοντο ἐκκλησιαστικῶς νεκροί, οὔτε τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ σοῦ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ κἀνης. Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ἕλληνες ἀντιμετώπιζαν ἐξορίες καὶ στρατόπεδα τοῦ Ἐμβερ Χότζα, γιὰ νὰ προστίθενται νέοι μάρτυρες στὸ μαρτυρολόγιο τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς πατρίδος. Καὶ σήμερα μὴ νομίζετε ὅτι ὁ διωγμὸς ἔπαυσε. Συνεχίζεται. Ὅχι ἴσως τόσο σκληρά, ἀλλὰ πάντως μὲ ποικίλους τρόπους ἢ εὐσέβεια ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ καταδιώκεται.

Καὶ στὰ λεγόμενα ὅμως φιλελεύθερα καὶ δημοκρατικὰ πολιτεύματα ἢ πίστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ διώκεται. Δὲν πᾶτε στὴ Βουλὴ τῶν Ἑλλήνων; Ἐὰν εἴμεθα Χριστιανοί, τί περιμένετε νὰ δῆτε; Οἱ κομμουνισταὶ εἶχαν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Μάρξ, αὐτὸς εἶνε ἀρχηγὸς τους. Ἐμεῖς; Οὔτε ἢ εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου ὑπάρχει στὴν αἴθουσα τῆς Βουλῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων! Κι ὅταν κάποιος βουλευτὴς τόλμησε νὰ ὑποδείξει ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ὑπάρχει ἢ εἰκόνα τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸν εἰρωνεύθηκαν «ὁ παπᾶς, ὁ παπᾶς!...». Διώκεται λοιπὸν ἢ πίστις μας ἐμμέσως καὶ ἀμέσως. Διώκεται ἀπὸ ῥαδιοφωνικοὺς καὶ τηλεοπτικοὺς σταθμοὺς πού μιλοῦν ἐναντίον τοῦ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Ε' πού ἀπηγχονίσθη στὴν πύλη τοῦ πατριαρχείου, διώκεται ἀπὸ φύλλα ἐφημερίδων, διώκεται ἀπὸ παντοῦ.

Καὶ μέσα στὴν κοινωνία καὶ μέσα στὸ σπίτι ἀκόμα· ἢ εὐσεβῆς γυναίκα πιεζέται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄπιστο ἄντρα, τὰ παιδιά ἐμποδίζονται νὰ πλησιάσουν τὰ κατηχητικὰ σχολεῖα, τὴν ἐξομολόγησι, τὴ θεία κοινωνία. Διώκεται ὁ Ἐσταυρωμένος. Διὰ μέσου τῶν αἰῶνων ἢ προφητεία ἐπιβεβαιώνεται «Οἱ θέλοντες εὐσεβῶς ζῆν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διωχθήσονται».

Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ἀγαπητοί μου, τί εἶπε; «διωχθήσονται»· ὅτι ἢ πίστις θὰ διωχθῆ. Δὲν εἶπε ὅμως καὶ ὅτι θὰ συντριβῆ. Διωχθήσονται ναί, συντριβήσονται

ὄχι! Μιὰ ἰδέα, ὅσο τὴν πολεμᾶς, τόσο ῥιζώνει. Εἶνε σὰν τὸ καρφί, πού ὅσο τὸ χτυπᾶς τόσο βαθύτερα ἐμπήγνυται στὴ σάρκα τοῦ ξύλου. Καὶ ἢ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅσο διώκεται, τόσο κατακτᾶ τὶς ψυχές. Καμμία δύναμις, τὸ πιστεύω ἀκραδάντως, δὲ θὰ τὴ νικήσῃ. Ὅσοι διωγμοὶ κι ἂν γίνουν, ὅσοι ποταμοὶ αἱμάτων κι ἂν χυθοῦν, ὅσοι Νέρωνες καὶ Διοκλητιανοὶ καὶ Ἰουλιανοὶ Παραβάται κι ἂν παρουσιαστοῦν καὶ ὅποια μέσα κι ἂν μεταχειριστοῦν, ἢ πίστις μας ἔχει βαθεῖα ῥίζα· αὐτὸ πού θὰ κάνουν εἶνε νὰ ἐπισπεύσουν τὸν θρίαμβό της.

**Οἱ πιστοὶ «διωχθήσονται», ἀλλ' οὐ συντριβήσονται.** Ἄλλοι θὰ συντριβοῦν. Θὰ συντριβοῦν οἱ διώκται. Παρ' ὅλο τὸ αἷμα πού χύνουν, παρ' ὅλη τὴ βία πού ἀσκοῦν, παρ' ὅλα τὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ τὰ μέσα ἐξοντώσεως πού διαθέτουν, τὸ τέλος τους θὰ 'νε οἰκτρό. Ἡ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας θὰ μείνῃ—ἰδιαίτερος δὲ στὴν πατρίδα μας τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἢ ὁποῖα μὲ κάθε τρόπο καὶ σὲ ὅλες τὶς σελίδες τῆς ἱστορίας της αἰνεῖ καὶ δοξάζει Χριστὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.

† ἐπίσκοπος Αὐγουστίνος



**«Ἐν τοῖς Λογισμοῖς μας Βελτιούμεθα ἢ Ἀχρειούμεθα».**

Ἐλαδὴ ἓνας λογισμὸς, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀπρόσεκτα θὰ μᾶς προσβάλη, θὰ μᾶς δηλητηριάσῃ, θὰ μᾶς ἠδονίσῃ, μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς καταστήσῃ ἀξίους γιὰ τὴν Κόλαση. Ἐνας λογισμὸς θεϊκός, ἓνας λογισμὸς αὐταπαρνήσεως, ἓνας λογισμὸς ἀνδρείας, ἓνας λογισμὸς προσευχῆς καὶ θεωρίας, μᾶς ἀξιώνει νὰ πλησιάσουμε τὸν Θεῖο Θρόνο καὶ νὰ γευθοῦμε πράγματα οὐράνια. Ἀπὸ τοὺς λογισμοὺς ἢ θὰ γίνουμε ἀκάθαρτοι ἢ θὰ γίνουμε καλύτεροι. Ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων ξεκινᾷ ἀπὸ τοὺς λογισμοὺς. Οἱ λογισμοὶ πηγάζουν ἀπὸ τὶς πέντε αἰσθήσεις, τὸσον τὶς πνευματικὲς ὅσον καὶ τὶς σωματικὲς. Ὅταν ἀφήσουμε τὴν αἴσθησι τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀνεξέλεγκτη καὶ βλέπη ὁ,τιδήποτε ἀπρόσεκτα, αὐτὴ ἢ ἀπροσεξία θὰ γεννήσῃ μία σωρεία ἀπὸ εἰκόνες βρώμικες καὶ ἀμαρτωλές. Αὐτὲς οἱ εἰκόνες ἀφοῦ εἰσαχθοῦν στὸ φανταστικόν, μετὰ στάζουν δηλητήριον ἀμαρτωλῆς ἠδονῆς μέσα στὴν καρδιά τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὴ ἢ ἠδονὴ εἶναι τὸ δηλητήριον, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον δηλητηριάζεται ἢ καρδιά καὶ γίνεται τότε ἀκάθαρτη καὶ ἔνοχη μπρὸς στὸν ἀκοίμητον ὀφθαλμὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

**Γέροντος Ἐφραίμ τῆς Ἀριζόνα**

## AN INEFFABLE FRAGRANCE

By Metropolitan Nikolaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, from "A Still Small Voice," Athens 2006, pp. 139–144.

It is impossible to describe the exquisiteness and nobility of our Orthodox ascetics! These people—although they bear the traces of harsh struggles, although their bodies are so withered and emaciated—have a fragrance and grace imprinted on their wondrous souls.

I reflect back to 1976, the month of August—July 22<sup>nd</sup> (by the old calendar—which is what the Holy Mountain follows). The feast day of St. Mary Magdalene in Simonopetra<sup>[1]</sup>. How they love this saint in her Athonite monastery! Her left hand is kept here—her wrist, palm, and fingers—with the skin and tendons. Its temperature holds steadily at 98.6 °F / 37° C—proof that this is the hand of a living witness of the Resurrected Christ, living proof of the fact that *death hath no more dominion over her*, either. (Rom 6:9).

During the All-Night Vigil, they seated me at a *stasidion*<sup>[2]</sup> practically in the center. Right next to me was seated a grey-haired geronda, small in stature. He stood as straight as a candle, without any stirring whatsoever. During the course of the service he weakened—he was obviously tired. Most likely, he was sleeping. However, not relaxed as people usually sleep. His state was distinct and interesting: his head was leaning on his hand, his eyes almost shut. From time to time, you could hear him snore a little, gently and peacefully. However, every time the singers would make a mistake, he would come into action and immediately correct it. Then, he resumed his ... restful position. *The body sleeps out of nature's need, but his heart keeps awake out of its great love.* And truly, his mind is keeping a true vigil. This man, it seems, lives in another world.

We came to the *exapostilarion*<sup>[3]</sup>. All the fathers stood, took off their *skufias*<sup>[4]</sup>, and bowed low when the serving priest performed the litany over the relics of the great saint and

protectress of the monastery, which were lying on a silver tray. Soon the veneration began—I was stunned...

I watched what the others did, and I felt that I was not with them. I tried to understand what to do and how to do it correctly, but I could not touch the secret. Everyone around me, I felt, was experiencing an event, new to me, and about which I had zero clue. The chanters intensified the celebration. The monks showed by their whole appearance that they were experiencing something the likes of which I could not perceive. The only thing that I was able to do was to follow what was going on—superficially and with curiosity. Soon the *geronda* standing next to me left his place and went, in his turn, up to the relics. Making three prostrations, he kissed them, was anointed by the priest, and with deep emotion he returned to his *stasidion*.

—You go too, he says to me, do not be shy; today the Saint is fragrant. Receive some of her grace.

I did what he said and went up to the relics. This is what, apart from everything else, the others had done as well. However, my doubts stayed with me. I did not particularly believe in all this. I went up in a reverie. And I was immensely astonished by the fragrance. I had an insatiable desire to confirm the statement of this fact from an investigative point of view and to venerate the relics again. However, I felt awkward—it was an inappropriate time for experiments! I returned to my place—physically—but mentally I stayed with the Saint. My questions multiplied, but my faith did not increase. It was the "sign" that I had been asking for, but it was not the "sign" that I needed. I could not believe

in it, but again, I could not imagine that the monks were lying. They had such pure countenances, and they experienced what was going on without reasoning or arguments. I had no reason to suspect them of lying.

—Geronda, how does this happen? I asked. Maybe out of piety the fathers sprinkled a little perfume? Or are the relics themselves fragrant?



**Holy Monastery of Simonopetra<sup>[1]</sup>, Holy Mountain**



**The incorrupt relics of St. Mary Magdalene**

—Here reverence is ruined as soon as you sprinkle perfume. Reverence is increased when you receive the “ineffable fragrance” in simplicity. The Holy Mountain is full of such occurrences.

—What does “ineffable fragrance” mean?”

— If we sprinkled a little perfume from a perfume store, then it would be “fragrance.” Now, when we don’t sprinkle anything but the fragrance pours out all by itself, that is called “ineffable fragrance.”

I bowed and kissed his hand. He himself also was fragrant, as if he had been handling incense. The all-night vigil continued—it lasted twelve hours!...

A monk whom I knew came up to me:

—Did you get a blessing from Elder Arsenios?

—Who is that? I asked, not having any idea as to whom he was referring.

—The little old man who was standing next to you.

—The little old man who was sleeping next to me, I said to myself.

—He has the “gift of not washing,” added the monk. It has already been ten years since he has washed his face and he is fragrant all over. He is as pure as the tear of a child. He lives in Kalamitse, in a cell alone, an hour and a half walk from here. Run, before he leaves!

I did not catch up with him. He had withdrawn to his cell before the beginning of the festive *trapeza*. He was filled with the Divine service. He did not need food or words in order to fill his soul. He stood, sat, drifted off for twelve hours, and still every second breathed in the sweetness of the all-night vigil. He *hath chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from him.* (Lk 10:42).

† † †

[1] *Simonopetra Monastery* (Greek: Σιμωνόπετρα, literally: “Simon’s Rock”), also Monastery of Simonos Petra (Greek: Μονή Σίμωνος Πέτρας), was founded during the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Saint Simon the Myrrh-bearer. It ranks thirteenth in the hierarchy of the Athonite monasteries. The particular site upon which the monastery is built is exceptionally harsh. It is built on top of a single huge rock, practically hanging from a cliff 330 metres over the sea.

[2] *Stasidion*: in Orthodox monasteries, a special wooden chair with high armrests and a seat that can be lifted up out of the way, so that a monk can stand up during the long vigils while being able to rest his arms on the armrests. When it is allowed or necessary out of weakness, the seat may be folded down so he may sit.

[3] *Exapostilarion*: The Dismissal Hymn, the troparion that follows the Canon at Matins, near the end of the service. Sometimes called *photogogikon*, because it sings of Christ the Light of the world. It is connected with the Matins Gospel.

[4] *Skufia*: An item of clerical clothing worn by monastics or clergy, often referred to by laity as a “monastic’s hat.”

## ON THE DIVINE SERVICES

By St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.

Then, having successfully passed through the toll-houses and bowed down before God, the soul for the course of thirty-seven more days visits the heavenly habitations and the abysses of hell, not knowing yet where it will remain, and only on the fortieth day is its place appointed until the resurrection of the dead. Some souls find themselves (after the forty days) in a condition of foretasting eternal joy and blessedness, and others in fear of the eternal torments which will come in full after the Last Judgment. Until then changes are possible in the condition of souls, especially through offering for them the Bloodless Sacrifice (commemoration at the Liturgy), and likewise by other prayers. How important commemoration at the Liturgy is may be seen in the following occurrence:

Before the uncovering of the relics of St. Theodosius of Chernigov (1896), the priest-monk (the renowned Starets Alexis of Goloseyevsky Hermitage, of the Kiev-Caves Lavra, fell asleep in 1916) who was conducting the re-vesting of the relics, becoming weary while sitting by the relics, dozed off and saw before him the Saint, who told him:

“I thank you for laboring with me. I beg you also, when you will serve the Liturgy, to commemorate my parents.”

And he gave their names (Priest Nikita and Maria). The priest-monk asked the saint:

“How can you, O Saint, ask my prayers, when you yourself stand at the heavenly Throne and grant to people God’s mercy?”

“Yes, that is true,” replied St. Theodosius, “but the offering at the Liturgy is more powerful than my prayer.”

The Divine Services in their composition contain all the fullness of the dogmatic teaching of the Church and set forth the path to salvation. They present invaluable spiritual wealth. The more fully and precisely they are fulfilled, the more benefit the participants receive from them. Those who perform them carelessly and who shorten them by their laziness rob their flock, depriving them of their very daily bread, stealing from them a most valuable treasure.

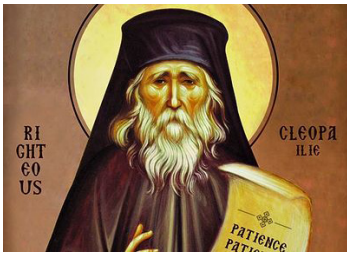


It is the responsibility of the clergy and, in particular, of the parish rectors to insure that those who wear lipstick do not venerate icons, the Cross, or anything holy, leaving lipstick marks on them. A notice to this effect should be posted near the entrance of the church, and, in sermons, it should repeatedly be explained that it is a great sin to defile something holy by such contact. Women should refrain from wearing lipstick to church or not venerate anything. In any case, they should not commune Christ’s Holy gifts without having thoroughly washed their lips.

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco

## ON THE HERESY OF CHILIASM THE “THOUSAND YEAR REIGN”

By Elder Cleopa of Romania, from “*The Truth of Our Faith*,” ch. 16.



**Inquirer:** There are those who maintain that between the Second Coming of the Lord and the end of the world Christ will reign upon the earth, governing, Himself, along with His elect for a thousand years.

What is the truth of the matter, Father?

**Elder Cleopa:** This idea is an ancient one. In the first centuries of Christianity, the so-called Chiliasts or Millenialists endorsed it. Against them rose the entire ancient Church and its most important representatives.

The divine Fathers of the Church indicated in their writings that the one thousand year reign referred to in the book of Revelation signifies an infinite number of years, i.e., *a kingdom that shall have no end*. This we know well since from Holy Scripture it is clear that the *Kingdom of Christ is not of this world*. (Jn 18:36). In Holy Scripture it is clearly indicated that the Kingdom of Heaven is also the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Christ, in so much as both Saint John the Forerunner and Christ Himself called it so. This Kingdom of Christ will be spiritual and will reign over the internal world of man, while externally being revealed in the *righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit*. (Rom 14:17). Christ Himself established this kingdom and explained in His parables how it will appear, whom it will include and what power it will possess. His *reign* will not endure for a thousand years, but *eternally*. (Lk 1:33). Its inhabitants will include all faithful Christians from *all the peoples of the world*. (Pss 116:1-2), it will *reign over all creation, all people, nations, and languages*, and it will be a kingdom of righteousness. (Dan 7:13-14). It will be a kingdom made up of souls (Mt. 28:18)—souls that have already entered and lived within it in this present life.

This kingdom of Christ, derived not from this world, constitutes *the Church*, or the Body, of Christ, of which *the head is Christ Himself* (Eph 1:22). The adoption and entrance into this kingdom takes place only through *the laver of regeneration* (Tit 3:5) or *birth from above* (Jn 3:3). No one can enter into this reign of God except *through baptism* (Rom 6:3), which is to say by being born again from above or *being born of water and the Spirit*, according to the word of the Saviour: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God* (Jn 3:5). This heavenly birth by the power of the All-holy Spirit is *a true resurrection from the dead* (Col. 2:12-13), and hence the reason why Baptism is so often

referred to as *resurrection* (Rom 6:3-5). Thus, also, it is that the Orthodox Christian baptism is a renaissance of life and a resurrection from the dead. When the Apostle Paul writes *awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*, (Eph. 5:14) he has in mind precisely this internal regeneration and resurrection through Christian Baptism, for no one can enter the Kingdom of Christ unless he has first been brought out from among the dead by Christian Baptism.

Holy Scripture speaks to us about the thousand-year reign in prophetic and symbolic terms, corresponding to that which we spoke of above. Here is what Saint John the Evangelist says in his Revelation: *And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:1-14).*

From this passage, we can ascertain the following:

[1] The thousand-year reign of Christ is a period in which Christ has bound the power of the Devil over men. (vv. 1-2)

[2] At the end of this period, the Devil will again be lord over men and oppress them, but only for a season. (v. 3)

[3] The members of this kingdom will be those alone who do not submit to the beast and accept his engraved seal, and who have a part in the first resurrection. (vv. 4-5)

[4] Those who were not worthy of this resurrection will be raised at the end of the thousand years, that is at the second resurrection, as this resurrection, relative to the first, is the second. (v. 5)

[5] Death will have no power over the sharers in the thousand-year reign. (v. 6)

[6] At the end of these thousand years and after a gruesomely violent persecution against the saints, the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire—the second death. (vv. 4-15)

From this it should be abundantly clear that the thousand-year kingdom is nothing else but the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, and this is clear seeing that:

[1] In the period of this reign, the Devil was bound and loosed, receiving power over men. Christ entered into His dominion and bound the Devil, that is, by the redemption of humanity by His Blood He bound and restrained his power over mankind.

[2] The entrance into this kingdom presupposes the first resurrection, that is, none other than holy baptism itself, often, in fact, called by the name of resurrection, or being born again from above or simply regeneration. This resurrection through baptism is the first, in comparison to the second, the general one, of the body, which is also called the last resurrection, as when *Martha* spoke to Christ concerning her brother: *I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection on the Last Day.* (Jn 11:24).

[3] At the end of this kingdom or reign, the Devil will again be let loose to deceive the people and with power and mania to assault and oppress holy Christians in the person of the antichrist, the beast or false prophet. (Rev 13:1-11).

[4] The duration of this period will be *brief* and yet it will constitute one of the signs signaling the immediacy of the Second Coming of Christ. (Mt 24:22; Rev 13:5, 20:3).

Therefore, it should be clearly known that the first resurrection is the baptismal resurrection and the second resurrection is that which we await on the last day, the last resurrection. Furthermore, it should also be clear that the first death is the natural one or the separation of the soul from the body, while the second death is the *eternal torment* (of hell) (Mt 18:8), so called due to its opposition to the *blessed life of eternity*. (Jn 5:24). It should also be clear that this second death has no power over those made worthy of the first resurrection. Likewise, from this it follows that the first death, from which not even the saints are delivered, is the natural or bodily death.

In Holy Scripture someone's sinful condition is also compared to a kind of death. It is with this meaning that the Saviour says to one of His disciples who had asked leave to first go and bury his father, *Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.* (Mt 8:22). Likewise does He speak with this in mind when saying, *He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* (Jn 11:25). The Apostle also had this meaning in mind when he wrote, *reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom 6:11, 8:10). Moreover, with this meaning as well is it written to the angel of the Church in Sardis: *I know thy works, and that thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead.* (Rev. 3:1).

Although the duration of the reign of Christ is designated on the whole as a thousand years, we should understand this to signify an era immeasurable and undesignated. Therefore, **its length is nothing else except the period between the first and second comings of the Lord**, or more precisely, the period of the consolidation of the Kingdom of God until His Second Coming. This is the explanation of the Kingdom of God and its duration upon this earth.

**Inquirer:** Father, recently I had a very disturbing conversation with some people concerning this question and came away with the opinion that the thousand-year reign could only be understood in earthly terms. This might be the case seeing that it will be inaugurated at the Second Coming; it will be preceded by the resurrection of the righteous who in turn will reign with Christ for a thousand years; and after which will occur the resurrection of sinners, the judgement and the end of the world.

This interpretation seems to me to proceed from the twentieth chapter of Revelation that you read earlier. It can be deduced from that chapter that there will be final resurrections: the first resurrection of the righteous at the beginning of the thousand years and the second resurrection of the sinful at the end of world. (vv. 4-5)

During the period of a thousand years the active power of the Devil will be restricted up until just before the end when, after a brief but horrible flurry of aggression, he will be thrown into Hades together with all of his servants (vv. 7-14). Afterward, they will be resurrected, judged and condemned to eternal punishment (vv. 12-15). After the first period, we will pass through to the end of the world (v. 11). This is, for example, what the Apostle Paul says when writing to the Christians of Thessalonica: *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first* (1Thess 4:14-16). Consequently,

at His Second Coming Christ will raise those who have died faithful to Him, i.e. those that, as the Apostle says, shall rise first, hence the first resurrection. The resurrection of the dead, or the second resurrection, will follow later—He does not tell us exactly when—but according to Revelation, it will be after a thousand years. Listen to what Saint Paul says about this: *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.* (1Cor 15:23). In other words, the Just join the choir of the Righteous at the beginning of the thousand-year reign and the sinful an assembly of their own at the end of the thousand-year period. Is this not the truth of matter, Father?

**Elder Cleopa:** As I explained to you earlier, the True Church of Christ understands the millennium of Holy Scripture mystically and symbolically to mean an indeterminate number of years. Do you think that Scripture only in this passage speaks in a mystical and veiled manner, or could it be that many hard to comprehend subjects are approached in this way? Are there not, in fact, many mystical, symbolic and allegorical expressions or events that cannot be explained literally but carry exalted and spiritual meanings often completely different from that readily apparent? How can we explain the book of Revelation literally, when it is *bound with seven seals?* (Rev. 5:1) What is the *red horse that is like unto fire?* (Rev 6:4). In addition, what of the *seven angels who were given seven plagues?* (Rev. 15:1-7) How should we understand them?

There are those who speak of two resurrections at the end of the world, and thus, according to them, somehow a third coming of the Lord must take place. However, such a thing is surely not true. It was shown above that, the first resurrection is realized through Christian baptism and the second is the last or general resurrection (of the body). Saint John the Evangelist renders precisely the words of the Saviour concerning the two resurrections: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.* (Jn. 5:24-25). As this passage concerns, the resurrection of those who will hear the voice of the Son of God, i.e. that resurrection which now is, this cannot be interpreted as referring to the last resurrection, but only to the present resurrection of those who are raised from the death of sin to the life of Christ, to the new life of Christian faith entered, as the Apostle and Evangelist himself relates elsewhere, through Christian baptism. (Jn 5:24-25). This is the first resurrection referred to in the book of Revelation.

Further, on the Saviour speaks about another kind of resurrection, a resurrection that even now is and yet will, however, happen at the end of the world, which is not of the soul but of the body, and specifically of the dead in the graves. *Marvel*

*not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:28-29). In other words, marvel not at the power of Christ to raise spiritually (i.e. in the first resurrection), for indeed He will raise all the dead from the graves as well. This passage excludes outright the possibility of their being a period of a thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the sinful, for it shows clearly that the last or general resurrection is one and only and will happen to all. This is the second resurrection. As for the first, we saw that it is that resurrection which now is, the present resurrection, and not the general or last.

Thus, through an analysis and comparison of the passages of Holy Scripture, we see how their meaning is clarified and elucidated, and how the possibility of an interpolation of a one thousand-year period between the two resurrections is ruled out. According to the teaching of the true Church of Christ, the one thousand-year period should be understood as extending between the first resurrection, which happens in Christian baptism, and the second or last resurrection.

This is, in fact, what we find in Saint Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (1Thess 4:14-16), where he speaks only of *one resurrection* and not a second or last resurrection. It is true that here Saint Paul is referring to the resurrection of the Just who have fallen asleep in the Lord and not to the resurrection of sinners. However, this is not because they will be raised later, after a thousand years, but simply because the Apostle Paul and his listeners are only concerned about the fate of those asleep in Christ. The fact that he makes no reference to sinners does not mean that they will be raised a thousand years later. The Apostle is not in the least concerned here with other questions, for his aim in this epistle is to comfort his readers (v. 18), that they be not sorrowful, anxious or in ignorance, concerning the fate of those reposed in Christ.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians (15:23), Saint Paul speaks of there being *orders*. The Chiliasts wrongly interpret this passage as referring only to two orders, namely of the Just and of the sinful, whose resurrections will be separated by a period of one thousand years. In truth, Saint Paul is speaking here of many orders, analogous to the degree of holiness or sinfulness (*for one differeth from another in glory*—see vv. 39-41) with which they will be revealed.

Holy Scripture is explicit and categorical in many places concerning the Second Coming of Christ, namely, that it will be one single date for all, righteous and sinners alike, without there being a period of one thousand years between the resurrection and judgement of some and that of others. The Saviour said: *For the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have*



done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (Jn 5:28-29). Hence, there will be one voice alone announcing the resurrection of all. In another place the Lord also says: *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire ...* (Mt 25:31-46).

Here the Saviour speaks with precision and clarity concerning His Second Coming and future judgement. In this most glorious parable He communicates the following certainty: *there will be one harvest* for the wheat and the tares alike (Mt 13:30, 42-43), the *Bridegroom will come for all the virgins* at one and the same time (Mt 25:1-13), and in the same hour will a reckoning be sought for the work done by the *servants entrusted with the talents*. (Mt 25:14-30). Therefore, one is the last advent of Christ, one the resurrection and appearance of all before the King and Judge, and one the judgement of mankind.

**Inquirer:** I read in a “brochure” that the date of the beginning of the millennium can be determined, and that it will not be identical with the date of the Second Coming, and that it represents the end of the era of idol-worship. Does this have any validity?

**Elder Cleopa:** First, know with absolute assurance that there does not exist any such millennium with the meaning conveyed in that “brochure.” If the date of the Second Coming of Christ cannot be determined, as *neither the angels nor even the Son of Man, as man*, have been informed of it (Mt 24:36-44), then surely neither can the date of the beginning of the millennium be determined.

We know that in that which pertains to salvation, the history of the world can only be divided into two periods: that of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Another age will begin with the Second Coming of our Lord, but this will be the last and everlasting age. In the history of the world, there existed other lesser episodes, which subdivided the two great periods without thereby constituting two or three more periods. Ages or epochs that we have with this meaning include that of the patriarchs, the apostles, the persecutions and so on.

Concerning the passages of the Old Testament, these cannot be understood as if they were magical, but are either factual or symbolic like the book from which they are derived. How can someone know that the six days of creation were, in actuality, some seven thousand years and that they each represent a great duration of time for humanity or even one thousand years?

Nowhere does it say in Holy Scripture that one day is equal to one thousand years, but only that before the creation of the visible world time did not exist. Time, for God, is neither fixed nor appointed, but, rather, *one day before God is considered as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day* or as a night watch (2Pet 3:8). It does not follow from this that any figures presented within Holy Scripture represent a certain number of days, which we then reckon as years.

**Inquirer:** With respect to that which is said in the Symbol of our Faith [The Nicene-Constantinople Creed, 325 and 381 A.D.] In addition, His kingdom shall have no end, the Chiliasts say that the Lord will come before the Future Judgement to rule with them a thousand years, and that afterward he will raise the sinners to be judged. Isn't it true that the Lord will rule endlessly after the final judgement?

**Elder Cleopa:** The True Church tells us that the kingdom of the Lord will have no end. The Reign of Jesus Christ, as man, and His Glory will never come to an end, but will endure eternally. For, on the one hand, Jesus is not only human, from whom God could someday take His glory, while on the other hand as the Son of God He will never deny His human nature. **His being a Man, so filled with divine glory, will never come to an end.**

The holy Archangel Gabriel announced the everlasting Reign of Jesus Christ in advance. It is true, as Saint Paul says, that Christ will be subjected in everything to the Father and afterward that He will subject everything to Himself. Yet, this means the submission of the entire world before the Father and the cessation of His redemptive activity (1Cor. 15:25-28), as it is His own work, which He assumed at His incarnation.

So, let the Chiliasts know that they cannot make human calculations and determinations for mysteries that are unknown to the angels, and even, in His humanity, to the Son of God Himself.



**D**o not do anything without signing yourself with the sign of the Cross! When you depart on a journey, when you begin your work, when you go to study, when you are alone, and when you are with other people, seal yourself with the Holy Cross on your forehead, your body, your chest, your heart, your lips, your eyes, your ears. All of you should be sealed with the sign of Christ's victory over hell. Then you will no longer be afraid of charms, evil spirits, or sorcery, because these are dissolved by the power of the Cross like wax before fire and like dust before the wind.

Elder Cleopa (+1998)

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT...

By Protopresbyter James Thornton.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, soon we Orthodox Christians begin the Great Fast (Monday, February 19<sup>th</sup> for the current year, *Ed.*). We will enter an extended period of approximately seven weeks of more intense prayer and fasting until we reach Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. This is a period of golden opportunity for each of us wherein we may look deeply within ourselves and determine what, from a spiritual point of view, is unwholesome or deficient. We may then, during this time, begin the work of excising from our lives that which is unhealthy and, at the same time, augmenting that which is truly sound and truly pleasing to God.

I run the risk here of sounding prosaic and platitudinous when I recall the popular saying, "You are what you eat." Yet I shall take the risk: you are indeed what you eat. It is quite obvious that if we eat luxuriously, if our diet is exclusively confined to the most extravagant foods, exotically flavored and rich in fats, spices, and sugars, as is typical of the contemporary American diet, our individual physiologies will sooner or later bear the marks of those habits, either in various aspects of outward appearance or in the functioning of our bodily systems, or in both.

Moreover, our individual characters, personalities, and temperaments will be marked, and, likewise, and most importantly, our souls. An obsession with the worldly impresses itself on the whole of our beings. By way of contrast, more prudent choices in our diets, as prescribed during the Fast by our wise Mother the Church, will do the opposite, and may make us physically healthier, and most assuredly will make us spiritually healthier.

Some religious writers of a modernist or fundamentalist bent enjoy drawing our attention to the alleged fact that in early Christianity—primitive Christianity, as it is sometimes called—there were no Holy Canons regarding fasting, no Great Lent, practically no fasting rules at all. Holy Canons and fasting periods are seen by these writers as latter-day and, by implication, needless accretions, even "monkish" accretions in the estimation of many of them.

St. Paul writes of a difference of opinion between those who believe that they may eat all things and those who *eateth herbs* [i.e., vegetables], as he puts it. (Rom 14:2). We see from this passage that even at this earliest stage, just a few decades after Christ's Ascension, questions about fasting from certain foods were already present and were already the subject of discussion. So, fasting was not unknown in the Apostolic Church. In fact, Orthodox historians maintain that the Wednesday and Friday fasts are of Apostolic origin and it is likely that, while the Lenten fasts were not codified in their current form until after the Apostolic period, that

codification nonetheless reflected an already established, though not always uniform, tradition.

Consequently, what the modernist and fundamentalist writers say is true only to the very limited extent that, in St. Paul's day, certain details about fasting had not yet appeared and would take time to unfold. As with medical science or, let us say, the science of physics, the "science" that is Orthodox theology required time to mature.

The comparison here between the natural sciences and theology is apt, yet it is imperfect in one respect. In the case of the natural sciences, new discoveries that radically alter the body of fundamental knowledge are always possible. The discovery of the connection between bacteria and disease by nineteenth-century medical science or the displacement of classical physics by quantum physics in the twentieth century are examples of this. In the case of Orthodox theology, that cannot happen.

All knowledge needed for salvation has been given us by Christ; the body of fundamental knowledge remains fixed and changeless. No radical discoveries about this knowledge are possible. However, a growth in the understanding of the application of that body of knowledge to our lives is possible, and that growth, that maturing, has characterized the history of Orthodoxy.

As the grave risk to life and limb that was associated with membership in the primitive Church abated in the early fourth century, it became safe, even fashionable, to belong to the Church. It was then that other methods for forging the spiritual character became an urgent necessity, and for this reason fasting took on an increased importance at that time. When one lives by day and by night under the terror of persecution; when crucifixion, burning alive, being devoured by wild animals, or being sentenced to a life of forced labor, are genuine possibilities for the followers of Christ; when one's outlook is colored by continuous fear of the knock at the door—in those circumstances, it may be argued, the most rigorous type of fasting is not as indispensable as in more tranquil times.

Therefore, those who argue that we ought to return to the more primitive practice of fasting, in which it was somewhat less comprehensively regulated, should understand that if membership in Christ's Church is to achieve anything positive for us at all, then with this less stringent regimen in fasting there must also come a desire for trials of the most severe kind elsewhere in our lives. If membership in Christ's Church is to make us more like Christ, either one or the other is indispensable. Considered that way, we can see that fasting from animal products is not so difficult after all.

Now, let us enter more fully into the message of St. Paul's words. In writing of the disputations in the early Roman Church between those who did not fast so strictly and those

who did, St. Paul offers this admonition: *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* (Rom 14:3-4). What wonderfully beneficial words these are!

St. Paul is telling us that whatever fasting discipline others or we follow, the crucial thing is that we address the matter of our own relationship with our Master, Jesus Christ, and not judge the relationship of our neighbor with Him. When we each face the question as to whether we need to fast more stringently to strengthen our commitment to our Faith, our answer to that question, and the way our answer manifests itself in our lives, will ultimately be judged by the Master Whom we serve, when we stand before His *dread judgment seat*. So it is also in all the things we choose. It is not for us to make judgments about our Christian brothers and sisters. For several reasons we do not judge them:

1. To judge another is to usurp the place of God; as St. Paul says: *Who art thou that judgest?*
2. To judge another is to take one's focus off the place where it should be, and must be, to save one's soul, which is on one's own spiritual imperfections.
3. To judge another is to incur the danger of an additional sin, misjudging, since we cannot see into another man's heart and cannot know all of the circumstances of his life. St. Dorotheos of Gaza observes that while one can see another man's sins, one cannot know about that man's standing with God, about his secret prayers of supplication for mercy and forgiveness. *You may well know about the sin, the great Saint writes, but you do not know about the repentance.* ("Discourse and Sayings")
4. To judge another brings further dissension and strife into the Church, a place where peace and love should be the primary attributes.
5. To judge another is to bring on the temptation of an even worse sin, one of the worst among sins, which is gossip.
6. Finally, and most significantly, to judge another is to bring judgment upon ourselves; Christ Himself warned, *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.* (Lk 6:37).

We are repeatedly warned as Christians not to judge other men and women. Does this require that we completely abandon our critical faculties when it comes to our dealings with other people? If we should know of a man who is a notorious embezzler, do we do right in judging him unfit to be the custodian of the public treasury? If we should encounter a man whom we know to be a psychopathic murderer, do we properly judge it unwise to invite him over to dinner? The answer to both questions, obviously, is yes.

Let us take some less extreme and more likely examples. If we learn that a particular friend or companion exerts an un-

healthy influence on us as Christians, or if we believe that a friend or companion of our children may lead those children astray, may we make the appropriate judgment in those cases and terminate such associations? Again, the answer is yes. Of course we may do that. We would be held accountable by Christ for not making these kinds of judgments.

What we are forbidden as Christians to do is to judge another person's ultimate state before God, or to employ our critical faculties to enhance, in our own minds, our own rank or station or footing, in what we fancy are the eyes of God, at the expense of another human being. We are forbidden, in other words, to regard ourselves as "holy" by comparison with someone we regard as "sinful." The Holy Gospel teaches us that Christ God judged the outwardly holy men of His country, the Pharisees, very harshly, while the Good Thief (a most unlikely candidate for salvation, one would think) was assured everlasting happiness. St. John of the Ladder declares that *The beginning and sum of the passions... is unholy self-esteem.* (Step 22).

Let us therefore not fasten our gaze upon the imagined inadequacies of other men and women during the Great Fast but examine with the most penetrating contemplation possible our own spiritual failures, that these may be swiftly amended. For most, if not all of us, that task is sufficient to fill a lifetime.



While the dying person addresses his last words to us, suddenly his tongue is at a loss, his eyes dim, his mouth falls silent, his voice paralyzed when the Lord's troops have arrived, when His frightening armies overwhelm him, when the divine bailiffs invite the soul to be gone from the body, when the inexorable lays hold of us to drag us to the tribunal... Then the angels take the soul and go off through the air. There stand principalities, powers and leaders of the adverse troops who govern the world, merciless accusers, strict agents of an implacable tax bureau, like so many examiners that await the soul in the air, ready to demand a reckoning, to examine everything, brandishing their claims, that is to say our sins: those of youth and of old age, those intentional and those not so, those committed by actions and those by words or thoughts. Great then is the fear of the poor soul, inexpressible its anguish when it sees itself at grips with these myriads of enemies, who stop it, push and shove it, accuse it, hinder it from dwelling in the light, from entering into the land of the living. But the holy angels, taking the righteous soul, lead it away.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

## WATCHFULNESS, PRAYER AND HOLY CONFESSION

*A homily by Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona, translated from the Greek by Fr. Seraphim Bell, pastor of St. Silouan the Athonite Orthodox Church in Walla Walla, WA.*



**M**y beloved children, Today we will say a few things about the great virtue of **watchfulness**.

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

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

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

The thoughts come from the five senses, the spiritual as well as the physical. When we allow the sense of sight to be uncontrolled and it carelessly sees anything, this carelessness will become no end of dirty and sinful images. Since these images are placed in the imagination, afterwards they drip the poison

of sinful pleasure inside the heart of man. This pleasure is the poison, by which the heart is polluted and then becomes unclean and guilty before the unsleeping eye of God. Just like the sense of sight, so it is also of touch, and also of taste and hearing and of smell. And so the five senses create analogous sinful images, which render the man unclean before the face of God. Here rests the entire philosophy of the spirit.

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

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

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

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

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

"I see it Angel of God."

"With this knife I kill by taking the heads of the ones who judge their neighbors. And since you didn't judge, you didn't condemn those who were in fact sinning—not imagining or guessing that they were sinners, but seeing them sin

with your own eyes—but you condemned yourself more, for this reason your name has been written in the book of eternal life.”

Success. His name is written in eternal life, because he didn't judge the sinners, he didn't condemn the sin of his brother. He would have judged if he hadn't had watchfulness, if he hadn't been vigilant *noetically* in guarding his soul. Do you see what good attention he produced? And do you see what harm he would have suffered, if he had been inattentive to the thought and allowed it to work within him! But his thought said that they were in fact sinning, he saw them. In spite of these things, however, even though the thought was spoken to him, the correct thought triumphed and thereby he escaped the shipwreck of his soul.

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

A pagan priest asked some monks:

“Does your God appear to you? Do you see Him? Does he speak to you?”

The fathers said:

“No.”

The pagan says:

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

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

“Indeed, the impure thoughts prevent man from communicating with God.”

Watchfulness does nothing less than cleanse the *nous* and the heart from every impurity. For this reason, with a little ascetical toil, watchfulness brings about the greatest spiritual results. When we strive ascetically and aren't mindful of our thoughts, we accomplish nothing.

The Sacred Chrysostomos wrote many chapters about **prayer** and about wakefulness. And in the midst of them he says something very beautiful:

*Prayer, he says, is enlightenment of the soul, true consciousness of God, a mediator between God and man, a physician of the passions, an antidote against diseases, medicine against every illness, tranquility of the soul, a guide which carries us to heaven, which doesn't revolve around the earth, which marches towards the apse of heaven. It passes over the buildings, it passes mentally through the air, it walks above the air, it passes over the whole of the stars, it opens the gates of heaven, it surpasses the angels, it transcends the Thrones and Principalities, it passes over the Cherubim and when it has passed through all of the foundation of nature, it comes near to the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the Divinity. There it is made worthy to become an interlocutor in the Heavenly Kingdom. Through this (the prayer), the soul, which is lifted up in the air to the heavens, embraces the Lord in an inexpressible manner, exactly as the baby embraces its mother and with tears cries loudly, desiring the enjoyment of divine milk. But it seeks the things which are necessary and receives a gift superior to all visible nature.*

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

All of the great fathers of the Church, especially the fathers of the desert, succeeded in becoming worthy of great gifts exclusively and only with watchfulness and vision of God (*theoria*). Keeping vigil all night and coming to the vision of the Light of God.

We have St. Gregory Palamas, the instructor of the desert, the instructor of *neptic* activity, the teacher of *noetic* prayer. This saint would remain enclosed in his cell for the entire week. He didn't go outside at all. There on his knees and with hands upraised, he was vigilant about his *nous* and his heart and he received heavenly theology (literally “theology from above”—*trans.*) by the Holy Spirit. The theology which

made known the Uncreated Light of the Divine Glory, of the Divine Nature.

The Uncreated Light is the glory of the Divine Nature. There was the goal and the conclusion of asceticism and of prayer. When the saints received this Light, they became all Light. And since the light floods the *nous* and the heart, how could they know less than the mysteries of the secrets which are known only to the angels? Through watchfulness the fathers attained to the pinnacle of the virtues and of the graces.

And we, if we are watchful, if we pray, even if we are in the world, and even if we don't attain to similar states, no matter what, we will attain to a condition of purity. When we succeed by watchfulness in not judging our brother, this is no small achievement. We put into practice the commandment of our Christ, which is as follows: *Do not judge, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged, and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you.* (Mt 7:1-2).

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

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

"Look, why is he peaceful? The negligence which he had in his life doesn't worry him? What happened to the debts which have been gathered because of sloth? His conscience doesn't rebel? It doesn't make him worry? He doesn't despair?"

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

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

He answered them and said:

"You are right, my fathers, that's how it is. I was negligent and didn't do what you did, but one thing I guarded in my life: not to judge my brother. I read in the Holy Gospel,

where the Lord says that the *one who does not judge, will not be judged*. Thus I tried, at least, not to judge. And I hope in the mercy of God that I will not be judged. For this reason I am departing with faith that God will apply his word."

The fathers looked into it among themselves and said that in fact the brother was very clever and masterfully gained his salvation.

If we are watchful, we will not criticize. For with the offense of judging, immediately watchfulness will set up a barrier and the thought of judgment will be prevented from continuing. Then will happen what took place with Abba Paphnoutios. And so we will escape from the sin of judging and of criticism of the tongue and our names will be written in eternal life. A man who keeps his tongue pure, both inner and outer, that is to say, the inner thought and the tongue, and does this in the knowledge of God, this is a guarantee that he is saved.

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

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

Our thanks to God must be unceasing. Our thanksgiving must never stop, because we are made worthy every time we want to receive this cleansing, and every time we feel a sin, immediately turn the mind to God. *"I have sinned Lord, forgive me."* With this *"I have sinned Lord, forgive me,"* God

answers: *My child, you are forgiven; the power of the law is remitted. Proceed to the application of the law.* And the application is beneath the *petraheli* (stole). There, all the sinfulness of man is ended. Forgiveness is so easy! It is very wrong for man, when this forgiveness is so easy and so free, because of his egoism not to want to receive it, not to want to open the doors of paradise and walk eternally in the glory of God!

Many men say: "Man should call upon God because of one sin? But this thing is wrong. Where is the love of God? Isn't God a father?" Yes, he is a father, but when every good moment comes for him to forgive you, why do you turn your back? Why do you not receive His mercy? Why do you refuse His embrace and go far away? Why do you accept the embrace of the devil and not of God? Perhaps your god seeks money or possessions or favors and you don't have all these things and for this reason you don't come to let go of your debt? No.

God is very rich, as we see also in the parable of the prodigal son. He wanted to depart far away. He demanded that part of the possessions which belonged to him. And God gave him what he was owed as physical gifts. He didn't deprive him of them. However, he squandered these gifts, the spiritual possessions, living prodigally. And when he arrived at the wretched end, he came to his senses, he came to himself. For he was not himself when all the prodigality reigned. And when he came to himself he said: *How many serve my father and they enjoy the good things of His possessions, and I His child, par excellence His child, am in such misery that I graze pigs and am allotted husks! I will return; He is a Father, He will receive me. I will ask forgiveness and will say to him, do not receive me as Your child, neither restore me to the first adoption, but I will ask him to become one of His servants. And this will be a great thing.* When he thought these things, already the Father came out from His house and waited for him with open arms. He accepted him with all his heart and all his soul. He embraced him, he kissed him, he wept from joy, because he was dead and he was restored to life, he was lost and was found. He made him His child again with all of the wealth. He forgave everything. He cleansed him of every filth. He clothed him in the original garments. In the end, he gave him everything.

The Heavenly Father also does this when one who is a sinner returns to Him. He cleanses him, washes him, he gives the original garments of baptism, he gives him sonship and makes him worthy of His Kingdom. Everything free. When the prodigal returned, he didn't seek an account, neither did he rebuke him nor did he seek to blame him. He begins where he returned; this was sufficient for the Father. Only to say "sinner," to leave his sins with humility, to understand his mistakes and from then on everything is loosed. But the sinful man doesn't do this. He doesn't return, he isn't humbled. He holds on to his egoism. The important thing is to get to the

confessional! It's just two steps. And from then on everything is finished. Yet the tears of egoism hold him. And when he comes to the hour of death and the reality of it, then he will repent and he will be remorseful, but he will be too late. In this, God respects the one who doesn't want to humble his spirit a little.

As for Lucifer, this great battalion commander, who was in the first place of the angelic hosts, what was the cause of the fall? What was the cause of the collapse, of the transformation from angels to demons? Pride and egoism. The error came from these two passions. And as with the angels, so also with our forebears. The fall of our forebears came about from pride and egoism. Because, before God accomplished the verdict of guilt, he approached the man Adam and said to him: *Adam, why did you do this?* Adam didn't seek forgiveness, he didn't say: *God forbid, I was wrong.* If he had done this, he wouldn't have been turned out from Paradise and neither would we have all this banishment and suffering today. By not saying *God forbid* all this mob of evil came about. And thus now man doesn't say *God forbid* and remains in his evil. But just say it, *O God stretch out the arms of forgiveness,* and He takes him in.

And again I say that because we have been made worthy to know as Orthodox Christians this mystery of sacred confession, we should have very great joy, because even if any time we fall down in some sin, into something evil, we can run immediately to correct it and to preserve the health of our souls. And when death comes, we will go to meet the Lord, cleansed, repentant, as prodigal sons returned, for our Heavenly Father accepts us and places us in the Paradise of eternal bliss which has no end, which has no conclusion to that bliss, which cannot be compared to anything earthly.

Even the holy Apostle Paul, who went up to the third heaven and saw the eternal good things, nevertheless was unable with his apostolic and graceful tongue to express with human words, the things of Paradise and the life above! So inexpressible is the happiness of the attainment through sacred confession.

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



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## WORLDLY “HAPPINESS” CAUSES WORLDLY ANXIETY

*By St. Paisios the Athonite.*

The more people distance themselves from natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do. This is why they go around restless; they even spin around the moon—like the belt of an old metal shop engine, spinning around the “crazy wheel”—since earth cannot contain all their restlessness.

Worldly stress is the result of worldly happiness, of worldly pleasures and self-indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, hundreds of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatrists. New psychiatric hospitals are being built and young psychiatrists go on for post-graduate studies. Many of them do not even believe in God or accept the existence of the soul. How can these people help the human soul, when they themselves are full of anxiety? How can one feel truly comforted, if he does not believe in God and in the true and eternal life after death? When man grasps the deeper meaning of this true life, stress goes away, divine consolation comes and he is healed. If someone went to psychiatric hospitals and read the Abba Isaac to the patients, those who believe in God would get well, because they would come to understand the deeper meaning of life.

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with the theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes

when the soul is humble and God fills it with divine consolation. And imagine how all those tourists must suffer who come from other countries to Greece, and walk the streets in the hot summer sun, in the dusty and noisy streets! What great pressure they must feel inside, how stressed they must be if they need all this heat and noise to find comfort! It's like their own selves are driving them away, and all they can see in this trouble is rest!

When we see a person who has everything be stressed, anxious and sad, we must know that God is missing from his life. In the end, even wealth will make people suffer, because the material goods cannot really satisfy them. Theirs is a double affliction. I know wealthy people who have everything and are miserable. They do not even have children but they are still miserable. They are too lazy to lie down or take a walk. “Fine,” I told someone, “since you have some free time, do something spiritual; read one of the Hours of prayer, read a passage from the Gospel.” “I cannot,” he said. “Then,” I told him, “try doing something good; go to a hospital to visit some sick person.” “Why should I go all the way there,” he says, “what will become of it?” “Go help some poor person in your neighborhood.” “No,” he says, “that does not please me either.”

Can you believe that this person is miserable despite the fact that he has everything: free time, numerous houses and so on? Do you know how many people like this are in society? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing! And if they happen to be independently wealthy and do not work, then they are the most miserable of all. If they at least had a job they would feel somewhat better.